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A Sustainable Pathway to Consumer Wellbeing. The Role of Anticonsumption and Consumer Empowerment

This study investigates the effect of different anticonsumption constructs on consumer wellbeing. The study assumes that people will only lower their level of consumption if doing so does not also lower personal wellbeing. More precisely, this research investigates how specific subtypes of sustainable anticonsumption (e.g., voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living) relate to different states of consumer's wellbeing (e.g., financial, psychosocial, and subjective wellbeing). This work also examines whether consumer empowerment can improve personal wellbeing and strengthen the anticonsumption wellbeing relationship. The results show that voluntarily foregoing consumption does not reduce wellbeing and consumer empowerment plays a significant role in supporting sustainable pathways to consumer wellbeing. This study reasons that empowerment improves consumer sovereignty, but may be detrimental for consumers heavily concerned about debt-free living. The present investigation concludes by proposing implications for public and consumer policymakers wishing to promote appropriate sustainable (anticonsumption) pathways to consumer wellbeing.

What we consume, how we consume, and indeed, why we (do not) consume are important issues, not only for business and marketing, but also public and consumer affairs. Yet, unsustainable consumption has led to many environmental (e.g., climate change and resource exploitation), social (e.g., gap between haves and have-nots), and personal (e.g., over-indebtedness) problems. Thus, understanding consumption habits is vital to both enhancing consumer sovereignty and attaining sustainable lifestyles (Arbuthnott 2012). Consequently, consumer policy should be interested in research on how to persuade people to consume only as much as the environment can allow. Yet, increasing consumer wellbeing and attaining sustainability by limiting personal consumption are two

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seemingly incompatible goals for public policy when we consider the consumption driven society surrounding us (Devezer et al. 2014). Despite efforts by policymakers, marketers and scholars to encourage sustainable, resource-saving behavior, unsustainable consumption continues to be the norm, at least in the affluent Western countries. Therefore, research concerned with consumer affairs needs to consider how unsustainable over-consumption can be reduced without adversely affecting consumer wellbeing.

In this vein, anticonsumption in terms of consciously rejecting, reducing, or reclaiming consumption (Lee et al. 2011) can be regarded as a suitable concept for encouraging consumption sustainability. Anticonsumption lifestyles emphasize conservation rather than resource exploitation, particularly in the cases of voluntary simplification (Zavestoski 2002), collaborative consumption (Seegebarth et al. 2016), eco-feminism (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001), and green activism (Peattie 2001). Yet, in a consumerist society, anticonsumption lifestyles are considered incompatible with economic welfare and consumer wellbeing. Indeed, many politicians, business managers and scholars argue that for “most” people, rejecting or even reducing consumption may be perceived as a sacrifice (Belk 2001). Coupled with the importance of Gross Domestic Production (as a measure of a country’s economic success), this stance could explain the lack of will on the part of some governments to encourage more sustainable consumption behavior on a grand scale. However, if empirical research can refute the prevailing consumerist attitudes and demonstrate that a positive (or at least nonnegative) relationship exists between anticonsumption and wellbeing, then public policymakers will have more licenses to promote practices that benefit both the environment and people.

With this reasoning in mind, the first goal of this study is to investigate whether there is empirical evidence that sustainable anticonsumption consciousness improves wellbeing, or at least does not diminish it. This is a scientifically and socially relevant issue, as people will only consume more sustainably if they benefit in some way. Certainly, scholars have already suggested such a theoretical link (Chancellor and Lyubomirsky 2011; Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas 2011). Although (consumer) wellbeing is a common research focus (Iyer and Muncy 2016), empirical support for a positive relationship between anticonsumption and wellbeing is scarce. Based on qualitative research, Lee and Ahn (2016) found a positive link between anticonsumption values and consumer wellbeing. Other empirical studies show that less material consumption, a central factor for voluntarily simplifying lifestyle (Etzioni 1998), relates positively to personal wellbeing as well as life satisfaction (e.g., Boujbel and d’Astous 2012;

Seegebarth et al. 2016). On the other hand, Iyer and Muncy (2016) identify that positive attitudes toward “micro” versus “macro” anticonsumption (and consumption) sometimes relate positively, and sometimes negatively, to subjective wellbeing. The results of Hüttel et al.’s (2018) means-end chains analysis show that sustainable anticonsumption patterns “are often linked to making sacrifices” and “only weak links tie (these behavior) to enhanced personal wellbeing” (834). Despite these few studies, the effect of anticonsumption lifestyles on people’s wellbeing within consumerist societies remains unclear. A shared limitation of previous studies is an over emphasis on finding a positive relationship between anticonsumption preference and wellbeing. However, it may be that the main finding required to progress society toward a more sustainable future is evidence confirming there is no negative relationship between anticonsumption preference and wellbeing.

Thus, in the face of ambivalent results, this study aims to contribute knowledge by validating and extending existing studies in the area, and by providing empirical evidence that sustainable anticonsumption preferences do not reduce consumer wellbeing. In line with previous research, this study also argues that, in some cases, anticonsumption may even have a positive effect on wellbeing. If either or both cases are true (i.e., a nonnegative relationship between anticonsumption and wellbeing, and/or a positive relationship), then we can identify important levers surrounding this relationship to foster sustainable consumption (via anticonsumption) as well as consumer wellbeing. This knowledge would allow policymakers to promote sustainable lifestyles by pointing out that anticonsumption practices are not only beneficial for the environment, but also to the financial, subjective, psychosocial wellbeing and overall life satisfaction of individuals.

The second goal of this study is to contribute new knowledge to the area by focusing on the role consumer empowerment plays in the context of the anticonsumption–wellbeing relationship. Consumer empowerment is defined as a (positive) subjective state resulting from individuals’ perceived sense of control (Corrigan et al. 1999). It is a key factor in enabling people to cope with the increasing complexity of global markets, and as a means for consumers to preserve control and sovereignty over their own decisions (Brennan and Coppack 2008). Empowered consumers are less confused by extensive product offerings and better prepared for choosing products that best suit their needs, resulting in higher consumption satisfaction. As consumer empowerment (Füller et al. 2014; Hunter and Garnefeld 2008) is associated with consumption-critical attitudes and actions like resistance, boycotting, complaining behavior, voluntary simplification, and virtually

any emancipatory manifestation of anticonsumption (Kozinets 2002), this study aims to scrutinize the moderating effect of empowerment on the anticonsumption–wellbeing relationship.

