

Mindful Consumption and Universal Love: A Case Study of Sri Lankan Consumer Activists



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1 Learning Objectives

- (1) To comprehend the meaning and importance of the notions of mindful consumption, spirituality, and universal love toward Socially Responsible Consumption
- (2) To identify how consumer activists practice socially responsible consumption how the concepts discussed above drive their consumption
- (3) To reflect and identify how the above concepts are driving the routine consumption practices of students' routine consumption practice
- (4) To identify possible ways of changing students' consumption practices toward achieving sustainability.

2 Introduction

Overconsumption driven by materialistic mindsets seems to result in many environmental and social problems that would impact the long-term wellbeing of all living beings. Unsustainable consumption (or environmentally unfriendly consumption) emphasizes the need for change toward the well-being of future generations (Sharma & Rani, 2014) so that sustainability agenda can be effectively pursued with sustainable consumption practices among consumers at the individual level. To meet the challenge of overconsumption at the individual level, both behavior and mindset of individuals need to change, which can be achieved by instilling 'mindful consumption' (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011).

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Mindful consumption has a dominant influence on climate balance and the preservation of natural ecosystems yet investigations on mindful consumption of consumer activists are still in their infancy. The current study will elaborate on mindful consumption practices adopted by them.

Although many types of research have been conducted on sustainability and mindful consumption there are few discussions made on exploring the ways Universal love and spirituality are reflected in the consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists.

In sum, the discussions with the respondents helped build an understanding of the roots of mindful consumption practices of the consumer activists with the reflection of universal love and spirituality. With the analysis of the 25 respondents, the findings confirmed that Spirituality and Universal love leads to Mindful consumption to overcome the challenge, Overconsumption through their activists' programs and practices. Overconsumption and the need for growing material wealth were treated unsuitable and as sources of environmental changes along with unhappiness by the respondents in general where some respondents remarked their mechanisms toward eliminating the environmental degradation through overconsumption with the application of technical solutions and by leading their followers. Respondents marked the significance of mindful consumption while highlighting their practices such as Reusing, Reducing, Rejecting, Recycling, and Redefining which were found common among all toward sustainability.

Study motivates readers to care and take responsibility for their personal and organizational impacts on the environment by altering their consumption patterns. Our study unearthed the ways through which spirituality and universal love were reflected in the consumption practices of consumer activists in Sri Lanka. It appeared that consumer activists' consumption practices were driven by an inner change that was inspired by love and spirituality through respect, compassion, responsibility, religious bonds, bonds with nature, and happiness.

Up 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 major 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 social activists who live in other cities.

Also, future research must go for 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 consist of the respondents who play the lead roles in their movements.

3 Key Lessons Learned and Implications

It was understood that for a society to change the change agents of the society must change. As consumers activists when they change the society changes. A major finding of the study is the reflection of mindful consumption, spirituality, and universal love-driven social and environmentally friendly orientations of the Sri Lankan consumer activists. The second learning is that by educating them about their impact they can inspire change in society. Society's consumption behaviors change with awareness. With the introduction of new sustainable consumption practices through consumer activists, the corporate sector and the policymakers were also directed with implications.

The insights of this study recommend organizations to change their way of thinking, most of their unsustainable business practice and the business goals needs actions that generate a positive influence environmentally, socially, and economically because most people follow these consumer activists' today toward a better sustainable world. Contributions from the corporate sector are also necessary for the members of 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 their 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 a 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 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.

Despite consumer activists, as a changing force in any society, adopt different mindful consumption practices. The alterations which make their relationships with other human beings and with nature less self-centred and more loving are with the reflection of Universal Love and Spirituality. As it was not clear in the current literature how universal love and spirituality were reflected in their practices. Findings show that Universal Love and Spirituality are reflected through respect, compassion, responsibility, religion, bond with nature, and happiness. Thus, these ways can be treated as the core values of a society to improve sustainability initiatives in the society because the absence of such values is the root cause of the unsustainability and unhappiness that all societies suffer with.

Spirituality and Sustainability are connected than they seem, and they both provoke success at individual as well as in the organizational levels (Beehner, 2019).

The notion of spirituality has been theorized in relation to religions, it is independently conceptualized from religious affiliations (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017). Religion is referred to as an organized belief system (GÖÇER & ÖZĞAN, 2018), and religion is a way through spirituality is practiced (Guillory, 2000).

