



Research Review

Buddhist psychology: Selected insights, benefits, and research agenda for consumer psychology

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Abstract

Consumer psychology has been overly reliant on a small set of paradigms. As a result, the field appears less prepared than it could aspire to be for contributing new knowledge on, and relief from, our hyper-consumption era. Accordingly, I explore Buddhist psychology by drawing from its foundational framework known as the Three Marks of Existence (suffering, impermanence, and no-self) to introduce an Eastern theory of mind and provide alternative guidance on research for consumer well-being. The TME framework offers an opportunity to re-think the priorities, nature, and processes of the comparing and judging consumer mind (e.g., expectations, preferences, satisfaction); the attaching and depending consumer mind (e.g., ownership, materialism, excessive behaviors); and the deciding, choosing, and regulating consumer mind (marketplace morality, cognitive biases, values-based choice, and free will). From these considerations I generate research questions and summarizing propositions for future research. The closing discussion synthesizes the contributions and limitations, including extra opportunities for integrating Buddhist and consumer psychologies. © 2016 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Buddhist psychology; Well-being; Satisfaction; Ownership; Materialism; Choice

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Introduction

*Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And time for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

*For I have known them all already, known them all—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
(Excerpts from T. S. Eliot [1915], “The Love Song of J.
Alfred Prufrock”)*

Eliot’s century-old portrayal of self-absorption, cognitive labyrinths, and ritualized consumption is both haunting and prescient, as we now witness our own era being thoroughly

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structured and impelled by activities of acquiring, consuming, and disposing. Each day in the developed world consumers are tracked and propositioned by businesses non-stop, both online and off-line; confronted with thousands of choices, some significant and many trivial, much of which challenges and tires them; and compelled by socioeconomic and cultural obligations to keep on searching, buying, owning, and discarding (Mick, Broniarczyk, & Haidt, 2004; Schor & Holt, 2000; Schwartz, 2004; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). According to numerous analysts, this globally-cascading ideology of marketplace gameship, vigorous consumption, and boundless economic growth is harmful to physical, psychological, societal, and ecological health (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Daly, 1998; De Graaf, Wann, & Naylor, 2005; Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004). It is no surprise then that the era has been variously characterized as one of skepticism (Wilson, 1993), paradox (Schwartz, 2004), the illusion of choice (Schmookler, 1993), exhaustion (Brown, 1995), and trauma (Emmons, 1999).

Whither consumer psychology? According to Pham's (2013) critique, it has evolved into an almost exclusive reliance on three paradigms: cognitive psychology, social psychology, and behavioral decision theory. Together these have produced valuable insights on consumer memory, preferences, attitudes, and choice, among other topics. However, being so rooted in only three mainstream social science paradigms, consumer psychology may be less prepared to contribute important knowledge on, and relief from, the exigent issues of our era than the field might aspire to. There is a lingering and enlarging need—for theoretical, substantive, and normative objectives—to seriously consider alternative approaches.

The one I introduce and explore in this paper is Buddhist psychology (Cayton, 2012; De Silva, 1979; Goleman, 1981; Kalupahana, 1987; Olendzki, 2003). It derives from historical Buddhism, which is considered the most psychological among spiritual traditions (Smith, 1991). After originating in India during the fifth century BCE, Buddhism spread throughout Asia. It eventually reached the West just over a century ago (see works by T. W. & C. A. Rhys Davids), and it elicited in succeeding decades strong interest among psychoanalytical, Gestalt, and humanistic psychologists (Mikulas, 2007).¹ Over time the Buddhism-oriented literature has elaborated profound insights about reality and consciousness through its concepts, principles, and contemplative practices, yielding a unique focus on well-being that is now being progressively quarried, corroborated, and extended by social science, educational

research, neuroscience, and medicine (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Cayton, 2012; Chambers, Barbara Lo, & Allen, 2008; Davidson et al., 2012; Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Holzel et al., 2011; Sahdra, Shaver, & Brown, 2010; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013). These developments reflect what several Buddhist writers have espoused as a contemporary Westernized version of Buddhism (Batchelor, 2015; Dalai Lama, 2011; Loy, 2015), providing the collaborative groundwork for a new mind science (Dalai Lama, Benson, Thurman, Gardner, & Goleman, 1999; Davidson & Begley, 2012; deCharms, 1998; Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Rosch, 1997), at an apropos time when consumer psychologists have been encouraged to dwell more on theories of the consumer mind (Baumeister, Sparks, Stillman, & Vohs, 2008).

A few consumer researchers have previously drawn on Buddhism. Gould (1991a), a pioneer in this area, wrote an essay on the Tibetan Wheel of Life that explains, for example, how the control of desires invokes calm vital energy and positive consumer behaviors, such as maintaining comfort and achieving inner growth (see also Gould, 1991b). In quantitative empirical work, Kopalle, Lehmann, and Farley (2010) focused on the Buddhist concept of *karma*, which emphasizes intention and accountability for one's behaviors. Their study found that a stronger belief in *karma* leads to higher expectations surrounding a company's product performances, which can then impact the level to which consumers are satisfied or not with a particular product or service experience. Also, Pace (2013) recently showed that people committed to Buddhism exhibit a lower materialism value due, in part, to certain ethical qualities associated with Buddhism, such as compassion and sympathetic joy. Looking across these works, and a few others (e.g., Wattanasuwan & Elliott, 1999), it is apparent that Buddhism has afforded several new insights on consumer behavior. As a group, however, these works have been eclectic, intermittent, and unconnected, leading Buddhist psychology to be mostly overlooked by consumer psychologists and unapplied in a more systematic manner.

Observing from the other direction, Buddhist writers have occasionally focused on consumption. Among the earliest is Schumacher's (1973/1989) treatise on the economics of voluntary simplicity. Since then there have been books, for example, addressing capitalism and money (Loy, 2008), in addition to edited volumes on consumerism (Badiner, 2002) and on specific impulses and motivations such as desire and greed (Kaza, 2005). Many of these are thought-provoking. Unfortunately, they are also consistently untethered to prior theory or findings on consumer behavior. This too may explain why Buddhist psychology has had little bearing so far on consumer psychology.

In light of Buddhism's long history, its voluminous literature and special terminology, and its present status as terra incognita among consumer psychologists, this paper is unavoidably suggestive and illustrative, rather than definitive and comprehensive. Thorough orientations to Buddhism and its psychology can be found in Aronson (2004), Brazier (2003), De Silva (1979), Garfield (2015), Harris (1998), and Kalupahana (1987), among others. Spurred by Pham's (2013) concerns, I seek to expand consumer psychology's paradigms, particularly as to how Buddhist psychology can be utilized to address aspects of

¹ There is debate on whether Buddhism is a religion, philosophy, psychology, or combination thereof. For example, since the original Buddha made no pronouncements about the existence of God(s), the possibility of a non-theistic or even atheistic Buddhism (e.g., Batchelor, 1997, 2011) is quite unlike Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Moreover, Buddhism did not become religion-like until well after the Buddha's death, with centuries of followers laying over numerous new beliefs and rituals as Buddhism grew and migrated (Snelling, 1991). Hence, this paper leaves aside whether, based on its origins, Buddhism is a religion (see instead Mathras, Cohen, Mandel, & Mick, 2016). Following Brazier (2003), Cayton (2012), De Silva (1979), Goleman (1981), Grabovac, Lau, & Willett (2011), Kalupahana (1987), Olendzki (2003), and others, I treat Buddhism as a psychology that is highly germane to consumer behavior and research in our present era.

suffering and the challenges to well-being engendered by today's consumer society.

