



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

MASTER THESIS IN MARKETING AND CONSUMPTION

Fostering mindful consumption with mindfulness training

- *A qualitative study of the perceived effects of mindfulness training and education on consumers decision-making and consumption behavior*

Keywords: Overconsumption, Mindful consumption, Mindfulness training, Consumption for fulfillment, Mindless consumption, Decision-making, Consumption behavior

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Abstract

Overconsumption has grown into one of the main planetary issues in post-modern society. Mindless consumption along with consumption in the purpose of fulfillment are argued to be two of the main underlying reasons behind this unmanageable behavior of consumers. Increased mindfulness is considered an antidote to mindlessness and consumers endless need for fulfillment, as it has been proven to increase cognitive presence and improve subjective well-being. The purpose of this qualitative thesis is, thus, to study the perceived changes in individual consumers decision-making and consumption behavior, as a result of increased mindfulness through a period of guided mindfulness practice. This makes the following research questions a topic of interest:

- 1. How does consumers perceive that mindfulness training in combination with education affects their decision-making at the point of consumption?*
- 2. How does consumers perceive that mindfulness training in combination with education affects their regular and habitual consumption behavior?*

Three participants underwent a 30-day long intervention period of consistent guided mindfulness training, granted through the online mindfulness application “*Headspace*”. Additionally, participants took part in a pre-intervention educative introductory session regarding marketing and advertisement techniques and their intended effects. Primary data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured video interviews. Effects of the intervention were partly assessed by analyzing interview responses with the supplement of comparison of pre- and post-intervention measures of mindful awareness (MAAS) and life satisfaction (SWLS). The findings indicated that increased mindfulness in combination with education do affect consumers decision-making, as they become increasingly conscious at the point of consumption, while simultaneously becoming more aware of external manipulations in form of marketing and advertising techniques. The participants described multiple cases of mindful decision-making. Additionally, the findings indicated that increased awareness at the point of consumption do affect consumption behavior that originate from mindless impulses. However, several cases were identified where consumption for fulfillment were not prevented as a result of increased awareness at the point of consumption. The consumers rather showed indications on having made mindful decisions to consume in the sole purpose of temporary satisfaction and relief of unpleasant emotions.

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1. Introduction

“This is not, fundamentally, a technological problem. Nor is it, fundamentally, a political problem. This is a problem of appetites, and of narcissism, and of self-deceit. The planet is breaking, and it is breaking under the weight of our hunger for more. To reform the world, we must first reform ourselves.” (Affluenza website derived from Kjellberg, 2008, p.160)

It has been inevitable that the consumption behavior in the economically developed parts of the world has grown into one of the main planetary issues during the last couple of decades. The overconsuming appetites of the post-modern consumer do not only seem to be voracious, but are also detrimental to social, environmental, and individual well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). For example, it has been pointed out that the average American use almost six times the resources that would be available in a sustainable ecosystem (Worldwatch Institute, 2013). According to WWF’s Living Planet report (2016), the average Swede is living a lifestyle that would require 4.2 earths to sustain, and overconsumption is reported as one of the main human activities that has damaged the wildlife on earth. Furthermore, the annual expenditure on non-essential items such as cosmetics, perfume and ice cream; is far greater than the total amount needed to provide clean water, food and education for the world’s poorest people (Worldwatch Institute, 2013). Educating people about the consequences of overconsumption may be helpful but has not yet shown the rate of improvement that is required to reduce the harm on the planet (Prothero et al. 2011; Bahl et al. 2016).

A large proportion of these consumption-based problems are argued to originate from mindlessness that is inhabited within the everyday behavior of mass consumers. Advertisers and large corporations are exploiting the automatic and habitual processes in consumer behavior, by using techniques that encourage nonconscious and impulsive consumption decisions (Rosenberg, 2004). Furthermore, these subliminal consumption choices are additionally driven by individuals endless need for fulfillment in modern society (ibid). Thus, certain advertising and marketing techniques are developed to prey on consumers feelings of anxiety, stress and poor subjective well-being; by advocating consumption as a form of self-medication and a solution to instant feelings of happiness and satisfaction (ibid). Too

recurringly, these manipulative techniques result in impulsive and unconscious decisions, leading us to consume more than what is necessary and sometimes even more than what is desired (ibid).

Increased mindfulness works as an antidote to the cognitive automaticity within the human mind (Brown and Ryan, 2003). By practicing mindfulness, one may become more aware of their behavioral responses to manipulative techniques on the marketplace (Rosenberg, 2004). Moreover, mindfulness training is proven to improve subjective well-being by enhancing self-esteem and increasing life satisfaction (Brown and Ryan, 2003), counteracting with consumption behavior that derives from individuals desire for fulfillment (Rosenberg, 2004). Thus, several researchers consider mindfulness training as a contributive tool in reducing individual overconsumption, by making consumption decisions a matter of conscious choice rather than an outcome of habitual and impulsive behavior.

Increased mindfulness in combination with education regarding overconsumption and manipulative marketing techniques and how they exploit the mind, have been considered a strong antidote to excessive consumption by multiple scholars (e.g., Rosenberg, 2004; Bahl et al. 2016; Prothero et al. 2011; Geiger et al. 2020; Gupta and Verma, 2019; Helm and Subramaniam, 2019). However, current research within the field have not yet come to fully assess the role of mindfulness in enabling consumers to make better and more controlled consumption decisions in the marketplace (Bahl et al. 2016). Additionally, the existing research that is accessible within the discipline solely concerns quantitative assessments of the suggested effects of mindfulness training on sustainable consumption and mindful consumption behavior. The consumer perspective on the role of mindfulness in consumption behavior and decision-making has, however, not yet been extensively studied and evaluated from a qualitative aspect. Thus, a qualitative study of changes in consumption behavior and consumer decision-making, as a result of increased mindfulness through mindfulness training, could provide interesting results to the research field. The observations could provide contributive findings to the task of spelling out the potential benefits and applications of mindfulness training in a consumption behavioral context to the average consumer.

1.1 Research purpose and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze consumers perceived changes in their decision-making and their consumption behavior, as a result of a period of consistent mindfulness training in combination with education. The aim of the mindfulness training is to increase the consumers mindful capacity and improve their subjective well-being. The primary focus concerns how mindfulness training in combination with education affects the process of decision-making at the point of consumption, as well as the effects on consumers regular and habitual consumption behavior. This makes the following research questions a topic of interest:

1. How does consumers perceive that mindfulness training in combination with education affects their decision-making at the point of consumption?
2. How does consumers perceive that mindfulness training in combination with education affects their regular and habitual consumption behavior?

2. Theoretical framework and Literature review

The following section consists of elaborate presentations and definitions of all interrelated concepts that are of relevance to this study. Furthermore, previous literature and research within the field that is of high relevance to the thesis has been presented and synthesized to build a stable basis of knowledge and understanding regarding what approach was taken and what conclusions were drawn when addressing the proposed research questions.

2.1 Defining overconsumption from a CCS-perspective

Following the criteria of customer-centric sustainability (CCS), regular consumption turns into overconsumption when the level of consumption results in negative economic or environmental consequences; or have a negative impact on individual or collective well-being (Sheth et al, 2010). During these circumstances, the side-effects of this type of consumption behavior outweighs the intended value that is produced by consuming the product or the service (Quelch and Jocz, 2007). The type of consumption that matches those criteria can result in overexploitation of the environment; or cause physical or financial distress for consumers (ibid). It can therefore be viewed as unsustainable and unproductive (ibid), and should thus be perceived as an important issue that needs to be addressed by companies and policy makers (Quelch and Jocz, 2007; Prothero et al. 2011). As earlier stated, overconsuming behavior is mainly recognizable in the economically developed countries (Worldwatch Institute, 2013; WWF, 2016).

