

OVERCONSUMPTION THROUGH THE LENS SRI LANKAN CONSUMER ACTIVISTS

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Abstract

Overconsumption, driven by materialism, results in many environmental and social problems that will impact the long-term wellbeing of individuals making sustainability vitally important. The challenge of overconsumption can be addressed by instilling mindful consumption in the minds of the consumers. The root-cause of overconsumption is the separateness from fellow humans and the natural environment yet, if one makes their consumption choices mindfully, it will no longer be a problem. Consumer activists, as a changing force in any society, view overconsumption with different perspectives and with their awareness of the long-term impacts on the nature and the wellbeing of the humans they adopt different mindful consumption practices towards the betterment of themselves, society along with the nature around them. Yet it is not clear in the current literature how consumer activists in Sri Lanka perceive overconsumption. The objective of this research is to investigate how consumer activists in Sri Lanka perceive overconsumption and to understand their perspectives on its causes and solutions. The specific methodology involved conducting an exploratory study under the inductive approach using the qualitative research design where 25 in-depth interviews were and the thematic analyses was used for data analysis, to gain insight into the views and practices of these consumer activists and the thematic analyses was used for data analysis. The findings show that consumer activists perceive overconsumption as a waste of everything everywhere along with the means and the roots of overconsumption that lead them towards the mindful practices adopted by them. Accordingly, this research contributes to the existing literature by providing a unique perspective on overconsumption from the standpoint of consumer activists in Sri Lanka, offering practical implications for fostering mindful consumption and promoting sustainability in the region. Further, the current study shows key policy implications for improving sustainability initiatives in the business organizations and society as consumer activists of Sri Lanka possess a better understanding of the root causes, as well as the means of overconsumption.

Keywords: Consumer Activists, consumption, materialism, overconsumption

Introduction

Overconsumption of resources, driven by materialism, is likely to impact the long-term well-being of individuals and the environment (Magdoff & Foster, 2011). The 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 1981 to 2010 average loss for the month (NSIDC Arctic News, 2017). Also, human actions are found threatening 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 destroyed since 1990 (The World Bank, 2022). The Global Footprint Network, (2017) highlights today's population overuses the earth's crust, natural resources and ecosystem services for their current consumption causing damage to the planet, which in turn, results in climate change. Over half a century, global affluence has increased resource use and pollutant emissions, affecting environmental impacts. Transitioning towards sustainability requires lifestyle changes and technological advancements, but existing societies and economies encourage consumption expansion, hindering necessary societal change (Ripple et al., 2017). Due to this, sea level around Island nations such as Sri Lanka is rising higher, 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 recently argued to be one of the main causes of

global environmental change, says 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). It was recognized that the root of the issue is excessive resource utilization. This has been determined that the main issue at hand is the lack of resources. Moreover, the research findings indicate that the genesis of an excessively materialistic lifestyle is the initial attachment to extra wants (Jayantha, Ariyawansa & Kumara, 2022).

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 researches on environmentally and socially responsible consumption or sustainable consumption has created a greater impact on marketing and consumption practices (Huxlin *et al.*, 2009). The giant of sustainability arena says 'The use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, whilst minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations' (IISD/United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999). Consumer activists' perception of overconsumption is a growing concern as they recognize its far-reaching negative consequences on the environment, society, and individual well-being. However, a comprehensive understanding of consumer activists' specific perspectives, motivations, and strategies in addressing overconsumption remains limited. As overconsumption continues to exacerbate environmental degradation, social inequalities, and unsustainable production practices, it is imperative to investigate how consumer activists perceive this issue to inform targeted interventions and policy measures that promote sustainable and responsible consumer behavior. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to explore how Sri Lankan consumer activists perceive overconsumption, means of overconsumption and root causes of overconsumption.

Literature review

The nature around us

Katupotha (2018) emphasized that the ocean level growth along with the neo-glacial vicissitudes have together achieved the cumulation of hotness, cold phases, emission of GreenHouse Gas occasionally (by little ice ages) by human activities and industrialization. Authors agree in literature that unsustainable production and consumption is the foremost cause of polluting nature, water pollution, lessening in biodiversity along with climate change. Substantial research indicated the need to adopt sustainable consumption practices in order to protect and enhance the eco systems around us for the collective wellbeing of all living beings for the present moment and to the future usage. These activities have worsened during the last 500-year period, and they have exquisitely hurried since 1,960s and it is found that by 2,100 the climate change and sea level rise will plunge the coastal wetland. This submergence is endangered for rising floods, the population pressure, damages to the coastal buildings, infrastructures and finally to the economy. With careful examinations it is also found that the past Global climate change and sea level rise of the geologic time, it is impossible to prevent the future climate change, sea level rise and the submergence of the coastal wetlands (Katupotha, 2018). Overall these research highlights the significance of sustainable consumption towards a better world.

