

# Mindfulness: Its Transformative Potential for Consumer, Societal, and Environmental Well-Being

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*The authors propose that mindfulness is an antidote to mindless consumption, which adversely affects individual and collective well-being. The concept of mindfulness is explained and applied to the consumption context. More specifically, the authors examine mindful consumption as an ongoing practice of bringing attention, with acceptance, to inner and outer stimuli, and the effects of this practice on the consumption process. The transformative potential of mindful consumption is reviewed across domains of consumer, societal, and environmental well-being, with suggestions for future research. The article highlights some of the challenges to realizing the transformative potential of mindful consumption and concludes with suggestions for the actions that consumers, institutions, and policy makers could take to promote mindful consumption.*

**Keywords:** mindfulness, mindful consumption, transformative consumer research, well-being, policy interventions

Mindful consumption is the way to heal ourselves and to heal the world.

—Thich Nhat Hanh (2008, p. 16).

It has been noted that consumers' appetites are not only seemingly insatiable but are also detrimental to environmental, social, and individual well-being (Csikszentmihalyi

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2000). For example, Americans use almost six times the resources that would be available in a sustainable ecosystem, and “ecological footprints” vary from an average of 9.7 hectares of biologically productive land used by each American to the .5 hectares used by the average Mozambican (Worldwatch Institute 2013). According to Worldwatch Institute, the annual expenditure on luxury items like cosmetics, ice cream, and perfume is far greater than the total amount needed to provide food, clean water, and education for the world’s poorest people. Unhealthy consumption choices also affect consumers and businesses. For example, health care costs associated with obesity in 2008 were estimated at \$147 billion, and the productivity costs of obesity-related absenteeism were up to \$6.38 billion (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015). Furthermore, people with higher materialistic values face a greater risk of unhappiness, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and problems with intimacy (Kasser 2003).

We argue in this article that a major determinant of consumption-induced problems is mindlessness. Millions of contemporary consumers sleepwalk through a fog of impulses, habits, addictions, compulsions, and decision biases. Despite growing concerns about unsustainable and unhealthy lifestyles, academic research and initiatives by government and nonprofit organizations have met with little success in shifting consumer behavior for improved quality of life, especially in affluent populations (Prothero et al. 2011). It is indeed challenging to wake consumers up when they are deeply sedated by promises of pleasures and escapes everywhere in the marketplace, particularly as they traverse their technology-pervaded and overwhelmed days (Schulte

2014). Researchers who focus on individual and collective well-being understand that merely providing more information is not enough to offset the messages that induce consumers to behave irrationally. Instead, a primary objective of transformative consumer research is empowering consumers to have greater agency in making conscious consumption choices that promote individual, social, and ecological well-being (Mick et al. 2012).

One way to achieve this goal is to help consumers make choices with more mindfulness, which is defined as “the awareness that arises by paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn 2013, p. 11). Mindfulness is now the subject of extensive research within medicine, psychology, education, business, and law (Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2013), and a recent estimate indicated that the National Institutes of Health have spent more than \$100 million on mindfulness research, primarily through the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (Harrington 2014). As part of its strategic priorities, this center supports scholarship on the use of mindfulness and other meditation practices to enhance health, with a focus on a variety of conditions, including reducing stress, managing weight, managing type 2 diabetes, regulating emotions, improving sleep, and reducing heart disease (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health 2007). Even politicians, such as Congressman Tim Ryan, are advocating mindfulness as a key intervention for preventive health (Ryan 2012); Congressman Ryan has allocated funds to this end in his home district in Ohio (Cullen 2011). In addition, many corporations and organizations are championing mindfulness practices, including Google, Aetna, professional sports teams, educational institutions, and the U.S. military.

Current research and applications of mindfulness have yet to systematically consider the role of mindfulness in enabling consumers to make better choices in the marketplace. As a nonreactive awareness of things as they are, mindfulness can enhance people’s capacity to self-regulate (i.e., achieve their goals) (Hölzel et al. 2011). It can also serve as an effective antidote to automaticity and reactivity in the marketplace (Rosenberg 2004). However, with a few recent exceptions of context-specific applications (e.g., Bahl et al. 2013; Van De Veer, Van Herpen, and Van Trijp 2016), researchers have not fully confronted and spelled out for consumers the benefits of mindfulness and its theoretical, daily pragmatic, and policy implications.

This article reviews mindfulness to highlight its potential for improving consumer well-being across a broad intersection of marketplace and social problems. While our focus is mainly directed toward consumers, we also look at the role of business and policy in supporting people to make more mindful choices in their consumption processes. We first review the idea of mindfulness. Next, we offer a working definition and description of mindful consumption, followed by insights on how it can promote individual, societal, and environmental well-being. We highlight some challenges to realizing the transformative potential of mindful consumption, and we conclude with suggestions for actions that consumers, institutions, and policy makers could take to encourage healthier, more reflective consumption.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is studied as a secular practice, state, and trait that has its origins in many different worldviews and religions, including Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism. In this article, we adopt the view of mindfulness emanating from Buddhist traditions popularized by Jon Kabat-Zinn in his pioneering program known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2013; see also Mick 2016 on mindfulness and Buddhist psychology). This approach has similarities to but also key differences from the mindfulness construct developed by the Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer (1989). A full comparison of these approaches is beyond the scope of this article but is well provided in Hart, Ivtzan, and Hart (2013). Briefly, Langer views mindfulness as a heightened state of involvement and wakefulness, with an emphasis on awareness of external stimuli, openness to novelty, and drawing of novel distinctions. This approach relies on a more Western view based in cognitive psychology, and it particularly focuses on creative cognition. In contrast, Kabat-Zinn views mindfulness as being present in a non-judgmental manner with respect to both internal stimuli (e.g., thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations) and external stimuli. His approach is substantially therapeutic insofar as its Eastern foundation emphasizes poor mental discipline (which can be remedied by mindfulness) as a chief cause of human distress. After reviewing multiple operationalizations and studies of mindfulness from each of these two mindfulness paradigms, Hart et al. (2013) maintain that Kabat-Zinn’s approach is broader and more detailed than Langer’s. Nonetheless, they also conclude that ultimately both views are about self-regulation, particularly of automatic or reactive autopilot tendencies of the mind. As we review, and others agree (Brown, Ryan, and Creswell 2007; Mick 2016), achieving this heightened self-regulation can improve psychological and physical well-being along a number of dimensions.

