



Mindful consumption: A research program

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MINDFUL CONSUMPTION: A RESEARCH PROGRAM. STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION – MINDFUL CONSUMPTION, AN ELUSIVE CONSTRUCT

Consumption, especially overconsumption, is one of the current severe concerns regarding sustainability issues and climate change. Although research on sustainable consumption and purchasing abound, its focus only refers to the environment, leaving aside other impacts on society and the consumers themselves. Within marketing research, in 2010, Seth et al. advanced and substantiated the construct of mindful consumption as a theoretical way to deal with the critical issue of sustainability. Fischer et al. (2017) reviewed 44 studies and identified that one-third are conceptual studies, whereas two-thirds are empirical (quantitative, mixed, and qualitative), signaling an evolving research stage on mindful consumption and mindful marketing. A literature review on mindful consumption traces 368 studies in the last 41 years (Garg et al., 2024) in bibliometric analysis. It identifies clusters related to responsible consumption, health, value consciousness, their antecedents, and the conceptualization of mindful consumption. In this last cluster, the conceptualization involves the roles of mindfulness as intentional awareness, which is an antecedent in switching consumption behaviors from indulgence and immediate pleasure towards temperance of consumption.

In the previous studies, the lack of a clear operationalization of the construct and a valid measurement scale has kept the research stream far from impactful. Recently, Seth and Gupta (2024) advanced and substantiated a composite construct of mindful consumption as a theoretical way to deal with the critical issue of sustainability in consumption. They also introduced and tested a measurement scale comprising the concepts of awareness and caring for the effects of consumption on the individual, the community, and the environment, as well as the dimension of temperance in consumption. This scale allows valid and reliable studies across categories and considers some antecedents and consequences. This opens the way to analyze mindful consumption for the first time systematically.

Hence, this abstract advances a research agenda to assess mindful consumption antecedents, interventions, and outcomes. Three main research proposals are advanced to understand mindful consumption better, regarding (1) assessing a number of antecedents influencing mindful consumption, such as routines, habits, and social influence, (2) assessing the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions that may ‘nudge’ consumers towards more mindful consumption behavior, and (3) as mindful consumption includes the consumer virtue of temperance, from an ethical standpoint we propose to assess consumer orientation towards utilitarianism vs virtue.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RPs ON ANTECEDENTS, INTERVENTIONS, ETHICAL CONSEQUENCES OF MINDFUL CONSUMPTION

1. Mindful consumption across categories – antecedents and consequences.

Mindful consumption can emerge across categories and industries in different degrees; sustainable consumer behaviors are influenced by several factors: social influence, habits and routines, self-identity, and other individual traits (White et al., 2019). A handful of studies relating MC with categories have been developed, mainly in food, apparel (Zahid et al., 2023), consumable electronics, and cosmetics (Seth and Gupta, 2024). Regarding food, MC appears to be linked to switching towards more healthy habits as measured by the calorie intake of consumers (Carrière et al., 2018). Regarding apparel, the consumption intention of second-hand clothing is positively social norms and mediated by ego involvement in the purchase process (Zahid et al., 2023). Additionally, broad cultural differences influence consumer attitudes and subsequent sustainable behaviors; mainly, the subjective norms related to pragmatism (vs. dogmatism) influence normative and sustainable behaviors and, to a lower degree, self-enhancing sustainable behaviors (Minto et al., 2018). Moreover, using secondary data, Felix et al. (2018) find that country-level indulgence moderates the relationship between religiousness and environmental concern. Notably, religious practice is associated with lower levels of unrestrained consumption, *i.e.*, compulsive and impulsive (Singh et al., 2021). Finally, the marketing mix has heterogeneous effects on purchase intentions, altering mindful consumption at varying degrees. Functional aspects of the marketing mix, such as advertising intensity, distribution coverage, and price tactics (Hanaysha et al., 2021; Munsch, 2021), may play moderating roles in the relationships from mindful consumption to purchase intention across categories. The previous findings help posit the following:

RPI: Internal and external variables related to the consumer are antecedents of mindful consumption, which subsequently influences purchase intention and purchase behaviors across categories -apparel, food, and consumable electronics. The marketing mix plays a moderating role in the relationship between the antecedents and mindful consumption.

2. Interventions to promote mindful consumption and related outcomes.

Amid the antecedent factors influencing mindful consumption are religiosity (Sandikci, 2021; Felix et al., 2021), responsibility and agency (Carrington et al., 2021; Parvatiyar and Seth, 2023), and non-materialistic lifestyles (Fischer, 2017). Mindfulness, as a correlate to mindful consumption, refers to a deliberate effort to increase the awareness of the present perceptual experience and the mental states and processes (Grossman, 2010). Mindfulness has gained prominence in business and management to enhance individual features, and from a marketing perspective, it has been linked to consumption behaviors (Fischer et al., 2017). Cultivating a mindfulness habit involves developing personal attitudes and intentions of kindness and generosity towards oneself and others (Grossman, 2015). Practicing mindfulness has been related to managing thoughts and emotions concerning external stimuli more than habitual, automatic responses (Chambers et al., 2009). Bahl et al. (2016) suggest that mindfulness can change consumption behaviors by enabling consumers to observe and