Materialism

Materialism is the belief where acquisition and possession of material objects are recognized as the ultimate source of happiness and life satisfaction (Richins & Dawson, 1992) For most individuals in developed and developing countries "Happiness "is the prime goal in consumption. Where they believe that the possession and the more consumption of products will lead them towards happiness, materialism has a negative relationship with the consumer's well-being. Materialism is intensely distinguished with consumption, more than any other personality attribute, and the common notion of materialism is the position with one's attachments to worldly possessions (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Belk (1985) conceptualized materialism as a personality trait, comprising three traits as envy, possessiveness, and no generosity.

Materialism has been associated with self-centered traits such as selfishness (Bauer et al. 2012), envy, or non-generosity (Belk, 1985). Having money-oriented values brands an individual focus on one's own wealth and well-

being rather than on another's well-being. Therefore, having materialistic values negatively impacts on the ability to consider macro level concerns such as environmental or community challenges (Kilbourne, 2006). This commands us to marketing. Marketing systems are top powerhouses of both matter and meaning, shaping culture both material and immaterial (Scott et al., 2014). Most of the goods and services that people consume across the globe are produced and distributed by marketing institutions, and marketing is the unchanged system that assigns much of the meaning to those goods and services. Through numerous methods marketing is the perfect institutionalization of the new materialism, at the macro level (Scott et al., 2014). The place where meaning and matter are entirely entwined, where discourses and infrastructures conspire to shape the global society in which we live. Where the new materialist philosophy at large in the world as per (Dolphijn & Tuin 2012), departs radically from idealist traditions that prioritize the social construction of meanings comprising consumption mythologies. Moreover, there are disparities in resource consumption between the wealthy and non-wealthy populations. Over half a century, global affluence has increased resource use and pollutant emissions, affecting environmental impacts. Transitioning towards sustainability requires lifestyle changes and technological advancements, but existing societies and economies encourage consumption expansion, hindering necessary societal change (Wiedmann et al., 2020).

Consumption vs. Overconsumption

Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero (1997) defined that, "consumption is not just a matter of satisfying material greed, of filling your stomach. It is a question of manipulating symbols for all sorts of purposes. On the level of the lifeworld, it is for the purpose of constructing identity, constructing self, and constructing relations with others. The sense of consumption itself varies, as per physicists, economists, ecologists and sociologists, who have placed uniquely different meanings to the notion of Consumption which is still valid to the modern dynamic society of consumers (Poirier et al. 2006).

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 is treated as a mean of unproductive unsustainable consumption that creates negative impacts on both individual and collective wellbeing of a society. Sustainable consumption is rooted in a decision-making process that takes the consumer's social responsibility into consideration other than the individual needs and wants (Meulenber 2003). Thus, overconsumption is a state in which individuals, communities, or societies consume resources, goods, and services at a level beyond what is sustainable and necessary for well-being. It involves excessive consumption patterns that lead to environmental degradation, resource depletion, and social inequality.

Overconsumption has negative impacts on individual consumers, society, and the environment, with direct individual effects being more frequently mentioned in studies. Overconsumption is a widely used term in various scientific fields, including medicine, nutrition, psychology, marketing, sociology, ecology, and economics, and is prominently discussed in numerous scientific publications (Håkansson, 2014). The majority of the research acknowledged the effects of overconsumption, some even going into great detail about them. Table 4 displays the many types of inductively formed categories. The majority of the research lists many effects that fall into various categories. As a result, Table 4 lists the quantity of research discussing every consequence. This mode of representation was selected because it provides a more comprehensive understanding of the effects, leaving out effects that are frequently cited but not as prominent. Overconsumption is primarily defined as harming the individual consumer on a physical and psychological level.

