

CRITICAL REVIEW

Creation of the Islamic Self for Sustainability: Can Muslim Entrepreneurship Positively Contribute to the SDGs through *Tazkīyah* and *Tarbīyah* of the Muslim Youth

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Keywords

Self-Esteem

Consumerism

Self-Worth

Muslim Entrepreneurship

SDG

tazkīyah

Muslim Youth

Sabr (Self-Restraint)

Abstract. The self-esteem, self-image, and subsequently self-worth of young consumers all around the globe, are determined by unsustainable consumption habits. This is equally true for Muslim youth who are as vulnerable to the pressure of building their self-image as consumers. This has led to adverse effects on the ecosystem and therefore, goes against the United Nation's sustainable development goals (Goal no. 6,7,11-15). This paper argues that by changing the criterion to gauge and establish their self-image, self-esteem, and self-worth, we can influence the degree of sustainability of the consumption patterns of young Muslim individuals. This would subsequently undo the undue pressure on the ecosystem and reduce the damage. This paper explores how the prevalent criteria of determining self-esteem and self-worth are rooted in unsustainable consumerism, trapping the planet's ecosystem in an ever-expanding vicious cycle of production, consumption, and waste. The paper recommends the Islamic alternative of determining one's self-worth, which then buttresses one's self-confidence and self-esteem. The Islamic concept of self, unlike its modern counterpart, is not dependent on extrinsic factors, such as products and services acquired and consumed by an individual, but on intrinsic factors lying within each individual. *Taqwā* (God-consciousness and mindfulness leading to virtuosity), *qanā'at* (contentment with what you already have), *tawakkul* (trust in the grace of Allah), *tashakkur* (gratitude), and *zuhd* (frugality) are key concepts and behavioral tools to bring the required transformation to the consumption patterns of Muslims, especially youth. The paper proposes ways to promote the cultivation of an Islamically informed self that derives its worth from virtuosity. This alternative Islamic self-image is to be propagated through education (both at the religious institutions and conventional universities) and Islamic entrepreneurship.

Received: 09 May 2020

Accepted: 18 September 2020

KAUJIE Classification: 03, P0

JEL Classification: A2, M1

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to overemphasize the degree of climate emergency the planet is facing right now. Pollution of all types, from plastic to carbon emissions, is responsible for bringing the planet towards the current state of crisis. There is no debate on the root cause of the problem either. The unsustainable modes of production and consumption are largely responsible. The antidote cannot be any sort of a radical shift in our production and consumption patterns. Along with using eco-friendly materials for manufacturing and renewable sources for energy production, a substantial reduction in quantities of unnecessary consumption is also needed. According to some estimates, at the current levels of consumption in developed countries, multiple planets are required to sustain (Sachs 2010; Thiel & Masters 2014; Wackernagel *et al.*, 2006). At the moment our consumption habits are putting a burden many times greater than what can be absorbed by the planetary ecosystem. The damage will not just harm wildlife but also human beings; in fact, the harm is already being experienced in many parts of the world. A radical shift in our lifestyle where we find contentment in far lesser levels of consumption is, therefore, a necessary precondition for the survival of the life support system of our planet.

In this context, one of the biggest challenges perhaps to reduce the level of consumption is to redefine what consumption means for us. The free market system has spent hundreds of billions of dollars during the last few decades to ground the self-image of an ordinary person in the image of a conspicuous consumer and define his or her self-esteem in accordance with one's comparative consumption levels. An ideal person is an ideal consumer; to be happy, one must indulge in the perpetual maximization of consumption. A society that produces and consumes more is better than a society which consumes and produces less. The toxicity of such ideas for the planetary eco-system is not hard to ignore now.

One way to address the issue at hand can be to decouple the self-image and self-esteem of the general public from their unsustainable consumption habits and ground those in the form of responsible and thinking consumers. Furthermore, it may be argued that an alternative world view where sustainable consumption is not just considered significant from a psychological point of view (only addressing the esteem needs), but also from a spiritual point of view, will perhaps further reinforce the habit of sustainable consumption. In this context, the paper presents a case for a world view grounded in Islamic philosophy which can be used to reinforce the desired habit likewise. It is further argued that future consumers, the Muslim youth, maybe the primary audience to be engaged in this process of psychological and spiritual transformation to internalize the habit of sustainable consumption. If the proposed transformation becomes successful, then it may be exported to other sociocultural and ideological contexts.

The paper first describes how individual and cultural identities are formed through consumption in the contemporary globalized world and how Islamic attitudes have also succumbed to this pressure in the form of Halal consumerist lifestyles. The paper then explains the concepts of self-image and self-esteem from the perspective of Islam and modern psychology, and how they connect with the contemporary habits of unsustainable consumption. The next section describes various spiritual tools offered by the Islamic world view which

eliminates the need of surrounding oneself with unnecessary products while reinforcing the motivation for a frugal lifestyle. The final section before the conclusion will explain how various stakeholders like parents, education, and business in the Muslim world can facilitate bringing the necessary psychological and spiritual transformation. The last section will conclude.