Within the Eastern-derived approach, mindfulness is a type of awareness that bestows the ability to see clearly. Instead of viewing the world through a filter of memories and attachments, mindfulness enables a direct and immediate experience of whatever is happening, which is distinct from thinking about or conceptualizing the experience. The trained mind can sustain and easily return to this objective awareness, which facilitates deliberate choices and less susceptibility to persuasive messaging (Rosenberg 2004). For the untrained mind, this awareness is regularly sidetracked by a proliferation of memories, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and judgments, which results in the squandering of time, energy, and attention, all of which are limited resources for consumers. Fortunately, mindfulness as a state or trait can be cultivated through the practice of mindfulness meditation, particularly the type of mental training that teaches people “how to pay open-hearted attention to objects in the exterior and interior world as they unfold, moment by moment” (Williams 2010, p. 2).

Mindfulness meditation, taught more than 25 centuries ago by the original Buddha, has gained the attention of neuroscientists, who have substantiated that adult brains change both functionally and structurally through meditation training (Hölzel et al. 2011). Mindfulness meditation can be broadly categorized into two distinct but complementary mental

training activities, namely, focused and open awareness meditations (Lutz et al. 2008). Whereas focused meditation trains the mind to stabilize attention on the object of concentration, like the breath or body sensations, open monitoring guides the mind in a nonreactive observation of, and being with, the present-moment experience. Focused and open awareness meditations are essential to developing the mind. Once these skills are learned, mindfulness can be evoked outside of the meditation practice to guide people in responding more skillfully during stressful or emotionally provocative situations (Bishop et al. 2004).

## Mindful Consumption

Mindfulness offers the potential of replacing mindless consumption with mindful consumption. The pivotal benefit of mindfulness is “disengaging individuals from automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behavior patterns” (Brown and Ryan 2003, p. 823), thereby reinforcing the realization that many matters of daily human psychology (attention, thoughts, narratives, feelings, preferences, decisions, behaviors, etc.) are selections unto themselves. Once the consumer realizes he/she has selected these, he/she becomes free to make a different selection.

However, there is reason to believe that it is not enough to maintain general awareness; rather, one has to sustain mindful attention to specific consumption domains in which one wants to change one’s behavior, in order to achieve the desired goals of mindful consumption. For example, Van De Veer et al. (2016) show that mindful attention directed to the body, as opposed to the environment, leads to awareness of satiety cues and adjustment of further food intake accordingly. For consumers to fully benefit from mindfulness, it is vital that they are able to direct and sustain their awareness during consumption. Thus, it is important to clarify the meaning and practice of mindful consumption.

We define mindful consumption as the ongoing practice of paying attention, with acceptance, to internal stimuli (bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts) and external stimuli and their effects on the consumption process. Consistent with the essence of mindfulness, we suggest that mindful consumption is an inquiry-based process that endows consumers with awareness and insight to choose their responses rather than react blindly or habitually.

The specific attributes of mindful consumption can be illustrated with an example. Consider a tired and hungry consumer coming home from a long day of work and seeing a bag of potato chips on his/her kitchen counter. If the consumer is mindless, he/she acts on the hunger (internal stimuli) and consumes the bag of potato chips (external stimuli) without deliberation. In contrast, if the consumer is mindful, instead of immediately giving into the desire to eat chips, he/she is able to observe the bodily sensations associated with hunger, the desire to satiate that hunger with the packet of chips, and any habitual behaviors related to hunger. The consumer can experience the situation with more acceptance by observing hunger as a natural phenomenon, which removes any guilt or self-judgment. The consumer’s ability to focus on bodily sensations with acceptance allows him/her to engage with the situation with more clarity and make a deliberate choice instead of reacting habitually. Through such deliberation, the

consumer may be open to exploring healthier alternatives, like an apple with almond butter, which he/she may find more satisfying. The mindful consumption process does not end with making the food choice. Once the choice is made, the consumer continues to maintain awareness of the effects of eating on his/her bodily sensations to enjoy the experience and stop eating upon satiation. The process eventually ends with the mindful disposal of packaging or food waste. In the next section, we further explain the concepts of attention with acceptance and awareness.

## Attention with Acceptance

In the context of mindful consumption, attention implies directing a wandering mind to focus on external stimuli, including objects, people, and the environment, and on internal stimuli, including bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts related to the current consumption situation. Mindful consumption also entails noticing the effects of the stimuli on the consumption process.

Mindful consumption is not about just paying attention but also how you pay attention. It entails giving full attention to the present-moment experience with an attitude of acceptance, which entails nonjudgment, compassion, and flexibility of mind.

### *Nonjudgment*

When practicing mindfulness, it is important to recognize the judging quality of mind and remind ourselves to observe the present-moment experience, including our judgments, as an impartial witness (Kabat-Zinn 2013). Note that nonjudgment does not mean refusing to see stimuli as favorable or unfavorable; indeed, such behavior would make consumption decisions difficult if not impossible. Rather, nonjudgmental consideration of stimuli entails being deliberate in evaluations and not acting on automatic or unconscious judgments (Brown et al. 2009).