Sustainable Consumption

Unsustainable consumption or environmentally unfriendly consumption conduct entrusts the need for change towards sustainable consumption (Sharma & Rani 2014). Sustainability has been described in many different ways and there is still no unified definition for sustainability (Nicol, 2017). The most widely signified definition of the concept states that the fundamental concern of sustainability lies in meeting the needs of the present without compromising the capability of future generations to meet their needs (Carvalho et al., 2015). Due to the growing emphasis on sustainable development, which requires the participation of both corporate organizations and members of the public, sustainability has emerged as one of the most significant features of the modern business world (Gibson, et al., 2011). According to the Brundtland Report (1987), sustainability is the protection and development of the resources that are currently available for use by future generations. The three fundamental pillars of sustainability are social,

environmental, and economic. These three pillars are also regarded as planet, profit, and people respectively. Although it is one of the most crucial components of sustainable development, environmental sustainability is not the same as sustainability. Yet, sustainability is really about preserving the long-term well-being of corporate organizations' employees through the use of limitless and frightening resources (Brundtland Report, 1987). According to Ekins and Zenghelis (2021) the environmental part of the triple bottom line idea is associated with the mitigation of environmental degradation and the eradication of air, noise, and water pollution. The studies of sustainable consumption conduct within the different communities and countries have shown a diversified set of results (Radzir et al., 2015) There are about two dozen definitions for sustainable consumption within the literature (Bernini, 1998) by the late nineteenth century. As we, consumers demand for many products steered with the aspects of materialism, the businesses will supply what we demand. Thus, consumers must be mindful in demanding products which will make the reduction of overconsumption, environmental harm and pollution possible by changing the mindless consumption practices by practicing mindful consumption.

In terms of the existing gap between consumer attitudes towards green consumption and their actual behavior, which is essential for understanding sustainable consumption practices, it is evident that, the green gap phenomenon, which refers to the discrepancy between consumers' environmental concerns and their actual actions, has been extensively studied in the field of sustainable consumption, despite the lack of literature on this topic (ElHaffar, Durif & Dubé, 2020). Green consumption research has grown significantly, attracting academic and professional attention. Groening et al. (2018) summarized all proposed theories concerning green consumers, classifying them into six categories: Values and Knowledge, Beliefs, Attitude, Intentions, Motivations, and Social Confirmation.

Consumer Activists

As consumption has arrived to recreate a progressively dominant role in contemporary society, consumer movements have arisen to challenge and transform features of it by propagating ideologies of consumption that radicalize mainstream views (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). The Consumer Activists function with the prime goal of changing the principles, practices, and policies of organizations, businesses, industries, and governments. The movement's activists publicly portray their goal, themselves, and their adversary (Melucci, 1989).

Social movements have only commenced to obtain systematic attention within sociology in the past 25 years. Social scientists have gradually enthused away from considering social movements as threatening or irrational actions by extremists to seeing them as the normal and rational political challenges of aggrieved groups (Buechler, 2000). One important characteristic of social movements is that they function outside of the institutional arena. Social movements normally trust social movement organizations (SMOs) to affect governments because of the absence of formal political representation. However, many contemporary social movements, such as the civil rights and women's movements, have a significant number of activists who have gained political positions (Santoro & McGuire 1997). Accordingly, Sri Lankan Consumer Activists show the same universal Characteristics similarly with the international Consumer Activists Movements. Therefore, it is evident that literature also discusses the role of consumer activism and grassroots movements in raising awareness about overconsumption and advocating for sustainable practices. Activists and NGOs often campaign for responsible consumption and corporate accountability.

Methodology

The philosophical assumptions driving the study come from the interpretive research paradigm which implies a subjective epistemology which means both the researcher and respondents co-create the knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and an ontological belief that highlights reality is socially constructed. Under the interpretivism paradigm the researcher will inductively produce a theory or pattern from the data collected (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the present study is an exploratory study with the application of the inductive approach. This research is qualitative in nature with the focus of exploring the ways in which Universal love and spirituality are reflected in the consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists, in a contrived setting.

Primary sampling techniques available for the researcher are probability and non-probability sampling. Bryman and Bell, (2011) provide numerous types of non-probability sampling techniques such as convenience, snowball, and quota sampling. The current study employs the snowball sampling technique. This research adopted the snowballing sampling technique, which involves choosing several 'information-rich' respondents (Patton, 2002). In line with this approach, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with consumer activists in Sri Lanka under individual units of

analysis. The first six respondents were solicited through the researcher's personal network. It was relevant because the researcher herself had engaged in several social activities and the respondents were personally known by the researcher. 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. Appendix 1 shows the diversity of the respondents who took part in the current study, the researcher incorporated respondents with different demographic characteristics such as gender, age, religion, level of education, and the social activist programs conducted by them.

The study used thematic analysis, using interview transcripts. The six-step data analysis method is adopted, which includes familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The data is transcribed in the original languages used during the interviews, and the Sinhala transcripts are translated into English by the researcher under supervision. Thematic analysis is a valuable method for gathering insights and building relationships. The researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading transcripts multiple times. Initial codes were generated, forming a list of 60 related to the research question. These codes were recorded manually for easy reference and revision. Subcodes were created for easier understanding. After sorting, the search for themes began. The data was collected by the researcher herself.

