



Commentary

## Enhancing Consumer and Planetary Well-Being by Consuming Less, Consuming Better

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### ABSTRACT

The urgent need to address unsustainable consumption practices has become increasingly evident. While much traditional consumer behavior research serves to stimulate consumption, the focus needs to shift towards encouraging more sustainable consumption patterns. This commentary synthesizes insights from a roundtable discussion at the 2023 Society for Consumer Psychology Conference, which comprised an exploration of novel, creative, actionable, and theoretically sound avenues for getting people to consume less, consume better. The commentary tackles three essential questions: (1) What do we mean by consuming less, consuming better? (2) Who is/are responsible for such behaviors? (3) How do we get people to consume less, consume better? In doing so, it lays out several future research directions.

### KEYWORDS

conceptual/theoretical, consumer behavior, consuming less, consuming better, sustainable consumer psychology/behavior

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## 1. Introduction

Consumption is, quite literally, destroying our planet. Earth Overshoot day, the date by which humanity has used up all the biological resources that the Earth generates during the entire year, fell on August 2 in

2023 (Earth Overshoot Day, 2023) – a clear signal that we are consuming well beyond our means. Unfettered neoliberalism, along with the yoking of economic growth to more and more consumption, has raised living standards for many worldwide but at grave eco-



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logical and human cost. As the world tries to dial back from the perils of global warming, the specter of ever more frequent pandemics, and skyrocketing inequities between the rich and the rest, the curbing of a host of consumption-related practices, particularly in the world's wealthiest and most populous nations, has become a vital but as of yet unrealized goal. Rampant consumerism manifests as a problem not only in energy emissions and usage, but also in water usage, high-meat diets, unsustainable clothing purchases, and countless other ways. In many nations, wealthy and otherwise, the market mentality has seeped into the collective psyche, including value systems, promoting consumption as not just a panacea for a host of psychological and social ills but even a virtue.

Despite all the actions taken towards a sustainable future, we are missing the complete picture; this norm of unsustainable consumption needs to be changed, as our planet simply cannot keep up with such great resource demands. With humanity projected to double material resource use by 2050 under the “business as usual” scenario (Bringezu et al., 2017), a sustainable future must involve lowering individual, social, and environmental harm. Interestingly, we consumer behavior scholars have traditionally focused on developing theories and strategies aimed at selling more to consumers. But with the tables now turning, we need to start asking: how can we get consumers to consume less, consume better (i.e., more sustainably) and dispose better, thereby lowering our ecological footprint and contributing to greater and more equitable societal wellbeing. Trying to find novel, creative, actionable, and theoretically sound answers to this essential question was the motivation for our roundtable at the Society for Consumer Psychology (SCP) Conference in Puerto Rico, March 2023, “When Less is More: Enhancing Well-being by Reducing Consumption.”

This commentary is an integrative summary of our discussion at the SCP Roundtable. Each of us brought distinct but often complementary perspectives on the topic to generate a discussion that touched on three essential questions about Consuming Less, Consuming Better (from here onwards CLCB): (1) what is CLCB (i.e., what do we mean by CLCB)? (2) who

is/are responsible for CLCB (i.e., who are the relevant stakeholders)? and, most importantly, (3) how do we get people to CLCB? This commentary is, thus, organized around these three questions (What, Who, and How). Each section conveys the basic points made and research insights discussed at the Roundtable, pointing to, where relevant, future research directions. In that, a key objective of this commentary is to serve as a springboard for conceptually rigorous scholarship that helps the world consume less, consume better.