I strive to exemplify the merits of Buddhist psychology by focusing on one of its most basic frameworks, namely, the Three Marks of Existence (TME). The TME framework is comprised of interlocking tenets about suffering, impermanence, and no-self, which mutually incorporate the practice of mindfulness and cultivate the virtues of equanimity and moderation (Cayton, 2012; Dalai Lama & Chodron, 2014; Garfield, 2015; Grabovac et al., 2011; Harris, 1998; Rosch, 2007, 2013). I draw out the implications of the framework for consumer well-being by re-imagining, re-theorizing, and re-prioritizing the nature and role of key consumption topics such as judgments, satisfaction, ownership, materialism, consumption excesses, decision biases, values-based choice, and free will. The topics addressed are also selected because they are among the most deliberated upon in Buddhism, as it will become clearer. In the process I develop summarizing propositions and pose additional research questions.

I begin by introducing Buddhism's TME framework, with some juxtapositions to consumer psychology. Then the paper moves into a series of three broadly construed subsections or classes of phenomena: (a) the comparing and judging consumer mind; (b) the attaching and depending consumer mind; and (c) the deciding, choosing, and regulating consumer mind. The subsequent section suggests how to implement aspects of the Buddhist psychological insights developed here. The closing discussion synthesizes the contributions and limitations, including additional opportunities for integrating Buddhist psychology with consumer psychology.

Buddhism and the three marks of existence

There are many branches of Buddhism (Dalai Lama & Chodron, 2014; Snelling, 1991). I focus here on the Three Marks of Existence (TME) framework, which is widely recognized among Western Buddhists and other devotees of two historically-prominent Buddhist schools that survive into the present, known as Theravada and Mahayana. Both accept the *suttas* (discourses) attributed to the Buddha as the distillate of his main lessons (McCance, 1986), and I draw from them as based in the early Pali canon and language.

It is important to begin by acknowledging a crucial distinction Buddhists make between two genres of truth: the relative or conventional (including facts and beliefs that are assumed or taken for granted) and the absolute or ultimate, which is often obscure or dismissed (Dalai Lama, 2005; Garfield, 2015). Many Buddhist frameworks and concepts, including the TME, are intended to assist in identifying and dissecting relative truths in order to reveal underlying fundamental truths. As I discuss below, Buddhists would use this demarcation to probe and advance current perspectives and behaviors among consumers as well as consumer psychologists.

The first or primary mark of existence is known as *dukkha*, which has no direct counterpart in English. Its customary all-encompassing translation is suffering, and it is also rendered periodically as unease, stress, anxiety, unsatisfactoriness, anguish, sorrow, or pain. *Dukkha* is considered omnipresent and

inescapable to the untrained mind, i.e., the mind that does not recognize its character and sources. For this reason, to liberate from suffering Buddhist psychology professes essential roles for mental awareness and discipline through principles, frameworks, and contemplative practices that foster what is widely called mindfulness (Aronson, 2004; Cayton, 2012; Dalai Lama, 2000). Worth noting also, the foundation on *dukkha* can make Buddhist psychology seem immediately and unreasonably pessimistic. However, as Das (1997) emphasizes, *dukkha* is simply a matter-of-fact. Not everything is suffering, but Buddhist psychology neither avoids nor downplays the observation that life is arduous and imperfect. Rather, it builds on that insight for understanding the myriad of complexities and experiences in life, and how to manage the mind accordingly for different dimensions of well-being.

There are three kinds or levels of *dukkha* in Buddhism (Dalai Lama, 2005; Garfield, 2015). The most ordinary and noticeable involves physical and mental discomfort surrounding daily activities, such as muscle aches, hunger and thirst, fatigue, boredom, disappointment, irritation, worry, and fright. The second level of *dukkha* is related to change. All things age, weaken, break down, disappear, etc. As a result, there is the potential for constant distress as well as continuing efforts to elude or minimize change. Consumer psychologists would recognize some of these efforts in terms of the so-called status quo bias. The third level of *dukkha* involves the interdependence of all things, particularly the multicomponent causal chains surrounding us that are beyond our control. Our well-being is persistently vulnerable to genes, germs, weather, and the actions of many other people, including health care workers, pilots, repair technicians, other car drivers, and computer hackers, among numerous others. Taken all together, *dukkha* is "the problem of human life" (Garfield, 2015, p. 9, emphasis in the original). Because it pervades everyone and demands response, if not resolution, *dukkha* serves as the central orienting concept in all of Buddhist psychology. Moreover, the melioristic goal of Buddhist psychology is freedom from suffering and realization of well-being that are not contingent on enjoyable stimuli (Wallace, 1999; Webb, 2012). This is a markedly different orientation from consumer psychology's focus on need- and want-fulfillments, within which happiness is believed to mainly accrue from experiences and satiety of pleasure (see review by Alba & Williams, 2013).

Buddhists contend that the paramount cause of *dukkha* is ignorance, particularly ignorance of the sources of suffering (Dalai Lama, 2005). In Buddhist psychology these sources are referred to as *tanha*, translated typically as desire/craving or clinging/attaching. The objects of *tanha* are extensive, ranging from physical sensations (especially pleasure), beliefs, memories, feelings, and behaviors, to possessions, family and friends, and our own corporal survival. As I will discuss, greater recognition of the varieties and role of *tanha* is crucial to future consumer psychology, and also to Buddhism's second mark of existence.

This second component of the TME framework is *annica* (translated as impermanence). On the surface, impermanence seems an eccentricity of metaphysics, without relevance to

consumer psychology. However, the Buddhist psychologist Cayton (2012, p. 118) argues that one of the ultimate truths is that “The changeable, transient, ephemeral nature of life eventually undermines all of our efforts and processes,” which readily includes many consumer behaviors. The Buddhist tenet of *annica* runs quite contrary to the common Western orientation in which having and controlling are assumed to be natural, sustainable, and for-the-most-part healthful (see Belk’s, 1988, discussion). For Buddhists, having and controlling can evolve precipitously into a pathological tendency. In their view, attachments are typically pursued by people in order to simulate security in a world where *annica* is inevitable. However, grasping neither alleviates suffering nor bestows fulfilling and lasting well-being. In Buddhist psychology, attachment and grasping are both fear-based and pointless in an evanescent world where nothing lasts. Hence, they foment *dukkha* due to erroneous suppositions about reality (Aronson, 2004). Most people go on, however, serendipitously encountering and energetically embracing attachment and grasping opportunities for which they often have no discerning recognition to preclude or cope.

The third quality of existence in the TME framework is *anatta* (translated as no-self), and it is perhaps the most marked difference between Buddhist psychology and consumer psychology. The latter has long followed Western psychology’s firm assumption that each person is an independent, authentic, and immutable self (Johnson, 1985; Nitis, 1989). Consequently, ego development and differentiation are widely claimed to be the most important goals of human maturation (Mosig, 2006; Nitis, 1989; Walsh, 1988), leading to self-fulfillment that is considered synonymous with the good life (Chambers & Hickinbottom, 2008). Consumer researchers have endorsed these Western viewpoints on the self through a cornucopia of studies and reviews that go back over 50 years (see, e.g., Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988; Coleman & Williams, 2015; Escalas, 2012; Levy, 1959). Altogether, it is now thoroughly believed that consumption inherently transpires, and often succeeds, in the service of selfhood.

Buddhist psychology, in stark disagreement, argues that there is no self that is either separate or lasting (De Silva, 1979; Harris, 1998; Kolm, 1986). Batchelor (1997, pp. 78–79) describes the Buddhist view of no-self through an apt metaphor:

Just as a potter forms a pot on the wheel, so I configure my personality from the spinning clay of my existence. The pot does not exist in its own right: it emerges from the interactions of the potter, the wheel, the clay, its shape, its function (each of which in turn emerges from the interactions of its causes and components ad infinitum)... [Pots] are devoid of an identity stamped like a serial number in the core of their being... And so it is with us.

