

From Overconsumption to Mindful Consumption: An Examination of Consumption Practices of Sri Lankan Consumer Activists

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Mindful
Consumption

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Abstract

Overconsumption, driven by materialism results in many environmental problems. It also impacts the long-term wellbeing of individuals. Therefore, engaging in sustainable consumption is vital. In addressing the issue of sustainability, overconsumption at individual level is likely to be an effective approach which can be achieved by instilling mindful consumption. The root-cause of overconsumption is the detachment from fellow humans and the natural environment. Yet, if one makes their consumption choices mindfully, it will no longer be a problem. Many anti-materialistic consumption practices that are presented in previous literature are initiated by various types of consumer activists and anti-consumption movements. It is not clear in the current literature how universal love and spirituality are reflected in their consumption practices. To unearth this, using a qualitative approach, 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with individual consumer activists' who lives in the Colombo district, Sri Lanka using snowball sampling. The gathered data were then transcribed and analyzed through the thematic analysis. Findings highlight the various mindful consumption practices adopted by the consumer activists in Sri Lanka. Reducing, reusing, rejecting, recycling and redefining were the common mindful practices highlighted by the respondents. Mindful consumption can be seen as a delineating social and business challenge. As shown in the implications these ways must be treated as the core values of a society to improve mindful consumption practices in the society because the absence of such values can be seen as the root cause of the unsustainability and unhappiness. Thus, the current study shows key policy implications for improving initiatives related to mindful consumption in the society.

Keywords: Overconsumption, Mindful consumption, Reduce, Reuse, Reject, Recycle, Consumer activists

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Introduction

Overconsumption of resources, driven by materialism, is likely to impact the long term well-being of individuals (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002) and the environment (Magdoff, 2011). A major threat the human population faces today is climate change. Along with climate change, countless and unusual environmental problems have also evolved, and they together create unfavorable effects on human health and longevity (NSIDC Arctic News, 2017). It is found that the sea ice extent during May 2019 has been reduced by 1.49 million square kilometers (575,300 square miles). This is close to the average loss recorded between 1981 to 2010. Thus, it is evident that the rate at which the loss occurs has significantly increased as what earlier took close to three decades now only takes a month. (NSIDC Arctic News, 2017). In addition, human actions threaten wildlife in two main ways: by destroying and damaging the places where species live, and by using them in ways that are unsustainable. Further it has been found that the forest area on Earth has been subject to continuous destruction since 1990 (World Bank, 2022).

The Global Footprint Network (2017) highlights that today's population overuses the earth's crust, natural resources and eco system services for their current consumption causing damage to the planet, which in turn, results in climate change. Due to this, the sea level around island nations such as Sri Lanka is rapidly rising, putting millions of lives and billions of dollars' worth of land, property and infrastructure at great risk (Katupotha, 2018). Thus, it is worth exploring this area further.

Both international policy organizations and the scientific research communities commonly agree that current levels of consumption of natural resources are unsustainable (Lim, 2017). Consumption, along with production and population, is one of the main causes of global environmental change according to the Agenda 21, the non-treaty action plan for achieving sustainable development. "Today humanity uses the equivalent of 1.6 Earths to provide the resources we use and absorb our waste. This means it now takes the Earth one year and six months to regenerate what we use in a year.

We use more ecological resources and services than nature can regenerate through overfishing, overharvesting forests, and emitting more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than forests can sequester (Global Footprint Network, 2017). Therefore, sustainability has, thus, become a vitally important concern today for multiple parties, including, but not limited to, investors, customers and policymakers (Pfeffer, 2010). Also, over the past forty years research on environmentally and socially responsible consumption or sustainable consumption have created a greater impact on marketing and consumption practices (Huxlin, et al., 2009).

With the mighty advances of natural science in the present century, we are now more than ever in a position to realize, and hence to control, the more remote natural consequences at least of our day-to-day productive activities (Marx & Engels 1968). Furthermore, sustainability has become a major issue in research, business, and governmental discussions as well (Flammer 2013).

To this end, the environment, the economy and the society are essential elements of achieving sustainability, as it signifies the ability of humankind to sustain itself indefinitely (Ulluwishewa, 2018). In addressing the issue of sustainability, addressing ‘overconsumption at individual level’ is likely to be an effective approach than making external changes like technological, institutional, societal, political and administrative changes (Ulluwishewa, 2018).

