Development of a Green Economy in the Context of a Minimalist Movement

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Abstract. Mindless consumption is an excessive purchase of goods without considering the life cycle of this purchase, which harms the environment and destroys a person’s mental health, replacing universal values with “dependence on things”, fueling imaginary happiness with another dose of purchase. Today, social networks play a crucial role in this problem, spreading information about fast fashion and consumer culture. And large marketplaces subdue these habits by constantly reducing prices and speeding up or free shipping. All this happens on the ruins of the natural environment to satisfy the hunger of customers. Recently, thoughtless consumption has also been fueled by “Green brainwashing.” This phenomenon of using the good intentions of consumers perpetuates the disinformation system. This practice uses deceptive marketing techniques to make consumers think they are buying something good for the environment, although this may not be the case. A minimalist lifestyle does not require a complete rejection of worldly possessions. On the contrary, it means buying only those things that have a constant ability to bring real value. Minimalists approach all aspects of their lives from this perspective, carefully choosing the kind of life that makes them as happy as possible.

1 Introduction

In a study published in 2012 titled “Family Life in the Twenty-First Century: 32 families open their doors,” researchers from the University of California, Los Angeles observed 32 middle-class families in Los Angeles. 75% of families who participated in the study were unable to drive their cars into the garage because it was full of “necessary” things [1].

In developed countries, people are always encouraged to buy more things. TV ads, fashion magazines, and billboards offer what only the best, latest products can offer – happiness. But does material property really bring happiness?

Of course, there is nothing negative about buying things and owning them. The property has a practical application, aesthetic purpose, and personal perception. Our things only become a problem when we repeat them repeatedly [3].

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A consumer culture that puts GDP above all other indicators of progress does not promote sustainability. Even if we aim to use resources efficiently and protect the environment, these values are often incompatible with an economic philosophy that requires people to buy more and more.

Consumer goods need to be transported—sometimes abroad. This requires a lot of energy and leads to more greenhouse gas emissions. When products reach store shelves, they are bought by individual consumers, but often they are not used until the end of the life cycle before being disposed of (for example, in the “fast fashion” industry) [4]. If you consider the packaging and tags, even the smallest items are fraught with huge losses.

By buying a lot of low-quality products instead of a few higher-quality ones, people consume and throw away more, causing more pollution and waste. An environmental problem is being created that a minimalist lifestyle and a green economy are trying to solve.

Minimalists are picky about what they buy and therefore buy less [5]. They choose items that will last longer, meet their needs more effectively, and that they won’t get tired of. At its core, this is the opposite of impulsive buying.

Buying fewer higher-quality products can help protect the environment by reducing demand for “fast” consumer products and reducing the amount of garbage in landfills. As such, it can be a useful tool for limiting our environmental impact.

Consumer behavior researchers have long recognized that product desires and choices are influenced by cultural norms and values. However, in the era of globalization, the exchange of cultural values is growing, and our ability to form an accurate perception of norms may be leveled. Established values and worldviews are being replaced by a massive, faceless, sometimes distorting opinion about generalized consumer behavior. This information often does not reflect the true situation, but it is not disputed as an acceptable substitute for “knowledge” about the world [8; 11; 12].

## 2 Research Methodology

While we like to believe that our perception of social reality is accurate and based on the ability to observe and interpret information from the world around us, this may just be a convenient illusion [6]. Stop watching TV programs for a couple of months, and your attitude will change.

In fact, we can only observe a tiny part of the world around us. A huge amount of what we “know” is mediated by information we receive from other people or the media. Most of this information is carefully processed as if it were observed directly in the real world and converted into knowledge of reality. Due to the specific nature of this indirectly obtained information and its widespread provision, there is a limited and distorted synthesis of regulatory information about consumption. As a result, people can act based on a false perception of social reality.

More and more researchers interested in consumer behavior describe the role of advertising in creating symbolic and cultural beliefs of consumers. However, advertising makes up only a small part of the media content. More significant is the introduction to the “world” depicted on television, which becomes part of stable cognitive structures. We begin to believe that the world, or at least part of it, exists in the form in which it is created by television.