### *Compassion*

Mindfulness is an exploration of current experiences that could include suffering and needs to be undertaken with compassion and nonjudgment for healing and recovery (Kabat-Zinn 2013). Within the consumption context there is growing evidence that self-compassion aids in transforming unhealthy consumption patterns (e.g., Bahl and Milne 2010). Further, greater awareness and acceptance of one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions helps in recognizing and accepting the same in others, and thus the practice of mindfulness entails compassion not only for self but also for others (Rosenberg 2004). We include compassion as an integral attitude with which consumers pay attention to self and others in the mindful consumption process. Like Rosenberg (2004), we assert that for consumers to make choices that are beneficial to all beings, attention needs to be accompanied with compassion toward self and others.

### *Flexibility of Mind*

Mindfulness training also involves attending to the object of attention with an open mind that is willing to consider various perspectives. Indeed, Moore and Malinowski (2009) find that mindfulness meditators outperform nonmeditators in tests of cognitive flexibility. Advocates of mindfulness practices

posit that a mindful individual, much like a “zoom lens” (Brown, Ryan, and Creswell 2007), can fluidly switch between attending to all currently salient stimuli and focusing attention on a particular stimulus or specific details.

## Awareness

Awareness refers to the experience of one’s current sensory and knowledge-based mental phenomena, which cannot be grasped by only conceptual thinking (Kabat-Zinn 2013). The stabilizing of attention with an attitude of acceptance creates the conditions for awareness of inner mind and body (inner-focused awareness) and of the physical, social, and marketing environment (outer-focused awareness). In terms of inner-focused awareness, mindfulness improves consumers’ awareness of body sensations and of their reliance on physiological cues across consumption episodes (Van De Veer et al. 2016). In terms of outer-focused awareness, mindfulness increases access to information, resulting in a wider perspective on experience (Bishop et al. 2004). As such, the practice of mindful consumption should heighten awareness of the marketplace stimuli on consumers’ preferences and experiences, thereby enabling them to make more informed choices.

While our definition of mindful consumption is similar to Sheth et al.’s (2011), we make the process explicit for making choices that are consistent with consumers’ values and preferences. As a point of distinction, we focus on consumers’ attention to their bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions with the attitude of acceptance as an ongoing process of inquiry to make choices that are based on one’s direct experience of needs, values, and insight. Because many cognitive processes and motivations guiding consumer behavior lie below the threshold of consciousness (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), consumers’ increased awareness—in particular, of their bodily sensations—can guide them toward mindful choices that are not directed by unconscious pursuits of pleasure and avoidance of pain. Herein lies the transformative potential of mindful consumption.

## Transformative Potential of Mindful Consumption

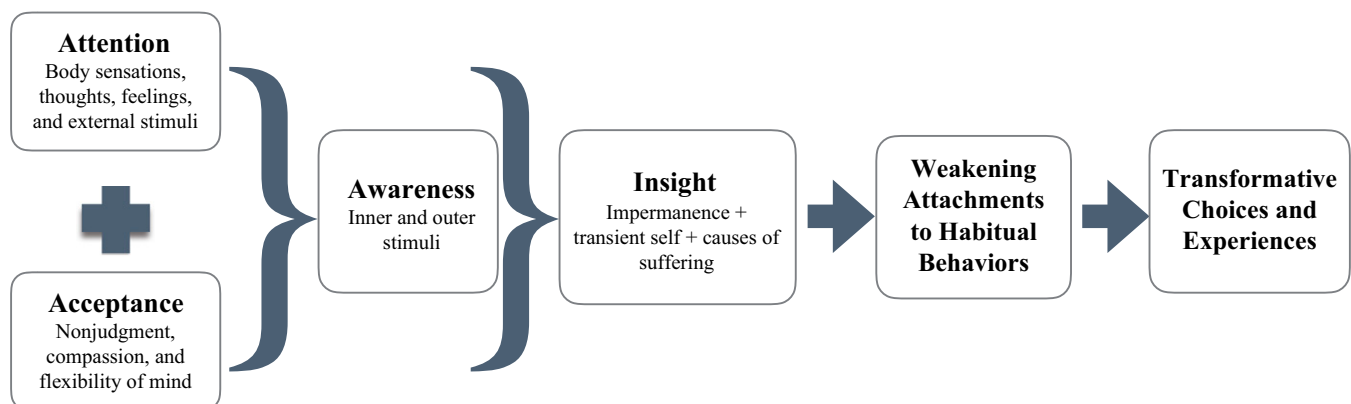
The transformative potential of mindful consumption is depicted in Figure 1. Consumers can learn to attend to internal and external stimuli, and the effects of these stimuli on the consumption process, with the attitude of nonjudgment, compassion, and flexibility, which facilitates enhanced awareness. Sustaining this quality of enhanced awareness creates the conditions for insight into life’s primary conditions—notably, suffering and its sources—which leads to a reduction in mental propagation of problems and attachments and thus makes possible a transformation of the self (Grabovac 2015). Sustained awareness of inner and outer stimuli facilitates insights into the true nature of consumption reality, including seeing the changing and transient nature of all phenomena (including the self). This form of clearer seeing can free consumers from the futility of seeking happiness in experiences that are ephemeral in nature. It can weaken consumers’ attachments to habitual and conditioned behaviors that evoke positive emotions at the time of consumption but are detrimental to their well-being in the long run. This widened and more sensitized perspective can lead to transformative choices and experiences.

In Table 1, we detail mindful practices that consumers can engage in to potentially mitigate or avert the deleterious outcomes of mindless consumption within three domains of well-being: consumer, societal, and environmental. The outcomes of mindful consumption practices within each domain are supported by empirical research findings. We outline opportunities for future research in each area given the promise of prior results.

