

Minimalism in Consumption: A Typology and Brand Engagement Strategies

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AUTHORS

Aniruddha Pangarkar, Paurav Shukla and Charles Ray Taylor

ABSTRACT

Minimalistic consumption has received increased attention during the last few years with a substantial segment of consumers having adopted this notion. Minimalism highlights subjective well-being, happiness, and increased quality of life. Despite minimalism gaining significance, we know little about minimalistic consumption, its various forms, its antecedents, and its impact on consumer behavior. Extant literature does not offer a clear or concise conceptualization of minimalism in consumption or the potential strategies to identify, target, and engage minimalistic consumers. This has been a major deterrent in advancing research on minimalistic consumption. This article provides a conceptualization of minimalism and offers a typology of consumers that engage in minimalistic consumption based on two dimensions: the conditional susceptibility and goal orientation of consumers. It presents a framework of brand engagement strategies for each type of consumer and shows how firms can potentially benefit in terms of sales, profitability, and customer relationships by engaging with minimalistic customers.

Keywords: minimalism, consumer well-being, brand engagement, marketing strategies, minimalistic consumers

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1. Introduction

Over the past few years, global consumerism has seen growth due to internationalization, increased standards of living, and exposure to different cultures, resulting in a more experience driven economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). A unique aspect of this experience economy pertains to a novel social movement known as minimalistic consumption.

Minimalism focuses on owning less, reducing excessive consumption, and improving the quality of life by not indulging in consumerism (Lee & Ahn, 2016).

Although the British philosopher, Richard Wollheim propagated minimalism as far back as 1965, the seeds of this movement have gained momentum only recently across the world, particularly among millennials. For example, 78% of millennials - compared to 59% of baby boomers – demonstrate a consumption preference toward minimalism (Weinswig, 2016). Minimalistic consumers increasingly focus on simplicity, refraining from engaging in materialism as they would in the past, and reducing dependency on certain materialistic aspects that provide instant gratification (Iyer & Muncy, 2016; Seegebarth et al., 2016). The economic shock and associated long-terms financial fears created by the COVID-19 pandemic may contribute to additional interest in this consumption philosophy.

The purchasing power of millennials is very high and they will likely spend more than \$10 trillion in their lifetime (Solomon, 2018). However, minimalistic consumption, an important consideration of this cohort in their decision-making, is a neglected and under-researched area that deserves more attention. We believe that this is a global phenomenon, which has experienced strong customer adoption and buoyancy in perceptions leading to a minimalistic lifestyle. Thus, it is timely to examine the phenomenon of minimalistic consumption (Cherrier, 2009; Iyer & Muncy, 2016). This article addresses several questions

for both researchers and managers in this regard. First, what is minimalistic consumption and what are the types of minimalism in consumption? Second, what factors foster minimalism among consumers? Third, what strategies should brands implement to engage with minimalistic consumers? We answer each of these questions and develop a typology of minimalistic consumption that represents the variety of ways in which consumers approach this unique practice. Further, we provide strategies for organizations to engage with minimalistic consumers in a meaningful way.

Minimalism is a paradigm and philosophy that can be leveraged to achieve a goal—that of leading an uncluttered, simplistic, and congenial life, in the pursuit of happiness, and free from any kinds of tensions or worries (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Peyer et al., 2016). However, extant research indicates several different definitions and perceptions about minimalism depending on research assumptions, consumer inferences, and conclusions. Prior studies have suggested that minimalism can take several forms including voluntary simplicity, reduced consumption, and anti-consumption. We identify, define, and distinguish between these three forms of minimalistic consumption (Elgin, 1981; Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; McGouran & Prothero, 2016; Meissner, 2019; Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009; Cherrier, 2009; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Iyer and Muncy 2016).

While prior identification forms of minimalism has advanced the literature considerably and created awareness of minimalistic consumption, the information available is disparate, not synthesized, and open to subjective interpretation. There exists a need for a comprehensive framework that describes the constituent processes that drive minimalism and its distinct forms. To this end, we synthesize the extant literature, address the research gap, and add a fourth dimension, namely inconspicuous minimalism, to yield a typology that offers an overarching framework for describing the components that provide form and shape to the concept of minimalism.

Most marketing management strategies posit that satisfying consumer wants and needs while motivating consumers to purchase more is important. This contrasts with what minimalistic consumers want. Thus, without managers having sufficient understanding of how to design and develop strategies that satisfy minimalistic consumers, the standard focus on increased consumption may suffer from poor returns among this substantial and globally growing segment. Managers can balance this discordant picture by recognizing the enormous potential that minimalistic consumers offer through developing effective strategies to engage this unique consumer segment. In this paper, we articulate and explain minimalism in its different forms and offer insights and guidance to practitioners regarding how they can target minimalistic consumers through long-term customer engagement strategies that can be part of their firm's blueprint for growth.

2. A Typology of Minimalism

Prior research has examined minimalism through subjective lenses leading to different representations. Researchers have identified a number of forms that minimalism may take. For example, several authors have examined minimalism through the lens of anti-consumption (Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009). Anti-consumption espouses a view toward actively boycotting consumption. Other researchers approach minimalism through the lens of voluntary simplicity (Elgin, 1981; Grigsby, 2012). They argue that this approach to life involves renouncing materialism while leading a simplistic and uncomplicated lifestyle, characterized by the pursuit of interests and activities that provide satisfaction, happiness, and fulfillment. Minimalistic consumers may also aspire to maximize their consumption utility. In reality, by using less, they often do so. The underlying aspect that researchers agree on with regards to minimalism, is the implicit rejection of consumerism while focusing on simplicity, improvement in the quality of life, and the achievement of subjective well-being (Meissner, 2019).

Based on the literature, we distinguish between four broad categories of minimalistic consumers. Two basic conceptual distinctions help in structuring the different types of minimalistic consumption: a) consumption goal orientation and b) conditional susceptibility. Here, consumption goal orientation refers to a motivational state with a desire to approach a goal with either achieving success or avoiding failure (Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Conditional susceptibility refers to economic or normative influences that play a part in driving an individual's goal orientation. At the intersection of these two dimensions, we develop a 2X2 matrix, where Type I minimalism focuses on a voluntary simplicity approach, Type II focuses on reduction in consumption, Type III represents the phenomenon of anti-consumption, and Type IV introduces the novel concept of inconspicuous minimalism. In the section below, we provide a detailed discussion of the typology of minimalism by reflecting on the diverse minimalism forms, their characteristics, and the drivers that lead consumers to engage in minimalism.

Our research builds on and advances the literature on minimalistic consumption because the typology that we identify in our paper is distinct from extant research focusing on anti-consumption typologies (Iyer and Muncy 2009; Iyer and Muncy 2016) on two important grounds: (a) the focus of the typology and (b) determinants of the classification within the typology. For example, Iyer and Muncy (2009) focus on anti-consumption research and identify four different kinds of anti-consumption consumers, namely general-societal (who are concerned about societal welfare and environmental damage), general-personal (driven by a spiritual or ethical belief that it is wrong to divert focus on activities that are self-serving), brand-societal (driven by the belief that certain brands or products cause damage or harm to society), and brand personal (avoidance of a brand because of a negative event connected with it). In contrast to the typology by Iyer and Muncy (2009) which focus on anti-consumption and its impact on brand preferences, perceptions, and experiences, our study

addresses the research gap and contributes to the literature by focusing on different types of minimalistic consumers and the reasons why they choose to be minimalistic.

We build on past research to arrive at this typology because extant research on minimalism has been disparate, neglected, and unstructured. Our typology focuses on voluntary simplicity (focusing less on material possessions to achieve satisfaction through other creative pursuits, hobbies, and interests), reduced consumption (triggered by life events which necessitate spending less because of uncertainty faced in life such as loss of a job or divorce), anti-consumption (consumers influenced by normative pressures to contribute toward sustainability and societal welfare issues), and inconspicuous minimalism (our defining contribution to the literature where normative influences play a part in consumers seeking muted designs and logos that signal sophistication and subtlety to those around them). Thus, the focus of our typology is distinctly different.

