



As good as it gets Marketing happiness

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As good as it gets



A smiling summary

There has been a dramatic shift in the interest of psychologists and social scientists away from negative psychology to the study of happiness and positive psychology. The science of happiness is now a valid academic subject and the focus of a mountain of self-help books and advice. Some marketers have already responded to this growing demand for greater happiness, particularly those who recognise the central role of wealthy baby boomers in this pursuit of happiness. Others struggle with the idea that marketing may even lead to unhappiness or reduced happiness.

Despite the vagueness in definition, we know that happiness is fleeting and, in many ways, is a futile pursuit. This is because we:

- adapt to what we have,
- can't commit,
- have a need for progress,
- constantly compare our position to those around us,
- overconsume when we can,
- focus on exceptions, particularly negative ones,
- do not know ourselves despite our self-obsession,
- are influenced by our family and work situations,
- have poor decision making abilities.

There is a range of strategies that marketers can use to encourage happiness (remembering a brand cannot make someone happy: we can only make ourselves happy.)

- Increase customer expertise,
- match high expectations,
- offer customers a way out of a problem,
- focus on experiences,
- focus on older consumers,
- involve customers in doing things with the brand,
- help them make others happier,
- achieve personal goals,
- ensure progress, even if it feels small, and
- address the entire consumption cycle, not just production and sales.

Index

1.0	Introduction	4
1.1	Happiness and marketing	4
1.2	A new religion?	4
2.0	Happiness is ...	
2.1	Hard to pin down	6
2.2	Many ways to express it	6
2.3	Levels of happiness	7
2.4	Love make us happy	7
2.5	Sex makes us happy	7
2.6	Measuring happiness	8
2.7	Happiness or contentment?	9
2.8	Happiness or wellbeing?	10
2.9	Happiness or satisfaction?	10
2.10	Happiness or hope?	11
2.11	Are some of us born to be happy?	11
2.12	It doesn't last	12
2.13	Does humour make us happy?	12
3.0	Who is happy?	13
3.1	Happy countries	13
3.2	Statistics and damned lies	15
4.0	Money can't buy it	16
4.1	Happiness is not a straight line graph	16
5.0	Why aren't we happier?	18
5.1	We adapt	18
5.2	We can't commit	18
5.3	Constancy versus variety	18
5.4	We need progress	19
5.5	We compare	20
5.6	Relationships affect our happiness	21
5.7	We overconsume when we can	21
5.8	We focus on exceptions, usually the negative ones	22
5.9	We swing between the extremes	22
5.10	We don't know ourselves	22
5.11	We're self-obsessed	23
5.12	We're too rushed to be happy	23
5.13	Children don't make us happy	23
5.14	TV makes us miserable	24
5.15	Commuting upsets us	24
5.16	We make poor decisions	24
6.0	Does consumption reduce happiness?	25
6.1	The argument for consumption	25
6.2	The argument against consumption	25
6.3	Marketing makes us unhappy	25
6.4	The consumer rebel	26
7.0	How to consumers happier (theory)	28
7.1	Approaches to happiness	28
8.0	How to make consumers happier (practical)	30
8.1	Segment them	30
8.2	Immediate rewards	30
8.3	Consumer expertise	30

8.4	Moderate expectations	30
8.5	Take it back	31
8.6	They just want it	31
8.7	Experiences	31
8.8	Anticipation	32
8.9	Employ someone – but not a lawyer!	32
8.10	Don't let them dwell on the past	33
8.11	Get older	33
8.12	Surprise them!	34
8.13	Give advice	34
8.14	Make it a hobby	34
8.15	Give 'em the same stuff	34
8.16	Happiness for others	34
8.17	Help them to achieve their goals	35
8.18	Make progress	35
8.19	Telling stories about happiness	35
8.20	Get them involved	37
9.0	Is it better to be happy?	39
10.0	Not marketing's fault	40
10.1	A futile and meaningless pursuit?	40
10.2	Easy scapegoat	41
11.0	Look at the whole cycle of consumption	42
11.1	Happy brands	42
11.2	Want what we have	46
12.0	Conclusion	47
13.0	Appendix	48
14.0	References	50

1.0 Introduction

“Thus happiness depends, as Nature shows,
Less on exterior things than most suppose.”