Findings and discussion

Perception of Overconsumption

This section aims to answer the first research question: "How do Sri Lankan Consumer Activists perceive Overconsumption?" Many insightful descriptions were presented by the participants during the data collection that would enable the understanding of how they perceive Overconsumption. In order to understand the relationship between Materialism driven Over consumption and Climate Change and many other Environmental Problems, the starting point was to analyze the respondents' own understanding and interpretation of the concept of Overconsumption. According to the interpretations made by the Consumer Activists it appears that all of them were well aware of the concept and its hardships who also claimed that Overconsumption is a waste of everything that happens everywhere along with the various means and the root causes of Overconsumption backed by their experiences in life with the engagement of various consumer movements.

Overconsumption as a Waste

Participants claimed that Overconsumption is a waste of all products and resources which is highly unacceptable and unhealthy for the next generations. When asked about how they perceive overconsumption, Respondent 12 (a 24-year-old male) who is an undergraduate of a local university in Sri Lanka replied,

"It's a waste and I think it is not a healthy way of living. I think it's not a good thing. When we over consume, our future generations will end up with no resources for their consumption so we should stop it."

The respondent regrets the fact that with our overconsumption the future generations will happen to face problems in the future unveiling the awareness of the negative effects of consumption on the entire world along with its adverse impact on the health of a human. As per literature, "Consumption at a rate that leads to bad future outcomes, such as excess weight, is considered overconsumption," according to Jain (2012), who defines overconsumption as consumption that is detrimental to an individual's physical health.

Respondent 8 (a 22-year-old male), who was also an undergraduate of a local university in Sri Lanka also agreed with respondent 12,

"It's a waste and a set of things go unused. I think people over consume because they don't tend to see the value of what we have received."

The respondent expounds that overconsumption is due to the lack of mindfulness of the humans.

Respondent 19 (a 25-year-old female), a graduate who is currently researching on spirituality replied,

“I believe that overconsumption is when I use even one unit of anything more than what I really need. Now there are some people who want to hear the tap open while brushing teeth, I believe that is overconsumption.”

She explains that overconsumption is the use of one extra unit of anything than what one really needs. Further emphasizing its unaffordability and unacceptance as explained by Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas (2011) she expressed the negative impacts that might result due to the unsustainable act of mankind. The literature also highlights the significant environmental consequences of overconsumption, including greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, water pollution, and waste generation. Overconsumption is considered a major driver of climate change and ecological disruption. Respondent 25(a 29-year-old female) who is a Buddhist and a founder of a social group also highlighted,

“People consume everything excessively than they really need and it’s a total waste. People nowadays waste food a lot. I have seen some people; they won’t even tend to feed animals or birds with that overly cooked food. Our people are blind with useless pride but if we all live in harmony and interact with others with unity that won’t happen. I think we have to change their attitudes and promote spiritual development among them to avoid all these negative problems for a betterment of our future generations.”

She confirms that consumption nowadays is unsustainable as Holt (2012) argued. The respondent highlights that one must be aware of his or her consumption since it has an impact on both the present and the future caring for the future generations.

Participants perceive Overconsumption as a Waste of Products and Resources. Overconsumption and the need for growing material wealth are treated as unsuitable and as sources of environmental changes along with unhappiness by the respondents in general.

Overconsumption is Everywhere

Another definition was given by the respondents where they see Overconsumption as it is everywhere. Accordingly, Respondent 17 (a 22-year-old female), who is an undergraduate of a local university in Sri Lanka pointed,

“I see that it’s kind of everywhere. Even at a supermarket these days I see people are given many shopping bags. Some people don’t consider it but take them all home and some others say No to them. See now even Lord Buddha has explained the middle way of moderation and life will become simpler and easier if we consume only what we really need.”

The excessive consumption of goods such as polythene is seen everywhere as per the respondents. Also, the neglect of environmental problems and the neglect of individual and societal wellbeing is highlighted by the respondents emphasizing on how they will affect the climate balance of the world. Further it is shown by the respondents that despite following one’s religious teachings individuals today engage in mindless consumption practices whereas a few deliberately avoid such consumption. Consumer activists recognize that overconsumption leads to excessive resource extraction, energy consumption, and waste generation. They also have an understanding that this unsustainable use of resources contributes to environmental degradation, climate change, habitat destruction, and biodiversity loss.