Our typology further differs from existing anti-consumption typology on the fundamental underpinnings. For instance, Iyer and Muncy (2009) offer four types of anti-consumption consumers, whose foundations rest on two dimensions namely, those who want to reduce their overall level of consumption versus those who are interested in reducing the consumption of certain brands or products. Our typology is grounded in two fundamentally different constructs namely, consumption goal orientation and conditional susceptibility. Thus, our typology pertaining to minimalistic consumers, differs substantially from earlier conceptualizations.

– Figure 1 about here –

2.1 Type 1: Voluntary Simplicity

The basic premise of voluntary simplicity is that by focusing less attention in collection and acquisition of materialistic possessions, consumers can redirect their finances,

attention and energy towards pursuits in life that are more meaningful to them and provide satisfaction and happiness. Voluntary simplicity is a philosophy that many consumers have been embracing in the past few years. The goal orientation for voluntary simplifiers involves limiting consumption with an intention to develop interests and pursuits in self-fulfillment activities that are non-materialistic in nature (Etzioni, 1999). The economic influences in the lives of consumers guide such goals and advocate using finances astutely and sagaciously.

In some ways, voluntary simplicity is an awakening or enlightenment for the consumer, because it opposes conspicuous consumption and advocates the frugality approach in tandem with a) responsibility in consumption, b) a functionalist way of life, and c) moderation, self-discipline, and self-control with regard to consumption practices. Voluntary simplicity does not espouse that consumers should live in deprivation, but rather it elucidates that one should define sufficiency levels and practice judiciousness regarding financial matters, while repudiating the lure of strictly materialistic possessions. Voluntary simplicity can be viewed as a self-concept, because the focus is very much on one's attitudes, perceptions, and forming judgments of situations around oneself in order to fulfill goals and comprehend one's self-worth (Turner, 2010).

Extant research states that voluntary simplicity is a philosophy where individuals should be genuine in reducing or eliminating the ostensible elements in their lives and focus on fulfilling their self-potential and responsibilities (Elgin, 1981). Also, when consumers adopt voluntary simplicity, they tend to be far more in control of their lives and are able to be introspective, thus feeling more entitled and positive about life in general. Such consumers would then have opportunities to allocate resources toward goals such as education and learning unique capabilities that can shape their personalities (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002).

Voluntary simplifiers refuse to consume items that do not add to their happiness and satisfaction levels (Elgin, 1981). This is because self-drive, fulfilling goals with the objective of achieving well-being, and self-introspection are important for such consumers. Voluntary simplicity helps them accomplish these objectives (Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Huneke, 2005). Voluntary simplifiers gravitate toward what, from their viewpoint, are deeper and more satisfying goals in life because they want to maximize their time and finances in pursuing activities that are more experiential and deeply satisfying.

Some researchers state that voluntary simplicity is a healing mechanism and defense against the effects of materialism, since consumers are no longer worried so much about acquisition and possession, yet are free to develop hobbies, skills, and interests that make them happy (Cenzig & Torlak, 2018). Voluntary simplifiers act this way because they want to embrace positivity, seize control of their daily lives, and not depend on other sources for finding joy and solace (Lenoard-Barton, 1981). Some other researchers identify voluntary simplicity as a revolution, which helps in developing one's self-dependency and cultivating one's judgment regarding life priorities (Zavestoki, 2002).

Our conceptualization finds some overlap with the broad-based reflection of micro anti-consumption by Iyer and Muncy (2016) which relates to avoiding excess consumption in order to live a simpler life. However, we extend this broad-based understanding by differentiating and elucidating on the antecedents and characteristics of voluntary simplifiers. Further, our conceptualization of voluntary simplifiers differs from an earlier version (Iyer and Muncy 2009) that focuses on anti-consumption simplifiers. For instance, in defining anti-consumption simplifiers, Iyer and Muncy (2009) propose that these consumers are not driven by economic circumstances. However, in our conceptualization we demonstrate that voluntary simplifiers often focus on judicious resource allocation due to potential economic constraints. Further, it is important to note that extant research (Iyer and Muncy 2016; Iyer

and Muncy 2009) focuses more on the environmental factors that play a part in consumption decisions along with avoidance of certain brands that are known to cause damage to society and products that have contributed to a negative impact or association in their lives. In contrast, our approach clearly identifies the reasons and antecedents as to why consumers that espouse voluntary simplicity or reduced consumption demonstrate such behaviors via the goal orientation approach. For example, a recent university graduate during the COVID (and potentially post-COVID) pandemic economy might focus on finding mental peace, solace, and satisfaction through joining yoga classes or a gymnasium in order to maintain their physical and mental health. In order to pursue these hobbies and goals because of constraints due to limited income available at their disposal, such an individual might not immediately purchase a car, but utilize Uber or shared transportation to meet their needs and requirements.

In recent times, many voluntary simplifiers have resorted to decluttering their homes because of frantic lifestyles that previously caused incessant purchase and consumption. In order to better utilize spaces and free one's mind from the excesses of consumption, decluttering has proven to be a deeply satisfying experience for such voluntary simplifiers (Goyal, 2018). There are several instances of groups and communities advocating voluntary simplicity. For example, since 1996, the San Diego Voluntary Simplicity Group has been espousing the voluntary simplicity movement through monthly meetings, involving members seeking financial freedom, reducing clutter, and achieving important life-goals.

2.2 Type II: Reduced Consumption

Reduced consumption indicates engaging in less consumption than before, based on economic constraints or practicing frugality in an individual's life. Reduced consumption is characterized by necessity and utility-driven consumption which trigger the goal orientation of avoidance (Zavestoski, 2002). In some instances, it may be a temporary state. Like

voluntary simplicity, the economic influences in the lives of consumers guide such goals and advocate for using finances prudently and cautiously. The basic premise of reduced consumption is that by decreasing consumption and ensuring that only necessity, utility, or occasion-driven requirements propel such activities, consumers can channel their financial resources effectively, thus enhancing subjective well-being and increasing quality of life. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, an individual in a family might lose their job temporarily, leading to a realization that it is sensible to consume less and exercise frugality in those purchases that do need to be made.

It is pertinent to note that unlike anti-consumption, reduced consumption does not advocate boycotting or giving up on consumption completely. As per extant research, anti-consumption refers to consumers boycotting specific brands or products because of environmental reasons or a strong focus on societal welfare (Iyer and Muncy 2016). Consider this example- over the past several years, People For the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and its members, have been propagating a campaign against Canada Goose garments for the use of coyote fur in its products (Testa 2020). PETA's members have advocated a ban on the company and its products because of behavior that they believe is causing damage to animals and the environment. This is a classic example of anti-consumption. However, it is important to note that unlike anti-consumption which promulgates complete boycott and avoidance of products and brands, reduced consumption implies that consumers might still purchase certain products, but they will do so in moderation. This stems from the realization that they possess limited financial resources affected by certain life events like loss of employment, divorce, or changes in the family lifecycle such as marriage or birth of a child, which lead to additional financial responsibilities. Thus, such consumers will only purchase as per their needs and requirement. For example, a consumer might reduce their consumption under normal circumstances due to financial constraints, but could still splurge on special

occasions like a birthday, anniversary, or achievement of an important life goal, such as a promotion or getting a new job.

It is pertinent to understand that just like voluntary simplifiers who limit consumption to find happiness and solace in other aspects of life, such as pursuing a hobby or enhancing their education skills, the goal orientation of reduced consumption consumers is driven by financial constraints triggered by certain lifestyle and family changes which lead them to conserve finances. Thus, reduced consumption consumers have distinct underlying motives driven by financial pressures and are not directly impacted or influenced by environmental concerns or brand avoidance because of societal welfare concerns, as is the case with anti-consumption consumers (Iyer and Muncy 2009; Iyer and Muncy 2016). Reduced consumption consumers focus on self-image, self-esteem, and differentiation from others around them, such as peers (Turner, 2010). However, life changes can also trigger insecurities among consumers and/or change their economic condition and lifestyle. In such cases, consumers may analyze and be retrospective of their consumption behavior, while concluding that they need to stop behaviors that advocate self-absorption and self-centeredness, leading to instant gratification (Fournier & Richins, 1991). At such junctures, consumers might reduce consumption with a view to conserving finances and building relations with others around them, while gaining enhanced security for their future. Overall, reduced consumption is temporal and in case of improved economic conditions and increased finances, consumers may revert to previous consumption habits.