Identity via Consumption in the Context of Globalization

Researchers have recognized for a long time that people are motivated to consume in ways that are consistent with their sense of self (Levy, 1959; Sirgy 1982). Research has documented that consumers use possessions and brands to create their self-identities and communicate these selves to others (e.g., Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998). Psychological research has focused on broad conceptual issues surrounding consumption and consumers' sense of self. Psychologists have also taken a closer look at the relationship between people's concern for their identity through consumption, to the effects of specific types of consumptions on values and self-related goals for enhancing and projecting different aspects of self-worth.

Consumerism has become a value of modern times and goes beyond individualistic or collectivistic cultural or value division. Although excessive consumption used to be relevant to Western capitalist society; but now due to modern globalization consumption level of urban residents has been continuously going up. Among some societies, the guilt related to this consumption has been reduced by introducing the concept of green consumption, organic consumption, bio-friendly consumption, and in the Muslim cultures, halal consumption. Despite the occasional guilt, modern human consumption has gradually deviated from the traditional concern and dissonance for disrupting "harmony between human and nature" and hence continued to non-sustainable "consumerism".

Another modern-day understanding of globalization is the unique combination of capitalism and advanced technologies, the union of these two phenomena is what is commonly referred to as "techno-capital". This includes creating forces that at certain points in time work in homogenizing identities, and at others to differentiate the same. Therefore, it's not surprising that the impacts of contemporary globalization are not only limited to the social, environmental, technological, economic, and cultural realms but have also transformed the sense of identity.

In the essay, "Psychology of Globalization", Jeffrey (2002) discusses how globalization influences psychological functioning, particularly the influence on the issues related to identity. One consequence is that it changes how people think about themselves in relation to the social environment.

The first is that most people in the world now develop a bicultural identity, one that is rooted in their local culture and one that is emerging from an awareness of their relation to the global culture. The second is about how this may create confusion among young people who are not in Western culture; when their local cultures transform with regards to the influences of globalization, these young people may find themselves de-rooted from both the local and global culture. A third aspect is how in each society, there are individuals who choose to develop their self-selected cultures with people sharing similar interests and they

wish to have an identity that is either uninfluenced by the global culture and its values, or the values are thoughtfully chosen by the individual and appropriated to their own religious and cultural value framework (Arnett, 2002).

Islam and Consumption: Setting the Context

In an article discussing the growth of consumerist attitudes in Islamic societies, Crow (2015) laments the "branding" of the idea of a wholesome life and the blending of key aspects of Islamic identity and practice with the promotion of such attitudes. He argues that, while the inborn human appetitive faculty, *Shahwah*, is necessary for ensuring an organism's survival, it may be abused by the creation of "wants" which are acquired through special techniques and incite an individual to abandon "*i'tidāl*" or moderation when it comes to the satisfaction of needs. Thus, one problem centers on the creation of wants that encourage non-essential or even redundant consumption, while the other involves substituting inner contentment with outer-oriented wants. "Islamic consumption" is sold to the vulnerable masses through techniques of branding and marketing, by achieving a delicate balance between the creation of wants and maintaining the semblance of conformity to wholesome moderation and legitimate satisfaction of our divinely provisioned needs. Thus, the idea is to sell contentment¹, which poses challenges to consumption as it still remains entrenched in Islamic culture as a highly celebrated and valued trait, as a commodity to be consumed as part of a "*ḥalāl* or Islamic" lifestyle. This is achieved by, nudging consumers towards external trappings, while remaining heedless of the inner depths of Islamic values. This task is easily accomplished due to the prevailing ignorance of genuine Islamic values among the majority of affluent Muslims, with their reigning mindset of judging by surface tokens.

As Asian economies grow, the bulk of the global economic activity is expected to shift to the East which comprises major Muslim societies, where the growing middle-class eagerly embraces consumer appetites marketed as 'Islamic' (Maqsood, 2017). They do not stop to consider the havoc free-market capitalism has wrought. In the wake of this transformation, the fragile sense of the transcendent source of all life and being, embedded in a moral faith community ordered by higher human values within a moral economy (which is the veritable meaning of *Sharī'ah*), is evaporating. Islam, as religion-faith-ethic is at the brink of losing its authentic individual significance and effective social-communal purpose by submersion within a quasi-religion stressing outward ritualized conformity and the hollowing out of Muslim identity.

One cannot overstress the need for an Islamic alternative to the present consumer society, i.e. alternative forms of social organization and business models before economic and financial structures, or institutional and governing bodies could be transformed, to help Muslims remain true to themselves and their tradition of moral values. Foremost among that is the traditional Islamic understanding of the human self and the associated notions of self-worth, self-esteem, genuine happiness, and contentment.

¹Also known as *qanā'ah* ('frugal contentment'), *rida* ('temperate satisfaction'), or *qiṣāṣ al-amāl* ('curtailing worldly expectation'); contentment also embraced '*iffāh* and *ḥāyā*' ('prudence'), as well as *zuhd* ('renunciation' of appetitive wants).

Self

The concept of self is not a newly coined one; this recognition of the nature of selfhood finds its roots even in the early philosophical debates. Starting from Plato and till Kant, even many modern and pre-modern times religious thinkers argue that the self is an immortal soul that transcends the physical. This viewpoint is rejected by some philosophers who question the idea of self altogether. For David Hume, the self is nothing more than a bundle of physical perceptions. Daniel Dennett goes even further and argues that the self is merely a "center of negative gravity".