Using two independent samples from Germany (Europe’s largest economy), we analyze the direction and strength of the anticonsumption–wellbeing relationship and the role of consumer empowerment. Consequently, the main contribution of this study is to empirically establish the relationship between three forms of sustainable anticonsumption (voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living) with four wellbeing concepts (psychosocial, subjective and financial wellbeing, and overall life satisfaction). The second contribution is to empirically scrutinize the role of empowerment as a moderator of the anticonsumption–wellbeing relationship.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Anticonsumption and Consumer Wellbeing

The Concept of Anticonsumption

Anticonsumption encompasses various forms of self-determined rejection, reduction, reuse, and redirection of material consumption (Lee et al. 2011) and is a growing field of research. Studies on anticonsumption assume that “reasons against” consumption justify special theoretical treatment as they are not sufficiently addressed by traditional approaches in consumer behavior, which focuses on “reasons for” consumption (Chatzidakis and Lee 2013). In this study of sustainable consumption, we use the concept of sustainability-rooted anticonsumption (SRAC; Seegebarth et al. 2016). Here, consumers practice different forms of anticonsumption for reasons of sustainability. This research focuses on three sustainable subtypes of anticonsumption: voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living. Voluntary simplicity refers to a lifestyle focusing on reduced materialism and less engagement in consumption activities (Etzioni 1998). Collaborative consumption, as a broader anticonsumption concept, implies private or commercially shared consumption practices, such as borrowing, leasing or renting, and serves as an alternative to traditional ownership and consumption habits (Belk 2010, 2014). Finally, because long-term financial stability (Devezer et al. 2014) is a factor for household sustainability, the concept of “debt-free living” is introduced into the SRAC approach. This construct reflects the preference for not spending more money than one can afford, and a desire for long-term financial stability (Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas 2011).

The Concept of Consumer Wellbeing

Wellbeing covers a broad spectrum of phenomena encompassing emotional and cognitive assessments of personal life satisfaction. The basic rationale of wellbeing theory is that satisfaction of needs causes happiness, while the persistence of unfulfilled needs causes unhappiness (Diener et al. 1999). Wellbeing is multifaceted and encompasses different metalevel concepts, such as consumer quality of life, subjective wellbeing, overall happiness with life, interpersonal wellbeing, societal wellbeing, and financial wellbeing (Dittmar et al. 2014; Sirgy, Lee, and Rahtz 2007). Wellbeing has been investigated from various perspectives (Cacioppo et al. 2008; Dittmar et al. 2014; Iyer and Muncy 2016; Pancer and Handelman 2012) and by many disciplines, ranging from economics (Frey and Stutzer 2005), through psychology, environmental science and sociology (Costanza et al. 2007), to marketing (e.g., Lee and Sirgy 2004 for an overview; Ahuvia 2018; Devezer et al. 2014; Netemeyer et al. 2018; Rodas, Ahluwalia, and Olson 2018; Sirgy, Lee, and Rahtz 2007) and consumer affairs (MacDonald and Douthitt 1992).

Although the phenomenon of consumer wellbeing has been investigated in many studies with very different objectives, attention is normally focused on enhancing individual wellbeing (Lee and Sirgy 2004). The concept wellbeing can primarily be traced back to two broad types: the eudaimonic and the hedonic approaches (Ryan and Deci 2001). The Eudaimonian view of wellbeing underscores the personal perception of mastering life's challenges. This conceptualization of wellbeing does not focus on situational happiness or pleasure, but rather on individuals' meaningful and self-realized lifespan growth (Ryff 1989). It is often measured with the Flourishing Scale of psychosocial wellbeing and refers to different aspects of human actualization like autonomy and mastery; for example, "I am engaged and interested in my daily activities" (Diener et al. 2010; Ryff and Keyes 1995).

The hedonic view on the other hand relates wellbeing to pleasure and happiness (Ryan and Deci 2001). Measurements that match the hedonic wellbeing approach are, for example, the global life satisfaction scale used in the European Social Survey that measures people's life experiences, and the subjective wellbeing scale, which is a broader assessment of individuals' happiness, for example, "In general, I consider myself: not a very happy person—very happy person" (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999). Finally, because consumer wellbeing and financial stability may be enhanced by spending less money on unnecessary things, this research also considers the concept of financial wellbeing as an important aspect of consumer affairs (Devezer et al. 2014).

The Anticonsumption–Wellbeing Relationship

The subjective wellbeing approach can be used to assess different aspects of life such as wealth and income, health, and environmental and climate protection. The basic assumption of our research is that anticonsumption preferences influence personal assessment of wellbeing. In order to test this assumption, we analyze the influence of three anticonsumption subtypes (voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living) on four wellbeing concepts (psychosocial, subjective and financial wellbeing, and global life satisfaction).

First, voluntary simplifiers distance themselves from materialism and product possession, limiting consumption to what is necessary (McDonald et al. 2006). While voluntary simplification involves the reduction and rejection of excessive consumption, it does not involve complete consumption renunciation (Etzioni 1998). Instead, voluntary simplifiers prefer to purchase high quality, long-lasting sustainable goods, but over rather long intervals (Alexander and Ussher 2012). They strive for a meaningful and contented life (inward riches, intrinsically oriented goals) (Etzioni 1998). Nonetheless, voluntary simplification sits comfortably as a type of anticonsumption (Zavestoski 2002). Materialistic attitudes are found to negatively affect subjective wellbeing (see Dittmar et al. 2014 for an overview; Cacioppo et al. 2008; Iyer and Muncy 2016; Lee and Ahn 2016). In contrast, reorganizing personal life priorities beyond materialism, and living simply, increases life satisfaction and wellbeing (Boujbel and d’Astous 2012). Moreover, simplicity involves controlling consumption expenditures, which conserves financial resources and in turn increases financial wellbeing.

Second, collaborative consumption occurs when people temporarily access goods instead of purchasing or owning them (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Belk’s definition extends this understanding and considers that people coordinate “the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation.” (Belk 2014, 1597). Engaging in sharing activities may reduce acquisition of goods (Ozanne and Ozanne 2011). As Lee et al. (2011) point out, anticonsumption in general focuses on the rejection or reduction of any aspect of the consumption cycle, which encompasses acquisition, use and disposal. Following this logic, collaborative consumption thus fits as a subtype of anticonsumption, since it promotes the rejection or reduction of “acquisition” without necessarily rejecting the “use” of objects. Collaborative consumption is strongly related to prosocial behavior (Benkler 2004). In turn, connecting with other people through collaborative consumption activities (Belk 2010) may also lead to greater subjective wellbeing, a finding further supported by reports that subjective

wellbeing is determined by fundamentals such as family, friendship, and community network activities (Brown and Vergragt 2016; Burke, Marlow, and Lento 2010). Moreover, because borrowing is cheaper than buying a product, financial wellbeing should be enhanced, and there are also savings in terms of natural resources. Finally, although collaborative consumption comes with restrictions (e.g., lack of autonomy and the need to coordinate use), it makes it possible to use a product without having to assume the so-called burdens of ownership, i.e., risks and responsibilities arising from ownership of a product (e.g., storage, maintenance, and repair of products).