One of the main problems regarding the prevention of overconsumption is that we live in a consumer-based society. Consumerism builds upon the idea that increased levels of material acquisition will increase well-being and public health, resulting in states promoting consumption through policies that are specifically intended to increase turnover of goods (Lister, 2016). Furthermore, consumption in business and marketing has in general been perceived as an intermediary for market demand, which can be directly linked to company revenue (ibid). Thus, consumption is perceived in a notion of “the more, the better”.

During later years, when the problem of overconsumption has received increased attention, the focus of the business and marketing side has been on the “greening” of consumption

practices (Sheth et al. 2010; Prothero et al. 2011). The intention has been to solve the problem by making people consume more sustainably produced products and services, rather than by consuming less. This perception assumes that consumption of more environmentally friendly products can neutralize the negative impact that follows as a result of consumption (Prothero et al. 2011). However, this approach has so far shown to be inadequate, due to a stable growing consumption per-capita rate (Assadourian, 2010). Hence, alternative solutions that are independent of the business and marketing side of the coin need to be identified and assessed, in order to influence consumers to reduce their non-essential consumption.

2.2 Mindless consumption and the problem of automatic cognitive processing

Several researchers argue that one of the determinant factors of consumption induced issues is mindlessness and the underlying cognitive automaticity in consumption behavior (Rosenberg, 2004; Sheth et al. 2010; Bahl et al. 2016). Langer and Piper (1987) were among the first to discuss mindlessness theory and cognitive automaticity within the human mind. They define mindlessness as a function of automatic subliminal mental processing that results in impulsive and habitual behavior, as the mind functions on “autopilot” due to the lack of awareness (ibid). They have shown that people generally make impulsive choices without examining the situation or all the available information (ibid).

Even though mindless and automatic behavior can be beneficial in some cases, extending the logic of mindlessness into a consumption behavioral context, makes automatic cognitive responses an issue due to their cause of problems such as overconsumption and unsustainable consumption behavior. Marketers and advertisers have in decades been developing marketing techniques that capitalize on mindless processing and exploited the automaticity in consumption behavior to increase sales and profit (Rosenberg, 2004).

One of the easiest ways to manipulate consumers preferences is by repeatedly exposing them to the same products, services and brands over and over again, through the so-called *mere exposure* technique. Research shows that consumers tend to be drawn towards product options that they are more familiar with, regardless of whether they’ve had earlier practical experience with the product (Grimes, 2008; Stafford and Grimes, 2012).

Another strategy that preys on mindless processing is *conditioning*. Through conditioning, advertisement manipulate the mind into believing that the acquisition of a particular products is associated with different types of pleasant responses, such as happiness or satisfaction (Rosenberg, 2004). Therefore, marketers tend to associate particular brands and products with higher social status, success, popularity, beauty etc. This is one of the reasons to why associating brands with celebrities has been a successful approach in branding (Till et al. 2008). Limited time discount offerings, limited quantity strategies and quantity-based price reductions are further examples of techniques that are being used in the marketplace to impose on consumers mindless and impulsive responses.

All the strategies that are mentioned above rely on a passive state of mind and are typically not as effective when the consumer is aware of their effects (Rosenberg, 2004). Thus, education regarding the subject in combination with increased mindfulness is argued to be a strong antidote that counteract with the intended effects of the techniques (ibid).

2.3 Materialism and consumption for fulfillment

Rosenberg (2004) discuss the motivations behind consumption as another major consumption-induced problem. Richins (2010, p.01) defines consumer materialism as “the importance that a consumer places on the acquisition and possession of material objects”. Consumers that put high value into material things tend to view acquisition as an essential practice to attain happiness, achieve higher social status and reach a higher sense of self-worth (Richins, 2004). This particular value orientation makes consumption of material objects a centrality within one’s life, often leading to overconsumption.

Furthermore, Rosenberg (2004) discuss how consumers have a constant need to fulfill their so called “inner emptiness”. Consumption is an easy, but only temporary approach to fill this inner void with satisfaction (Cushman, 1990; Rosenberg, 2004). Even though consumption may induce a momentarily sense of pleasant responses, the fact that it does not work as a long-term solution may in many cases result in a cycle of overconsuming behavior for those struggling with poor subjective well-being or low self-esteem (Rosenberg, 2004). The consumers may repeatedly turn to consumption as a form of instant self-medication that relieve their unpleasant emotions (ibid). Rather than enhancing long term well-being, an

overconsuming appetite in fact correlates with poor subjective well-being, low self-esteem, increased anxiety and weaker social relationships (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011).

Additionally, consumers that seek fulfillment through consumption become vulnerable to marketing campaigns and advertisement that aim to propose consumption as a solution to all individual life problems (Cushman, 1990). This kind of advertisement could for instance aim to persuade the consumers to believe that the acquisition of a product “enable” them to live their desired lifestyle which is featured in the ad. By communicating the product and the lifestyle in the same sense, the consumers tend to feel that they require that particular product to be able to be part of that lifestyle themselves. This technique works in a similar way as conditioning, but preys on the consumers need for satisfaction and fulfillment rather than automatic cognitive responses.

If consumers were self-aware enough to understand the actual sources of emptiness, Rosenberg (2004) argue that they would realize that momentary fixes through consumption is not the solution, and rather seek more enriching ways to fulfill their inner void and increase their subjective well-being.

2.4 Mindfulness and its transformative potential for the consumer

The concept of mindfulness originates from Buddhist practices and is defined as the mental state of being consciously aware in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2015). Langer (1989) generalized the concept of mindfulness in relation to the practice of de-automatizing cognitive behavior by being cognitively present. Langer (2014) further described the concept from a socio-psychological aspect as purposely switching to an active state of mind within any given moment. In a mindful state of mind, Keane (2015) states that we are not comparing, judging or committing to; but simply impartially observing all the emotions, thoughts and sensations that appear in our mind and our environment. We simply become more aware of what is going on around us and within us in the present moment (ibid). Even though increased mindfulness can be practiced in all daily situations in life by intentionally and continuously focusing on the on-going task in hand (Kabat-Zinn,2015); meditation, yoga and breath exercises are, however, a few among multiple mindfulness training techniques that focuses particularly on increasing individuals’ mindful capacity. Brown and Ryan (2003), as

well as Rosenberg (2004) further draw parallels between mindfulness and another widely acknowledged term known as *flow* which is characterized by intense engagement with and attention to the occurring experience, originally presented by Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

The concept of mindfulness brings us further into the concept of *mindful consumption*. Sheth et al., (2011) describes mindful consumption as being conscious in thought and behavior about the overall consequences of one's consumption practices. Based on this concept, the consumer is assumed to be in a position where he/she single handedly chooses what and how to consume, without influence from external factors (ibid). This means for instance that the consumption decision is not to the same extent influenced by external force, manipulation or limitations due to particular circumstances or specific conditions on the marketplace, which often results in impulsive behavior; but rather mainly a result of the consumers own values and preferences (Sheth et al. 2011).

A quantitative study conducted by Gupta and Verma (2018) showed how increased mindfulness, as a result of in-group mindfulness meditation sessions during a period of two months, showed indications on differences in both life satisfaction and mindful consumption among higher education students when measures of mindful consumption and life-satisfaction were compared to a control group. Additionally, another quantitative study executed through an online survey among 546 American consumers, indicated that higher levels of mindfulness is positively associated with increased attentiveness to sustainable consumption options as mindful consumers tend to put more consideration into the outcomes of their consumption behavior (Helm and Subramaniam, 2019). Furthermore, the study also indicated that higher levels of mindfulness is negatively associated with higher materialistic values (ibid).