As this depiction implies, the self in actuality is an open dynamic network of relationships, and its existence originates, dissolves, and re-originate moment-to-moment, in complete interdependence with other matter and conditions. For this reason, the penultimate meaning of no-self is emptiness, that there is no essence to anything (Batchelor, 2015). Thus,

Buddhism asserts not only that an isolable transcendent self is a fallacy (*annica*), but also that the quest for and the clinging to self-identity is a leading cause of *dukkha*. As the cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch (2007) argues from a Buddhist orientation, the self is irretrievably fictional, much more so than is commonly recognized or studied through concepts such as self-schemas, self-monitoring, self-construal, or self-brand associations.

According to a TME-based model developed by Grabovac et al. (2011), the steady observing of *dukkha*, *annica*, and *anatta* constitutes mindfulness. Rosenberg (2004, p. 108) elaborates mindfulness further as a process of

expanding one’s awareness to include stimuli that might otherwise be filtered out or not attended to, of becoming aware of the kinds of biases to which one’s mind might typically be vulnerable, and of maintaining a nonjudgmental stance toward what arises in one’s own mind (including emotions as well as sensations provided from one’s own body and the outside world).

Mindfulness is cultivated through contemplative practices such as meditation, which Walsh and Shapiro (2006, pp. 228–229) identify as “a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration.” With practice, *samadhi* develops, namely a stability and attentiveness of the mind to enable lucid observation, wisdom, and ethical character (Garfield, 2015). For reviews of burgeoning mindfulness research, see Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007), Holzel et al. (2011), Ndubisi (2014), and Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2013).²

A pivotal by-product of mindfulness in Grabovac et al.’s (2011) model is the development of equanimity (*upekkha*), which has been sparsely mentioned in Western psychology. Equanimity is defined as a steadiness or inner stillness of the mind in regard to all experiences regardless of their affective valence, and it manifests as being undisturbed by stress, emotions, or other aspects of current conditions (Desbordes et al., 2015; Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Pace, 2013). *Upekkha* is a quality of awareness that observes its object (sensory or cognitive) with neither attachment nor aversion, corresponding to “a state of mind that cannot be swayed by biases and preferences” (Bodhi, 2000, p. 34). Among other things, equanimity implies that excessiveness of any kind is counter-productive for well-being.

² The mindfulness construct detailed by Langer (1989) shares some characteristics with Buddhist mindfulness (e.g., flexible awareness). However, it is quite different in other ways due to separate historical and cultural origins. Langer concedes that her work is focused on mindfulness outside of meditative traditions (<http://langermindfulnessinstitute.com/mindfulness-research/>, accessed May 19, 2014), and due to this fact some Buddhists have criticized aspects of her view (<http://artandzentoday.com/?tag=insight-meditation>, accessed June 3, 2014). It is worth noting that there are appearing new comparisons of the mindfulness/meditation practices in canonical Buddhism versus the contemporary Western mindfulness movement (both the Langer and the Kabat-Zinn approaches). See, for example, Dunne (2015), Hart, Ivtzan, and Hart (2013), and Rosch (2015).

Rather, it links directly to the Buddhist Middle Way (*majjhima patipada*; Habito, 2005), which denotes that a life of peace and happiness is best achieved when it is composed of moderation (Hartshome, 1987). As discussed further below, this philosophy suggests that, in the context of consumer psychology, fervent shopping, buying, and consuming are not an effective antidote for most forms of *dukkha*.

Given this primer on Buddhist psychology, with emphasis on the Three Marks of Existence (TME) framework, I now consider selective ramifications for consumer psychology.

The comparing and judging consumer mind

Humans and their minds have evolved through, and constantly engage in, acts of comparison and judgment. These are also central to constructs and processes in consumer psychology, such as status seeking and social emulation, assessments of need and want fulfillment, preferences, and satisfaction. As it is studied, the comparing and judging mind is assumed to be mostly advantageous for consumerhood, serving to ascertain the achievement of expectations, desires, and goals through searching, purchasing, and owning.

Buddhist psychology and the TME framework would put forth an alternative analysis, to identify omitted truths about the tendencies and effects of the comparing and judging mind. But before delving into this analysis, it is imperative to acknowledge the contexts and conditions in contemporary societies within which the consumer mind operates. Given that comparison is a fundamental human mechanism, then it is indeed a voluminous and prominent phenomenon in developed economies, and often automatic and unreflective. Comparisons today are a function in large part of consumers being continually reminded by marketers that their personal needs and wishes are preeminent. A persistent underlying theme is that customers are always right, always deserving of satisfaction, and they can be even more thoroughly gratified by buying one branded product (e.g., automobile, laundry detergent), experience (e.g., restaurant, vacation locale), or service (e.g., bank, law office) instead of another. These comparisons are strongly undergirded by the collective assumption of an independent ego, with one marketing message after another parlaying the mirage of selfhood that the TME framework cautions against for its centrality to *dukkha*. In a blunt illustration, McKibben (1992) scrutinized over 2400 h of videotape of everything from a single day that came across the 100 channels of one of the largest cable TV systems at that time in the U.S. For the bulk of the advertisements he concluded that there was one prevailing motif: you the viewer, you the customer, are the most important entity on earth. Significant research questions carry forward: What are the subtler and fuller effects of prolific marketing repetitions about consumer self-importance on the consumer mind's daily comparison processes? Broadly speaking, from Buddhist psychology and the TME framework, what sorts of *dukkha* entail? Higher selfishness? Rising comparison standards? Idealistic or impractical comparison standards? Less flexible comparison standards?

Consumers' days of profuse comparisons—energized by the raucously competitive marketplace (Chodron, 2005)—compose

a life in which consumers often want conditions to be different than they are. The comparisons involved in consumer judgments, preferences, desires, and hopes are multifarious, across a spacious array of products and services that consumers regularly want to be: cheaper, bigger, faster, easier, lighter, stronger, softer, safer, quieter, sweeter, warmer, more reliable, more user friendly, and so on. This seemingly simple, logical, and instinctive comparison process—and wanting things to be different than they are—encapsulates in Buddhist psychology and the TME framework a rudimentary manner of conceptualizing suffering (see, e.g., Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987, Ch. 4). Hence, the fundamental Buddhist insight that connects comparison and judgment to suffering maintains that consumers wanting things to be different than they are, which is much of what marketing strategy intends to foment, precipitates negative affect, including anxiety, jealousy, frustration, exasperation, and regret, across a range and to a degree, that prior consumer research has not fully confronted. Future research questions are thusly entailed: What are the predominant and obscured forms of *dukkha* triggered by rampant promises of comparative advantage, how cognizant are consumers of these influences and effects, and who is most vulnerable?

Taking further steps according to Buddhist psychology, as the consumer's comparing and judging mind is energized by assorted marketplace activities, the suffering that ensues may also include fewer or diminished experiences of joy and gratitude. The tyranny and error-proneness of the frenetic comparing mind (Rosch, 1996, pp. 14–15) hinders individuals from seeing life's circumstances more precisely and more candidly. In short, their minds are deficient of equanimity (Desbordes et al., 2015). It is better, according to Buddhism, to simply observe at first, rather than quickly judge by use of expectations, preferences, desires, and so forth (Levine, 2000). Buddhist psychology maintains that there is a vital distinction between judicious mindful assessment versus automatic mindless judgments, especially the hasty ones that lead to mistakes, embarrassments, guilt, injustices, and pain, i.e., more suffering and less well-being (Chodron, 2005; King, 2009; Levine, 2000). Buddhist psychology upholds that hurried and unfettered expectations, preferences, and desires evince a comparing mind inventoried with preconceptions and unwelcoming to new qualities, meanings, and possibilities. This phenomenon reflects a rush to size things up, manage the situation, and move on. Learning from and relishing the present moment's experience are minimized or shut off entirely. As Mark Twain once observed, and Buddhist writers have concurred, "Comparison kills joy."