Third, debt-free living should also increase consumer wellbeing due to less financially imposed stress. Because debt is usually incurred due to the desire or necessity to consume, it makes sense that debt-free-living should be classified as a subtype of anticonsumption consciousness. Prior research on happiness demonstrates that good health, finance, friends, family, and religion are important domains of wellbeing (Diener et al. 2010) but positioning wealth and financial success as the sole purpose in life negatively affects personal wellbeing and happiness (Kasser and Ryan 1993). The same negative effect holds when individuals are faced with debts and long-term financial indebtedness (Cacioppo et al. 2008; Seegebarth et al. 2016). Garðarsdóttir and Dittmar (2012) illustrate that materialistic lifestyles create the risk of indebtedness, which in turn negatively affects financial wellbeing. In a similar vein, Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) argue that subjective wellbeing is positively determined by money only when it is sufficient to avoid poverty, but when individuals prioritize the accumulation of money, it has a negative effect on wellbeing. Recently, Netemeyer et al. (2018) showed that materialism increases people's current money management stress, as opposed to leading to financial wellbeing.

If anticonsumption behaviors and/or preferences do not reduce personal wellbeing, then they must provide the consumer with other benefits that compensate for the loss of consumption benefits due to product renunciation. In order to explain this benefit compensation process, we next consider consumer value categories for both behaviors (consumption vs. anti-consumption), drawing on the theories of consumption values and prosocial behavior as a theoretical basis for our first hypotheses. The widely accepted theory of consumption values advanced by Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991) distinguishes five value dimensions, three of which are important for our study: the utilitarian (e.g., the ability of a product to perform), the social (image transfer from the product congruent with the norms of the consumer's in-group), and the emotional (ability of the product to create positive emotions) value (see also Oloko and Balderjahn 2011). Furthermore, because sustainable anticonsumption belongs to a class of

prosocial behavior, we refer to prosocial behavior theory as it addresses the causes and motivations for helping and supporting behaviors that arise from a personal obligation to other people and the environment. Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) define prosocial behavior as “voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals” (3). Sustainable anticonsumption behavior can be explained by specific consumption values and norms rooted in prosocial behavior. Buying products is not the only way to create value and wellbeing for the customer (e.g., utilitarian value, emotional, and social value). Giving up the purchase of a product can also bring benefits and consumer wellbeing (ecological, emotional, financial, and social value). For example, Iyer and Muncy’s (2016) study demonstrated that anticonsumption attitudes produce stronger positive feelings and evaluations than proconsumption attitudes.

Cognitive prosocial theories also posit benefits from prosocial behavior that emerge if consumers act in accordance with their internalized social norms and values such as helpfulness and social responsibility (i.e., the social dimension of consumer values; Oloko and Balderjahn 2011). Furthermore, according to affective theories of prosocial behavior, sustainable consumption can produce positive emotions as well (i.e., the emotional dimension of consumer values, e.g., pride, self-esteem) (Schwartz 1973). Considering the theoretical propositions for prosocial behavior theory as they align with theories of consumer values and sustainable anticonsumption lifestyles, it is reasonable to assume that both the consumption (utilitarian values) and the anticonsumption of a product (social and emotional values) can create benefits and wellbeing for the consumer. Thus, considering the literature review and the few empirical studies on the anticonsumption–wellbeing relationship, we conservatively formulate our hypothesis as follows:

H1: Consumers’ consciousness toward three subtypes of sustainable anticonsumption practices (simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living) does not diminish and may sometimes strengthen four subtypes of consumer wellbeing (subjective, psychosocial, financial wellbeing, and overall life satisfaction).

Anticonsumption and Consumer Empowerment

Consumer empowerment is defined as a (positive) subjective state resulting from an individual’s perceived sense of control (Corrigan et al. 1999). Perceived consumer empowerment results from increasing actual decision control (Hunter and Garnefeld 2008) and is sometimes measured with items such as: “Regarding my buying decisions I feel I am in control,” and “The ability to influence the goods and services that are offered to me is beneficial to me.” It should be noted that this type of empowerment is

based on the subjective self-assessment of a consumer and does not capture the objective empowerment of a person (e.g., product knowledge and access to decision aids, helpful heuristics and tools; Wathieu et al. 2002). As such, perceived control that evokes empowerment “may be experienced whether control actually increase or not” (Hunter and Garnefeld 2008, 2). Scholars conceptualize empowerment as a means of strengthening individuals’ self-determination, autonomy, self-efficacy, and competence (Füller et al. 2014). Empowered individuals have “the power to take action and control conditions affecting their daily life” (McGregor 2005, 440). Prior research has shown that perceived control positively influences physical and psychological wellbeing (Hui and Bateson 1991), task performance (e.g., Burger 1987), and health (Evans and Carrère 1991).

With respect to anticonsumption, Cherrier (2009) argues that “anticonsumption depends on a sense of identity that is grounded in social positions, empowerment and a vision of society” (Cherrier 2009, 189). Additionally, Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2008) emphasize consumer empowerment as a key motivator for consumer driven anticonsumption activities. Participating in consumer boycotts or voluntary simplification are the actions of sovereign consumers (Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006). Hence, consumer empowerment as an affective state and subjective feeling of having influence and control over buying decisions fosters consumer sovereignty in the marketplace. Consumer empowerment suggests that people benefit from increased control. Such a positive effect may influence consumer judgments, including the assessment of their own wellbeing (Hunter and Garnefeld 2008). The control of decisions and actions increases self-determination and autonomy in individuals, a core aspect of wellbeing (Iyer and Muncy 2016) and quality of life (Schalock 2004). In addition, empowered consumers should be better prepared to cope with information overload, resulting in less confusion and more satisfaction (Walsh and Mitchell 2010). It should also be mentioned that empowerment plays an important role in job satisfaction (Ahmad and Oranye 2010). Since empowered people are self-determined, well prepared for mastery of buying decisions and less confused, they should experience greater wellbeing than less empowered consumers. In sum, the more consumers are empowered, the more they are able to determine the outcomes of anticonsumption. They should also feel more in control and competent in achieving their anticonsumption goals with respect to voluntary simplicity, collaboration and debt-free living. Overall, empowered consumers should also feel more satisfied with life. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: Consumers' self-perceived empowerment has a positive effect on the four subtypes of wellbeing (subjective, psychosocial, and financial wellbeing as well as overall life satisfaction).

Consumer expertise is an important moderator in consumer information processing (Broniarczyk and Griffin 2014) and thus a complementary concept to consumer empowerment. As empowered consumers are more experienced (and able) to deal with complex information and decision tasks, they also have greater understanding and the ability to produce desired outcomes (e.g., Brennan and Ritters 2003; Hunter and Garnefeld 2008). Less empowered and knowledgeable consumers are less able to deal with complex buying situations. In the area of job satisfaction, empowerment reinforces the relationship between perceived over-qualification and job performance. Empowered employees are better able and motivated to enact greater performance (Erdogan and Bauer 2009). Looking at these studies, we posit that empowerment moderates the anticonsumption wellbeing relationship in such a way that more empowered consumers are better prepared to assess the consequences of anticonsumption, more able to achieve their intended goals, and thus experience greater levels of wellbeing. Thus,

H3: Consumer empowerment positively moderates the relationships between the three sustainable anticonsumption subtypes (voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living) and the four states of consumer wellbeing (subjective, psychosocial, and financial wellbeing, as well as overall life satisfaction).

Figure 1 depicts our research model as derived from our three hypotheses.