Additionally, the links between mindfulness and environmentally sustainable consumption has been studied in multiple cases (Fischer et al. 2017; Bahl et al. 2016; Geiger et al. 2020; Liu and Valente, 2018). Mindfulness is argued to wake consumers up to the planetary problems we are facing and encourage them to act more environmentally in their all-daily life (Liu and Valente, 2018). However, these studies failed to prove significant changes in consumers sustainable behavior and mindset as a result of consistent mindfulness practice. In

some particular cases, mindfulness rather enhanced consumption in new forms, as the consumers became more curious and interested in trying out new things (Geiger et al. 2020). This indicates that increased mindfulness may not in all cases be associated with reduced levels of overconsumption as multiple scholars proposes and is thus another interest of consideration in the analysis of this qualitative study.

2.5 Mindfulness as an antidote to mindless consumption and consumption for fulfillment

Many researchers have considered increased mindfulness as a way for consumers to make better and more responsible choices on the market by fostering mindful consumption behavior. Increased mindfulness works as an antidote to automatic cognitive responding (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003; Rosenberg, 2004), which is being exploited on the marketplace by marketers and advertisers. Consumers become more aware of their own cognitive behavior and how they respond to psychological manipulations, while simultaneously becoming more conscious to the ways their subliminal minds are being manipulated and exploited on the marketplace (Rosenberg, 2004). For instance, consumers may recognize marketing manipulations in form of discounts or limited quantity campaigns and realize how they are being influenced by them during the point of consumption, which will further reduce their intended effects on the consumers behavior.

Furthermore, mindfulness training has repeatedly been proven to significantly improve subjective well-being by increasing life-satisfaction and enhancing self-esteem (e.g. Brown and Ryan, 2003; Carmody and Baer, 2008; Gupta and Verma, 2018). Rosenberg (2004) argues that mindful people are in general more appreciative of their daily experiences and experience higher satisfaction with everything in life, as their minds are focused on the present moment rather than the future or the past. Increased emotional awareness, another proven outcome of mindfulness training (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003), is likely to develop people's ability to detect the actual sources of unfulfillment; and make them realize how satisfaction through external pleasures such as drugs, sex and possessions are only temporary (Rosenberg, 2004). Thus, consumers with higher emotional awareness and a higher overall satisfaction with life, tend to turn to consumption and the acquisition of material objects as a way of fulfillment less often.

2.6 Online mindfulness apps and their potential for fostering mindful consumption

Due to the various beneficial impacts of mindfulness training, many attempts have been made to abbreviate mindfulness programs in order to increase their accessibility and feasibility for the general population, while maintaining their efficient components (Spijkerman et al. 2016). Bahl et al., (2016) consider consumers finite amount of time and resources to commit to mindfulness training as one of the main challenges when it comes to fostering mindful consumption by increasing mindfulness. Mindfulness practice can be initially effortful and hard to devote to before it becomes engraved into the daily routines of the individual (Bahl et al. 2016; Cresswell, 2017). Therefore, factors such as time demands, cost and the requirement to attend sessions in person may act as barriers for the majority of the population.

However, the number of digital alternatives for mindfulness training, such as mindfulness-based smartphone applications, have been growing significantly and become widely available on the market during recent years (Plaza et al. 2013; Cresswell, 2017). In comparison to its alternatives, digital mediums have made guided mindfulness training more affordable, far less time-demanding, more engaging and in general more feasible for the public (Economides et al. 2018). This recently developed technology has opened a whole new world of possibilities when it comes to promoting and encouraging mindfulness in the population to those who are attentive.

A meta-analysis of online mindfulness-based interventions presented by Spijkerman et al. (2016), suggests that digital mindfulness training alternatives has showed significant beneficial impact on well-being, anxiety, stress and depression; suggesting that digital mindfulness training may confer similar benefits to in person training (Spijkerman et al. 2016). In support of this suggestion, several recent quantitative studies have been conducted with evidence that mindfulness training delivered via a smartphone app can increase life satisfaction (van Emmerik et al. 2017), improve subjective well-being (Howells et al. 2016; Plaza García et al. 2017), and enhance self-reported mindfulness (Plaza García et al. 2017; van Emmerik et al. 2017).

The high accessibility and feasibility of online mindfulness apps, in combination with the suggested beneficial impact on well-being, quality of life and increased mindfulness, makes it

a highly applicable tool when studying the implications of mindfulness training in a consumption behavioral context.

2.7 Negative reactions as an outcome of mindfulness training

Although practitioners of mindfulness training most commonly report feelings of relaxation and contentment, it is not unusual that participants of mindfulness interventions initially experience unpleasant reactions such as confusion, discomfort or anxiety during formal mindfulness exercises (Creswell, 2017). These unpleasant reactions are however perceived as an important aspect of the psychotherapeutic process, as sustained mindful attention to one's experience is considered to help the practitioner understand that these reactions are temporary, and further foster insight into how they should be dealt with (ibid). Even though these potential negative reactions bring no further harm to the average participant, individuals that suffer from e.g., post-traumatic stress or schizophrenia might put themselves under elevated risk for exacerbation of their symptoms during formal mindfulness practice (ibid).

3. Method

This qualitative thesis is primarily based on three different methodological approaches: a semi-systematic literature review, a mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) and semi-structured qualitative interviews. The following section will initially discuss the participant selection and the demarcations of the study. Additionally, the section consists of a broader presentation of the full procedure of the conducted method in section 3.3, followed by separate in-depth descriptions and explanations of each separate part in the methodological approach. Additionally, the critical and ethical aspects of the thesis are discussed, as well as its limitations and weaknesses.

3.1 Methodological approach

Researchers consider increased mindfulness in combination with education to work as an antidote to individual overconsumption within the lines of mindless consumption and consumption for fulfillment (Rosenberg, 2004; Sheth et al. 2010). As mentioned, previous research has quantitatively approached the proposition which has showed positive correlations between mindfulness training and mindful consumption (Gupta and Verma, 2018), and has further also indicated that consumers with higher levels of mindful capacity tends to put more emphasis on consequences of their consumption behavior during their decision-making (Helm and Subramaniam, 2019). However, this thesis rather aims at generating more in-depth understanding within the matter. A qualitative approach has therefore been chosen with the purpose of studying and understanding the proposed effects of mindfulness training in combination with education on consumption behavior and decision-making from a consumer perspective. Studying the experiences of the participants could provide findings that clarifies the beneficial and interfering aspects of the proposition for practical implications.

3.2 Participants

The study consisted of three participants, one male and two females. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling strategy, where respondents are selected based on availability. This sampling strategy has to some extent been criticized in qualitative research, as it is argued to be insufficient when considering the criterion of information richness (Schreier, 2018). However, depending on the purpose of the study, convenience sampling can

be appropriate in many cases (ibid). In this thesis, the sampling strategy was mainly used because of the limitation in resources required to find participants that were willing to take part in a 30-day long mindfulness intervention.

The participants were recruited through an Instagram story-post on a personal Instagram account, with the statement “seeking for potential participants that are willing to commit to a period of mindfulness training, followed by taking part in one or two one-on-one qualitative video interviews, DM for more information if you (or anyone you are familiar with) are interested”. Criteria for eligibility included having no prior experience of mindfulness training, being fluent in English, having access to a smartphone and having no psychological illness that could interfere with mindfulness practice. The criteria were mainly set to facilitate understanding of all the given information, as well as easing the execution of the guided mindfulness sessions. The population was thus limited into the 607 followers of the personal Instagram account, as well as their closed ones. This resulted in the majority of the potential participants being students between the ages of 19 to 26.

According to Schreier (2018), the question of sample size in qualitative research is heavily discussed. While some researchers argue that sample size in qualitative research is irrelevant or at least of no primary concern (e.g. Crouch and McKenzie, 2006; Patton, 2015 derived from Schreier, 2018), others argue that the size of the sample plays a significant role (e.g. Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Sandelowski, 1995 derived from Schreier, 2018).