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 obtaining systematic attention within sociology in the past 25 years. Accordingly, Sri Lankan Consumer Activists show the same universal Characteristics similarly with the international Consumer Activists Movements. Policies surrounding the initiatives to mould 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 nature. It is also necessary to educate the parents on their parenting skills to mould the children from their very early stages to the end. The findings of the present study could enlighten policymakers on some valuable aspects of individuals since the findings show that the Consumer Activists have become who they are with the light of their religious beliefs. We are endowed with the ability to downgrade our self-centeredness. All great religions can be considered as different pathways to realizing this purpose. The study highlights the importance of making the consumer activists aware of their impact toward further improved activism with the incorporation of meaning in Sri Lanka. It also indicated that not only do the consumer activists inspire society, but they get inspired by society and have changed their behaviors mindfully.

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 as per Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas, (2011), the caring for nature, personal and community wellbeing were brought up and were confronted by the respondents through means of Respect to others and as a Responsibility toward others and to the community at large. They see soft-wired kindness and universal love as a responsibility. All most all the respondents saw the connection between materialism-driven overconsumption causing countless environmental problems along with the climate changes that create a long-term impact on individuals and the society at large. Accordingly, most saw that protecting the environment and trying to enhance and promote the current ecosystems as their duty. The respect held by respondents leads them toward certain mindful consumption practices and to all the social activists' programs they engage in. The respect comes from caring for their loved ones for the encouragement, love, protection, and mutual understanding provided to them and the caring for all beings around them whether at work or family. The inner respect expressed is backed by compassion in many ways as well.

It was found that mindful consumption broadens its horizons to many fields such as consumption, food preparation, social activities, and more. Table 1 below summarizes

Table 1 Mindful Consumption Practices adopted by the Sri Lankan consumer activists

Mindful consumption practices	Examples of consumption practices
1. Reducing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced or No use of Plastics and Polythene • Better waste management • The effort to reduce their waste to nature • The practice of not being wasteful • Reduced spending on wants
2. Reusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuse of Plastics and Polythene • Use of reusable items • Buying 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 • The practice of Loving and Kindness

Source Author Developed

the Mindful Consumption Practices adopted by the Sri Lankan consumer activists.

Most participants expressed their inner respect as a major reason for what they do. The key finding shows that consumer activists reflect universal love and spirituality through respecting their loved ones by being grateful for what they have done for them in return by extend their love and care to them.

The respondents also confirmed the findings of Ulluwishewa (2016), under the theme of Compassion, where he explains that the soft-wired brain has been programmed by our wrong perceptions to see ourselves, not as integral parts of the whole, but as individuals separated from others and the environment, and to perceive our fellow human beings as “others”, “competitors” and “enemies” (Uluwishewa, 2016). Compassion was shared because of their social experiences by walking in the same paths in life before evolving as consumer activists. Also, the practice of compassion and kindness was backed by their parents, family, and the religious beliefs deeply held from childhood. The random acts of kindness were proven through their stories and their planned acts of kindness for the future were revealed filled with a gentle self-satisfaction toward happiness that lasts according to them. The respondent’s beliefs shaped by their Religions was also found a major drive of mindful consumption and a reflection of universal love where sentience, kindness, and love to all beings was given as teaching of Religion that leads to the attainment of spirituality under religious grounds.

Most respondents saw being harmless to any being as their responsibility. The reason for going vegetarian for them was mainly due to unwillingness to see another being get killed just to fulfill their hunger which reflects universal love. Respondents confirmed the intrinsic, instrumental, and aesthetic values they held for nature under the theme of the Bond with nature. Where respondents expressed that we are a part of nature not apart from nature which is also backed by compassion in some ways.

Happiness, from the spiritual perspective, is not a worldly feeling we feel through our senses, brain, and the nervous system, but a property of the universal consciousness, or the energy-self (Uluwishewa, 2016; Ludwigs, Henning, & Arends, 2019) which was received as a response from all most all the respondents explained under the theme “Happiness”.

Appendix 1 shows the diversity of the respondents, the researcher incorporated respondents with different demographic characteristics such as gender, age, religion, level of education, and the social activist programs conducted by them. It also summarizes the Profile of the Respondents, and it supports the argument that universal love and spirituality are reflected within their activism. Accordingly, we assure that universal love and mindfulness practices were as much more closely associated with their main area of activism. It was also clear that they were different from other ordinary consumers. They live their own social life, but they have dedicated themselves comparatively more toward a worthy cause. Table 2 summarizes the reflection of the notions in their practices.