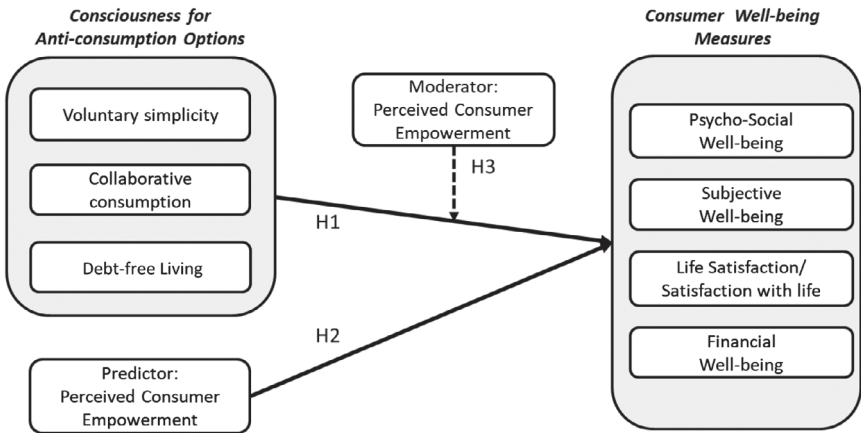
DATA, MEASUREMENTS, METHOD, AND RESULTS

Data

The use of only one (convenience) sample and the subsequent lack of external validity is a much discussed topic in empirical consumer research (Peterson and Merunka 2014). Therefore, empirical replications of a study are recommended in order to bolster the reliability, validity, and generalizability of research findings (Easley, Madden, and Dunn 2000). To address this issue of external validity and generalizability, we replicate the findings of our first sample (Sample 1) with a follow-up second sample (Sample 2). For both samples we used an identical questionnaire and the data were collected from the same (German) population. Only findings confirmed in both samples (Sample 1 and Sample 2) were accepted and used to test our hypotheses.

Data were collected for Sample 1 in 2016 using an online questionnaire administered at two German universities, which resulted in 450 responses.

FIGURE 1
Effects of Specific Anticonsumption Options and Consumer Empowerment on Different States of Wellbeing



The undergraduate business and administration students were predominantly male (60.4%) with a mean age of 22.8 (SD = 3.61) (see sample characteristics in Table 1). For Sample 2, data from a convenience sample were also obtained in 2016 in Germany using the same online questionnaire as for Sample 1 and resulting in 640 responses. Study participants were predominantly female (55.0%), young (54.7% indicated that they were younger than 35 years) and approximately 31% of the sample earned less than €1,000 per month (see sample characteristics in Table 1). Both samples were collected independently.

Measurements and Validity Assessment

Measurements for each construct of our conceptual framework (Figure 1) were adapted from existing and validated scales. Scales to measure consciousness for “voluntary simplicity” (SIMP), “collaborative consumption” (COLLAB), and “debt-free living” (DEBT-FREE) were obtained from Balderjahn et al. (2013). In line with research on consumer debt (Benito et al. 2006), we excluded mortgages (homes and cars) from the measurement of debt as they are classified as different types of loans. Psychosocial wellbeing (PWB) was measured with the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al. 2010), and subjective wellbeing (SWB) with the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999). For overall life satisfaction (LS), we used a single item applied by the European Social Survey (“All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a

TABLE 1
Sample Characteristics

	Sample 1		Sample 2	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Sample size	450	100	640	100
Gender ^a				
Female	174	38.7	346	55.0
Male	272	60.4	283	45.0
Age groups ^a				
18–24	316	70.2	151	23.6
25–34	125	27.8	199	31.1
35–44	2	.4	26	4.1
45–54	1	.2	127	19.8
>55			119	18.6
Income (in €) ^a				
<500			54	8.7
500–999			136	22.0
1,000–1,499			73	11.8
1,500–1,999			82	13.2
2,000–2,499			60	9.7
2,500–2,999			55	8.9
3,000–3,499			40	6.5
3,500–3,999			53	8.6
>4,000			66	10.7

^aDifference in cumulative values are due to missing values.

whole nowadays?”). The measurement for financial wellbeing (FWB) was operationalized using the In Charge Financial Distress/Financial Wellbeing Scale (Prawitz et al. 2006). Finally, to measure empowerment we used Hunter and Garnefeld’s (2008) 4-item scale of perceived consumer empowerment (EMPO). All measures were assessed on 7-point Likert scale except for life satisfaction, which was rated on the original 10-point scale.

In both samples we used the same set of identical measurements. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for both samples exhibited sufficiently high factor loadings (>.689) for all but six items. These six items were eliminated from the subsequent analysis in both samples (Table 2). All values of Cronbach’s alpha were higher than .70 in both samples, thus demonstrating high internal consistency across our seven constructs. Composite reliability scores exceeded the value of .70 (Nunnally, Bernstein, and Berge 1967) and all average variance extracted (AVE) scores exceeded the threshold value of .5. Discriminant validity of the constructs was confirmed in both samples as all AVE values were greater than their respective squared correlations (Fornell and Larcker 1981) (Table 3). Confirmatory

factor analysis (CFA) of the *measurement models* in both samples showed an acceptable model fit indicating sufficient convergent validity (Sample 1: $\chi^2/df = 562.105/303$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .046; CFI = .943; TLI = .934; SRMR = .042; Sample 2: $\chi^2/df = 587.371/303$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .039; CFI = .956; TLI = .949; SRMR = .035).

Methods and Analysis Models

We tested hypotheses H1 (anticonsumption effects on wellbeing) and H2 (empowerment effects on wellbeing) by structural equation modeling using robust maximum likelihood estimation (MLR) in Mplus 8 (Muthén and Muthén 2017). H3, our third hypothesis, proposes the moderation effect of consumer empowerment with regard to the influence of the three anti-consumption subtypes on the four different wellbeing states. Currently, there are different methodological approaches available for the analysis of such latent interaction effects (Moosbrugger et al. 2009). Klein and Moosbrugger (2000) and Maslowsky, Jager, and Hemken (2015) proposed the “latent moderated structural (LMS) equations method,” which has two notable advantages: statistical efficiency and availability in Mplus 8. However, there are also considerable shortcomings associated with this LMS procedure (e.g., no model fit indices are available and no standard coefficient), so we decided to opt for the “factor scores regression method” developed by Jöreskog (2000) and Yang Jonsson (1998). In this method, factor scores of the independent constructs are calculated and multiplied to create latent interaction terms, which are used to estimate latent interaction parameters via regression analysis. These standardized regression parameters of the interaction terms are then inserted in the complete structural equation model, which is subsequently analyzed using full ML estimation technique with robust chi-squares and standard errors (MLR) in Mplus 8. The advantages of this approach are regression based estimated latent interactions, assessment of multicollinearity, and the availability of fit indices. The assumption of normally distributed data in this method does not pose a problem when using the MLR estimation procedure.