Unsustainable consumption (or consumption that is not environmentally friendly) emphasizes the need for change towards the wellbeing of future generations (Sharma & Rani 2014), so that sustainability agenda can be effectively pursued with sustainable consumption practices among consumers at the individual level (Sheth et al., 2011). To meet the challenge of overconsumption at individual level, both behavior and mindset of individuals need to change, which can be achieved by instilling ‘mindful consumption’ (Sheth, Sethia , & Srinivas, 2011).

Mindfulness has become the center of focus of a sizable community around the world, during the last twenty years. Mindfulness is the process of giving full attention to ‘moment by moment experience’ (Zinn, 1990), and it is an inherent state of consciousness (Brown & Ryan 2003), which leads one’s consumption practices as well. Thus, in line with the above, mindful consumption can be defined as the temperance in acquisitive, repetitive, and aspirational consumption at the behavioral level, resulting from and reinforced by a mindset that reveals a sense of caring for self, community, and nature (Sheth, Sethia , & Srinivas, 2011).

Mindful consumption can be driven by the desire to be kind and caring towards others and can be practiced by avoiding unsustainable consumption practices. Mindful Consumption is the active rejection of acquiring possessions, hoping that they will lead to happiness, satisfaction with life and generalized well-being (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). To address the above question, scholars have explored unique practices of mindful consumption such as buying less, refusing and eschewing products and service that they do not need, downsizing, going vegan to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions (Bowling, 2015), and shifting away from individual ownership of a consumer good to collectivity and sharing, buying second-hand, buying eco-friendly or green products, buying local products and practicing zero waste (Gleba, 2018).

Such ‘anti-materialistic consumption practices are initiated by various types of consumer activists and anti-consumption movements (Forno & Graziano, 2014). Thus, it would be interesting to unearth the drivers of such engagement of consumer activists from a mindful consumption point of view. Consumption, which lies at the heart of economic, social, ecological, and ethical debates, is being progressively confronted by those whose conduct may be driven by selflessness or spirituality. Thus, the present study aimed to explore the mindful consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists through their engagement in mindful consumption and in various activists’ programs they conduct along with the different progressive stages of the evolutionary process as consumer activists.

Research Question

RQ1: What are the mindful consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists?

Research Objective

RO1: To explore the mindful consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists.

Literature Review

The Nature around Us

The upsurge in the destruction of natural resources is rising because humans place greed over needs and profits over people along with the lack of concern for its impact on the natural environment (Jeevan Kumar, Rajendra Prasad, Banerjee, & Thammineni, 2015). The shortage of resources should be taken earnestly because it would threaten the guarantee of natural resources for future generations (Kalsum & Isa, 2016) because all that we consume has its origins in the nature around us. As According to the Global Footprint Network (2017), today's population overuses the earth's crust, resources and eco system services. Furthermore Ortiz-Catalan, Håkansson, & Brånemark, (2014) saw overconsumption as a problematic phenomenon in the modern world with the accelerating population along with their consumption patterns. This was reconfirmed by Scheiner, Barfield and Holt (2012) who stated that the extraction of resources, which is the starting point of all supply chains for both individuals and businesses, ends with both parties throwing the trash back to nature. The continuation of this cycle is based on consumption. Therefore, as highlighted in literature, at present, the eco systems cannot support the high level of consumption prevalent in contemporary society.

Overconsumption

Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas (2011) defined overconsumption as the level of consumption that is unaffordable or unacceptable because of its environmental or economic consequences. He also introduced a framework called 'the guiding principle' towards customer centric sustainability. Thus, overconsumption can be seen as unproductive unsustainable consumption that creates negative impacts on both the individual and collective wellbeing of a society. Sustainable consumption is rooted on a decision-making process that takes the consumer's social responsibility into consideration other than the individual needs and wants (Meulenberg, 2003). Thus, Overconsumption, therefore, can cause financial stresses on individuals due to the unnecessary impulsive spending.

As the present study sees overconsumption as the root cause of climate change then the consumers need to change. They must consume in a way that will save and add value to the existing resources provided by nature for the use of future generations.

