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Intentional hedonic consumption motivates prosocial behavior☆

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ABSTRACT

Consumers frequently engage in hedonic experiences either intentionally, driven by their own volition, or unintentionally, motivated by situational factors. This research investigates the effect of the intentionality of hedonic consumption on subsequent prosocial behavior. We propose and find that consumers are more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior after engaging in intentional, versus unintentional, hedonic consumption. This effect arises because intentional hedonic consumption leads consumers to infer that they cultivated self-compassion, which in turn motivates them to behave prosocially. Seven experiments demonstrate convergent evidence for this effect, using monetary as well as non-monetary prosocial behavior, generalizing across several hedonic consumption domains, and ruling out alternative mechanisms. Importantly, the effect occurs specifically following intentional hedonic (vs. non-hedonic) consumption, and only when the prosocial behavior is not unduly effortful. These findings provide meaningful implications for consumer welfare, marketers of hedonic offerings, and nonprofit organizations.

"If you don't love yourself, you cannot love others. If you have no compassion for yourself then you are not able of developing compassion for others." The Dalai Lama

1. Introduction

Pleasure constantly inhabits our minds. Whether deciding what to have for dinner or selecting the next movie to watch, consumers are often motivated by the pursuit of pleasure. However, consumers' engagement in hedonic consumption can emerge in various ways. They may often decide purposefully to pursue hedonics in accordance with their personal preferences and for various situational reasons. At other times, and in contrast to such *intentional* hedonic consumption, consumers may engage in hedonic experiences

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because of a motivation to conform to either injunctive or descriptive norms. Examples of such instances of *unintentional* hedonic consumption include explicit guidelines from powerholders (e.g., office parties[1]; teambuilding events) or significant others (e.g., receiving hedonic gifts; dinner with in-laws), and social norms (e.g., parents attending school plays of their children; drinking champagne on New Year's Eve). While numerous hedonic experiences are motivated by external factors, the *intentionality* of hedonic consumption has been mostly overlooked in extant research.

What might be possible consequences of such differences in the intentionality of hedonic consumption? Barasch et al. (2017) showed that participants who intentionally took photographs during a museum experience recognized more of what they visited relative to participants who could not take photos, and Chen and Sengupta (2014) indicated that consumers experience higher levels of vitality after engaging in vice consumption under conditions of low autonomy. As might be evident, both the above investigations considered the effects of intentionality on the actors themselves. In this research, we adopt a broader perspective juxtaposing hedonic consumption and intentionality, and investigate possible interpersonal downstream consequences of intentional hedonic consumption. Specifically, we ask the novel question: what might be the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior? Competing possibilities suggest themselves. On one hand, it is possible that intentional hedonic consumption could potentially reduce prosocial behavior. Hedonic consumption is characterized by directing positive emotions towards oneself in the present moment (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Prioritising one's well-being is conceptually antithetical to a focus on broader and more distal concerns (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Gibbons & Wicklund, 1982), and hence a simple prediction is that intentional engagement in pleasure-oriented behaviors would have a negative effect on prosociality.

While the above possibility may be true, it ignores the specific psychological consequences of intentionality. Consumers draw inferences from their own behaviors (Bem, 1972; Festinger, 1957), and choices can serve as self-signals that guide people's intuitions about the motivations for their own behavior (Bodner & Prelec, 2003). We suggest that after engaging in intentional hedonic consumption, whereby they deliberately chose to do something pleasurable for themselves, consumers infer that they cultivated self-compassion. This is less likely to be the case for unintentional hedonic consumption, which could be based on a variety of other reasons. Now, prosocial behavior often implies trade-offs between compassion directed at others vs. oneself (Labroo, Khan, & Su, 2023; Wilson, 1975). A consumer who has just cultivated self-compassion via their intentional hedonic consumption will have their own well-being already accounted for, and hence be less sensitive to the trade-offs between helping others vs. themselves. Therefore, we argue that intentional hedonic consumption will increase consumers' subsequent propensity to help others (as opposed to themselves), and that self-compassion underlies this facilitating effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior.

Our research makes several theoretical contributions. First, by showing that after intentionally engaging in hedonic consumption, people behave more prosocially, our findings demonstrate that behaviors typically considered self-benefitting can actually be beneficial for others. Thus, we provide a refined understanding of hedonics and contribute to the limited body of work on the positive consequences of hedonic consumption (Chen & Sengupta, 2014; Do Vale, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2016; Mead et al., 2016).

Second, the current work augments the growing body of research on prosociality. By showing that hedonic consumption increases behavioral helping, charitable giving, and volunteering intentions, the current findings advance knowledge about what motivates prosocial acts and contribute to a better understanding of the philanthropic sector. Furthermore, our work extends the literature on consumer well-being. Given the numerous links between prosociality and well-being (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010), our results underscore the importance of hedonics for everyday well-being. Thus, the current work also provides practical implications for consumers that want to enhance their well-being.

Third, we advance existing knowledge by documenting a qualitatively different relationship between hedonics and prosociality. In contrast with prior research that suggested competing antecedents of prosociality such as positive mood (Isen & Levin, 1972) or guilt (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2016) our work uncovers self-compassion as a novel mechanism. To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has documented this process.

In the following sections, we first define the concept of intentional hedonic consumption. We then develop our theoretical framework and outline the conditions under which consumers exhibit increased prosociality following hedonic consumption. Next, we report the results of seven experiments that test our hypotheses across various consumption domains, examine the underlying mechanism, and test two boundary conditions. We conclude with a discussion of implications for consumer welfare, marketing managers, and charitable organizations.

2. Conceptual development

2.1. Intentional hedonic consumption

Hedonic consumption refers to pleasurable, multisensory, and fun experiences that are sought for their inherent affective and sensory attributes, and the enjoyment they provide (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Alba & Williams, 2013). Within consumer research, a large body of work has contrasted hedonic consumption with utilitarian consumption. However, the hedonic-utilitarian dichotomy and accordingly, the trade-offs between "vices" and "virtues" in consumer choice have been questioned since they fail to account for contextual factors (Vosgerau, Scopelliti, & Huh, 2020). Similarly, at times, prior research has framed hedonic consumption as impulsive, and depicted consumers as vulnerable individuals that "fall prey", "give in", or "yield to temptations" (Baumeister, 2002;

[1] Recent examples illustrating the widespread occurrence of unintentional hedonics include: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-right-not-to-be-fun-at-work and https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-50568595.

Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). In contrast, we argue that oftentimes consumers pursue hedonics *intentionally,* and investigate the interpersonal consequences of such actions.

In the current research, we aim to extend the literature on the positive outcomes of hedonics by examining the conditions under which hedonic consumption may increase prosocial behavior. While it seems evident that hedonic consumption is typically rewarding (Mukhopadhyay & Johar, 2005), and rewarding experiences can promote prosocial behavior (Aknin et al., 2018), we argue that hedonic consumption per se is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for observing positive effects on prosocial behavior. Rather, we posit that the intentionality of the hedonic consumption is a key factor. Our theorizing is informed by the juxtaposition of two research streams: the self-signaling literature (Bem, 1972) and research showing that intentionality is diagnostic of choice freedom (Botti, Iyengar, & McGill, 2023) and motivation (Dik & Aarts, 2007; Kruger et al., 2004). Based on these research streams, we characterize intentional hedonic consumption as intrinsically motivated. That is, consumers engage in intentional hedonic consumption purposefully and primarily to enhance their own well-being and to derive satisfaction from the consumption experience without further goals (Botti & McGill, 2011). By the same token, we characterize unintentional hedonic consumption as extrinsically motivated (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Furthermore, since hedonic choice is inherently rewarding, we argue that pursuing intentional hedonic consumption represents an expression of choice freedom. This is not the case for unintentional hedonic consumption, which is pursued for external reasons and denotes reduced choice freedom. Therefore, going for a massage to relax illustrates intentional hedonic consumption, whereas receiving a massage as a gift and redeeming it to show consideration towards the giver illustrates unintentional hedonic consumption. Integrating these arguments, we argue that to constitute not only a necessary but also sufficient condition to induce prosocial behavior, hedonic consumption needs to be construed as being *intentional*.