## Consumer Well-Being

The practice of mindful consumption by consumers has important implications for a diverse set of domains, including health and addiction, family matters, financial well-being, and materialism (see Table 1). In the health and addiction

**Figure 1. The Transformative Potential of Mindful Consumption**



Notes: Domains of transformation: consumer well-being (health and addiction, family matters, financial well-being, and materialism), societal well-being (multiculturalism, education, and political engagement), and environmental well-being (sustainability and waste).

Table 1. The Transformative Potential of Mindful Consumption

Domain	Mindful Consumption Practice	Transformative Outcomes	Questions for Future Research
<b>Consumer Well-Being</b> Health and addiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of triggers of unhealthy behavior</li> <li>• Attention to bodily sensations and emotions aroused by consumption objects</li> <li>• Acceptance and compassion toward self and openness to feedback and behavioral change</li> <li>• Understanding of the impermanence of cravings separate from the self</li> </ul>	<p>Increased ability to weaken detrimental habits and enhance experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness-based smoking cessation program showed success rates nearly five times higher than another leading treatment program (Brewer et al. 2011).</li> <li>• Mindfulness is associated with lower rates of overeating (Bahl et al. 2013);</li> <li>• Mindful consumers eat slower, enjoy food more (Hong, Lishner, and Han 2014), attend more to satiety cues (Van De Veer, Van Herpen, and Van Trijp 2016).</li> <li>• Eating disorders result from disruptions of basic psychological needs (Ryan, Deci, and Grolnick 1995); mindfulness may help alleviate these conditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can awareness and insights into impermanence of desire and cravings support mindful consumption in other areas of health and addiction-like unhealthy eating behavior, Internet additions, and substance abuse?</li> <li>• What are the most effective ways to enhance mindful consumption across different age groups and consumer segments?</li> <li>• What role can technologies like apps and online communities play in supporting mindful consumption?</li> </ul>
<b>Family matters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to needs of family members in relationship to self</li> <li>• Acceptance of self and others</li> <li>• Engagement of family members with full attention and an attitude of curiosity, nonjudgment, and compassion</li> <li>• Awareness of triggers and unhealthy pattern of relationships</li> <li>• Replacement of reactivity with curiosity, compassion, and openness to different perspectives</li> </ul>	<p>Enhanced quality of time and experience with family; increased ability to make better decisions for well-being of family members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindful parenting programs significantly improve family functioning and parenting satisfaction (Duncan, Coatsworth, and Greenberg 2009).</li> <li>• Parents display improvements in parental attention, emotional awareness, and nonjudgmental receptivity to their children's articulation of thoughts and displays of emotion, as well as greater ability to regulate reactivity to child behavior (Coatsworth et al. 2010).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the role of mindfulness training in increasing empathy and compassion regarding the needs of others?</li> <li>• Can mindfulness training improve parent-child relationships?</li> <li>• What impact does mindful parenting have on behavioral problems and well-being among children?</li> <li>• What impact does mindful consumption have on family health and well-being?</li> </ul>
<b>Financial well-being</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to body sensations and emotional response to financial decisions</li> <li>• Accept resource availability and spending patterns</li> <li>• Awareness of underlying motives and triggers to spend money or value material possessions in contrast to the transitory nature of the self</li> </ul>	<p>Increased ability to make skillful financial decisions that are aligned with deeper values and facilitate well-being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness reduces focus on past and future financial contexts, which leads to less negative emotion; lowered negativity facilitates the ability to let go of sunk costs (Hafenbrack, Kimias, and Barsade 2014).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can mindfulness training be directed to reducing biases that lead to poor financial decisions?</li> <li>• To what extent are stress, lack of present focus, and negative emotions linked to financial decision processes moderated by mindfulness?</li> </ul>

Table 1. Continued

Domain	Mindful Consumption Practice	Transformative Outcomes	Questions for Future Research
Materialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to self-talk and body sensations triggered in materialistic context</li> <li>• Acceptance of present experience of self that is not reliant on material goods for identity maintenance</li> <li>• Awareness of constructed sense of identity based on material goods</li> <li>• Understanding of the impermanent nature of self and emotions, which weakens the attachment to material pursuits needed to gain approval from self or others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased capacity to manage societal pressures to spend money or value possessions and greater ability to find ways to satisfy psychological needs at a deeper level:</li> <li>• Mindfulness is associated with higher self-esteem, greater satisfaction with own behavior, and lower likelihood of being motivated by approval motives. Seeing the self as a construction of thoughts rather than an object to be evaluated should lead to less desire to seek approval from self or others (Brown and Ryan 2003).</li> <li>• Mindful consumers are less susceptible to marketing tactics (Pollock et al. 1998).</li> <li>• Mindful consumers are more likely to feel that they have enough financial wealth (Brown et al. 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do mindful consumption practices affect the relationship between self-concept and dependency on material goods?</li> <li>• What is the impact of mindful consumption on materialism and the processing of messages promoting materialism?</li> <li>• How is mindful consumption related to the pursuit of intrinsic motives?</li> <li>• What are the longitudinal effects of mindful consumption training in children on their materialistic pursuits and identities as adolescents?</li> </ul>
<b>Societal Well-Being</b> Multiculturalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to body sensations, emotions, and thoughts evoked by prejudices and stereotypes prior to behavior</li> <li>• Awareness of one's and others' biases</li> <li>• Compassion and openness toward one's biases about other groups and perspectives</li> <li>• Acceptance of different worldviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heightened ability to practice openness and tolerance toward other groups and perspectives:</li> <li>• Mindfulness meditation creates a state of mindfulness, which helps participants decrease automatically activated racially biased associations.</li> <li>• Mindfulness also lowers racial bias in a test of implicit bias (Lueke and Gibson 2015).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the long-term impact of mindfulness on prejudice reduction and acceptance of diversity?</li> <li>• How can mindfulness empower consumers to exercise economic, social, and cultural rights in the marketplace?</li> <li>• Can mindfulness overcome the inertia and resistance to consumer diversity initiatives?</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to distracted thoughts and irritations in classroom settings</li> <li>• Acceptance of social and emotional frustrations from learning new concepts and interacting with educators and classmates</li> <li>• Awareness of resistance to challenging concepts and choice to stay open to learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced resilience and confidence in the face of problem-solving, understanding challenging concepts, time management, and social and emotional tensions:</li> <li>• Mindfulness helps individuals engage with obstacles, regulate emotion during stress, and reduce negative thoughts and emotions (Barner and Barner 2011).</li> <li>• Attention and cognitive flexibility are positively associated with mindfulness meditation. Meditators perform significantly better than nonmeditators on tests of cognitive flexibility (Moore and Malinowski 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a link between mindfulness and educational outcomes and quality of life, demonstrated by longitudinal studies?</li> <li>• What is the impact of mindfulness on educational performance, classroom conduct, and teacher/peer interaction?</li> <li>• What is the impact of mindfulness on students' engagement and satisfaction with quality of academic experience?</li> </ul>