## **2. What is CLCB? Shifting Consumption Behaviors for Sustainability**

Consumption, and particularly the waste it generates, has long been a major contributor to environmental degradation, with profound implications for ecosystems and human health; it depletes natural resources and leads to biodiversity loss and habitat destruction. For instance, disposable plastics transform into toxic microplastics, killing marine animals and polluting oceans and landfills. Against this backdrop, the notion of CLCB encapsulates, at its broadest, the need for people to shift to more conscious, intentional, and sustainable consumption behaviors. To date, the most specific and pervasive manifestation of this shift is the principle of “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle,” which refers to minimizing the amount of consumption waste generated, reusing products that still have usable parts, and putting old, discarded products to new uses. Of these, the greatest societal and business emphasis to date has been on recycling, reflected also in the considerable scholarly insights into the drivers of such behavior, with the aim of encouraging it (Winterich et al., 2019).

Gaining in importance, but less studied, are reuse behaviors, which can involve repairing, refurbishing, or repurposing items to give them an extended or even second life (Godfrey et al., 2022). Reuse can be conceptualized to occur across time and/or across consumers. Reuse across time emphasizes the ability of the same consumer to repeatedly use a particular good for a prolonged period. Such reuse can be achieved, for instance, through consumer investment in product repair and refill, which extend the life of a particular good and limit the need for excessive packaging.

ing (Nenkov, 2024; Vadakkepatt et al., 2021). Reuse across consumers emphasizes the repeated use of a particular good across multiple consumers, such as in sharing economies and rental markets, both of which are rooted in the phenomenon of non-ownership (Eckhardt et al., 2019; Vadakkepatt et al., 2021). Notably, while our understanding of sharing economies and, to a lesser extent, rental markets is growing, scant consumer research has focused thus far on understanding the consumer repair decision, even as more organizations offer repair services.

Essential as recycling and reusing are, reducing the amount of waste generated in the first place, by using fewer resources and consuming less, offers greater environmental advantages when contrasted with these behaviors. This entails encouraging individuals, businesses, and communities to be mindful of their consumption habits, avoid unnecessary consumption (i.e., consumption that is not clearly related to “needs” like food, water, sleep, safety, but to “wants” such as in the domains of fashion, cosmetics, and travel) and minimize waste production. For example, using products with minimal packaging, opting for durable goods instead of disposable ones, and conserving resources like water and energy all contribute to waste reduction. Of course, curtailing consumption is more challenging than recycling or even reusing as the very act of consuming triggers dopamine responses, reinforcing consumption behaviors (Hartston, 2012). Beyond its biological effects, consumption is socially and cognitively rewarding, shaping individuals’ self-concept and identity while communicating this identity to others (Gao et al., 2009; Clair & Forehand, 2020; Huang & Fishbach, 2021). It is thus imperative for consumer behavior researchers to identify the ‘sweet spot’ at the intersection of maximizing consumer wellbeing and reducing consumption.

Clearly, more consumer research is needed in our efforts to maximize recycling, reusing, and reducing, as we discuss in the How section. At the same time, though, there is an opportunity here to update more fundamentally how we think about and study consumption behavior in the interest of jointly maximizing consumer and planetary well-being. Vital to this is a more

comprehensive and granular articulation of all the disparate behaviors characterizing CLCB, spanning four broad action categories: Acquisition, Sharing, Renewal and Disposal. The specific behaviors comprising each of these four categories are likely to have, as laid out in this commentary and summarized in Table 1, distinct but overlapping barriers and facilitators, pointing to opportunities for investigations into maximizing all of these behaviors.

At a more meso level, this fundamental update entails the articulation of alternative consumption models that provide a theoretical understanding of rental and sharing economies, non-ownership, and participation in buy nothing groups. More specifically, investigations into the psychological rewards of packaging for consumers would help us understand how firms can reduce packaging, and its accompanying costs, and focus on the contents. More generally, in order to foster consumer wellbeing and promote responsible consumption, it is essential to address the underlying issues of thoughtless and impulsive purchasing behavior, which often result in the acquisition of unnecessary items. This calls for the development of new paradigms, such as one focused on positive consumption, emphasizing consumption patterns that benefit both consumers and society, while incentivizing sustainable practices among companies. To achieve this, it is necessary to expand the scope of research beyond traditional company-related outcomes and include consumer-related factors, such as the impact of purchases on individual wellbeing, positive emotions, health, social relationships, life meaningfulness, and eudemonic happiness. As well, it is crucial to examine the societal and environmental consequences of consumption, appraising the extent to which purchases contribute positively versus negatively to broader societal and environmental well-being.