Our analysis starts with a simple model (Model 1), which specifies all the direct effects of the three anticonsumptions subtypes (SIMP, DEBT-FREE, COLLAB) on the four wellbeing measures (PWB, SWB, LS, FWB). The overall goodness-of-fit values for Model 1 (see Tables 4 and 5) are acceptably good in both samples (Sample 1: $\chi^2/df = 564.195/301$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .046; CFI = .942; TLI = .932; SRMR = .042; Sample 2: $\chi^2/df = 750.965/345$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .045; CFI = .938; TLI = .928; SRMR = .041). Next we add to Model 1 the direct

TABLE 2
Measures and Scale Statistics in Sample 1 and Sample 2

Items	Sample 1				Sample 2				
	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA)	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b
Consciousness for voluntary simplicity (Balderjahn et al. 2013)			$\gamma = 2.50$		AVE = .61 CR = .83		$\gamma = 2.12$		AVE = .57 CR = .80
Even if I can financially afford a product, I will buy it only if ...									
Simp1 I really need the product	4.94	1.64	.875	.821	.814	1.50	.873	.787	.855
Simp2 It is a useful product for me	5.34	1.47	.857		.816	1.35	.820		.685
Simp3 It is absolutely necessary for me	5.10	1.77	.848		.719	1.72	.828		.711
Consciousness for living without getting into debt (Balderjahn et al. 2013, debt-free living)			$\gamma = 3.54$		AVE = .63 CR = .90		$\gamma = 3.38$		AVE = .60 CR = .88
Even if I can financially afford a product, I will buy it only if:									
Debt-f.1 My expenses are not an excessive financial burden for me	5.55	1.50	.810	.896	.719	1.35	.784	.877	.672
Debt-f.2 I do not have to cut down on future spending	5.27	1.56	.830		.711	1.36	.785		.663
Debt-f.3 I do not have to take money from my emergency financial reserve for my purchase decisions	5.47	1.66	.820		.729	1.51	.823		.752

TABLE 2
Continued

Items	Sample 1				Sample 2					
	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b
Debt-f.4 I do not get into long-term debt	6.13	1.58	.865		.884	6.33	1.27	.859		.873
Debt-f.5 I do not put my financial security at risk	6.11	1.48	.882		.913	6.35	1.25	.856		.876
Consciousness for collaborative consumption (Balderjahn et al. 2013) Even if I can financially afford a product, I tend to ...			$\gamma = 2.16$		AVE = .59 CR = .81			$\gamma = 2.06$		AVE = .53 CR = .77
Collab1 Borrow products from friends or acquaintances instead of buying it	3.73	1.86	.856	.805	.780	3.64	1.90	.857	.769	.815
Collab2 Share products with others instead of owning it myself	3.31	1.77	.878		.832	3.15	1.72	.847		.746
Collab3 Rent products instead of buying them	3.20	1.70	.811		.675	3.42	1.79	.778		.607
Psychosocial wellbeing (Diener et al. 2010)			$\gamma = 4.46$		AVE = .53 CR = .85			$\gamma = 2.82$		AVE = .50 CR = .74
PWB1 I lead a purposeful and meaningful life ^a	—	—	—	.846	—	—	—	—	.805	—

TABLE 2
Continued

Items	Sample 1					Sample 2				
	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b
PWB2	5.82	1.20	.751		.683	5.94	1.06	.689		.585
PWB3	5.46	1.15	.767		.718	5.77	1.03	.756		.676
PWB4	—	—	—		—	—	—	—		—
PWB5	5.86	1.09	.832		.783	5.91	.95	.768		.681
PWB6	5.76	1.10	.794		.731	5.70	1.11	.763		.701
PWB7	—	—	—		—	—	—	—		—
PWB8	5.89	1.02	.798		.732	5.85	.98	.777		.723
Subjective wellbeing (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999)			$\gamma = 2.61$		AVE = .55 CR = .83			$\gamma = 2.64$		AVE = .55 CR = .83
SWB1	5.36	1.25	.799	.819	.712	5.52	1.11	.797	.819	.735

TABLE 2
Continued

Items	Sample 1					Sample 2				
	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b
SWB2	4.86	1.30	.804		.749	5.05	1.17	.845		.801
	Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself: less happy—more happy									
SWB3	4.86	1.40	.863		.817	4.93	1.31	.823		.748
	Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?									
SWB4	5.18	1.53	.763		.674	5.37	1.56	.783		.673
	Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?									
Life Satisfaction (European Social Survey)										
LS	7.19	1.57	—	—	—	7.63	1.46	—	—	—
	All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?									

TABLE 2
Continued

Items	Sample 1				Sample 2					
	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b
Financial wellbeing (Prawitz et al. 2006)			$\gamma = 4.55$		AVE = .62 CR = .89			$\gamma = 3.72$		AVE = .68 CR = .91
FWB1 What do you feel is the level of your financial stress today?	4.43	1.35	.820	.880	.758	4.41	1.29	.818	.907	.745
FWB2 On the stair steps below, mark how satisfied you are with your present financial situation	4.14	1.70	.824		.772	4.55	1.74	.880		.847
FWB3 How do you feel about your current financial situation?	4.35	1.32	.876		.865	4.58	1.43	.885		.870
FWB4 How often do you worry about being able to meet normal monthly living expenses? ^a	—	—	—		—	—	—	—		—
FWB5 How confident are you that you could find the money to pay for a financial emergency that costs about \$/€1,000? ^a	—	—	—		—	—	—	—		—
FWB6 How often does this happen to you? You want to go out to eat, go to a movie or do something else and do not go because you cannot afford to? ^a	—	—	—		—	—	—	—		—

TABLE 2
Continued

Items	Sample 1				Sample 2					
	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings (EFA)	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings (CFA) ^b
FWB7	4.44	1.79	.760		.674	4.75	1.87	.828		.764
	How frequently do you find yourself just getting by financially and living paycheck to paycheck?									
FWB8	4.90	1.31	.889		.855	5.15	1.36	.900		.884
	How stressed do you feel about your personal finances in general?									
Perceived Consumer Empowerment (Hunter and Garnefeld 2008)								$\gamma = 2.19$		AVE = .68 CR = .81
EMPO1	5.15	1.37	.917	.810	.909	5.22	1.36	.911	.796	.816
	Regarding my buying decisions I feel I am in control									
EMPO2	5.26	1.33	.917		.736	5.25	1.22	.911		.816
	The ability to influence the goods and services that are offered to me is beneficial to me									

^aItems were excluded from further data analysis due to their poor item reliability. AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability.