Islamic Concept of Self

i. Nafs, qalb and 'aql

In Islam, the Qur'ānic term used for the self is '*nafs*'. The *nafs* is an amalgam of the body and the spirit (*rūḥ*) also referred to as the soul (Anjum, 2020). For Ghazali, personhood has both an outward physical form and an inward spiritual self (Ali, 1995). According to Ibn-al-Qayyim, a complete understanding of the human self is achieved by connecting the body, the soul, and God (Briki & Amara 2017). This selfhood is constituted by the *nafs* or ego which is necessary to maintain the autonomy and oneness of the human self. Such an ego tends towards arrogance, pride, and envy. The bodily aspect leads to the danger of instant gratification of physical desires, lust, and greed, which are the baser qualities of the self. The spirit or *rūḥ* is the substrate of the gentler qualities of humility and patience and overcoming passions and desires. Hence, the demands and desires of the independent ego need to be put in check so that it can overcome passions and desires under the guidance of the spirit. Ghazali refers to one more faculty of the *qalb* or spiritual heart that understands the reality of things and sifts the right from the wrong. This *qalb* is the seat of connection to God and therefore, the core of the *nafs* or conscious self. The '*aql*' or intellect is closely related to the *qalb*. *Ibn al-qayyim* explains the intellect as the faculty that informs us whether an action is worth pursuing and then the right pathway to reach there. If an action leads to immediate pleasure but is forbidden according to the Divine Revelation, then the '*aql*' aided by the revelation stops the self from engaging in it. The role of *sabr* (self-control; self-regulation) is extremely important in this regard (Qayyim, 2012). *Sabr* is the faculty that changes the behavior of a person despite immediate pleasures ensuing from the past behavior. The knowledge of right behavior is acquired through the intellect ('*aql*') and revelation. *Sabr* overcomes the person's *hawā* (desires), *shahwa* (passions), and *shaitān* (satanic whispers) that encourage immediate gratification of desires and narcissistic behavior. This way human beings are oriented toward obtaining not the immediate pleasures of the lower *nafs* '*ammārah*' but virtuous benefits known through revelation. The intellect and *sabr* work together to show the worthlessness of fulfilling the lower desires of self-love and self-projection and hence, endure the internal pressure of the lower desires and passions, as well as the societal pressure outside. The self understands the Qur'ānic prescription that, *The wealth and children are from the allurements of this world, but the enduring (bāqiyāt) and virtuous (ṣāliḥāt) are better according to your Lord and the better (path) to aspire toward. (18:46).*

ii. *Meaning and Pleasure Seeking*

Ibn al-Qayyim argues that human beings are naturally predisposed to seek out what pleases them but *tawhīd* is necessary to transcend the hedonistic physical pleasures and "experience the true and ultimate pleasure of a meaningful life" (Rahman, 2018). The pleasurable activities are meaningful only if they result in closeness to Allah and an inner sense of contentment. The discussion of meaning is highly important for our purposes because Muslim entrepreneurs need to think about whether the goods and services they provide contribute to the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of the lives of their consumers/users. The long term sustained pleasure discussed by *Ibn al-Qayyim*, would also mean the higher happiness and self-worth that is not dependent on the use of unsustainable products or the unthinking usage of material products for short term pleasures. Studies have shown that these short term pleasures achieved via flaunting a consumptive lifestyle on social media platforms lead to long term depression, anxiety, and even suicide. "Meaning as a prerequisite to experiencing pleasure is an intriguing concept that is increasingly being recognized in the field of mental health. There is a correlation between suicide rates and experiencing a lack of meaning. Suicide is very strongly correlated with a phenomenon known as anhedonia, an inability to experience pleasure. Thus, a person who sees their life as meaningless is unable to experience the pleasures of this world and is left with just the pain. This drives them to want to end their suffering by ending their life" (Rahman, 2018).

There is a risk of falling into hedonism if pleasure-seeking is conceived as a sufficient tool in recognizing value or benefit. The consumer culture today has equated benefits with convenience, ease, luxury, and physical satisfaction. This lets the entrepreneurs come up with new products for pleasure maximization and the consumers also equate benefit with consumption leading to highly unsustainable lifestyles across the world. *Ibn al-Qayyim* is extremely pertinent here since he explains that any pleasure that leads to genuine "human flourishing (*kamāl*) can be conceptualized as worthy pleasures (*ladhha*) (*mahmūda*)". At the same time, he acknowledges that "many are misguided with their feelings and follow pleasures that result in damage and ruin one's life". This he labels as non-virtuous shameful pleasure (*ladhha madhmuuma*). *Ibn al-Qayyim* points out that sensory pleasures on their own do not bring about true human flourishing (*kamāl*) (Rahman, 2018). We know that the people who only live at the level of fulfilling their instincts like eating, drinking, and sexual relations are not the most fulfilled people. Everyone sees this lifestyle as devoid of purpose, almost animalistic. Furthermore, the mental pleasures associated with fame, beauty, higher social standing, and dominance are readily seen as creating unhealthy competitions breeding jealousy, envy, and many other vices. He mentions that both pleasures are meant to be experienced in a way that does not result in damage to one's soul or body "Eat and drink but not in excess, Certainly Allah does not love the extravagant" (Qur'ān, 7:31). To attain (*tazkīyah*), we are meant to compete with one another in virtue and uprightness, in a manner that is mutually encouraging and uplifting, "And for that (paradise) let the competitors compete" (Qur'ān, 83:26).