Such an effort would include the rethinking of our current models of consumer decision-making, which are overwhelmingly premised on an often reflexive connection between need recognition and consumption. There is a great deal of consumer research that establishes this link, exacerbated by consumers’ tendency to underweight opportunity costs (i.e., not asking what

**Table 1. CLCB Actions, Barriers and Facilitators**

	<b>Acquisition</b> Buy less/buy nothing; Buy durable; Buy second-hand; Buy sustainably made; Buy experiences	<b>Sharing</b> Share; Borrow; Rent; Access Based Services	<b>Renewal</b> Repurpose; Refurbish; Reuse; Repair; Upcycle; Recycle	<b>Disposal</b> Sell; Take-Back; Gift; Donate
<b>Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dopamine responses from consumption.</li> <li>• Habituated, reflexive or compulsive consumption.</li> <li>• Identity- and status-signaling goals.</li> <li>• Product durability neglect.</li> <li>• Psychological rewards of packaging.</li> <li>• Underweighting opportunity costs.</li> <li>• Loss aversion.</li> <li>• Inadequate and/or inaccurate understanding of sustainability and its role in acquisition.</li> <li>• Monetary costs associated with purchasing more sustainable products.</li> <li>• Corporate greenwashing practices.</li> <li>• Social norms promoting consumption.</li> <li>• Unclear understanding of responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing-related stigmas posing threats to identity and status.</li> <li>• Overestimation of product use duration resulting in an aversion to short-term rentals.</li> <li>• Inadequate and/or inaccurate understanding of sustainability and its role in sharing.</li> <li>• Contamination or contagion concerns pertaining to shared access goods.</li> <li>• Unclear understanding of responsibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aversions to the modification of a particular good resulting from beliefs surrounding its perceived inviolability.</li> <li>• Repurchase and replacement preferences outweigh renewal intentions.</li> <li>• Inadequate and/or inaccurate understanding of sustainability and its role in renewal.</li> <li>• Decoupling of consumption from repair has led to products designed for disposal (i.e., non-repairable).</li> <li>• Unclear understanding of responsibility.</li> <li>• Varied, and therefore confusing, recycling policies across geographic regions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns regarding how future users of dispositioned goods may negatively reflect upon their original owners (i.e., reverse contagion).</li> <li>• Inadequate and/or inaccurate understanding of sustainability and its role in disposition.</li> <li>• Low product durability may decrease the likelihood of sustainable disposal</li> <li>• Unclear understanding of responsibility</li> </ul>