Respondent 19, who is also a journalist with the interest of youth empowerment further explained,

“It happens everywhere, not only with economic products. Because when we hear of overconsumption, we think of the use of economic goods, but it happens with everything, everywhere. It happens even with our water consumption.”

Respondents see different means of overconsumption with respect to economic goods as well as to the limited resources gifted to us by nature.

Respondent 16(a 22-year-old female), who is an undergraduate of a local university in Sri Lanka further explained,

“Overconsumption is witnessed in all ways, even in Love, Family, Bondages simply everything is given a materialistic value. People are more into social trends than ever before, and they consume more only by thinking of themselves. I personally do not appreciate that way of living.”

Further respondents revealed how humans have become more materialistic than ever before and thereby they see no value to human bonds anymore. She explains how individuals today have become self-centered which is the reason for abridged bonds among humans that cause overconsumption eventually.

Respondent 15(a 30-year-old male), who is lecturer of Geography pointed out,

“It comes with the social pattern. Humans by nature they do not consume more than their needs. It happens with the societal patterns around people. Now if we take a person living in an urban area, he or she consumes relative to the other or maybe because the other consumes something. The same thing happens in rural areas, but we don’t see it. Because those people from villages have limited wealth and they overly consume within their limits. They follow the same trends slowly. So, it is everywhere, and I think it is happening unconsciously.”

The above respondents’ explanation further proves that the consumer activists see Overconsumption everywhere which occurs as a result of following social patterns. Moreover, as per literature, "Consumption of goods that are detrimental to personal and societal well-being, as some level of consumption is necessary to maintain life in modern societies" (Albinsson & Perera, 2012) is a more general class of repercussions that could affect both individuals and society as a whole.

Respondent 24(a 28-year-old female), who is currently engaging in research in the field of spirituality and management answered,

“I think when we hear the word overconsumption, we tend to think of massive types of things, but I think it starts with tiny things that we don’t mind, so I think overconsumption is everywhere. It is like this: we don't care much if we simply throw away plastic or polythene packages.”

Consumer activists seem to be concerned about the vast amounts of waste generated by overconsumption, including plastic pollution, e-waste, and discarded products. They advocate for reducing waste, promoting recycling, and adopting circular economy practices.

In sum, participants perceive Overconsumption as an occurrence evident everywhere with respect to everything in life. In accordance with their thoughts, it is evident that they have consciousness towards sustainable consumption practices to augment the environmental, social and economic aspects of quality of life which they are also trying to instill in their followers’ minds. Overall, consumer activists of Sri Lanka hold a negative perception of overconsumption. They view overconsumption as a significant and concerning issue with far-reaching consequences for the environment, society, and individual well-being. Their perception of overconsumption is shaped by various factors, including environmental awareness, social justice concerns, and a desire for a more sustainable and equitable world.

Means of Overconsumption

Within the responses made by the respondents they managed to explain several different means through which they witness overconsumption. Participants claimed that some Sri Lankan consumers engage in Overconsumption whereas some consumers face Underconsumption. Which are treated as Unsustainable consumption practices.

Accordingly, Respondent 1(a 39-year-old male), an army soldier who is amputated stated,

“People celebrate their birthdays smashing the whole cake on others' faces just for fun and on the other hand I have seen people, many kids who have not even tasted such a cake. Sometimes those people haven't even heard of a birthday. So, I think that the ones who have something they do have but the ones who have nothing have nothing.”

Respondent 11(a 54-year-old female), a mother of a 28-year-old daughter described,

“I personally don’t waste. I would reduce my consumption and will give it to the ones in need. There are people that I know who spend on food unlimitedly, who organize parties and won’t even eat a bit and who

throw away everything, but they won't even share the surplus with the ones in need. They waste things abnormally, but they never give."

Underconsumption is a problem for many segments of Sri Lanka due to the poverty levels of consumers. On the other hand, when people come out of poverty gradually higher consumption levels result in. Thus, it is advised to promote awareness of better mindful consumption practices among such segments in the market. As per the above respondent some consumers tend not to share the surplus with the needy segment of society signifying the self-centeredness of such consumers driven by the pride and prejudices, they hold for themselves.

Respondent 15, who is also an innovator and the head of his social group which consist of engineers, architectures, doctors and other professionals emphasized,

"We go to a five-star restaurant, and we keep a bit of our food and from our drinks to show our manners, yet it is also a waste of food that some others could just eat."

It can also be contended that many of the unsustainable and wasteful behaviors in which consumers engage are a result of manners of good behavior that have been taught to us by the society we live in.

