

Consumerism, Sustainability and Thrivability

Consumerism, [Sustainability](#) and Thrivability are three deeply interlinked concepts. Let's dive into a discussion to understand what they mean and how they are inter-connected.

Consumption vs. Consumerism

As humanity entered into the 21st century, it did so with the awareness that mass consumption is threatening human health, welfare, and other aspects of life (P.C. Stern, 1997). Rising levels of consumption, alongside population growth, and mechanization have also been linked to deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and pollution (Carson, 2002; Meadows et al., 1972).

In fact, mass consumerism and overconsumption are recognized as engines of unsustainability (Brown & Vergragt, 2016). Consumerism can have different definitions based on who is defining it, but when it is defined as an obsession with buying material goods or items, it becomes an engine of unsustainability. For instance, the acquisitive, repetitive, and/or aspirational overconsumption was identified as the culprit (Sheth et al., 2011). Moreover, Sheth et al. (2011) described acquisitive consumption as the most basic form of excessive consumption, where things are acquired at a scale that exceeds one's needs, or even one's capacity to consume. Secondly, repetitive consumption describes the cycle of buying, discarding, and buying again. Thirdly, aspirational consumption references the idea of conspicuous consumption amongst the super-rich (Veblen, 1973), where competition and upward social mobility are the main drivers.

Care for self, care for community, and care for nature as a cure to consumerism

According to Sheth et al. (2011), if consumption is to be sustainable, consumer behaviour across all three of these areas has to undergo a shift towards temperance. Their temperance framework would be based on a customer-centric approach to sustainability. This framework also introduces the concept of mindful

consumption (MC) as a guiding principle. Additionally, MC advocates a consumer mindset of caring for self, for community, and for nature. Not to mention, a caring mindset assists in tempering the self-defeating excesses associated with over-consumption. Indeed, a cultural shift towards a less consumerist lifestyle might become more widespread that is driven by the core pursuit of human wellbeing (Brown & Vergragt, 2016).



Transitioning from Consumerism to Collective Care

Consumerism and COVID

Unquestionably, during [COVID-times](#), the wellbeing debate has been raging. Due to the high levels of uncertainty and economic downturns, customers are questioning their ways of living and being. Hence, the pandemic has forced humanity to seek deeper meaning and purpose, while embracing transcendental connections (Karpen & Conduit, 2020). This collective, introspective, and meditative change in individuals across the world may indeed be the most compelling nudge towards [a much needed structural transformation](#).

Up until now, structural transformation of socially and ecologically self-destructive consumer societies has been let down by the political dysfunctionality of democracy (Blühdorn, 2017, 2019). In addition, numerous other factors have interfered in structural transformation, such as the corporate interests of large companies, the myopic focus on technological solutions, and the economic incentives for energy conservation. Altogether, these three (and many other) factors exacerbate the inertia towards an appropriate structural transformation (Brown & Vergragt, 2016).

Thrivability

Meanwhile, it is being argued that the sustainability paradigm has been exhausted (Blühdorn, 2017, 2019). In addition, the collective consciousness of the world is searching for deeper meaning and purpose (Karpen & Conduit, 2020). Therefore, what is a reasonable alternative? Consequently, some scholars advocate that a positive answer lies in humanity's potential to create value through artistic expression. In due time, these scholars imagine that a positive world will emerge through systemic innovation. Finally, in their imagination, the focus will be on curating favourable conditions of life and living. All in all, these curated conditions will favour the dynamics of 'Thrivability' (Laszlo, 2017).

In brief, Thrivability represents the 'ability to thrive' (Russell, 2013). Moreover, 'Thrivability' is seen as a set of perspectives, intentions, and practices reflecting that organisations and communities can act as dynamic living systems, where vital and meaningful connection may powerfully and effectively be brokered through work (Holliday & Jones, 2015). Consequently, *THRIVE* bases its origin on such [ideals](#). As a result, the development of the [Thrive Project](#) seeks to create a holistic systems-based simulation model and framework, which seeks to act as a tool that assesses business models against sustainability performances.

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