Table 1. Continued

Domain	Mindful Consumption Practice	Transformative Outcomes	Questions for Future Research
Political engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to bodily sensations and reactive thoughts and biases</li> <li>• Openness to diverse perspectives</li> <li>• Awareness of self and political choices in alignment with self and values</li> </ul>	<p>Greater ability to process candidate and campaign information and act on political leanings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals with higher trait mindfulness display higher psychological flexibility and potential for taking action (Silberstein et al. 2012).</li> <li>• Individuals engaged in spurring political change use mindfulness practices to prevent burnout (Gorski 2015).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a link between mindfulness programs and individual consumer political engagement?</li> <li>• What is the role of mindfulness training in facilitating more optimal political decisions?</li> <li>• How does mindfulness affect biases and increase openness to opposing viewpoints?</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental Well-Being</b> Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts evoked by being in nature</li> <li>• Awareness of the beneficial effects of the environment on oneself and the way one's behavior affects the environment</li> <li>• Awareness of the short-lived impact of material consumption on happiness</li> <li>• Openness to lifestyle changes and sustainability innovations</li> </ul>	<p>Greater ability to learn about, make, and sustain lifestyle changes that promote sustainability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindful individuals are more likely to engage in sustainable behavior (Ameel, Manning, and Scott 2009).</li> <li>• Mindfulness helps facilitate compatibility between happiness and ecologically responsible behavior (Brown and Kasser 2005; Jacob, Jovic, and Brinkerhoff 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the relationship between mindfulness and feelings of connection to the natural world?</li> <li>• What is the relative effectiveness of mindfulness-based bottom-up and top-down approaches of legislation and marketing communications to promote sustainability?</li> <li>• What is the impact of mindful consumption training and lifestyle alignment on sustainability?</li> </ul>
Waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to emotions, thoughts, and body sensation during disposal</li> <li>• Awareness of deeper connection to the value of existing resources</li> <li>• Clear vision of one's wasteful practices</li> <li>• Openness to behavioral changes and innovations that reduce waste</li> </ul>	<p>Greater ability to make and sustain lifestyle changes that decrease waste: reducing, reusing, recycling, upcycling, sharing, and repairing products:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindful consumers are more likely to consider information about wastefulness (e.g., recyclability) when making consumption decisions (Brown and Kasser 2005).</li> <li>• Mindfulness is associated with greater savoring (Beaumont 2011); consumers with slower consumption savor at slower rates (Galak, Kruger, and Loewenstein 2013). This helps sustain happiness with products and reduce disposal behavior.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the relationship between mindful consumption, product maintenance, duration, and disposal decisions?</li> <li>• What are the effects of mindful consumption on novel approaches to reusing, repairing, or upcycling products?</li> <li>• Are mindful consumers more open to participating in the sharing economy?</li> </ul>

domain, a smoker, for example, can effectively use mindful consumption practices to cease smoking. Mindfulness-based cessation programs have been shown to be up to five times more effective than traditional smoking cessation programs (Brewer et al. 2011). People in this type of program learn to maintain attention on their immediate experience with an attitude of acceptance, which gives them an objective experience of what the smoking cravings feel like in their bodies. People learn from their embodied experience that cravings are physical sensations that, if not acted upon, will subside. By teaching individuals to observe even uncomfortable body and mind states, mindfulness training fosters the replacement of habitual and reactive behaviors with enhanced self-regulation (Brewer et al. 2011). Because other conditions such as eating disorders, gambling, Internet addictions, and drug abuse share common psychological processes with tobacco addiction, mindfulness may help alleviate them as well (Ryan, Deci, and Grolnick 1995).

Furthermore, mindfulness helps consumers slow down and enjoy time-based experiences like eating (Hong, Lishner, and Han 2014), interpersonal interactions such as conversations (Haas and Langer 2014), and other consumption contexts such as playing video games (Galak, Kruger, and Loewenstein 2013). The increased enjoyment of experience—even of routine behaviors—enhances the quality of time elapsed and can add depth as well as flow to consumer experiences.

In addition, mindful practices may guide consumers to be more accountable to themselves, particularly in terms of using their values more readily to drive decision making that enriches themselves and their families more thoroughly (see Brown and Ryan 2003). Huber et al. (1997) have elaborated the advantages of value-directed choices, but the sources for such choices are not well known or empirically demonstrated. Mindful consumption practices could play an important role therein. Table 1 elaborates how consumers can engage in mindful consumption practices in the realms of family welfare, financial well-being, and materialism and presents an agenda for future research in these areas.