Our reasoning extends to the contrast between hedonic and non-hedonic consumption. Since hedonic consumption is pursued solely for pleasure, it may be more self-relevant and more diagnostic of one's taste (Botti et al., 2023). Conversely, non-hedonic consumption is typically pursued for instrumental reasons, and not indicative of one's taste, which renders it less self-relevant and less conducive to a positive affective state. Drawing on this logic, hedonic consumption would not only yield a pleasurable (affectively positive) experience but would also be experienced as self-relevant and meaningful, when compared to non-hedonic consumption. Thus, we predict that intentionality per se is not enough to facilitate prosocial behavior without the hedonic component.

2.2. Inferences from intentional hedonic consumption

Our theorizing is supported by the self-signaling literature that has examined how people signal to themselves information about their own preferences (Bodner & Prelec, 2003; Gneezy et al., 2010). Self-signaling, which is rooted in self-perception theory, refers to the process by which individuals develop an understanding of their inner states, including their motivations and preferences, by drawing inferences from their own behaviors (Bem, 1972; Festinger, 1957). According to self-signaling, people learn about their underlying psychological states through a process of self-attribution, based on the actions they take and the context in which their actions occur. Prior work has provided insights into how self-signaling influences decision-making across multiple realms. For instance, self-signaling suggests that individuals are not always fully aware of their own preferences and instead, they use their own behaviors as signals to make inferences about themselves (Bodner & Prelec, 2003).

In terms of such inference-making, the distinction between internal and external attributions is of key importance for our conceptualization. For instance, Mead and Patrick (2016) showed that unspecific postponement of consumption leads consumers to infer that a particular object of desire is less valuable, but only when the postponement is *attributed to the self* vs. external factors. Similarly, in the current context, it is critical to understand what consumers infer when the hedonic consumption is intentional (i.e., attributed to their own volition) as opposed to unintentional (i.e., driven by external factors).

Intentional hedonic consumption denotes choice freedom, as Botti et al. (2023) posited. Moreover, choice freedom influences the strength of the inferences that consumers draw from their choices (Etkin & Laran, 2019). Building on this, we propose that the intentionality of hedonic consumption yields different signals about the self. Specifically, we reason that following intentional vs. unintentional hedonic consumption, consumers will be more likely to infer that they are cultivating self-compassion. Conversely, unintentional hedonic consumption is not diagnostic of one's choice to cultivate self-compassion since it is determined by external factors. These differences in the inferential content of self-signaling based on intentionality have distinct consequences for prosocial behavior, as we discuss next.

2.3. Self-compassion and prosocial behavior

Self-compassion is characterized by feelings of care, warmth, and sympathy towards oneself rather than being judgmental and critical to the self (Neff, 2003). With roots in Buddhist psychology (Neff, 2011), self-compassion has received increased research attention across a wide range of fields ranging from psychotherapy (Neff & Germer, 2022) and positive psychology (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007) to marketing (Karanika & Hogg, 2016). Conceptualizations vary somewhat across these literatures but converge on the effect of people actively and mindfully being kind to themselves, either per se, or in response to difficult circumstances.

Several lines of research suggest that self-compassion may be a key factor in fostering prosocial behavior, manifested in many ways. Self-compassion positively correlates with other-focused traits, such as perspective taking, empathic concern, connectedness to others (Neff et al., 2007) and general trust (Neff & Pommier, 2013). It engenders a sense of safety such that individuals who exhibit self-compassion are more likely to treat others in a non-judgmental manner (Reyes, 2012; Welp & Brown, 2014), to display generosity toward others (Barnard & Curry, 2011; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012), to engage in healthier, more caring and supportive romantic relationship behaviors (Neff & Beretvas, 2013), and to behave selflessly in situations that require helping (Lindsay & Creswell, 2014).

Essentially, in contrast to being self-judgmental, self-compassion reduces the need for critical resource-consuming attention to the self, thereby allowing people to be more present and open in social interactions. Consequently, individuals are more able to extend kindness and support to others, making self-compassion a key psychological mechanism for enhancing prosocial engagement.

To summarize, self-compassion often prompts compassion towards others. Based on this, we propose that when intentional hedonic consumption is interpreted as a marker of self-compassion, it will lead to prosocial behavior. This prediction challenges standard economic theory (and standard marketing assumptions; Small & Cryder, 2016) which has long endorsed the view that prosocial behavior is a zero-sum game involving a trade-off between maximising one's self-interest vs. others' interest (Etzioni, 1988). According to this view, consumers consider this trade-off when considering whether to help (i.e., compassion towards others) or not (i.e., compassion towards oneself). In contrast, we predict that when one has just been compassionate to themselves, prosocial behavior requires less of a trade-off between the self and others, and this increases the likelihood of acting prosocially.

2.4. *Effortful prosocial behavior as a constraint*

Our key proposition is that hedonic consumption, when intentional, is construed as an act of self-compassion and induces prosocial behavior as a downstream consequence. This mechanism holds because self-compassion is a positive state. However, prosocial behavior may not always be pleasant to engage in, and indeed some forms of prosocial behavior may actually be incompatible with self-compassion. Prior work has conceptualized effort as a factor that individuals generally perceive as counter-hedonic and seek to minimize (Crocker, Fiske, & Taylor, 1984; Shenhav et al., 2017). Indeed, as Harris et al. (2023) demonstrated, effortful prosociality is perceived to be more painful. Prior research has also established that people tend to shy away from tasks demanding considerable effort, even when these tasks yield prosocial benefits (Kool et al., 2010). Similarly, Lockwood et al. (2017) have documented "prosocial

Table 1
Overview of studies.

Study	Hypotheses Tested	Design	Consumption Domain	Prosocial Behavior Measure(s)	Key Findings
Study 1A ($N = 99$) Lab	H_1	Yoked design 2 (intentional vs. unintentional) between-subjects	Hedonic food	Helping (real behavior)	**Main effect** of intentional hedonic consumption on prosociality.
Study 1B ($N = 85$) Lab	H_1	Yoked design 2 (intentional vs. unintentional) between-subjects Incentive compatible design	Hedonic food	Charitable donations (real money)	**Main effect** of intentional hedonic consumption on prosociality.
Study 1C ($N = 202$) Prolific	H_1	2 (intentional vs. unintentional) between-subjects	Hedonic video	Volunteering (intentions)	**Generalizability**: - Novel hedonic domain - Non-monetary prosociality
Study 2* ($N = 503$) Lab	H_1, H_2	Yoked design 2 (intentional vs. unintentional) x 2 (hedonic vs. non-hedonic) between-subjects +control condition(no consumption)	Food	Charitable donations (intentions) Behavioral sharing	**Boundary condition**: the effect does not hold for non-hedonic consumption. **Generalizability**: Non-monetary prosociality
Study 3* ($N = 300$) Prolific	H_1, H_3	2 (intentional vs. unintentional) between-subjects	Relaxing massage (scenario)	Volunteering (intentions)	**Process evidence:** Self-compassion mediates the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosociality. **Generalizability**: Novel hedonic domain
Study 4* ($N = 600$) Prolific	H_1, H_3	2 (intentional vs. unintentional) between-subjects	Relaxing break (scenario)	Volunteering (intentions)	**Process evidence:** Self-compassion mediates the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosociality. **Generalizability**: Novel hedonic domain
Study 5* ($N = 1004$) Prolific	H_1, H_4	2 (intentional vs. unintentional) x 2 (high vs. low effort helping) between-subjects	Relaxing break (scenario)	Volunteering (intentions)	**Boundary condition**: the effect is attenuated for high effort prosociality.

* Denotes preregistered studies.

apathy" by showing that individuals will help others but refrain from helping once their helping becomes painful (i.e., takes on a personal cost). Moreover, when the level of personal distress in enacting a prosocial cause reaches a certain threshold, people are motivated to down-regulate compassion and empathy to avoid the accompanying costs (Cameron et al., 2019; Scheffer et al., 2022).

In our context, following an intentional hedonic experience, consumers may be motivated to preserve the desirable feeling of self-compassion and avoid painful actions (Andreoni, 1990). Considering the incompatibility between self-compassion and the anticipated exertion of effort, we hypothesize that if a particular prosocial behavior requires a high level of effort, the negative effect of the anticipated effort may outweigh the effect of self-compassion and reduce the willingness to help others.

We formalize these predictions as follows:

H_1: Intentional vs. unintentional hedonic consumption leads to heightened prosocial behavior.

H_2: The positive effect of intentional consumption on prosocial behavior occurs for hedonic consumption, but not for non-hedonic consumption.

H_3: The positive effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior is mediated by self-compassion.

H_4: The positive effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior is attenuated when prosocial behavior requires high effort.

