

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19425973>

A Philosophical Inquiry into Consumerism and Well-being



Mr. Sheharyar

Probation Officer Pakpattan, Punjab Parole & Probation Services (Home Department, Pakistan) sheharyar@soc.qau.edu.pk

Abstract: *This paper explores the philosophical dimensions of consumerism and well-being, posing critical question about whether consumerism is ingrained in capitalist societies and if it can truly ensure well-being. The paper critically examines consumerism ideology's assumption of human hedonistic nature. Through a critical philosophical analysis, the validity and soundness of this ideology is questioned, particularly on the premises that pleasure is the highest human pursuit, and that consumption is the best means to achieve it. The paper argues that consumerism, driven by capitalist needs, leads to environmental damage and social inequality rather than well-being. By scrutinizing the historical shift in values since the Industrial Revolution and the role of media and advertising, it highlights how consumerism has become a central ideology of capitalism, perpetuating a cycle of consumption and unfulfilled desires. The study concludes that the ideology of consumerism is not inherently tied to human nature but is a tool for sustaining the capitalist economic system, often resulting in false consciousness, environmental degradation and other social problems. The paper also does aprioristic analysis of consumerism and well-being. For this purpose, Propositional logic and syllogistic reasoning are used with the combination of utilizing existing literature for evaluating the truthiness of premises. For logical analysis the possible definition of well-being is used with the acknowledgement that well-being is difficult to define, the article ends up on finding that there is no logical possibility of well-being through consumerism considering definition of well-being.*

Keywords: Consumerism, Well-being, Human nature, Consumerism philosophy.

Introduction

There have been many empirical studies about consumerism and well-being. The concern of this paper is the philosophical dimension of consumerism and well-being. "Are humans programmed for consumerism in capitalist society or it is our natural attitude?" and "Can Consumerism ensure well-being as it claims?" To find out the answer to these questions critically philosophical examination is done in this paper.

Consumerism is often defined as a cultural paradigm in which "Possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services is the principal cultural aspiration and the surest perceived route to personal happiness,

social status, and national success." Put more simply, consumerism can be defined as the practice of deriving our primary sense of acceptance, happiness, contentment, and significance from our purchases (Ekins, 1991, p.245). At social level Consumerism implies that the goal of society is to increase consumption of goods because it is desirable for society (Ritzer, 2011). The hallmark of a better life is the amount of consumption, the more people consume the better off they are (Schor, 1998). So, according to consumerism, the indicator of a better society is the amount of their consumption and goods which can be consumed. Ultimately, to be a better society, people should produce and consume more (Rojek, 2004;

Fellner & Goehmann, 2020). By taking such conception of consumerism and in following through implicit aspect of it, it is logical to infer that Consumerism ideology assumes the hedonistic nature of humans. As per this ideology, human beings are pleasure seekers, and it is the best possible thing which human can seek (Epicurus, 1993). In addition to that it also implies that the only surest way or at minimum best way of seeking pleasure is through consumption of goods (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). Consumerism can be loosely translate as consumption-ism which means consumerism is belief on consumption as a road to well-being. So, for consumerism ideology the well-being equation is:

The more you consume = The better off you are

Let us put consumerism ideology into a syllogism,

Premise 1: Pleasure is the best thing to achieve for humans.

Premise 2: Consumption of goods is the best way for achieving pleasure.

Conclusion: Consumption of goods is the best thing for human beings.

In this way consumerism advocates for more production and consumption of goods. After critical examination of the argument critically, by evaluating the truth of both premises, it is revealed that the argument is valid but not sound.

Critical Examination of First Premise

Before proceeding further, it is essential to note that there is difference between what someone want to do and what someone should do, it is also known as is/ought problem (Hume, 1978). Consumerism is based on naturalistic fallacy, it derives moral principles directly from human nature or natural facts (such as pleasure-seeking tendencies) which is a logical error (Moore, 1903; Rachels & Rachels, 2022). So, even if it is true that humans are pleasure seeker creators who want to maximize pleasure, this doesn't mean they should seek pleasure (Singer, 2011; Nagel, 1986). For example, if someone want to kill somebody it does not mean that he should kill. This completely undermines the credibility of hedonism as a normative claim. Regardless to this, truthiness of hedonism as descriptive statement is also worthy of discussion.