*Continued on next page*

Table 1 continued

<b>Facilitators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging in clarification of current wants and needs may offer alternative to consumption-focused need satisfaction.</li> <li>• Psychological states (e.g., loneliness) conducive to lower acquisition (e.g., buying second-hand products).</li> <li>• Waste aversion beliefs and preferences lowering total consumption.</li> <li>• Minimalism and deceleration as identity-defining motivations</li> <li>• Conspicuous non-consumption as a status signal</li> <li>• Greater focus on Epicurean/multi-sensory pleasure in consumption experiences.</li> <li>• Government policies such as Extended Producer Responsibility and carbon taxes.</li> <li>• Durability salience through communications at point-of-purchase.</li> <li>• Traceability technologies empowering consumer confidence in sustainable purchases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection goals superseding consumption goals in response to need recognition.</li> <li>• Waste aversion beliefs as motivator for sharing of collective resources, limiting costs associated with non or idle use.</li> <li>• Implementation of innovative business models of rental and access-based services.</li> <li>• Increased connection to others opens access to additional resources to share and borrow.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recombination and regeneration of existing goods and services as an alternative to consumption-focused need satisfaction.</li> <li>• Greater awareness of transformation salience.</li> <li>• Waste aversion motives to increase product longevity through repair and reuse.</li> <li>• Implementation of repair and cradle-to-cradle services at the business level.</li> <li>• Programs that implement income redistribution to enhance equity.</li> <li>• Social norms normalizing and facilitating DIY and product refurbishment.</li> <li>• Reframing of renewal behaviors as a commitment to one's products.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater perceptions of interpersonal connection provide more opportunities to engage in more prosocial disposal.</li> <li>• Waste aversion-related motives may increase sustainable disposal.</li> <li>• Community-level social cohesion generates closeness and therefore peer-to-peer disposition behaviors.</li> </ul>
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else can we do instead of consuming this). Instead, we need to explore alternative activities such as creation (the recombination or (re)generation of existing goods and services), connection (the access of existing, or development of new, interpersonal relationships), and clarification (the process of reaching a deeper understanding of consumer needs to identify the most efficient and effective solutions), which may fulfill consumer needs without relying on material consumption. Key questions to consider pertain to the contingent extent of the automatic link between need recognition and consumption, the natural inclination of consumers towards the more generative, non-consumptive activities, the types of needs best met by such activities, and the unique benefits derived from replacing consumption with alternative actions. How and in what circumstances could creation, connection and clarification replace consumption? Specifically, how might individuals be prompted to consider responding to needs by creating, rather than simply using up resources? Could individuals achieve higher satisfaction by connecting with others rather than consuming? Might individuals be able to satisfy needs more effectively by taking their time to clarify the true nature of their needs as opposed to consuming?

A natural question arises, then, about who/what entities are responsible for these fundamental consumption shifts. We discuss this “who” question next.

### **3. Who Is Responsible for Consuming Less, Consuming Better?**

The three groups ultimately responsible for CLCB are consumers, businesses and the public sector (government, non-profits). Our discussion of how, when, and why these groups are both individually and collaboratively responsible revealed four basic themes. The first, and most basic, theme emphasized the necessity of transitioning from individual-level micro solutions to transformative business-level strategies to address systemic environmental and social challenges effectively. Researchers have thus far focused primarily on individual consumer responsibility and inducing micro-level changes in behavior rather than examining the broader systemic context (Chater & Loewenstein, 2023). However, relying solely on individual consumer actions has

its limits: research shows that consumers are not only loss averse (Mrkva et al., 2020), unwilling to give up their consumption experiences, but also often quite at sea as to how to CLCB (Johnson et al., 2024). Placing exclusive responsibility on consumers also disregards systemic issues entrenched in corporate practices and government policies contributing to environmental and social problems (Winterich et al., 2023)

Thus, there is a need to move beyond undue reliance on individual consumer action, and, critically, consumer responsabilization for CLCB, to articulate transformative business-level solutions, including new and innovative business strategies and models such as rental services, shifts to a refill economy, and accessible circular economy programs (Tari & Trudel, 2024), which, together, induce consumers to CLCB. These strategies are not only more viable, with companies of all sizes able to adopt them within shorter timeframes, but they also offer significant advantages not only in terms of environmental gains (e.g., reducing carbon emissions and limiting consumption waste), but also in terms of economic benefits (e.g., operational efficiency and cost savings), social benefits (e.g., job creations), and strategic benefits (e.g., driving innovation and setting industry standards) (Nenkov, 2024). To enable such a shift, consumer researchers need to broaden their investigations beyond the mere promotion of sustainable products, which may not actually offset the consumption of less sustainable ones, to, among others, better understand the impact of and support for government policies aiming to add environmental costs to market prices, such as Extended Producer Responsibility and carbon taxes.