Respondent 18(a 28-year-old male), a graduate of a private university in Sri Lanka brought up,

"At the end of parties unconsumed meat is thrown away in kilos uselessly and to fulfill that demand the natural supply of animals is insufficient so that they grow animals artificially which is a major threat to the whole world."

The respondent above recognized how the waste of meat will create adverse effects on nature through supporting more GreenHouse Gas emissions and how the artificial growing of animals damages the entire ecosystem.

As per respondent 19, who as a social activist has struggled for many problems that village farmers face replied,

"I see the need of an opened tap to brush teeth, using the fan in rainy days, engaging in fancy actions at bath, using deodorants and Applying nail polish and several other courts are means of overconsumption."

Means of Over Consumption as per the Consumer Activists is another important finding because these consumer activists engage a lot with different consumers at different segments of the society whether they be educated or not whether they be high-end consumers or not. Thus, it is vital to understand the means of overconsumption backed by the social experiences they have received over time to help businesses and other policy makers to implement better solutions to eliminate such means of overconsumption.

Roots of Overconsumption

Within their prolonged answers for the first question that they were given, almost all the respondents provided the perceived reasons for Overconsumption in their own point of view. The significant reason highlighted by the Consumer Activists was "Materialism."

Respondent 17, whose dream is to build an elder's home which will be funded by her own business one day replied,

"People are more materialized than ever before now. We try to show off everything we do; social media is a good example with the posting of photos of everything we do. I have seen some families where the mother has her own car, the father has his own vehicle, and the children have their own. Which I believe is not necessary. People think that they must collect as many as physical products and items in order to become successful in life. They don't see a life beyond that. People overconsume because they have become more materialistic. They believe that owning a lot of things is life."

Accordingly, Overconsumption is revealed in people's housing, home appliances, vehicles and other personal goods. The possession of durable goods reflects the level of consumer spending. Also, this excessive possession of goods seems to result due to materialism. In accordance with Zinkhan (1994) Overconsumption results in the personal

possession of greater amounts of material goods. Thus, it is evident that similar to the respondents of the present study, the researchers also often link overconsumption to prevailing consumer culture and materialistic values. Societal norms and advertising often promote the idea that happiness and success are tied to material possessions, leading to increased consumption. Respondents identified Marketing and Business' conducts as a root cause of Materialism that together create different social trends, social patterns, the need for wealth, dreams and expectations and the fulfillment of one's endless greed.

Respondent 19, who considered herself as a spiritual living being under the definition of loving all beings equally suggested,

“If a person is less attached to physical things and has not made their lives complicated, then that person will not engage in overconsumption. When we allow ourselves to be controlled by today's media, markets and advertising we become materialized. The market system today makes us purchase more. They teach us that our odor due to bacteria is smelly and to use a deodorant. Now that is not something that we had. They teach us that our nails must get painted with nail polish and then not just keep but to apply a topcoat to protect it. They give us many options now. And as humans we fall into their traps and consume more. Not only for products but there are so attached with knowledge.”

Drawing upon the concept of materialism it can be concluded that materialism tends to make individual consumers attached to certain products and perceive that the consumption of such products will make them happy. Materialism is argued as the belief where acquisition and possession of material objects are recognized as the ultimate source of happiness and life satisfaction (Richins & Dawson, 1992) which makes the individuals move away from mindfulness and then by sustainability.

Respondent 20(a 23-year-old male), an undergraduate of a local university in Sri Lanka emphasized,

“Businesses today decide how people should live, and they want us to consume their products and Marketing creates needs and influences us in order to sell the businesses products”?

For businesses and for marketing, the consumers' demand is an achievement. It always seems better for them when consumers tend to consume more. Since Overconsumption plays a major role in climate balance it is the responsibility of the businesses and the marketers to pay more attention on reducing such consumption practices of consumers. Furthermore, consumer activists hold corporations accountable for their role in perpetuating overconsumption. They advocate for greater transparency, responsible marketing practices, and corporate social responsibility to ensure that businesses consider their environmental and social impacts.

Respondent 2(a 27-year-old female), the founder of a social club functioned for two years said,

“People crave from one need to the other with the fulfilment of one after the other need.”

Respondent 2, who is an English teacher who teaches free of charge for many students further highlighted,

“Their needs are changing and also upscaling in nature.”

The changing wants are considered as a root cause of Over Consumption resulting from cravings and greed of consumers in the society.

Respondent 16, who plays two leading roles in two social clubs in Sri Lanka stated,

“We try to live luxury lives, with big houses and all but we do not see that a tree will die for the luxury furniture designs.”