Nevertheless, researchers discuss some of the key factors to take into account when deciding on an appropriate sample size as: the goal of the research (e.g. Bryman, 2016; Charmaz, 2014 derived from Schreier, 2018), external constraints such as time and resources available for the study (Flick, 2015 derived from Schreier, 2018); as well as the saturation of data, more precisely the criterion of data satisfaction to a point where the data obtained is adequate for the analysis and acknowledgement of the research questions (Saunders et al. 2018).

Depending on the context, even a single case may sometimes be perfectly suitable (Schreier, 2018).

In total, eight volunteers expressed interest in participating, of which six were qualified within the criteria of eligibility. However, due to lack of time and resources to conduct

interviews, transcriptions, translation and coding; the three volunteers that first expressed their interest in participation were selected to proceed with the study, in order to avoid a biased decision in respondent selection. All three participants were given detailed information regarding the procedure of the study, and informed consent towards all stages prior to participation. Due to the low number of participants and the sampling strategy, the saturation of data and credibility of this thesis could be considered as weak aspects of the study. The credibility of this study, as well as other aspects of quality will be more profoundly discussed in section 3.9.

3.3 Demarcations of study

This thesis has been narrowed down into studying consumers perceived changes in their consumption behavior, as well as their perceived changes in decision-making prior to consumption practices. A decision was made to disregard consumers actual consumption due to the limited time frame of 30 days. During a longer period of study, examining changes in consumers actual consumption practices would have been of great interest. However, during a period of 30 days, the likelihood of confounding variables affecting the results was argued to be too large, which could further result in an inaccurate perception of how increased mindfulness affects actual consumption behavior. Thus, the focus was rather aimed at the participants' perceptions and experiences.

Furthermore, it was earlier stated that mindfulness is argued to wake consumers up to the planetary problems we are facing and encourage them to act more environmentally in their all-daily life (Liu and Valente, 2018). However, emphasis on the effects of mindfulness in relation to particular changes in environmentally sustainable behavior, such as eating more climate friendly food or buying "green" products, is outside the scope of this thesis. The central aim of this study is to examine the potential effects of increased mindfulness on changed consumer behavior and decision-making in relation to mindless consumption and consumption behavior that originate from the need for fulfillment, rather than observing how increased mindfulness affects consumers mindset in relation to environmentally sustainable products and services.

3.4 Method design and procedure

To receive an indication regarding the effects and the efficiency of the intervention; levels of *mindful awareness* (MAAS) and *satisfaction with life* (SWLS) were measured using scale-based questionnaires, prior and posterior to the intervention period (*see section 3.6*). After answering the pre-intervention questionnaire, each participant took part in an individual informative and educative oral introductory session; where they were informed about the research background, marketing techniques that exploit on mindlessness and the need for fulfillment, as well as an introduction of the mindfulness intervention. Additionally, information regarding each subject's view of their own potential overconsumption behaviors were collected through further discourse during the individual introductory sessions.

The participants were then subjected to a 30-day long mindfulness intervention period, with the aim of increasing their mindfulness and subjective well-being, through guided mindfulness-based meditation sessions (*see section 3.5*). The sessions were granted through the online mindfulness application "Headspace", and each participant were encouraged to complete a maximum of 30 and a minimum of 10 sessions within the 30-day period.

After the intervention period, the participants were ones again requested to fill out the questionnaires. Furthermore, one week after accomplishment; each respondent participated in a post-intervention one-on-one semi-structured video interview, where they were encouraged to discuss their thoughts and experiences regarding changes in their consumption decision-making, consumption behavior, and their view on mindfulness training within the context of consumption (*see section 3.7*).

3.5 Mindfulness intervention program

In recent years, mindfulness interventions have become increasingly popular in the purpose of understanding the effects of mindfulness training and how it influences psychological and physical behavior and functioning, as well as examining potential applications of mindfulness-based approaches in various contexts (Tan and Keng, 2018). The purpose of the mindfulness intervention in this study was to increase the mindful capacity (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Plaza García et al. 2017; van Emmerik et al. 2017) and the subjective well-being (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Howells et al. 2016; Plaza García et al. 2017) of the participants, in

order to study the perceived changes in their consumption behavior and decision-making as a result of an increase in these two variables.

The mindfulness intervention program used in this thesis is to a major extent replicated from a study conducted by Economides et al., (2018). The purpose of the study was to examine the effects that online mindfulness training applications had on levels of mindfulness and subjective well-being (ibid). The study indicated that participants who completed a 10-session introductory program of mindfulness-based meditation within a time frame of 30 days showed significant improvement regarding different aspects of subjective well-being, increased mindfulness, and reduced stress associated with external pressure (ibid). The study conducted by Economides et al., (2018) was however, unlike this study, not applied within a consumption behavioral context. The study rather focused solely on a quantitative assessment of mindfulness-based applications in relation to changes in mindful capacity, subjective well-being and levels of stress among users.

The mindfulness intervention was delivered via the Headspace app, the current number one mindfulness app in multiple countries; with over 1 million downloads and a customer rating of 4.8 out of 5 on the Apple App store, rated by approximately 28 000 people (Apple App store, 2021). Each participant received a Headspace Pro account, enabling them to complete as many sessions as they wanted during the set time frame of 30 days. The duration of each session varied between 5 to 10 minutes depending on user preferences, and during each session the participants were guided through the following mindful meditation techniques: *deep breathing, mindful listening, mindful feeling, body scan, breath awareness and emotional awareness.*

The participants were encouraged to complete one session a day, but this was not enforced. By forcing themselves to commit to mindfulness training, it could be argued that the participants are less likely to benefit from practice as they are less engaged and less focused on properly completing each session. Additionally, the feasibility of mindfulness training to the subjects was an aspect of interest, making the level of commitment without force of high relevance. However, as mindfulness training to a certain degree is required to see potential changes in mindfulness, the respondents were told that they should aim at completing a

minimum of 10 sessions during the set time frame. Furthermore, an additional aspect that should be taken into consideration in the analysis is whether the increased levels of mindfulness and improvements in well-being as an outcome of mindfulness training, during the limited time frame of 30 days, is enough to show changes in consumer decision-making and consumption behavior, as suggested by previous research presented in the literature review.

3.6 Measurements

In order to get an approximate indication on the effects of the intervention; life satisfaction and subjective well-being, as well as mindful awareness were compared prior and posterior to the intervention period using a scale-based questionnaire. The data obtained from the questionnaire was handled with low significance and emphasis during the analysis. The numbers derived from the scales worked as an indication of the effects of the intervention in addition to the interviews, rather than a primary source of empirical data. The questionnaire was presented through a survey on google form (*Appendix B*) and the respondents were asked to conduct the surveys before they were given the introductory session, as well as after the 30-day trial. *Table 1, 2 and 3 in section 4* summarizes the data obtained from the questionnaires.

Changes in mindfulness were assessed using MAAS (Mindful Attention Awareness scale) (Brown and Ryan, 2003). The scale consists of 15 statements such as: “*I find myself doing things without paying attention*” and “*It seems I am running on automatic without much awareness of what I’m doing*”. The participants were asked to respond to each statement by choosing an option in a six-point Likert-type scale, going from “*1. Almost always*” to “*6. almost never*”. The higher the summarized score, the higher the mindfulness of the respondent. The scale has shown a high reliability and a high convergent and discriminant validity in assessments (Brown and Ryan, 2003).

Additionally, changes in life satisfaction and subjective well-being were assessed using the *Satisfaction with life scale* (SWLS) (Diener et al. 1985). The scale consists of five short statements with a seven-point Likert-type scale. The options vary from “*1. Strongly agree*” to “*7. Strongly disagree*” and all five questions were reverse coded. The scale has shown good

reports in terms of validity, reliability and sensitivity to change (Diener and Diener, 2009; Diener et al. 2012 derived from Gupta and Verma, 2020). After reversing the answers, the higher the score, the higher the life satisfaction of the respondent.