Underpinning this transition from consumers to businesses and governments is the basic question of who bears responsibility, moral and otherwise – and, importantly, feels responsible – for lowering the ecological footprint of consumption and, more broadly, solving societal issues tied to consumption. This comprises the second theme, pertaining to the drivers and dynamics of responsibility allocation between consumers, companies, and governments, and the accompanying need to understand when and how responsibility shifts occur and how, more generally, it can be best shared to drive CLCB. Both consumers

and businesses have clear incentives to “pass the CLCB buck” to one another, so it is important to understand both when consumers should – and, in fact, do – feel responsible for sustainability and when they should not, despite the attempts of business to pass the responsibility onto them, claiming often the primacy of consumer demand. This is complicated by recent findings that consumers are particularly sensitive, and react adversely, to any indication that a company might be passing off what they perceive to be its responsibility on to them (Goenka & Bagchi, 2024). Understanding how and when responsibility is shared between businesses and consumers is inherently challenging and it depends on a host of consumer, context, product, and industry specific factors. For instance, when businesses do accept responsibility, do consumers join in to do their share or simply let businesses do all the heavy lifting? What strategies and tactics, including nudges, might ensure sharing rather than the passing of responsibility? And what mechanisms underlie consumers’ enthusiasm, and assumption of responsibility, for CLCB?

A third, more specific theme pertains to the responsibility and role of marketing in getting consumers to CLCB. Central to this is the need for businesses to develop innovative marketing practices to effectively communicate their sustainability performance to consumers trying to CLCB. In the face of continued consumer skepticism about the actions and intentions of businesses in this regard, exacerbated by the prevalence of greenwashing, there is a clear need for systems that incentivize and reward truly sustainable companies, distinguishing them from both laggards and imposters. To this end, technologies like blockchain can play a powerful role, offering traceability information that empowers consumers to minimize the negative externalities of their purchases (Du et al., 2023). For instance, Dutch retailer Albert Heijn’s implementation of a blockchain-based solution exemplifies how marketers can leverage this technology to let consumers easily track the journey of products, such as orange juice, from the farm to the retailer (Ahold Delhaize, 2018). In line with this, future research should delve into how to best concretely communicate the impact

CLCB might have (e.g. through collective efficacy messaging, analogies); this will help make marketers more effective players in this arena.

The fourth theme circles back to consumers, focusing on the inherent imbalance in the responsibility for and ability to CLCB imputed to different socioeconomic groups globally. This theme centers around the prevalent notion today that only affluent consumers can afford to be “green” by purchasing products like electric cars and organic food—seen as markers of class privilege—overlooking the barriers low-income consumers face in accessing sustainable options. This division, described by Bourdieu (1984) as a form of “distinction,” points squarely to the divorcing of sustainability concerns from social welfare ones when, in fact, they are intertwined. Indeed, the dramatic rise in income disparities since the 1980s is mirrored in carbon emissions, with the wealthiest 1% responsible for 15% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, contrasted with the lower 50% contributing 10% (Bruckner et al., 2022). This correlation highlights the social dimension of CLCB, raising research-worthy questions about the underexplored effects of income redistribution on CLCB. Investigating how income redistribution impacts high-income versus low-income groups’ spending and sustainable practices can offer insights into CLCB at both individual and systemic levels. Moreover, exploring political and social narratives around CLCB and redistribution can help illuminate broader equity issues. For example, the debate over whether it is fair to expect developing nations to pursue green growth under stricter constraints than those historically faced by developed countries points to the need for a nuanced understanding of CLCB that considers both global inequities and, more specifically, capabilities. This complex global landscape underscores the need to examine, more broadly, the interplay between sustainability, social justice, and economic policies in our efforts to understand the “who” question pertaining to CLCB.

Of course, regardless of the specific configuration of responsibility across consumers, firms, and the public sector in driving CLCB across different contexts, the focal behaviors of consuming less and consuming better are ultimately engaged in by the – eponymous – con-

sumers. Thus, we end with a discussion of the most crucial question in our quest to motivate consumer research on CLCB: how can consumers be encouraged to CLCB?