First premise assumes hedonistic nature of human beings which is not necessarily true. It is

widely recognized that the emotions are just means to tell you about life condition, keeping in view your values (Schwarz & Clore, 2003; Frijda, 1986). This means pleasure is not a value itself but result of positive evaluation of life condition according to values (Nozick, 1974; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2011). The majority of thinkers do not believe that governing force to human is 'Will to pleasure' as the first premise is assuming. Arthur Schopenhauer argued for 'Will to live' (Wicks, 2011) also supported by evolutionary theory and evolutionary psychology (Buss, 2019); Spinoza (1996) articulates the concept of 'conatus' to describing the natural "will to perfection" as the fundamental drive for self-preservation and enhancement. Similarly, Nietzsche (1883) advocates for 'Will to power'; Frankl (2020) posits 'Will to meanings.' In all this one thing is common, which is the denial of pleasure as our basic drive. So, this posits a doubt about the truthiness of the first premises. It is also found that the pursuit of meaning through material goods often fails to fulfill deeper human needs for connection, purpose, and self-understanding (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Kasser, 2003). While consumerism provides temporary pleasures, it frequently leads individuals to dissatisfaction and yearning for more (Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992), as they are attempting to satisfy existential needs with material objects which is not sufficient for fulfilment of these needs (Fromm, 1976; James, 2007).

Furthermore, Sociological literature undermines credibility of such claims significantly.

Consumerism as Ideology of Capitalism

Literature suggests that Consumerism is the product and core ideology of capitalism. In the past there was a kind of consensus on the point of hedonistic living and consumption being seen as immoral, bad for human well-being. For instance, Aristotle's conception of "Eudemonic life" opposes needless consumption of goods, Plato also advocates superiority of reason and not to surprise. He put appetites on very low in his hierarchy of TRI-partite Soul. Similarly, Stoicism and Cynicism, their advocating philosophers also established to revolt against hedonism and luxurious living(consumption) as a necessity for well-being (Warburton, 2013). This phenomenon is find out across religious ideologies too. For instance, Siddhartha (founder of Buddhism) maintains that attachment to possessions and desire for pleasures caused suffering, so to achieve Nirvana someone must detach from them

(Suzuki, 2021). Along with other religions Christianity and Islam also discourage materialism and consumerism (Eliade, 1959; 2009).

Since the industrial revolution there is an ideological shift. With this shift from what was considered mundane has become sacred and what was sacred has turned into mundane. Stearns (2001) traces the origins of modern Consumerism back to the eighteenth century since materials ownership and luxurious consumption is being considered as source of happiness and well-being. There is a significant role of media & advertisement as a tool for bringing ideological shift and promoting these kinds of narratives. This was done to serve the interest of capitalists.

It leads to how "Consumerism is the core ideology of Capitalism." Capitalism requires ever-expanding markets for which it is necessary to convince people to consume more and more; otherwise, the capitalist economic system will cease to grow. The need for a continuously growing market for its products drives the bourgeoisie over the entire planet, as outlined by Marx and Engels. It must make its home everywhere, settle there, and form relationships there. Global literature emerges as a result of the bourgeoisies'... The bourgeoisie quickly constructs a world based on its ideals. The nation, the East on the West, has been subordinated by the bourgeoisie (Marx & Engels 1967, p. 83–84). One may legitimately say that consumption is the inventor of this engine of capitalism's products and exploitation.

Victor Lebow, a retail analyst and recognized as one of the architects of the consumer society, said famously in 1955: "We must make consumption our way of life, turn the purchase and use of goods into rituals, and look to consumption for our ego and spiritual satisfactions. This is what our extraordinarily productive economy demands." Things must be used, burned, worn out, replaced, and disposed of at an ever-increasing rate. Thinking along these lines brings us to consumer society, consumerism, and the increasing conspicuous consumption that still predominates in modern society. This demonstrates how consumption functions as capitalism's central ideology.

Consumerism an instrumental ideology

In general, the role of culture and ideology in shaping our desires, nature and needs is evident in the writings of many social scientists and scholars. For instance, in his book "The History of Sexuality," Foucault (1990) examines the

societal development of sexuality. He highlights the significance of ideology in influencing our sexual urges. He supports this assertion by pushing for the emergence of sexual orientations throughout history, which are shaped by power rather than being rooted in nature or biology. Jeffrey Weeks further emphasizes that social processes not only shape subjectivities as categories but also at the individual level of desires. Judith Butler (1990) contends that gender is a socially created concept that arises from repeated acts and behaviors influenced by ideology.

Karl Marx was the first to criticize the capitalist economic system and identify the instrumental use of ideology within this system to manipulate disadvantaged masses (proletariats) and prevent social change. Marx emphasizes that ideology serves as a weapon of the Bourgeois, which they use to keep them in false consciousness (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017).

After him, Gramsci, and Frankfurt School, along with many others, continued to expose the challenges of ideology. For instance, Gramsci (1971) posited that in a capitalist economic system, the ruling class (bourgeoisie) retains its domination not alone via economic mechanisms but also through cultural and ideological manipulation. Gramsci implied that the purpose of capitalist ideology, which consists of norms, values, and beliefs that uphold and legitimize the capitalist system, is to gain the support of the masses and prevent social change. Because of Consumerist ideology, people demand more pay rather than more time off from work; they strive to work more to earn as much as they can so they may be able to buy things and consume these things; they take Consumerism for granted and willingly participate in Capitalist economic system & exploitation (Assadourian, 2010).