### Societal Well-Being

Mindful consumption practices can also support consumer choices and experiences that affect societal well-being. Within the multiculturalism domain under societal well-being, research has shown that most consumers hold prejudices and biases as a result of exposure to environmental stimuli, which perpetuate stereotypes (Greenwald and Banaji 1995). Because these are sensitive topics and the thoughts often occur outside of awareness, consumers are either unaware or unwilling to admit that they hold these unsavory viewpoints. The mindful consumption practices of nonjudgmental attention to positive or negative sensations that arise when one is exposed to individuals of various genders, races, religions, sexualities, ages, and so on, can alert consumers to their internal biases. There is evidence that even a brief mindful intervention can increase state mindfulness and lower implicit racial and age biases (Lueke and Gibson 2015). Furthermore, mindfulness training enhances consumers' ability to hold these biases without self-criticism or guilt, which can then support attitudes that are less defensive and more open to changing biased perceptions.

Mindfulness enhances awareness of automatic reactions and decreases the influence of those reactions on behavior in the context of multiculturalism. These benefits hold significant promise for consumption behaviors in our increasingly multicultural society. These include, for example, overcoming inertia and resistance to consumer diversity initiatives (Brumbaugh and Grier 2013) and bringing awareness to and overcoming “marketplace practices that impede consumers from exercising their universal economic, social, and cultural rights” (Demangeot et al. 2013, p. 157). Mindful consumption training can be incorporated into the multi-stakeholder framework proposed by Demangeot et al. (2013) to enhance resilience of vulnerable consumers to fully participate in multicultural markets, while cultivating broader awareness and compassion among all stakeholders to develop intercultural competence. It may also help in other societal domains of education and political engagement, which are explored in Table 1.

### Environmental Well-Being

Mindful consumption also has the capacity to improve the well-being of the environment. For instance, being aware of one's pleasant sensations when in nature (e.g., Berman, Jonides, and Kaplan 2008; Tyrväinen et al. 2014) may help consumers “fall back in love” with nature and heighten their commitment to protecting the natural world. Brown and Kasser (2005) show that mindful consumers are more likely to consider the ecological facets of a product (e.g., recyclability) when making consumption decisions, in support of the idea that mindful consumers may care more about the effects of their behavior on the environment. Using mindfulness to refuel interest in the planet from the bottom up (i.e., a grassroots approach to motivating change, as opposed to policy-driven change) may help increase sustainability without extensive need for expensive policy interventions.

It can also be argued that many of the unsustainable and wasteful behaviors in which consumers engage are a result of habit. If mindfulness training can reduce the extent to which behaviors are driven by automaticity, as it does with implicit reactions to race and age (as mentioned in the previous section), then mindful consumption may have the ability to reduce consumer engagement in repetitive, environmentally harmful behaviors like mindless waste of resources. Furthermore, changing one's behaviors requires a mind that is open to new ways of living, and it takes energy, cognitive, and temporal resources to enact the change. Research has shown that mindfulness increases psychological flexibility and openness to action (Silberstein et al. 2012), suggesting that mindful consumption can increase openness to new and sometimes radical ideas of how to live in harmony with the planet. And, because mindful consumers tend to engage in more savoring (Beaumont 2011) and slower consumption that prolongs their enjoyment of products (Galak, Kruger, and Loewenstein 2013), mindfulness may decrease overconsumption and waste from disposal by helping consumers stay happy with what they have for longer periods of time. An agenda for future research related to the impact of mindful consumption on sustainability and waste is elaborated in Table 1.



## Challenges to Achieving the Transformative Potential of Mindful Consumption

A big challenge to achieving the transformative potential of mindful consumption is consumers' scarcity of time and resources to devote to mindfulness training. Practicing mindfulness can be effortful in the initial stages, before it becomes a positive routine that progresses into becoming a trait mindfulness, which requires less effort to sustain. To cultivate the habit of mindful consumption, it is important for consumers to remember to practice mindfulness in different consumption contexts even if it feels effortful initially.

Another challenge confronting mindfulness is the lack of understanding and several misperceptions about mindfulness practices by the public. Given that mindfulness is rooted in Eastern philosophy and Buddhism, it can be opposed for cultural, religious, and spiritual reasons. For example, there have been incidents of parents complaining about mindfulness being taught in public schools because of the subject's roots in Eastern religions (Gregoire 2013). Common misperceptions of mindfulness as religious doctrine or ritual need to be addressed through education and training. Over time, providing robust and rigorous scientific evidence that demonstrates long-term benefits of mindfulness could also help mitigate concerns regarding its origins.

The benefits of mindful consumption may also be limited by the phenomenon of self-licensing. It is possible that consumers might justify unmindful behaviors because they have been mindful in other consumption domains. Mindfulness self-licensing follows from the licensing concept in social psychology and consumer research—particularly from moral self-licensing (Khan and Dhar 2007). For example, a consumer who is practicing mindfulness to support healthier eating choices may feel justified indulging in frivolous shopping.

Finally, the term “McMindfulness,” used by some commentators to criticize mindfulness practice, is an artifact of decontextualizing mindfulness from its roots in compassion and from its mission to reduce suffering and illuminate the transient nature of the self and all else. In the form currently adopted by many large organizations, mindfulness is being promoted as an ethically neutral technique for primarily enhancing personal well-being and work performance (Gelles 2015). Individualistic approaches to mindfulness directed toward quick relief and efficiencies at work may be good for self-advancement, but they ignore the causes of suffering at the individual and collective levels. In the absence of directing mindful attention with compassion to the causes and consequences of our consumption choices regarding our personal, societal, and environmental well-being, we are likely to remain stuck in mindless patterns that perpetuate an irresponsible and unhealthy consumption culture. The transformative potential of mindful consumption lies in consumers' engaging in the different domains and stages of consumption with awareness and insight. This requires a fundamental shift in how we act as consumers.

