

The Experiential Dimensions of Minimalism: Insights from Grounded Theory

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Abstract: Purpose: This research study seeks to explore the experiential dimensions of minimalism and its connection with experiential consumption, employing qualitative grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as the primary research approach. Embedded within the foundational tenets of grounded theory, this study endeavours to unveil the experiential narratives of individuals ardently immersed in the practice of minimalism. Findings: The analysis revealed a multifaceted understanding of minimalism, encompassing dimensions such as mindful presence, experiential richness, personal growth, social connections, autonomy, and sustainable consumption. Participants consistently reported transformative experiences within these themes, offering nuanced insights into the intricate relationship between intentional simplicity and experiential choices. The findings contribute to the development of a grounded theory that elucidates the complexities of minimalism in the realm of consumer behaviour. Methodology: Adopting a qualitative grounded theory design, this study utilized purposive sampling to select ten participants deeply engaged in minimalism and experiential consumption. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to rigorous grounded theory analysis involving constant comparison, coding, and theoretical sampling. Limitations: This study acknowledges limitations, including a small sample size of ten participants, potential biases in self-reporting during semi-structured interviews, and contextual specificity that may limit generalizability. Future research endeavours should involve larger and more diverse participant pools to enhance the transferability of findings. Originality: This research contributes to the discourse on minimalism by offering a grounded exploration of individuals actively embracing this lifestyle. Grounded theory methods enrich our understanding of the intricate relationship between minimalism and experiential consumption, providing distinctive insights into the challenges and rewards associated with intentional simplicity.

Keywords: Minimalism, experiential consumption, intentional simplicity, qualitative research, grounded theory methods

1. Introduction

In the contemporary tapestry of consumer culture, the interplay between lifestyle choices, well-being, and consumption patterns has become an area of heightened scholarly interest (Martin-Woodhead, 2022a). One notable phenomenon that has captured public attention is the rise of minimalism coupled with a shift towards experiential pursuits in favour of enriching life through experiences (Druică *et al.*, 2023a). The confluence of these two trends reflects a nuanced re-evaluation of societal

values and the quest for a more meaningful existence in an era characterized by relentless consumerism (Sudha *et al.*, 2023).

Minimalism, as a lifestyle philosophy, advocates intentional simplicity and the deliberate reduction of material possessions (Lloyd and Pennington, 2020). This movement has gained traction globally, with individuals embracing the notion that a decluttered physical environment can pave the way for a decluttered and more fulfilling life (Köse, 2020a). Concurrently, the paradigm of experiential consumption emphasizes the prioritization of experiences over material acquisitions (Morewedge *et al.*, 2021). The allure of creating memories, fostering personal growth, and building meaningful social connections takes precedence over the accumulation of possessions (Virtaluo *et al.*, 2021).

Despite the increasing prevalence of minimalism and experiential consumption, a comprehensive theoretical exploration of the intricate dynamics between these two phenomena is notably absent from the existing literature (Matte *et al.*, 2021a). This research seeks to bridge this gap by delving into the theoretical foundations of minimalism and its synergistic relationship with experiential consumption. By unravelling the complexities inherent in these lifestyle choices, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the implications for individual well-being and broader societal trends.

The rationale for investigating minimalism and experiential consumption lies in their potential to redefine conventional notions of happiness, success, and fulfilment. Proponents of minimalism assert that by divesting oneself of unnecessary possessions, individuals can attain a heightened sense of autonomy, clarity of purpose, and improved mental well-being experiences, fosters personal growth, strengthens social bonds, and aligns with principles of sustainability (Köse, 2020).

To address the research gap, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten individuals who identify as practitioners of both minimalism and experiential consumption. Grounded theory methods (Birks *et al.*, 2019; Cepellos and Tonelli, 2020) were employed to analyze the rich qualitative data, allowing for the emergence of key themes and theoretical insights. The ensuing exploration not only sheds light on the subjective experiences of those who have embraced these lifestyle choices but also seeks to

contribute to a broader theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between minimalism and experiential consumption.