Like many consumer behaviors (Pham, 2013), prosocial behaviors are multiply determined. Since hedonic consumption is affectively rich, the role of mood needs to be considered when examining the downstream effect of hedonic consumption on prosociality. On one hand, prior research has indicated that simple pleasures (i.e., enjoying a cocktail) are natural precursors of positive affect (Mead et al., 2016) and that experiencing positive affective states, or personally rewarding experiences more broadly, can promote prosocial behavior (Aknin et al., 2018). On the other hand, extant research has designated hedonic experiences as "sinful pleasures" (Giner-Sorolla, 2001), which in turn prompt guilt-induced helping (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2016). We acknowledge that both accounts are possible since mixed emotions co-exist (Larsen, McGraw, & Cacioppo, 2001; Williams & Aaker, 2002), and test for mood and guilt as possible alternative accounts.

3. Overview of studies

We tested our hypotheses across seven studies using a variety of monetary and non-monetary hedonic domains (i.e., food, media consumption, a massage, a relaxing break), and behavioral and self-reported measures of prosociality. Across all the studies that relied on actual food consumption (Studies 1A, 1B, and 2), we employed a yoked design to rule out differences in food intake between the experimental and control conditions as an alternative account for any results reported.

Studies 1A and 1B provide initial demonstrations of the main effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior (H_1) in the context of behavioral helping (Study 1A) and real monetary charitable donations (Study 1B). Next, Study 1C enhances the generalizability of the effect beyond the food domain by focusing on hedonic media consumption. Studies 2–5 (all preregistered) shed light on boundary conditions and the underlying process. Specifically, Study 2 demonstrates that the effect is specific to hedonic vs. non-hedonic consumption (H_2) and not driven by intentionality per se. Besides documenting the consumption nature as a boundary condition, Study 2 examines behavioral generosity by measuring social value orientation. Importantly, Studies 3 and 4 examine the mediating role of self-compassion (H_3) and further extend our inquiry to novel hedonic domains. Study 5 examines the nature of helping behavior as a boundary condition and shows that the positive effect of intentional hedonic consumption does not occur when prosociality requires high effort (H_4). Across the studies, we rule out multiple alternative explanations. In addition, we report two preregistered post-tests (Appendices I and K) which support the manipulations used in the main studies. We report all the manipulations and the results of all the supplementary analyses in the appendix (sections B – M). Table 1 summarizes our studies and results.

3.1. Study 1A: Intentional hedonic food consumption promotes behavioral helping

Study 1A tested H_1. The goal of this study was to provide behavioral evidence of the main effect in a pervasive hedonic domain: food consumption (Alba & Williams, 2013). We expected that participants who engaged in intentional (vs. unintentional) hedonic consumption would display higher prosociality. One might argue that given the food consumption domain, any positive effect of hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior might be driven by the amount of food consumed (Aarøe & Petersen, 2013). To rule out intake as an alternative explanation, we used a yoked design (Botti & McGill, 2011; Bruyneel et al., 2006; Celiktutan, Klesse, & Tuk, 2024, see below for details).

3.1.1. Participants and procedure

The experiment was presented as a study about food perception. One hundred and three students from a major European business school took part in this laboratory study in exchange for a monetary reward (approximately 9 USD). We utilized a between-participants design, where hedonic consumption (intentional vs. unintentional) was the manipulated factor. Each participant had in their individual cubicles a box of nine identical chocolates (stimuli in appendix A) and was not able to observe the consumption of other participants. Participants were instructed to consume either as many chocolates as they wanted in the *intentional* condition, or as indicated in the instructions in the *unintentional consumption* condition[2] (manipulation in Appendix B). Unbeknownst to the

[2] Participants in the unintentional consumption condition were told that if for any reason they preferred to not complete the eating task, they could withdraw from the study anytime.

participants, the intake of each participant in the unintentional condition was yoked to the intake of a corresponding participant in the intentional condition. Hence, each participant in the intentional condition was matched with a randomly selected participant in the unintentional condition, with the latter instructed to consume the number of chocolates that their intentional counterpart had consumed. Thus, by design, the intake was identical across both conditions.

Following the eating task, consistent with the cover story of testing a new product, all participants evaluated the chocolates on several dimensions (e.g., tastiness, healthiness) on seven-point scales (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*) and rated their post-consumption mood (twenty items, PANAS; Watson et al., 1988; $\alpha = 0.72$), perceived conflict (seven items, $\alpha = 0.85$), and dietary restraint (thirteen items, DEBQ; van Strien et al., 1986; $\alpha = 0.74$) (see supplementary analyses in appendix G1). Participants then completed two manipulation checks on the extent to which (i) they felt that it was their own choice to decide how many chocolates to eat, and (ii) they believed they had a choice to consume the chocolates as instructed. Each item was measured on a seven-point scale (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*). These two items were averaged to create a composite measure of choice freedom ($\alpha = 0.75$). Lastly, participants reported their demographics.

Behavioral helping. Following the demographics, participants were told that the study had ended. Then, after receiving the payment, right before leaving the lab, each participant was asked whether they would be willing to help check written exams for a correct number of pages since the experiment had ended sooner than planned. The experimenter made it clear that the purpose was to help the Exam Office and that the participant could check as many exams as they wished, but the greater the number of exams they checked, the more helpful it would be. The number of checked exams served as the key dependent measure of behavioral helping.

3.1.2. Results and discussion

Data from four participants who failed to comply with the provided instructions and removed the food stimulus from their cubicles were discarded before conducting any analyses. Thus, our final sample consisted of ninety-nine responses ($N = 99$; 72 % female; $M_{age} = 23.20$, $SD_{age} = 2.73$). The intake varied between two and nine pieces of chocolate ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 2.22$). Due to the yoked design, the intake was identical across the two conditions.

Manipulation check. The intentionality manipulation was successful. Participants in the intentional condition perceived higher choice freedom ($M_{Intentional} = 6.21$, $SD = 1.05$) compared to participants in the unintentional condition ($M_{Unintentional} = 2.84$, $SD = 1.59$; $F(1, 97) = 154.13$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.61$).

Behavioral helping. Since our dependent measure was a count of the number of checked exams (only non-negative integer values), we estimated a Poisson regression. Refusals to help were coded as zero. Consistent with our prediction, the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on behavioral helping was significant and positive ($b = 0.43$; $\chi2(1) = 25.96$; $p < 0.001$). As hypothesized, participants in the intentional hedonic consumption condition helped more than participants in the unintentional hedonic consumption condition ($M_{Intentional} = 7.14$, $SD = 3.68$; $M_{Unintentional} = 4.63$, $SD = 2.85$). As a robustness check, we used a separate regression analysis with the log-transformed number of exams that revealed the same direction and significance of the results. The results held when including intake as a covariate ($b = 0.41$; $\chi2(1) = 23.75$; $p < 0.001$).

Study 1A provided initial evidence that intentional hedonic consumption promotes behavioral helping. Consistent with H_1, individuals who engaged in intentional (vs. unintentional) hedonic food consumption displayed significantly more helping behavior.

3.2. Study 1B: Intentional hedonic food consumption promotes real charitable donations

Study 1B tested H_1 using a different behavioral measure of prosociality: real monetary donations. We employed an incentive compatible design and similar to Study 1A, a yoked design to rule out intake as an alternative account.

3.2.1. Participants and procedure

Eighty-five students at a large European business school participated in this laboratory study for a monetary reward ($N = 85$; 55.3 % female; $M_{age} = 23.99$, $SD_{age} = 3.30$). We employed a between-participants design, where hedonic consumption (intentional vs. unintentional) was the manipulated factor. All participants had in their cubicles a plate with seven Oreo biscuits out of which they could consume either as many as wanted (*intentional* condition) or as indicated in the experimental instructions (*unintentional* condition). Similar to Study 1A , the present one used a yoked design and hence the intake was identical across the two conditions. Following the eating task, participants rated their post-consumption mood and perceived conflict, and then, consistent with the cover story, they evaluated the biscuits on several dimensions (e.g., tastiness, healthiness) on seven-point scales (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*) (supplementary analyses in appendix G2).