Mindful Consumption

Around the past 20 years, a substantial community has developed all over the world around the practice of mindfulness. Being aware is the act of paying close attention to one's "moment by moment experience" (Zinn, 1990). According to Brown and Ryan (2003), mindfulness also governs one's consuming habits, making it an ongoing activity. Thus, mindful consumption can be seen as a strategy that can be used to support individual consumers to practice sustainable consumption rather than consuming blindly or succumbing to habitual overconsumption.

According to Eastern derived approaches, mindfulness is an important aspect of awareness that bestows the aptitude to see and understand clearly. Instead of considering the world through a filter of memories, affections and attachments, mindfulness permits a direct and immediate experience of whatever the occurrence which is distinct from thinking about or conceptualizing the experience. A well taught mind can withstand and effortlessly return to this objective awareness, which simplifies deliberate choices and is less susceptible to persuasive messaging (Rosenberg, 2004). The concept of mindfulness meditation can be traced back to about 25 centuries ago to the teachings of Lord Buddha (Hölzel, et al., 2011).

Mindful consumption is theorized as consciousness in thought and action regarding the consequences of consumption. Mindful consumption also supposes that one is in a position to choose what and how much one consumes (Sheth, Sethia , & Srinivas, 2011). According to his or her values and preferences, consumers make conscious choices about their consumption practices, guided by the mindful mindset. The core attribute of the mindful mindset is caring. This encapsulates caring for nature, as well as personal and community wellbeing (Sheth et al., 2011). When consumers are not being proactively mindful of their consumption habits, they often do not pay attention to the amount they consume, nor do they think of the effects of their consumption, Thus, overconsumption can be overcome by practicing mindful consumption.

Behaviour can be seen as a tangible facet of consumption practices. On the other hand, the mindset of the consumer can be seen as an intangible facet of consumption. The mindset of each consumer is affected by attitudes, values and expectations of the consumption practices (Sheth et al., 2011). As overconsumption driven by materialism causes countless problems, bringing about a change in both the behavior and mindset of the consumers is a must . This change can be brought about by instilling mindful consumption practices in the minds of human beings (Sheth et al., 2011), in order to brush away the mindlessness that has been soft wired into our brains with habits, thoughts and unhealthy behavior patterns.

Thus, in line with the above, mindful consumption can be defined as the temperance in acquisitive, repetitive and aspirational consumption at the behavioral level, resulting from and reinforced by a mindset that reveals a sense of caring for self, community and nature (Sheth, Sethia , & Srinivas, 2011). The motives that drive individuals to care for nature can be diverse. Kilbourne (2006) categorizes these motivations through the different values people attach to nature. According to him there is intrinsic, instrumental, and aesthetic value to nature. We have a responsibility to conserve nature irrespective of any utilitarian concerns and respect the intrinsic value of natures (Naess, 1990). Kilbourne (2006) signified that nature is treated as a welfare ecology which rests in the middle of both preservationism and conservationism as per the aesthetic values.

Caring for oneself is not all about being self-centered, but it is about paying close attention to one's well-being. An eudemonic approach to happiness, and economic stability are the two major aspects of personal wellbeing (Sheth et al., 2011). Frank (2004) suggested that "healthier, longer and happier lives" result from "inconspicuous goods such as freedom from a long commute or a stressful job," and from devoting more time "to family and friends, to exercise, sleep, travel and other restorative activities." He further elaborated that, happiness does

not result from spending increased income on conspicuous consumption, such as buying a larger house or a more expensive car (Frank, 2004).

Caring for the community is fundamental for the shared well-being of everyone, but it is also intimately connected with individual well-being (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011). Whybrow (2005) showed that most people discover happiness in a social context, and in the relationships, they have with others around them. He points out that “financial success and material goods” are feeble substitutes to “the empathic understanding of friends and family, and the social networks of community”

The core attribute of mindful behavior is temperance which can be used to brush away the three types of behaviors, namely the acquisitive, repetitive, and aspirational consumption, that are closely tied with overconsumption (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011). Acquisitive consumption is the most fundamental way of overconsumption resulting in the acquisition of many products that exceeds one’s true needs (Mooallem, 2009). Repetitive consumption is the endless cycle of buying, discarding, and buying again which is yet another means of overconsumption. Most products are discarded and purchased repeatedly over and over again, because of the belief that they are meant to be disposable (McCollough, 2007).