– Table 1 about here –

2.3 Type III: Anti-Consumption

During the last few years, several scholars have studied and written about anti-consumption. Extant research defines anti-consumption as a strong dislike, abhorrence, and

dismissal of consumption practices (Zavestoski, 2002). Anti-consumption is a goal-avoidance approach driven by normative pressures in the form of ecological focus and sustainability, which results in improved well-being and the satisfaction of contributing to societal and environmental issues. Some scholars state that anti-consumption is a unique type of non-consumption that comes about in circumstances where consumers are idealists, highly engaged with social causes, and are strongly convinced about renouncing consumption of certain products and services (Seegebarth et al., 2016). In this sense, anti-consumption is behavior linked to the notion of well-being, where consumers introspect their social self-identity, social orientations, social motives, and social self-interests before rejecting consumption and the excesses associated with such consumption (Iyer & Muncy, 2009). In short, normative and social influences drive consumers to take part in anti-consumption.

Iyer and Muncy (2009) classify anti-consumption consumers into four sub-categories, which include consumers who care for the environment and society, those who prefer a simple and uncomplicated life devoid of materialistic pursuits, those who feel that certain brands are impacting society negatively, and lastly those who switch loyalties and boycott certain brands because their personal philosophies do not match that of the brand. Based on this classification, we surmise that consumers focused on anti-consumption already have their physiological needs satisfied. Instead, self-esteem needs drive such consumers, who may typically belong to the upper classes of society. Further, scholars allude to anti-consumption sharing a connection with consumers switching to alternate brands because their personal ideologies do not match with the brand or because the concerned brand is having a negative impact on society (Iyer & Muncy, 2009). Thus, in general, anti-consumption is specifically opposed to consumption. We posit that classifying brand switching as part of the anti-consumption segment is not truly reflective of anti-consumption categorization from a

minimalistic perspective, but rather a separate issue related to the political environment facing marketers that cuts across most types of consumption situations.

Anti-consumption is a part of the minimalistic mindset of consumers and involves the goal of avoiding certain types of consumption. In our opinion and based on the literature, anti-consumption is a phenomenon where the consumers strongly and vehemently refrain from buying certain brands or products because of normative influences driven by sustainability, ecological focus, and societal welfare (Zavestoski, 2002; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009; Seegebarth et al., 2016; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009). Such consumers believe their actions make a social contribution and the result is increased satisfaction through boycotting undesirable or wasteful consumption. Consumers who preach anti-consumerism strongly feel they can make a difference to their own lives and those of others around them (Hutter & Hoffmann, 2013). For example, certain consumers might engage in anti-consumption of: beauty products that engage in animal testing; products from companies that lack fair trade policies; brands that are unaware about conserving the environment through reducing waste in their manufacturing plants; and those who do not use recycled material in their packaging, among other practices.

2.4 Type IV: Inconspicuous Minimalism

One of our defining contributions to the literature on minimalism is the addition of *inconspicuous minimalism*, which is inspired and influenced by consumer research literature on inconspicuous consumption (Berger & Ward, 2010; Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015). Normative pressures similar to anti-consumption drive inconspicuous minimalism, but the key difference is that rather than boycotting products, consumers desire goods due to inherent subtle signals that run counter to conspicuousness. Inconspicuous minimalists engage with designs

and materials, including logos, cuts, styles, and fashion that are soft, muted, and often discreet in appearance. Such designs are often not easily decipherable, except to insiders.

Unlike voluntary simplicity and reduced consumption, normative influences guide inconspicuous minimalism due to social pressures, conformance, and group affiliation (Li, Li, & Kambele, 2012; Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2019). Thus, consumers demonstrate an approach goal orientation, guided by social or normative pressures. For example, consider a consumer carrying a Coach handbag with a subtle logo that is not prominent and thus not easily noticeable to observers, except for Coach aficionados. In this case, true connoisseurs recognize the styling and appearance of a Coach handbag and can thus easily distinguish it from other brands.

Inconspicuous minimalism consumers typically belong to the higher echelons of society, are well educated, and stable in their professions. Thus, such consumers are typically more ecologically focused, practice sustainability, and focus on waste reduction. These notions typically result from normative influences and the effect of social circles. In fact, such consumers could be willing to pay more for products that signal inconspicuous minimalism because of the distinctiveness and differentiation associated with such products, along with compliance towards sustainability initiatives (Han, Nunez, & Dreze, 2010). For example, consider Hermes, the French luxury retail company, which is known for its quality and opulence and possesses all the attributes of being a luxury brand (Ko, Costello, & Taylor, 2019). The company is also famous for its minimalistic designs, distinctive style and focus on sustainability and recycling. Thus, we believe that inconspicuous minimalism is a societal concept because consumers practice social responsibility through acquisition and consumption of designs and patterns that are high quality, yet minimalistic in approach and reduce wastage (Mohr, Webb, & Harris 2001).

Normative influences guide inconspicuous minimalism consumption practices, which indicates a long-term impact that seeks to benefit society in general. Inconspicuous minimalism is not just confined to luxury brands but also extends into services such as hair salons, spas, tourism and other lifestyle services. For example, EviDenS de Beauté, a French-Japanese cosmetics brand that offers cutting-edge cosmetic expertise from Japan combined with French elegance, worked with designer Emmanuelle Simon to create a minimalistic spa without the extravagance typically associated with such treatments. Similarly, built with the remains of an ancient 1338 building residing in Portugal, the Torre de Palma Wine Hotel offers a unique minimalistic experience for customers who want finer things in life without the opulence of traditional high end luxury hotels.

Inconspicuous minimalism is not just about sustainability but rather focuses on the subtle and discreet signals that patronage of goods and services communicate to insiders, even though the product or service itself is minimalistic in appearance and style. For example, Insignis Getaways is a travel company with a different model based in Chennai, India. It designs customized holidays in exotic but less-traveled, and arguably less “prestigious” destinations such as Croatia, Slovenia, Peru, Seychelles, Georgia etc. for honeymoon couples, solo travelers, anniversary celebrations, and urban consumers wishing to expand life horizons and broaden their experiences. The company believes in experiential consumption and offers its patrons services such as shopping advice before departure to the destination so that busy individuals can utilize their time judiciously and carefully selected food menus catering to individual tastes in order to make the experience memorable, along with reducing wastage often seen in buffets. Thus, in comparison to regular travel agents, Insignis offers an unforgettable and everlasting experience to its patrons without the frills of higher costs and excessive services that often never get utilized. Insignis is not an elite or luxury service, but it differentiates itself from the competition by clearly identifying its key

customers and satisfying their demands. Most of the company's patrons are word of mouth referrals that desire personalized but minimalistic services, and are therefore happy to communicate this with others looking for similar adventures and memories.

Minimalism in design can signify class, sophistication, and an elitist mindset. Thus, affluent consumers who are conscious of their image and status could embrace inconspicuous minimalism because they prefer to associate with dignified and distinguished consumers from their own social class. Another reason for such consumers to adopt minimalism in their choice of designs is that they prefer subtle and neat designs that convey grace and finesse rather than loud and pretentious designs using excessively costly materials, which they do not identify with. For example, Lunya, the Santa-Monica brand is popular among its fans and followers because of its simple, aesthetic, and sustainably sourced fabrics that focus on comfort, is one of the early adopters of the minimalistic design movement.

In many ways, the need to conform to one's social self-image guided by normative influences lead these consumers to endorse a minimalistic approach. Such consumers are typically not "nouveau-riche" and thus do not feel the need to display their wealth to others. Selectivity in acquisition and possessing unique designs that stand out due to attention to detail is important for such consumers since it helps in maintaining status and distinguishing themselves from others. An inconspicuous minimalistic approach serves them well because it signifies culture, sophistication, and class without ostentation.