Charitable donations. To be able to solicit on the spot donations, each participant was given the experimental payment (approximately 5 USD) placed in an envelope next to the computer. After they had consumed and evaluated the biscuits, participants were asked to proceed to the following part of the study. Then, in an allegedly unrelated study, they saw an ad for *Save the Children* (appendix C). Following the ad, participants were told that if they wanted, they had the possibility to donate some of their experimental payment to this charity and keep the rest of the money for themselves. They were asked to leave the desired donation amount (if any) in the provided envelope, which served as our behavioral measure of prosociality. Following the study completion, all the donations were transferred to the charity. A manipulation check with five items (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*) was included (e.g., "I feel free from restraints or strictness"). The five items were averaged to create a composite measure of perceived freedom ($\alpha = 0.48$). Finally, participants reported their demographics.

3.2.2. Results and discussion

There were no data exclusions in this study or any of the subsequent studies. Intake varied between one and seven biscuits (M = 3.95, SD = 1.90).

Manipulation check. The intentionality manipulation was successful. Participants who engaged in intentional hedonic consumption felt more free ($M_{\text{Intentional}}$ = 3.81, SD = 0.51) than participants who engaged in unintentional hedonic consumption ($M_{\text{Unintentional}}$ = 3.40, SD = 0.64; $F(1, 83) = 10.90$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$).

Real charitable donations. Results indicated a significant main effect of intentional hedonic consumption on real monetary donations ($F(1, 83) = 7.21$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$) such that, as hypothesized, participants in the intentional (vs. unintentional) consumption condition made larger charitable donations ($M_{\text{Intentional}}$ = 19.56, SD = 20.02; $M_{\text{Unintentional}}$ = 8.75, SD = 16.66). The effect persisted when intake was included as a covariate ($F(1, 82) = 7.10$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$). As a robustness check, we also examined the donation incidence. A logistic regression revealed that intentional hedonic consumption had a significant effect on donation likelihood ($\chi2(1) = 7.12$; $p = 0.008$).

Studies 1A and 1B provided initial demonstrations of our effect using real hedonic food consumption and behavioral measures of prosociality. However, hedonic experiences may occur across a wider range of consumption domains. In the following study, we therefore extend our inquiry to the domain of hedonic media consumption.

3.3. Study 1C: Intentional hedonic media consumption increases volunteering

3.3.1. Participants and procedure

UK Prolific participants (N = 202; 57.9 % female; M_{age} = 41.54, SD_{age} = 13.09) were randomly assigned to a two-condition (hedonic media consumption: intentional vs. unintentional) between-subjects design. Across both conditions, participants were invited to watch a Budweiser Super Bowl ad featuring the journey of a horse carriage through stormy weather. Participants in the intentional condition were asked to watch the video with the intention of having a break from other tasks. They were also told they could watch the video for as long as they wanted (manipulation in appendix D). Participants in the unintentional condition were asked to watch the video with the intention of evaluating it. They were told that they could not decide for how long to watch the video but had to watch it in its entirety.

Following the video task, participants reported their enjoyment of the video (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Definitely yes*) on three items (liking, enjoyable, boring (R)). These three items were averaged to create a composite measure of enjoyment (α = 0.94).

Next, participants reported their willingness to volunteer for a charitable organization of their own choice (1 = *Definitely Unwilling*, 7 = *Definitely Willing*). Finally, they responded to two manipulation checks (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*) on the extents to which (i) they believed they had a choice over whether to watch the entire video or not and (ii) they felt that they had no control over the video watching task (R), which were averaged to create a composite measure of perceived freedom (α = 0.82).

3.3.2. Results and discussion

Manipulation check. The intentionality manipulation was successful. Participants in the intentional condition perceived higher freedom compared to those in the unintentional condition ($M_{\text{Intentional}}$ = 6.10, SD = 1.07; $M_{\text{Unintentional}}$ = 2.99, SD = 1.73; $F(1, 200) = 230.02$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.53$).

Enjoyment. Overall, participants across both conditions reported a high level of enjoyment (M = 5.04, SD = 1.55; significantly higher than the scale midpoint $t(201) = 9.55$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.67$) indicating that watching the video was indeed a hedonically rewarding experience. Participants in the unintentional condition rated the video marginally more enjoyable than those in the intentional condition ($M_{\text{Intentional}}$ = 4.83, SD = 1.60, $M_{\text{Unintentional}}$ = 5.24, SD = 1.47, $t(200) = -1.89$, $p = 0.060$, $d = -0.26$). We attribute this marginal difference to the fact that participants in the unintentional condition were asked to watch the entire video, whereas those in the intentional condition could watch the video for as long as they wanted to which resulted in a shorter watching time ($M_{\text{Intentional}}$ = 69.39, SD = 29.78 vs. $M_{\text{Unintentional}}$ = 77.27, SD = 11.88; $t(200) = -2.49$, $p = 0.013$, $d = -0.35$).

Volunteering. As hypothesized, participants who experienced intentional hedonic media consumption were more willing to volunteer than participants in the unintentional condition ($M_{\text{Intentional}}$ = 4.69, SD = 1.64, $M_{\text{Unintentional}}$ = 4.16, SD = 1.85, $F(1, 200) = 4.62$, $p = 0.033$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.023$). As a robustness check, viewing duration did not have an effect on volunteering intentions ($F < 1$), and controlling for viewing duration did not weaken the effect ($F(1, 199) = 4.80$, $p = 0.030$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.024$).

Study 1C provides support for the generalizability of our effect. As predicted, the effect is not specific to hedonic food, but occurs for hedonic media as well. Importantly, the observed results are incompatible with a mood-related account since we observe a higher level of volunteering intentions in the intentional vs. unintentional condition.

Together, the first three studies support H_1 (all supplementary results are reported in appendices G1-G2). The following four studies shed light on the proposed mechanism and two boundary conditions.

3.4. Study 2: Non-hedonic consumption as a boundary condition

Study 2 tested H_1 and H_2 and aimed to extend the previous findings in two important ways. First, we reasoned that when consumers pursue intentional hedonic consumption, they infer that they are cultivating self-compassion. However, this is not the case for non-hedonic consumption. On this premise, we hypothesized that intentionality increases prosociality for hedonic consumption, but not

for non-hedonic consumption. To test this prediction, we included two new conditions: intentional and unintentional *non-hedonic* consumption. Akin to studies 1A and 1B, we used a yoked design to rule out intake as an alternative explanation. Furthermore, to establish the direction of the effect we included a *control* condition, void of any consumption, which served as a proxy for baseline prosociality. Second, in addition to charitable donations, we included a second dependent measure that captures behavioral sharing (using a nine-trial social value orientation task; Van Lange et al., 1997). This study was preregistered at https://aspredicted.org/N2Y_L2B.

3.4.1. Participants, design, and procedure

Students from a large European business school ($N = 503$; 58 % female; $M_{age} = 22.93$, $SD_{age} = 4.85$) were randomly assigned across conditions in a 2 (intentionality: intentional vs. unintentional) x 2 (consumption nature: hedonic vs. non-hedonic) between-subjects design with an added control (no consumption) condition.

Eating task. In the hedonic conditions, participants were provided with nine identical chocolate truffles, whereas in the non-hedonic conditions they were provided with eight identical pieces of plain rice crackers.[3] To manipulate intentionality, we employed the same product evaluation task from studies 1A and 1B across all four consumption conditions. Participants were instructed to consume either as many pieces of the food stimulus as they wanted in the two *intentional consumption* conditions, or as indicated in the instructions in the *unintentional consumption* conditions (appendix F). Given the yoked design, the intake was equivalent across conditions. Following the eating task, participants evaluated the food on several dimensions (e.g., perceived healthiness) and rated their post-consumption mood (supplementary analyses in appendix G3). Participants in the control condition did not undertake the eating task but proceeded directly to the prosociality measures and then took part in an unrelated study in order to keep the study length constant across conditions.

Charitable donations. As our main dependent measure, participants indicated the amount of money out of their experiment payment (approximately 9 USD) they would like to donate to a charity of their own choice (agnostic to the cause).

Behavioral sharing. As a secondary dependent measure, we measured behavioral sharing using a Social Value Orientation task (SVO; Van Lange et al., 2007; $\alpha = 0.95$). This task consists of a set of nine decomposed trials assessing resource allocation where participants make choices involving outcomes for themselves and another (unknown) person. For each trial, participants were given three possible point distributions and had to indicate their preferred distribution. Each game entailed a prosocial (e.g., You get: 480 points—Other gets: 480 points), individualistic (e.g., You get: 540 points —Other gets: 280 points), or a competitive (e.g., You get: 480 points—Other gets: 80 points) choice distribution.