As a result of consumerism, actively seeking personal fulfilment through material possessions comes from consuming. A person who practices consumerism is likely to become entangled in the never-ending cycle of buying, using, discarding, and then repurchasing the same goods. They were taught to believe by Consumerism Ideology that they might achieve both material and social fulfilment through these products. Buyers' decisions are often influenced more by their social needs, which they attempt to satisfy through buying, than by their material needs (Weber, 1958).

Weber (1958, p.60) once said: "Human nature does not require people to seek wealth constantly; rather, it is for them to want to live

the kind of life they are used to and to make the money required to support that lifestyle." Thus, consumption has conditioned individuals to work more, earn more money, and ultimately spend and consume more; put another way, it has prepared them for a world where economic expansion is a goal unto itself.

Herbert Marcuse (1955) advances their critique of consumerism by using psychoanalytic Marxism to analyze how capitalism manipulates human nature and promotes consumerism. He used the term "repressive DE-sublimation" to describe how capitalist societies promote consumerism and alienate individuals from their genuine needs. For him, "Repressive DE sublimation" refers to a process where natural human desires and drives are redirected and manipulated within the constraints of the existing social order, particularly in a consumerist context. This process encourages people to seek satisfaction and gratification through consumption and conform to the prevailing norms and values of capitalist societies. He argues that the capitalist system generates artificial desires and disconnects individuals from their inherent nature and aspirations. The desire for "must-have" apparel, gadgets, and non-essential products originates from a distorted perception of necessity instilled in us by advertising and the media. Due to these false needs, people seek happiness in material possessions but find themselves unfulfilled in their pursuit. They engage in surplus alienated labor to acquire more to gain fulfilment and failed in their attempt again, the circle of unfulfillment keep repeating in this way.

Jean Baudrillard (1988) expands upon the sociological theories of Marx and Weber and presents a groundbreaking theory on consumption. Consumption, as he conceives it, is a process whereby consumers purchase and utilize products to establish and sustain a feeling of identity and distinction from others by showing acquisition of certain items. Baudrillard contends that consuming has escalated to a hyper-real, symbolic realm, where the act of purchase not only serves as a means of acquiring goods but also functions as a driving force for individuals in their employment endeavors. According to Baudrillard, the argument is that capitalism's dominant ideology, known as consumerism, asserts that the purpose of existence lies in acquiring material goods and pre-arranged experiences. He highlighted that the ideology of consumerism has two main functions: firstly, to legitimize capitalism, and secondly, to incentivize individuals to become

consumers in both their imagination and in actuality.

Baudrillard asserts that the preconceived notion of consuming is often perceived as more pleasurable than the actual act of consumption, resulting in a perpetual longing to spend and an incessant deferral of gratification. Baudrillard contends that consuming has no inherent constraints... If we were to interpret it as a simple act of absorption or consumption, then we would attain satisfaction. However, this is not the case because we desire to increase our consumption continually...The seemingly unstoppable nature of consuming is due to its inherently idealistic nature, which goes beyond the mere fulfilment of requirements (Baudrillard 1988, p.24). In summary, Baudrillard argues that consuming should not be regarded as the fulfilment of biologically predetermined demands. While we may have biological requirements, it is the social and cultural variables present in modern capitalist cultures that convert these needs into a desire to participate in consumption.

A scholar eloquently conveyed the same concept, stating that consuming extends well beyond only fulfilling basic physical or physiological necessities such as food and shelter. Material possessions play a significant role in people's psychological and social well-being. Individuals establish and sustain their identities via the utilization of tangible possessions... The inherent ability of physical objects to evoke emotions and memories enables a variety of intricate and deeply rooted discussions about social standing, individuality, social unity, and the quest for personal and cultural significance (Jackson, 2008, p. 49).

All the above-mentioned literature pointing out that consumer culture is not the product of human's basic needs but manipulation of them. Consumerism channels our social and psychological needs, which can be channelized in other ways (Baudrillard, 1998; Fromm, 1976; Rojek, 2004). Literature as we discussed suggests that consumerism is internalized in us to ensure working of economic system by using deception. Just like parents can deceive their children by combining chocolate with book reading. Children can assume that they are getting joy because of reading a book and they can start craving for reading book, while the reason is chocolate. So, in reality he is craving chocolate, this is called conditioning. In the same way people do not consume just for the sake of consumption. It can be called false consciousness (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017). As

Fellner & Goehmann (2020) have concluded, consumption is not necessary for human well-being but can be a cause of human destruction.