– Table 2 about here –

3. Customer Engagement Strategies Targeting Minimalists

This paper has identified the different types of minimalistic consumers and some of the antecedents that cause consumers to engage in minimalistic consumption. To utilize this knowledge effectively, it is important for firms to create customer engagement strategies that

allow for meaningful interactions with minimalists. Some key strategies identified for the four different types of minimalistic consumers are as follows:

3.1 *Type 1: Voluntary Simplicity*

Voluntary simplicity involves self-control, self-fulfillment, and achievement of well-being through reduced dependency on consumption and limiting acquisition of possessions to pursue other interests and hobbies. Such consumers are economically constrained and endeavor to conserve their finances on activities, which improve their quality of life. For these consumers, firms should focus on the longevity of brands through maintaining the brand experience, forging an emotional connection with consumers, evolving with marketplace changes, and maintaining consistent quality standards.

One of the fundamental and distinguishing aspects about voluntary simplifiers is the need and desire to limit minimalism with an intention to pursue other self-fulfilling pursuits and hobbies. For example, consider the example of Uber, the largest transportation network company in the world (Mazareanu, 2018). With 95 million users worldwide that use its app, Uber leverages its innovative technologies and dynamic capabilities, which helps customers in ridesharing, ride service hailing, and food delivery (Uber Eats) (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014; Goyal, 2018). Thousands of consumers, globally, have switched to using Uber as a daily ritual. For instance, in emerging markets like India, there are many consumers who can afford to purchase a car, but prefer using Uber, because it is simple to use, minimalistic (allows ride-sharing), and frees up the finances associated with purchasing a car and other related costs such as maintenance, repairs, and servicing. Another attraction offered by Uber that several consumers cherish is the fact that ridesharing results in lesser pollution, curtails environmental damage, minimizes parking problems, and reduces road traffic. Thus, customers experience greater contentment that they can contribute to societal welfare and

responsible consumption. In addition, because a service like Uber does not require greater financial commitment or responsibilities, it is ideal for consumers who are resource constrained. Such consumers can use Uber for their utilitarian needs for transportation, while pursuing other hobbies and interests to which they can devote greater time and attention.

Functionality is very important for voluntary simplifiers since there are economic pressures and they need to balance their spending on other pursuits and interests. As such, firms should ensure that voluntary simplifiers are able to receive greater functional benefits from the products that they consume. It is very important for firms to gauge consumer insights and create products that offer such functional benefits. For example, General Mills leveraged ethnographic research techniques to gauge how consumers would adapt to yogurt sold in a tube (Gordon, Musso, & Zeitouni, 2015). This strategy proved particularly effective for parents who faced difficulties in convincing sleepy children to eat before their early morning school rush. The yogurt sold in a tube was timely for such families, as kids could consume it in the car or before lunchtime at school. General Mills engaged in innovative thinking and instead of focusing on improving the product, it focused on making the packaging utilitarian for young mobile consumers (Santos-Vijande et al., 2013). Go Gurt's market strategy hinged on affordable pricing (a 16 tube pack costs only \$4.47 at stores like Walmart), necessitated by economic constraints that young parents face, and the need for a tasty but healthy alternative that kids on the move could consume. This strategy of focusing very directly on functionality resulted in Go-Gurt yogurt achieving sales of \$37 million and a significant market share.

Decluttering and getting rid of unwanted and unused things in order to keep one's home and surroundings simplistic, is one of the philosophies that voluntary simplifiers follow. To achieve this goal, the focus is on freeing up space in homes and creating positive energy through implementing minimalistic techniques in items like furniture, which to a

voluntary simplifier, results in a more meaningful perspective towards life. Moreover, in many countries across the world such, as India, China, and Singapore, apartments are small, thereby not affording the luxury of huge spaces. Thus, it is important to limit furniture such as wardrobes, sofas, and TV cabinets.

Consider, Furlenco, an award-winning Indian company, which not only offers furniture and home décor for rent, but also advises consumers on how to make their homes look better with minimalistic furniture and designs (Karimpana, 2017). Furlenco guides its customers on making their home look good through decluttering, making spaces functional, and using simple and inexpensive decorations that still add a touch of freshness and natural beauty. Furlenco's philosophy of a "sharing economy" resonates with consumers who want to reduce ownership, share on a budget without compromising on functionality, contribute to using refurbished products that reduces environmental impact, and develop a sense of belongingness towards community. In addition, Furlenco offers its customers one deep cleaning service annually, thereby ensuring the aspects of longevity and maintenance. Thus, a minimalistic mindset, along with other functional benefits and longevity, offered by companies like Furlenco frees up the mind for consumers to pursue other experiential passions like traveling and painting.

3.2 Type II: Reduced Consumption

Reduced consumption is a form of consumption practiced by minimalistic consumers driven by economics constraints with a goal to avoid unnecessary financial outlay. For such consumers, functional benefits of the brand, which provide enhanced utility and influence their lives positively, are very important. Reduced consumption consumers are typically price-sensitive, which is why firms should demonstrate the benefits of the quality-price ratio for their brands when targeting such consumers. For example, Kirkland, Costco's private

label brand, provides superior quality along with low prices for a wide variety of its products across food, baby products, and clothing (Curley, 2018). Similarly, Xiaomi, the Chinese multinational company has earned the title “Apple of China” just ten years after its inception. Xiaomi manufactures inexpensive and affordable smartphones with a strong focus on quality and ease of use. The company’s smartphones, with sleek product designs modeled on famous predecessors, offer the same variety of uses and applications that bigger brands like Apple and Samsung offer, at a fraction of the cost (Saiidi, 2019). Xiaomi’s success story in Asian markets, is a result of offering customers a greater price-utility ratio, and because it fosters an open and transparent communication policy with its consumers by informing them of the latest innovations and technologies that it is developing. By providing consumers with economical models that offer all of the features which more expensive brands provide, Xiaomi has created its own niche in the smartphone market by targeting a segment where affordability and utility reign supreme. This helps the company in maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Menguc, Auh, & Shih, 2007; Zhou, Brown, & Dev, 2009).

While voluntary simplifiers look for narrow and selective product lines, reduced consumption consumers are predominantly affordability focused and attempt to consume only if it fits within their financial means. Thus, firms should target reduced consumption consumers by extending their product lines towards affordable segments. For instance, in targeting reduced consumption consumers, Tesco, the largest retailer in the UK, specifically created a lower tier of its private label value brand following the 2008 financial crisis as the firm realized many of its consumers were having difficulty affording the regular brands. Adaptation to changing markets, competition, and consumer expectations are very important. For example, Polo Ralph Lauren, the American luxury brand, introduced Chaps, its lower-priced line for consumers that could not afford the higher-priced designs. Chaps targets middle-income consumers who wish to experience the styling and comfort of a luxury brand

within modest budgets. In addition, since reduced consumption is temporal in nature and financial constraints cause this behavior, it is very important for companies to ensure they provide the appropriate product range to cater to such segments. This is especially important because once the financial condition of consumers improves, they might be prone to seeking other high-end brands within the same parent company. Researchers have attributed Ralph Lauren's and Tesco's success to brands like Chaps and Tesco Value, since they not only cater to the price-sensitive end of the market but also satisfy the aspirational needs of consumers in that segment (Segran, 2016; Dawes & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013).

Retail stores, especially those that are customer oriented and have invested in data analytics and CRM efforts, are aware about who their regular patrons are. Thus, in the event of reduced consumption from regular consumers, retailers could develop strategies that help these consumers in making optimal choices. If retailers become aware that a life-changing traumatic situation has occurred in their regular consumers' lives and affected consumption patterns, firms could reach out and demonstrate care and empathy towards such consumers. This will reassure such consumers that firms do not just care about their regular patronage but are also willing to lend emotional support during crisis times.

