



Modern Consumerist Culture, Its Drawbacks and Benefits

H.S.C. Perera^a and T.S.L.W. Gunawardana^b

^aFaculty of Management and Finance, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka. sunethrap@badm.ruh.ac.lk

^bFaculty of Management and Finance, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka. gunawardana@badm.ruh.ac.lk

Abstract

Consumerism is a concept that is shaped by social and economic conditions. Consumers in different social classes employ different discourse on consumption, one that is shaped through the operationalization of historically rooted ideals of community, family solidarity and asceticism. Consumerism as a phenomenon describes consumer culture as debased materialism, while at the same time presenting it as core for social life. This article explores the impact of pessimistic and optimistic effect of modern consumerist culture, and its drawbacks and benefits. Consumerism by itself is a part of the general process of social control and cultural hegemony in modern society. Opponents in modern consumerist culture eroding the human's spiritual connection with nature, while Proponents preserving it. Modern consumption is needed to minimize the drawbacks while increasing the benefits using education as a strategic tool.

Keywords: *modern consumerist, drawbacks, benefits, pessimistic effects and optimistic effects*

1. Introduction

Consumerism is the policy, program of protection or promotion of the interest of consumers (Oxford Dictionary, 2002). Miller (2006) defines consumerism as "The theory that a progressively greater consumption of goods is economically beneficial; Attachment to materialistic values or possessions" (p. 248). The concept of consumerism started after the Second World War and developed with industrial revolution by describing the effects of equating personal happiness with purchasing material possessions and consumption. Researchers describe, psychological and spiritual effects of consumerism may be important to reverse the current world trend of harsh, destructive and unsustainable consumption. But at the mean time some researchers argue that, consumerism is ecologically unsustainable and threatens to destroy the beneficial connection between nature and human spirit (Berry, 1995; Suzuki, 1997; McDaniel, 2000; Emerald, 2004). With this ground, this study argues the concept of consumerism and its major drawbacks compare to the benefits of modern consumerist culture.

2. Modern Consumerist culture and pessimistic effects: Opponents

With the industrial revolution the society moved from religious based culture to a scientific based culture, and at the same time it transformed the agriculture based economy to an industrial based economy, rural settings to an urban settings, and community values to individual values (Emerald, 2004). This economic and cultural change causes people to move to urban areas. This has led the society to be more detached from the nature, and to be developed with lack of ecological awareness and psychological wellbeing. With this trend towards migration to cities, people began to lose contact with their cultural roots: ethnic tradition, family ties, and spiritual foundations, as they adapted to the urban environment. This loss of cultural background could lead to an emptiness in one's self (Cushman, 1990). These economic, industrial, marketing and advertising developments, combined with number of changes in the society, set the stage for the explosion of consumerism.

Further, the rise of consumerism increased the focused on the level of consumption of goods and services of all the population in the world. Today, the North American economy, reached the point where its technology was capable of satisfying basic material needs. They now rely on the creation of new consumer demands by convincing people to buy goods, for which they are unaware of any need until, the need is forcibly brought to their attention by the media (Lasch, 1979). In the present society, advertising and marketing have shaped consumers behaviour and their psychological profiles. Also, current consumer culture always tends to people, to identify products or services that they consume; especially, those with commercial brand names and obvious status enhancing appeal. This consumerism culture impulses buyers who cannot resist, but spend money, creating shopaholics who demands more non-essential products like high fashions and unnecessary junk foods. Even though the demand for these products increased, for the most part, it was still wealthier class of individuals that could afford these products (Stearns, 2001). Always, the concept of consumerism protects such consumption culture. Hence, today, the people are not caring about the ecological impacts on the process of manufacturing and consuming goods and services. In addition, at the process of manufacturing they utilized more rational equipment than needed. Consequently, at the level of production and consumption, people are not worried about the future generations and their sustainability. Opponents of consumerism argue that, the consumerism affects the individual in a number of ways. It affects the psychological health of the individual through erosion of the true self and replacing it with a false self, and the spiritual health of the individual by eroding human's spiritual connections with nature and replacing it with consumption of goods and services (Emerald, 2004). Further, many luxuries and unnecessary consumer goods and services are signals that allow people to identify like-minded individuals through consumption. Some researchers pointed out that products or brand names are substitutes for a healthy human relationship. Consumerism by itself is a part of the general process of social control and cultural hegemony in modern society.