Contemporary critic Zizek (2008, p.25), in his book "Sublime Objects of Ideology", while discussing the purposes that ideology serves, mentioned classical Marxian critics of ideology, which describes "ideology as false consciousness", which implies that "they do not know what they are actually doing". In our context, it means that ideology creates false consciousness, and consumers are manipulated because of it. They are not aware that they are consuming unnecessarily; this of critic observed in literature, e.g., Gramsci, who belonged to Frankfurt school, including Herbert Marcuse's writing, as we have already discussed above. This trend is continued even today by various thinkers, e.g., Baudrillard; in this type of criticism, consumers are shown as victims of the ideology of Consumerism and manipulated participants in the vicious circle of consumption. Things get interesting when he says that this old critic of ideology is no longer relevant to our society. In some sense people claim that they currently reside in a society that has moved beyond the influence of ideologies. Zizek (2008, p.30) mentions that the contemporary version of ideology is "they know that in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it." In our context, this statement claims that consumers are very well aware of the illusions. However, still, they are consuming with full awareness. They know they are being deceived but they are still acting in alignment with deception.

Implication

It can be said based on the above discussion that desire for consumption and hedonism is probably not human nature but the need of capitalist economic system. Furthermore, attainment of well-being by consumerism also can be doubted. It is probable that consumerism ideology exists not because of the desire of human beings but because it provides stability to capitalist economic system. The argument can be stated as:

Premise 1: If humans do not govern by 'Will to Pleasure' & consumerism is an instrumental ideology of capitalism which is internalized in us deceptively then Pleasure is not the best thing to achieve for humans.

Premise 2: Humans most probably do not govern by 'Will to Pleasure' & most probably consumerism is an instrumental ideology of capitalism which is internalized in us

deceptively.

Conclusion: Therefore, most probably pleasure is not the best thing to achieve for humans.

It is a **Most probabilistic modus ponens** which is granting that the critic is logically valid. Premise of these arguments are supported by existing literature. Also remind is/ought problem which has been discussed even if humans are govern by 'will to pleasure' it doesn't mean they should. The second premise became irrelevant after this critic on the first place. To do justice with the second premise, it is being examined below.

Critical examination of second premise

Consumerism as a social problem

Consumption of goods is not the best way for achieving pleasure because unnecessary consumption damages the environment and causes inequality, a best way should not be causing severe bad consequences. But consumption is considered a bad practice and there is a need to transform or reject capitalist economic systems and their values (consumption, pursuit of profit etc.) in order to attain environmental justice (Bell, 2015).

Hopkins et al. (2020) have maintained that we are living in a world where some people are consuming unnecessarily while others are even deprived of basic needs; they constructed a rudimentary bottom-up model to ascertain a feasible minimal threshold for the aggregate energy consumption required to provide every individual on Earth with a decent quality of life. By 2050, it is possible to reduce worldwide consumption of energy to the same levels as in the 1960s despite a threefold increase in population. They state that to do that, we need to reduce consumption to levels of sufficiency, regardless of income; such a world requires significant demand-side reforms as well as a major rollout of new technology across all industries. Interestingly, their model of sufficiency is significantly more materially generous than the assumption made by those who are against significant consumption cutbacks.

The comparison between global spending on luxury goods and the additional funding required to achieve key social and economic

goals reveals significant disparities. For instance, while only \$1.3 billion is needed annually to immunize every child worldwide, \$11 billion is spent each year on ice cream in Europe alone. Similarly, providing clean drinking water to everyone would require \$10 billion, yet \$14 billion is spent annually on ocean cruises. To ensure education for all, \$5.23 billion is needed, but \$15 billion is spent on perfumes. Addressing hunger and malnutrition requires \$19 billion, nearly matching the \$17 billion spent on pet food in the United States and Europe. Lastly, the \$12 billion necessary for providing genital health care to all females is overshadowed by the \$18 billion spent on makeup. These comparisons highlight how redirecting a fraction of luxury spending could significantly advance global health, education, and well-being (World Watch Institute, 2004, p. 10).

The above information presents a very dark fact about consumerism and the senselessness of human beings. As already discussed, the money we spend on buying and consuming luxurious things is the same money we spend on solving social problems; we can successfully solve them. There is no need for an extra budget; the money we waste on attempting to fulfil unnecessary desires is enough to solve some of the social problems. However, the dark reality is that no one cares about others, and everyone is busy with luxurious consumption in search of a false sense of happiness through Consumerism. The unfortunate truth is that the developed world alone allocates a more significant number of financial resources towards the purchase of luxury goods than what would be required to accomplish the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (World Watch Institute, 2004).

Despite the occurrence of hunger-related deaths in certain regions, "In 2006, global expenditure on goods and services amounted to \$30.5 trillion. Additionally, in 2008, individuals acquired sixty-eight million automobiles, eighty-five million fridges, 297 million desktops, and 1.2 billion cellphones" (World Watch Institute 2010, p.4). The rapid consumption of the world's natural resources is

jeopardizing the future of both humanity and the planet. According to a study by the World Watch Institute (2010), the world extracts an amount of resources equivalent to 112 Empire State Construction sites every day.