One of the chief determinants of overconsumption provokes problems is mindlessness or the unconsciousness. Also, respondents recognize unconsciousness as a root cause for materialism driven overconsumption. As Black (2011) explained, mindfulness is an inherent quality of human consciousness and when people lack such consciousness it results in Overconsumption.

Most of the contemporary customers sleepwalk through a fog of impulses, habits, addictions, compulsions, and decision biases which were also recognized well by most of the respondents in the study. Learned habits along with the socialization process in general creates materialized humans according to some respondents. Many see Materialism as the basic nature of humankind which lays the foundation for the possessive nature of humans, self-centeredness and pride. From the analysis, it can be concluded that all the participants are fully aware of the concept, Overconsumption and its roots and Sustainable consumption was also a well embraced key concept among all the consumer activists representing a few academics, practitioners along with the many social activists.

Table 1 summarizes the key findings of the study.

Table 1: Summary of Key Findings

Perception of Overconsumption		Means of Overconsumption	Roots causes of Overconsumption
It's a Waste	It's Everywhere		
All the consumer Activists perceive Overconsumption as a waste of resources which is unsustainable, unaffordable and unacceptable.	The Consumer Activists see Overconsumption in Everything Everywhere. From the urban societies to the big cities, it happens everywhere consciously or unconsciously.	1) Celebrations of life. 2) Conspicuous consumption and Competitive consumption. 3) Fashion, Habits, Social patterns and Trends.	“Materialism” was recognized as the main root cause of overconsumption and they saw Marketing and business’ conducts, the modern market systems, Medias, unconsciousness and the socialization process making humans more materialistic than ever before.

Conclusion and Implications

Materialism driven overconsumption causes a number of environmental and societal issues. The current literature does not make it clear how consumer activists of Sri Lanka perceive Overconsumption, means and the roots of Overconsumption despite the fact that they employ various mindful consumption behaviors as a force for change in any community. Thus, the exact purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing literature gap, since there were limited studies that have accomplished this. Therefore, the proposed research question was to identify how consumer activists of Sri Lanka perceive Overconsumption, means and the roots of Overconsumption. It was found that the Consumer activists view overconsumption as a waste of resources, unsustainable, and unacceptable. It occurs in urban societies, through life celebrations, conspicuous consumption, and competition. Materialism is recognized as the root cause, influenced by marketing, business, media, and unconsciousness. Thus, this study contributes to both academia and practice as follows.

Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contributions of understanding how consumer activists perceive overconsumption can provide valuable insights into various aspects of consumer behavior, social movements, and environmental activism. Studying how consumer activists perceive overconsumption can contribute to social movement theory by shedding light on the motivations, mobilization strategies, and collective action of individuals advocating for sustainable consumption. It can help identify the factors that drive consumer activists to take action and understand how they organize and collaborate to effect change.

Exploring consumer activists' perceptions of overconsumption can enrich the understanding of consumer behavior and decision-making processes. By examining the factors that shape their attitudes and preferences towards sustainable consumption, researchers can identify key drivers for pro-environmental choices and how these motivations differ from conventional consumers. Thus, understanding how consumer activists perceive overconsumption can contribute to various theoretical frameworks, spanning from social movements and consumer behavior to sustainability, ethics, and social change. This knowledge can inform strategies for promoting sustainable consumption and environmental activism to address the pressing challenges of overconsumption.

Having reflected upon the occurrence of managing a qualitative questioning, the existing study adds to the qualitative research practice in some ways. First, it lights up the use of the snowball sampling technique. When adopting snowball sampling, as per Morehouse (2011) the potential respondents need to be identified through referrals from the respondents who have already taken part in the study. Accordingly, Respondent 5 introduced Respondents 9 and 22 where Respondent 2 introduced Respondents 3,6,11 and 18. Trustworthiness could be earned by the Researchers personal experiences and the network created with the considerable time spent with the chosen Respondents and by engaging in several social activities with them. The Respondents 5,8,12,16,17,20,21 and 23 were chosen for inquiry with the personal network of the researcher.

Practical implications

Policies surrounding the initiatives to mold the members of the society from their early stages must be effectively organized. Having explored how the Consumer Activists have evolved it is essential to reorganize the Educational System in Sri Lanka by teaching the children to love themselves, others around them and to nature. It is also necessary to educate the parents on their parenting skills in order to mold the children from their very early stages to the end.