### Consumer Implications

In a fast-paced world, mindful consumption can help consumers stay in touch with the most important priorities in their lives and then help them self-regulate to make choices based on

those priorities. To be proficient in the mindful consumption practices outlined in Table 1, it behooves consumers to develop basic mindfulness skills of attention, awareness, and acceptance by getting formal training, in groups or individually. In the absence of mindfulness training focusing on consumption contexts, consumers may benefit from programs like mindfulness-based stress reduction, taught by trained teachers. We are starting to see programs dedicated to mindful eating and overcoming addictions like smoking, but there is an opportunity to develop research-based programs that foster skills in consumers to apply mindfulness to consumption activities in different domains of well-being.

Beyond the basic practice and understanding of mindfulness, consumers need support in applying mindfulness to consumption contexts and making it part of their lifestyles, for which there is a growing array of apps and community support to choose from. For busy consumers, there are many online programs and apps that can accommodate their lifestyles. Apps like Simple Habit and Headspace offer systematic ways for consumers to develop mindfulness skills in different domains. Apps like Insight Timer offer some mindfulness guidance but focus more on supporting mindfulness practitioners with tools like timers, journaling, and community. Support groups like Weight Watchers promote accountability and therapeutic benefits to their members in their journey of weight loss (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). Similarly, consumers can seek out local and online communities that hold them accountable and support them in practicing mindful consumption.

Like exercise, consumers need to practice mindfulness to reap its benefits. However, to achieve the transformative potential of mindfulness for societal and environmental well-being, the focus should not be solely at the individual level. It should also involve societal institutions and policies to make mindful consumption accessible to consumers and other key stakeholders.

### Policy Implications

Marketing scholars are recognizing the need to “reinvent marketing” (Kotler 2011) and expand the marketing paradigm to address systemic challenges that limit the well-being of diverse populations, the environment, and society at large (Hill and Martin 2014). Societal trends are also moving toward more conscious approaches to consumption. For example, one outcome of the 2008 financial meltdown is that it has driven a value shift for consumers whereby they are more reflective about their consumption (Kotler 2011, p. 134). Mindful consumption offers a novel and innovative approach to developing more effective ways to manage consumer demand for sustainable and responsible consumption (Kotler 2011; Sheth et al. 2011). We build on the growing evidence base, as well as practical market instantiations, to suggest three potential channels—promotion, teaching, and research—that organizations and institutions can utilize to support consumers' efforts in practicing mindful consumption.

### Promote Mindfulness (Endorse and Remind About Mindfulness)

Institutional endorsement of mindfulness would help to integrate the approach into society—including the marketplace—and contribute to a broader influence on consumption choices

and behaviors. Given the continual nature of consumption choices, promotion could involve ongoing reminders from important marketplace institutions. In a nutshell, we need to market mindfulness. Organizations and institutions can consider how best to promote it and develop products and programs that support it. In addition, it is important to consider the costs, both monetary and nonmonetary, of consumers' practice of mindfulness and to take steps to ensure broad, equitable access to mindfulness programs throughout the population.

A simple but fundamental role that an organization could take to encourage mindful consumption is to endorse the idea that making efforts toward a mindful lifestyle is a worthy goal for the organization's key stakeholders (e.g., members, customers, clients, constituents). To be maximally effective, this endorsement should be promoted drawing on scientific research that indicates the benefits of mindful consumption. The extent of mindfulness research has been rapidly increasing, with recent studies showing the benefits of mindfulness in schools (e.g., Zenner et al. 2014) as well as in work contexts (e.g., Dane and Brummel 2013). At a societal level, it would be helpful for a broad spectrum of governmental agencies and organizations to communicate these research findings to consumers.

There are numerous academics, practitioners, and policy actors across sectors who develop and implement initiatives designed to influence consumption behaviors that impact society. Each of the sectors, both individually and through collaborative efforts, could help endorse mindfulness to establish the needed support for consumers. For example, the U.S. Department of Education and local school boards could embed policies that consider the link between mindfulness and attention into curricular considerations. This could result in curricula that link mindfulness to an understanding of financial, economic, and social decisions, which have many consumption-related components. For instance, the current trend toward teaching financial literacy to high school and college students could benefit from including mindful consumption practices like the ones highlighted in Table 1.

Consumers often need support to apply attention and acceptance to consumption activities, so it is important that institutional endorsement of mindfulness be backed up by policies that provide support for a mindful lifestyle. Thus, organizations could establish quiet rooms for meditation in the workplace and invite employees, customers, and clients to use these facilities. At present, several national and international airports have meditation and yoga rooms to allow consumers to stop and practice. The increase has been attributed to the stressful nature of airport travel (White 2015). The development of "third spaces," where mindfulness can become part of the culture, may be an important endeavor for government and commercial entities.

The promotion and support of mindful consumption and spaces could also be used to combat the allure of unhealthy food consumption. For example, some schools promote mindful eating with a present-moment and nonjudgmental focus on body sensations and self-talk to help students counter not only overeating and emotional eating but also body image dissatisfaction, as well as navigate social and emotional changes associated with adolescence (Fraga 2016). Similarly, dining areas could be designed to encourage

employees to disengage from their electronic devices so as to eat more mindfully. Also, employees could be encouraged to take periodic breaks in order to engage in activities such as mindful walking outdoors to reduce stress and reconnect with nature.

New technologies may provide especially fruitful approaches. For example, the National Center for PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder), part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, in partnership with the Department of Defense's National Center for Telehealth and Technology, has developed a free mindfulness coach application, downloadable from iTunes. This software provides education about mindfulness, including exercises for practice, strategies for overcoming challenges, and reminders to support the practice (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2015).