This shows how Capitalism increases inequality and consumerism; the result is that the rich are destroying the environment by consuming unnecessarily, whereas the poor are starving because they do not have anything to eat. It is hardly unexpected that the United States and Canada, which together make up just 5.2% of the global population, account for 31.5% of global consumption. South Asia, with 22.4% of the worldwide population, accounts for a mere 2% of global consumption. (World Watch Institute, 2004).

Furthermore, Lynch et al. (2019) furthermore uses ecological footprint analysis based on secondary data to demonstrate that luxury items consumed by the wealthy for the sake of social status are damaging the environment/ecology. To prove their claim, they also show support for their claim from existing literature; for doing so, they mention a study by Kennedy et al. (2014), which showed that the wealthiest income group might be referred to as "egregious emitters" since they have a greater degree of consumption. In addition, Rees and Westra (2003) assert that the top 20% of the world's population consumes more than 80% of the global economic output, thus using the whole capacity of the globe. So, these wealthy people should be held accountable for the damage they have done, and their actions should be considered green crimes.

Implication

Because of all these bad consequences of consumption practices, consumption of material things should not be considered the best pathway to pleasure. Alternatives such as aesthetic pleasure, pleasure which stems from appreciation of natural beauty, pleasure which stems from compassion and empathy should be priorities. As Mill (2016) discusses the distinction between higher and lower pleasures, asserting that pleasures of the intellect and moral sentiments are of a higher quality. Argument can be stated as follows:

Premise 1: Best way to attain pleasure should

not be causing severe bad consequences.

Premise 2: Consumption is causing severe bad consequences.

Conclusion: Consumption is not the best way to attain pleasure.

This is a valid syllogism which undermines credibility of the second premise of the main argument.

Result of Critical Examination

Above discussion can be summed up as many philosophers do not support the idea of 'Will to pleasure.' Marxist and Neo-Marxist literature in general suggests that consumerism has nothing to do with well-being, it is an instrumental ideology to support a capitalist economic system and to keep the system working. The working of capitalist economic system can be maintained by increasing the production and consumption of goods but not necessarily it is a pathway to human well-being. Furthermore, it also implies even if humans tend to prefer pleasure, it doesn't mean they should. Furthermore, consumption is not the best way for pleasure.

Before delving into more discussion, it is pertinent to note that in this paper researcher is not concerned about empirical correlation between consumption and well-being. The aim is to see the logical possibilities of Well-being through Consumerism. Analytical methods are utilized such as syllogistic logic and propositional logic to examine the philosophical/theoretical dimensions and possibilities of well-being through consumerism. Syllogistic logic is used to construct and analyze basic arguments regarding consumerism and well-being. By evaluating premises and conclusions, logical consistency or contradictions can be identified in theoretical assertions. Existing literature is used to determine the truthiness of premises. Furthermore, wherever needed propositional logic is used which helped to explore more complex relationships between different propositions related to consumerism and well-being. This method allows to systematically evaluate the validity of compound statements and their implications.

The Challenge of Defining Well-being

Some consider happiness and well-being synonymous, but as Daniel Kahneman said in a

Ted talk, "Happiness means nothing these days simply because it is being used in very different meanings." Well-being has been acknowledged as a multifaceted concept. Dodge et al. (2012) have said that although wellbeing is a growing field of study, the question of how it should be defined remains unanswered. It has been observed that several academics who have tried to describe its essence have not prioritized defining it but rather just concentrated on the various aspects of well-being. Forgeard et al, have noted that the issue of how well-being must be defined is still largely unsettled. This lack of clarity has resulted in vague and too-wide definitions of well-being (2011, 81). The issue lies not just in the absence of a universally accepted definition of well-being but also in the inherent complexity of this concept. Thomas (2009) contends that well-being is an intangible and challenging construct to describe and much more so to quantify. There are significant difficulties surrounding the accuracy and reliability of measuring well-being when we try to define and quantify it which can be seen as a critic to empirical studies on measuring well-being.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that there is a difference between the 'definition' of a construct and its 'description.' There is an increasing need to be clear about what is being measured with growing attention to the measurement of well-being. Furthermore, to undertake a fair and valid assessment, it should clarify how the measured data should be interpreted. Therefore, to be capable of creating a clear and definite statement about the exact meaning of the term, any new definition must go beyond an account or description of well-being itself (Dodge et al. 2012). So, defining well-being is a fundamental problem which needs to be solved.

The problem of defining well-being becomes more severe by combining it with postmodernist thinkers who hold a nonessentialist stance about human nature and intellectuals who deny free will. If Sapolsky (2023) is correct, and we do not have freewill. In that case, our emotions, thoughts, and actions are just results of our programming, which makes defining happiness and well-being more challenging and posit a philosophical question of "What should be well-being?" or "What should create feelings and emotions of happiness and other emotions which are associated with well-being?" The role of post-modernist ideological critics is also a contributor to difficulty and worthy of consideration while defining happiness and well-being (also see Foucault 1990; Butler

1990).