The methodological basis of the study was the method of dialectical materialism, general philosophical theory, neoclassical, and institutionalist principles of analysis. During the research, the method of historicism, the unity of logical and historical, a systematic approach, the method of scientific abstraction, etc. were widely used.
3 Results and Discussions

With consumer spending accounting for approximately 60% of global GDP, harnessing the potential of technology to create value is paramount to ensuring progress in all developed and developing countries [7].

A house, apartment, or garage are areas where we accumulate things. And it is with them that each of us must start if we want to reduce the impact of global anthropogenic impact on the planet.

Consumers make purchasing decisions based on the value they attribute to the product. Some may think about the origin of the items they buy (and whether it was done using fair and sustainable methods) and plan the time they will use them and then dispose of them.

Of course, consumer behavior varies even within the country, especially in the poorest countries [8]. There is a large gap in consumption and ownership levels within developed countries, as well as between regions and continents. Such inequality leads not only to differences in consumption and distribution of wealth [9]. This affects access to health, education, food, employment, financial and technology platforms, exacerbating poverty, isolation and violence.

By 2030, the deadline for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, annual consumption will double to 8.8 trillion. US $ in China and 6-in

India. Today, consumption expenditures account for 60% of global GDP [15]. In the United States alone, consumption is 16 trillion USD; and people, unfortunately, consume less responsibly than they did five years ago.

Final consumer spending of Russian families increased by 11.9% last year: “final consumer spending of households increased by 11.9% after their increase of 9.3% in 2018. consumption was supported primarily by significant growth rates of wages and Pensions. This was also facilitated by rather high consumer sentiment of the population, as well as a slowdown in inflation” [14].

These staggering consumption levels have a major impact on the environment and biodiversity. Consumer spending determines the use of non-renewable natural resources and production volumes, which in turn affects the use of water, energy, and land.

In 1990, about 8.1 tons of natural resources were used to meet the needs of society; in 2015, almost 12 tons of natural resources were extracted and processed for each person. This has affected our ability to achieve the twelve sustainable development goals – ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, as well as the Paris Agreement goals to reduce emissions and limit global temperature rise [15].

However, a new problem arises: consumption and production are considered remote and extended concepts that are in no way directly related to us. They are responsible for global climate change. In fact, we consume goods ourselves, and in some cases even manage production companies.

Consumption is not just a purchase. This is an understanding, recognition, and agreement with the behind-the-scenes history of the product, all stages of its life cycle. Ignorance of all these processes does not release us from responsibility for our choices. This is the result of using products throughout their entire service life and how they are disposed of.

So, what can we as consumers do? Jane Goodall, who for more than 60 years has inspired and motivated millions of people around the world to live in greater harmony with nature and take action for the sake of our planet, once said: “Each of us must contribute to the creation of a better world, because every day we make small choices – what to buy, what to eat, what to wear, which may seem insignificant. But the combined effect of billions of people who have made ethical choices will begin to heal the natural world” [8].

As Dr David Nabarro of King’s College London put it at the Annual Lecture of the
Institut for Global Health Innovation, nature, and its relationship to everything that matters to humanity should be respected [12].

With a few small and tangible steps (such as reducing consumption and devoting time to organizing your home and office), we can make a difference. We just need determination and creativity to improve our way of life and civilizational heritage [14].

The Environmental Program for sustainable consumption encourages humanity to develop together with natural ecosystems. It contributes to the well-being and quality of life of people, along with preserving the natural environment.

At the international level, responsible production and consumption were discussed as early as 1972. However, it was not until 1992, at the UN conference on Environment and development in Rio de Janeiro, that a declaration was signed calling for “limiting and eliminating non-viable models of production and consumption” to “achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people” [11].

Effective measures and strategies are needed to achieve all these decisions and goals. They should be based on programs, the essence of which is to balance the man-made load on the environment with its ability to recover. A Multisectoral policy is needed that includes environmental performance parameters in technological, economic and social areas.

This policy is based on the recognition of vital environmental problems caused by improper production and consumption models (global warming, or rather, global climate imbalance; man – made pollution of Water Resources and soil, deforestation, reduced biodiversity, and much more).

As stated in the agenda for the XXI century [13], “the main reason for the long-term deterioration of the global environment is the unstable nature of consumption and production...”. Therefore, it is imperative that citizens in developed countries adopt more sustainable consumption patterns, using goods and services only for necessary needs and wisely choosing environmentally friendly goods instead of products with a toxic history (both physico-chemical and social) that is hostile to the environment.