William Cowper (1731-1800)

Happiness is like love – an overused word – and not always in abundant supply. When John Updike wrote that America is a “vast conspiracy to make you happy”, he could have been describing marketing. Yet, as Benjamin Franklin said, America “only gives you the right to pursue Happiness. You have to catch it yourself”.

Marketing often uses a promise of happiness as it seeks to build the desire for a brand. This approach has frequently been blamed for fuelling rising materialism. But it may be accurate to say: marketing “only gives you the tools to pursue Happiness. You have to catch it yourself”.

None of the numerous studies into happiness has been able to find a cast-iron link between materialism and happiness and more often it is the reverse: buying things cannot make you happy. It raises the challenging question: why do we expect consumption to make us happy?

This report will explore happiness through the eyes of marketing. It will look at each of the arguments for what makes us happy, why we ought to be happy, and whether happiness really is an issue for marketers.

1.1 Happiness and marketing?

“Happiness is electrical activity in the left front part of the brain, and it comes from getting married, getting friends, getting rich, and avoiding communism.” Johan Norberg, Timbro.

Being happy is one of the mainstream media’s most popular obsessions, but this focus on happiness could be misguided. It reflects what may be called a typical Hollywood view of life, where everything is glossy, airbrushed and fun, but that is not our real lives. Pursuing happiness as a life goal may be saying something about our need to be entertained rather than offering a meaningful view of life.

Demanding that happiness be the goal can also be seen as juvenile and symptomatic of a society that refuses to grow up. It fits with the view that kidults, adultescents, and narcissism are prevalent today, particularly among the baby boomers.

1.2 A new religion?

Another possible view is that materialism has run its course, and we are now focusing on happiness as a new kind of religion.

If we look around, we see:

- The rise of Pentecostal religions – they are religions of happiness, not hell and damnation,
- The so-called epidemic of depression, supported by widespread happiness drug use (Prozac, Serepax),
- Declining satisfaction levels with brands and companies,
- Increasing numbers of people declining job promotions or long hours,
- Rise of anti-marketing sentiments and “does consumption bring happiness?” debates,
- Fear of terror and growing fear of those we don’t know.

Marketing as it operates in the western developed world, is asking serious questions about happiness and capitalism, yet we are not any happier, despite rising affluence and, in fact, we are seeing reduced satisfaction.

What can marketers do in this environment? Is happiness their concern and, if so, can they address it?



The sky is taking on light,
though the moon still hangs pale over the
water.

Such beauty that for a minute
death and ambition, even love,
doesn't enter into this.

Happiness. It comes on
unexpectedly. And goes beyond, really,
any early morning talk about it.

Raymond Carver, Happiness.

2.0 Happiness is ...

Happiness is “an activity of the soul that expresses virtue.” Aristotle.

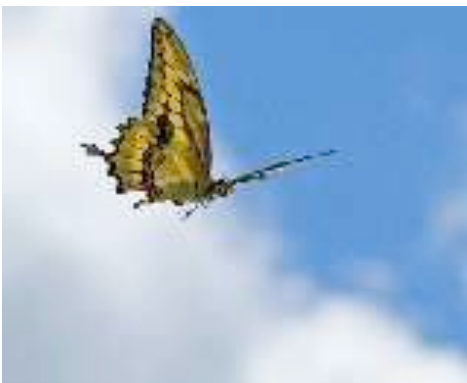
2.1 Hard to pin down

In spite of increasing academic interest in happiness, and its antecedents (there are 205,157 books on Amazon with happiness in the title!), we still do not really understand what it means to be happy and how we might become happier.

The meaning of the term happiness seems to have changed through the ages, from the idea that it was bound up with good fortune or right actions (see Jane Austen), to today’s interpretation as a private feeling of pleasure, joy or elation.