Veblen (1899) was the first to articulate the concept of aspirational consumption which is the most easily recognizable way of overconsumption. Aspirational consumption is associated with the concept of conspicuous consumption and competitive consumption where people are in a continuous competition to keep up with their neighbors, or those of a similar socio-economic standing. This results in an upward shift in consumer aspirations creating an upscale spending pattern that supports overconsumption.

Methodology

Along with the purpose of the current study, to explore the mindful consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists an exploratory study approach was used for the investigation. Guptha and Awasthi (2015) reported that there are two approaches, namely, inductive and deductive approach. Inductive approach is the process where the researcher attempts to ascertain some generalizations about the phenomenon under the study after careful observation. To delve into the purpose of the current study, to explore the mindful consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists, the inductive approach was utilized. Some of the popular qualitative methods are grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), phenomenology (Goulding, 2005), narrative analysis (Mishler, 1995), basic interpretive studies (Merriam, 2002) summarized ethnographic procedures and the many faces and research strategies of ethnography. Among these different methods considered, the basic interpretive qualitative study, introduced by Merriam (2002), was deemed appropriate for the study. The primary data was gathered in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method because of the flexibility it offers the researcher to guide the interview process and also because it allows the researcher to ask additional questions to enrich the data being collected. With qualitative research, sufficiency of sample size is

measured by depth of data rather than frequencies, therefore, samples should consist of participants who best represent the research topic (Morse, et al., 2002).

Thus, for this study it was decided to have a sample size of 25. As the study proceeded the researcher recognized other potential participants who were previously unknown to the researcher from those who were recommended by the initial respondents and through other references. The unit of analysis of the study was individuals who practice mindful consumption and engage in social activist programs.

Data Analysis

The data in the current study is comprised of the interview transcripts. The study adopted the six-step data analysis method recommended by (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The six steps are as follows:

Familiarization with the Data

Firstly, to be familiarized with the data all the transcripts were read several times. The process of familiarization was easy as the data were collected by the researcher herself.

Generating Initial Codes

With the initial creation and assignment of codes the full list of codes was created in a structure aligning with the questions asked. All the codes were then recorded manually in one sheet for easy referencing. Also, the manual editing made the revision much easier. Since many phrases fell under the same code, they were broken down into sub codes under one parental code. Once the initial sorting of data was completed the search for themes began.

Searching for Themes

Next the search for the themes began. A theme needs to explain something meaningful about the data and should be able to answer research questions (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This component was led with the intension of discovering themes and subthemes.

Reviewing Themes

Once the potential themes were recognized they were reviewed and established under the guidance of the supervisor.

Defining and Naming Themes

The final reviewing of the themes was followed by the defining and naming of the themes.

Producing the Report

Findings and Discussion

Mindful Consumption Practices of Social Activists

This section aims to answer the second research question: “What are the mindful consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists?”

Reduce

A practice that many of the respondents had in common was their efforts to reduce their consumption.

Respondent 1, who claimed to be the first person to donate the highest number of wheelchairs for the neediest in Sri Lanka replied,

“I use Polythene minimally as I can. Now it is like this. We can't live 100% correctly and harmlessly. Even though the use of polythene got banned there are some moments where we must use polythene. But I manage to reduce the use of polythene even in what I do. I take food in a huge bucket so that I don't have to use polythene bags. I do that not because I don't have enough money but because I know that it is not good for the environment. It is not healthy if we even burn them”

The respondents practice reduced consumption or no consumption of plastics and polythene knowing that they exploit the nature around us. This reflects their care towards the nature around them providing evidence to the first finding for the mindful consumption practice adopted by them.

Respondent 2, who is the current president of their club (The Vikings club of University of Sri Jayewardenepura which is a social entrepreneurship club) which celebrated the second anniversary proudly said,

“I won't litter around, not even a wrapper of a toffee. I advise all my friends not to do so and I have changed my father also now.”

Almost all the participants highlighted that they follow nature-friendly waste disposal practices from a very early age under the guidance of their families and religion.

Respondent 5 (a 24-year-old female), an undergraduate of a local university in Sri Lanka pointed,

“I manage myself to dispose garbage properly. I am concerned with garbage disposal. I see many well-educated qualified people driving huge, beautiful vehicles come and throw away their garbage bags to the main roads sometimes.”

