

Mindful Consumption – A Path towards Fashion Detox

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Abstract

The G20 summit has sharply put on focus how the current patterns of consumption are unsustainable and countries across the world need to rethink their production and consumption patterns. Sustainable consumption and production patterns are the focal points of SDG 12, one of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve SDG-12's objective, policies that maximize resource utilization while minimizing waste are mandated to be implemented by 2030. Because the fashion industry designs, manufactures, markets, and distributes products to satisfy the needs of end users, and collaborates with textile and apparel manufacturers on one end and distribution channels on the other, it ends up with considerable resource utilization, creates waste, environmental pollution and worker exploitation across its value chain. On the consumer end, the fashion industry is marked by rapid transformations and planned obsolescence which causes garments to be discarded before the end of their useful life, resulting in brief product cycles and conspicuous consumption patterns. Sustainability in the fashion industry cannot be achieved unless personal values dominate mindless consumption perpetuated by fast fashion. The objective of this research is to investigate the impact of mindfulness on consumer behavior in relation to sustainable fashion. This study provides a comprehensive examination of the transformative potential of mindful consumption across several areas of sustainability. This research begins by doing a thorough analysis of existing literature to establish the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the mindful sustainable consumption (MSC) method. This approach addresses a significant gap in the literature, which typically fails to integrate mindful consumption with sustainability.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Consumption Behaviour, Sustainable fashion, SDG, Mindful Consumption

Introduction

Increased awareness of the climate crisis leads to sustainability becoming more important to many people as the actions made today will greatly impact future generations. Sustainable consumption and production patterns are the focal points of SDG 12, one of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve SDG-12's objective, policies that maximize resource utilization while minimizing waste are mandated to be implemented by 2030 (Aid et al., 2016). As the ecological problem gets worse and the effects of climate change become more and more real each year, the search for ways to make our society more sustainable is becoming extremely urgent. Humanity needs a consciousness shift as intense and extensive as the agricultural and industrial revolution to prevent a global ecosystem collapse before the mid-21st century (Brinkerhoff & Jacob 1999). This includes a growing understanding that this problem was caused by people and will need their help to be fixed (Beckage et al. 2018). The current consumption-based dominant social paradigm (DSP) has moulded our lives for the last three centuries. DSP was invented by economists, but politicians promoted it as a sure-fire way to succeed. Businesses and marketers projected this DSP and made consumption the sole way to succeed and create identity. Thus the

quality of our lives started depending on material belongings, which determine power, authority, social prestige, and income levels without considering social and environmental development.

Due to the deep roots of human cultures and habits, it is becoming clearer that the world needs strategies that change people's core personalities and some of their worldviews, values, and beliefs (Park et al., 2013). More and more researchers from a wide range of areas are thus looking into how Mindfulness affects Sustainability and pro-environment behavior (PEB) (Amel, et al., 2009). Research indicates that mindfulness not only affects sustainable behavior but also has a direct bearing on well-being and pro-social behavior (Dhandra, 2019). The purpose of this study is to take a close look at the transformative potential of mindful consumption leading to sustainability focusing on clothing and fashion. The current research and any future research on mindful consumption will help answer the questions that policymakers or sustainable brand owners may have before they invest in mindfulness as a policy or strategy. Also, previous studies on sustainable fashion have not covered conceptual aspects of mindful marketing and consumption. Hence there is an excellent scope for theoretical extension in this area as it covers sustainability, marketing, and consumer behavior in fashion.

Methodology

This study uses a typical literature review which began with a Google Scholar and Scopus keyword search for 'mindfulness AND sustainability'. From this list of peer-reviewed articles, the snowballing method was used to add relevant material from the reference lists. The period of the last 20 years was chosen because prolific research on mindfulness in marketing and consumption from the business perspective happened during this period (Mick, 2017).

Literature Review

Theoretical Background: The two-pathway model of pro-environmental behaviors (Fig. 1) builds a bridge between sustainability and mindfulness by reinforcing how mindfulness could serve as an experiential strategy that strengthens both the societal as well as the interpersonal relationship aspects of pro-environmental behaviors (Barbaro & Pickett, 2016). The two-pathway model is embedded in the wider framework of self-determination theory and therefore communicating with those who see mindfulness as a way to engage with life in a more meaningful way (Kasser 2017).