3.7 Qualitative interviews

The primary aim of the qualitative interviews was to study perceived changes in the respondent's consumption decision-making after the mindfulness intervention period. Qualitative interviews are mainly conducted when the focus of the study lies within making in-depth descriptions and analysis of the respondent's inner thoughts and experiences (Roulston and Choi, 2018). Thus, this makes the interviews the most fundamental approach for empirical data collection in this thesis.

In an interview, knowledge is produced through discourse between the interviewer and the respondents (Given, 2008), in this case through one-on-one video conversations, due to the Covid-19 pandemic circumstances. A semi-structural interview was carried out with the purpose of having partial control over the topics of the interview, without limiting the range of responses to each question (Given, 2008). The interviews were therefore partially based on an interview guide consisting of predetermined questions (*Appendix A*), with the intent to steer the focus towards topics that had been studied in the literature review such as: consumption in the purpose of fulfillment, mindless consumption, marketing and advertising techniques, mindful consumption and the consumers perceived effects of mindfulness training on their consumption behavior and decision-making. However, to ensure interpretive validity, one of the central aspects in the semi-structured interviews was to avoid leading questions (Given, 2008). Despite the predetermined questions, the respondents were encouraged to talk freely about their thoughts, ideas and experiences. The respondents were also asked whether they wanted to conduct the interviews in English or Swedish. Even though all respondents were fluent in English, the lack of a wide vocabulary could work as a barrier when it came to giving detailed explanations of their own thoughts and experiences.

The interviews were audio recorded for the purpose of translation, transcription and coding in order to facilitate the analysis (Casell, 2015). The translated transcriptions of the interviews served as the primary source of data when it came to presenting and analyzing the

findings (see Appendix C). Transcribing interviews demands sensitivity to the significant differences between written text and oral speech, something that should be kept in mind when analyzing the material (Given, 2008). The same consideration applies to translations from one language to another.

Additionally, the coding of the empirical data was a central procedure within the task of identifying interesting concepts and ideas related to the research topic, as well as interpreting the collected data for the sake of the analysis (Roulston, 2010). The codes in this study were mainly developed prior to data collection, based on categories derived from the literature. However, some additional codes emerged inductively throughout the coding process. The following coding categories were used when performing the coding of the interviews:

Mindful consumption and mindful decision-making (Sheth et al. 2010)

Consumption for fulfillment (Rosenberg, 2004)

Mindless consumption (Rosenberg, 2004; Sheth et al. 2010; Bahl et al. 2016)

Effects of intervention linked to subjective well-being (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Carmody and Baer, 2008; Gupta and Verma, 2018)

Effects of intervention linked to cognitive awareness (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003; Rosenberg, 2004, Langer, 2014)

Identifying marketing techniques (Rosenberg, 2004)

Changes in consumption behavior and decision-making (Rosenberg, 2004; Bahl et al. 2016; Gupta and Verma, 2018; Subramaniam and Helm, 2019)

Increased consumption linked to mindfulness training*

Comments regarding the effects of information and mindfulness training*

Goal and mindset*

(Codes that emerged inductively throughout the coding process*)

3.8 Ethical aspects

One of the main ethical issues in this study is the data collection (Given, 2008). The respondents are acknowledged that all data that is collected during the interview and throughout the entire study, will only be used solely for the purpose of research. Additionally, the identities of the participants are confidential and will not be presented to anyone without their approval, as the anonymity of individuals are of high priority (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). In order to ensure their anonymity their original names have been swapped out.

Additionally, informed consent has been an additional ethical issue of consideration in this qualitative study (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). It has been of high interest to ensure that the participants do not feel forced or pressured to engage in the research during any point of time. Participants need to understand the fact that they are giving authorization to be involved in research, as well as fully comprehend what they are giving authorization to (Israel and Hay, 2006 derived from Given, 2008). To guarantee that all participants were fully aware of what they were giving consent to, they received detailed information about the purpose of the study, research questions, procedure and possible outcomes of the research based on previous studies. To ensure that the given consent maintained throughout the entire period of study, the participants were repetitively reminded that their participation is entirely voluntary, prior to every new stage of the procedure. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study whenever they wanted and that replacements were available.

Additionally, as explained by Creswell (2017), individuals that suffer from psychological illnesses such as post-traumatic stress or schizophrenia might put themselves under elevated risk for exacerbation of their symptoms during formal mindfulness practice. Thus, it was of high priority to ensure that none of the participants suffered from any psychological illnesses that could be aggravated as a result of mindfulness training.

3.9 Research quality analysis

Because of the methodological diversity of qualitative research compared to quantitative studies, research quality is not as often discussed in the notions of validity, reliability and generalization (Given, 2008). Instead, alternative concepts such as credibility, consistency, confirmability and transparency has been used when analyzing the quality of this qualitative thesis (ibid).

Confirmability concerns the degree to which the researcher's interpretations of the findings and the participants experiences are correct and unbiased (Given, 2008). To ensure a high grade of confirmability, a high level of transparency has been of high relevance throughout the study. The research process has been elaboratively described in the method section; and translated transcripts, the coding process, as well as the original transcripts have all been attached as appendices to enable readers to individually assess the quality of the research. Additionally, biased approaches that have been of recognition have been pointed out and explained. However, it is important to point out that it is easy to get overwhelmed by the large quantity of data, and therefore not unlikely to fall into a pitfall where biased interpretations are made without the researcher's realization. Thus, although measures have been taken to present evidence that suggests on good confirmability, the fact that biased interpretations could be a possibility makes it impossible to ensure confirmability of the highest degree.

Additionally, the concept of credibility is another term that is frequently used when discussing the quality of qualitative research (Given, 2008). Creating a high degree of consistency is of relevance to any qualitative researcher, and readers and participants should be able to understand the reasons behind why particular approaches were taken and the why the particular respondents were selected (ibid). To ensure that a high level of credibility was aimed for, accurate descriptions of the entire procedure have been presented in the method section. Participant selection, data collection strategies and method of analysis have been elaboratively presented and discussed. As earlier mentioned, the limitations of *time*, as well as the *saturation of data*, are two of the main factors that negatively affects the credibility of the study. Both these factors have been discussed in more detail in section 3.2 and 3.10.

Furthermore, the concept of interviewer bias needs to be considered when evaluating the quality of the findings in the study. Interviewer bias may be an outcome of the influence that the interviewer's identity and behavior have on the collected data (Frey, 2018). Respondents may be influenced by their lower educational position within the field of study in relation to the interviewer more knowledgeable position. This may interfere with the interest of participants fully expressing their own views and perspectives on the regarded topic, but rather shape their articulations towards what they believe is expected of them in the situation

(ibid). To prevent interviewer bias to interfere with the data to such a large extent as possible, the participants were encouraged to talk freely about their thoughts, ideas and experiences; without laying emphasis on the relevance of the topic to the existing study or the propriety of their expressions.

Additionally, interviewer bias may also arise from presumptions and expectations set by the interviewer, which will further affect the way the interview is being conducted or interpreted (ibid). Even though the main interest lies within avoiding bias to such a high extent as possible, the possibility that interviewer bias may have influenced the collection of the empirical data needs to be considered when assessing the quality of the thesis.

3.10 Limitations to the study

Starting to practice mindfulness with no earlier experience is a challenging task which requires time, effort and engagement (Bahl et al. 2016; Cresswell, 2017). It can therefore be hard for someone without any prior experience of mindfulness training to commit to practice, as it has not yet been embedded into the routines of the practitioner. In order to make mindfulness training as easy to perform and commit to as possible for the unexperienced participants, the intervention alternative that was considered the most feasible one was chosen to facilitate practice. However, the subjects were limited to a 30-day period of practice, which can potentially become a limitation when it comes to observing significant effects of consistent mindfulness training on a beginner.