Definition of well-being

The above discussion posits a heavy question mark on empirical research which has been done on this topic of consumerism and well-being in the first place, which should not be ignored. However, there are attempts to define and measure well-being which demand consideration. As it already has mentioned, well-being is difficult to define and measure (Thomas, 2008), but there are attempts to define well-being. Before engaging about the definition of well-being there should be awareness that attempts of defining well-being are somewhat oversimplified, the unfortunate exclusion of other significant components of well-being results from researchers' preference to overlook the diverse character of well-being and equate it with a single construct, most frequently life satisfaction, in most well-being studies (Forgeard et al., 2011, p. 81). So, well-being as having overall life satisfaction' is the most used definition of well-being, which will be utilized in our paper too.

Consumerism and Well-being

Consumerism ideology tells a pathway of well-being as already has been discussed, according to consumerism one should be an active participant in the consumption of goods and services more than one's basic needs, and in larger quantities to be happy and ensure his well-being. The well-being of individuals and society is to engage as much as possible in the vicious circle of practicing consumption. So, according to consumerism's pathway of well-being people should purchase products, consume them, get rid of them, and repurchase them again. if we articulate consumer culture's formula of happiness/wellbeing, the formula of happiness/wellbeing at superficial level would look like this:

Desires + Fulfilment of desires = Well-being

But on critical examination It reveals something which is significant to note, Consumerism is not based on the mere fulfilment of desires but also on the creation of them; having more desires is necessary to have the desire of enjoy more in order to enjoy more, as Zizek (2008) argued in his book named "For they know not what they do: enjoyment as a political factor" that 'enjoyment is super-ego', it is not the part of id but norm of capitalist ideology which is learned & followed in order to be part of consumer culture. So, Consumerism goes one step further, on critical examination, it reveals that well-

being according to the ideology of Consumerism is indeed nonsatisfaction of desires. Here, consumption is the end itself, so the secret is to keep the object of desire at a distance, so you continuously keep engaged in consumption.

Buddhism considers the vicious cycle of desires as a trap that should be avoided, whereas to consumerism it is not the problem rather It is what wellbeing is; as Zizek (2009) says: "The more you have, the more you want, the more you drink, the more you thirsty, the more you follow super-ego, the more guilty you are." In that way, Consumerism believes that the more you consume, the more you want, and the more you want, the more you buy, which means consumerism is not about the fulfilment of desires but the increment of them. So, the standard formula of well-being according to the ideology of Consumerism should be:

Desires + Consumption for the fulfilment of desires + More desires to fulfil = Well-being

If "life satisfaction" is considered as well-being. Its existence in consumerism ideology is a logical absurdity because, as it has discussed above, consumerism, at its critical examination, is the ideology of a lifestyle which is based on dissatisfaction (Zizek 2008; 2009). Consumerism ideology considers dissatisfaction as an avenue for well-being; it believes that dissatisfaction with present life conditions is necessary for well-being or, to put it in capitalism's terms, increased growth is essential to well-being (Weber 1998). So, considering well-being as "life satisfaction," and by keeping in view above discussion, it can logically argue that Consumerism is anti-wellbeing. Argument in simplistic form is stated in this way:

Premise 1: Well-being is having overall life satisfaction.

Premise 2: In consumerism ideology, there is no overall life satisfaction.

Conclusion: Therefore, in consumerism ideology, there is no well-being.

This is a valid syllogism which points out that given the definition of well-being as 'life satisfaction', the consumerism ideology is anti-well-being. So, studies in this domain are irrelevant. It is also essential to mention here that empirical research on this domain actually focuses on the correlation between consumption and well-being, not present logical analysis of consumerism ideology and well-being.

Anti-Consumerism Well-being

Interestingly, Buddhism shares the fundamentally utterly opposite view of well-

being with consumerism. Buddhism teaches that an attempt to fulfil your desires is a vicious trap which has no destination; Siddhartha Gautama, who is known as “The Buddha,” declares that in the path of desires and fulfilment of desires, there is nothing but pain which one gets by engaging in this vicious cycle of desire. Your desires cannot be satisfied in any case. As Nabulo Suzuki (2021), in his book “WABI SABI: The Wisdom in Imperfection”, mentioned the significance of love to imperfections. This book is based on the Japanese philosophy named “WABI SABI,” which is built on Buddhist teachings. Suzuki explains it by stating that imperfection is the very essence of existence, and the best thing someone can do is to find or be able to see beauty in imperfection. As Siddhartha Gautama has taught, desires are the root of all suffering, desire brings dissatisfaction and then dissatisfaction causes suffering. In order to be happy and content, someone should eliminate desires. So, a complete state of well-being can only be achieved by the complete negation of all kinds of extra desires. In his book, Suzuki mentions this Buddhist anti-consumerism formula for happiness. Which is:

Reality – Desires = Happiness/well-being

It is essential to not confuse desires with needs; there is no dispute that fulfilment of needs is pre-conditioned to applicability of this formula and attainment of well-being. The above formula is based on the subtraction of desires rather than needs; in other words, the formula suggests an approach to happiness which is basically anti-consumerism. Consumerism suggests, as already discussed, that desires are not bad things but avenues to well-being because it leads to consumption and consumption to well-being. Unlike consumerism ideology, Buddhism is compatible with well-being. If we consider well-being as ‘life satisfaction,’ Buddhism seems the most effective path to well-being. Life dissatisfaction is a state of desiring, some unpossessed things, means having unfulfilled desire. One way to life satisfaction can be to fulfil unfulfilling desires, but after fulfilling these desires the danger is the creation of new unfulfilled desires which ultimately turns into dissatisfaction with present conditions. Another way is in following pathway of Buddhism. If we remove desire what remains is only ‘life satisfaction.’ Basically, the argument is stated as follows:

Premise 1: If there are (unfulfilled) desires then there is not ‘life satisfaction’.

Premise 2: If there are no (unfulfilled) desires then there is ‘life satisfaction’.

Premise 3: (by following Buddhism formula) There are no (unfulfilled) desires.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is life satisfaction.

It is a **Modus ponens** (a valid form of argument). Buddhism has presented a solid formula as subtraction of desires results into ‘life satisfaction’ which is equivalent to well-being if we agree on this definition of well-being. There are also some other definitions of well-being, many scholars have defined well-being differently.

It is also said that Well-being is synonymous with quality of life. Shin & Johnson (1978) introduce the notion of subjective well-being as a comprehensive evaluation of an individual's quality of life based on their determined standards (p. 478). Their concept of well-being focuses on an individual's view of their quality of life based on their subjective criteria. They equate an excellent quality of life with well-being. If someone believes that consumption is a determining factor for a good quality of life, then they would consider a person who consumes more, even if it is unnecessary, to be living a better quality of life than someone who consumes less. According to this criterion, the individual would evaluate their quality of life based on their level of consumption.

The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) describes quality of life in the same manner. The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) defines the quality of life as an individual's subjective evaluation of their place in life, considering the cultural and value systems in which they exist, as well as their objectives, expectations, standards, and worries. The idea of quality of life is influenced by several factors, including an individual's physical health, psychological well-being, personal views, social connections, and their interaction with essential aspects of their surroundings” (World Health Organization, 1997).

Defining well-being in this way leads to several philosophical questions. What values, goals, expectations, and standards should someone consider assessing his/her well-being (quality of life)? Are values, goals, expectations, and standards of Consumerism ideology good? Should these be ideal to assess someone's well-being (quality of life)? The second and third question is already answered in the beginning, based on discussed reasons the answer to these questions is no. The answer to first question “What values, goals, expectations, and standards

should someone consider assessing his/her well-being (quality of life)?" is worthy of future considerations because it is not answered here. This critique presented in the paper opens the doors for rethinking economic and social policies. It calls for consideration of prioritizing genuine human well-being over material accumulation. It is indicated that values of Consumerism ideology should be replaced. It can be expected that values of moderation, sustainability, and social equity, societies can better align their economic practices with the true needs and aspirations of individuals.

Conclusion

This paper tackles the philosophical dimension of consumerism and well-being. It presents critical insights such as the dominant ideology of consumerism posits that the fundamental principle which governs human behavior is hedonism and pleasure derived from the consumption of goods is the highest human aspiration, which is critically flawed. It has been presented that assumption is challenged by various philosophical traditions and contemporary scientific critiques, which argue that human fulfillment and well-being are not solely, or even primarily, achieved through material consumption. After critical analysis it is demonstrated that consumerism is not an ideal pathway to well-being. Values, goals, expectations, and standards of Consumerism ideology are not desirable for individual and social well-being because these are harmful. Furthermore, it is demonstrated by a priori analysis that consumerism's standards are contradictory to well-being if we agree with the given definition of well-being. These standards should not be ideal to assess someone's well-being (quality of life). This points out the need for a philosophical inquire to find out "What should be objective standards for assessing well-being?"