Furthermore, *Ibn al-Qayyim* asserts,

"Any pleasure that leads to pain or averts a pleasure worthier than it cannot really be

called pleasure, even if the nafs (self) mistakes it for pleasure. Can you really say there was pleasure in a poisoned meal that may have initially felt good, but led to immense pain shortly thereafter?" (Rahman, 2018)

The above quote reflects the current crisis of the world caused and bred by the unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, which has shown in less than a century that it was like a poisoned meal that felt good initially and now we are facing the pain of near catastrophe. Ibn al-Qayyim also talks about the tension between the *nafs 'ammārah bis-suu'* (nature within our soul that inclines to evil), and the *nafs mutma'inn* (the nature within our soul that inclines towards a higher existence) in great detail. This conflict is actualized in the *qalb* or spiritual heart. The *'aql* under the guidance of *qalb* disciplines the lower or impulsive part of the self that is *nafs 'ammārah*. It is the immoderate appetites, desires, and passions of the *nafs 'ammārah* that are restrained by the *nafs lawwama* that is the inner conscience. This inner conscience is alive as much as the spiritual *qalb* is connected to God and the *'aql* receives the divine illumination. The *qalb saleem* eventually guides the *nafs* to the highest state, *nafs al mutma'innah* (Abu-Raiya, 2012). According to Ibn al Qayyim the desire-ego, reproachful ego, and *fitra* [the innate disposition of man] are the three constitutive elements of the self (Briki & Amara 2017). Hence, a person can attain true freedom and happiness through a spiritual progression that is the development of the self in which one progresses from the constraints of the material self (*nafs 'ammārah*) to finally attain the self at peace (*nafs mutma'innah*). The *nafs 'ammārah* relates to the physical world, the *nafs lawwama* corresponds to the mental world, and the *nafs mutma'inna* to the spiritual world, respectively. The science of spiritual progression or purification of the self and soul is called (*tazkiyah*). We find that in the Qur'ān,

"Indeed that person has brought himself into happiness and success (falāḥ) who purifies himself (tazkiyah)." (Qur'ān 87:14)

Tazkiyah as Central

The self-purification or (*tazkiyah*) is the genuine criterion of true success and development for a Muslim and the ultimate objective of Sharī'ah. It is the same as living in harmony with the will of God as well as the creation. Achieving this harmony requires humans to know, act, and believe in a measured way. This involves rigorous inward character development in addition to the outward acts of pious devotion and social duty.

When elaborating on the character development of young children Ghazali's stress on simple clothing is notable. The over consumption characteristic of the fast-fashion clothing industry, which is the second-largest polluting industry (Raquib & Khan, 2019). The overemphasis on appearance and fashion characteristic of the contemporary consumer culture leads to a number of psycho-social problems. The self-esteem of the majority of young people in the globalized culture is reliant on their usage of the latest versions of renowned brands. The highly contagious consumer culture leads to the "romanticization of commodities" and the "institutionalization of envy" amongst the young people. This has "created and exacerbated new forms of unhappiness-personal insecurity, status anxiety, anxiety in parents about their ability to satisfy the needs of the young" (Lasch, 2018). Highly problematic is the fact that

the spiritual vacuum and lack of communal bonds in the postmodern culture are supposedly addressed through more consumption. The solace and comfort that should have been sought in the relationship with God and the relationship with family, neighbors, relatives, and the broader community, is sought out in unstoppable consumption (Waldinger, 2015).

Ghazali's insistence on instilling a habit of simplicity in dress and a dislike for luxury from early on in childhood becomes highly significant when we see how the fashion industry undermines young people's self-esteem vis-a-vis their appearance and clothing. It instills the reprehensible quality of arrogance rather than the praiseworthy attribute of humility (*tawāḍuḥ*). Ghazali talks about self-praise, self-conceit, and envy as the constituents of pride or arrogance. We see how these are essential ingredients of the consumer culture, exacerbated by the social media self-aggrandizement to the extent of the idolatry of the self (Ghazzali, 1993).

This struggle between the *naf 'ammārah* and *nafs muttma'inn* in the context of sustainability is the one where the former pushes the self towards the immediately pleasurable and narcissistic behavior that is destructive both for the soul and the environment, whereas the latter orients the individual towards virtuosity that demands the exercise of self-restraint (*sabr* or patience) under the supervision of sound intellect or '*aql saleem*. This internal locus for self-regulation has also been discussed in modern psychology, the details of which will be found in the coming section. This internal locus is made up of the *sabr* construct, which is the "mind's ability to regulate one's behavior by offsetting immediate pleasure for long-term benefit and acting in accordance with one's values. When a motivational state is activated towards an end that our intellect deems to be harmful, hopeless, or idle, then the *nafs muttma'inn* utilizes its self-regulatory capacity (*sabr*) to restrain from the compulsion" (Rahman, 2018).