As noted earlier, some Buddhist writers translate *dukkha* in the TME framework as unsatisfactoriness (Das, 1997, p. 77; Harris, 1998, p. 42; <http://www.buddhapadipa.org/dhamma-corner/dukkha-suffering-or-dissatisfaction/>, accessed July 20, 2015). This insight links Buddhism and the comparing and judging mind to traditional satisfaction theory in consumer psychology. Over the years satisfaction has been conceptualized as a person's judgment about an interaction with a product/service in which he or she compares product/service performance to a pre-performance standard that he or she holds (most often an expectation, though sometimes identified as a desire or norm).

The subsequent satisfaction judgment reflects how much more or less the performance meets the standard. This portrait of such a significant and widely-occurring event in consumer behavior makes the satisfaction process look, in theory and practice, eminently reasonable, rational, and trouble-free. But Buddhist psychology would demur, and raise some thorny issues about the core of consumer satisfaction.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, conventional theorizing and empirical studies on consumer satisfaction have underappreciated the chronically rapid fire and conditioned mindless use of comparison standards. In general, satisfaction researchers have routinely neglected to consider whether expectations and related judgments in the elementary satisfaction process are as void of murkier psychological issues as past studies imply. Strong and unfettered expectations that stimulate incessant judgments are, for example, part and partial to feelings of entitlement and, thereby, they may lead consumers to be less able to take things in stride, contrary to the TME framework's emphasis on equanimity (Cayton, 2012). Scratch the surface of many dissatisfaction episodes, and the revealed affective turbulence ranges from impatience, disappointment, and irritation to anger and outrage. Recognizing and mastering expectations are valued aptitudes within the TME framework for living with equanimity and exercising its facility to circumvent suffering. One study in consumer psychology has shown that when expectations are kept in check, dissatisfaction is also curtailed (Van Dijk, Zeelenberg, & van der Pligt, 2003). Clearly, more research in this area is needed, including how consumers can better control their expectations, whether that ability can be reinforced for consistent application, and determining for which situations the management of expectations is most favorable to well-being.

Moreover, as the comparing and judging mind seeks whatever seems better, it does not appreciate that consumer dissatisfaction as a mode of suffering can also be facilitated by actually *getting what one wants*, especially when the comparing and judging mind is relentless (Cayton, 2012; Rosch, 2013). This curious phenomenon is intimated in recent neuroscience where positive arousal has been found to be higher in the anticipation or eagerness for consumption than in the consumption act itself (Knutson & Karmarkar, 2014). Such a finding implies that as consumers obtain what they expect or want, the experience may be more often less satisfying than what they self-report (as in the long-established satisfaction paradigm), and this may help to further explain why the pursuit of satisfaction readily begins again, directed at something else. Foreseeing and pursuing what one wants, then getting what one wants, is likened in Buddhist psychology to drinking saltwater, i.e., the more one consumes due to an ostensible thirst, the thirstier one becomes (Cayton, 2012). Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003) address aspects of this phenomenon, and call it the desire cycle. But this may be restrictive. The thirst is not just desire, but all needs, wants, expectations, hopes, preferences, and other constituent drivers of the comparing and judging mind. In Buddhism, all of these participate in cycles of suffering, known as *samsara*, which not only never end, but also never thoroughly satisfy. In terms of new research avenues, consumer psychology

is still mostly at a loss about the darker side of anticipation and suffering cycles in the avid chase for satisfaction and happiness via consumer behavior. Can we more fully explain why attaining what a consumer wants can be detrimental, as in the sardonic cliché, “be careful what you ask for”? Can we more fully understand why this counterintuitive phenomenon occurs, when it is more likely and for whom, and to what other effects in life?

Related to these latter issues, can a person mitigate or overcome the comparing and judging mind, and its potential deleterious effects? In Buddhist psychology and the TME framework, the remedy is contemplative practices for augmented mindfulness (Grabovac et al., 2011). By becoming more aware of the urge for persistent comparisons and judgments, and the tendency to seek what always seems better (including the role of marketing in stimulating comparisons and judgments), the individual may be able to reduce or avoid an overly comparing and judging consumer mind and its effects of suffering.

Pulling together these threads of discussion on the consumer mind, two summarizing propositions emerge:

P1. The consumer mind, with its attachments to, and proclivities for, unreflective auto-pilot comparisons and judgments—facilitated by expectations, desires, preferences, hopes and so forth—undermines well-being by fomenting suffering such as, but not limited to, entitlement, envy, frustration, impatience, dissatisfaction, regret, resentment, anger, and exasperation, and whereas getting what one wants can also prompt suffering.

P2. Commitment to the TME framework and the instigation of mindfulness may alleviate the tendencies and negative influences of the comparing and judging consumer mind, especially the hyper-active one that competitive marketplaces propagate. Joy and gratefulness in consumption experiences may also be enhanced, even when the experiences may appear less than what could be reasonably anticipated, less than what other people receive, and so on.

The attaching and depending consumer mind

Over recent decades the concept of attachment in general psychology has largely flowed from Bolby's (1969) work on the constructive role of interpersonal attachment in child development. In parallel among consumer researchers, attachments to brands, products, and possessions have been steadily deemed a positive contributor to consumers' lives, especially their self-identities (e.g. Belk, 1992, Kleine & Baker, 2004, Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011). Adverse issues in consumer attachments are mostly absent.

In contrast, dependencies—particularly manifestations such as addictions—have been treated in both general psychology and consumer research as perilous behaviors, with the most obvious foci being nicotine, alcohol, drugs, gambling, and compulsive buying (in consumer research, see, e.g., Cotte & Latour, 2009; Hirschman, 1992; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Less acute dependencies among consumers have been occasionally addressed, for example, by Cornwell, Wamwara-Mbugua, and Nicovich (2008) in relation to the family life cycle.

In Buddhist psychology and the TME framework, attachments and dependencies are not a restricted or special topic. They are formidable phenomena across all areas of life, fraught with the potential for causing varied forms of *dukkha*. Buddhist psychology contends that moderate to strong attachments and dependencies are exhibited much more in daily life than historically credited by consumer researchers, as for instance in the provinces of food (e.g., prepared and packaged meals, fast-food restaurants), higher technology (e.g., automobiles, cell phones, microwave ovens, portable computers), lower technology and tools (air conditioning, hair dryers, dehumidifiers, lawn mowers), symbolic artifacts (e.g., clothing, jewelry), and the legion of service industries (e.g., home cleaning, yard maintenance, legal and tax consultancies). In contemporary times consumers draw from socioeconomic mandates, especially with respect to technology, to construct lifestyles that are thoroughly reliant on a plethora of things. Buddhist psychology would insist that consumer life as it is systematically conditioned on the socioeconomic world cannot be divorced from the materialism construct in theoretical analyses. Drawing from the Buddhist TME framework, it is vital to more fully consider the nature of possession and ownership, technology, and materialism in order to appreciate the unseen roles of consumer attachments and dependencies.

Over a century ago William James (1890) wrote that the self is the sum of what people call their own, and Eric Fromm (1976) later proclaimed that losing a possession is a loss of self. Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2003) have compellingly argued that the urge to possess arises and persists from a combination of biological and social factors, and it has become integral among people of Western heritage. More provocatively, Preston and Vickers (2014, p. 127) have since alleged that “modern humans are obsessed with their possessions.”