To test alternative explanations, we measured self-esteem (ten items; $\alpha = 0.87$; Rosenberg, 1965), reactance (fourteen items; $\alpha = 0.89$; Hong & Faedda, 1996), immersion (four items; $\alpha = 0.82$; Oh & Pham, 2022) and post-consumption conflict (seven items; $\alpha = 0.81$). We provide all the additional analyses in appendix G3.

The study concluded with two intentionality manipulation checks on the extent to which participants perceived they (i) had a free choice regarding how much food to consume and (ii) were not able to decide how much food to consume (R) that were averaged to create a composite measure of perceived freedom ($\alpha = 0.87$), and one manipulation check item for consumption nature ("How pleasurable do you consider the eating experience that you just had?"). All three items were measured on a seven-point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*).

3.4.2. Results and discussion

The chocolate intake varied between one and nine pieces ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.65$), and the rice crackers intake varied between one and eight pieces ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.44$).

Manipulation checks. The intentionality manipulation was successful. Participants in the intentional conditions perceived higher choice freedom than participants in the unintentional conditions ($M_{Intentional} = 6.07$, $SD = 1.11$; $M_{Unintentional} = 2.30$, $SD = 1.57$; $F(1, 399) = 782.71$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.66$). The manipulation of consumption nature was also successful. As expected, participants in the hedonic conditions perceived the chocolates more pleasurable than participants in the non-hedonic conditions, who consumed rice crackers ($M_{Hedonic} = 5.70$, $SD = 1.33$; $M_{Non\text{-}hedonic} = 3.10$, $SD = 1.49$; $F(1, 399) = 337.53$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.45$) (additional analyses for each of the three items in appendix M).

Charitable donations. In line with the pre-registration, a 2 (intentionality) x 2 (consumption nature) ANOVA yielded a significant main effect of intentionality ($F(1, 399) = 5.05$, $p = 0.025$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.013$) and a significant main effect of consumption nature ($F(1, 399) = 19.40$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.046$). Further, we observed the predicted two-way interaction on charitable donations ($F(1, 399) = 5.89$, $p = 0.016$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.015$). In line with the prior studies, we found the effect of intentionality, but only for hedonic and not for non-hedonic food consumption. Hence, participants who experienced intentional hedonic consumption wanted to make larger donations ($M = 31.07$, $SD = 39.66$) compared to participants who experienced unintentional hedonic consumption ($M = 16.86$, $SD = 32.54$, $F(1, 399) = 10.95$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.027$). Including the intake as a covariate did not change the results.

In line with our theorizing, this pattern did not emerge when consumption was non-hedonic ($M_{Intentional} = 10.31$, $SD = 23.25$ vs. $M_{Unintentional} = 10.85$, $SD = 23.24$, $F < 1$). Thus, Study 2 supported H_2. Also of note, the level of donations in the control condition was

[3] The results of a pre-test indicated that participants considered the size of a rice cracker too big. For this reason we used halves instead of full pieces and therefore, we had to employ an even number (eight pieces for each sample). Please see the food stimuli in appendix A.

not significantly different from the non-hedonic consumption conditions ($M_{Control} = 10.00$, SD = 25.34), indicating the direction of the effect (Fig. 1). Planned contrasts revealed that compared to the control condition (no consumption), only intentional hedonic consumption significantly increased charitable donations $F(1, 498) = 25.67$, $p < 0.001$. Experiencing unintentional hedonic consumption did not significantly increase charitable donations compared to the control condition ($F(1, 498) = 2.68$, $p = 0.10$). This was also the case for the two non-hedonic consumption conditions; neither intentional ($F(1, 498) = 0.054$, $p = 0.94$) nor unintentional non-hedonic consumption ($F(1, 498) = 0.04$, $p = 0.84$) led to a significant increase in charitable donations compared to the control condition.

Donation incidence. As a robustness check, we conducted a logistic regression with donation incidence as the dependent variable, and intentionality, consumption nature, and their interaction as predictors. The regression revealed a significant interaction (B = 0.82, SE = 0.43, Wald = 3.73, $p = 0.05$). The main effects of food and intentionality were not significant. Within hedonic consumption, intentionality led to a higher donation likelihood compared to unintentional consumption: $M_{Intentional} = 50$ % vs. $M_{Unintentional} = 34$ %, $\chi2[1] = 5.30$, $p = 0.021$. Within non-hedonic consumption, intentionality did not have a significant effect on donation likelihood: $M_{Intentional} = 47.4$ % vs. $M_{Unintentional} = 52.6$ %, $\chi2[1] = 0.26$, $p = 0.61$.

Behavioral sharing. For each of the nine choices we calculated a social value orientation (SVO) score by dividing the points attributed to the "Other" by the total amount of points that had been distributed in that choice (Bekkers, 2004). For example, the choice for the distribution "You get: 480—Other gets: 480" led to an SVO score of 0.50 (i.e., 480/[480 + 480]), whereas the choice for the distribution "You get: 480—Other gets: 80" corresponded to an SVO score of 0.14 (i.e., 80/[480 + 80]). We calculated an overall SVO score by averaging the SVO scores for all nine choices presented to the participants with higher scores indicating a tendency for more prosocial sharing ($\alpha = 0.95$).

A 2 (intentionality) x 2 (consumption nature) ANOVA on SVO scores yielded a two-way interaction ($F(1, 399) = 9.65$, $p = 0.002$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.024$) and a main effect of intentionality ($F(1, 399) = 6.50$, $p = 0.011$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.016$). The main effect of consumption nature was not significant ($F < 1$). Consistent with our theorizing, and paralleling the results on monetary donations, when participants engaged in hedonic consumption, intentionality led to increased behavioral sharing ($M_{Intentional} = 3.99$, SD = 0.63 vs. $M_{Unintentional} = 3.56$, SD = 0.86, $F(1, 399) = 16.036$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.039$). However, this pattern did not occur when participants engaged in non-hedonic consumption ($M_{Intentional} = 3.69$, SD = 0.76 vs. $M_{Unintentional} = 3.74$, SD = 0.79, $F < 1$). Thus, intentionality increased sharing only when the consumption was hedonic. This finding corroborates our reasoning that only after engaging in intentional hedonics, consumers infer that they have been caring and compassionate towards themselves and are therefore more likely to be caring and compassionate towards others.

Study 2 supports our hypothesis that intentional consumption increases prosociality and shows that the effect does not occur for any type of intentional consumption, but only for hedonic consumption. Additionally, it rules out alternative explanations based on self-esteem, reactance, conflict, mood, and immersion (appendix G3). The relatively high means for donation incidence in the non-hedonic consumption conditions merit future investigation since our theorizing does not speak to prosociality following non-hedonic consumption. Next, Studies 3 and 4 aim to provide direct process evidence through mediation. Specifically, we predict that the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior will be driven by self-compassion.

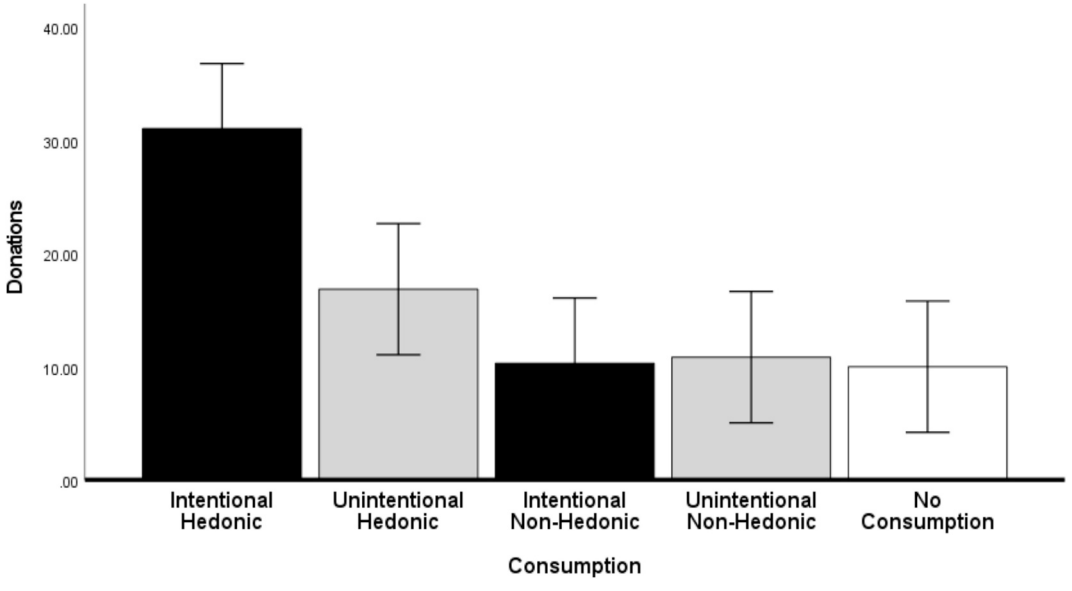

Fig. 1. Donations as a function of intentionality and consumption nature (Study 2). Error bars represent 95% CI.