3.3 Type III: Anti-consumption

Several scholars define anti-consumption as the avoidance of consumption practices triggered by ecological focus and sustainability resulting in improved well-being from the perspective of the consumer (Zavestoski, 2002; Seegebarth et al., 2016). Normative and social factors play a very important role in influencing such actions. For firms to engage such consumers, they need to demonstrate ecological benefits coupled with functional benefits, such as what the brand does, the greater purpose it serves, and the sustainable result it achieves, along with the time and money saved. For example, Tom's Shoes follows the "one

for all concept” model, which has been its signature strategy and won the company many accolades and recognition. Tom’s Shoes propagates corporate social responsibility through a very innovative strategy (Saeidi et al., 2015). It donates one pair of shoes to a needy child for every pair of shoes sold. Through this strategy, the company strives to engage its customers in social causes. Such a business model with underlying societal welfare initiatives can attract anti-consumers, with the reassurance that their purchase is contributing to a needy cause.

It is important to note that unlike voluntary simplifiers or reduced consumption consumers, anti-consumption consumers are not economically constrained. Anti-consumption consumers are ecologically minded and gravitate towards sustainable social welfare. This is a fast-burgeoning segment particularly among millennials (Solomon, 2018). Additionally, anti-consumption consumers focus on prudence and rationality through avoiding excess hoarding and collecting of goods by only purchasing utilitarian items, such as moisturizers that are effective for dry skin or shampoos that can soften dry or coarse hair. Because of this unique nature of such consumers, it is very important to provide them with products that can satisfy their life goals, and provide durability as exemplified by superior quality, and offer societal and environmental benefits.

For example, consider The Body Shop, which has been one of the early proponents of the sustainability movement and has been doing this for decades, when environmental focus was not in vogue (Danigelis, 2019). The Body Shop has recently launched an in-store recycling campaign aimed to reduce plastic waste and focus on sustainability. As part of this campaign, customers can empty bottles, jars, tubes and pots from their product line and receive incentives. This is in addition to several other initiatives that the company undertakes, such as working with suppliers to promote sustainable and natural ingredients, maintaining low water footprint value and low eco-toxicity, using only renewable ingredients, and inculcating an organization-wide culture of reducing water and waste. It is noteworthy to

mention that despite being subject to two acquisitions, one by L'Oréal and one by Natura (of which it is currently a part), The Body Shop has consistently retained its core values of focusing on societal welfare.

Anti-consumption consumers possess strong notions about sustainability. In order to target such consumers, it is important for firms to collaborate with not-for-profit organizations with an ecological focus. For example, the GE Foundation has donated medicine and supplies to the charity Americares, which has helped it in opening more than 750 free clinics for the poor and needy (GE Foundation 2020). These clinics will help in serving 5 million people per year. In addition, GE partners with Americares to respond to natural calamities and disasters across the globe with immediate aid and long-term recovery support. The Coca-Cola Foundation too has donated generously to various non-profits including Pact (Pact, 2013). These donations range up to half a billion dollars annually and focus on the theme of “women, water, and well-being”. Here it is important to note the critical role of brand/cause fit (Das et al., 2016; Precejus & Olsen, 2004) for successfully engaging with anti-consumption consumers. In the above examples, GE Healthcare is one of the core businesses for General Electric, so the association with Americares resonates deeply with its customers. Likewise, the notion of Coca Cola being a beverage company focusing on conserving water, and encouraging diversity at the workforce, therefore reverberate with its core brand values.

3.4 Type IV: Inconspicuous Minimalism

Inconspicuous minimalism finds favor among consumers who are economically well-off and actively engage in minimalism driven by normative pressures. These consumers prefer designs, styles, and logos that are soft, muted, and graceful. Muji, the Japanese retail brand selling consumer products and household goods has thrived on the pursuit of

minimalism in design and materials used. Muji's product designs are very simple and not flamboyant or conspicuous. Muji selects materials used for their products very carefully and follows the practice of minimalistic packaging. Usability and functionality are what drives Muji's product philosophy and the company takes it very seriously (Shah, 2016). Thus, subtlety, functionality, and minimalism form the core crux of Muji's product designs. A true Muji consumer would be able to recognize its creations for the elegance and simplicity of its designs. Differentiation arises from the customer's experience of its quality, design, and features, therefore the typical profile of Muji's customers is that they regard themselves to be more evolved, mature, and environmentally conscious, with a strong desire to enrich their daily lives through subtle and minimalistic designs.

It is important to consider the fact that inconspicuous minimalism consumers are generally well-educated, upper class individuals exposed to opulent lifestyles. In recent years, several luxury fashion brands such as Prada and Coach have introduced muted logos, discreet designs, and simple styles, along with minimalistic materials used, in many of their products. For example, certain Prada t-shirts do not have the ubiquitous loud fonts on them, but are, instead, simple and unpretentious in their design. These brands cater to the inconspicuous minimalistic segment, which wants to avoid loud signaling. Since many such consumers belong to upmarket families, insiders from their social circle are aware of the style and designs of popular brands. In fact, social circle and networks that are patrician and not concerned about elevating social status, play a big role in influencing such consumers. Thus, such consumers are very different from the strictly conspicuous consumption-oriented consumers who love to flaunt their Prada t-shirt.

Firms should keep this motive of not wanting widespread attention in mind when designing products for such consumers. Here, we draw from the term "brand prominence", which refers to how certain brands delineate their products in a manner such that they are

either more conspicuous or less conspicuous (Han, Nunes, & Dreze, 2010). While some firms may choose to display conspicuous or attention-seeking designs, other firms rely on the fact that insiders are able to identify their brands, even if the product possesses discreet branding. For example, certain brands such as Bottega Veneta do not display loud logos or explicit branding, but insiders and loyal patrons are still able to distinguish it from other branded handbags. Likewise, I Think Fitness, a fitness center and gymnasium that caters to celebrities and health connoisseurs in Mumbai, India, offers a location nestled in a green zone, with natural lighting, latest equipment that is maintained very well, excellent hygiene standards, and a cafeteria that includes gluten-free organic food. Despite its expensive charges for services, celebrities and prominent personalities patronize it because it is low key and not ostentatious. Yet, at the same time, the gym is exclusive, practices sustainability initiatives, and signals to insiders very subtly that the individual that seeks its membership belongs to a certain class of society.

Inconspicuous minimalistic consumers wish to differentiate themselves from other affluent consumers who might be purchasing certain brands for ostentatious display of wealth signifying prestige. These are “patricians”, who are wealthy individuals that do not wish to engage in flaunting wealth, but rather seek to assimilate with like-minded individuals (other patricians) using low-key signals (Han, Nunes, & Dreze, 2010). For example, several Indian consumers belonging to aristocratic families wear clothes designed by local designers such as Rohit Bal and Satya Paul, which are simple in design and appearance. Although these clothes are expensive and exclusive with intricate designs and unique handmade styles, only true insiders and connoisseurs can recognize the inimitable nature of the work and design, despite the unostentatious nature of the materials used. This trend is observed among patricians across the world. Firms targeting such consumers should consider these factors and design their products accordingly.

4. Organizational response to minimalism

We argue that many organizations currently do not differentiate between minimalistic customers and tend to simply treat them all as one group. We further posit that since the triggers, as well as the characteristics and outcomes of minimising customers are different, organizations need a novel approach to engage different types of minimising customers. Minimalistic consumption is an important global phenomenon and although prior research has focused on creating awareness about such consumption, more structured and actionable information is needed (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2012; Iyer & Muncy, 2016; Seegebarth et. al., 2016).

The approach of viewing all consumers through the same lens has its own flaws and is hazardous for firms. In considering all minimalistic consumers to be homogeneous, firms are overlooking aspects such as understanding consumer psyche, behavior, emotions, and aspirations, thus losing potential revenue boosting strategies. For example, anti-consumption consumers and inconspicuous minimalism consumers are not economically constrained but have completely different motives, approaches, and aspirations regarding engaging in minimalistic consumption.