Ownership in Westernized consumption is usually conceptualized as having and controlling things, through legal and other means (Belk, 1983, 1988). Pierce et al. (2003, p. 86) define psychological ownership as “the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is “theirs” (i.e., “It is *mine!*”)” (italics in the original). Hence, claiming and sustaining ownership is at base a form of personalized attachment, and it is typically intended to exert rights, mastery, and power for meeting survival and social needs. Taken together, these insights represent an orthodoxy in Western circles, in which private ownership is regarded as primal, instrumental, and commonly beneficial. From a Buddhist TME perspective, these insights stop short of profounder truths about ownership and possession.

Not only would Buddhist psychology argue that the consumer’s quest for possession and control is unwise, it would also question the very viability and meaning of possession: Can people ever really possess anything? Buddhists would begin broaching this question, in part, by pointing to the manner in which customary conceptualizations of possession breach principles in the TME framework. In Western views of possession there is a universal presumption of an independent self (what is “mine”) and there is a presumed relationship with the object exemplified as “a *close connection* with the self” (Pierce et al., 2003, p. 86,

italics added; see also Belk, 1988, on how this connection is presumed to extend far and wide). The TME framework that incorporates *annica* (impermanence), *anatta* (no-self), and *dukkha* (suffering) brings into bold relief the otherwise opaque problems associated with the concept of psychological ownership. With all things in flux, with suffering precipitated by attachment and dependency, and with no firm self-identity, the TME framework casts possession itself as a type of non sequitur of relative truth. In the Buddhist view, ownership readily becomes an illusion that can lead to toxic consequences. Claiming ownership foments suffering because the attachments and dependencies therein merely prop up a self that is mistakenly believed to be distinctive, and these attachments and dependencies are fruitless and short-term as all things change, deteriorate, and disappear. Based on Buddhist psychology, Ross (1991) explains that possessions become an impediment to mental health and well-being because they potentiate anxiety, fear, defensiveness, and temper as these forms of *dukkha* accrue from and are aimed at anything that threatens what a person believes to possess.

Glimpses of this Buddhist-oriented viewpoint have been offered in prior consumer psychology, but not yet fully unpacked. Consider two characteristic examples, the endowment and the option attachment effects. In a classic demonstration of the former, Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1990) provided one group of subjects with ownership of a new mug, and then subsequently offered them the chance to sell or trade it. The researchers found that these subjects wanted up to twice more money to part with the mug as compared to subjects in a control group who were only shown the mug and asked how much they would be willing to pay for obtaining it. Buddhist psychology would interpret the higher valued mug among the “ownership subjects” as an abrupt experience of *dukkha*, particularly the distress they felt by the prospect of releasing their attachment to something just at the moment when the emotional elevation of a new “mine” had begun. Thusly, they demanded higher monetary value. Subsequent research has revealed that emotions play a major part in the endowment effect (Shu & Peck, 2011) and that the effect strengthens as duration of the subjective sense of ownership increases (Strahilevitz & Loewenstein, 1998). In the option attachment effect (Carmon, Wertenbroch, & Zeelenberg, 2003), consumers cogitate over available choice options to the degree that they have a sense of prefactual ownership of each, and then they select one option and feel subsequent discomfort for passing up or, so to speak, losing the opportunity to own the other options. In both the endowment and option-attachment effects, psychological ownership involves *dukkha* of a kind that can be characterized as a foreboding of forfeiture and sadness. Blending these studies with Ross’ (1991) commentary, new research questions emerge, such as: How aware are consumers of their attachments and the negative emotions that often ensue from broken attachments? For well-being, does increased awareness of a commencing attachment (mindfulness) mitigate potential negative feelings when it is subsequently dissolved?

As an admixture of relationship, attachment, and dependency, ownership can also augur other qualities of *dukkha* in the TME framework, including the quagmire of responsibilities

and annoyances that are regularly downplayed or overlooked—by consumers and consumer psychologists—as ownership begins and progresses. Put differently, Buddhist psychology would maintain that one of the unrecognized underlying truths is that ownership and possession not only fulfill needs and solve problems, they also generate *more* needs and problems, thus affecting well-being in manners seldom noticed or studied (see, e.g., Cayton, 2012). As one need is fulfilled, as one problem is resolved, others are engendered, without the consumer fully realizing the time, attention, effort, and financial commitments that lie ahead. For example, the lately purchased dehumidifier that manages air moisture in a basement soon prompts regular monitoring of humidity levels as the seasons change as well as altering the settings, dumping the water reservoir (sometimes daily), ordering and making filter changes, and so forth. Multiply this scenario by the dozens of other possessions that surround consumers with bids for vigilance and for upkeep, or that propel consumers into feelings of culpability for not having done their due diligence according to warranties, product ownership guides, and so forth. In terms of new research questions, the field could do much more for consumer well-being to determine when and how much consumers comprehend ownership obligations at the time of purchase (or not), and how the aftermath may arise as forms of stress or other suffering.

Along these same lines, one of the most prominent domains of mainstream consumer research, within which one might suppose the aforementioned issues of ownership and attachment would surface, is materialism. But, it turns out, not so much. From its early appearances in consumer research, materialism has been conceptualized as the importance a person places on owning, and it includes the penchant to obtain things as a principal means to accomplishing life goals and desired end states (Duh, 2015; Shrum et al., 2012). Underlying that conceptualization is two approaches to materialism, as a personality trait (Belk, 1985) or as a personal value (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Both assert that possessions are necessary to the materialist's self-definition, as these signify success in life and serve as the main sought means to the materialist's happiness. Similarly, measurement items from the two most popular materialism scales (Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992) make consistent references to matters of what I-the-consumer believe, enjoy, want, avoid, or do with products and possessions. As a result, the field has become staunchly committed to an ego-involvement paradigm of materialism insofar as materialists confer high levels of personal relevance and interest on ownership. Nowhere in consumer psychology is the assumption and predominance of selfhood more ingrained, more a conventional truth, than in materialism studies.

The ego-involvement paradigm has been a wellspring of insights about the causes (e.g., money attitudes, childhood trauma) and consequences (e.g., unhappiness, lower self-esteem) of materialism (see Duh, 2015; Kasser et al., 2004). It is clear from prior research that materialism has negative effects, but given the ubiquity and complexity of the topic, the field has not yet thoroughly accounted for why these negative effects come about. The principal explanation revolves around egoism and

misplaced priorities in life. Buddhist psychology would explicate materialism in terms of the TME framework by arguing that the focal issue is not chiefly the person-proclaimed importance of things, but an errant belief in an independent concrete self that grasps at transitory reality and then experiences the fallout that such clinging elicits. From that position Buddhism would use its TME framework to turn theorization and research about materialism in a different direction, specifically in terms of attachments and dependencies.

In the materialistic lifestyles in which millions of consumers are enmeshed, suffering is most visible in terms of attachments and dependencies when consumers cannot readily disengage from, or seek alternatives to, their current possessions, products, and services. To be dependent means not being as capable of meeting needs or goals when possessions, products, and services wear out, get lost, break down, or perform poorly, as they are all fated to do according to the TME framework. When this occurs, emotional reactions and withdrawal symptoms arise as *dukkha*, including tension, exasperation, confusion, helplessness, grief, etc. Writing from a Buddhist perspective, Rosch (1996, p. 13) points out that when the things to which we are accustomed for comfort or pleasure no longer provide acknowledged benefits by their presence, but do create suffering by their absence, that is “technically the definition of addiction.” Thus, while prior research has justifiably linked materialism to several negative outcomes, Buddhist psychology's contribution may emerge from identifying the *meia*-source of these effects as attachment and dependency. Thereby, future research questions include: How can new research more fully elaborate an attachment-dependency theory of materialism, determine if this orientation can detect formerly unknown effects, and test whether it can explain additional variance in negative effects previously discovered.