3.5. Study 3: The underlying role of Self-Compassion

Study 3 tested H_1 and H_3 using a novel hedonic domain: a relaxing massage. We employed a hypothetical scenario adapted from prior work on hedonic choices (Botti & McGill, 2011). This study was preregistered at https://aspredicted.org/YL9_LYL.

3.5.1. Participants and procedure

Three hundred UK Prolific participants ($N = 300$; 66.7 % female; $M_{age} = 39.06$, $SD_{age} = 12.53$) were randomly assigned to a two-condition (hedonic massage: intentional vs. unintentional) between-subjects design. First, we manipulated intentionality by framing the same hedonic experience as either intentional or unintentional. Across both conditions, participants were asked to imagine that a new massage centre had recently opened in their neighborhood and that they had received a voucher for a free relaxing 15-minute massage. They were further asked to imagine that they had just taken this massage. In the *intentional condition*, participants were told that they had freely chosen the type of massage. In the *unintentional condition,* they were told that the type of massage was specified in the voucher and so they were not able to decide what massage to have (appendix H).

Volunteering. Next, participants were asked to imagine that, as they were exiting the massage centre, they saw a charitable organization that they admired (agnostic to the domain) asking for online volunteers. Participants reported their willingness to volunteer on a seven-point scale (1 = *Definitely Unwilling*, 7 = *Definitely Willing*).

Self-compassion. Next, participants completed a four-item measure of self-compassion based on the Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF; Raes et al., 2011; α = 0.94) (e.g., "I am directing kindness toward myself", "I am being nice to myself") measured on a seven-point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree,* 7 = *Strongly Agree*).

Alternative account: guilt. Given the common belief that hedonic consumption might prompt feelings of guilt, we additionally explored the role of guilt. To this end, participants reported to what extent they felt guilty for having focused on themselves while experiencing the massage (1 = *Definitely Disagree*, 7 = *Definitely Agree*).

Participants then completed a manipulation check consisting of two items on the extents to which they (i) believed they had a choice over what type of massage to experience and (ii) felt that it was their own choice to decide the type of massage (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*). These two items were averaged to create a composite measure of choice freedom ($\alpha = 0.77$). Lastly, participants reported their demographics.

3.5.2. Results and discussion

Manipulation check. The intentionality manipulation was successful. Participants in the intentional condition perceived higher choice freedom ($M_{Intentional} = 5.16$, SD = 1.35) compared to participants in the unintentional condition ($M_{Unintentional} = 1.89$, SD = 1.10; $F(1, 298) = 528.36$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.64$).

Volunteering. As preregistered, and consistent with the previous studies, intentional hedonic consumption led to higher willingness to volunteer than unintentional hedonic condition ($M_{Intentional} = 4.63$, SD = 1.50, $M_{Unintentional} = 4.23$, SD = 1.68, $F(1, 298) = 4.71$, $p = 0.031$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.016$).

Mediation by self-compassion. A sweetspot analysis (Pieters, 2017) showed that self-compassion and volunteering exhibited sufficient discriminant validity for self-compassion to qualify as a suitable mediator ($r = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, to test the theorized mechanism we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017; Process model 4; 5,000 bootstraps) with hedonic consumption (1 = intentional, 0 = unintentional) as the independent variable, self-compassion as the mediator, and volunteering as the dependent variable. Consistent with our theorizing, intentional hedonic consumption was positively associated with self-compassion ($a = 0.47$, SE = 0.13, 95 % CI [.22, 0.74]), and self-compassion was positively associated with volunteering ($b = 0.23$, SE = 0.08, 95 % CI [.07, 0.39]). Notably, the model revealed a significant indirect effect of hedonic consumption on volunteering through the proposed mechanism of self-compassion ($c = 0.11$, SE = 0.054, 95 % CI [.03, 0.23]). The direct effect of hedonic consumption on volunteering was not significant when self-compassion was included in the model ($c' = 0.28$, SE = 0.18, 95 % CI [−0.07, 0.65]), indicating full mediation. These results support the proposed mechanism, showing that self-compassion mediates the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on volunteering. We also conducted a similar mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017; Process model 4; 5,000 bootstraps) testing for guilt as a possible mediator. Guilt did not mediate the effect as the 95 % CI for the indirect effect included zero (CI_{95} = [-0.051, 0.021]).

3.5.3. Post-test A

A preregistered post-test (https://aspredicted.org/5wty-349t.pdf; appendix I) used the exact same manipulation and examined to what extent Prolific participants ($N = 100$; 62 % female; $M_{age} = 42.15$, $SD_{age} = 13.01$) perceived the massage as an expression of (a) choice freedom and (b) intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) motivation. Choice freedom was measured using the following three items adapted from the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (McAuley et al., 1989): (i) "I believe I had the freedom to choose to have the massage", (ii) "I believe that I had a choice over what type of massage to experience", (iii) "I felt that it was my own choice to decide the length of the massage" on a seven-point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*; α = 0.87). Additionally, following Woolley & Fishbach (2018) and Milyavskaya, Inzlicht, Hope, & Koestner (2015), the extent of intrinsic motivation for having the massage was measured with the following item "To what extent did having the massage feel like something you had to do or feel like something you wanted to do?" on a seven-point scale (1 = *Something I had to do*, 7 = *Something I wanted to do*). A higher score on this measure reflected a higher level of intrinsic motivation.

The results showed that participants perceived a higher level of choice freedom in the intentional massage condition ($M = 6.09$, SD

= 0.85) than the unintentional condition ($M = 2.76$, SD = 1.44; $F(1, 98) = 196.70$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.67$), lending support to the notion that intentional consumption denotes choice freedom. Moreover, participants inferred that the massage was something that they wanted to do (vs. had to do) to a higher extent in the intentional condition ($M = 6.46$, SD = 0.78) than in the unintentional condition ($M = 4.22$, SD = 1.83; $F(1, 98) = 63.04$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.39$). Therefore, the post-test confirmed that participants in the intentional condition felt they had greater choice freedom and intrinsic motivation than those in the unintentional condition.

By directly measuring self-compassion, Study 3 sheds light on the mechanism driving the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosociality, thus supporting H_3. When consumers engage in hedonic consumption intentionally, they infer that they have cultivated self-compassion, which subsequently motivates them to behave prosocially. However, this is not the case for unintentional consumption since this does not signal self-compassion. It is important to acknowledge that our conceptualization involves choice freedom at a general level. Specifically, hedonic consumption increases prosociality only when consumers perceive the hedonic experience as a manifestation of their choice freedom. The current research is agnostic regarding whether the perceived choice freedom arises from the act of choosing to engage in hedonic consumption vs. not, as opposed to choosing from amongst different hedonic options.

In the following study, we employ yet another paradigm to test the underlying mechanism and examine hedonic experiences more broadly.

3.6. Study 4: Non-monetary intentional hedonic consumption and self-compassion

Study 4 tested H_1 and H_3, aiming to provide additional process evidence for the relationship between an intentional hedonic experience and prosocial behavior, and also to further examine the generalizability of our effect. Studies 1–3 examined hedonic experiences that imply monetary costs. In daily life, however, individuals engage in a wide range of hedonics, including simple pleasures that do not require a specific financial commitment (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Mead et al., 2016). In Study 4, we therefore tested whether the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior holds for a free hedonic experience: taking a break. This study was preregistered at https://aspredicted.org/gz2d-5fs4.pdf.

3.6.1. Participants and procedure

UK Prolific participants ($N = 600$; 56.7 % female; $M_{age} = 41.90$, $SD_{age} = 13.59$) were randomly assigned to a two-condition (hedonic break: intentional vs. unintentional) between-subjects design. First, we manipulated the intentionality of the hedonic experience by using a novel, non-monetary domain. Participants read a brief scenario about taking a twenty-minute break in the sun either *intentionally*, to treat themselves to a relaxing break from work, or *unintentionally* because an IT update temporarily disabled their work laptop (appendix J).