Respondent 12, who engages in his own business activities reminded,

“I'm not wasteful eat my meal in full. I used to throw food before but now I have purposefully thought and have stopped that. I am concern in buying cloths also. I don't know if that is because I don't have much money, but I don't spend a lot on many cloths. I buy the comfortable at the lowest price. But when I want to buy something say for an example if I want to buy an iPhone because I like it, I don't see it as unsustainable”

The efforts to be less wasteful or not to be wasteful at all are two other key findings that can be added as mindful mechanisms practiced by the participants. Accordingly, the respondents showcased their efforts to be less wasteful of their food consumption. Also, it has been found that reducing food waste is the third key solution out of hundred solutions for decreasing the carbon emissions (Hawken, 2017).

Respondent 13 (a 29-year-old female) who has changed herself to a sustainable woman shared,

“I stopped using Polythene bags, I carry my water bottle everywhere so that I do not have to purchase plastic water bottles, I don’t use straws, I always try to reduce my usage in everything, I even started buying secondhand clothes.”

Carrying one’s own water bottle and lunch box is a way to cut the repetitive consumption. (Sheth et al. 2010). The practice of cutting out a repetitive purchase of disposable products such as water bottles, razors, plastic toothbrushes and lunch packets can be suggested as mindful consumption practices practiced by the consumer activists.

Respondent 13 also said,

“I don’t use tissues nor face paper; I’m always trying to reduce my waste also I no longer buy new cloths and am only spending on the things that I really need. I don’t buy plastic cleaners, liquids, hand washes because companies don’t recycle them. We just throw it away.”

Mindful consumption may have the capability to downgrade consumer engagement in repetitive, environmentally damaging conducts like mindless waste of resources such as the practices the respondent has mentioned.

Respondent 16, the elder daughter in her family stated,

“I am strictly concerned in spending money, so I only purchase what I really need. I went to the book fair this time but didn’t buy any books because I still had books I have not finished reading from the last time. As girls we buy a lot of cloths normally, but now I have limited that a lot because now I feel that my parents must spend for us. I also have a sister and they must take care of her needs as well. So, try my best to reduce my consumption”

Mindfulness is an antidote to mindless overconsumption, which unfavorably influences the individual and collective well-being. Mindful consumption can be defined as the temperance in acquisitive, repetitive and aspirational consumption at the behavioral level, resulting from and reinforced by a mindset that reveals a sense of caring for self, community and nature (Sheth et al., 2010). This is manifested through buying fewer items, making fewer repetitive purchases, and denying aspirational consumption.

Acquisitive consumption is the most fundamental way of overconsumption resulting in the acquisition of many products that exceeds one’s true needs (Mooallem, 2009). It can be argued that this consumption pattern is backed by materialistic values. For instance, exploitation occurs when consumers purchase more than what they really need, however, at the same time, it also results in more waste accumulation (Sheth et al., 2010).

Reduction in consumption levels is in accordance with the renunciation of fervent want-fulfilment as an effective source of long-term satisfaction, a more important aspect in terms of environmental ramifications is the need to change the nature of consumption (Daniels, 2018). The respondents practice reduced consumption of plastic and polythene by considering the damage they together cause nature which showcases their caring mindset towards nature. Also, they highlighted waste management concerns and practices along with their effort to minimize the waste that is added to the environment. This highlights that concept of reducing is a well embraced mindful consumption practice by the consumer activists in Sri Lanka.

Reuse

Another practice highlighted by the respondents is the practice of reusing.

Respondent 7(a 23-year-old male), an undergraduate of a local university in Sri Lanka noted,

“I reuse the polythene bags at home. We have a one big bag that contains all the extra bags, and we take from that whenever we needed one. Even for my business I am trying to go for a paper bag to give away the mugs and all. I think much about that for the damage that it creates. My mother takes her cloth bags shopping”

The reuse of polythene can be shown as a finding under the mindful consumption practice adopted by the consumer activists taking into consideration that nature is exploited more than ever before due to the unsustainable and careless practices of mankind. Accordingly, respondent 13, who also writes a personal blog about living sustainably to educate people on the substitutes that could be used instead of products that are unhealthy for oneself and to nature added,

“I started using reusable items. I don’t use pads any more instead I use the menstrual cup. I carry my water bottle and lunch box everywhere I go. And when I have surplus food on my plate, I ask the hotel people to pack it and give it to me, well most of the time they look at me weirdly but I don’t mind as long as I’m doing good.”