These insights, along with Rosch's (2013) point above about addictions, lead to another underappreciated viewpoint on materialism. That is, according to Buddhist psychology, the challenge for consumers is to eschew over-attachment to possessions for avoiding *dukkha*, while still enjoying and being grateful for them, as opposed to becoming too attached and (ironically) being less thankful in an authentic and stable manner. No empirical research has yet unraveled this conundrum.

One Buddhist-oriented study that has peered into these issues found that individuals with lower attachments (i.e., lower materialists) have an ability to care more about current situations and things (that is, being mindful and joyful) without becoming ego-entangled or self-aggrandizing (Sahdra et al., 2010). Extending those insights via Buddhist psychology, it can be hypothesized that one of the most serious predicaments in materialists' lives is not that they think and care too much about things—a foundational tenet of the standard ego-involvement paradigm—but that they appreciate and savor *too little*, especially for that which they already own (see also Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011). Indeed, researchers have just recently found that gratitude and materialism are inversely related (e.g., Tsang, Carpenter, Roberts, Frisch, & Carlisle, 2014).

On a related matter of new priorities and directions, Buddhist psychology would also enlarge the concept of materialism it advocates via attachments and dependencies by encouraging

consumer psychologists to cast a much wider net in regard to the runaway enthusiasms and surpluses of consumer societies. It is well known, for example, that tens of thousands of people are substance abusers (Hirschman, 1992), obsessive gamblers (Petry, 2005), and out-of-control hoarders (Frost et al., 1998). But numerous other forms of excessive and addictive consumption—some seemingly innocuous—occur daily worldwide (Bruni, 2013), and their capacity to incite and recycle *dukkha* is potent. Buddhist psychology would contend that excessive consumption evolves and persists due to most people's inability to recognize that clinging behaviors are unwholesome and can cause physical, emotional, interpersonal, economic, and other forms of suffering. As it is well documented, for example, over a third of all American adults are considered clinically obese, due in large part to their frequent overeating of cheaper, less healthy, and more convenient food (<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/statistics/index.htm>, accessed March 1, 2014). The pernicious effects of this excess are multiform. Less pinned down until recently, one study has estimated that consumers' daily time engaged in electronic communication, including television, cell phones and portable computers, has risen to approximately 45% of waking hours (<http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2010/08/19/consumers-spend-almost-half-of-their-waking-hours-using-media-and-communications/>, accessed May 1, 2014). This is a striking phenomenon, and Buddhist psychologists would ask: At what costs of suffering in the diminishment of personal and interpersonal well-being? How much is finally too much? Less obvious but also potentially troublesome, there are thousands for whom exercise has now become a highly disproportionate behavior (e.g., by one estimate, as many as one-tenth of all gym users in the United Kingdom: <http://addictions.about.com/od/lesserknownaddictions/a/exerciseadd.htm>, accessed April 28, 2014). Other related behaviors include food compulsions and avoidance (anorexia, bulimia); sugar, coffee, and soda overconsumption; Internet pornography addiction; sports fanaticism; luxury fascination; and hypochondria (including over-the-counter drugs, remedies, and alternative medicines, etc.), all of which represent excessiveness. This insight is critical to recognizing the pervasiveness of attachments and dependencies, and it reveals how thoroughly modern societies have foregone a healthier philosophy of moderation for well-being (per the TME framework and the Middle Way in Buddhist psychology). Overall, the abovementioned behaviors are omnipresent in global consumer culture and under-prioritized in the consumer psychology of materialism, though the related suffering looms large.

In the Buddhist TME framework one of the principal purposes of contemplative practices is to heighten awareness and increase sensitivity to *tanha* (attachments and dependencies) since it is the penultimate cause of *dukkha*. A central intention in such practices is to nurture non-attachment and non-dependency as well as equanimity and moderation. Reflection on, and acceptance of, *annica* (impermanence) and *anatta* (no-self) via the TME framework can help individuals to reduce their strong seeking of control and to be more present and appreciative in their ownership and consumption experiences.

Pulling together the insights above, these summarizing propositions can be formalized:

P3. The attaching and depending mind, especially through consumer ownership, materialism, and excessive behaviors, can undermine well-being by inciting suffering such as, but not limited to, stresses (social, financial, health, etc.), fear, defensiveness, exasperation, vulnerability/helplessness, grief, entrapment, and regret.

P4. Commitment to the TME framework and the instantiation of mindfulness may preclude or mitigate the negative influences of the attaching and depending consumer mind, and increase propensities for savoring, moderation, and gratitude.

The deciding, choosing, and regulating consumer mind

Decision making and choice have been among the most studied topics in consumer psychology, and they are also essential in Buddhist psychology. From the latter's perspective, as consumers select any product—via deliberation, routinization, heuristic, or impulse—they validate whatever is invested in it. Investment here means every material, effort, expense, and life that went into creating and delivering the product, and as yet to come as it is consumed and discarded. Hence, Buddhist psychologists would maintain that decisions and choices are morally consequential in an intrinsic and humbling manner, more so than prior consumer psychology has generally acknowledged or examined.

This assertion may seem contentious, but Kirmani's (2015) recent presidential address before the Association for Consumer Research suggests the same. She details how marketplace morality has been largely ignored in favor of substantive topics on purely self-focused issues and their related explanations, and she especially calls for cross-disciplinary morality research. Buddhist psychology and the TME framework could contribute fittingly. Ruedy and Schweitzer (2010), for example, showed that individuals who are more conscious of a present experience and pending choice (i.e., being more mindful) express greater likelihood of acting ethically and, in one study, actually carry through by cheating less in a laboratory exercise. In another study participants trained for amplified mindfulness showed sounder moral reasoning (Shapiro, Jazaieri, & Goldin, 2012). In addition, Brown and Kasser (2005) found that participants with higher mindfulness in relation to present circumstances and their own values (measured as a dispositional trait) engaged in more ecologically responsible choice behaviors across their diets, transportation, and housing. New research questions for consumer psychology center around the why, when, and how of these insights as they extend into ethical topics such as the uses of expired coupons and other promotions; falsifying information for access and benefits at websites; investing in companies known for malfeasance or non-sustainable practices; filing fraudulent insurance claims; and purchasing, using, and returning products to retailers.