Volunteering. Following the intentionality manipulation, participants were asked to imagine that after work they had encountered a charity they admired (agnostic to the domain) looking for online volunteers. Participants reported their willingness to volunteer on a seven-point scale (1 = *Definitely Unwilling*, 7 = *Definitely Willing*).

Self-compassion. Next, participants completed the same four-item measure of self-compassion as in Study 3, based on the Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF; Raes et al., 2011; α = 0.94) (e.g., "I am directing kindness toward myself", "I am being nice to myself") measured on a seven-point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*).

Lastly, participants completed a manipulation check consisting of two items ("I believe that I chose when to take the break"; "It was my own choice to decide the length of the break" measured on seven-point scales (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*) that were averaged to create a composite measure of choice freedom ($\alpha = 0.94$), and then reported their age and gender.

3.6.2. Results and discussion

Manipulation check. The intentionality manipulation was successful. Participants in the intentional condition perceived a higher level of choice freedom than participants in the unintentional condition ($M_{Intentional} = 6.23$, SD = 0.95 vs. $M_{Unintentional} = 2.17$, SD = 1.26; $F(1, 598) = 1981.88$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.76$).

Volunteering. As preregistered, and consistent with the previous studies, intentional hedonic consumption led to higher willingness to volunteer than unintentional hedonic condition ($M_{Intentional} = 4.46$, SD = 1.38, $M_{Unintentional} = 4.11$, SD = 1.52, $F(1, 598) = 8.34$, $p = 0.004$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.014$).

Mediation by self-compassion. A sweetspot analysis (Pieters, 2017) showed that self-compassion and volunteering exhibited sufficient discriminant validity ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, to test the theorized mechanism we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017; Process model 4; 5,000 bootstraps) with hedonic consumption (1 = intentional, 0 = unintentional) as the independent variable, self-compassion as the mediator, and volunteering as the dependent variable. Consistent with our theorizing, intentional hedonic consumption was positively associated with self-compassion ($a = 0.71$, SE = 0.08, 95 % CI [.54, 0.87]), and self-compassion was positively associated with volunteering ($b = 0.25$, SE = 0.06, 95 % CI [.15, 0.37]). Notably, the model revealed a significant indirect effect of hedonic consumption on volunteering through the proposed mechanism of self-compassion ($c = 0.18$, SE = 0.054, 95 % CI [.08, 0.30]). The direct effect of hedonic consumption on volunteering was not significant when self-compassion was included in the model ($c' = 0.16$, SE = 0.12, 95 % CI [−0.08, 0.40]) indicating full mediation. These results support the proposed mechanism, showing that self-compassion mediates the effect of intentional hedonic consumption on volunteering even for a non-monetary hedonic experience.

3.6.3. Post-test B

A preregistered post-test (https://aspredicted.org/vkkn-d766.pdf; appendix K) used the exact same manipulation and examined to what extent Prolific participants ($N = 101$; 55 % female; $M_{age} = 41.35$, $SD_{age} = 13.97$) perceived the break as an expression of (a) choice freedom and (b) intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) motivation, using the same measures and anchors as Post-test A.

Results. Participants perceived a higher level of choice freedom in the intentional break condition ($M = 6.22$, SD = 0.95) than the unintentional break condition ($M = 2.58$, SD = 1.39; $F(1, 99) = 235.17$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.70$), lending support to the notion that intentional consumption reflects choice freedom. Moreover, participants felt that the break was something that they wanted to do (vs. had to do) to a higher extent in the intentional condition ($M = 5.82$, SD = 1.42) than in the unintentional condition ($M = 3.44$, SD = 1.86; $F(1, 99) = 52.26$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.34$). Therefore, the post-test confirmed that an intentional (vs. unintentional) break reflects a higher level of choice freedom and intrinsic motivation.

Besides providing additional direct process evidence, by extending our inquiry to a non-monetary hedonic experience, Study 4 demonstrates the robustness of our effect. In the following study we examine a second boundary condition, namely the effort investment required for the prosocial behavior. We hypothesize that the effect will be attenuated for prosocial behavior that implies high effort since this is incompatible with self-compassion.

3.7. Study 5: Non-monetary intentional hedonic consumption and effortful prosocial behavior

Study 5 tested H_1 and H_4. The purpose of this study was to document a managerially relevant boundary condition, namely the effortfulness of the prosocial behavior. Building on research showing that effort is generally experienced as aversive and responses to prosocial requests are less likely to be positive when they are effortful (David et al., 2024; Job et al., 2024; Kool et al., 2010), we predicted that the positive effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosocial behavior would be attenuated when prosocial behavior requires high effort. This study was preregistered at https://aspredicted.org/T5K_9CM.

3.7.1. Participants and procedure

UK Prolific participants ($N = 1004$; 54 % female; $M_{age} = 44.96$, $SD_{age} = 13.72$) were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions in a 2 (intentionality) x 2 (effort) design. First, we manipulated the intentionality of the hedonic experience using the same manipulation as in Study 4(appendix J). Next, we manipulated the effort required by the prosocial behavior. Participants were told that after work, on their way home, they had encountered a charity they admire looking for volunteers to help either *online* (low effort) or *in person* knowing that the charity is located one hour away from their homes (high effort; appendix L). As a measure of prosociality, participants reported their willingness to volunteer on a seven-point scale (1 = *Definitely Unwilling*, 7 = *Definitely Willing*).

Participants then responded to two intentionality manipulation check questions on the extents to which (i) they had the break deliberately, (ii) they decided the length of the break, and an effort manipulation check (iii) "The charity was looking for online volunteers", all items measured on seven-point scales (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*). The first two items were averaged to create a composite measure of choice freedom ($\alpha = 0.95$). Finally, participants reported their demographics.

3.7.2. Results and discussion

Manipulation checks. The intentionality manipulation was successful. Participants in the intentional condition perceived higher choice freedom ($M_{Intentional} = 6.54$, SD = 0.71) compared to participants in the unintentional condition ($M_{Unintentional} = 1.68$, SD = 1.02; $F(1, 1002) = 7639.23$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.88$). The effort manipulation was successful as well ($M_{LowEffort} = 5.44$, SD = 2.04 vs. $M_{HighEffort} = 2.00$, SD = 1.68, $F(1, 1002) = 844.73$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.45$).

Volunteering. A 2 (intentionality) x 2 (effort) ANOVA yielded two significant main effects of intentionality ($F(1, 1000) = 6.95$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.007$) and effort ($F(1, 1000) = 94.92$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.087$). The interaction was not significant ($F < 1$, $p = 0.69$). As preregistered, and replicating the prior studies, a planned contrast within the low effort conditions showed that participants who had an intentional hedonic experience were more willing to volunteer ($M = 4.65$, SD = 1.55) than those who had an unintentional hedonic experience ($M = 4.32$, SD = 1.68, $F(1, 1000) = 4.62$, $p = 0.032$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.005$). As theorized, this pattern did not emerge when prosocial behavior required a high level of effort ($M_{Intentional} = 3.54$, SD = 1.89 vs. $M_{Unintentional} = 3.30$, SD = 1.81, $F(1, 1000) = 2.49$, $p = 0.12$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.002$). Evidently, not only was the effect of the effort manipulation stronger than that of intentionality, it reduced the effect of intentionality in the high effort conditions to below statistical significance.

Validating H_4, these findings imply that prosocial behavior represents a complex, multiply determined phenomenon (Pham, 2013). From a managerial standpoint, Study 5 suggests that organisations that are looking for volunteers will benefit from framing their appeals as effortlessly as possible.

4. General discussion

The current work investigated whether intentional hedonic consumption increases prosocial behavior and whether self-compassion drives this effect. The results of seven experiments lend credence to these hypotheses. Specifically, we found that intentional vs. unintentional hedonic consumption increased multiple forms of prosociality such as behavioral helping (Study 1A), real monetary donations (Study 1B), intended donations (Study 2), behavioral sharing (Study 2), and volunteering intentions (Studies 1C, 3, 4, and 5). The effect extended across various hedonic domains ranging from real hedonic food consumption (Studies 1A, 1B, and 2) and

hedonic media consumption (Study 1C) to a hypothetical massage (Study 3) and a relaxing break (Studies 4 and 5). Importantly, the positive effect of intentionality on prosociality did not occur for non-hedonic consumption (Study 2). In support of our proposed mechanism, Studies 3 and 4 provide evidence for the mediating role of self-compassion. We concluded by showing that the key effect of intentional hedonic consumption on prosociality is eliminated when consumers are asked to engage in prosocial behavior that requires a high level of effort (Study 5).