The structure of this paper unfolds as follows: first, a comprehensive review of the literature on minimalism, experiential consumption, and their intersection provides a foundation for the study. Next, the research methodology and data analysis techniques are elucidated, detailing the rationale for selecting semi-structured interviews and grounded theory. Subsequently, the findings are presented, organized around six key themes that encapsulate the essence of the participants' experiences. The discussion section interprets these findings in the context of existing research and theories, offering theoretical insights into the symbiotic relationship between minimalism and experiential consumption. The implications of this study span various disciplines, influencing academia, policy, and practical applications in domains such as psychology, sociology, marketing, sustainability, and beyond.

2. Literature Review

In the evolving landscape of consumer culture, the intricate interplay between lifestyle choices, well-being, and consumption patterns has become a focal point for scholarly exploration (Meissner, 2019). One notable phenomenon capturing attention is the convergence of minimalism and experiential consumption, signifying a deliberate shift away from materialism towards a more experiential and fulfilling existence (Atanasova and Eckhardt, 2021). The amalgamation of these trends represents a nuanced reevaluation of societal values in response to the pervasive influence of relentless consumerism (Mary and Ming-Ming, 2022).

Minimalism, as a lifestyle philosophy, advocates intentional simplicity and the deliberate reduction of material possessions (Drucă et al., 2023). The movement has gained global traction, with individuals embracing the belief

that a streamlined physical environment can lead to a more fulfilling life (Herziger et al., 2020). This deliberate paring down of possessions aligns with the assertion that decluttering one's physical space can contribute to mental clarity and autonomy (Virtaluo et al., 2021)

Concurrently, the paradigm of experiential consumption underscores the prioritization of experiences over material acquisitions (Martin-Woodhead, 2022). The allure of creating memories, fostering personal growth, and building meaningful social connections takes precedence over the accumulation of possessions. This shift reflects a broader societal movement towards valuing the intangible and the experiential over the tangible and material.

Despite the increasing prevalence of minimalism and experiential consumption, a comprehensive theoretical exploration of the intricate dynamics between these two phenomena is notably absent from the existing literature (Matte et al., 2021b). The absence of a robust theoretical framework hinders a thorough understanding of the implications of these lifestyle choices for individual well-

being and societal trends.

The rationale for investigating minimalism and experiential consumption lies in their potential to redefine conventional notions of happiness, success, and fulfillment. Advocates argue that divesting oneself of unnecessary possessions can lead to heightened autonomy, clarity of purpose, improved mental well-being, personal growth, strengthened social bonds, and alignment with principles of sustainability (Köse, 2020).

To address this research gap, the current study conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten individuals practicing both minimalism and experiential consumption. Grounded theory methods were employed to analyze the rich qualitative data, aiming to extract key themes and theoretical insights. By exploring the subjective experiences of those embracing these lifestyle choices, the study seeks to contribute to a broader theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between minimalism and experiential consumption.

In summary, the literature review establishes the context for the study by highlighting the existing discourse on minimalism, experiential consumption, and their intersection. The subsequent sections of the paper delve into the research methodology, findings, and discussions, aiming to deepen our understanding of the symbiotic relationship between minimalism and experiential consumption. The implications of this research extend across multiple disciplines, impacting academia, policy, and practical applications in psychology, sociology, marketing, sustainability, and beyond.

3. Research Design

In the investigation of minimalism and experiential consumption, a notable gap in scholarly discourse prompted a departure from conventional quantitative methodologies. Recognizing the exploratory nature of the study and the paucity of research dedicated to the intersection of minimalism and experiential consumption, this research adopts qualitative grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The overarching goal is to construct a foundational theory that elucidates the dynamic relationship between minimalism and well-being in the context of experiential consumption.