#### 4. How Can Consumers Consume Less, Consume Better?

As consumer researchers, our work, together, points to a myriad of routes through which consumers' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings interact with their identity and social preoccupations towards better and less consumption, with concomitant opportunities to shape such behaviors through marketing. We discuss these next.

##### 4.1. Perceptions, Cognitions and Affect

Current patterns of consumption, often reflexive, underscore the value of a basic widening in consumers' perceptual, cognitive, and affective "fields of vision" to make room for CLCB. This includes the perceptual (re)framing of goods and their utility, novel thought pathways, and less-traveled affective foci. Turning to perceptual framing first, recent work shows that in getting consumers to consider repairing their malfunctioning products rather than replacing them, going beyond presenting repair as an act of sustainability to frame it as a commitment to one's products is particularly effective for brand loyal consumers (Doe, 2023). Parallels in the domain of recycling and extending product utilization and reuse point to the effectiveness of making certain desirable downstream consequences of such behavior concrete and salient in the mind of consumers. For instance, making consumers aware of what recyclables are transformed into (e.g., a plastic bottle is turned into sportswear), termed transformation salience, motivates them to recycle more (Winterich et al., 2019). Similarly, making reuse transformation salient through brand advertisements (e.g., jeans transformed and reused as shorts or furniture transformed and reused as something else) appears to not only promote extended product utilization but also increase brand evaluations (Winterich et al., 2023).

The value of getting consumers to focus, cognitively, on certain routinely neglected aspects of their decision-

making is reflected in the notion of product durability neglect, which has been examined in the context of consuming luxury versus ordinary products (Sun et al., 2021). Specifically, in deciding between ordinary and luxury products, consumers tend to allocate their budgets to multiple ordinary – and cheaper – goods in lieu of fewer high-end, more expensive products because of their cognitive failure to consider how long a product will actually last, even though they are generally aware that the higher-end products typically last longer. In light of this, making product durability more salient by mentioning the word "durable" in advertising may be effective in nudging consumers towards the purchase of fewer, more durable goods.

Presenting an interesting parallel, in terms of a beneficial quality-quantity tradeoff, in the domain of affect are the CLCB implications of shifting consumers' focus from the visceral pleasure they obtain from food consumption, which is the transient hedonic response triggered by immediate eating impulses, to the Epicurean pleasure therein, defined as the long-lasting enjoyment derived from the multisensory, aesthetic, and symbolic appreciation of food (Cornil & Chandon, 2016a,b). When consumers emphasize Epicurean pleasure or are encouraged to do so through marketing that accentuates the food's multisensory quality, or through explicit instructions that guide consumer experience towards a deeper, more appreciative engagement with food, they tend to be satisfied with smaller portion sizes. Decreasing portion sizes contributes not only to better overall health outcomes (with implications for the handling of the obesity epidemic) but also helps mitigate the environmental impact associated with food overproduction, such as increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and excessive water use. In that, this affective refocus towards a multisensory appreciation in food consumption presents a viable, business-friendly alternative to more restrictive measures such as calorie labeling and legislation against large portions, suggesting a sustainable strategy for promoting healthier eating habits and environmental conservation. An interesting future question pertains, then, to the generalizability of this affective refocus on the experience of multisensory pleasure in the present



moment to other consumption domains, making it a key lever in helping consumers reduce consumption without compromising – and with possibly enhancing – their wellbeing.

