

Less is more: A Literature Review to Understand Minimalism- A Chosen Lifestyle in Practice

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ABSTRACT : Besides the growth of consumerism and the outburst of shopaholics - people who consider goods and shopping as an indicator of a happiness, prosperous life and satisfaction, a kind of entertainment ; in contrast, minimalism also gradually appeared and developed in a non-explosive way but became increasingly popular. Representatives of those who follow a minimalist lifestyle aim for the life motto: "less is more", the less you own, the more comfortable mental you are. Along with such social reality, research on the minimalist lifestyle is also increasing, and the research is interested in many aspects of this lifestyle, including how to define and redefine its components, how to measure its manifestation, and its influencing factors. This article aims to synthesize and analyze research related to the minimalist - as a chosen way of life, including specific content such as ways to define the minimalist lifestyle, measurement scale, influencing factors, and role of this lifestyle in personal life.

Keywords – Minimalism, Minimalist lifestyle, literature review of minimalism

I. INTRODUCTION

Minimalism's emergence as an important phenomenon in people's lives began in Asian countries like Japan (Jiyun Kang et al., 2019). This lifestyle was initially defined as a "reaction", an "opposition" to the booming consumerism in developed countries. Minimalism lifestyle was first defined as minimizing purchasing and owning unnecessary items instead of focusing on the function of objects. In addition, many studies also show that the minimalist lifestyle does not only focus on material factors, but its consequence also helps people to focus on the spiritual factors inside each individual. Thus, minimalism includes both material and non-material aspects.

Simplifying life helps individuals focus more on relationships, goals, and ideals of life, cut down on unnecessary thoughts and material dependence, towards understand and be closer to human nature and natural elements. The minimalist lifestyle has many positive points when addressing the relationship between people and people, people and nature and society. Therefore, recognizing the advantages and limitations of this lifestyle, as well as considering whether to choose this lifestyle can have a significant impact on the development of quality of life, the level of life satisfaction, and the sense of personal happiness.

This article aims to synthesize and analyze previous research to learn about the concept of the minimalist lifestyle, scales to measure the minimalist lifestyle, factors affecting the minimalist lifestyle, and its impacts on people's spiritual and material lives - or in other words, the role of this lifestyle in personal life.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review includes an analysis of previous research, divided into 4 main content groups: (1) The different ways to understand the minimalism lifestyle, (2) how to measure minimalism in practice, (3) the factors that impact the minimalist lifestyle, and (4) the effect of the minimalist lifestyle on the individual life.

2.1. The different ways to understand minimalism lifestyle

Minimalism belongs to a broader consumer movements-oriented lifestyle that aims to challenge mainstream consumer culture through modified forms of consumption – such as green consumerism, veganism, slow food, and fashion trends (Martin, 2022). The most similar lifestyle movement related to minimalism is the voluntary simplicity movement. The concept has been initially articulated by Richard Gregg (1936). This

concept was followed by subsequent research with the understanding of minimalists as individuals who for whatever reason choose to live with less (Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002: 188) or individuals who have freely chosen an anti-consumption lifestyle characterized by low resource use and low environmental impact (McDonald et al., 2006: 516). The central premises of voluntary minimalism include actively choosing to limit spending on consumer goods and services (Etzioni, 1998: 620), trying to accumulate fewer assets (Elgin, 1981), and neat arrangement of possessions (material simplicity) (Johnston and Burton, 2003; Martin, 2022). This was aimed at freeing up resources, especially time and money (Huneke, 2005), with the ultimate aim of controlling needs and capturing non-material meaning (Etzioni, 1998: 620). Through reducing material consumption and removing clutter from one's life, voluntary simplicity is ultimately based on the premise of having fewer material things but more immaterial objects.

Blonski et al (2019) defined minimalist living as anti-consumerism, voluntary simplicity, and reduced consumption. Minimalism means intentionally and reasonably limiting consumption based on consumer's demographics, and personal physical and mental characteristics while emphasizing responsibility for decision-making in this field. The most common manifestations of processes related to minimalism are mainly limitations in the quantity and structure of consumption.

In other way, Dopierala' s research (2017) provided different ways of conceptualizing minimalism including: 1) minimalism is opposed to consumerism, 2) minimalism is a style of consumption, and 3) minimalism is a way of conscious consumption.