3.1 Participants

Ten participants, comprising three males and seven females, aged between 24 and 50, formed the focal point of this study. Geographical diversity was ensured, with participants residing in the India, United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America, Canada, and Germany. The variety of living arrangements included solo living, cohabitation with partners, familial living, and shared accommodation. Employing purposeful sampling (Suri, 2011), participants were selected based on their self-identification as minimalists or practitioners of a minimalist lifestyle. Recruitment channels encompassed social media groups dedicated to minimalism and leveraged the researcher's personal and professional networks. Interested participants

received comprehensive information, completed a pre-interview questionnaire for demographic insights, and formally consented to participation. Conducted online via video conferencing, interviews were recorded with participant consent.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary means of data collection, providing flexibility in guiding participants within the research scope and accommodating the exploration of emergent themes. Aligned with the grounded theory approach, the constant comparative method facilitated simultaneous and continuous data collection, analysis, and theorizing.

The coding process unfolded through successive phases, starting with initial coding, progressing to focused coding, and culminating in theoretical coding. Initial coding involved a meticulous line-by-line analysis, maintaining openness to diverse theoretical trajectories. Focused coding identified and categorized prevalent initial codes for integrated explanations. Theoretical coding elevated the analysis to a theoretical perspective, postulating relationships between categories. Throughout this process, the researcher engaged in memo-writing and diagramming to enhance analysis, productivity, and abstraction.

Data collection concluded after ten interviews, dictated by institutional constraints. This decision aligned with achieving theoretical saturation, signifying that the insights garnered from the interviews no longer presented novel dimensions, providing a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences within the realm of minimalism and experiential consumption.

4. Results

In the pursuit of understanding the symbiotic relationship between minimalism and experiential consumption, the qualitative analysis of participant responses has revealed a multifaceted tapestry of well-being benefits intrinsic to these chosen lifestyles. The identified key themes, coupled with their respective sub-themes, provide a nuanced exploration of the experiential dimensions shaping the well-being landscape of individuals embracing minimalism and experiential consumption.

4.1 Mindful Presence

In the exploration of minimalism and experiential consumption, the theme of mindful presence emerges, revealing participants' intentional and conscious engagement with their chosen lifestyle. Sub-themes within mindful presence illuminate distinct facets of this essential aspect.

1) Liberation from Possessions

Mindful presence is intricately linked with the liberation from material possessions, as participants express a sense of freedom from the burden and constraints of consumerism. Minimalism becomes a pathway to break free from the cycle of routine, allowing for a more authentic and intentional

existence.

"Minimalism allowed us to break free from the cycle of routine. Now, we create stories and memories instead of repeating the same old patterns." (Participant 7)

2) Value-Aligned Living

Within mindful presence, value-aligned living emerges as a significant sub-theme, signifying the participants' heightened awareness of personal values. Minimalism becomes a tool for aligning actions with these values, contributing to a more purposeful and meaningful lifestyle.

"Through minimalism, I found a confidence in knowing what I want and what I don't want. It's about becoming more aware and authentic in my choices." (Participant 10)

3) Authenticity in Expression

Authenticity in expression is another sub-theme within mindful presence, emphasizing how minimalism enables individuals to express their true identity. Participants reject societal expectations, engaging in strategic and purposeful purchases that genuinely resonate with their authentic selves.

"Possessions now reflect my authentic self, bringing joy. They're not just items; they contribute to my well-being and align with my values." (Participant 8)

In summary, mindful presence within minimalism and experiential consumption encompasses liberation from possessions, value-aligned living, and authenticity in expression. Participants' narratives highlight the transformative impact of cultivating mindful presence, fostering a more intentional and authentic way of life.

4.2 Experiential Richness

In the exploration of minimalism and experiential consumption, experiential richness emerges as a cornerstone, embodying participants' qualitative fulfillment from prioritizing experiences over possessions. The sub-themes within experiential richness unravel profound dimensions of this aspect.