The harm inferred by the intellect, in the current context, simultaneously affects the individual, society, and the environment. Since the *nafs mutmainna* and the concomitant self-regulation is absent in the contemporary consumerist climate, the knowledge of all real and potential harm is not acted upon. We, therefore, see not much action on the part of entrepreneurs and consumers despite a lot of awareness.

iii. *Sabr and Self-Regulation in meeting the SDGs*

Sabr in Islam, serves the same purpose as self-regulation does in modern psychology. Both self-regulation and *sabr* are understood as the ability to act ethically. *Sabr* has the additional dimension of conforming to the higher Truth, which modern psychology does not possess. The self-regulation allows one to give up on short-term hedonistic pleasures to acquire long-term benefits. *Sabr*, not only inhibits one's self to abstain from actions that do not conform to the dictates of Truth and Morality but also provides strength to make the right decisions even if they entail pain and hardships. A Muslim is obliged to uphold *al-haqq* or truth in all matters of one's life and fulfilling this responsibility requires the constant exercise of the faculty of *sabr* (Qur'ān: Surah Asr:3).

The inhibitory dimension of *sabr* is most relevant for our purpose, as it has to do with refraining or abstaining from a particular action. The Muslim as trustee (*Khalifah*) on earth should understand this restraint or abstinence as part of the responsibility to avert climate

change and meet the SDGs, despite the appeal of short-term pleasure or the short-term pain associated with abstinence. The Muslim entrepreneur and consumer both lack this dimension of *sabr*. The practicing Muslim entrepreneurs and consumers who are very prompt in fulfilling their ritual worship, like prayer, fasting, and charity, are least concerned and bothered about environmental sustainability, lack this inhibitory component.

Ibn al-Qayyim in discussing a person's *sabr* explains that it intervenes by either cognitive interventions ('*ilm*) or behavioral ('*amāl*). The cognitive dimension makes one understand one's values better and hence, the responsibilities and obligations subsequent to those values. It helps one understand the true benefit and fulfillment. When discussing sustainability, the deeper a Muslim understands the concepts of *khilafah*, *amanah*, and the environment as *Ayat Allah*, the higher will be the objective of preserving the sacred environment through sustainable production and consumption. Understanding how sustainable living is concomitant to acquiring a *nafs mutmainna*, the person would have the required motivation and strong determination to act upon these values. The tremendous happiness of living a meaningful, purposeful life in harmony with the God-created world would overshadow the sacrifices one has to make in giving up the consumptive lifestyle. *Sabr* in action toward reducing consumption becomes possible only when genuine cognitive and spiritual happiness is acquired in the *qalb*.

Self Esteem and Social Comparison

In psychological research, self-esteem has been defined as the overall concept about the self which is a positive or negative evaluation of the self. Self-esteem raises concerns for social image-defined as our respect and value in the eyes of others (Rodriguez Mosquera *et al.*, 2008) and this link suggests that our respect, positive appraisal, and recognition lie in the eyes of the beholder, thus, our image and self-esteem is inherently social (see Anjum *et al.*, 2019). Many researchers and theorists have suggested that maintaining self-esteem is vital for raising social image as it is a basic human need (Kalpidou *et al.*, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Tazghini & Siedlecki 2013; Weiten, 2004).

In the Islamic understanding of the self we have seen that for the one who has acquired '*aql saleem*, *qalb saleem* and *nafs lawwama* and *mutmainna*, the self-esteem is acquired in virtue of one's standing before God and is not inherently social. "*Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him*" (Qur'ān 49:13).

In the discourse about self-esteem and social image, it is important to talk about the social context in which the self is situated because that context determines people's tendencies to make comparisons and also the type of comparisons that are made. In this reference, the Social Comparison Theory provides a prominent framework for this debate. Social Comparison Theory (SCT: Festinger, 1954) argues that people constantly compare themselves with others who look or perform better than them. Follow up research on these theoretical speculations shows that our self-esteem based on social image tends to be correlated with the types of social comparison we make (also see Wood, 1989; 1996). For instance, research by Wood *et al.* (1994) has shown that under no threats to the social image, individuals with high self-esteem tend to make upward comparisons, whereas, people with low self-esteem tend to make downward comparisons. It is interesting to note that no research has so far explored

how people behave under threats to their image. For example, if people have a feeling of insufficiency, they might struggle more for upward comparisons and hence look for ways to increase their social standing by spending on themselves and showing off through social comparisons.

High self-esteem -> upward comparison

Low self-esteem -> downward comparison

An extensive research by Chung and Mallery (1999) has shown that there are stark differences in social comparison choices that are based on self-esteem and social image between people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The study explored the need and expression of social comparison among the individualistic (United States) and collectivistic (China) people, focusing on self-esteem based worth of themselves as a possible mediator. The scores on social comparison measure revealed that people with higher collectivism scores were more likely to show a higher desire to make upward social comparisons and lower downward comparisons. The research concluded that in collectivistic communities, the tendency toward upward self-improvement comparisons is more likely. What is missing from this research literature is the possibility that how striving for such upward comparisons can actually negatively affect people's self-esteem and make them vulnerable to constant comparison with others. There is a specificity to the Muslim community unlike the Chinese or other collectivist cultures, where the highest standard to judge fellow community members is or should be *taqwa* or the virtuosity. The Muslim community despite being collectivist, essentially curbs comparison in terms of material goods and comforts and replaces it with the higher values of God-consciousness, knowledge, sincerity, worship, honesty, justice, gratitude, patience, generosity, courage, and self-control.