2.2. How to measure the minimalism in practice

The external manifestations of minimalist consumption are diverse, throughout the process of consumption decision-making, evaluation, purchase, and use (Oliveira et al., 2020). Through classifying and synthesizing specific behaviors of minimalist consumption in previous studies, Chen et al (2021) illustrated six characteristics of minimalist consumption as follows:

First, "consuming as little as possible" is mainly reflected in people's spending and using time. Minimalism consumers voluntarily adopt a low-consumption lifestyle, such as limiting consumer spending and reducing material purchases (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020). At the same time, reducing exposure to advertising and other commercial propaganda is also a behavior supported by minimalists (Altinbasak-Farina & Burnaz, 2019). In terms of the use of time, this way of lifestyle manifestes itself in a higher level of appreciating time, such as spending time on things that can promote personal development (Huneke, 2005). In addition, reducing working hours is also an important manifestation of minimalism (Alexander & Ussher, 2012).

The second characteristic "small is beautiful" is mainly reflected in people's preferences for organizing life, with space and details. In terms of organizational choices, minimalist consumers try to reduce their dependence on large-scale organizations that they cannot control and chose local small-scale or self-employed businesses to make purchases (Leonard-Barton, 1981). In terms of space, people may prefer a smaller house, because a small room can save space and make it look more sophisticated (Elgaaïed-Gambier, 2016). Minimalist consumption has a certain detail orientation, paying more attention to the subtleties in life and paying more attention to the details of workmanship in products (Shama, 1985). It means focusing on the quality instead of the quantity.

The third characteristic is that "simplicity is beauty", which is mainly expressed in the preference for products with simple forms and the idea of following "functional standards". Simple and plain colors (such as white, gray, off-white, etc.) are more attractive to those who practice a minimalist lifestyle (Peyer et al., 2017). "Function-based" means that people think that when purchasing a product or service, its actual function should be the most important factor (Shama, 1985). Minimalist consumers avoid excessive packaging or shipping of premium products. They believed that "flashy" packaging or long-distance shipping only increases the non-functional cost of the product, which violates the "function-oriented" principle (Rich, et al., 2017).

The fourth characteristic is personal self-reflection. Minimalists do more self-reflection, including introspection, deep thinking, meditation, etc., all of which are manifestations of increased self-awareness (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020). Studies have shown that the purpose of adopting minimalist behaviors was to create more enjoyable experiences for individuals and improve well-being (Wu et al., 2013). The important role of minimalist consumption is that it can guide consumers to find their true selves. It can be seen that a large part of the driving force behind minimalist consumption behavior is that individuals want to handle the relationship between things and themselves, especially emphasizing the importance of spiritual life (Oliverira et al., 2020).

The fifth feature is sociability. Minimalist consumption also shows a strong tendency to connect with other individuals in society. Huneke's study (2005) identified the "communal" aspect of minimalist consumption, which includes activities such as sharing dinners, housing, and exchanging services. It can be seen that, although minimalist consumption is personal it is not an independent lifestyle that separates individuals and groups, but is a "glue" that promotes coexistence among members of the community.

The sixth feature is greater ecological awareness. People who practice minimalist consumption tend to be more ecologically aware and take more beneficial actions to save natural resources, maintain ecological balance, and protect the natural environment (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020). Kasser (2017) pointed out that minimalist consumers are more likely to buy second-hand products to maximize resource use. Rich et al. (2020) also found that minimalist consumers buy more organic and green agricultural products and are willing to participate in fundraising activities of local environmental protection organizations.

Another scale proposed by Jiyun Kang et al (2021) was summarized from previous studies related to four groups of behaviors considered minimalist consumption, including:

Minimization is often described as a process initiated by removing clutter (Dopierala, 2017; Uggl, 2019; Rodriguez, 2018): including removing assets, rearranging spaces, changing consumption habits, and maintaining self-discipline (Kasperek, 2016). Assets are evaluated according to their usefulness, and those considered unnecessary, unprofitable, or unmemorable are given away, sold, or exchanged (Dopierala, 2017). What is judged as excessive and unnecessary will be determined by each individual when those search for moderation and balance (Dopierala, 2017; Rodriguez, 2018). Because assets take time to manage, reducing one's assets is a time management strategy that allows people to focus on more important things.