1) Mindful Consumption Choices

Mindful consumption choices stand out as a crucial sub-theme within experiential richness, emphasizing participants' intentional decisions aligned with environmental stewardship. Minimalism becomes a vehicle for making mindful choices that extend beyond personal experience to consider the broader ecological impact.

"I am more mindful of what I buy and its impact on the environment. It's about the world around me, not just my personal experience." (Participant 5)

2) Emotional Resonance

Emotional resonance surfaces within experiential richness, highlighting the joy and fulfillment derived from shared experiences and meaningful connections. Participants express a deep sense of happiness fostered by the richness of interpersonal relationships and shared moments.

"Experiences with loved ones hold a special place. It's not just about what I do alone, but how these experiences create bonds and memories with those around me." (Participant 2)

In summary, experiential richness within minimalism and experiential consumption reflects mindful consumption choices and emotional resonance. The interplay between intentional decisions and the emotional depth of shared experiences contributes to individual well-being and environmental stewardship.

4.3 Personal Growth

In the exploration of minimalism and experiential consumption, personal growth emerges as a salient outcome, reflecting participants' transformative journey of self-discovery and self-improvement. The sub-themes within personal growth illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of this theme.

1) Autonomy and Empowerment

Autonomy and empowerment emerge as significant sub-themes within personal growth, capturing participants' experiences of liberation and self-determination through minimalist practices. Minimalism becomes a catalyst for autonomy, empowering individuals to make intentional choices aligned with their values.

"Minimalism gave me a confidence of knowing what I want and what I don't want. It's about becoming more aware and authentic in my choices." (Participant 1)

2) Transformative Well-being

Transformative well-being surfaces within personal growth, emphasizing the holistic benefits of a minimalist lifestyle on participants' overall well-being. The pursuit of experiences over possessions contributes to heightened positive emotions, including joy and peacefulness.

"Becoming a minimalist made me more aware of what expresses me and what I value. This awareness makes me more authentic and brings happiness." (Participant 4)

In summary, personal growth in the context of minimalism and experiential consumption encompasses autonomy and transformative well-being. Participants' narratives underscore the transformative impact of these lifestyle choices, fostering a journey towards self-discovery, authentic living, and emotional well-being.

4.4 Social Connections

In the realm of minimalism and experiential consumption, social connections emerge as a pivotal aspect, highlighting the profound impact on participants' well-being through meaningful relationships. The sub-themes within social connections unravel the intricate dimensions of this crucial element.

1) Mindful presence in Relationships

Mindful presence in relationships stands out as a fundamental sub-theme, emphasizing the importance of being fully engaged and present during social interactions.

This sub-theme underscores the depth of connections, contributing to more meaningful and authentic relationships.

"Minimalism allowed us to break free from the cycle of routine. Now, we create stories and memories instead of repeating the same old patterns." (Participant 7)

2) Enriching Bonds

Enriching bonds surface within social connections, unveiling the joy and fulfillment derived from shared experiences and meaningful connections. Participants express a profound sense of happiness fostered by the richness of interpersonal relationships.

"Shared experiences and connections contribute to enriching bonds, creating a profound sense of joy and fulfillment in our interactions." (Participant 3)

In summary, the exploration of social connections within minimalism and experiential consumption emphasizes mindful presence in relationships and the profound joy derived from enriching bonds. Participants' narratives underscore the transformative impact of fostering authentic and meaningful relationships through intentional lifestyle choices.

4.5 Autonomy

Within the context of minimalism and experiential consumption, autonomy emerges as a central theme, reflecting participants' experiences of liberation and self-determination through minimalist practices. The sub-themes within autonomy elucidate various facets of this theme, including freedom, authenticity, and alignment with values.

1) Freedom from Societal Norms

Freedom from societal norms is a key sub-theme within autonomy, capturing participants' sense of release from the constraints of conforming to societal expectations. Minimalism becomes a pathway to break free from the pressures of societal norms, fostering a more authentic and intentional existence.