#### 4.2. Motivations

The perceptual, cognitive, and affective factors discussed above coalesce to motivate the consumer to CLCB. Turning more directly, then, to the myriad and multifaceted motivations consumers have for CLCB, some key themes emerged from the Roundtable. First and most basically, as per our discussion of who is responsible for CLCB, the extent to which consumers feel a sense of responsibility or even psychological ownership (Tari & Trudel, 2024) towards sustainability is likely to be a key motivator of their efforts to CLCB. This sense of responsibility can be triggered/heightened by making, among other things, the environmental costs of products more visible and apparent to the consumer. For instance, research (Vadakkepatt et al., 2021) suggests that highlighting the environmental and economic costs of packaging, which often holds intrinsic appeal for consumers, can motivate them to choose options that focus more on product content and less on packaging (i.e., content over container), thereby reducing waste.

This also points, more broadly, to many consumers' aversion to waste as a key motivator of their efforts to CLCB. Such waste aversion encompasses not just material goods but also immaterial resources like time and money. To the extent that consumers are inclined to adopt behaviors that optimize resource use, preferring products and services that offer greater efficiency and longevity, future research can try to understand how waste aversion can be best harnessed as a driver of CLCB. Specifically, theories of waste aversion can help link consumer motivations to avoid waste and conserve resources to reduced consumption. As well, future research could elucidate contexts wherein the motivation to conserve resources like money, time, or materials outweighs the desire for new acquisitions.

Notably, this aversion consumers have to wasting resources, both material and immaterial, is at least partially responsible for their increasing participation in the sharing economy. However, the rise of this econ-

omy highlights a dynamic tension in consumer behavior between reducing and potentially increasing consumption. By facilitating the sharing, donating, or reselling of goods, the sharing economy promotes the extended use of products, aligning with the motivation of waste aversion. However, this model also introduces shifts in consumption patterns that might inadvertently increase consumption, given that reduced attachment to personal items and altered perceptions of value, including the lower perceived costs of consuming, may, at least for some consumers, encourage more frequent transactions.

More basically, future research would do well to dig deeper into why so many consumers are motivated to engage in over-consumption/ unnecessary consumption, as defined earlier. What underlying motivations (e.g., sense of control, sense of purpose, positive emotions, simple boredom) separate the pursuit of need-fulfilment from want-fulfilment? For instance, a motive guiding many want-based consumption decisions is the psychological drive to compensate for personal deficiencies, such as a perceived lack of control over one's life. Interestingly, this perceived self-deficit can be evinced, at least in part, in the interaction between the objective and self-perceived subjective wealth of consumers (Bellezza & Gladstone, 2024). Wealthier consumers who feel rich spend less, while poorer consumers who feel richer spend more, with spending the highest among wealthy individuals who feel poor and feel they lack control over their lives. Recognizing this motive, then, along with for whom and when it manifests, provides an opportunity to develop interventions that redirect such compensatory consumption towards more sustainable alternatives.

#### 4.3. Identity/Self

A fundamental motivation to consume is the creation and maintenance of a desired identity, or our sense of who we are. Consumption helps to curate one's identity, reinforce self-esteem, and allow individuals to present desired images of themselves to others (White et al., 2019). Thus, it is no surprise that consumers' identity management efforts can also serve as both a barrier and, importantly, an impetus for CLCB. A case

in point is the identity-defining notion of consumer minimalism (Wilson & Bellezza, 2022), which refers to consumers who voluntarily choose to own very few items (i.e., buy less). Such minimalism manifests along three dimensions: the number of possessions, reflecting the ownership of few possessions, sparse aesthetic, reflecting the preference for simple and uncomplicated designs, and mindfully curated consumption, reflecting the thoughtful selection of possessions. The first dimension is particularly relevant for CLCB as it emphasizes the willful reduction of consumption levels among consumers who could afford to buy more products but intentionally decide not to.