Careful shopping is a key factor that helps minimalists to avoid unlimited and thoughtless purchases. Minimalists set limits on their consumption to achieve appropriate proportions of consumption and eliminate excess (Dopierala, 2017). Minimalists also value longevity, favor good design, multi-purpose and space-saving objects, and avoid cheap, low-quality goods. They reduce waste by carefully using and managing what they own, including repairing items when feasible (Dopierala, 2017). Finally, minimalism also emphasizes self-sufficiency, primarily driven by people's desire to reduce their dependence on material possessions for happiness (Dopierala, 2017).

The essence of minimalism is the rejection of ostentation or purchases based on the social meaning attributed to consumption (Oliverira et al., 2020). According to Craig-Lees & Hill (2002) and Meissner (2019) in this way, consumers apply the idea of "less is more" in reducing their possession of material goods and have more "mental space" to explore aspects of non-physical nature. So it can be seen that to measure the minimalist lifestyle, two main aspects need attention: minimalism in possessing material things (material aspects) and minimalism in thinking and spirit (non-material aspects).

Besides, Dopierala (2017) believed that becoming a minimalist, building and maintaining self-definition is a process, the process of finding balance within each individual. The stages in this process include Awakening, Learning, Transformation, and Adaptations. However, research by Oliveira et al., (2020) showed that this process may be non-linear- which means occurs differently in each individual. In this process, external barriers and personal constraints affect the process and act as points of tension. Thus, another way to measure the practice of a minimalist lifestyle is to measure through the process, or in other words, to look at the level of individual adaptation to this lifestyle.

2.3. The factors that impact choosing a minimalist lifestyle

Oliveira et al (2020) also pointed out a few factors affecting choosing minimalism through in-depth interviews. Awareness of a minimalist lifestyle can be influenced by an individual's search for knowledge, family influence, and personal financial crisis. Learning this lifestyle is promoted through: the development of social networks, and socialization groups. The process of transformation is closely associated with "learning", - as a practice of expressing ideas acquired during the learning process. External barriers include factors such as rules and value standards on consumption from the community. Personal constraints include the difficulties of letting go of old lifestyles, getting rid of possessions/products that hold memories, and connecting with others. Adaptation is the process of individuals proactively and personalizing the meaning of their minimalist lifestyle practices, or in other words, they find a reasonable explanation for their minimalist lifestyle.

Martin's qualitative study (2022) with British minimalists, revealed that minimalists practice sustainable consumption through limiting their consumption. This was achieved by proactively buying less, using up, practicing intentionally, and (sometimes) considering ethical consumption. For some, such practices are primarily based on strong ethical and environmental motivations or are seen as a positive consequence of their minimalist lifestyle. While for others, their motives are primarily aligned with personal happiness. The article then argued that the restrained and considered practices of minimalist consumption can be considered sustainable practices in terms of outcomes.

Chen et al (2021) argued that minimalism refers to a lifestyle that seeks satisfaction in a non-materialistic world by reducing consumption. The study provided a classification scheme related to voluntary simplicity, including concept, sample size, and scale. Practicing a simplified lifestyle often entails minimizing possessions, consuming less, and valuing personal growth. This study presented the factors influencing the minimalist lifestyle. There are many reasons for individuals to adopt simplifying behaviors. The motivations for minimalist consumption are diverse and complex, including both internal (e.g. personal, financial, and lifestyle)

and external (e.g. economic, social, and environmental motivations). Besides, some consumers are conscious of consumption even though they are financially well-off. The rejection of the notion that one's success is determined by the material possessions one possesses (i.e., materialism) has fueled interest in minimalist consumption. Additionally, some simplifiers (i.e. minimalist consumers) are motivated by environmental sustainability motives. That is, as consumers care more about the natural environment and ecological systems, they can engage in voluntary simplicity to live well and sustainably. Furthermore, people can live independent and self-determined lives through minimalism. Therefore, the desire to achieve an autonomous life is an important premise of minimalism.

2.4. How a minimalism lifestyle affects health, happiness and life satisfaction

Matte et al.'s research (2021) proposed and tested a theoretical model that represents the relationship among minimalism, happiness, life satisfaction, and experiential consumption. A survey of 395 Brazilian amateur athletes was conducted. It was worth noting that minimalism did not directly influence feelings of happiness. The proposed framework showed that life satisfaction and experiential consumption explain 54.2% of happiness among leisure practitioners. Because people typically do not increase their happiness by choosing a simple lifestyle, that is, individuals may reduce consumption for other motives except happiness. Therefore, public policies aimed at raising awareness of the importance of reducing consumption should focus on other benefits, such as those that can be gained from recreational and experiential consumption.