On a different aspect of decisions and choices, consumer and Buddhist psychologists agree that the human mind is substantially

challenged in its daily cognitive processes, being regularly prone to attentional spasticity and other mental weaknesses (e.g. Cayton, 2012; Kahneman, 2011). Through numerous studies based in behavioral decision theory, consumer psychology has built up a catalog of cognitive biases in decision making and choice, including framing, status quo preferences, negativity bias, overconfidence, confirmation bias, sunk costs, and myopia, all of which can undermine decision processes and foil better outcomes (Kahneman, 2011; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). In parallel, Buddhist psychologists discuss how the human mind is predisposed to dysfunctional patterns that affect who and what people think they are, what they believe is real or not, and how to act (Aronson, 2004; Cayton, 2012; Rosch, 2002). However, while consumer and Buddhist psychologists both view the limitations of the mind as commonplace and persistent, the former consistently imply that the shortcomings are largely insurmountable without outside intervention. Consequently, many efforts in consumer psychology to demonstrate how cognitive biases can be averted, including for societal welfare, have focused on so-called choice architecture, also known as nudges (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Put differently, consumer psychologists in recent years have discounted, if not disparaged, the role of education or training for overcoming biases. Instead, many suggest re-designing choice scenarios to steer people into using their biases, typically without their awareness, for achieving an outcome favored by the choice architect.³

In contrast, the Buddhist mind theory and the therapeutic thrust of the TME framework assert that people can bring cognitive processes under greater awareness and control through intention and instruction (Aronson, 2004; Cayton, 2012; Goleman, 1981; Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Research on the beneficial effects of mindfulness for decision making and choice are just now coming to the fore. For example, a recent review by Karelai and Reb (2015) discusses how mindfulness improves information gathering, conclusion drawing, and feedback learning. In consumer psychology, Papies, Keesman, Pronk, and Barsalou (2015) manipulated mindfulness by encouraging some subjects to recognize their mental and emotional experiences as being impermanent phenomena (in accordance with the TME framework) and, thereby, easing attachment to desires. The researchers then showed that the hunger levels of the mindful participants did not increase the attractiveness of unhealthy foods, thereby leading them to choose healthier options. In a complementary project, Bahl, Milne, Ross, and Chan (2013) measured mindfulness as a dispositional trait among college students and showed

across two studies that lower mindfulness was associated with poorer eating habits, including overeating and skipping meals. Very recently, Van de Veer, van Herpen, and van Trijp (2016) demonstrated that mindful consumers were more cognizant of previous food intake as they made a subsequent decision about how much of a chocolate snack to eat. These researchers also showed that enhanced mindfulness in a general population was correlated with a more constant body weight. All combined, these varied studies establish that the TME framework and mindfulness can distinctively aid consumer decision making and choices for well-being. As questions for future research, it remains to be investigated whether mindfulness can inhibit the effects of cognitive decision biases such as framing, overconfidence, confirmation bias, status quo, and myopia, among others. New mindfulness research on the biases of sunk costs and negativity is encouraging (Hafenbrack, Kinias, & Barsade, 2014; Kilken & Shook, 2011). As suggested by consumer psychologists, there may indeed be a host of occasions for using choice architecture to foster certain welfare outcomes, but the particular value of mindfulness, as engendered in Buddhist psychology and the TME framework, is that it should apply across many different decision and choice contexts. And as it is fortified through repeated practice, mindfulness can come to reside in and travel with the individual consumer.

Another significant area of research to which Buddhist psychology may pertain is resource depletion and self-regulation. One well-regarded orientation, called the strength model, maintains that self-regulation is limited in supply. Multiple studies supporting this model have shown how the use of self-control in one task leads to lower self-control in a subsequent task (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2015). Consumer researchers are now investigating this phenomenon, as for example in spending impulsively (Vohs & Faber, 2007). Some investigators are now considering how the negative effects of resource depletion can be neutralized. To that end, Friese, Messner, and Schaffner (2012) have initially demonstrated that mindfulness can productively recharge self-control. Research questions going forward include whether and how the basic insight from Friese et al. (2012) may apply to consumers shunning imprudent purchases at checkout counters after their main shopping, making wholesome snack choices when they are emotionally disheveled, and preserving their diets as well as smoking, alcohol, and drug cessation late in the day and evenings.

From a different angle on decision making and choice, Huber et al. (1997) have argued in a conceptual paper that a values-based approach is likely to be more favorable for well-being as compared to alternatives-based. The former begins by first determining values for guiding decisions and choices by reflecting about the aspects of one's life that have brought the most joy and contentment. In an opposite manner, the latter jumps hastily into evaluating the merits of each separate option. Hence, the values-based approach requires a capacity to step back at the right time for the right reasons, to consider ideals and purposes before finalizing decisions and choices, especially important or complex ones. Regrettably, despite the far-reaching potential of this template, consumer

³ An oft-cited example is the invitation to be an organ donor, as indicated by checking a box on a form when obtaining a driver's license. The status quo bias is to avoid change, which in this case is to avoid opting into the program by checking the box, and thereby leaving one's status as it presently is (i.e., not being an organ donor). But by making the box-checking action a move to opt-out rather than opt-into, the status quo bias works in favor of recruiting more organ donors, whether the individual consumer recognizes or intends to do this. A similar application relates to workers signing up for 401(k) retirement plans. However, new criticism of nudges has also appeared (http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/24/business/economy/nudges-arent-enough-to-solve-societys-problems.html?_r=0, accessed February 24, 2016), in addition to those I raise from a Buddhist orientation.

psychologists have yet to examine empirically how a values-based approach could be effectively actuated in suitable contexts. Guidance could be drawn from Buddhist psychology where researchers such as Brown and Ryan (2003) and Grabovac et al. (2011) have explained how the TME framework and its contemplative practices strengthen the realization that (1) what one attends to is a matter of choice more often than commonly acknowledged and (2) greater vigilance to personal values and goals is achievable. New research is needed to examine the TME framework for reliably effecting values-based choice.

Finally, some theorists now distinguish between two psychological systems, one called System 1, which incorporates rapid and nonconscious affective intuition, and the other called System 2, which involves slower and effortful intellectual reasoning. Baumeister et al. (2008, p. 8) argue that the ability to override System 1 by System 2 during decision making represents a hallmark of implementing free will. As such, they speculate that this proficiency within consumer psychology could have “the greatest impact on life, happiness, and other positive outcomes.” It might seem, nonetheless, that a psychology such as Buddhism’s that rejects the notion of a stable independent self cannot endorse the existence of free will wherein human actions are believed to originate from a given agent. But this concern is unwarranted. As Meyers (2014) explains, Buddhist psychology focuses keenly on understanding the mind and enhancing its discipline. She also points out that the Buddhist path to deliverance from *samsara* (cycles of suffering) and the promotion of well-being necessitates, if anything, free will (see also Wallace, 2011). Hence, through its emphasis on contemplation and equanimity—particularly for managing attention, judgments, emotions, and cognitions—the Buddhist TME framework could potentially strengthen consumers’ capability to invoke System 2 processing more diligently when needed. Recent neuroscience offers early support for this premise. Tang, Posner, and Rothbart (2014) have demonstrated that meditation heightens activation and connectivity in brain areas associated with self-regulation. More related research can be suggested, including the extent to which the TME framework can assist in bolstering free will across different contexts, both the mundane and the weighty (e.g., finances, health, education, leisure, media and internet consumption).

Collectively, the discussion above and the studies alluded to indicate that the Buddhist TME framework has much to offer consumer research on decision making, choice, and regulation. Pulling together the insights developed above, two overarching propositions can be formalized:

P5. The deciding, choosing, and regulating consumer mind confronts moral issues on a wide and incessant basis each day and it is more governable than previously maintained with respect to cognitive biases, resource depletion, values-based choice, and free will.

P6. Commitment to the TME framework and the instantiation of mindfulness can heighten sensitivity to moral issues in choices and the uses of values and free will, and can lessen the

occurrence and effects of cognitive biases and resource depletion.

Implementing Buddhist psychology and the TME framework

The discussion so far has focused on consumer behavior issues from a Buddhist perspective without empirical-implementation suggestions, which I turn to now. The comparing mind, as it might vary across individuals, could be examined by using or borrowing from scales that have included items on non-judgmentalism (e.g. Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Walach, Buchheld, Buittemuller, Kleinknecht, & Schmidt, 2006). Also, future research could derive or tailor items from existing scales found in research on adult relationships or substance abuse to examine, respectively, the attaching and depending consumer mind. This would pertain to the nature and role of attachments and dependencies in a Buddhist theory of materialism and to studying the wider array of excessive consumer behaviors discussed earlier. Consumer psychologists could also investigate the role of equanimity in strengthening and guiding values-based choices and free will by drawing from Desbordes et al. (2015) and Hanson and Mendius (2009) who have developed measures of equanimity.