This raises interesting questions about the role consumer identity might play in the conceptualization and implementation of, more generally, non-monetary consumption models, centered on consumption that does not involve a financial exchange (e.g., buy-nothing groups, social recycling (Donnelly et al., 2017), or the more traditional borrowing of assets). For instance, what is the role of consumers' identity curation motives in how drawn they are to non-monetary consumption as opposed to the more traditional renting of assets? Could the former, by being socially stigmatized, pose a potential threat to the identity of at least certain consumers? And if so, could such consumption be framed favorably, from an identity and, thus, consumption perspective, as building community or benefiting environment/society rather than saving money? Along the same lines, given prior research linking loneliness to increased second-hand product interest (Huang & Fishbach, 2021) it is worth examining how consumer comparisons of consumption modes, such as owning versus renting or buying secondhand, respond to specific identity-relevant dynamics such as a perceived threat to the self, the need for status, or the desire for self-concept clarity and self-concept continuity. In short, exploring the role of identity/the self in the appeal, or lack thereof, to consumers of alternative consumption models that eschew monetary transactions comprises a compelling avenue for future research.

#### 4.4. Social Influence

A key identity-related motive is to present a positive, desirable image of ourselves to others. This along with our more general tendency to modulate our consumption for maximal social rewards, in the form of admiration, reputation, and more generally status, points to the importance of understanding how such influences can shift consumers away from overconsumption to CLCB. An interesting notion, in that vein, is that of conspicuous non-consumption, where people intentionally choose to abstain from consuming products, and even actively reduce the number of their possessions, to signal their values to others. Interestingly, as material abundance and waste are progressively losing their value as signifiers of status because advanced stages of capitalism in many developed economies have made it easier for many consumers to accumulate many items, conspicuous non-consumption seems to be emerging as a modern form of status signaling, particularly among the elite (Bellezza, 2023). One particularly interesting question in our quest for CLCB is the relative effectiveness of such non-consumption, versus other forms of sustainable consumption, as an effective way to signal values or status. More generally, future research in the domain of social influence can try to understand how social norms can be reshaped to decrease consumption (e.g., public commitments to reduce consumption or even “buy nothing” for a period of time?) and encourage circular consumption behaviors. In doing so, how to best deal with competing social norms that promote consumption is an important question.

#### 4.5. Behaviors

Finally, a key barrier to CLCB is the speeded up, distracted, 24/7, multi-tasking lives of many people around the world, which can often produce a myriad of consumption behaviors that are mindless, habit-driven, impulsive, and even compulsive. Thus, interventions that can help reduce such consumption patterns have the potential to enable consumers to CLCB. At the one end of such interventions are subtle behavioral nudges that are part of choice architectures designed to break habits and disrupt mindless modes of consumption (White et al., 2019). For example, if the consumer tends to experience a lack of control at

certain times of the day (e.g., impulse purchasing online after 8pm) or on certain platforms (e.g., Instagram), could they opt in to a lock on their spending at certain times or block ads from certain platforms?

At the other end are certain transformative changes in consumer lifestyle, such as deceleration, or the purposeful and sustained practice of slowing down both psychologically and physically. Specifically, some recent research (Eckhardt et al., 2019) conducted with individuals on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage points to deceleration as a potential pathway towards more sustainable consumer lifestyles, wherein consumers realize that “less is more,” and dematerialize and declutter in their quest for physical and mental wellbeing, even after the pilgrimage is over. However, maintaining these benefits in the fast pace of everyday life remains a challenge, and insights, through further investigations, into strategies that help consumers realize and maintain the deceleration mindset and lifestyle well past any specific intervention (e.g., pilgrimages) are crucial for fostering a long-term commitment to CLCB.

## 5. Conclusion

As the detrimental impact of consumption on our planet becomes increasingly evident, the imperative to address unsustainable consumption practices has never been more urgent. While traditional consumer behavior research has predominantly focused on strategies to sell more, there is a pressing need for consumer researchers to understand the actors and the psychological levers that can effect less, and better, consumption. Our roundtable discussion at the Society for Consumer Psychology Conference in Puerto Rico was one step in this line of inquiry, and this commentary summarizes the insights, questions and future research directions pertaining to a deeper, more actionable understanding of CLCB.

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# LUMINOUS INSIGHTS

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