Theoretically speaking, some authors have interpreted self-esteem based on social image related findings through Social Compensation Theory (SCT). SCT speculates the poor-get-richer hypothesis that argues that people experience difficulties in social relations through low self-esteem and social anxieties act as motivation to consume more to portray an opposite social image or representation in order to compensate for their unsatisfactory self-perception (see McKenna *et al.*, 2002). More recent research confirms these speculations; there are now studies that have found evidence that people with a positive self-evaluation and higher self-esteem spend more on consuming (Ghosh & Dasgupta 2015). Yet another theoretically opposite perspective is Social Enhancement Theory (SET), which argues for the rich-get-richer speculation. According to SET, for more sociable and likable young people, there are added benefits from expanding positive social image through the consumption of valued products and social media. The proponent of this framework argue that people who engage in active social comparisons are those who have high levels of self-esteem and the same people are more inclined to utilize products as means to extend their social network further (Kraut *et al.*, 2002).

Consumption -> social image enhancement

Cultural values: Individualism and Collectivism

One of the most commonly applied values base frameworks for predicting what would make people's attitudes and behaviors related to self and social image-based comparisons are their embeddedness in cultural values of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 2001). The cultural values of individualism and collectivism are how we perceive ourselves and our relationships with others, the type of comparisons we make, the kind of goals we pursue, and the type of behavior and motives we value (see Triandis, 2001). Both types of values (individualism and collectivism) differently predict our self-esteem, happiness, and what kind of sustainable and unsustainable behaviors are valued by us. Research has shown that individualistic cultures emphasize the differentiation of self from others such that they consider the individual to be autonomous, self-reliant, self-focused, and independent (Triandis, 2001; Hofstede, 2001). Collectivistic cultures, on the contrary, value social approval and maintaining social relationships and expectations (Hofstede, 2001; Lee & Oyserman, 2007). Hence, in the collectivist cultures, it will be valued to prioritize the social image and approval over the individual's personal achievement. Therefore, people who live in collectivistic cultures would be more attuned to the social judgment of their consumptions and behaviors and obey the popular expectations at any given time (Argyle *et al.*, 1986; Koydemir & Essau, 2018; Triandis, 1989).

This does not however mean that collectivistic cultures consume more than individualistic cultures. It can be argued that within their means, the reasons for consumption are based on social comparisons for collectivistic cultures; whereas, in the individualistic cultures, the reasons might be based on self-distinction and hedonic pursuits of self-enhancement reinforced by modernity. For example, in a recent study by Stathopoulou and Balabanis (2019), survey data from U.S. consumers showed that individualistic cultural values influence consumers' "perceptions of the usability, uniqueness, quality, and luxury motives". The study argues that motives of self-enhancement and luxury are the key drivers of consumers' tendency to over-consume luxury brands. Detailed analyses showed that consumers could be categorized as "unconcerned," "functionalists," "moderately-eager," and "luxury-enthusiasts." Furthermore, those who had high self-enhancement individualistic values were more likely to buy luxury products and be subject to overconsumption, whereas, functionalists and unconcerned did not buy luxury products and consumed less in general. If we look at the Muslim culture, then the values of community override individualism, however, the higher dimension of taqwa (God-consciousness) and ihsan (spiritual and moral excellence) as the communal value should act as a deterrent in judging the societal members on the basis of their consumerist lifestyle. Instead, an Islamic value framework and understanding of the self condemns such behavior of arrogance, ostentation, and narcissism. Muslim collectivism is one that must encourage competing in virtues instead of competing in branded goods.

As we have seen in the section on Self-Esteem and Social Comparison, the SCT claims that individuals with higher self-esteem are more inclined to make social comparisons with people higher up on the ladder of social status and prestige. People generally tend to compare themselves with those who are better off than them, rather than the ones who are worst off. The Islamic socio-ethical guideline in this regard is to always look at the ones who are worse

off than themselves irrespective of one's social and financial standing and position. This is the prescription for comparing one's worldly prestige and position. However, when it comes to one's spiritual and moral perfection and one's standing before Allah (SWT), the prophetic hadith advises humanity to idealize the ones who are better off in terms of their God-consciousness and piety (taqwa) and their altruism.

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Verily, Allah does not look at your appearance or wealth, but rather he looks at your hearts and actions." Sahih Muslim 2564. Grade: Sahih (authentic) according to Muslim.

In terms of worldly possessions, one should look at those underneath them and in terms of religio-spiritual perfection a person should always look at the one above them.

There is a prophetic hadith, "*Do not look to those above you, lest you view the favors of Allah as trivial.*" (Sahih al-Bukhari 6125; Sahih Muslim 2963).

Role of Social Media in Shaping Self-Esteem and Influencing Consumption

At the end of the last century, Selfless altruism-A motivation and goal to increase others' welfare as opposed to being selfish (Batson, 1991) - was popular. However, in recent times, selfless altruism has been argued to be a quality that youth are lacking (Twenge & Foster 2010). Youth are being characterized as selfish, individualist, and entitled, due to which they have been occasionally labelled as Generation Me (see Twenge, 2006). In addition, psychological research has indicated that adolescents' orientation towards 'others vs self' needs more attention (Cramer, 2011; Horton & Tritch 2014).