Using a menstrual cup instead of tampons and pads can be used to cut the repetitive consumption (Sheth et al., 2010) which will reduce the number of disposables that are released to nature, and it will also save the money of the individual consumers.

Respondent 16, the proud treasurer of their social club highlighted,

“I love reusing I make small fancy items from waste at home, I make pencil holders and other artifacts using them. I use the boxes that we get with presents, and I won’t let my mother throw it and I keep them stored and whenever I get a free time, I make things with them for my usage.”

Participants claimed that they try and turn the waste into something valuable which could be reused in the future.

Respondent 17, who is also the elder daughter of the family replied,

“We reuse bags at home. We throw them away only if we can’t use it at all”

Respondent 19, who has her own brother and many cousin sisters replied,

“I am very careful with my stuff; I use a slipper for two years or more until I barely could walk wearing it. I think that with the money that I save by using the same slipper I could buy something worthy to a needy. I think we all should do that. And we know that for all girls they must spend more on cloths, but I don’t because I have my cousin sisters who give me their cloths and we share most of the time, so I don’t spend on clothing, I spend on my books. I am a crazy reader. I have books that might worth six hundred thousand rupees.”

The practice of collective ownership is visible among the mindful practices adopted by the consumer activists which means shifting away from individual ownership of a consumer goods to collectivity and sharing. Thus, it creates less demand for products and will thereby reduce the environmental harm (Prothero et al., 2011). As per the findings of the research and the observations of the researcher overtime even before the inquiries were made, by personally knowing many of the respondents’ practices, it can be concluded that they are moving away from individual ownership. This practice will discourage them as well as the other consumers to use more products and thereby it will help eliminate and reduce the waste thrown into the nature around us. Reusing can also contribute to living a zero-waste life. Thus, reusing can be presented as a mindful consumption practice adopted by the consumer activists in Sri Lanka.

Reject

The third significant practice brought up by the respondents was the practice of rejecting certain products. Sheth et al., (2010) explains ‘rejecting’ as saying “No” to products that you really do not need. Rejection is a means of anti-consumption and is a practice used by consumers to remove the materialistic values they hold. They further argued that consumers can decide to avoid and not to consume products that are incompatible with their conservation ideology. Also, in order to overcome the challenge of overconsumption one can buy less as the consumer activists do in the current study. Thus, one must either say no to what one really does not need or reject the consumption of such products mindfully. Accordingly, respondent 7, who is an undergraduate and a partner in his friends’ social business also replied,

“I have stopped eating fish and all meat from 2015.”

Respondent 12, whose mother is a nurse at a hospital for cancer patients in Sri Lanka told,

“I have stopped eating sausages, chicken, coke and all artificial products because my mother showed me how people suffer to death with cancer.”

Respondent 13, who believes that humans have two homes as in our body and the planet we live in noted,

“I no longer eat rotting animal flesh”

Respondent 18, who is the founder of a well-recognized animal movement in Sri Lanka answered,

“I have adopted a full vegetarian dietary pattern.”

Through the above it is apparent that respondents reject several food products due to the unhealthy consequences they cause. In addition, it is evident that the respondents also refuse consumption of such products due to the empathy they hold for animals which will be discussed under the next section.

Recycle

Another practice adopted by the social activists is the practice of recycling.

Respondent 7, who also runs his own business of creative digital art works stated,

“I am trying so hard to use recyclable wrappers and bags for packaging in my business”

The idea of minimizing waste is a key finding of the study, and it is also important to take it into consideration because the more we consume the more we accumulate waste. Waste is a major contributor of global warming (Hawken, 2017). This is because when the waste is accumulated in landfills it emits the greenhouse gas methane, which is recognized as 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Respondent 10 (a 23-year-old male), an undergraduate of a local university in Sri Lanka who runs his own social business and a friend of respondent 7 as stated before replied,

“We use a biogas system for the manufacturing and filters water”

The use of biogas was recognized by the participant as a source of saving money as well.

Respondent 17, who owns a gift shop of handcrafted items also replied,

“I use recyclable materials for my products and for the packaging”

It is visible that the two consumer activists who run their own businesses are trying and using recyclable materials for the packaging. This reveals that adopting a zero-waste lifestyle is not impossible. Also, if the consumers in general follow these changes as a society, it will force businesses to adopt zero waste packaging which will make zero-waste living possible as a mindful consumption practice.