Sustainability and Sustainable Consumption: Sustainability encompasses economic, environmental, and social dimensions (National Research Council, 1999; WCED, 1987). As a business objective, this translates into a "triple bottom line" responsibility, implying that the evaluation of business results should consider not only economic performance but also environmental and social impact (Brown & Marshall, 2006). Current sustainability strategies have three main flaws: they lack a direct focus on the customer, they fail to recognize the impending dangers posed by rising global overconsumption, and they lack a holistic approach (Sheth et al., 2011). Sustainable Consumption (SC) and production (SCP) is about "the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations" (Dubey et al., 2016).

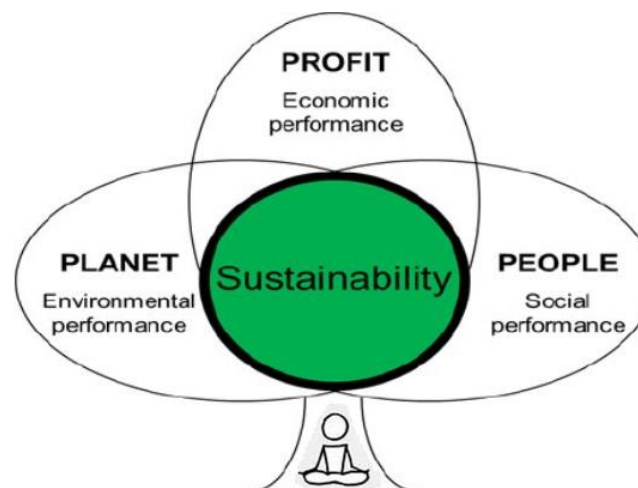
Sustainable Fashion Consumption: It is challenging to define sustainable fashion as there is no industry standard. Fashion consumption refers to the purchase, use, and disposal of garments. Sustainable fashion refers to various terms like organic, green, fair trade, sustainable, slow, eco, etc., addressing perceived issues in the fashion industry, such as animal cruelty, environmental damage, and worker exploitation (Manly et al., 2023). Joergens (2006) defines "ethical fashion" as "fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions and no harm to the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton." Research suggests that garment usage has the highest environmental

impact (Sohn et al., 2021). Fletcher (2013) reports that 82% of garment energy usage comes from laundry, and textile waste in the UK increased by around 2 million tonnes annually from 2005 to 2010 (Niinimäki & Hassi 2011). Laundry, usage, reuse, and disposal can significantly affect clothing sustainability and should not be ignored from a definition (Cervellon et al. 2010).

Mindfulness and Sustainable Fashion Consumption: Mindfulness is a secular practice with roots in various religions and worldviews, such as Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism. Mindfulness can be defined as a universal human ability, a state of consciousness that is accessible to all regardless of culture or religion (Shapiro et al. 2018). Mindfulness is the awareness that results from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment to the unfolding of experience moment by moment. (Kabat-Zinn 2003). Mindfulness affects sustainable consumption behavior in the following ways (Sheth, 2011)

1. Disruption of routines: Mindfulness helps people stop thinking automatically, commonly known as ‘being on autopilot’. This awareness trait should help people recognize unconscious, potentially unsustainable fashion-consuming habits and break them.
2. Congruence of attitude and behaviour: Mindfulness practice may also assist in lessening the well-known attitude/intention gap in sustainable fashion consumption, where people’s actual behaviour rarely matches their good attitude.
3. Pro-sociality & connectedness to nature and others: Mindfulness, which incorporates compassion, can help us focus on the world rather than ourselves. It can influence socially responsible consumer habits like buying fair-trade apparel.
4. Values and meaning in life: Research indicates that dispositional mindfulness is linked to meaning-making and intrinsic, social values, rather than materialistic or hedonist values. Such ideals positively impact sustainable behavior and attitudes.