Our youth thinks of their living in a fashionable way that is "me first" and then think about sustainability. Where do these motivations come from? Mostly from extrinsic values, media and social approval. Researchers like Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn (2004) and Dooley et al. (2010) have argued and concluded that mass media can be blamed for intentionally selling an unrealistic ideal image, which often leads to image dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. People often internalize these ideals as a representation of reality and push themselves toward unhealthy behaviours in an unlikely attempt to achieve those standards.

Media and social factors based influences impact many consumers such that they value the opinions of others and engage in approval-seeking behaviors which are potential risk factors for image dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and low self-esteem (see, Gulas & McKeage 2000; Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Trampe *et al.*, 2007; Venkat & Ogden 2002). Body image dissatisfaction and low self-esteem tend to increase the likelihood of body image comparison with peers and models, which becomes a vicious cycle that is difficult to intercede. In addition, media influences are often reinforced by family, social networks and especially peers, and one of the primary indicators of pathology is peer perception of what is cool and what is not. This perception of being or not being cool determines what is acceptable behavior and what is not.

Using Social Media to Increase Environmental Awareness and Sustainable Consumption

Social media, particularly Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter are immensely popular

and powerful marketing tools for portraying a certain type of social image among consumers. They are highly accessible and able to distribute the message of ideal self-concept without time and space limits. Social media facilitates the interaction between young individuals and entrepreneurs and they are the best marketing tools for small-to-medium companies, as well as large corporates. Hence, users can easily contribute to engage in constructing and participating in modern shared ideal images and self-concept and influence their consumption behavior (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010).

Kanter and Fine (2010) carried out one of the first studies focusing on the importance of using social media to increase interest in environmental measures with the final aim of better communicating sustainability issues. Their study shows how social networks can actively promote positive self-image embedded in environmental awareness and a sustainable lifestyle. Another study by Ballew *et al.* (2015) revealed that social media technologies might facilitate the communication of psychological and sociological or tangible factors (e.g., sustainability production program) to influence pro-environmental behavior. Chen *et al.* (2015) found that when the information provided by blogs meets users' self-esteem needs, consumers are willing to engage in the so-called customer citizenship behavior, which refers to the recommendation of the business to friends or family. Based on this assumption, the use of social media to convey messages about environmental sustainability and positive image, especially among the millennial generation, becomes a proxy of the word of mouth to increase visibility; and four millennials out of ten use social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as a source for searching for information when buying products and they are attracted to the sustainability messages.

The fact is that despite environmentalism and sustainability being one of the most discussed and shared themes on social media, they often fail to influence the long-term behavior of young people. As a passing fashion, young people could become the users of green products but the sustainable mindset is not internalized and hence, does not steer their consumption choices in the longer run. As we have seen in the previous sections, social media promotes a consumerist, ostentatious lifestyle. In instances where it tends to promote a sustainable lifestyle, even that is flaunted as something that is fashionable and that could provide an ego boost to the people who could post their pictures using a metal straw and so on. It manipulates the *nafs 'ammārah* in a very obvious manner leading to narcissism and self-projection of all types (Rosen *et al.*, 2012). As we will see in the next section, the deeper religious motivation derived from a religious-cosmic understanding of the created universe, enshrined in the Islamic belief in Tawhid is lacking and hence we fail to have a real behavior change. Social media does not lead to self-determined behavior where the locus of control is internal. Instead, it provides external rewards of getting social approval. Islamic ethics, with its extreme emphasis on intention (*niyyah*) which is internal, helps the Muslim consumer transcend the fears and allurements of the social disapproval or approval. That is an attitude of someone at the stage of *nafs lawwama-mutmainna*.

Motivation behind Sustainable Consumption

Although the term sustainability has multiple emblems in many contexts and objectives

(Kratzig & Warren-Kretzschmar 2014), this concept mostly includes three-dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. Unfortunately, today the majority of the sustainability programs and their standards mostly focus on the environmental aspects without accounting for motivation for engaging or disengaging from sustainable consumption. Crocker and Park (2004), Deci and Ryan (1985), Furnham et al. (2002), Markland and Hardy (1993) and Th yggersen-Ntoumani et al. (2007) have proposed and shown in their research that motivation for engaging in different behaviors vary from person to person. However, there are two main types of motivations that drive human behavior: self-determined and controlling.

Self-determined motivation refers to positive and healthy reasons for engaging in a given behavior (in this case sustainability), while controlling motivation refers to engaging in an activity or behavior for external, material reasons. These researchers have argued that individuals with greater self-determination and internal locus of control are more likely to engage in healthier and sustainable behavior.

internal locus of control -> sustainable behavior + Greater

Self-esteem

It can be argued that in the contexts and cultures where people have internalized locus of control (whether individualistic or collectivist cultures), people will be more focused on sustainable behavior and this higher sustainable consumption may lead to a more positive image of the self and hence greater self-esteem. Therefore, it can be suggested that self-esteem can also be an outcome of sustainable consumption instead of being the cause or predictor.