revert automatic behaviors, focusing attention on immediate experiences, and being aware of them can help them react less impulsively, thereby closing the gap between intention and behavior. Studies show that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can take different forms, such as Mindfulness-based stress reduction, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, and mindful self-compassion to change students enrolled in education for sustainable consumption courses (Stanszus et al., 2017). MBI studies within consumer behavior are scant, but those oriented to some categories show mixed results. For example, a meta-analysis found that MBIs are effective in modifying eating behaviors among people with overweight and obesity (Carrière et al., 2018), and smaller effect sizes are found for psychological outcomes such as depression and anxiety (Rogers et al., 2017). In contrast, Geiger et al. (2020) found that MBI has only a moderating role in the relationship between attitudes towards sustainable consumption and sustainable consumption behavior; the pre- and post-measurement of MBIs was found to be directly related only to consumer well-being but not to sustainable consumption behavior. Finally, Manchanda et al. (2023) found that mindfulness positively affects sustainability consciousness and is moderated by materialism. While signaling changes before and after interventions, the previous studies lack an explicit assessment of consumption context; hence, assessing switching behaviors can better capture the phenomena of stopping unhealthy eating habits while starting healthy eating habits. Finally, indulgence and materialism may play a role in influencing MBI outcomes (Heydari et al., 2021). The previous findings call for identifying suitable MBI that focuses on consumer awareness and caring for the impact of consumption. Mindfulness-Based Eudaimonic Enhancement Training (MEET) (Allen et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2023) can be posited as an appropriate intervention focusing on eudaimonia and related behaviors since MEET mindfulness promotes eudaimonia, which can be linked to the benefits of healthy habits. Hence, we propose that:

RP2: MEET as an MBI is suitable for positively influencing switching behaviors in the food category. The link between mindfulness and food purchase intention is moderated by materialism.

3. The ethics perspective: Between consumer virtue and utilitarian pragmatism

A notable component of the mindful consumption construct in Seth and Gupta (2024) is temperance. From an ethical standpoint, Bahl et al. (2016) argue that mindfulness changes consumption habits by reassessing personal values and switching from greed, “delusion, and aversion” (Grossman, 2015) to mental clarity that is related to a switch from materialism and hedonic values towards eudemonic well-being. Additionally, mindfulness has been suggested to be related to pro-social behaviors (Lim et al., 2015). Mindfulness can then be expected to project itself into a temperance consumption of products. Temperance can then be described as a virtue cultivated as a measure of restraint and continence in behaviors. The temperance dimension in the conceptualization by Seth and Gutpa (2024) refers to intrinsic rewards that can foster purchase intention and behavior in consumers who are aware and able to act according to their consumption's social and environmental impact. The consumer consumes mindfully because it is the right thing to do, within the personal freedom to act. This virtuousness dimension of mindful consumption may seem to contrast with the value-

based marketing perspective (Doyle, 2000; Picot-Coupey et al., 2021) that equates functional and symbolic attributes concerning perceived costs and benefits. The mindfulness consumption construct can then be decomposed to be further analyzed in relation to how consumers make purchase decisions. On one side, consumers may behave virtuously as driven by intrinsic rewards. For example, buying the right amount of organic food may be the right thing to do, whereas, on the other side, a consumer following a value-based perspective may consider the price of the organic food while simultaneously assessing the benefits of the exchange to themselves, the environment, and the society, thus, behaving in a utilitarian way and considering an extrinsic reward. Hence, we propose that:

RP3: The temperance component of mindful consumption is driven to a higher extent than awareness and care for the impact of consumption by intrinsic rewards, whereas the awareness and care for the impact of consumption are driven by extrinsic rewards associated with a value-based estimation of costs and benefits of the exchange.

DISCUSSION

The research propositions advanced in this abstract attempt to be comprehensive, including antecedents, interventions oriented to shift antecedents to mindful consumption, and consumption outcomes. Additionally, we consider the ethical view of the market exchange. The scope of this research agenda comprises only consumer exchanges of consumable products in the marketplace. In this line, firm exchanges and mindful marketing are excluded because the construct deserves a complete study that only addresses firm-side issues. Researchers can find these RPs as an effort to systematize the analysis of mindful consumption. RPs in this structured abstract can find ways to reshape the practice of marketing focused on solving actual consumer problems and developing mindful marketing strategies instead of engaging in overconsumption practices. This research program has some limitations. First, we assume homogeneous samples for the MC phenomena. However, observed and unobserved heterogeneity may emerge as clusters that must be controlled. For example, Milne et al. (2020) found consumer segments associated with MC associated with traits such as careful economic-based consumption, those who monitor the firms' activities, and those consumers informed about the impact of their consumption. Research needs to consider such differences across categories. Second, studies suggest a dual-attitude mechanism to explain inconsistent consumer behaviors as influenced by the same stimuli in the context of ethical consumption (Govind et al., 2017), leading to an attitude-behavior gap. A similar issue may emerge when analyzing mindful consumption. Mitigating this issue can be addressed by considering only behavioral outcomes instead of attitudinal ones. Third, while the classical view of the consumer refers to the concept of a utility-maximizing agent in ethical consumption (Hiller and Woodall, 2018), a moral-based problematization of mindful consumption is left out of our research program. More research is needed to understand the utilitarian vs the moral approaches to consumption. We hope to contribute to reshaping the role of marketing by conducting studies to test the RPs advanced.

References Available Upon Request