Sustainable consumption practices are characterized as mindful consumption practices (Seth et al., 2011).

For example, caring for nature is signified by subjects such as environmental protection, and the sparing use of natural resources highlighted by the act of the participants by reducing,

reusing or rejecting the use of plastics and polythene and trying to reduce their cumulative waste. Thus, as suggested earlier recycling can be also applied to life a zero-waste life.

Referring to Buddhism, Buddha has specifically referred to recycling by providing guidance to his monks regarding the preparation and the use of the robe. Buddhaghosa, (2011) in *Visuddhimagga* (1960) or *The Path of Purification* (gives details regarding the preparation of a robe from refuse material such as a rag dropped on a charnel ground, a cloth thrown into a place for rubbish, a rag thrown away after wiping up blood stains, etc. Cullavagga (1995) edited by Oldenberg, (1995) contains a conversation between King Udena and Thera Ananda regarding the use of the robe. The thera told the king that once the robe is worn thin after use, it will be used as a bed spread. When it is also worn out it will be used as a mattress covering, afterwards as a ground covering, then as a door mat until it is worn out. Afterwards it will be shredded, kneaded with mud, and used for plastering.

Redefine

Ancient Sri Lankans, our ancestors, practiced sustainable consumption even before the coining of the term sustainability in the western context. As a result, the Sri Lankan indigenous settlements are rooted with the wisdom of Buddhism. This was because they were avid followers of Buddhism which preached mindful practices. Sri Lankan history also shows that humans lived prosperous lives without harming nature, which is what the current population have been unable to achieve (Dayaratne, 2018). Accordingly, redefinitions of these practices were found adopted by the respondents. For example, respondent 13, who lives a sustainable life comfortably highlighted,

“I live a chemical free life; I no longer force my body to absorb chemicals. I exercise thrice a week, meditate and use natural materials on my body no shampoo nor lotions. I use bamboo toothbrushes instead of plastic brushes. I’m truly happy and comfortable with the changes that I have made. I have also stopped buying new cloths instead I go to places where they sell imported cloths from Canada, USA and from European countries. They have new fashion but they must be washed well before using, totally cost cutting and again I reduce my waste. I don’t use conventional deodorants instead I use deo crystal, a crystal mineral that is found naturally and it dissolve when you apply it or baking soda mixed with water in a paste. I also use essential oil. The extracts of perfume. After having a bath, I apply it.”

Buying secondhand products as a mindful consumption practice seems to have been embraced by a few respondents. When an individual purchases secondhand it reduces the demand for many new products, on the other hand limits the extraction of raw materials from the nature continuously. When a consumer buys a new product, it reflects a signal for the manufacturer of that product to manufacture more (Ballantine , Jack , & Parsons , 2010) whereas when a consumer buys a secondhand product, that signal does not reach the manufacturer. Therefore, this will also support the reduction and recycling of products.

Thus, buying and selling secondhand will be an effective solution to overcome the hardships of overconsumption towards a sustainable world. Therefore, it is better to encourage such acts by individual practitioners of sustainable living and for them to spread the message more often to different audiences.

Respondent 13 further added,

“I stopped using soap, shampoo, conditioner, body scrub and what else I can’t remember the names because I have stopped using them long time back. I use virgin coconut oil before I go to bed on my head and body. I have stopped eating meat instead I eat great food. I eat plants.”

Respondent 14(a 48-year-old female), a mother of a 19-year-old daughter and the aunt of Respondent 17 suggested,

“I am practicing tidiness and cleanliness in life. Before our people adopted 5S I practiced it at home. We only have three cups, three plates on the kitchen table. It is not that we don’t have items at home. Everything’s kept inside the cupboards. And the same practice, I have adopted it here in the playhouse.”