- Greek tragedies were filled with the idea that happiness was a matter of fate.
- The Middle English word, “hap” refers to "chance, fortune or luck" as in “mishap”, “hapless” and “happen”.
- The Oxford English Dictionary records usages of happiness only since the 16th century but Chaucer mentioned it in the Canterbury Tales.
- The concept of humans having the ability to pursue happiness as pleasure arose in the 18th century or Age of Enlightenment. Source: Wikipedia.

Many have described happiness in terms of something elusive, a butterfly, or something you can only identify when it has gone.



2.2 Many ways to express it

The word “happiness” is often used interchangeably with contentment, satisfaction, pleasure, preference, quality of life, wellbeing, or an acute thrill. Each one has a slightly different twist, depending on whether it is linked to expectations, the environment, or one’s natural level of happiness.

The academic view is that each word means something different, and so the questions they might ask vary according to the definition.

For our purposes, the term "happiness" or any synonym is not important because many people cannot or do not want to distinguish the difference. The objective of this report is not to semantically dissect differences in terms but to ask: what can marketing do or not do to sustain and improve these feel-good perspectives?

Intellectuals have expressed happiness in a number of different, rational ways, based on whether they are coming from an economic, psychology or philosophic viewpoint. (It might even be said that intellectuals are rather miserable, because they analyse things that shouldn’t be analysed!)

“Should we wish to label happiness with a convenient slogan, we might call it, not a good mood, but *psychic flourishing*.” Don Haybron, academic.

Since 2000, the University of Erasmus at Rotterdam has published the Journal of Happiness Studies. Its editorial board is overrepresented by Californians and Germans: is this an interesting cultural anomaly?

Happiness is a ... (Google search)

Warm gun – Beatles song, claimed to be about the needle shooting heroin.

Cream pie – pie throwing at unwanted people.

Rectilinear kitten - "lost" Eastern art of sealing kittens inside rectilinear jars to reshape them into pleasing forms.

Kick ass radio station - WMMR in Philadelphia. Long-standing reputation as one of the best rock radio stations in the US.

Warm planet – “Global warming, if it were to occur, would probably benefit most Americans.” Thomas Gale Moore.

Chemical imbalance – collection of 20 poems by artist, Jonny Metro, of Jots From The Flipside.

Cigar called hamlet (ad line) - a long-running campaign for Hamlet Cigars.

2.3 Levels of happiness

- Level 1 happiness is the hedonistic pleasure, say, from a glass of wine, or a good meal, it is intense, and temporary (15 mins approx).
- Level 2 happiness is cognitive or intellectual, say, the satisfaction and contentment you feel when you look at your life and think about past achievements and future path, and it is more lasting.
- Level 1 is not better than level 2. Source: Raj Persaud, ABC Radio National (5).

“If merely feeling good could decide the state of wellbeing, then mild drunkenness would be the supreme valid human experience.” William James.

2.4 Love makes us happy

Love makes the world go round, but does it make people happy?

Relationships are important, whether it is with partner, neighbour, family or close friends, and are a strong contributor to our happiness. But relationships also cause heartache, children do not make us happy, and loving someone can create unreasonable expectations. Even so:

- 67% of Australian women and 51% of men say their happiness comes from relationships with their family, including their partner.
- Men are more likely than women to cite community and friends as most important (11% v 6%).
- 67% of those aged 30-49 say family relationships (including partner) are most important compared to 55% of younger people.
- 70% of those with kids (58% without) said partner and other family relationships were paramount. Source: Ipsos McKay, 2006 (3).

Countries that are focused on community rather than individuals do not appear to be happier (Italy and Greece do not score highly, and neither do Japan or Korea). But this might mean that happiness cannot be measured in these countries by asking individuals, because they think in terms of their group rather than their own happiness. (See also Relationships affect our happiness.)