Figure 2. Sustainability and Mindfulness



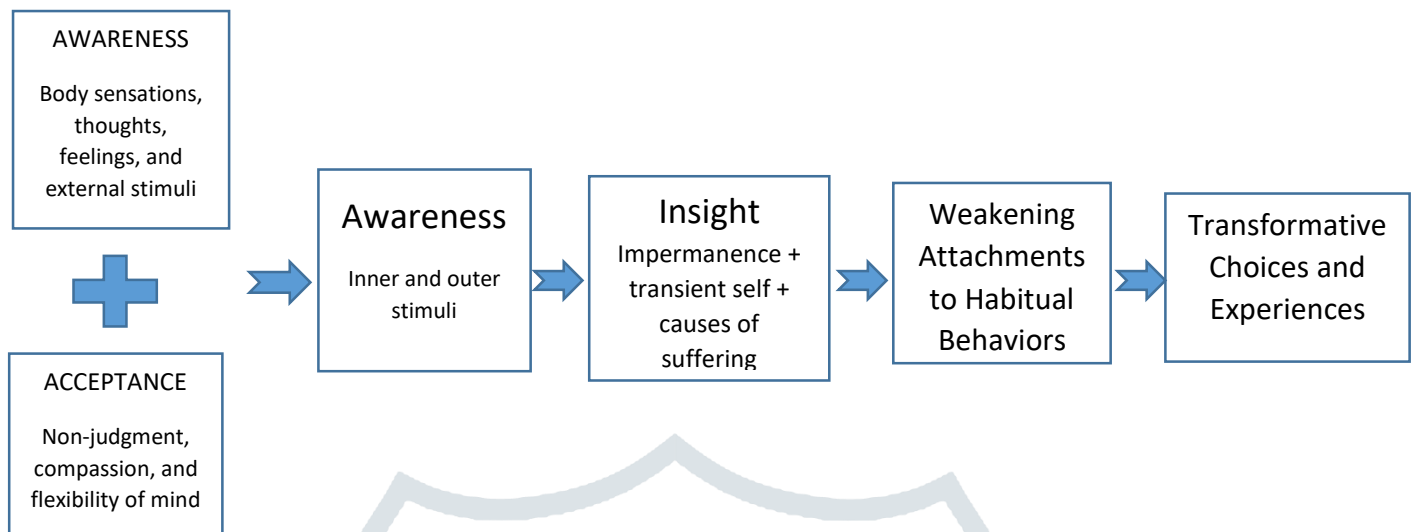
(Siano et al.,2013)

The Mindful Sustainable Consumption (MSC) of fast fashion consumers typically spans four quadrants of sustainable mindful behaviors or practices.

1. Mindful mindset – making durability, recycling, and reuse a part of customers' mental habits
2. Mindful behavior- stimulate demand for recycled clothing and reuse of garment
3. Sustainable mindset – increased clothing usage through extended lifecycle by the way of rental, and resale

4. Sustainable behavior- conscious purchase of fast fashion garments disrupting the routine purchase habits.

Figure 3. The Transformative Potential of Mindful Consumption



Source : (Bahl et al.2016)

Mindful mindset consumption is exhibited by pro-socio-ecological awareness towards sustainable consumption behaviors. Anti-consumption, Sharing, Voluntary simplicity, Sufficiency consumption, and Green consumption are behavioral impacts of Mindfulness. Whereas responsible consumption and ethical consumption are a result of awareness due to mindfulness (Sheth et al., 2011). It has been reported that mindfulness, an important Buddhist tenet, helps create mindful markets with mutually reinforcing consumption and entrepreneurship. Mindful consumerism is mindful consumption that is smart, nonviolent, and compassionate. Whereas mindful entrepreneurship applies Buddhist principles to manufacturing and trade (Valliere, 2008). For example, the brand Patagonia's core values are connectivity with the natural world and all beings, harmony, responsibility, and cooperation, supporting stakeholders' human development and self-realization, and spirituality. Their mission is to provide high-quality, simple, practical outdoor products without causing harm by protecting and restoring nature, supporting activism, and regenerative agriculture (Jurkovic & Jurkovic, 2017)