"Minimalism gave me the freedom to live on my terms. It's not just about possessions; it's about breaking free from societal expectations and living authentically." (Participant 6)

2) Authentic Alignment with Values

Authentic alignment with values is intricately linked with autonomy, reflecting participants' intentional choices guided by personal values. Minimalism becomes a tool for aligning actions with these values, contributing to a more purposeful and meaningful lifestyle.

"Through minimalism, I found a confidence in knowing what I want and what I don't want. It's about becoming more aware and authentic in my choices." (Participant 2)

In summary, autonomy within minimalism and experiential consumption encompasses freedom from societal norms and authentic alignment with personal values. Participants' narratives highlight the transformative impact of cultivating

autonomy in their lives, shaping a more intentional and authentic existence.

4.6 Sustainable Consumption

In the exploration of minimalism and experiential consumption, sustainable consumption emerges as a crucial theme, reflecting participants' commitment to minimizing environmental impact. The sub-themes within sustainable consumption shed light on the nuanced dimensions of this crucial aspect.

1) Conscious Choices for Environmental Stewardship

Conscious choices for environmental stewardship form a prominent sub-theme within sustainable consumption, emphasizing participants' shift towards purposeful and well-researched purchases. Minimalism becomes a vehicle for making mindful choices that extend beyond personal experience to consider the broader ecological impact.

"Being more mindful of what I buy and its impact on the environment is an integral part of my minimalist journey. Every choice I make reflects a conscious effort towards

sustainability." (Participant 4)

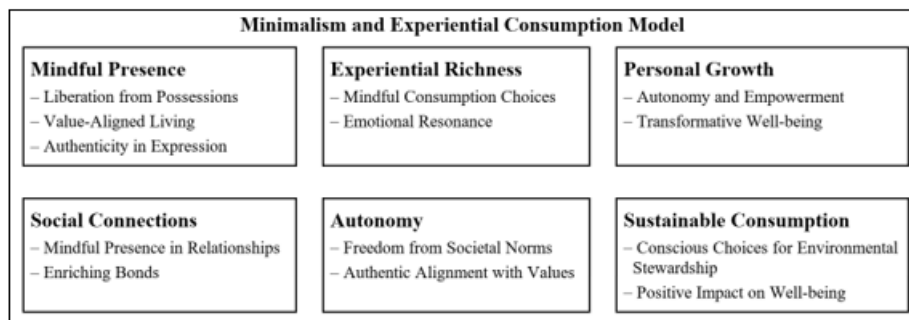
2) Positive Impact on Well-being

Positive impact on well-being surfaces within sustainable consumption, with a sense of fulfilment derived from contributing to ecological well-being. Participants express how their possessions, chosen strategically and ethically, add joy and value to their lives while also aligning with their commitment to sustainability.

"My possessions now reflect my authentic self, bringing joy. They're not just items; they contribute to my well-being and align with my values." (Participant 8)

In summary, sustainable consumption within minimalism and experiential consumption emphasizes conscious choices for environmental stewardship and positive impact on well-being. Participants' narratives underscore the

transformative impact of integrating sustainability into their lifestyle, contributing not only to individual well-being but also to environmental stewardship.



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5. Discussion

The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the intersection of minimalism and experiential consumption, shedding light on the diverse ways in which individuals experience and benefit from adopting a low-consumption lifestyle. The discussion is organized around key themes and sub-themes identified in the study, exploring their implications and potential contributions to various fields.

The theme of autonomy emerged prominently, reflecting participants' experiences of liberation from societal norms and the constraints of consumerism. The narratives reveal that minimalism not only entails the reduction of material possessions but also serves as a means of breaking free from societal expectations. Participants expressed a profound sense of freedom to live authentically, emphasizing the importance of autonomy in shaping a more intentional and fulfilling life. This aligns with previous literature on voluntary simplicity and provides new insights into the transformative impact of autonomy within the context of minimalism.