4.1. Theoretical contributions

Our work makes several theoretical contributions. First, we enhance the current understanding of hedonics. Although hedonic consumption has been extensively studied, most of the extant work has focused on its antecedents, while its interpersonal consequences have been understudied. Thus, we expand the limited body of work on the positive outcomes of hedonic experiences (Chen & Sengupta, 2014; Do Vale, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2016; Mead et al., 2016).

Unlike previous studies contrasting hedonic and non-hedonic consumption, our interest lies in the intentional pursuit of hedonics. In the current experiments, participants were not asked to make a choice between hedonic and non-hedonic consumption, but simply experienced identical hedonic consumption either intentionally or unintentionally. By focusing on intentional vs. unintentional hedonic consumption, we add to the understanding of how daily hedonic experiences can influence unrelated consumer decisions such as charitable giving. By documenting the interplay between hedonics and intentionality, our findings add to extant research on volitional consumption (Barasch et al., 2017) and to the literature on self-gifting (Atalay & Meloy, 2011; Mick & DeMoss, 1990).

Second, the current work augments the growing body of research on prosocial behavior within the marketing literature. In showing that hedonic consumption enhances behavioral helping across multiple domains (monetary and time donations) and documenting our focal effect for both specific target entities (i.e., Save the Children) and general ones (a charity that one admires), the current findings advance our knowledge about what motivates prosocial acts and contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the philanthropic sector. By examining settings where consumers intentionally engage in hedonic consumption we provide a counterpoint to the literature on guilt-induced prosociality.

Interestingly, although popular culture has portrayed individuals who seek hedonics as being self-interested ("McVitie's: Too good to share"), our findings show that this is not always the case. On the contrary, the current work provides a silver lining by showing that pursuing a seemingly self-benefitting behavior motivates behaviors intended to benefit others (i.e., helping behavior, charitable donations) and thus, it can potentially alter moral judgments of both hedonics and prosociality (Olson et al., 2021).

Clearly, intentional hedonic consumption motivates prosocial behavior, but why is this the case? As a third theoretical contribution, we document a qualitatively different relationship between hedonics and prosociality, revealing self-compassion as a novel mechanism. By showing that after being kind to themselves, consumers are kinder to others we show that self-care and caring for others go hand in hand. Therefore, we shed light on a novel route from hedonic consumption to prosociality and enhance the literature on imposed self-interest (Berman & Small, 2012).

4.2. Managerial implications

The present work has important practical implications for marketers, charitable organizations, and policymakers. In the first place, considering the ubiquity of hedonic products and services, our findings are insightful for managers of hedonic offerings, across multiple industries, ranging from restaurants and bakeries to wellness centers, travel agencies or entertainment-related businesses (e.g., movie theatres, amusement parks, and art museums).

The current results indicate that brand managers can benefit from outlining the intentionality of hedonic experiences when designing marketing communication. For instance, marketers should frame hedonic offerings as an opportunity to promote behaviors held in high regard like prosociality (i.e., "being kind to yourself makes you kinder to others"). Relatedly, in service settings, the fact that customers exhibit increased prosocial behavior following intentional hedonic consumption may lead to smoother customer-employee interactions and potentially an increase in tipping behavior (Warren & Hanson, 2023), which in turn could boost employee satisfaction. Recent anecdotal evidence from the CEO of Lyft supports the current findings: after attending a Taylor Swift concert, which presumably illustrates an intentional hedonic experience, customers offer more generous tips to taxi drivers relative to customers pursuing regular activities.[4]

Second, our work has important real-world implications for charities and provides insights into designing more effective fundraising requests. By showing that hedonic experiences positively impact charitable giving, the current findings suggest an alternative path for non-profit professionals to raise additional funds. Specifically, charitable organizations may benefit from exposing customers to donation appeals immediately after they experienced intentional hedonic consumption. For instance, by being present in the proximity of hedonic offerings such as wellness centers or hairdressers, where the focus on self-compassion is salient, non-profit organizations could prompt donations or encourage higher rates of volunteering.

Furthermore, unlike more traditional ways of increasing donations that imply a longer time window and substantial budgets (i.e., advertising), this research shows that non-profit organizations can benefit from less costly interventions by embedding hedonics into fundraising initiatives. For instance, engaging customers in intentional hedonic experiences (i.e., a concert) prior to exposing them to

[4] https://fortune.com/2024/05/31/lyft-ceo-david-risher-best-tippers-taylor-swift-swifties-eras-tour/.

donation appeals could elicit higher donations. Similarly, an increasing number of charities have been collaborating with restaurant and movie theatre chains. In light of our findings, charities would increase the effectiveness of donation appeals by framing such hedonic experiences as intentional choices that customers purposefully made to treat themselves (for instance, "You are here at Disney because *you chose* to experience the magic"). Furthermore, Study 5 shows that in order to increase volunteering, non-profit organizations ought to frame their appeals in a low effort manner that is compatible with self-compassion.

Relatedly, the current work also provides practical implications for marketing communication. Although marketers oftentimes hold the intuition that consumers experience negative emotions following hedonic purchases and try to alleviate such reactions in advance by emphasizing that no guilt will ensue, our results show that this is not the case for intentional hedonics. Specifically, a framing based on negative emotions such as guilt appeals in advertising hedonic products or services is not necessary to inspire prosocial behavior. Consequently, when designing marketing communication for hedonic products, instead of focusing on deterring negative emotions (i.e., "guilt-free desserts"; "shameless goodies") it may be more beneficial for marketing managers to outline the upsides of hedonic experiences ("be kind to yourself", "Have a break, have a KitKat") and nudge consumers to be intentional about their pleasure.

Finally, the current findings provide invigorating insights for policymakers interested in maximizing consumer welfare. Extant research has shown that certain consumers tend to deprive themselves of hedonic experiences because of overweighing the future over the present. This leads to a host of negative outcomes, including lower productivity, feelings of missing out on life, and acute regret for not enjoying oneself (Kivetz & Keinan, 2006). Importantly, Studies 4 and 5 show that even hedonic experiences that do not require any financial commitment such as simply taking a break positively impact prosociality. By demonstrating that the effect is robust across various hedonic domains, our findings provide an uplifting perspective on the (social) benefits of intentionally pursuing hedonic consumption thereby enhancing consumer welfare.

4.3. Limitations and future research directions

The current findings show that intentional hedonic consumption enhances both monetary and non-monetary (i.e., real helping, time donations) prosociality. Nonetheless, except for study 5, the other studies did not involve prosocial behavior that is highly costly to oneself. In an ancillary study, we tested whether intentional vs. unintentional hedonic consumption increases willingness to donate blood (appendix N). In line with our intuition, we did not find a significant effect. Based on this, we speculate that counter-hedonic prosocial behavior is motivated to a higher extent by chronic vs. situational factors. Thus, future research may benefit from studying forms of prosociality that require larger sacrifices, and other types of effort .

Our inquiry focused on both experienced (i.e., eating hedonic food, watching a hedonic video) and hypothetical hedonic consumption (i.e., a relaxing massage, a relaxing break). We observed that even merely imagining intentional hedonic consumption is sufficient to prompt feelings of self-compassion and in turn, prosocial behavior. Nevertheless, future research might systematically pit imagined vs. experienced hedonic consumption against each other, to assess whether the latter produces systematically larger effect sizes.

Finally, the current work is limited to the immediate consequences of hedonic consumption. However, more research is needed to examine the time course of hedonics since these consumption episodes do not occur sporadically, but rather regularly. An interesting future research avenue would be to explore whether consumers who experience a sequence of hedonic experiences in a relatively short period of time (for instance, going on holidays) manage to "accumulate" and unfold the associated benefits over a longer time window or whether they experience hedonic adaptation. Therefore, taking a longitudinal perspective might shed light on the potential carryover effects of hedonic experiences.

To conclude, hedonic experiences represent a cornerstone of our everyday well-being. However, their social utility has been mostly overlooked. In this research, we asked whether intentional hedonic consumption facilitates prosocial behavior, and found that it indeed does. Our findings demonstrate that intentional hedonic consumption can stimulate a vital social function: helping others. We hope that future research will expand on our findings and further examine the positive consequences of intentional hedonic consumption.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Daniela Carmen Cristian: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Bob Fennis:** Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Anirban Mukhopadhyay:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Luk Warlop:** Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2025.07.002.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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