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Labovitz School of Business & Economics, University of Minnesota Duluth, 11 E. Superior Street, Suite 210, Duluth, MN 55802

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Pimlapas Pongsakornrungsilp, Walailak University, Thailand

Siwarit Pongsakornrungsilp, Walailak University, Thailand

Theeranuch Pusaksrikit, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Thailand

Employing qualitative methods, this study attempts to understand how consumers practice mindful consumption. Through applying the concept of the sufficiency economy, the process of mindful consumption can be developed and sustained. This study extends the concept of mindful consumption by examining the phenomenon at both individual and collective levels.

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Theeranuch Pusaksrikit, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Thailand

Siwarit Pongsakornrunsilp, Walailak University, Thailand

Pimlapas Pongsakornrunsilp, Walailak University, Thailand

ABSTRACT

Interest in mindful consumption and its practices has increased among consumer researchers in recent years (e.g., Bechwati and Baalbaki, 2011; Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas, 2011) because of a trend among consumers showing that many of them have become aware of their consumption patterns and their impact on society and nature. Many consumers have begun to take more time to consider what—and whether—to buy and to think harder about the value they get from their spending (Salzman, 2010). Instead of constantly accumulating various products and services, some consumers now search for a sustainable, self-sufficient way of living in the belief that this approach offers true happiness (Salzman, 2010).

To understand mindful consumption, Sheth et al. (2011, p.27) define the concept as consciousness in thought and behavior about the implications and consequences of consumption. The main elements of mindful consumption are mindful mindset and mindful behavior (Sheth et al., 2011). Mindful mindset comprises a sense of caring and thinking about the future and the consequences of one's actions toward oneself, community, and nature, while mindful behavior involves behaving and making decisions with the aim of increasing a consumer's personal, economic, and social well-being to an optimal level (Bechwati and Baalbaki, 2011; Sheth et al., 2011).

As a concept, mindful consumption has been developed to solve two main problems of consumption: underconsumption and overconsumption (Sheth et al., 2011). Underconsumption exists when consumers have insufficient purchasing power to meet their basic consumption needs. The majority of the world's population, particularly people in developing countries, often experience underconsumption and its negative effect on personal and social well-being. Individuals may consume competitively, to the point of fighting among themselves, to gain resources for survival.

In contrast, overconsumption exists when the rich minority of the world's population consumes too much as it exploits resources to fulfill its desire to acquire luxury products and services. Sheth et al.'s (2011) study focuses mainly on overconsumption in the U.S. that is associated with acquisitive, repetitive, and aspirational consumption. They argue that underconsumption is declining as businesses increase their attention to enter this untapped market. Nevertheless, in developing countries, underconsumption remains a major social problem that needs to be addressed. It is possible that the concept of mindful consumption can be broadened to examine its practices and consequences in order to address the underconsumption problem. To investigate the mindful consumption process and how the relationship between a caring mindset and mindful behavior has an effect on solving this problem, we draw on the sufficiency economy framework.

Stemming from remarks by Thailand's His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the sufficiency economy is a holistic concept that acknowledges interdependency among people, society, and nature. It calls for balanced and sustainable development to reduce poverty and achieve a healthy community (Sathirathai and Piboolsravut, 2004). This concept was initially promoted as a means for struggling farmers to escape debt traps, achieve agricultural self-sufficiency, and sustain for integration into national agricultural markets (Dayley, 2008). At present, the sufficiency economy serves as a guideline for living for people at all levels of society: from the family to the

community and beyond to the nation (Sathirathai and Piboolsravut, 2004). Sufficiency emphasizes Buddhism's principle of following the middle path, which refers to a person fully satisfied with what one has and is at peace with the self. Under this principle, consuming too little or too much for pleasure leads to unhappiness, especially when consumption cannot fulfill expectations. The sufficiency economy is conditioned by basic need, not greed, and restrained by a conscious effort to consume moderately (Krongkaew, 2003).