Another example of ecological focus affecting anti-consumption consumers is how they would likely patronize a non-GMO Verified organic chocolate company, such as Endangered Species. Endangered Species is a company that demonstrates concern for animals by carrying information about animal species on the inside of its chocolate wrappers, and by donating 10% of net profits to its charity partners like The Xerxes Foundation and the African Wildlife Foundation (Bowman, 2018). Thus, Endangered Species is a very good

example of a company that will appeal to anti-consumption consumers who are typically concerned about environmental damage and protecting animals and do not mind paying a higher price for such products, rather than their voluntary simplicity counterparts who are more concerned about finances that they wish to divert toward other pursuits. Therefore, the same product will not appeal to these two contrasting types of consumers.

On the other hand, if we consider the example of handbags, some of the most popular and haute couture brands such as Valextra, Goyard, and Coach all have one thing in common (Cochrane, 2016). During the past few years, all these brands have adopted a very discreet no logo handbag approach that focuses on inconspicuous minimalistic consumers. The discreet branding and muted logos appeal to insiders and those in the know. The consumers who purchase these luxury handbags are not doing it for group affiliation or displaying wealth. Rather, these consumers belong to the upper sections of society, are elite, well-traveled, and mature individuals who are not “nouveau riche” but are looking to network with other like-minded individuals focused on minimalistic designs. In short, subtlety in designs actually creates exclusivity because such consumers are willing to pay premium prices to purchase brands with discreet logos. Such minimalistic designs also help distinguish patricians from wannabes.

As is evident from the two distinct examples presented, the needs of different types of minimalistic consumers are heterogeneous and not homogeneous. The purchasing power, desires, goals, and satisfaction levels also differ among these kinds of consumers. Therefore, it is in the best interest of firms to develop different marketing strategies for these dissimilar and divergent consumers, thus ensuring loyal patronage and higher level of engagement, translating to higher revenues.

– Figure 2 about here –

5. Managerial Implications

It is very important for firms to engage with the different types of minimalistic consumers based on the typology of consumers that we have identified and presented in earlier sections. There is a stark divergence or polarity between what minimalistic consumers want and what firms understand about their needs and requirements. As discussed earlier, firms are viewing minimalistic consumers through the same lens without understanding their intrinsic desires, motivations, and triggers in being minimalistic. It is thus necessary that firms develop strategies and tactics to tap this emerging segment of minimalistic consumers. We identify four different strategies that managers can leverage to target and better engage with minimalistic consumers. These strategies pertain to the 1) personal, 2) social, 3) organizational, and 4) global level engagement with minimalistic consumers.

5.1 Engaging with minimalistic consumers personally

There are myriad benefits that firms can accrue through better personal engagement with minimalistic consumers including customer loyalty, higher retention, increased revenue growth, word-of-mouth promotion, and higher credibility. For example, Reliance Brands has introduced premium luxury brands such as Giorgio Armani, Kate Spade, Tiffany & Company, and Burberry in India. In their own unique way, Reliance Brands has championed and demonstrated how a brand can engage with its consumers at a personal level. In fact, such is the strong bond between regular customers and employees that if a loyal customer does not visit the store, then employees enquire about their welfare and also act as mentors or confidantes in case the customers are facing any personal problems or adversities. Even for irregular customers, the company stays in touch and invites them for coffee sessions or

community events. Besides this, Reliance staff also serves customers in smaller Indian cities, where patrons possess purchasing power, but are unable to visit stores located in urban areas because of their life commitments. For such customers, Reliance sends sales staff for home visits with products or accessories desired by these customers.

It is noteworthy that by employing this highly personalized engagement, Reliance Brands is able to cater to inconspicuous minimalistic consumers, reduced consumption consumers, and anti-consumers simultaneously and that this personal service matters more in these contexts than many other consumption contexts. Through offering high-quality products that are not only unique, sophisticated, and avant-garde, but at the same time possess muted logos, minimalistic patterns, and distinctive designs, Reliance provides inconspicuous minimalistic consumers with exactly the kind of merchandise they seek. For reduced consumption consumers, Reliance understands that a prudent orientation compelled by financial limitations are temporal in nature and that, certain life-incidents can precipitate a reduced consumption orientation. Thus, Reliance sales staff communicate regularly with such consumers, acts as personal counsellors, and provide them discounts on special occasions such as anniversaries or birthdays to demonstrate concern and support, along with highlighting product utility and quality. Reliance also serves anti-consumption consumers and their focus on people, planet, and prosperity, backed by a host of initiatives such as developing infrastructure for water conservation, women and youth empowerment programs, wildlife support initiatives and providing healthcare services for the needy.

In the case of voluntary simplifiers, the desire to declutter, limit materialism and possessions, and pursue other self-fulfilling interests is paramount. For these consumers, Share at Door Step (SADS) programs can serve as an example. SADS encourages consumers to donate their old clothes, books, shoes, stationery, and toys to NGOs and charity organizations. For voluntary simplifiers, the benefits are manifold, first, they can free up their

clutter and unwanted items in order to devote time to other pursuits and hobbies, second, they can spread cheer and happiness to others, thus contributing to society. In addition, the consumer gets a feeling of acting in a socially responsible manner that can enhance positivity and well-being in life. By educating consumers about how their possessions can reach needy individuals rather than end up in landfills, it connects with anti-consumers also. In addition, organizations like SADS provide these consumers with gifts from their brand partners in acknowledgment for their contributions and may be able to connect with reduced consumption consumers who face temporary financial constraints.

5.2 Engaging with minimalistic consumers socially

At the social level engaging with minimalistic consumers can lead to substantially greater societal rewards including greater approval and recognition of the firm's efforts globally. Consider the example of Lush Cosmetics, which states that it believes in protecting people, animals, and the planet (Slater, 2020). To accomplish these goals, the company has followed a unique policy that focuses on social acceptance and appreciation. Lush products such as shampoo bars, soap bars, and body butters possess no excess packaging, helping reduce the company's carbon footprint. Waste elimination is one of the core philosophies at Lush and it achieves this through using 100% recycled and biodegradable materials in its packaging. Thus, Lush's strategy is effective in serving inconspicuous minimalistic consumers and anti-consumption consumers. Because its products have no discernible packaging, font, or logos, which can help identify the brand, inconspicuous minimalistic consumers find it appealing. Likewise, because of its focus on sustainability, waste management reduction, ecological preservation, and resource conservation, it finds patronage from anti-consumption consumers who possess purchasing power but are environmentally conscious.

In the case of reduced consumption consumers, Netflix is an example of a company that provides consumers with utility products at lower and economical prices. Netflix collects a huge amount of data on customers to create hyper-personalized recommendations. It uses that data to help customers find their new favorite shows and to create award-winning original content. Netflix pricing is very competitive globally, and has allowed some consumers to engage in “cord cutting.” The company also offers a variety of plans for reduced consumption users, which differ based on streaming quality and the number of screens running concurrently but at the same time providing the same content choice for those consumers who are economically constrained.

5.3 Engaging with minimalistic consumers at organizational level

Minimalistic consumers differ in several respects- concerning education, ethnicity, financial strength, product attributes, environmentally focused products, life-satisfaction and fulfilment goals, among others. For consumers with such diverse backgrounds, firms need to segment them better to come up with product offerings that are both utility-driven, hedonic, and focused on societal welfare. For example, Chobani Yogurt, the iconic American yogurt company has transformed itself into an immensely successful and profitable company in just 15 years. Through its research, Chobani realized it was missing one major segment of minimalistic consumers who were health and environment focused. Thus, Chobani created a range of creamy blended Greek yogurt that included natural ingredients along with high protein and calcium. In promoting the product, Chobani highlighted its focus on societal welfare initiatives such as a reduced carbon footprint, the use of 100% renewable energy, reduced water consumption, and sustainable packaging and sourcing. Chobani, through its focus on quality, economical prices, variety, and taste, along with its ecological orientation

has successfully engage voluntary simplifiers, anti-consumers, and reduced consumption consumers at the same time.