Interventions using social marketing techniques and behavioral decision theory are well suited to remind and motivate consumers to engage in more deliberate consumption. For example, social marketing frameworks emphasize strategies such as pledges and recognition that could be used to increase the nonmonetary benefits of mindful practices. For example, the mindfulness app Insight Timer acknowledges users' regular practice of meditation by rewarding them with a star each time a milestone is reached. Similarly, behavioral decision theory strategies can prompt mindful consumption through environmental "nudges." Considering ways to creatively disseminate information to promote mindful consumption and embedding these notions into popular culture is an important approach. For example, Buick ran a digital campaign encouraging drivers to get off their smartphones and be "in the moment" with the entertaining use of a YouTube video and the social networking site Tumblr.<sup>1</sup> The power of such messaging, however, would be greater if instead of being an isolated campaign, the messaging were part of the brand's authentic adoption of mindful consumption. Patagonia is a leading example of a company that has embraced the mindful approach to consumption by encouraging consumers to reflect before shopping, in addition to its offering repair, reuse, and recycle options for its products. Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, personally embraces and promotes mindful consumption, which entails questioning the premise of our materialistic culture and the motivations underlying our purchasing habits (Gelles 2015).

## Teach Mindfulness

It would be helpful for organizational promotion of mindfulness to be backed up by effective teaching and training of self-reflective practices that foster mindful consumption across different domains of well-being. For example, there is growing evidence of the impact of mindfulness-based interventions in workplaces, including decreased perceived stress and burnout rates as well as increased resiliency, vigor, and sleep quality (Schultz et al. 2015). These benefits are particularly important because highly stressed individuals are at greater risk for health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, depression, and anxiety. Given the complexity and long-term nature of many chronic conditions, health is undoubtedly

<sup>1</sup>See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfUD0WhE264&feature%1F=youtu.be> and <http://getinthemoment.tumblr.com>.

an important consumption context that can be positively enhanced by teaching mindful consumption.

Educational institutions have a particularly great potential in the teaching of mindful consumption. Children and youth often face multiple stressors and mental health challenges, which have a significant negative impact on their educational performance and knowledge attainment (Mendelson et al. 2010). Likewise, teachers face unique stressors that challenge their ability to teach effectively (Meiklejohn et al. 2012). Mindfulness-based interventions have been implemented, evaluated, and researched within the education system in order to improve not only the way educators and students deal with stressful situations but also to help teachers and students develop the skills needed to enhance resiliency and increase attentional capacities (Zenner et al. 2014). For example, organizations such as the Garrison Institute, Mindfulness in Education Network, and the Association for Mindfulness in Education have researched and promoted age-appropriate mindfulness curricula (Meiklejohn et al. 2012). The new Contemplative Sciences Center at the University of Virginia is a broad, cross-disciplinary effort to enhance teaching, research, and community outreach with respect to mindfulness.

Most of these diverse educational efforts have not considered in depth the specific application of mindfulness practices within consumption contexts for consumer, societal, and environmental well-being. Ideas regarding body awareness and mindful management of emotions in relation to marketplace interactions could be incorporated into educational curricula as early as elementary school. Basic mindfulness concepts and practices such as mindful yoga could very naturally be incorporated into high-school health and physical education courses, along with discussions about healthful consumption. Consumption also touches broader areas of consumer well-being in the domains of education, housing, neighborhoods and related amenities, and social relationships. Given the emerging evidence of mindfulness benefits in reducing racial biases, college campuses and communities involved in controversies in multicultural settings (e.g., agitated racial climate on college campuses; cross-cultural tensions related to gentrification) might benefit from offering mindfulness trainings to their constituencies. Such training may assist educational institutions and local governments in the development of empathy and the ability to see multiple perspectives among diverse constituents. More effective emotional regulation may help consumers to reduce tension and conflict, contributing to better social relationships and community building. Similarly, people's connection with nature and sustainable consumption could be enhanced by developing mindfulness programs in nature that involve mindful walking and slowing down to deepen consumers' experience of nature's benefits on their personal well-being while expanding awareness of the consequences of their consumption behaviors on nature. The capacity and infrastructure to support populationwide dissemination, teaching, and integration of mindfulness across consumption domains needs to be developed by drawing on research in this area.

### Facilitate Research in Mindful Consumption

Because mindfulness research is important for the effective promotion and teaching of mindful consumption, it is crucial

that organizations also consider ways to facilitate such research. Government organizations, companies, nonprofits, and funding organizations could offer monetary grants to support mindfulness research in different consumption contexts. Organizations that promote or teach mindfulness could take steps to evaluate the effectiveness of mindful consumption practices. And all organizations could adopt an attitude of cooperation that is essential for enabling researchers, from either within or outside the organization, to carry out systematic study of the needs for and consequences of the various types of mindfulness practices and programs. For a broader impact that would directly affect mindful consumption, government agencies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, could emphasize mindful consumption as they develop prevention-oriented interventions related to the consumption of food, alcohol, tobacco, and prescription medicines. Table 1 offers suggestions for future research on how mindfulness can contribute to consumer, societal, and environmental well-being.

## Conclusion

Today, everyone understands that physical exercise is good for health. But it was not so long ago, in the 1960s, that Dr. Jerry Morris, who first gathered scientific evidence for the health benefits of exercise, was considered crazy for his advocacy of regular 20-minute jogs. We believe that mindfulness—with its many benefits being increasingly corroborated through an array of scholarly approaches—is reaching a tipping point of being accepted, like physical exercise, as an essential element of well-being. Key stakeholders can cultivate this inspiring opportunity by promoting, teaching, and researching mindful consumption to support not only personal but also societal and environmental welfare. In fact, if we are looking for a paradigm shift toward a more mindful consumption culture, it behooves all change agents—academics, marketing practitioners, consumers, and policy makers—to develop their own proficiency for mindfulness to equip themselves for more successfully confronting, with lucidity and compassion, the complex and imposing problems of today's world.

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