2.5 Sex makes us happy

- Sex is the activity that produces the single-largest amount of happiness and is probably evolution’s way of ensuring the species continues. Research indicates that the more sex you have, the happier you will be.
- Vance Packard found a playful approach to sex was one of the seven ingredients in most happy marriages.
- Australian men into bondage, discipline, domination and submission (BDSM) scored more highly on a scale of psychological wellbeing than other men. Researchers believe it could be they are more in harmony with themselves because they are into something unusual and are comfortable with that!

2.6 Measuring happiness

“[The] concept of happiness is one for which there can be no scientific objective measure”.
Wilfred Beckerman, economist.

We could be in danger of intellectualising happiness, simply to create another metric. Yet, this urge to rationalise happiness is not new.

During the 1800s, someone had an idea for a hedonimeter, a "psychophysical machine" that would record the ups and downs of a man's feelings rather like a thermometer. However, the hedonimeter was never invented (2).

Efforts by economists and psychologists to measure welfare or wellbeing go back at least to the early 20th century. Since then there have been about 3,000 empirical studies, but there are massive discrepancies in the types of questions and scales used. Adding to the muddle of results (due to various methodologies and statistical approaches) is the problem that different populations have their own interpretations of the terms and concepts associated with wellbeing or happiness (1).

Despite the difficulties, there is an increasing need to measure happiness because of the popular belief that how people feel about their lives is as important as economic growth. Governments are being urged to consider the personal happiness and wellbeing of their citizens and, in many cases, are already attempting to improve it, albeit with some cynical reactions (trying to boost enjoyment, instead of employment! (2)).

- A 2006 UK survey found 81% of Britons believe the government's primary objective should be the greatest happiness rather than the greatest wealth (only 13% disagreed). Source: Gfk NOP.
- A 2006 survey found 77% of Australians agreed on this objective and only 16% disagreed. Source: Ipsos MacKay (3).

Even in 1790, Thomas Paine was criticising any government that does not consider “general happiness”:



“Whatever the apparent cause of any riots may be, the real one is always want of happiness. It shows that something is wrong in the system of government that injures the felicity by which society is to be preserved... Whatever the form or constitution of government may be, it ought to have no other object than the general happiness.”

Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (1790).

The need to measure happiness may mirror the way marketers attempt to measure satisfaction with a brand, or company. It is not sufficient to know that people merely buy the product; we want to know that people are happy with it.

Although we can measure various dimensions of wellbeing —health, longevity, the experience of pleasure, a sense of control, developing our resources, or achieving valued aims — it is impossible to measure wellbeing in total. As Will Wilkinson (policy analyst) said, “Nature has nowhere posted a table of exchange rates between the various values that compose individual welfare” (4).

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is another attempt to define quality of life in more holistic and psychological terms than the economically oriented Gross National Product. The King of Bhutan created this measure in 1972 to build an economy based on Buddhism and to:

- Promote equitable and sustainable socio-economic development,
- preserve and promote cultural values,
- conserve the natural environment, and
- establish good governance. See Appendix.

National Happiness Accounts (US) or “welfare accounts” could explore subjective wellbeing at the aggregate level and measure changes in aggregate happiness or self-reported welfare over time (5).

Pleasant Activity Training (PAT) is where people list five to ten things they enjoy doing most in life. When they actually do them, they become happier (5).

Why haven't they always done them?

Positive emotion study

Self-reported positive emotion during the day by 909 employed women

Activities	Positive affect	Hours/day
Intimate relations	5.10	.2
Socialising	4.59	2.3
Relaxing	4.42	2.2
Eating	4.34	2.2
Exercising	4.31	.2
Watching TV	4.19	2.2
Shopping	3.95	.4
Preparing food	3.93	1.1
On the phone	3.92	2.5
Taking care of my children	3.86	1.1
Computer/email/internet	3.81	1.9
Housework	3.73	1.1
Working	3.62	6.9
Commuting	3.45	1.6
Interaction partners		
friends	4.36	2.6
relatives	4.17	1
spouse/other	4.11	2.7
children	4.04	2.3
alone	3.41	3.4

A Survey Method for Characterizing Daily Life Experience: The Day Reconstruction Method (6).