The North American way of life is one which they consume far more natural resources per capita than any other nation in the world (Gardner, Assadourian, & Sarin 2004). On the other hand the world's current consumer habits cause serious environmental issues and the population growth rivals consumption as a cause of ecological decline. Also, it is well documented that the depletion of resources and environmental degradation is directly related to the consumption of goods and services (Brown2001, Brower & Leon 1999, Gardner & Stern 2002). Hence, in contrast consumption is viewed as a good-indeed almost everywhere, now it is the primary goal of national policy (Emerald, 2004). This clearly illustrates the degree to which consumerism is deeply ingrained into the culture.

P₁: The modern consumerist culture and pessimistic effects eroding human's spiritual connections with the nature.

3. Modern consumerist culture and optimistic effects: Proponents

The proponents of the consumerism believe that the creation of new goods and services "lift people from drudgery", give people a sense of meaning and purpose in life and has the potential to unite people all over the world in a common consumer culture (Mc Daniel,2000). Also some researchers explained that, cultural changes on consumption are linked with human psychology, not with the concept of consumerism. For example, Gardner and Assadourian (2004) stated that "people in a wellbeing society has develop close relationships with the natural environment and would recognize the trees in their parks and the flowers in their yards as easily as they identify corporate logos also, they would understand the environmental foundations of their economic activity: where their water comes from, where their garbage goes, and whether coal, nuclear, or renewable energy runs the power plant that generates their electricity. They would likely enjoy developing projects at home that help them to live more intimately with nature and they would learn to love nature and to become advocates for it". So, they argue that, the present changes of the society connect with the psychology of humans not with the concept of consumerism.

P₁: *The modern consumerist culture and optimistic effects preserving human's spiritual connections with the nature.*

4. Arguments on proponents Ideas: Refutation

Researcher believes that people must attempt to change the current consumer culture of the global society. If the society move human race forward without addressing the challenges of spirituality and sustainability, the world should have to face an extremely unpleasant period of human culture and evolution. It is no longer acceptable to conduct business as usual (Brown, 2003). Long standing precepts need to be carefully scrutinized and set aside, if they are barriers to social and cultural change (Emerald, 2004). Further, there is no single remedy for the spiritual ills brought on consumerism and the resulting detachment from nature (Ibid, P.38). Solutions are broad range and it should be implemented very carefully by ensuring maximum benefits to the global society. The challenges are formidable with the current consumer culture. It is critical to move forward with current socio-political institutional frame work. It should begin with beliefs of the individuals and enable them to explore their spirituality. Proponents have many things to say on how one can live a harmonious life ecologically but, one should understand that the core of the change is human behaviour, life style and their culture (Emerald, 2004). Therefore, people should think about what are the ecological costs to the planet at the point of manufacturing, purchasing and consuming of products and services. Especially when consuming, people should consider whether the product is really needed and good for the life. Emerald (2004) stated that the phenomenon of consumerism, sustainability and spirituality are inextricably linked requiring a multi-faceted approach on many levels to address environmental problems of the globe. Consequently, human can find rich, rewarding, and enduring fulfilment of themselves through exploration of nature.

5. Conclusions

Consumerism has affected global society in different ways. As a concept consumerism always feel good about ourselves requiring constant attention and reinforcement through regular consumption. However, the researchers argues that, consumerism has profound impact on the psychology of the individual, contributing to the development of an unsatisfying false self and eroding society's spiritual connection with the nature (Emerald,2004). Hence, the concept of consumerism is ecologically unsustainable and threatens to destroy the beneficial connection between nature and human spirit. To face this scenario the world need to find ways and means to protect and conserve the resource for future generations. Also, the transition to sustainable society will require a major improvement in societal organizations, government institutions and citizenry activities of the world. Specially, those organizations should address the issue of consumerism, environmental quality, and ecological sustainability. Finally, it can be concluded that, to address this issues of consumerism education will be a good weapon for changing unnecessary consumption, culture and the behaviours of the world.

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