TABLE 3
Fornell–Larcker Criterion

	Sample 1							
	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Consciousness for voluntary simplicity	.62	1.00						
2. Consciousness for debt-free living	.63	.27	1.00					
3. Consciousness for collaborative consumption	.59	.07	.00	1.00				
4. Psychosocial wellbeing	.53	.07	.09	.02	1.00			
5. Subjective wellbeing	.55	.06	.02	.03	.36	1.00		
6. Financial wellbeing	.62	.00	.03	.01	.05	.12	1.00	
7. Perceived consumer empowerment	.68	.06	.03	.00	.04	.02	.01	1.00

	Sample 2							
	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Consciousness for voluntary simplicity	.57	1.00						
2. Consciousness for debt-free living	.60	.08	1.00					
3. Consciousness for collaborative consumption	.53	.11	.01	1.00				
4. Psychosocial wellbeing	.50	.03	.07	.02	1.00			
5. Subjective wellbeing	.55	.02	.01	.00	.36	1.00		
6. Financial wellbeing	.68	.01	.00	.00	.04	.10	1.00	
7. Perceived consumer empowerment	.67	.14	.02	.00	.05	.03	.06	1.00

effects of EMPO on the four wellbeing constructs (Model 2). The overall fit of Model 2 is sufficient in both samples (Sample 1: $\chi^2/df = 631.842/347$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .045; CFI = .940; TLI = .930; SRMR = .042, Table 4; Sample 2: $\chi^2/df = 829.639/395$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .043; CFI = .937; TLI = .927; SRMR = .043).

To test H3, we insert into Model 2 the latent interaction coefficient (β -coefficients) for consumer empowerment with respect to the 12 specified anticonsumption–wellbeing relationships, as estimated by the factor scores regression method described above (Model 3). The overall fit of Model 3 is satisfactory in both samples (Sample 1: $\chi^2/df = 748.775/419$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .044; CFI = .931; TLI = .919; SRMR = .048, Table 4; Sample 2: $\chi^2/df = 926.665/467$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .041; CFI = .934; TLI = .922; SRMR = .044). Finally, the variance inflation factors of the independent variables are less than 1.52 in both samples, indicating that multicollinearity is not a problem in our analysis.

RESULTS

Hypothesis H1 assumes that people who forego consumption for the sake of sustainability and financial stability do not perceive reductions

TABLE 4
Structural Modeling Results and (Latent) Moderating Effects (Sample 1)

	Model 1 <i>N</i> = 407 ^a	Model 2 <i>N</i> = 407	Model 3 <i>N</i> = 407
SIMP → PWB	.132*	.092	.084
SIMP → SWB	.196***	.177*	.183**
SIMP → LS	.142**	.133*	.129*
SIMP → FWB	-.001	-.017	-.023
DEBT-FREE → PWB	.235***	.233***	.234***
DEBT-FREE → SWB	.036	.032	.024
DEBT-FREE → LS	.019	.015	.013
DEBT-FREE → FWB	.176***	.174***	.181***
COLLAB → PWB	.075	.079	.071
COLLAB → SWB	.124**	.125**	.120**
COLLAB → LS	.054	.054	.039
COLLAB → FWB	-.094	-.093	-.105*
EMPO → PWB		.157**	.145**
EMPO → SWB		.086	.055
EMPO → LS		.057	.033
EMPO → FWB		.089	.093
EMPO × SIMP → PWB			.024
EMPO × SIMP → SWB			-.049
EMPO × SIMP → LS			-.017
EMPO × SIMP → FWB			.022
EMPO × DEBT-FREE → PWB			-.130
EMPO × DEBT-FREE → SWB			-.058
EMPO × DEBT-FREE → LS			-.139***
EMPO × DEBT-FREE → FWB			-.083
EMPO × COLLAB → PWB			-.034
EMPO × COLLAB → SWB			-.056
EMPO × COLLAB → LS			-.025
EMPO × COLLAB → FWB			.029
χ^2/df	1.87 (<i>p</i> = .000)	1.85 (<i>p</i> = .000)	1.79 (<i>p</i> = .000)
df	102	115	127
RMSEA	.046	.045	.044
CFI	.942	.940	.931
TLI	.932	.930	.919
SRMR	.042	.042	.048
AIC	32,949.02	35,321.47	35,328.67
BIC	33,358.42	35,782.48	35,837.81
BIC ^b	33,034.70	35,417.57	35,434.82

Notes: Parameters are standardized. Significant effects of covariate gender: Model 1: gender → PWB: .158***; Model 2: gender → PWB: .167***; Model 3: gender → PWB: .181***.

COLLAB = collaborative consumption; DEBT-FREE = debt-free living; EMPO = perceived consumer empowerment; FWB = financial wellbeing; LS = life satisfaction; PWB = psychosocial wellbeing; SIMP = voluntary simplification; SWB = subjective wellbeing.

^aDifference to sample size of *N* = 450 resulting from list-wise deletion of missing data.

^bSample-size-adjusted BIC.

p* < .1, *p* < .05, ****p* < .01.

TABLE 5
Structural Model Results and (Latent) Moderating Effects (Sample 2)

	Model 1 <i>N</i> = 590 ^a	Model 2 <i>N</i> = 589	Model 3 <i>N</i> = 589
SIMP → PWB	.120*	.056	.047
SIMP → SWB	.102*	.065	.054
SIMP → LS	.092*	.035	.026
SIMP → FWB	.129***	.081	.074
DEBT-FREE → PWB	.226***	.217***	.219***
DEBT-FREE → SWB	.083*	.079	.079
DEBT-FREE → LS	.053	.046	.050
DEBT-FREE → FWB	.063	.057	.060
COLLAB → PWB	.060	.065	.059
COLLAB → SWB	.035	.038	.037
COLLAB → LS	.002	.007	.013
COLLAB → FWB	-.041	-.038	-.040
EMPO → PWB		.173***	.185***
EMPO → SWB		.101*	.102*
EMPO → LS		.155**	.180***
EMPO → FWB		.138***	.153***
EMPO × SIMP → PWB			.013
EMPO × SIMP → SWB			.007
EMPO × SIMP → LS			.102**
EMPO × SIMP → FWB			.038
EMPO × DEBT-FREE → PWB			-.158***
EMPO × DEBT-FREE → SWB			-.109**
EMPO × DEBT-FREE → LS			-.080**
EMPO × DEBT-FREE → FWB			-.101**
EMPO × COLLAB → PWB			.064
EMPO × COLLAB → SWB			-.018
EMPO × COLLAB → LS			-.004
EMPO × COLLAB → FWB			.042
χ^2/df	2.18 (<i>p</i> = .000)	2.10 (<i>p</i> = .000)	1.98 (<i>p</i> = .000)
df	110	123	135
RMSEA	.045	.043	.041
CFI	.938	.937	.934
TLI	.928	.927	.922
SRMR	.041	.043	.044
AIC	46,448.15	50,046.76	50,038.83
BIC	46,929.97	50,585.30	50,629.92
BIC ^b	46,580.75	50,194.82	50,201.34

Notes: Parameters are standardized. Significant effects of covariates: Model 1: gender → PWB: .108**, age → PWB: -.110**, income → PWB: .118**, income → SWB: .110**, gender → LS: .108***, income → LS: .180***, income → FWB: .408***; Model 2: gender → PWB: .113***, age → PWB: -.126**, income → SWB: .099*, gender → LS: .112***, income → LS: .164***, income → FWB: .398***; Model 3: gender → PWB: .105**, age → PWB: -.122**, income → PWB: .088*, income → SWB: .092*, gender → LS: .104***, income → LS: .170***, income → FWB: .393***.