In the case of inconspicuous minimalistic consumers, however, firms do need to adapt to consumers in different geographical locations, markets, and culture. Consider the example of Tom Ford, the famous American luxury brand, known for its high impact designs often worn by celebrities across the globe. In many parts of the western world, when targeting inconspicuous minimalists, Tom Ford does not put any logos on its clothes and uses rather plain packaging for its private blend fragrance collection. However, in countries such as the Gulf region, when targeting ostentatious consumers, Tom Ford sells the same private fragrance collection in oversized bottles that are conspicuous by their appearance and easily noticeable by patrons. Thus, changing the product's appearance that fits with the desires of minimalistic consumers can help brands in successfully engaging with these consumers.

5.4 Engaging with minimalistic consumers globally

Minimalistic consumers, particularly anti-consumers care deeply about the environment and societal welfare. It is thus very important for firms to engage with consumers about cause-related activities that hold importance to them. Consider the example of Kering, the French luxury goods company, possessing brands such as Gucci and Boucheron, as part of its portfolio has always been a strong proponent of sustainability initiatives. Along with its focus on environmental and social issues, Kering achieved the rare distinction of being the world's first luxury fashion brands company that created science-focused goals of reducing its carbon footprint. Kering has also been among the first users of 100% traceable organic cotton and supports animal welfare in the fashion industry. All these sustainability initiatives demonstrate to anti-consumers that the company cares about society

and the environment. Further, through its brands focused on intricate designs and logos that are subtle and muted, Kering is also able to serve inconspicuous minimalistic consumers.

IKEA, the Swedish multinational company that designs and sells ready to assemble furniture, kitchen appliances, and home appliances is very popular among its users for affordable products that offer higher utility for the price and are easy to install. IKEA's products are thus suited for consumers with a frugal orientation looking at greater selectivity in consumption. Thus, reduced consumption consumers are an ideal consumer base for IKEA. Further, the company supports sustainable forestry and partners with organizations such as UNICEF and Save the Children. IKEA's efforts in saving the environment and people demonstrates its commitment towards society, which can find favour with reduced consumption and anti-consumption consumers.

6 Conclusion

Minimalistic consumption has been gaining ascendancy globally over the last few years. There is higher awareness among consumers about the benefits of a minimalistic lifestyle. However, extant research on minimalism has been disparate, subjective, and open to interpretation. Important questions remain unanswered such as, are there differences between minimalistic consumers? what triggers drive minimalistic lifestyles and what do consumers aim to achieve through minimalism? and how can brands engage with minimalistic consumers and what are the benefits of such engagement? This article has attempted to address these important questions and shed light by offering a typology of minimalistic consumers, antecedents of minimalism, brand engagement strategies, and benefits of engaging minimalistic consumers. Most firms classify minimalistic consumers as being homogeneous. In reality, minimalism comes in different forms, as each consumer possesses unique needs, desires, motives, and goals to engage in minimalism. Through our

conceptualization, we have endeavored to address the different types of minimalistic consumers and the brand engagement strategies that firms can implement in targeting, segmenting, and adding value to these consumers through diverse product offerings.

7 Limitations and future research

Extant research on minimalism has been discordant and in need of additional structure. Hence, our conceptualization contributes to extant literature on minimalistic consumption by providing a holistic framework that defines minimalistic consumption and its various types. The exploration also provides relevant and actionable strategies for managers and practitioners that will enable them to engage with minimalistic consumers and satisfy their unique wants and needs. However, the paper is not without limitations. The paper is an attempt to provide a typology of minimalistic consumers which would be helpful for both researchers and practitioners. In doing so, the conceptual framework argues that minimalistic consumers should be treated as heterogeneous with dissimilar interests rather than homogeneous with similar purchasing aspirations, so as to design strategies for these distinct and diverse consumer groups. Yet, the success of this proposition is not empirically tested. We follow the approach taken by scholars such as Clark, Lages, and Hollebeek (2020), where it is first important to conceptually structure and design a comprehensive typology which can then be tested empirically through scale development and testing for its validity and reliability. Thus, we put forward the need for future empirical research to test, substantiate, and revise our proposed typology.

Currently, no scale exists for the minimalism construct. To this end, we suggest that researchers and scholars take this research forward through developing a scale for measuring minimalism and its various types, which would also determine and establish convergent and

discriminant validity between the constructs. Future empirical research is required to develop measurement scales in order to investigate and validate our findings. In addition, although minimalism is a global phenomenon, it would be interesting to examine if the extent of minimalism varies across cultures and whether the types of minimalistic consumers differ based on national cultures. Future research can also examine the psychographic and psychodemographic characteristics and traits of minimalistic consumers. This will help firms understand the habits, hobbies, spending patterns, and motivations of minimalistic consumers, along with uncovering deeper knowledge of the cognitive factors that drive such consumption.

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Table 1: Minimalism Types, Characteristics, Triggers, and Outcomes

| Type | Characteristics | Triggers | Outcomes |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|
| Voluntary simplicity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limiting materialism with an intention to pursue other self-fulfilling pursuits - Reduced attention on acquisition of possessions - Focuses on sufficiency in a meaningful way - Refusal to consume if the product/service does not fulfil their grand desires - High socio-economic segment of the society - High achievers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need for self-fulfilment - Pursuing higher quality of life - Greater meaning in life - Need for greater self-control - Fulfilment of self-potential and responsibility - Achievement of well-being - De-clutter | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased responsible consumption - Greater focus on functionality - Greater contentment - Increased control over consumption choice - Positive outlook towards life - Increased self-dependency |
| Anti-consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong dislike, abhorrence and dismissal of consumption practices - Highly engaged in social causes and welfare activities - Idealist - Oriented towards sustainable social welfare - Avoid excess and wastage - Focused on prudence and rationality in consumption - Ecologically minded - Educated, mature individuals with high-income levels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong negative belief about consumption - Driven by motives of well-being at societal level - Sustainability driven consumption - Utility driven consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling of greater social contribution - Greater fulfilment through utilitarian endeavours - Environmentally friendly consumption - Active boycott of undesired items |
| Inconspicuous consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pursue minimalism in design and materials used - Look for discreet products with soft or muted logos - Avoid loud signalling - Highest socio-economic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affiliate or remain in the patrician club - Significantly influenced by the higher status peer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Status maintenance / achievement - Greater focus on subtlety and distinction - Greater |

| | | | |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
| | <p>status in their own society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not looking to elevate or reaffirm societal status - Substantial need to distinguish from others - Greater selective acquisition rather than display orientation | <p>group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Display of sophistication - Subtle signals drive such consumers as they can differentiate themselves, interact easily with insiders and like-minded individuals - Subtle signals can also make in-group tastes difficult to imitate | <p>enjoyment through consumption of high-quality items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure to further refined lifestyle |
| Reduced consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frugal orientation - Financially constrained - Temporality - Greater selectivity in consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic constraints driving consumption - Traumatic life experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subjective well-being - Necessity and utility driven consumption - Occasion driven consumption |

Table 2: Brand Engagement Strategies for Minimalistic Consumers

| | Brand engagement strategies | |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| | Self-concept focus | Social-concept focus |
| Voluntary simplification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Longevity - Narrow and selective lines - Demonstrate greater functionality - Show benefit driven communications - Highlight experiential pursuits through the use of brand - Communications focus on self-fulfilment and self-control <p>Achievement orientation, simplicity and organization through the use of the brand</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlight socially responsible initiatives - Great positive social impact |
| Anti-consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate functional advantages of the brand - Connect with charities and not-for-profit organizations through co-branding initiatives - Create logical advertisements - Focus on ecological credentials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlight socially responsible initiatives - Highlight associations with certification movements like Fairtrade - Demonstrate reduction of waste and excess throughout supply chain - Demonstrate greater social desirability among peer groups |
| Inconspicuous consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate design superiority through minimalism - Create unique designs with muted signalling - Pender to their status achievements - Focus on exclusivity of acquisition and not display - Highlight highest level of quality and pleasure - Create a separate line of products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate subtlety and social distinction with the use of the brand - Highlight connoisseurship - Engage in education initiatives regarding the nuances of the brand - Highlight heritage in all communications |
| Reduced consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate greater quality-price ratio - Highlight utility - Offer affordable product line - Show sympathy to life challenges in communications - Highlight well-being | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acceptance among social circles - Demonstrate strong purchase awareness by focusing on occasions related associations |