Another study aimed to determine the level of happiness in people who practice a minimalist lifestyle. Informant criteria were selected based on three conditions: male/female aged 20–30 years, reduced ownership of goods voluntarily, and experienced this lifestyle for at least 1 year. Factors influencing respondents' happiness include internal factors, specifically satisfaction with the past, optimism, and happiness in the present, while external factors include finances, social life, positive emotions, aging, and spirituality. The indicators of lifestyle include living a more conscious life, focusing more on desired life goals, appreciating the simple things in life, increasing the ability to control emotions, building a positive environment, contributing to environmental sustainability, better financial management, and feeling more connected to God. These indicators were quite relevant to minimalism (Mohammad Yusron Abadi & Lisnawati, 2022).

Research by Jiyun Kang et al (2021) proposed demographic factors that impact the minimalist lifestyle such as gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, employment, the highest level of education, and annual home income. Then, research developed and tested a structural model that depicts the effects of minimalism on positive emotions (flourishing) and negative emotions (depression). Results indicated that minimalism increases flourishing while reducing depression. Furthermore, the study provided clear reasons as to why consumers should incorporate minimalism into their lifestyles, which could motivate manufacturers to seek sustainable production methods that are suitable for a minimalist lifestyle (Jiyun Kang et al., 2021).

Other research showed a few of the benefits of this lifestyle namely reclaiming time, eliminating excess stuff, enjoying life, discovering meaning of life, appreciating the moment, concentrating on what is important, pursuing our passions, finding happiness, doing whatever we want to do, finding our missions, experiencing freedom, and creating more by consuming less (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2016).

Michelle's research (2020) also summarized aspects of the impact of a minimalist lifestyle on aspects of people's lives. Accordingly, this lifestyle had a positive impact, improving physical health, mental and emotional health (assessment of happiness, depression and anxiety, sense of security, stress, feelings of social isolation), and social relationships.

III. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study has synthesized and analyzed the views of several previous studies related to aspects of the minimalist lifestyle including how to define the minimalist lifestyle, the scale to measure the minimalist lifestyle, factors affecting the minimalist lifestyle, and the role this lifestyle plays in personal life.

Regarding how to define a minimalist lifestyle, there are many different views. Originating from the term of voluntary simplicity, minimalism was first seen in terms of material aspects. Later, there were many studies discussing the non-material aspect of this lifestyle, specifically, the aspect of spiritual life. Expanding this concept generally does not change the ultimate goals and the value of this lifestyle, which is that simplicity of life will bring more meaning to the individual's life. Such a comprehensive definition also points out two important components to describe this lifestyle: the material and non-material/spiritual aspects. This is the basis for subsequent research to build scales to measure minimalist lifestyle in practice.

Regarding the scale, studies have mentioned indicators that can be used to build scales to measure this lifestyle in practice, related to specific behaviors believed to be associated with the minimalism lifestyle. However, the gap in research is that there has not been any study that has provided a comprehensive scale of all aspects of this lifestyle according to the expanded definition of the concept related to material aspects (consumption, using space, using items, etc.), and non-material aspects (simplification of thinking, spirituality, inward-oriented behavior, focus on personal own values/thoughts/feelings, priorities in spend time on important

relationships and tasks, be considering the environment aspects). This may be an open research aspect for future studies to consider.

Regarding factors affecting a minimalist lifestyle, studies showed that the motivations that promote a minimalist lifestyle are very diverse and complex, including internal motivations such as individual demographics (gender, age, education, occupation, etc), financial ability, choice of life values, views on consumption, and external factors (influence of social trends, media and social networks, influencing from social group and family agent, environmental awareness, etc). These are suggestions for measuring aspects that have a positive or negative impact on an individual's choice of a minimalist lifestyle.

Regarding the role of a minimalist lifestyle, studies revealed that this lifestyle has a positive impact on happiness, mental health, well-being, and personal satisfaction of life. This lifestyle, on the one hand, helps individuals reduce spending and the burden of asset management. On the other hand, it also helps individuals avoid experiencing pressure on consumption trends, thus having clear positive benefits to mental and physical health. Its consequence is that individuals feel happier, have more time to focus on important life goals, towards important relationships in life, and improve their relationships with other people and the environment.

From the above synthesis, it can be seen that there were many studies interested in the minimalism lifestyle, however, there are still many gaps in research to continue learning about this lifestyle in practice through experimental research.

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