COLLAB = collaborative consumption; DEBT-FREE = debt-free living; EMPO = perceived consumer empowerment; FWB = financial wellbeing; LS = life satisfaction; PWB = psychosocial wellbeing; SIMP = voluntary simplification; SWB = subjective wellbeing.

^aDifference to sample size of *N* = 640 resulting from list-wise deletion of missing data.

^bSample-size-adjusted BIC.

p* < .1, *p* < .05, ****p* < .01.

in their wellbeing. For both samples apart from one exception in Sample 1 (COLLAB \rightarrow FWB), with respect to our focal Model 3, there are no significant negative relationships between simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living with the four wellbeing subtypes. Moreover, even the effect of debt-free living on PWB is positive in both samples ($\beta_{\text{Sample 1}} = .234, p < .01, \beta_{\text{Sample 2}} = .219, p < .01$; see Tables 4 and 5). These findings mostly confirm H1.

Hypothesis H2 posits that consumers' perceived empowerment exerts a positive impact on the four wellbeing subtypes. While H2 holds in only one case in Sample 1 (EMPO \rightarrow PBW), in Sample 2 all effects of consumer empowerment on wellbeing are as expected—positive and significant. Regarding the generalizability of the results, however, only the impact of consumer empowerment on psychosocial wellbeing is interpreted here ($\beta_{\text{Sample 1}} = .145, p < .05, \beta_{\text{Sample 2}} = .185, p < .01$; see Tables 4 and 5). Accordingly, H2 must be rejected.

H3 assumes that consumer empowerment positively moderates the 12 anticonsumption–wellbeing relationships of our research model. Contrary to this assumption, only the relationship between voluntary simplicity and life satisfaction is positively moderated by perceived consumer empowerment, and only in Sample 2 ($\beta_{\text{Sample 2}} = .102, p < .05$) (see Table 5). Moreover, the moderation effect of perceived consumer empowerment is even significantly negative for the influence of debt-free living on life satisfaction in Sample 1 ($\beta_{\text{Sample 1}} = -.139, p < .01$), and further, significantly negative for the four effects of debt-free living on consumer wellbeing in Sample 2 (PWB: $\beta_{\text{Sample 2}} = -.158, p < .01$; SWB: $\beta_{\text{Sample 2}} = -.109, p < .05$; LS: $\beta_{\text{Sample 2}} = -.080, p < .05$; FWB: $\beta_{\text{Sample 2}} = -.101, p < .05$; see Tables 4 and 5). Remarkably, in both samples, the relationship between debt-free living and life satisfaction is significantly and negatively moderated by perceived consumer empowerment. In sum, H3 must therefore be rejected.

DISCUSSION

Consumers' wellbeing should be a core focus of public and consumer affairs, but in an era of global warming, diminishing resources, and widening gaps between rich and poor, strategies to increase consumer welfare must be enacted in both a responsible and sustainable manner. To address this issue, we have carried out our analysis with a particular focus on SRAC lifestyles (Seegerbarth et al. 2016). In this vein, the main purpose of the present study is to provide new insights into how sustainable anticonsumption subtypes (voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and

debt-free living) affect consumer wellbeing. The replication achieved by using two independent samples for this research ensures that the generalizability and external validity of the findings can be better justified. Only findings confirmed in both samples were used for hypotheses testing and the discussion of findings.

First, our study follows the general assumption of rational decision making, whereby even if motivated by sustainability, people only refrain from consumption if their personal wellbeing is not diminished. The results of our study confirm the assumption that anticonsumption is not perceived as a loss of wellbeing. Contrary to some prior research (Belk 2001), which suggests foregoing materialism may be seen as a sacrifice, this study provides evidence that people who restrain their consumption do not perceive any personal sacrifice. It is possible that a loss of benefit due to anticonsumption is compensated by other benefits such as self-esteem and autonomy. As shown by one case in our study, anticonsumption even improves people's wellbeing, as striving to live without getting into debt significantly increases consumers' psychosocial wellbeing. The concept psychosocial wellbeing does not refer to a short-term pleasure or happiness but captures individuals' meaningful and self-realized lifespan growth, which is linked with self-actualization, autonomy, and mastery of their lives. Thus, when individuals have their finances under control, their long-term wellbeing is enhanced. In summary, our data provide empirical support for the assumption that rejection of consumption is not perceived as a sacrifice, but instead, in the case of debt-free living, may even lead to an increase in wellbeing.

Second, with implications for consumer policy, the present study explored whether consumer empowerment may be a good strategy to support sustainable consumer habits in a way that benefits consumers. In this case, empowerment is proposed as having a positive effect on the wellbeing of consumers (assumed in H2), and when it strengthens the influence of anticonsumption on wellbeing (assumed in H3). As argued for H2, empowerment helps people cope with their consumption decisions, which should then improve their wellbeing. This study showed, however, that empowerment only improves psychosocial wellbeing, but not the other three types of wellbeing. In other words, it is only the life-span and personal-growth oriented forms of psychosocial wellbeing that positively relate to empowerment, but not hedonistic wellbeing in the form of pleasure and happiness. Additionally, neither global life satisfaction nor financial wellbeing improved as a result of greater perceived empowerment.

Third, our argument in respect of H3 is that empowerment helps people to better assess the consequences of renouncing consumption to better meet

their sustainable needs, which should have a positive effect on consumer wellbeing. Surprisingly however, the results draw a different picture. No moderating effect of perceived empowerment, which enhances the influence of anticonsumption on wellbeing, could be proven in any of the 12 relationships across both samples in our study. On the contrary, the effect of debt-free living on life satisfaction was attenuated in both samples with increasing consumer empowerment. Furthermore, in Sample 2, empowerment negatively influences all relationships between debt-free living and consumer wellbeing. Although empowerment may lead to a better understanding and cognitive control of financial transactions, and thus reduce financial stress, the results suggest that only consumers who perceive themselves as less empowered will benefit from a concern with debt-free living. Or put another way, when consumers simultaneously perceive themselves as highly empowered and are also striving for debt-free living, their psychosocial wellbeing decreases.

Future research is required to understand these counter-intuitive findings, in particular with respect to empowerment's negative moderation effect on the influence of debt-free living on life satisfaction in both samples, as well as on all four wellbeing measures in Sample 2. Consumers need high competence and access to useful information in order to manage financial tasks to achieve financial security (Netemeyer et al. 2018). It could be that the benefits of empowerment (e.g., increased knowledge and decision control) are a mixed blessing for consumers concerned with debt-free living. Indeed, some prior research does argue that too much empowerment may lead to information overload and difficulty coping with decisions (Malhotra 1982; Wathieu et al. 2002). Perhaps, less cognitively demanding behaviors or simple tips/advice that foster debt-free living may do a better job of reducing financial stress than factors aiming to increase empowerment (such as additional financial information or constant deliberation over financial decisions). Overall, our study suggests that consumers may need support from public policy when it comes to balancing levels of empowerment, financial decision rules, and financial wellbeing.

CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSUMER AFFAIRS

The present study provides three significant contributions relevant to public policy and consumer affairs. First, the study shows that consumers who renounced products for sustainable reasons in relation to three different subtypes of anticonsumption (voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living), did not suffer any loss of wellbeing. On the contrary, in both samples, debt-free living even had a significant positive

influence on consumers' psychosocial wellbeing. These findings suggest that, in general, consumers who practice sustainable anticonsumption do not regard rejecting or reducing consumption as a personal sacrifice. Therefore, scholars and practitioners in consumer affairs should be aware that not buying a product is not necessarily accompanied by loss of benefit, pleasure, or wellbeing. On the contrary, product renunciation may be associated with benefits that can compensate for the loss of functional benefits due to not purchasing a product. Thus, rather than utilizing narratives of "personal sacrifice" to promote sustainable consumption, more emphasis could be directed at the benefit gained from anticonsumption as a result of increased feelings of self-esteem, self-determination, financial stability, and autonomy. These positive feelings may work as incentives for people to behave more sustainably.

Second, the study provides empirical evidence that consumer empowerment, i.e., the ability to control decisions, significantly enhances life-span psychosocial wellbeing, however no clear positive effects of empowerment are evident for the other three wellbeing types (SWB, LS, and FWB). Nevertheless, as only a small body of past research has explicitly examined the role of consumer empowerment in anticonsumption and wellbeing, our study provides new insights. Significantly, this study considers individual's perceived empowerment, rather than their actual empowerment. Empowerment is thus shown to be a useful tool for policy practitioners to improve the consumer's ability to make purchasing decisions that meet their own needs while at the same time fostering their psychosocial wellbeing. Enhancing consumers' perceived empowerment as well as their wellbeing are therefore important objectives for consumer affairs.

Third, contrary to hypothesis H3, consumer empowerment does not enhance the impact of sustainable anticonsumption subtypes on various wellbeing measures. In fact, empowerment is shown to negatively moderate the effect of debt-free living and life satisfaction. In Sample 2, this even applies to all four wellbeing types. Our findings suggest that consumers who see themselves as less empowered benefit more from debt-free living than highly empowered consumers. Thus, consumer empowerment and debt-free living, which both contribute to improved psychosocial wellbeing, may interfere with each other. Perhaps consciousness for debt-free living can, to some extent, compensate for lack of empowerment with respect to consumer wellbeing. The results emphasize the importance of empowerment in helping consumers to make spending decisions based on what they can afford, and, particularly in the absence of empowerment, the need to live a debt-free life. But when both aspects interact, complex financial decisions can create stress for empowered consumers, while less

empowered consumers are made happy by simply striving to live debt-free. In sum, individually, empowerment and consciousness for debt-free living improve consumer wellbeing, particularly the psychosocial form of wellbeing. However, in combination, concern for debt-free living and high levels of perceived empowerment may introduce too much complexity for the consumer, resulting in a significantly negative relationship with wellbeing.

Regarding the objectives of strengthening consumer sovereignty, improving individual wellbeing and promoting sustainability, consumer-related policy should be careful to not to overload consumers with too much empowerment, particularly those already concerned about their financial stability. Policymakers can therefore support consumers by providing tools to improve empowerment along with helpful guidelines for living in a frugal and sustainable manner.

Overall, public and consumer policy activities that increase consumers' sovereignty and market power by means of enhancing their empowerment as well as supporting anticonsumption practices contribute to a sustainable world. What is most promising is the confirmation that, in general, anticonsumers do not feel that they are giving up something important or are less satisfied with their life than mainstream consumers. Thus, anticonsumption consciousness and consumer empowerment are appropriate and sustainable pathways to consumer wellbeing.

LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

Overall, this study validates and extends previous work in the area of sustainable anticonsumption, consumer empowerment, and wellbeing. Further, it provides new insights into the anticonsumption–wellbeing relationship with respect to three contributions: (a) sustainability rooted anticonsumption does not diminish people's wellbeing, and consumer empowerment plays an ambivalent role in supporting sustainable pathways to consumer wellbeing, because (b) on the one hand, empowerment enhances consumers' psychosocial wellbeing, but (c) on the other hand, empowerment also attenuates the impact of debt-free living on consumers' life satisfaction.

However, there are some limitations to consider. This study considers the consumers' consciousness for three different anticonsumption manifestations—voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and debt-free living, but no actual anticonsumption behavior. Future research should therefore include actual anticonsumption behavior. Furthermore, although perceived empowerment, as used in this study, is a good indicator

of actual or objective empowerment, actual empowerment (perhaps via experimental manipulation) should also be included in future research. Additionally, the 2-item scale for perceived consumer empowerment should be further developed in future research. This study considers the anticonsumption–wellbeing relationship in the context of sustainable consumption patterns. However, other motives for anticonsumption that also play a role (e.g., political, ethnocentrism, religious motives) are not addressed here. Although we use two independent samples for our analysis to enhance the external validity and generalizability of the findings, the representativeness of these results for other populations is limited. Future studies on this topic should use large-scale representative samples for specific populations (e.g., countries).

Future research should also consider theories of consumption/anticonsumption values and prosocial behavior to explain the anticonsumption–wellbeing relationship. Furthermore, moderators other than consumer empowerment should be considered, such as trust or need for cognition. The presumed exchange process regarding “benefits of purchase” vs. “benefits of nonpurchase” must be pursued further with consideration of consumer values theory and prosocial theory. In particular, further research is needed to clarify the status of collaborative consumption in relation to sustainability and consumer wellbeing. Furthermore, our study excludes mortgages for the anticonsumption subitem “debt-free living” because this is a special category of “necessary” loans that should be considered separately. Additionally, future research should look more closely at other subtypes of anticonsumption, such as consumer resistance and propensity to boycott, and how they might relate to empowerment and wellbeing. Although we have considered four different concepts of wellbeing in our study (hedonic, eudaimonic, and financial wellbeing, as well as life satisfaction), further wellbeing measures, such as societal wellbeing (i.e., societal potential for personal growth; Vazquez and Hervas 2013), should be included in future studies. Other researchers (e.g., Netemeyer et al. 2018; Ng and Diener 2014) already provide evidence that financial wellbeing is an antecedent of overall wellbeing. Thus, future research should emphasize the specific (mediating) role of financial wellbeing in the anticonsumption wellbeing context.

The main contribution of this study is the provision of new empirical insights regarding the path from sustainable anticonsumption to wellbeing. This knowledge is needed if policymakers and environmental agencies wish to promote sustainable anticonsumption practices. Furthermore, this study utilizes a comprehensive approach by including three anticonsumption constructs (voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and

debt-free living), whereas other studies often focus on only one type of anti-consumption (e.g., voluntary simplicity). Additionally, this study considers four different wellbeing states. As a result, the findings of our study provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between wellbeing and anticonsumption. Finally, this study analyses the role of perceived consumer empowerment as a key variable linking sustainable consumption to wellbeing.

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