Furthermore, the limited duration of the intervention becomes a boundary to study changes in actual consumption behavior. These changes could have preferably been studied through for example observation of monthly expenditures, which could further be compared to time periods prior to the intervention. However, as earlier mentioned, the likelihood of confounding variables affecting the data was considered as too large during the short extent of time. This would further give an inaccurate perception of the effects of mindfulness training in relation to actual consumption behavior.

Finally, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in severe changes in consumption behavior among the younger population during the past year. Consumption behavior in form

events, partying and visiting restaurants have been entirely restricted. All three participants expressed that their regular consumption behavior had been profoundly affected by the pandemic. The restricted consumption behavior of the participants resulted in a narrower scope of data, which may likely have further led to comparably weaker results.

4. Empirical analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the empirical findings that were derived from the primary source of empirical data in the form of coded qualitative interviews, with the supplement of the data obtained from the questionnaires and the introductory sessions. The analysis was based on the theoretical concepts and literature presented in section 2.

4.1 General findings

The following sub-section consists of a summarized presentation of each and one of the three participants: Sara, Anna and Jake. Additionally, the data derived from the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires is summarized in *table 4*.

4.1.1 Presentation: Subject 1 - Sara

During the pre-intervention introductory session, Sara stated that she perceived her food consumption as her only consumption behavior that could be categorized as excessive, according to herself. She often tends to turn to food, in particular sweets, as a form of medication. When she experiences feelings of sadness, anxiety or stress; she has developed a habit to overeat with the purpose of relieving these negative emotions. An overview of Sara is presented in *table 1*.

Table 1. An overview of subject 1: Sara.

| | |
|--|--|
| Name of subject | Sara |
| Age | 23 |
| Occupation | Third year student in Business and Economics |
| Prior experience of mindfulness training | None |
| Identified overconsumption behavior | Food, sweets, emotional eating |
| Number of sessions completed during the period of intervention | 10 sessions |

4.1.2 Presentation: Subject 2 – Anna

During the pre-intervention introductory session, Anna stated that her overconsumption practices were mainly current within the lines of fashion, clothing, make-up and personal hygiene products. She did a lot of internet shopping, particularly during her exam periods. Additionally, Anna expressed that she watches a lot of influencer videos on YouTube and that it is one of the main underlying reasons behind her online shopping behavior. Whenever she watches one of those videos, she often tends to end up on online shopping websites. Furthermore, during the intervention period, Anna had come to the realization that the urge to consume products in many cases most likely originated from her feelings of stress regarding school, because she was annoyed about something, or because of other reasons that was bothering her in life. An overview of Anna is presented in *table 2*.

Table 2. An overview of subject 2: Anna.

| | |
|--|--|
| Name of subject | Anna |
| Age | 23 |
| Occupation | Fourth year law student |
| Prior experience of mindfulness training | None |
| Identified overconsumption behavior | Internet shopping, fashion, clothing, make-up, personal hygiene products |
| Number of sessions completed during the period of intervention | 15 sessions |

4.1.3 Presentation: Subject 3 – Jake

During the pre-intervention introductory session, Jake stated that he could not identify any cases of overconsumption that were relevant in his case. However, during the post-intervention interview, Jake stated that he had realized that he often tended to mindlessly purchase products that he later found unnecessary whenever he went grocery shopping. Furthermore, Jake explained that he had been studying some of the effects of mindfulness training and mindfulness interventions during a few of his psychology courses, but that he had no earlier practical experience of training. An overview of Jake is presented in *table 3*.

Table 3. An overview of subject 3: Jake.

| | |
|--|---|
| Name of subject | Jake |
| Age | 22 |
| Occupation | Second year student in psychology. |
| Prior experience of mindfulness training | None |
| Identified overconsumption behavior | No excessive consumption identified during the introductory session |
| Number of sessions completed during the period of intervention | 15 sessions |

4.1.4 Measures

Table 4 presents the data derived from the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires regarding changes in mindfulness (MAAS) and life satisfaction (SWLS) among the three subjects.

Changes in scores after the intervention period is presented in the *effects of intervention*-row with the purpose of indicating the likely effects of the intervention period on mindfulness and life satisfaction.

Table 4. Measures of mindfulness and life satisfaction prior and posterior to intervention period.

| | Mindfulness (MAAS) (Brown and Ryan, 2003) | | | Satisfaction with life and subjective well-being (SWLS) (Diener et al. 1985) | | |
|-------------------------|---|------------------|------------------|---|------------------|------------------|
| Name of subject | Sara | Anna | Jake | Sara | Anna | Jake |
| Pre-intervention score | 57/90 | 47/90 | 62/90 | 25/35 | 31/35 | 22/35 |
| Post-intervention score | 64/90 | 55/90 | 63/90 | 28/35 | 34/35 | 24/35 |
| Effects of intervention | +7 in MAAS-score | +7 in MAAS-score | +1 in MAAS-score | +3 in SWLS-score | +3 in SWLS-score | +2 in SWLS-score |
| Explanation of scores | The higher the score → the higher the mindful awareness | | | The higher the score → the higher life satisfaction and subjective well-being | | |

4.2 Indications of intervention effects on mindfulness

The objective of the mindfulness intervention in this study was partly to increase the mindful capacity among the participants (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003; Rosenberg, 2004). The purpose of the intended increase in mindfulness was to reduce cases of mindless consumption, more precisely consumption behavior that originate from automatic cognitive responses which is further being exploited through marketing and advertising techniques on the marketplace (Rosenberg, 2004). The current sub-section (*section 4.2*) consists of discussions regarding indications on whether the intervention has been successful in increasing the mindfulness of the participants.

Both Anna and Sara show indications of having experienced effects posterior to the intervention period that show signs of increased mindfulness. Anna explains that she occasionally had started to become aware of moments where she was acting mindless during the intervention. For instance, when she was having a conversation with someone, she discovered that she often tended to float away in her thoughts. After the start of the intervention period, however, she had begun to recognize these moments and drew herself back to an active state of mind as they occurred. This behavior can be linked to Langer's (1989, 2014) description of mindfulness as the practice of de-automatizing cognitive behavior by purposely switching to an active state of mind within any given moment, which can further be recognized as an outcome of the mindfulness training, as suggested by Brown and Ryan (2003). Similar effects were experienced by Sara. Sara expressed that mindfulness training had made her question her presence in everyday life and helped her realize that she tended to float away in her thoughts, which often lead to anxiety and stress about the future. Becoming more aware of situations like this had helped her prevent being overwhelmed by them, as she had started to drag herself back to the present moment whenever they occurred. Like Anna's case, this is an indication of the effects of increased mindfulness on de-automatization of cognitive behavior in everyday life (Langer, 1989; Langer, 2014).

In addition to the data derived from the interviews, both Sara and Anna showed an increase of seven points in mindful awareness (MAAS) which has been presented in *table 4*. These measures can be an additional supplemental indication that the intervention has, at least to some extent, fulfilled its intended purpose of increasing mindful capacity, according to Brown and Ryan's (2003) *Mindful attention awareness scale*. An upcoming topic of

discussion is, however, whether the indicated increase in mindfulness, in combination with education, has been enough to affect Anna's and Sara's consumption behavior and decision making, as suggested by the academic literature (Rosenberg, 2004; Sheth et al. 2010; Gupta and Verma, 2018; Helm and Subramaniam, 2019). This will be more profoundly discussed in upcoming sub-sections in this chapter.