The concept of freedom from societal norms suggests potential implications for societal well-being. As individuals experience a sense of release from societal pressures, there may be broader societal benefits, such as reduced stress and

increased overall life satisfaction. Moreover, the rejection of materialistic values and recreational shopping aligns with sustainability goals, contributing to a more conscious and eco-friendly society.

The sub-theme of value-aligned living highlights the participants' increased awareness of personal values and the intentional alignment of their actions with these values. Minimalism is portrayed as a catalyst for self-discovery, allowing individuals to strip away excess possessions and distractions to reveal a clearer view of their authentic selves. This theme has implications for positive psychology, suggesting that a minimalist lifestyle may foster a stronger sense of purpose, identity, and overall well-being.

The rejection of materialism and the intentional pursuit of experiences over possessions underscore the potential for positive environmental impact. Participants reported making mindful and sustainable consumption choices, contributing to a broader narrative of responsible and ethical living. This aligns with current discourses on sustainable development and offers avenues for promoting pro-environmental behaviours through lifestyle choices.

Experiential richness emerged as a central theme, emphasizing the participants' qualitative fulfilment derived from prioritizing experiences over material possessions. The

sub-theme of emotional resonance indicates that shared experiences and meaningful connections play a pivotal role in enhancing overall life satisfaction. This finding resonates with existing research on the importance of social connections for well-being and extends it to the realm of minimalist lifestyles.

The discussion around experiential richness highlights the potential for interventions aimed at promoting well-being through experiential rather than material pursuits. It suggests that encouraging individuals to invest in experiences and meaningful relationships may contribute not only to individual happiness but also to the broader societal fabric.

The theme of sustainable consumption emphasizes the participants' commitment to minimizing environmental impact through mindful and purposeful choices. The sub-theme of conscious choices for environmental stewardship aligns with the broader global movement towards sustainable living. Participants' narratives suggest that minimalism can be a powerful driver for sustainable behaviours, offering a potential solution to the environmental challenges posed by excessive consumption.

The positive impact on well-being, as reported by participants, implies a dual benefit of sustainable consumption contributing to environmental well-being while enhancing personal fulfilment. This finding supports the notion that sustainable practices are not only ethically responsible but also intrinsically rewarding.

6. Practical Implications and Future Directions

The multidisciplinary implications of these findings are noteworthy. From a positive psychology perspective, the study contributes to our understanding of how intentional living, value alignment, and experiential richness can enhance well-being. In the realm of education, these insights may inform curriculum development that encourages mindfulness, environmental responsibility, and the pursuit of meaningful experiences.

From a business and marketing standpoint, the study suggests potential shifts in consumer behaviour towards more mindful and sustainable choices. Understanding the motivations behind minimalism could guide businesses in developing products and services that align with the values of this emerging consumer segment.

In the field of environmental conservation and sustainability, the research highlights the potential of minimalism as a lifestyle choice that aligns with broader sustainability goals. Further exploration into the long-term environmental impact of minimalism, beyond individual consumption choices, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of its ecological footprint.

7. Limitations and Areas for Further Research

While the study offers valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The qualitative nature of the

research limits the generalizability of findings, and future research could benefit from larger and more diverse samples. Additionally, the self-reported nature of participant experiences introduces the possibility of social desirability bias.

Further research could explore the dynamics of minimalism in different cultural contexts to understand how cultural factors may influence the adoption and experience of minimalist lifestyles. Longitudinal studies could also provide insights into the sustainability and long-term effects of minimalism on well-being and environmental impact.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on minimalism and experiential consumption. The identified themes and sub-themes offer a nuanced understanding of the individual and societal

implications of adopting a minimalist lifestyle. The study encourages further exploration and dialogue across disciplines, providing a foundation for future research, policy development, and practical applications in various domains.

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