The study was conducted among many respondents who played leadership roles in their movements who followed their dreams to make a change for a better world. According to Maslow (1970), they are ‘self-actualizers’. He believed that a society with eight percent of self-actualizing people would soon be a self-actualizing society. Because self-actualizers act as agents of change and their behavior and the activities, they initiate inspire and encourage others around them, which indicates changes in the conduct of all individuals, institutions, and the community at large.

Mindfulness as a state or trait can be cultivated through the practice of mindfulness meditation; thus, policymakers must spare their attention to such efforts with all religious leaders in Sri Lanka because one can achieve spirituality through both religious and non-religious ways. Also, public policymakers and government could initiate public awareness programs to encourage more religious and non-religious spiritual practices to mould the members of the society to overcome the challenges of Overconsumption. Such awareness campaigns would help the society to identify their state of wellbeing and of those around them which may encourage them to be mindful in their Consumption Practices.

4 Lesson Learned

Findings the various mindful consumption practices adopted by them and reveal that universal love and spirituality are reflected through respect, compassion, responsibility, religion, bond with the nature, and through happiness. Given the case study

Table 2 Ways of the reflection of universal love and spirituality

Ways of the reflection of universal love and spirituality	The practices toward a worthy cause
1. Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respecting their loved ones and animals as to pay their gratitude in return • Respecting the team members and followers • Respecting other human beings and life in general
2. Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassion to their loved ones • Compassion to the needy segments of the society • Compassion to other humans in general
3. Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking responsible to add value to the society they live in with the different roles they play in the society • Thinking responsible to live a harmless life to all beings • Perceiving Social Work as Social Responsibility
4. Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration as religious humans • Following their holy teacher Lord Buddha • Belief in “Karma” • Belief in Jesus and his teachings
5. Bond with the Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceiving the human body and the planet as the only homes • Perceiving all beings as a part of nature (instrumental values for the nature) • Touched by the natures’ aesthetic values • Bonds with animals • Being empathetic about animal lives
6. Happiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling the beauty of happiness by supporting another being • Overwhelmed with the self-satisfaction they receive • Enjoying a happiness that last forever • Not seeking to satisfy the pleasure centers

Source Author Developed

presented experiences of a unique consumer group in the society, application of their experiences to mundane consumption in the lay society would be challenging. However, discussion and sharing experiences of this nature could be a starting point for lay-consumers also to be stimulated and initiate their behavior changes too.

5 Declaration of Conflicting Interests

As per the authors' knowledge there is no conflicting interest with regard to the current case study, authorship, and publication of this case study.

Credit author statement

E.S. Wickramasekara participated in reading the relevant literature, data collection, and drafting the manuscript toward developing the final case study. WDC Jayawickrama participated in supervising the conduct of the study from the beginning, by providing necessary literature, finding suitable respondents, and supporting the data analysis.

Discussion questions

- (1) Critically evaluate the importance of Consumer Activists to business organizations, government, society, parents, and religious leaders in this modern. Preferable to discuss how the Consumer Activists influence the PESTEL factors.
- (2) Discuss the concepts of mindful consumption, spirituality, and universal love by providing real life examples.

Project/activity-based assignment/ exercise

- (1) Critically evaluate the importance of Consumer Activists to a business organization in this modern business world with reference to their Marketing in Practices.
- (2) Assess the contribution of the notions of mindful consumption, spirituality, and universal love toward Socially Responsible Consumption and Marketing in Practice.

Group Work

- (1) Ask the students to list down their mindful consumption practices and the attitudes along with values that influenced such choices and thereby make a comparison with the mindful practices used by the consumer activists of the case study.
- (2) Ask the students to find two or three consumer activists and to discuss about the mindful practices used by them in order to understand if there's a difference.

Additional Content

Did you know that Mindfulness is a 2500-year-old concept that originated from ancient eastern and Buddhist philosophy and that Jon Kabat-Zinn was the first to introduce the notion of mindfulness to the Western world?

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Appendix

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Religion	Educational level	Consumer activist programs and their role
Respondent 1	39	Male	Buddhist	Primary	Founder of a Foundation that has donated the highest number of wheelchairs to disabled Donations for the neediest segments of the society
Respondent 2	27	Female	Buddhist	Secondary	Founder and President a social group
Respondent 3	38	Male	Buddhist	Secondary	Founder of a social service foundation Donations for the neediest segments of the society
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 Initiates social and community development programs and encourage young social entrepreneurs
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

(continued)

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Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Religion	Educational level	Consumer activist programs and their role
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

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