The apparel consumer, one of the most important constituents in the apparel supply chain, plays an important role in advancing the sustainable development of the fashion industry. Every decision they make, from acquisition and maintenance to donation and disposal, has an impact on the environment. Various internal and external variables, including culture, customs, values, beliefs, norms, assumptions, the economy, gender, and education, influence these decisions (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Therefore, scientific comprehension is crucial, as consumers must be aware of what constitutes eco-friendly apparel and be mindful of their purchase behavior; only then will the circular transition be facilitated (Patwary et al., 2022). In 1999, Brinkerhoff and Jacob inspired by deep ecologists' 1990s theories, published the first academic and peer-reviewed journal article combining 'mindfulness' and 'sustainability'. In a second article that year, the authors confirmed their hypothesis that mindfulness could promote non-materialistic well-being and sustainability (Jacob & Brinkerhoff 1999). Mindfulness was also proposed as a solution to the harmful effects of consumerism. Individuals with stronger materialistic values are more likely to experience misery, including anxiety, sadness, low self-esteem, and relationship issues (Kasser 2003). It was hypothesized that heightened consciousness decreases automatic behavior and increases intrinsic satisfaction and interconnectedness (Deci et al., 2015). A survey of 250 adults and 200 students found that mindfulness is connected to sustainable behavior and psychological well-being (Ericson et al., 2014). According to a Vietnamese Monk of the Zen Buddhist tradition, Thich Nhat Hanh mindfulness could help

in solving the ecological crisis. According to him, the revolution must begin within us. We will reduce our suffering when we realize we and the Earth are one and behave mindfully. He emphasized that restoring balance to ourselves will restore equilibrium to Earth (Hanh, 2013). Ericson et al. (2014) were the first to publish a comprehensive review of the literature on mindfulness and sustainability, identifying substantial theoretical justifications for a link that may enhance pro-environmental behavior. They further suggest that emotional awareness, self-regulation, and attentiveness may interrupt unsustainable habits, which reduces automatic and impulsive behavior (Bahl et al., 2016). It has helped consumers break from routines and see the world differently. Sheth et al. (2011), confirm that Mindful marketing and consumption benefit the world, and people, and lead to profit. Mindfulness reduces consumer anxiety and materialism, according to the study. Many studies have focused on environmentally friendly consumption (Lundblad & Davies, 2016), ecological consumer, socially conscious, and green purchase behavior, but mindful consumer behavior has been understudied. Mindful consumption shifts consumers' perspective toward sustainability by recognizing that consumption patterns help reduce excessive consumption or impulsive buying (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Mindful consumption begins with product procurement, storage, and disposal (Sheth 2017) and aims to reduce societal and environmental deterioration. It involves avoiding excessive, repeated, and aspirational consumption and thereby protects the self and environment. In 1990 McCracken postulated three characteristics of mindful consumption: limited possessions, aesthetics, and intentional possession choices. It was also confirmed by Amel et al. (2009), that Mindful consumption affects consumer attitudes and encourages environmentally friendly buying behavior. This confirms that transformative choices can therefore reduce mindless behavior in consumers, according to Dholakia (2016).

Consumer behavior towards Sustainable Fashion: Consumer behavior connected to garment goods mainly focuses on buying, maintaining, utilizing, and disposing of clothes (Norum, 2017). Thus, apparel customers' environmentally friendly behavior can be studied from three perspectives: purchase, care, and disposal. Psychology, values, beliefs, goals, assumptions, financial conditions, education, family history, and culture influence these behaviors (Lundblad, & Davies, 2016). Sustainable clothing encompasses social and environmental issues in purchase, upkeep, and disposal. Several usages, laundering frequency, washing, drying, and ironing procedures define eco-friendly care. Recycle (upcycling and downcycling), donate and reuse, throw away (landfill or incineration), and store in the closet are eco-conscious disposal behaviors (Fletcher & Grose, 2012). Responsible consumption and longer garment usage yield the greatest environmental advantages, coming under the circular economy. Less consumption, longer usage, and sustainable care are consumer choices. Rechanneling, recycling, energy recovery from incineration, and landfilling are further sustainable methods outside customers' direct control. Landfilling is the worst way to dispose of garments and shoppers can help dispose of old clothing by donating or placing it in a collection bin. Thus, ethical consumer behavior is essential for supply chain circularity (Sheth et al., 2011). Consumption of fast fashion, which began in the early 2000s led to cheap, low-quality material usage which caused clothing to quickly lose charm (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Meanwhile, rising purchasing power allowed customers to buy new outfits frequently. Brands tempted buyers to dump outdated clothes by quickly releasing new lines and planning obsolescence. Additionally, firms' appealing marketing methods, traditional and social media, opinion leaders, bloggers, celebrities, and peers influenced customers to buy fast fashion (Rathore, 2018). In the last decade, garment consumption doubled, and consumers kept clothing half as long as 15 years earlier (Koszewska, M., 2018). They bought clothes based on fit, color, style, durability, and care alone. This behavior was caused by the complexity of the fashion value chain and customers' lack of awareness of climate change research (Harris et al., 2016). This leads to mindless fashion consumption habits (Ozdamar & Atik, 2015).