Consumer activists who are aware of overconsumption and its negative impacts can have significant practical implications in promoting sustainable and responsible consumer behavior. Consumer activists can promote and support businesses that prioritize sustainability and ethical practices. They can raise awareness about eco-friendly and socially responsible brands, encouraging consumers to make conscious choices when purchasing products and services.

Limitations

Further the Sample size was 25. Since this a qualitative study the sample size is relatively smaller but if the researcher was able to gather data from a greater number of participants it may gain more information about their reflection of Universal Love and Spirituality. Moreover, since this is qualitative research, it needs more time. Research allowed only to do up to this extent if no researcher would have been able to go beyond and search for more information through a much larger and a diversified sample. In terms of limitations of using snowball sampling and personal network for initial respondents in particular could have missed the opportunity to reach individuals who are not part of the researcher's social network, leading to sampling errors and potential gaps in understanding the broader population. Moreover, another limitation of the study stems from its qualitative approach, particularly its exploration of universal love and spirituality in consumption practices. This emphasis on subjective concepts may introduce a risk of bias, as interpretations could be influenced by the researcher's personal beliefs or preconceptions, potentially compromising the objectivity of the findings.

Future research

Having identified how the Consumer Activists in Sri Lanka perceive Overconsumption, future studies could explore how the Non-Social Activists or the members who follow the leading social activists perceive Overconsumption, means and the roots of Overconsumption. Since most of the Social Activists interviewed were the founders of such work and the current leading party of their work. Thus, a comparison could take place through future studies. Moreover, further research could swell the research horizons by introducing cross-cultural, worldwide, or demographical aspects into the research questions in order to understand how those different groups perceive Overconsumption, means and the roots of Overconsumption. The above issue was addressed to some extent by the researcher staying close with some respondents from the beginning of the study by volunteering with their social work and most of the other respondents were identified with the researcher's personal network and her engagement with various social work along with the respondents. Thus, it is recommended that longitudinal studies need to be adopted for future research if the researcher has no previous experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix 01: Participants' Profiles

<i>Pseudonyms</i>	<i>Age.</i>	<i>Gender.</i>	<i>Religion.</i>	<i>Educational Level.</i>	<i>Social activist programs and their role.</i>
Respondent 1	39	Male	Buddhist.	Primary.	Founder of a Foundation that has donated the highest number of wheelchairs to disabled.
Respondent 2	27	Female	Buddhist.	Secondary.	Founder and President, a social group.
Respondent 3	38	Male	Buddhist.	Secondary.	Founder of a social service foundation.
Respondent 4	25	Female	Christian	Graduate	Organizer of the religious forum.
Respondent 5	24	Female	Buddhist.	Undergraduate.	Co-Founder of Motivational session for students.
Respondent 6	22	Female	Buddhist.	Secondary.	Coordinator of a social club.
Respondent 7	23	Male	Buddhist.	Undergraduate.	Partner of a social business.
Respondent 8	22	Male	Buddhist.	Undergraduate.	Coordinator of a social club.
Respondent 9	34	Female	Christian.	Secondary.	Founder of a charitable movement.
Respondent10	23	Male	Buddhist.	Undergraduate.	Founder of a social business
Respondent11	54	Female	Buddhist.	Primary.	Coordinator of several humanistic clubs.
Respondent12	24	Male	Buddhist.	Undergraduate.	Coordinator of Motivational session for students.
Respondent13	29	Female	Buddhist.	Graduate	Practitioner of sustainable living.
Respondent14	48	Female	Buddhist.	Secondary.	In charge of the kids' section of a hospital for patients of Cancer.
Respondent15	30	Male	Buddhist.	Graduate	Innovator, Lecturer, Geographer and the founder of their social group.
Respondent16	22	Female	Buddhist.	Undergraduate.	Treasurer of a social club.
Respondent17	22	Female	Buddhist.	Undergraduate.	Founder and president of a social club.
Respondent18	28	Male	Buddhist.	Graduate	Founder of an animal movement.
Respondent19	25	Female	Christian	Graduate	Research Assistant on Spirituality and Management.
Respondent20	24	Male	Buddhist.	Undergraduate.	Former Vice President of a social entrepreneurship club.
Respondent21	26	Male	Buddhist	Undergraduate.	Founder of a social entrepreneurship club.
Respondent22	36	Female	Christian.	Secondary.	Founder of a charitable movement.
Respondent23	24	Male	Buddhist	Undergraduate.	Treasurer of a social entrepreneurship club.
Respondent24	28	Female	Christian.	Graduate	Research Assistant on Spirituality and Management.
Respondent25	29	Female	Buddhist	Secondary.	Founder of a social group.