Harold McMillan, a former British prime minister, was visiting France on a state visit, and happened to find himself alone with the wife of President Charles de Gaulle, Madame de Gaulle. He asked her what she was most looking forward to when her husband retired. He was somewhat startled and shocked at her reply: “A penis”.

It was only later on reflection that McMillan realised that what she was trying to say, with a heavy French accent, was ‘Happiness’. (5)

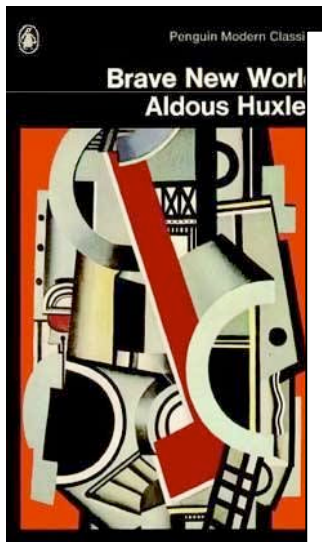
2.7 Happiness or contentment?

“The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time.” James Taylor.

Happiness can be seen in the light of different moods, whether high- or low-key. There are energetic positive emotions, such as happiness and joy, and low-energy positive emotions, such as tranquility, relaxation and contentment.

For sustained wellbeing, you might need to aim for about 6 out of 10 or mild contentment, rather than ecstasy: the full 10 (5). Contentment could be described as an inward happiness, independent of circumstances.

John Updike, author, once said that happiness was a matter of appreciating moments of contentment or joy as they happened, rather than later in a spirit of wistful nostalgia.



In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, everyone is in ignorant bliss, thanks to the drug Soma. Only one character, the Savage, is recognisably human and he claims the "right to be unhappy".

According to the Controller: "Universal happiness has been achieved by shifting the emphasis away from truth and beauty, and towards comfort. Art and science have become impossible because they require challenge, skill and frustration. Happiness has got to be paid for somehow and a guarantee of comfort requires losing other experiences that are part of being human."

The Savage asserts: "But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin."

The Controller says he is claiming "the right to be unhappy".

2.8 Happiness or wellbeing?

Some researchers claim that we are looking for a richer experience than happiness, and they call it wellbeing. Wellbeing includes physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellness, and is therefore a whole body experience. It is far more than the absence of sickness, just as happiness is more than the absence of sadness.

Many companies have jumped on the wellbeing ladder by creating products that are purported to increase wellbeing. But the "marketing of being" will require more than just a deeper understanding of promoting wellbeing in a person (7).

2.9 Happiness or satisfaction?

Many studies aim to measure satisfaction with life. However, whether or not you are satisfied may depend more on your values or character, than on how well your life is going. You could reasonably become *more* satisfied with your life when things are going much *worse* for you (a shift in perspective, say, from a cancer diagnosis). Although you might feel worse off, you are more appreciative of the good things (8).

Satisfaction might also be related to what people aspire to, rather than their own feelings. Or they may simply think they "ought" to be satisfied, considering what they have.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

The SWLS assesses respondents' level of agreement with five statements:

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Source: Daniel Haybron, Saint Louis University (8).

The high levels of life satisfaction found in many studies may reflect the prevalence of values such as gratitude, fortitude, or self-esteem, rather than high levels of wellbeing or happiness.

2.10 Happiness or hope?

Hope for a better future can lead to happiness, whether it is based on truth or illusion. Sometimes choice can be a source of hope, so choice need not in itself be a bad thing. The least happy countries appear to be those with no hope for the future.

Ireland is one example of a country of little hope that turned itself around and is now one of the happiest because of its current condition and hope for the future.

Happiness is what my life's about
Happiness no I can't do without
Happiness nothing can stop me now
Through ups and downs I'm still happy

Life is as good as I make it
I can't sit while you make it for me
I like those jewels you gave me
But I wanna buy some jewels for myself
To lose the ball and chain
Gotta reach for it
Nothin' comes for free
Gotta reach for it
No I'm not gonna have to depend on you

I'm the only one
Who's responsible
For me having fun
And you can't take my ... happiness

Vanessa Williams, Happiness

2.11 Are some of us born to be happy?

“Happy people confront the world in a different way from the unhappy.” Dan Haybron, philosopher.