Recommendations and Marketing Implications:

As marketing evolves sustainability of consumption is becoming more prominent in marketing literature presenting revolutionary conceptual and managerial solutions. The marketing approach to sustainability lacks conceptual framing and theoretical clarity, resulting in unreliable approaches and terms like “the

dark side of corporate social responsibility” (Wagner, 2008) and “greenwashing” which contribute to marketing mistrust. Thus, marketing must innovate conceptually good solutions and change consuming culture to make consumption sustainable (Jackson, 2004). Mindful consumption is a unique technique for managing consumer demand for sustainable and responsible consumption (Kotler 2011; Sheth et al. 2011). Marketers may use a new category of chatbots, named sustainability chatbots (SC), which could convey mindful and sustainable consumption choices. Also, a Mindful Consumption Index (MCI) that measures consumption trends at the individual, corporate, industry, and national levels will be particularly beneficial. This index should assess purchasing and consuming behavior (acquisition, replacement, and ambition) and self-, community-, and environmental care. MCI assessments would alert marketers, policymakers, and the public to consumption levels and trends and enable fact-based responses (Sheth et al., 2011). Marketers should be creative and innovative to make Mindful Consumption a winning proposition.

1) Fashion products can be engineered to encourage repetitive use. Thus, products could be more durable, upcyclable, and repairable. New product launches should be innovative, not superficial. The product mix can comprise multiple-use products, multi-user or shared-use products in product-service combinations, and service as a product substitute (Rothenberg, 2007).

2) Price is perhaps the best way to control demand and consumption. Recent petrol, agricultural, and commodity price hikes have made consumers conscious of the costs of overconsumption. Pricing that fully internalizes environmental and social costs can reduce acquisitive and repetitive consumption. Marketing should emphasize quality and value, not “cheap”.

3) Promotion. Advertising and communication can help reduce aspirational consumption and promote sustainable living. Through marketing communication, consumer education can reduce waste of acquisitive and repetitive consumption (Sheth et al., 2011). Some social marketing tactics could be used (Kotler, 2011).

4) Place. The purpose may be to improve service, repair, and “reuse fashion products.” Convenient location and attractive facilities can help develop markets for “product-service systems” and shared-use of products like rental stores for apparel and fashion goods (Mont, O. (2004).

Fischer et al. (2017) recommended integrating mindfulness in future sustainable consumption retailing because it promotes pro-social behavior and disrupts unsustainable habits.

Conclusion

New consumption patterns based on customers' awareness and retailers' sustainable policies emerge from recent and ongoing ecological disasters. Thus, contemporary consumer trends indicate that more individuals are becoming aware of their fashion consumption habits and their environmental and social impacts. Statistics show that “mindful customers” now want a sustainable, self-sufficient, eco-friendly lifestyle while buying (Sheth et al., 2011) Transparency is vitally important for all parties involved. A customer-centric sustainability approach is needed now. In this approach, mindful consumption (MC) is based on a consumer mindset of caring for self, community, and nature, which tempers the self-defeating excesses of acquisitive, repetitive, and aspirational consumption. Mindfulness is distinct and demands study beyond management paradigms. Companies globally use mindfulness because of its improved commercial potential. Consumers as well as companies must now think mindfully about fashion consumption and marketing. An extended manufacturing responsibility and responsible consumption habits will extend the lifecycle of fashion products, delay their disposal, and prevent waste. To promote a mindful consumption culture, academics, marketers, consumers, and policymakers should develop mindfulness skills to effectively address complex global issues with clarity and compassion.

Limitations: The research is based on a review of a limited number of papers. A systematic literature review on this topic is recommended.

Conflict of Interest: This is to declare that there is no conflict of interest in publishing this paper.

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