The sufficiency economy framework comprises three components and two underlying conditions (Piboolsravut, 2004). Its first component, moderation, involves controlling one's desires to avoid greed for things one does not need. It also refers to feeling compassion and the joy of sharing with others (Calkins, 2008). The second component, reasonableness, pertains to considering the cause and effect of events and being aware of what one is doing and why (Calkins, 2008). The final component, immunization, refers to the cultivation of inner resilience to deal with changes in internal and external factors. The two underlying conditions for sufficiency are (1) acquiring and applying knowledge (local wisdom and/or modern technological advancement) in every step with great care, and (2) maintaining morality with perseverance, harmlessness, and generosity (Piboolsravut, 2004).

This study sheds the light on mindful consumption (see also Sheth et al., 2011) in order to understand how consumers react to the underconsumption. We employ the concept of sufficiency economy to understand the process of developing mindful consumption and identify factors that influence the sense of caring in mindset and temperance in behavior. Empirical evidence will demonstrate how consumers engage in mindful consumption and how it can help solve underconsumption.

METHOD

The data in this study were collected using qualitative research methods. Different data sets were employed to explore the data's richness and achieve full understanding (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). This study used purposive sampling to gain access to informants who were in sufficiency economy community. Tonyuan District of Suratthani Province, Thailand, was chosen as the place to conduct this study because it was cited for best practices as a Sufficiency Economy Community. In 2005, it also won the Green World Award from the Green World Foundation. Comprising 12 rural villages, Tonyuan District was one of the communities in Thailand facing the poverty issue. For the first data set, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 members of Tonyuan District. Eighteen of them were farmers and 17 were male. All of them were married with one or two children. Each informant was interviewed for about 30 minutes at his or her village home.

The second data set was conducted using a focus group with a district chief and six village chiefs to understand the history of Tonyuan District and its community development. Additionally, the participated observation technique was employed at the community meeting hall and at informants' houses. The authors wrote a report of their interviews and observations as field notes. Their notes contained sequential descriptions of actions and interactions as well as context. The three data sets were combined for triangulation. All interview data were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in Thai.

Thematic process was employed for data analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Initially, the authors analyzed the data independently as suggested by Miles and Huberman’s (1994): data transformation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Basic themes began to appear from the data and these were used to code the transcripts for further detailed analysis. The authors reread transcripts, provided code, and recoded to complete the iterative process of interpretation (Thompson, 1997).

RESULTS

This study provides empirical evidence to show that the notion of mindful consumption can be expanded to address underconsumption. By employing mindful mindset and behavior through the sufficiency economy, consumers can overcome the problems of underconsumption (e.g., difficulties in earning income, unaffordable basic necessities, and poor family diet). As found with the Tonyuan District informants, engaging in mindful consumption raises awareness of living and consumption patterns. The informants began to consciously adopt positive and avoid negative attitudes and behavior as these can affect their personal and collective well-being. This study also demonstrates the whole process of developing mindful consumption. We strongly believe that practicing mindful consumption is a major contribution to transformative consumer research (see also Mick et al., 2012).

Around 90 per cent of Tonyuan District members grow rubber trees, oil palm trees, local fruits and vegetables, and work on animal farms. The community has practiced His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s “Sufficiency Economy Philosophy” since 1984. Many households in Tonyuan District employ the sufficiency economy in their daily lives. They began to adopt this concept to alleviate their poverty, whose main cause was low agricultural yield due to outbreaks of crop pests and the high cost of fertilizers and pesticides. In addition, they sometimes experienced poor weather conditions, all of which led to their lack of capital and accrual of debt.

To effect this principle, they began to learn and practice organic farming. They had to change their mindset and behavior to produce and consume sufficiently within their family and community, which is one of Sufficiency Economy characteristics. Furthermore, they tried not to buy products and services from outside their community. Their interdependency within the community helped reduce their spending significantly. Furthermore, when they had excess produce, they could sell it outside the community to increase their economic well-being. To secure itself from debt, the community formed many local groups such as a community savings group, local tourism group, grocery shop, and basic healthy volunteer group. Their

self-sufficiency activities enjoyed such success that the community received the Green World Award from the Green World Foundation in 2005, and was recognized for its best practices as a Sufficiency Economy Community.