The sustainable consumption strategy adds its own characteristics to established consumption practices and models. The first such feature is to reduce the number of materials used, or increase their productivity, value, multi-functionality, and so on. A minimum of material used means a minimum of natural capital involved, a minimum of depletion of natural resources (especially energy resources), and a minimum of materials released as waste. The second feature of the sustainable consumption strategy is to reduce the toxic characteristics of materials used in products at all stages of related processes. The third feature includes four principles: reduction, repair, reuse, and recycling. It is worth noting here that it is inappropriate to consider these principles only as purely technical problems. Scientific and technological innovation is only part of the solution, and perhaps an even more complex problem. The significant benefits of reduction, reuse, recycling, and repair are not only changes at the production level, but also unavoidable changes in consumption practices.

Thus, a policy that favors technical innovation is only one possible strategy.

It is a mistake to focus only on the productivity coefficient, aimed at reducing the mass of materials and energy in products. This is only one and perhaps not the most important part of the answer to the question of the sustainability of production and consumption patterns. Unfortunately, this is the easiest way to manage in a technology – oriented economy (and consumer culture), since it does not achieve the fundamental goal of increasing production.

When considering conscious eco-minimalist consumer behavior that affects the environment, a system is used that considers three main variables: motivations, abilities, and opportunities. Information, moral arguments, and economic incentives can be seen as
tools for correcting such behavior.

Thus, one of the main results of sustainable ecological and minimalistic choice, as stated by most eco-consumers, is the reduction of the carbon footprint [11]. Researchers agree that addressing environmental challenges at the individual and community levels requires behavioral change and a mechanism to make choices in favor of green consumption. However, for the most part, consumers don’t know much about how their consumer choices affect such results. Understanding the motivators and inhibitors of consumer environmental behavior is a prerequisite for developing incentives that can effectively stimulate environmental behavior.

Increased urbanization in countries around the world, especially in developing countries, introduces additional environmental problems to the economy. This is critical for firms that are trying to compete on the basis of Green calls in order to understand and adequately meet the eco-needs of consumers. Perhaps, in such conditions, it is necessary to act in three directions. The first direction is related to the concept of environmentally responsible consumption. The second one covers factors that affect the environmental behavior of consumers. The third concerns the problem of consumer resistance to green behavior.

Researchers of environmentally responsible behavior use various interchangeable terms, for example: environmental behavior, environmental behavior, environmentally safe behavior, and finally, green or sustainable behavior.

The terms “environmental” and “environmentally sound behavior” became widespread in the 1984s and 2000s. This period is characterized by an increase in the amount of solid waste and a constant increase in government concerns about the state of the environment. Proyectological behavior is also defined as conscious actions in response to social and individual requirements arising from the need to protect the environment [17]. These definitions emphasized the attitude to the problem of Environmental Protection, but, as some authors note, without linking trends to degradation with environmental and social issues of human well-being: socio-economic justice, employment, education, health [18].

Since the early 2000s, the concept of sustainable behavior has been defined as a set of effective, conscious preventive actions that ensure the conservation of natural resources, including the integrity of the animal and plant world, humans, and the social well-being of present and future generations. Therefore, the concepts of ecological and pro-ecological consumption were replaced by the terms “environmentally safe behavior” and “sustainable behavior”. This concept, which uses an integrated approach, provides for individual and group actions aimed at the rational use of Natural Resources, guaranteeing the well-being of people, as well as environmental balance.

Recently, a new term has appeared – “green behavior”, which includes, among other things, saving natural resources, composting, and eco-friendly construction. Its difference from sustainable behavior lies in the maximum minimization of a lifestyle with a special attitude to GDP growth and the orientation of the world economy in this direction.

Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in research on features that contribute to green behavior. However, these studies focused exclusively on economically developed countries (USA, Australia, Germany, France, Denmark, and the United Kingdom), without considering the economies of developing countries [3]. At the same time, most studies have shown that there is a stable relationship between consumer confidence in advertising the environmental benefits of products and the chance of purchasing them.