In the case of Jake, however, it was harder to identify apparent indications that signified the effects of increased mindfulness based on the interviews. He did not provide any explicit comments or examples that indicated that the mindfulness training had had any apparent effects on his mindfulness in general. Additionally, he gives several examples of cases where he has been acting on mindless impulses, something that he had not been aware of until moments after the situation had taken place. One of these occasions intervenes when he receives a call from his brother who was buying take-away food:

“... I was at home and I was pretty hungry. And we had food at home. Then my brother calls and is like, I'm at “Max”, should I buy you some burgers? And then I immediately said yes, even though I had food at home. And then later I became aware of it, and just damn, this was probably an impulse buy. Because I'm very hungry and then my impulses are extra high, extra strong. And that's probably why I agreed to it, because I think it's tastier and I was hungry, even though I have food at home...”

In this sequence Jake provides an example that shows how mindlessness at the point of purchase results in excessive consumption that can be linked to impulsive decision-making, as described by Rosenberg (2004) and Sheth et al., (2010). Even though Jake acknowledged his impulse-based decision after hanging up the phone, the lack of mindfulness during the call can be recognized as a case of mindless decision-making.

Despite providing a few examples where he was mindful at the point of consumption, which will further be discussed in upcoming sub-sections; Jake's mindlessness during several occasions, in combination with the insignificant change of one point in his post-intervention MAAS-score (*see table 4*), is something that stands out when compared to Sara and Anna. This could be discussed from several different aspects. The first possible case is that mindfulness training is not as effective in increasing mindfulness for everyone, especially when performed during the limited period of 30 days. Hence, there is a possibility that

mindfulness training is not a sufficient tool in the task of increasing mindfulness among some individuals in the population, like Jake, even though he has completed 15 sessions of mindfulness training. However, as no cases like these were observed in the academic literature that was taken part of, something that could additionally be taken into consideration in this particular case is Jake's relatively higher pre-intervention MAAS-score of 62 out of 90, compared to Anna's score of 47 and Sara's score of 57 (*table 4*). It is therefore also not unreasonable to believe that Jake may require a longer period of consistent mindfulness training to increase his mindful capacity even further. The opposition towards this argument is however that Jake, due to his initially higher mindful capacity in combination with education; according to the literature (Rosenberg, 2004; Gupta and Verma, 2018; Helm and Subramaniam, 2019), supposedly should show stronger indications of awareness during his consumption and purchase situations. This is however something that is not repeatedly evident when analyzing the data.

A second alternative possibility can also be linked to Jake's initially higher score of mindful awareness. Jake may have had a stronger capacity to recognize his cases of mindlessness after they occurred, compared to Sara and Anna, which further increases his ability to reflect upon them and explain his experience during the interview.

The last possibility is that Jake simply is more impartial in his interview compared to Sara and Anna. This argument can be linked to the concept of interviewer bias (Frey, 2018), discussed in *section 3.8*. Sara and Anna may have been biased in their expressions of their views and experiences in relation to mindlessness, due to their perceived lower educational position within the subject, in combination with their beliefs regarding what is expected by them in the situation, as discussed by Frey (2018). Jake may have not been as influenced by his position when expressing his responses, which may have resulted in more authentic and accurate reflections of his actual experience. To conclude, we cannot with certainty say that Jake's mindfulness has not at all been affected during the intervention period, even though analysis of the interview data in combination with his MAAS-score points more towards that direction than the opposite.

4.3 Indications of intervention effects on subjective well-being

The intervention was additionally aimed at enhancing the subjective well-being and life satisfaction among the practitioners (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Carmody and Baer, 2008; Gupta and Verma, 2018). Increased well-being is argued to work as an antidote to consumption behavior that originate from the need for fulfillment and satisfaction (Rosenberg, 2004). Additionally, increased emotional awareness as a result of increased mindfulness (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003), is argued to enhance the consumers ability to realize the actual sources of unfulfillment, as well as further come to the realization that seeking satisfaction through consumption is solely a temporary solution (Rosenberg, 2004). The current sub-section (*section 4.3*) consists of discussions regarding indications on whether the intervention has been successful in improving the subjective well-being of the participants.

All three respondents provided responses that, more or less, indicates that they have experienced changes regarding their subjective well-being during the intervention period. Sara explained how the mindfulness training had made her care more about her physical and mental health and further expressed how the training had helped her realize the importance of calmness and controlling one's breathing:

"... I have realized the importance of calmness within. Especially when it comes to performance and one's well-being. And not least the connection to one's breathing for example. And how much it really matters. [...] ... and now that I've done it anyway and I'm going to start doing it more often. It's something I'm going to start doing more and more, I actually feel like, that you almost find some confidence within yourself..."

"... and in terms of well-being, I would really say that this... at least at first, this thing of creating a calm... some kind of calm within, makes me feel better, because I've started to focus on myself a lot more..."

Sara's responses regarding calmness and finding confidence within herself can be linked to Brown and Ryan's (2003) statement about how mindfulness training has shown to improve subjective well-being by enhancing self-esteem.

As earlier discussed during the previous sub-section, Sara also expressed that the mindfulness training had been helping her become aware of moments where she tended to float away in her thoughts, which further resulted in emotions of stress and anxiety. Her emotional awareness during these situations had prevented her to be as negatively affected by them as usual, as she had started to drag her focus back to the present moment during these situations. This can further be related to Rosenberg's (2004) statement regarding how mindfulness training makes people more appreciative of life, as their minds are focused on the present moment rather than on their thoughts about the future or the past. She additionally explained that just a short break with mindfulness training had been affecting her significantly in terms of relieving stress. This is an additional influential factor that could be argued to affect Sara's subjective well-being positively in her everyday life, as mindfulness training is additionally proven to improve well-being by reducing stress (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Economides et al. 2018).

Anna expressed that the mindfulness training had helped her control her common emotions of irritation and anger. She had been more analytical of the underlying reasons to why she was irritated or angry, and sometimes it made her conclude that it was not worth being affected by. This cognitive behavior can also be associated with increased emotional awareness as an outcome of mindfulness training (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003). Additionally, she had started turning her focus to her breathing and tried to calm down whenever she became aware of those feelings, preventing her from being affected by them as much as usual. According to her, this had affected her subjective well-being positively. These statements by Anna can be characterized by Keane's (2015) description of how we are not judging or committing to our thoughts and emotions during a mindful state of mind, but simply impartially observing, without being further affected by them.

Jake also provided responses that can be associated with Anna's and Sara's experience regarding effects of mindfulness training that could possibly have affected their subjective well-being:

"... Now lately I've started thinking more, like when I get a negative thought, I've started thinking, well this is a negative thought. I just think it. I try not to put a value on it. Because before, when I've had negative thoughts, I've emotionally evaluated them and gotten anxiety

from it, because they are negative thoughts that give me anxiety. But now when they come up, I try to be aware that it's a negative thought, then I try to just let it pass. And I think that's because of the meditation. Because the guy who talks, he teaches tricks for how to think about thoughts. So I've noticed anyway that, when negative thoughts come... that I don't try to invest my emotions in them and instead just emphasize that they exist and that it's negative... ”

Like Anna and Sara, Jake's response can be associated with increased emotional awareness (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003) in combination with the practice of observing thoughts and emotions without being affected by them (Keane, 2015). Additionally, Jake further explained that he had felt happier during the intervention period. He, however, believed that it most likely had a lot to do with the weather getting better lately, even though he could not completely reject the fact that the mindfulness training could have had an influential impact as well. This signifies the importance of considering how confounding variables beyond mindfulness training could have affected the well-being of the respondents during the intervention period as well.

The interview responses in combination with Sara's three points increase (28 out of 35 post-intervention score), Anna's three points increase (34 out of 35 post-intervention score) and Jake's two points increase (24 out of 35 post-intervention score) in life satisfaction (*table 4*), according to the Satisfaction with life-scale (SWLS) (Diener et al. 1985), suggests that they have experienced changes in their subjective well-being during the intervention period. As mentioned, confounding variables should be considered when emphasizing these effects. However, whether the subjects have perceived that these potential changes have further influenced their consumption behavior and decision-making, as proposed by the literature (Rosenberg, 2004; Gupta and Verma, 2018), will be discussed further on in this chapter.