As shown in Figure 1, the process of mindful consumption consists of four main elements: willingness, training, practicing, and showing and sharing. We propose that the sufficiency economy is paralleled with mindful consumption when consumers are aware and concerned about the impact of their production and consumption toward themselves and society (see also Sheth et al., 2011). When combined with the investigation of how the community adopted the sufficiency economy to maintain their livelihood, this study’s empirical data present the process of mindful consumption.

Willingness: It is a very basic element, but one of the most important factors for living in a mindful manner. Informants carefully and intentionally integrated the sufficiency economy into their daily lives. Recognizing its importance and benefits, they, therefore, were willing to participate in the sufficiency economy program. The District Chief mentioned that:

Chief: “...at the initial stage, 30 % of households in Tonyuan District volunteered to adopt sufficiency economy models in the District. Gaining monetary benefits was not our first priority. We actually wanted to improve our quality of life... We focused on reducing our cost of living by raising basic vegetables to consume within our families. The rest we sell...”

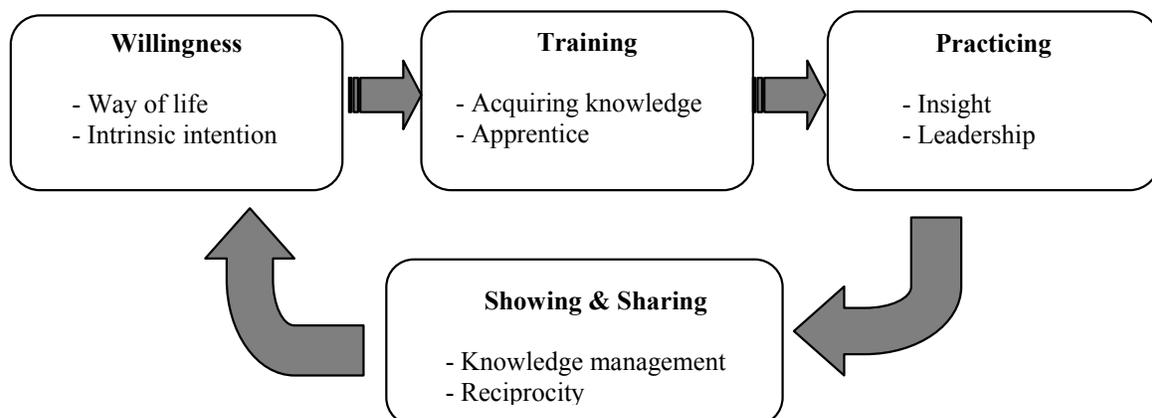
The following example shows the awareness and familiarity of a community member with the sufficiency economy concept:

Dee: “...doing sufficiency economy is like appreciating what we naturally do. It is the local wisdom and experience I have learned from my family. I help my parents grow vegetables, feed pigs and poultry, and collect eggs to use for our meals... We don’t follow sufficiency economy as people follow a fashion trend. We practice it because it is the way we now live.”

Dee and other informants employed “tacit knowledge” to behave mindfully in growing food for their families and community. This practice contributes to their healthy and wealthy lives. They can consume what they produce and be assured that it is good for health. They can increase revenue by selling their excess produce outside their community. Dee elaborated on this issue below:

Dee: “...I have been told that brown rice can cure beriberi, so I went to the supermarket to buy brown rice to try it. Unbeliev-

Figure 1: The Mindful Consumption Process



ably, it worked! So I set up a family rice mill to produce brown rice for our family. Since then, I don't need to go to see a doctor again... We have a poultry farm, so we can eat our own chickens and duck eggs. When our neighbors saw what I was doing, they wanted to start living a self-sufficient life."

Based on the above findings, we found that another factor driving consumers to develop mindfulness was their "intrinsic intention." We would say that this process is related to the cognitive stage in the hierarchy of effect model (Belch and Belch, 2005): awareness of the sufficiency economy. It activates consumers' desire to join the practice of the sufficiency economy.

Training: Although agriculture is commonly practiced among members in this community, some informants still need to acquire skills, knowledge, and experience because they come from different backgrounds. Some of them may not deeply understand how to conduct organic rice or animal farming; these members needed new knowledge and experience as mentioned by the District Chief:

Chief: "...we welcomed all community members to join our sufficiency economy program. They [community members] needed to understand the main idea of sufficiency economy and gain relevant skills, such as how to plant vegetables and fruits, how to feed animals, and so on, including how to farm rice [a staple food among Thais]. They needed to learn more..."