Certain consumer eco-beliefs and general eco-attitudes towards the natural environment provoked green consumer behavior in a certain way. For example, studies conducted in the Netherlands [6] have shown that environmental awareness has had a positive impact on the purchase of environmentally friendly food products and on waste management activities. Studying the relationship between the knowledge, attitude and behavior of Canadian
consumers, scientists have identified contradictions between the importance of awareness of environmental problems and the impact of household inconveniences on their solution [4].

In another study, when studying the motivation of Canadian consumers to choose organic products, a qualitative approach was applied, which revealed the relationship between empathy for environmental problems, controlling their health, on the one hand, and demand for organic food, on the other [6].

As for research in developing countries, consumers’ interest in protecting the environment is ranked by the degree of financial well-being and direct attitude to the environment. For example, studies conducted in the people’s Republic of China clearly distinguish this attitude between residents of provincial cities and megacities of Hong Kong, the Special Administrative Region of China. Residents of the provinces demonstrated knowledge on this issue; at the same time, their financial problems are caused by the high cost of eco-goods and, consequently, a decrease in confidence in information about the environmental friendliness of goods [6]. On the other hand, studies involving Hong Kong respondents have shown that social influence, stable income, Environmental Protection, caring for one’s image as an environmental defender, and the effectiveness of environmental behavior are the most important predictors of consumer environmental purchases [8].

Indeed, a person struggling for survival is less picky about environmental problems, and often draws his own meager income, using resources, sometimes not quite legal methods.

Even when most consumers are aware of environmental issues, the full range of environmental impacts is not considered. Their actions are focused mainly on cleanliness and aesthetics, rather than on protecting nature. Some forms of environmental behavior (such as the use of dishes with a thickened bottom, energy-saving lamps, subway rides instead of personal transport, etc.) are quite firmly rooted among the population of large cities, but these actions are not dictated by environmental consciousness, since they are associated with modernity, progress, and fashion. This area includes eco-products and eco-packaging with logos of prestigious brands that increase the status of consumers, and much more.

This focus on modernity was observed in the study of consumption habits, home equipment and transport in Brazil [15]. The authors found that the intensive use of electronics, household appliances, and private cars depends mainly on financial capabilities, rather than environmental awareness.

Interesting research on the example of green innovations in the hotel business was conducted in India. Higher prices for “environmental friendliness” divided visitors into those (and most of them) who support such Eco-Changes, and those who are willing to pay for them [8].

Today, it is often said that sustainable consumption is attracting increasing attention from the population of low-and middle-income countries. One of the main reasons for this trend is the rapid “transition” of lifestyle and, accordingly, an increase in consumer motivation: the “jump” in lifestyle has a positive effect on the ecological and social orientation of consumption models. The rejection of resource-intensive consumption styles typical of industrialized countries is not always acceptable for low-and middle-income populations. There are certain consumer orientations associated with the sustainability strategy, but these trends are unlikely to compensate for the benefits of resource-intensive lifestyles at the current stage of their development.

4 Conclusions

Environmental knowledge is an important factor on the way to green consumption, which is
confirmed by many studies. For more than three decades, this factor has been recognized as one of the main ones by many scientists. Since the assessment of the formation of consumer behavior in relation to the environment depends on appropriate measurements, the possibilities of measuring consumer knowledge about the environment are constantly being reviewed and expanded. The results show that both objective and subjective knowledge have a significant relationship with consumer behavior in the environment, with objective knowledge being a more important indicator.

Despite many studies devoted to these issues, the literature often discusses expanded environmental values. This is motivated by the claim that such indicators relate to a general environmental concern or a general environmental position. It is often suggested that prosocial and pro-ecological values are not similar or interrelated manifestations of altruism.

The development of a concept of an ecological worldview that would correspond to socio-ecological tasks implies the construction of an adequate behavior model. This is a kind of matrix on the basis of which you can create effective eco-educational projects. Consumers’ awareness of environmental issues affects personal motivation in maintaining good health, high quality of life, and nature conservation – both in the current time and for future generations. This mindset increases the demand for organic food and the choice of eco-friendly products. It encourages the choice between buying, renting or exchanging goods and has a significant impact on the corporate values of enterprises, including effective resource management, social responsibility, respect for nature and all living things.

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