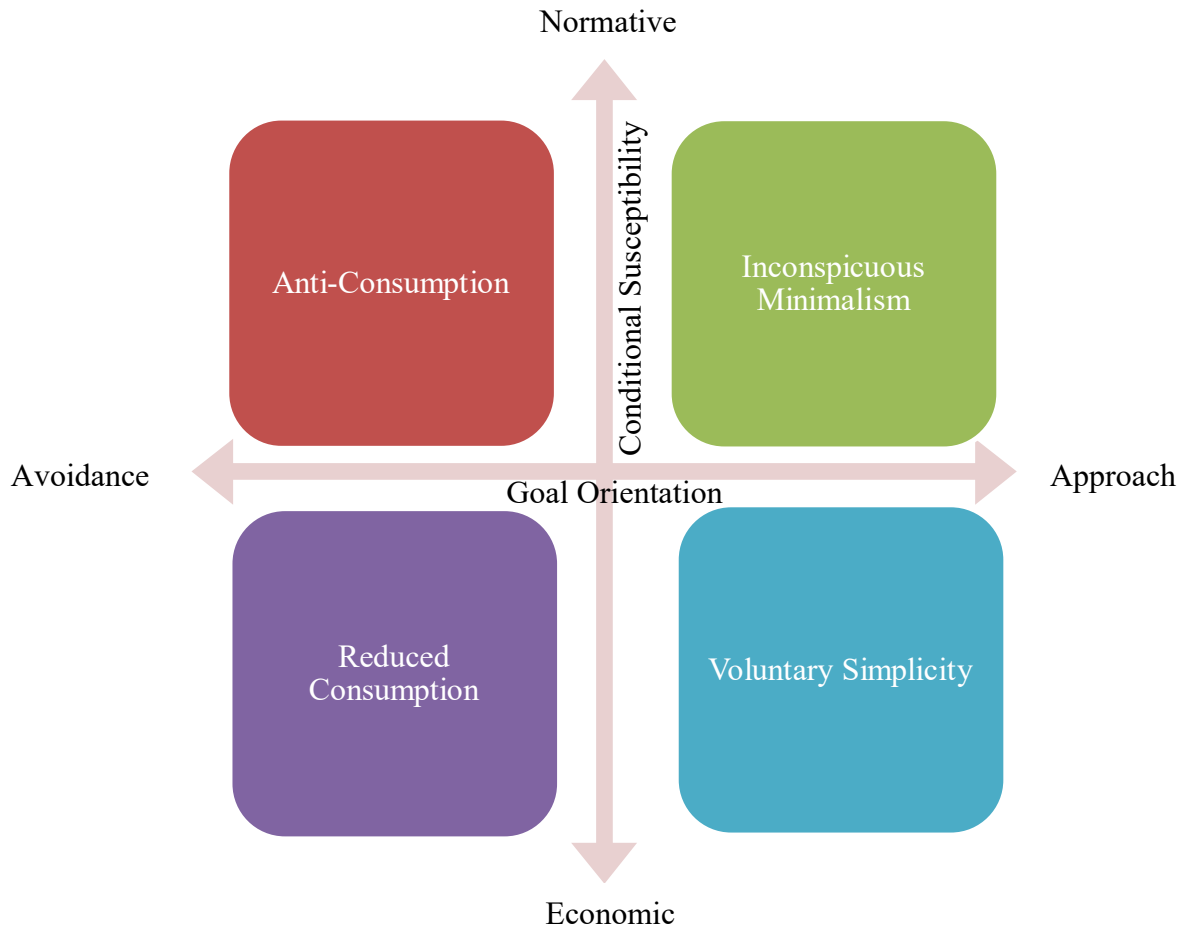


Figure 1: Typology of Minimalism

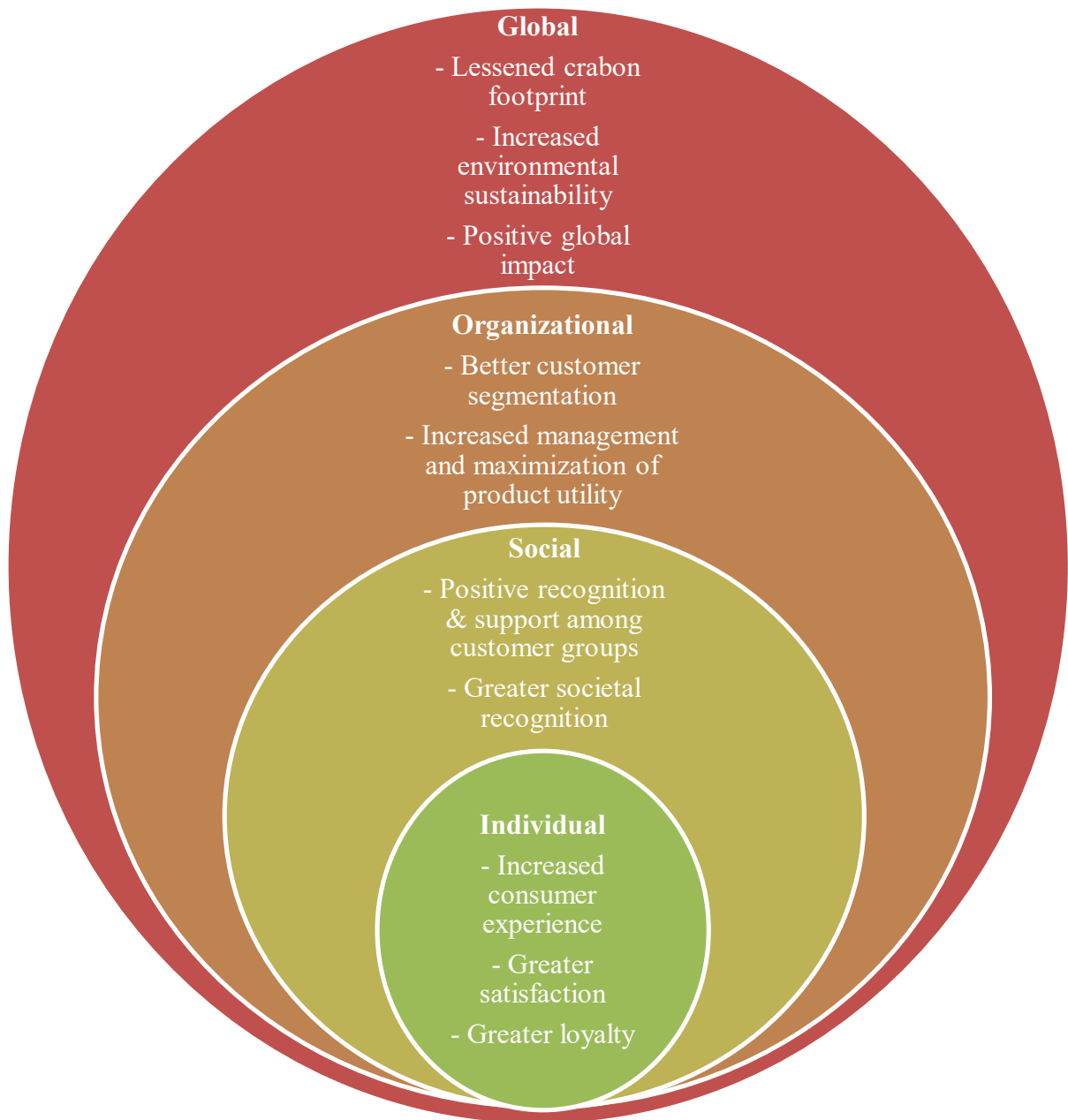


Figure 2: Benefits of Engaging with Minimalistic Consumers