Engaging in sufficient economy required members to master many skills necessary for running their farms and small businesses. Therefore, District Chief built the "Tonyuan Sufficiency Economy Learning Center" for supporting and encouraging community members to gain various skills. Novices learn particular skills from community veterans, similar to how experienced members in online communities support new members (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011), which strengthens relationships within the community. Moreover, Tonyuan District members want to sustain this way of living for the next generation. They agreed to create the "Sufficiency Economy Apprentice" project. Their caring for their community's future and seeking ways to build its strength show the importance of mindful mindset and behavior. One member mentioned that:

Butt: "...We recruit children of about 12 – 18 years old from each village to teach them the principle of sufficiency economy and train them how to grow plants and feed animals. They learn to become friends to the environment. They then can share our local wisdom and notions with future generations."

Butt and other informants believe that the sufficiency economy's success needs more than classroom learning; it must include real-life experience. The following conversations demonstrate another strategy for passing the sufficiency economy philosophy onto the next generation.

R: "Do you teach your children about sufficiency economy?"

Ban: "Yes, I do. We can't let our kids learn just from what is in books or classrooms. They need to learn by doing. For example, I asked my boy to help me plant vegetables. I grabbed one watering can and asked him to grab another. He learned through that process. Besides, when he saw those vegetables become our home-grown food or when we sold them to local shops, he was proud of what he had done."

R: "So, he enjoys these activities."

Ban: "Yes, why not? I plant two plots of vegetables. We each chose one and set up a mini competition. We watered them daily

and watched to see which plot grew better. He learned and absorbed sufficiency economy philosophy naturally."

As mentioned by Ban, younger generations of Tonyuan District residents were trained as "apprentices" to acquire necessary skills and knowledge. In this process, it related to the culture capital that young consumers gain through domestication by their parents (Bourdieu, 1986). This process is relevant to the affective stage in the hierarchy of effect model (Belch and Belch, 2005), whereby consumers perceive the sufficiency economy and may develop their mindset and decide to participate. As mentioned by Sheth et al. (2011), young community members need to be educated about mindful mindset in order to take mindful action.

Practicing: Learning and training are necessary stages for skill and knowledge acquisition. However, sufficiency economy cannot be sustained unless participants practice it in real life. Such practice helps them gain *insight* into the sufficiency economy philosophy and helps secure them from poverty. The following quote is an example of the results of such practice:

R: "What do you learn from your practice?"

Som: "I am happy. I eat the best foods and live the best life. I may not be rich, but I have my own land to earn enough to buy what I need."

R: "Are you still buying products or services from outside the community?"

Som: "Yes, I am. I have the same needs as others, but practicing sufficiency economy makes me think harder when I go to buy things. I don't consider just the price. Instead I'm concerned whether my consumption will make trouble for others, even for myself, my family or my village. For example, I can buy an expensive DVD home theater and play it at the loudest sound because I'm happy. That is, however, not the principle of the sufficiency economy..."

As mentioned by Som, her mindful consumption benefits both her physical and emotional well-being. The more she practices sufficiency economy, the more she is mindful of her behavior. This mindful behavior is similar to how consumers pursue meditation (see also Pongsakornrunsilp and Pusaksrikit, 2011): the more consumers practice meditation, the more deeply aware they can be of how their minds function. Additionally, mindful consumption also helps establish the relationship within the family and within the community as mentioned below.

Wi: "...My life has changed significantly. I used to rely on buying things, but now I prefer doing things myself. When I do something, the whole family comes to help. This creates a bond among our family members. We also help other community members by supporting and sharing what we have, so the relationship among community members is very strong."

Leadership also played an important role in initiating and supporting community activities. The District Chief was a key person to take on this role. His focus on reducing the reliance on external sources and improving the efficiency of internal sources contributed to the Tonyuan District's sustainable growth. Many district members saluted their leader for improving their quality of life. The community's strongly belief and willingness to follow their leader have been the main factors to surviving from poverty; therefore, the District Chief has gained "symbolic capital" – worthy to be listened to and followed (see also Bourdieu, 1986). This helps drive the community's development through the sufficiency economy.