Testing aspects of the even-numbered propositions (2, 4, & 6) will require locating individuals who are knowledgeable of and committed to the Buddhist TME framework. One straightforward approach is to recruit devotees from Buddhist centers or mindfulness communities, for comparison to a control group (e.g., Falkenstrom, 2010). Full scales, or select items thereof, can be utilized to verify individuals’ degree of adherence to Buddhist psychology (see, e.g., Gilgen & Cho, 1979; Pace, 2013). Other scales have been developed for assessing trait mindfulness, including (1) the mindfulness attention awareness scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003, 15 items) that determines the tendency to be attentive to and aware of present-moment experiences; (2) the shortened form of the Freiburg mindfulness scale (FMI; Walach et al., 2006, 14 items) that measures present-moment observation and openness to negative experiences; and (3) the Kentucky inventory of mindfulness skills (KIMS; Baer et al., 2004, 39 items) that assesses four different facets of Buddhist mindfulness (observing, describing, acting with awareness, and nonjudgmental acceptance). While these scales have similarities, their differences could matter across alternative projects. For instance, studies of satisfaction based in the TME framework might benefit from scales that include items on non-judgmentalism and/or openness to negative experiences (e.g., FMI, KIMS). The MAAS instrument might be more appropriate in studies on cognitive biases, resource depletion, values-based choosing, and activation of System 2 processing for free will.⁴

For examining states of mindfulness in laboratory studies, there are several options. Two studies have shown that as few as four to 10 days of instruction among novices can foster mental

⁴ Rosch (2015) has inspected the face and construct validities of trait mindfulness scales. While her concerns are worth heeding, they also open the door for consumer psychologists to make improvements as worthy contributions going forward.

awareness and regulation that have been previously demonstrated only among long-term meditators (Chambers et al., 2008; Zeidan, Johnson, Diamond, David, & Goolkasian, 2010). There is also emerging evidence that prompt inductions in the lab may be workable. Van de Veer et al. (2016) created two four-minute audio recordings that enhanced participants' mindfulness to their bodies or the environment around them. Also, as mentioned earlier, Papies et al. (2015) evoked present mindedness by instructing participants to consider their thoughts as constructions of the mind, just appearing and disappearing. For checking the success of such manipulations, consumer psychologists could draw upon the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (Lau et al., 2006), which assesses the attainment of a mindful state during an immediately preceding contemplative session.

Conclusion

Consumer psychology has thrived as a science of explanation and prediction, though it has also been criticized for insularity and irrelevance (Pham, 2013). Consequently, the field needs to mine insights from beyond its predominant paradigms to address more fully the demands of our hyper-consumption era and the varieties of stress and distress it induces and sustains.

I have argued that Buddhist psychology is worth considering, as both an explanatory and a normative-therapeutic science. It is founded on an Eastern philosophy of mind and contemplative practices that address the types, conditions, and causes of suffering and deliverance from it, to benefit individuals, societies, and ecologies (Kalupahana, 1987; Levine, 2000; Queen, 2000). Buddhist psychology is melding with the social sciences, medicine, education, and other fields to facilitate an interdisciplinary mind science aimed at greater capacities for consciousness, ethicality, and wisdom. What does consumer psychology stand to gain?

My purpose has been to begin answering that question. The Three Marks of Existence framework—suffering, impermanence, and no-self—and its incorporation of mindfulness, equanimity, and moderation constitute a paradigm of comparatively unorthodox thinking for consumer psychology that can stimulate novel propositions, questions, and directions about consumer well-being. Specifically, it leads to alternative ways of conceiving and, in some cases, re-envisioning the existence, nature, and influences of several focal phenomena within consumer psychology, including the comparing and judging mind (e.g., expectations, preferences, satisfaction), the attaching and depending mind (e.g., ownership, materialism, excessive behaviors), and the deciding, choosing, and regulating mind (e.g., marketplace morality, cognitive decision biases, values-based choice, and free will). In addition, the TME framework provides hope and recommendations for mitigating consumer suffering and augmenting quality of life in ways that have not been heretofore considered.

From this perspective I argued that certain consumer phenomena and processes that have been deemed natural or benign may be subtly more problematic than formerly considered (e.g., desires, expectations, satisfaction, preferences, hopes). Others harboring assumptions that have calcified over time—about an independent

and concrete self (identity) or the importance placed on things (materialism)—may be, respectively, less real and more about dependency than theorized before. At the same time, certain penchants and processes that have often been regarded as outside the usual realms of morality (everyday choices), as virtually inescapable (cognitive biases), or as very difficult to implement (values-based choices, free will) may not be so limited or limiting.

Nevertheless, this paper is quite incomplete since I have had to be selective as to which principles and tenets of Buddhist psychology I focused on, and to which domains in consumer psychology I applied them. Many other topics await. Take for instance habits, which Wood and Neal (2009, p. 580) conceptualize as automatic and rigid contextually-cued behaviors that undergird a sizeable share of daily activities (about 45%, p. 379). Verplanken and Wood (2006) advocate environmentally-oriented interventions for breaking bad habits (e.g., when households move and new routines are established), but they are otherwise skeptical about people's abilities to make their own agentic changes to current habits, including those unfavorable to well-being. Having said this, Quinn, Pasco, Wood, and Neal (2010) show from a non-Buddhist perspective that training for watchful monitoring of behavior may inhibit certain habits. Buddhist psychology and its TME framework with mindfulness may also boost recognition and editing of conditioned perfunctory behaviors, perhaps even more successfully, as future research could test.

Awareness of personal death, also known as mortality salience, is said to be the mother of all motivations and the precursor of all cultural endeavors (Turley, 2005), and it has been found to trigger an array of defense mechanisms, including materialism and interests in luxury brands (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004). In contraindication, Buddhists regularly use exercises and meditations to ponder death, in accordance with the TME framework's emphasis on impermanence and no-self. One of their key motives in these practices is to prompt themselves to live in the present more attentively, more jubilantly, and more gratefully. Research that preliminarily supports aspects of this Buddhist logic has shown that trait mindfulness can attenuate the effects of mortality salience on defense mechanisms (Niemiec et al., 2010). All in all, it could be worthwhile in future research to explore in more detail how devotees of Buddhist psychology may derive from mortality salience the ability to cherish ownership and consumption experiences more regularly, without attaching in ego-defensive ways as forms of denial or avoidance of death.

Another limitation of my scope is evident in other scholarship that has addressed Buddhism's similarities to and differentiation from Western psychology (e.g. Aronson, 2004; De Silva, 1979; deCharms, 1998; Goleman, 1981; Mikulas, 2007; Nitis, 1989; Olendzki, 2003; Rosch, 1997; 2002; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006), and most of these insights remain to be bridged to consumer psychology. Examples include Buddhism's Eightfold Path and its three poisons of greed, aversion, and delusion (Dalai Lama & Chodron, 2014; Garfield, 2015; Snelling, 1991).

Ness (2002) asserts that the arrival of Buddhist psychology in the West has offered a singular new opportunity to address significant modern dilemmas, among which are surely the ideology, trends, and impact of hyper-consumption in global

well-being today. Animating this opportunity for fresh, meaningful, and compassionate research, Daniel Goleman—a forerunner in the study of emotional intelligence and recent author (Goleman, 2015) on the Dalai Lama—has written that “No Western psychology even dreams of the deep structural transformation of consciousness that Buddhist psychology offers as a possibility” (1981, p. 136). It appears that the creative and pragmatic interweaving of Buddhist and consumer psychologies holds much promise for consumer researchers and consumers themselves.

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