Those researchers who have argued that individuals with greater self-esteem and internal locus of control are more likely to engage in healthier and sustainable behavior seem to be more aligned to the Islamic perspective than the ones who believe that people with a positive self-evaluation spend more on consuming. The Islamic notion of happiness is the one in which the sources of one's self-worth are derived from how satisfied one is with their spiritual and moral struggle, the tranquility of the *qalb* and *nafs mutmainna*. Thus, individuals and communities who have higher self-worth and self-esteem with regards to their perception about the strength of their religious piety and moral character tend to spend less on consumable items. For Muslims, especially the youth, both their internal locus of control and self-esteem can be controlled through the Islamic conception of self, as discussed earlier. But that needs to be internalized in such a way that their self-regulation allows them to counter the pressure of the global consumer culture and this is reflected in their sustainable behavior where they think, choose and decide sustainably.

COVID-19: Necessities and Wants in the Backdrop of the Pandemic and What Muslim Sustainable Entrepreneurship can learn from There

It is much easier to live at the level of needs rather than wants, a model that was witnessed in the life of *madina* during the time of the Prophet. Competing in virtue and living for an afterlife gave so much meaning to the lives of the companions (*ṣaḥābah*) that the physical and financial sacrifices in its way did not incur pain; rather it was a source of joy for them.

Conversely, we see the inhabitants of the industrially advanced world to find no pleasure despite the wants being fulfilled and they resort to suicide. It is the state of *qalb*, which has *ghina* or its absence that is most critical here. A relevant finding is the attitude of people during the current times of COVID-19. If we look from the *maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah* categories of necessities (*daruriyat*), needs (*hajiyyat*) and enhancements (*tahsiniyyat*), it has become very clear that in these times what the absolute necessities of human beings are. Another interesting reading is what is making humans across the globe live willfully at the level of necessities. It is the protection of a higher value of health, which according to Islam is essential to protecting human life that has compelled human beings to accept the closure of shopping malls and so many places of entertainment, which they know only provided them with the enhancements of life. If these enhancements can now harm the necessity of health, it seems the most sensible thing to do is to close down those places and stop those activities. People are managing to live without frequently visiting malls, a culture that has served as social oxygen so far, for the contemporary lifestyle. Can the same logic be applied to the discourse on sustainability? The majority of stuff that is produced and consumed unsustainably, by polluting the earth in many ways, provides human beings with the enhancements of life, wealth and intellect, all the while harming the essentials of religion, life, intellect, wealth and progeny (lineage and kinship). Fast consumer culture does not allow parents to raise God-conscious, responsible children because of the pressure to earn and consume. Similarly, family and community relations are also the victims of fast-paced consumerist lifestyle.

People lived without many goods and services which they thought were indispensable to their lives. They did not go out to shop for them because of the high value to health and prevention of disease. If the value of sustainability and conservation and community orientation is understood and internalized as a necessity or essential, this could prevent the Muslim populace from over-consumption and direct entrepreneurs toward this frugality thinking. Over-consumption even of essentials like food is already disregarded in Islam and comes under extravagance or *isrāf*. The value of sustainability adds another dimension of communal responsibility to conserve Allah’s creation leading to social good *maṣlahah*. Shopping and dining became meaningless when the fear of death was looming large. The Islamic (*tazkīyah*) tradition instills this understanding of death at all times that makes people less indulgent towards material stuff. The (*tazkīyah*) tradition is conducive to the SDGs and needs to be revived for a renewed entrepreneurship model.

Conclusion

This first part establishes why and how young people define and ground their self-esteem in conspicuous consumption leading to unsustainable behavior patterns while juxtaposing it with the Islamic notion of the self and its reality. After elaborating on the Islamic conception of self, it was discussed how a crisis of meaning and purpose is central for understanding the contemporary preoccupation with consumption and why having sound knowledge of genuine human happiness and seeking it through (*tazkīyah*) -*al-nafs* (Self-purification) is essential for Muslims to have sustainably living communities. The pivotal role of the faculty

of *sabr* for meeting the SDG's was then analyzed. Modern psychology theories tend to explain consumptive behavior as driven by culturally conditioned concepts of self-esteem, self-image and social comparison. These were significant to highlight the importance of building Muslim communities based on virtue and piety. Muslim societies are collectivistic unlike liberal, individualistic societies and instead of using the collectivistic mindset to gain social approvals for consumptive lifestyles, the mechanism of socially endorsing minimalism and frugality in lifestyle choices should be the goal for Muslims societies. A critical analysis of the role of social media was carried out since social media has an important function in shaping identity, influencing consumption and the self-esteem associated with it. Through the same social media environmentalism and sustainable consumption is also promoted.

In the next part other such Islamic spiritual and ethical resources will be discussed, the community-wide endorsement and propagation of which, would lead to the boosting of spiritual orientation and genuine self-esteem in the Muslim youth. The role of parents, educators and entrepreneurs will be highlighted. The Islamic spiritual and ethical resources are such that in the process of cultivating an Islamically true self, people's standards for measuring their success and happiness change. This change of standard shifts the locus of self-esteem from consumption-leading-to-social approval to *tazkīyah*-leading-to-God's approval. This in turn leads to sustainable choices, habits and actions in the private as well as in the entrepreneurial realm.

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