The respondent above also added, *“I help people. I had a miscarriage and lost my first child due to an infection that was spread to me from a patient. But I never stopped. I have only one child now. But see, now all these children love me. And the other thing is I treat every patient the same. No mother wants to see their kid being treated differently. So, I never carry or hold a baby. I have solved many families’ problems in addition to giving medications.”*

Respondent 24, who refused to believe the fact that God created everything replied,

“One thing I practice is kindness. I treat everyone equally. I think I could influence one through kindness. If I’m arrogant about something I won’t be able to get something done. So, I practice kindness. And with that I know for a fact that I have a very good relationship with my husband, with my family and with my friends because of that”

Respondent 2, who generously helped the researcher by introducing many other social activists in Sri Lanka replied,

“I try my best to live without hurting anyone. That is what we should do. And hopefully when I behave my family will behave and all the other families around us will also behave and change.”

In sum, respondents marked the significance of mindful consumption towards sustainability while highlighting their practices such as reusing, reducing, rejecting, recycling and redefining which were found to be common among all. Most respondents have not seen how universal love and spirituality could remove overconsumption. Yet, within their recollections of memories and their stories we can see that all their practices and the programs they lead and engage in are driven by the inner changes that took place with life’s progressions while sharing universal love in different ways.

Only a few recognized the practice of kindness as a mindful practice, yet the other respondents’ acts showcase that they are being driven by the same practice. However, the selflessness was reflected through them even at the cost of a one’s own child’s life as per the respondent 14, signifying the way the practice of loving and kindness is reflected into the willingness to undergo such profound risks to one’s own well-being.

Ulluwishewa (2016) highlighted the significance of spirituality along with the inner transformation from self-centeredness to selflessness by being kind to others which is proven well by the respondents.

Summary of the Findings

The following table portrays the key findings of the second section facilitating the answer for the second research question, “What are the mindful consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists?”

Table 1. Key Findings on the Mindful Consumption Practices Adopted by Consumer Activists in Sri Lanka

Mindful Consumption Practices	Examples of Consumption Practices
1. Reducing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduced or cease the use of plastics and polythene ● Better waste management ● Reduced spending on wants
2. Reusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reuse of plastics and polythene ● Use of reusable items ● Buying items secondhand ● Turning the waste into something valuable ● The practice of careful consumption of their possessions
3. Rejecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rejecting the consumption of animal flesh ● Rejecting artificial products
4. Recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of recyclable materials for their products and promotional materials ● Use of biogas ● The practice of filtering water
5. Redefining Consumption Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Living a chemical free life ● Eating healthy food ● Tidiness and cleanliness in life ● Practice of loving and kindness

Source: Author’s presentation

Implications

- The insights of this study recommend organizations to change their way of thinking. Most of their unsustainable business practices and business goals require actions that make a positive impact environmentally, socially and economically because most people follow these consumer activists’ today towards a better sustainable world.
- Also, contributions from the corporate sector are also necessary for the members of the society to adopt a sustainable lifestyle with ease. Hereby the corporates are advised to use

environmentally friendly materials for their products, packaging and promotional materials.

- The corporate sector can also engage in organizing awareness campaigns on re-wiring the spirituality levels of the general public through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Also, they can support the consumer activists in Sri Lanka by partnering up with their social activist movements.
- As per Drucker (1973) “Managers must convert society’s needs into opportunities for profitable business.” As per the findings of the current study the identified means of overconsumption along with the mindful practices adopted by the change agents of a society offer fruitful avenues for converting sustainability as one of the most persistent concerns of the community into a great opportunity to safeguard that business is both profitable and sustainable.
- Also, public policy makers and the government could initiate public awareness programs to encourage more religious and non-religious spiritual practices to mold the members of the society to overcome the challenges of overconsumption. Such awareness campaigns would help all the members of the society to identify their own state of wellbeing and of those around them which may, encourage them to be mindful in their consumption practices.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations in the current study which should be acknowledged. As to date, this is the first approach that examines the reflection of universal love and spirituality of the mindful consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists. Perhaps the major limitation backing the most important recommendation is that it included only in-depth interviews with 25 consumer activists, in one Sri Lankan city, Colombo. Thus, the results reported are not generalizable to all consumer activists who live in other cities.

Future Research

It is recommended that future research should focus on a more diversified sample of consumer activists because the present sample included social activists who engage in many different charitable programs. More practitioners of sustainable living should be examined. Another limitation is the sample consists of the respondents who play the leadership roles in their movements. It is recommended to examine the members of these movements because the leading roles are played by self-actualizers who act as agents of change with various other motives.

Acknowledgement of Originality

The findings explained in this research paper is original work and haven’t been presented nor have the work been accepted elsewhere.

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