Showing and Sharing: To promote the sufficiency economy to other members, Tonyuan District persuades and educates members through employing “Knowledge Management.” Members do not see new learners as competitors. They are willing to provide knowledge and information so they can build a larger and stronger network. By employing techniques of showing and sharing, members mindfully think of social benefits rather than personal benefits.

Wi: “We share knowledge and skills with other members at community meetings such as the housewife group meeting, Tonyuan District Learning Center meeting, and so on. We also share resources across villages... Our network was created to serve each other. Even when prices of rubber or palm oil fall, it doesn’t affect us because we co-develop unique products for each village to sell in the market...”

Pom: “We share knowledge, which we create or develop by ourselves, with other members interactively at our houses or markets. By sharing knowledge, we become experts in our field.”

The following quote is an example of how experienced community members support other members:

Tan: “...we set up a sufficiency economy network to support new participants by showing our skills. For example, I’m good at operating a fishery. Members who want to raise fish will come and see how I run my business: from building the farm to selling the fish.”

R: “Are you worried that they will become your competitors?”

Tan: “No. Many customers still need fish from our community. I don’t have to sell them everywhere. Buyers will come to my hometown to buy my fish.”

Reciprocity is another important factor in expanding the concept of mindful consumption. While knowledge providers receive recognition for their services from the community, new members must reciprocate the knowledge providers by sharing their knowledge with others. Knowledge is not for taking, but for giving. This process contributes to the Tonyuan District culture of members sharing all resources with others as found in online communities (see also Mathwick et al., 2008).

DISCUSSION

Problems from consumption arise because people’s desires do not match what they possess. This study’s findings demonstrate that engaging in mindful consumption can solve this problem at personal and social levels. When integrating mindful mindset and behavior, people become aware of their decisions and tend toward self-reliance in order to live harmoniously with nature and within society. Adopting the sufficiency economy framework into this context, this study identified four stages of the mindful consumption process: willingness, training, practice, and showing and sharing. In this study, these four stages were shown to alleviate a community’s consumption problems such as reducing the cost of living, increasing income, and creating a self-sufficient community.

Each stage of the mindful consumption process stresses the intent of consumers as they try to investigate their thoughts and behavior so they can make mindful decisions for themselves, their communities, and the environment. Mindful consumers do not focus only on how they can consume comfortably, but also how others can consume in a similar manner. Creating and joining useful activities for the community so other members can become self-reliant is one example of mindful consumption at the collective level. In addition, to expand mindful consumption practice, mindful consumers encourage others to show and share their knowledge and experiences so their network can be broadened and reach other consumer groups.

This study, however, has limitations as we focused on a rural agricultural community that successfully entered into a sufficiency economy program. A future study can examine this process with other consumer groups to see whether this process holds true. Moreover, future research should also investigate the factors that influence and motivate mindful consumption. It would be beneficial to study when and why consumers mindfully purchase, use, and dispose of products. In addition, the barriers to engage in mindful consumption should be examined.

Table 1: The Summary of Empirical Findings

Process	Sub-Theme	Meaning
Willingness	Way of life	Sufficiency economy is not a new issue; it is a way of life that consumers pursue daily.
	Intrinsic Intention	The mind that drives a consumer to be conscious and would like to join the sufficiency economy program.
Training	Acquiring Knowledge	Community members need to gain new knowledge and experience because practicing sufficient economy requires different skills that are necessary for their living and running their businesses.
	Apprentice	Community members persuade and educate new generation to live sufficiently through the apprentice project.
Practicing	Insight	Practicing in real life shapes members to become experts and broaden their perspectives on sufficiency economy philosophy.
	Leadership	Leaders need to support resources and encourage the community to engage in this practice.
Showing and Sharing:	Knowledge Management	Tonyuan District members employ knowledge management to enrich resources.
	Reciprocity	Tonyuan District members have to learn how to take and give to others through showing and sharing their knowledge.

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