References

- Assadourian, E. (2010). Transforming cultures: From consumerism to sustainability. *Journal of Micromarketing*, 30(2), 186–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146710361932>
- Baudrillard, J. (1988). *Selected writings*. Polity Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Sage Publications.
- Belk, R. W. (1985). Materialism: Trait aspects of living in the material world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12(3), 265–280. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208515>
- Bell, K. (2015). Can the capitalist economic system deliver environmental justice? *Environmental Research Letters*, 10(12), 125017. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/10/12/125017>
- Buss, D. (2019). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203183236>
- Eliade, M. (2009). *Yoga: Immortality and freedom* (Vol. 94). Princeton University Press.
- Mircea Eliade. (1959). *The sacred and the profane; the nature of religion*. Translated from the French by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Dodge, R., Daly, A., Huyton, J., & Sanders, L. (2012). The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 2(3), 222–235. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v2i3.4>
- Ekins, P. (1991). The sustainable consumer society: A contradiction in terms? *International Environmental Affairs*, 3, 245–258.
- Epicurus. (1993). *The essential Epicurus: Letters, principal doctrines, Vatican sayings, and fragments* (E. O'Connor, Trans.). Prometheus Books.
- Fellner, W. J., & Goehmann, B. (2020). Human needs, consumerism and welfare. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 44(2), 303–318. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bez046>
- Forgeard, M. J. C., Jayawickreme, E., Kern, M. L., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Doing the right thing: Measuring wellbeing for public policy. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 1(1), 79–106. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v1i1.15>
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Vintage.
- Frankl, V. E. (2020). *Man's search for meaning*. Rider Books.
- Frijda, N. H. (1986). *The emotions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fromm, E. (1976). *To have or to be?* Harper & Row.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. International Publishers.
- Hamilton, C., & Denniss, R. (2005). *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough*. Allen & Unwin.
- Hume, D. (1978). *A treatise of human nature* (L. A. Selby-Bigge & P. H. Nidditch, Eds.). Oxford University Press.

- Jackson, T., & Pepper, M. (2011). Consumerism as theodicy: Religious and secular meaning functions in modern society. In L. Thomas (Ed.), *Religion, consumerism and sustainability. Paradise lost?* (pp. 17–36). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-57667-4>
- James, O. (2007). *Affluenza: How to be successful and stay sane*. Vermilion
- Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (1996). Further Examining the American Dream: Differential Correlates of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22(3), 280–287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167296223006>
- Kasser, T. (2003). *The high price of materialism*. MIT Press.
- Lynch, M. J., Long, M. A., Stretesky, P. B., & Barrett, K. L. (2019). Measuring the ecological impact of the wealthy: Excessive consumption, ecological disorganization, green crime, and justice. *Social Currents*, 6(4), 377–395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329496519847491>
- Marcuse, H. (1955). *Eros and civilization: A philosophical inquiry into Freud*.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1967). *The communist manifesto* (A. J. P. Taylor, Introduction). Penguin Books.
- Mill, J. S. (2016). *Utilitarianism*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Millward-Hopkins, J., Steinberger, J. K., Rao, N. D., & Oswald, Y. (2020). Providing decent living with minimum energy: A global scenario. *Global Environmental Change*, 65, 102168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2020.102168>
- Moore, G. E. (1903). *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nagel, T. (1986). *The view from nowhere*. Oxford University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2018). *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Simon & Brown.
- Nozick, R. (1974). *Anarchy, state, and utopia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ritzer, G., & Stepnisky, J. (2017). *Sociological theory*. SAGE Publications.
- Rachels, J., & Rachels, S. (2022). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (10th ed.). McGraw Hill.
- Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. (1992). A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(3), 303–316. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209304>
- Rojek, C. (2004). The consumerist syndrome in contemporary society. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 4(3), 291–312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540504046516>
- Ritzer, G. (2011). *The McDonaldization of society* 6 (6th ed.). Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications Co.
- Sapolsky, R. M. (2023). *Determined*. Penguin.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press.
- Schor, J. (1998). *The overspent American: Why we want what we don't need*. Harper Perennial.
- Schwarz, N., & Clore, G. L. (2003). Mood as Information: 20 Years Later. *Psychological Inquiry*, 14(3–4), 296–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2003.9682896>
- Singer, P. (2011). *Practical ethics* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Shin, D. C., & Johnson, D. M. (1978). Avowed happiness as an overall assessment of the quality of life. *Social Indicators Research*, 5, 475–492. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00352944>
- Spinoza, B. (1996). *Ethics* (E. Curley, Trans.). Penguin Books.
- Stearns, P. N. (2001). *Consumerism in world history: The global transformation of modern society*. Routledge.
- Suzuki, N. (2021). *Wabi sabi: The wisdom in imperfection*. Tuttle Publishing.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 141–166. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141>
- Thomas, J. (2009). Current measures and the challenges of measuring children's wellbeing. Working paper. Office for National Statistics.
- Warburton, N. (2013). *Philosophy: The basics*. Routledge.
- Weber, M. (1998). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (with Weber's essay: The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism). Roxbury.
- Weber, M. (1958). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Scribners.
- Wicks, R. (2011). *Schopenhauer's The world as will and representation: A reader's guide*. Continuum.
- World Health Organization. (1997). *WHOQOL measuring quality of life*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

World Watch Institute. (2004). *State of the world 2004: The consumer society*. Norton/World watch.

World Watch Institute. (2010). *State of the world 2010: Transforming cultures from consumerism to sustainability*. Norton/World Watch.

Žižek, S. (2008). *For they know not what they do: Enjoyment as a political factor*. Verso.

Žižek, S. (2009). *The fragile absolute: Or, why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?* Verso.

Žižek, S. (2008). *The sublime object of ideology*. Verso Books.