Roughly 50 percent of our emotion is determined by genetics. We can only make some people happier, because some are already happy and others are coded to be perpetually unhappy or to experience only temporary happiness. The genetics of happiness may also help to explain differences between genders and even between races (7).

But since this is only half the story, what is the other half?

If H is your level of happiness, S is your set point, C is the conditions of your life, and V is the voluntary activities you do, the formula is:

$$H=S+C+V$$

In this equation, happiness consists of how happy you naturally are, plus whatever is going on in your life to affect your happiness, plus some voluntary work (9). Circumstances are only considered to be 10% of happiness (10).

Proponents of this view say that people are happy when their positive states outweigh negative states, and when these positive states are in most major dimensions (eg, work, family) (11).

Intrinsically happy people tend to take greater pleasure in things, to see things in a more positive light, to take greater notice of good things, to be more optimistic, to be more outgoing and friendly, and to take chances more.

2.12 It doesn't last

The psychological view of happiness says it is only temporary, and temporary is as good as it gets. Nothing can increase happiness permanently because we quickly adapt to whatever the circumstances that have made us happy.

With this argument, there might seem little point in trying to improve someone's happiness. Should governments take effective steps to improve social conditions and public services, this new standard would become the norm, and happiness surveys would show little sustained change (12).



In the Nun Study, 180 aging nuns had all written brief autobiographical sketches when they entered the convent (around age 22). These sketches were categorised according to positive or negative emotional content. It was reported that nuns in the lower half of the distribution of positive statements died on average nine years sooner than those in the top category of positive statements. This finding is fascinating because, from their early twenties, the nuns' lives were as identical as human lives can be. The difference in survival was not related to their lifestyle or circumstances in the intervening period but to their positive emotions six decades earlier.

Danner et al., 2001 (13).

Happiness among Buddhist monks does challenge this temporary, "as good as it gets" view. Neuroscientists have discovered that certain areas of the brain light up constantly in Buddhists, which indicates positive emotions and good mood. This happens even when they are not meditating.

Paul Ekman, University of California, suggests that meditation and mindfulness can tame the amygdala, an area of the brain that holds fear memory. Ekman found experienced Buddhists were less likely to be shocked, flustered, surprised or as angry as other people (14).

So while it may be possible to improve happiness, it is not easy to do. This view is reflected by the plethora of books on "how to be happy" (the most recent bestseller is by a Buddhist monk). As with all self-help books and courses, it is the fact they do not work that keeps that category of books selling and profitable.

O happiness enjoy'd but of a few!
And, if possess'd, as soon decay'd and done
As is the morning's silver-melting dew
Against the golden splendour of the sun!
An expired date, cancell'd ere well begun:
Honour and beauty, in the owner's arms,
Are weakly fortress'd from a world of harms.

Shakespeare, *The rape of Lucrece*.

2.13 Does humour make us happy?

Ken Dodd was a British comedian, and probably a classic Victorian-style comic, who had a hit single about happiness. Such Variety Hall entertainers by their very happy nature made the miserable poor working class smile laugh and be happy (at least for a short while).

A wise old man told me one time
That happiness is nothing but a frame of mind
I hope when you go to measuring my success
That you don't count my money count my happiness
Happiness, happiness, the greatest gift that I possess
I thank the Lord I've been blessed
With more than my share of happiness.

Ken Dodd, Happiness.

Today, there has been a change in humour to a more sophisticated, dry humour that we are forced to consider and appreciate (though Americans still do slapstick well).

But even laughing is not the same as feeling happy.

Evening shadows make me blue
When each weary day is through
How I long to be with you
My happiness
Every day I reminisce
Dreaming of your tender kiss
Always thinking how I miss
My happiness.

Elvis Presley, My happiness.

3.0 Who is happy?

Continues

78 References

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