In contrast to the mentioned beneficial aspects of mindfulness training on subjective well-being, both Sara and Anna additionally revealed that they experienced unpleasant effects that could be argued to negatively affect their mental health. Anna explained that she at some cases experienced more intensified feelings of anxiety during her meditation sessions. During her examination period, she felt that the meditation sessions brought her underlying exam anxiety to the surface and made it more intense, as she became more aware of it. She felt that this grew into a problem as mindfulness practice became associated with something negative

during this period, and therefore harder to commit to. Anna's explanation can once again be linked to increased emotional awareness as a result of mindfulness training, as discussed by Langer (1989) and Brown and Ryan (2003). Creswell (2017) explains how it is not unusual that participants of mindfulness interventions initially experience unpleasant reactions such as confusion, discomfort or anxiety during mindfulness training. As Creswell describes it; these reactions are viewed as an important aspect of the psychotherapeutic process, as it is considered to help the practitioner understand that these reactions are temporary, and further foster insight into how they should be dealt with (ibid). As these situations primarily occurred during the first week of the intervention when she went through her exam period, it is possible that Anna had not yet fully learned to observe her intensified emotions without being overwhelmed by them. As Jake mentioned in the previous quotation, the practitioner receives guidance on how to manage unpleasant emotions in order to not be heavily distressed by them, but rather simply impartially observe them. Thus, these unpleasant reactions may have rather been an outcome of the initial stage of the psychotherapeutic process, as described by Creswell (2017).

In a similar contrast to Anna's unpleasant experience, Sara revealed that she had been going through a period with a lot going on in her life lately. This, in combination with her mindfulness practice had resulted in her thinking more and bringing certain underlying emotions to the surface, emotions that she had suppressed. How Sara and Anna perceived that these unpleasant effects of the mindfulness training affected their consumption behavior during the intervention will be further discussed in the upcoming sub-sections in this chapter.

4.4 Mindfulness training as an antidote to mindless consumption

As earlier mentioned, Rosenberg (2004) argues that mindfulness work as an antidote to mindless consumption, as consumers become more aware of their cognitive responses, while simultaneously becoming more aware of the ways their minds are being manipulated. During the interviews, several cases could be identified where the subjects experienced that their behavior was affected by their awareness of the intended manipulative techniques, during their decision-making at the point of purchase.

In one example, Jake explains that he went to the local grocery store to buy a large Pepsi Max for himself and his brothers:

“...My brother asked me to buy a drink, a Pepsi Max, one of those two-liter ones. And I go there, and I see that it says... like, 2 for 30. And then I started thinking about what you said, that these methods exist, and I thought, but I don't need two, I only need one. And then I just took one. So, I had those thought processes. I was very aware of... like now it's just like one of those things he informed me about. Do I really need two? No, there are only three of us. So I just ended up taking one and left...”

The mental awareness of Jake during the purchase made him identify the marketing technique and base his decision on all the information he had available, without letting himself be influenced by the discount. He evaluated the situation; came to the conclusion that the two-liter drink was enough for three people and ended up concluding that he did not need more than one drink. This can be linked to the statement made by Rosenberg (2004), that a large proportion of manipulative techniques rely on the consumers passive state of mind and are typically not as effective when the consumer is aware of them. It is clear that Jake has made a mindful purchase in this situation, by evaluating his alternatives in relation to all the available information prior to consumption without getting influenced by external manipulations, as explained by Sheth et al., (2011).

In another example, Sara had also visited the grocery store when she encountered a discounted price on ice cream:

“...They had reduced the price of Ben and Jerry's to like 40 SEK [...] Absolutely great deal I thought, and I took it at first. Then it got me, so it was there and then I thought about what you had told me. Because I wasn't in the mood of having ice cream. But at first, when I saw that it was cheap, I wanted to buy it. But I didn't do it because we were talking about these techniques the other day, that marketers use precisely to get the consumer to increase consumption...”

Sara who, according to herself, finds satisfaction in food and sweets rather than material objects, had examined the situation and refrained from the purchase, even though she initially was attracted to the product. At this point, Sara had been practicing mindfulness regularly during a period of time. The respondent's cognitive awareness reminded her of the

information she had received during the introduction. She identified the marketing ploy and observed her emotions. Sara's recognition of her emotions in this scenario could possibly, as earlier mentioned, be explained by enhanced emotional awareness as an outcome of mindfulness training (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003). Being aware of the discounts intended effects, in combination with her awareness of the fact that she was not in the mood for ice cream, made the trick insufficient and prevented its intended effect, as suggested by Rosenberg (2004). Sara made a mindful decision to not purchase based on all the available information, without being influenced by the discount (Sheth et al. 2010).

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn regarding both these cases is that cognitive awareness seems to be one of the key elements in mindful decision-making, as suggested by Sheth et al., (2010). Grocery shopping is an everyday routine for most people and could be argued to be a habitual practice, meaning that it does not require a lot of awareness and active mental processing. It can therefore be linked to Langer and Piper's (1987) discussion regarding cognitive automaticity and the mind functioning on "autopilot" during lack of active mental awareness. Thus, consumers tend to end up with multiple mindless purchases of things that they do not require, because they are subconsciously drawn to discounts and other influential elements (Rosenberg, 2004). This seem to have initially been the case in Sara's situation, where she first considered buying the ice cream because of the discounted price. However, she later became aware and evaluated the situation properly, which resulted in her refraining from the purchase. An example of this type of mindless behavior is described by Jake in another of his grocery store visitations:

"...my mother had asked me to go grocery shopping. And she had given me a list. And in this list there are no chips for example. But then I walk past like... just when I enter Coop, they have a shelf, 2 for 30 chips. And I noticed that... that that's a marketing ploy too. So partly that it's 2 for 30, and partly because, just as you come in there's a big shelf with crisps. And it's their own products too, Coop's own. And in this situation, my mother didn't explicitly ask me to buy chips, but I still bought two chips..."

In this example, Jake describes a case of mindless consumption which he had identified after the point of purchase. Compared to the previous examples, the difference in this case is that Jake was not actively conscious at the time of decision-making. This resulted in him purchasing two bags of chips, even though chips were not included in his mother's grocery

list. He had later identified the marketing techniques which had most likely encouraged the mindless purchase.

Jake provides an example of a passive state of mind being exploited by marketing manipulations. If Jake were mindfully aware at the point of the purchase, he would most likely have evaluated the situation differently, which may have resulted in a different outcome. In cases like this, mindfulness training is an influential component to the situation. Mindfulness training, as stated by Brown and Ryan (2003) among others, increases cognitive awareness in all aspects in everyday life, which further decreases the likelihood of mindlessness in cases like this one. How come Jake was mindless during this visit to the grocery shop, we cannot say for sure. Maybe he was stressed, maybe it occurred during the time he had taken a break from mindfulness training due to his illness, or maybe it was because he happened to have a lot on his mind this day. It is, however, highly likely that a mindful state of mind would have influenced the outcome of the situation, as Jake would have been able to include all available information in his decision without being influenced by external manipulations to the same extent (Sheth et al. 2010). Further mindfulness training would, based on the proven effects of mindfulness training in relation to cognitive presence (Brown and Ryan, 2003), presumably reduce the likelihood of cases like this happening in the future.

4.5 Information or mindfulness training?

A recurring question during the interviews was whether it was the mindfulness training or the information that was the underlying variable that had affected Sara's and Jake's decision-making in their cases of mindful consumption. Neither Jake nor Sara had previously experienced these thought processes during their grocery shopping, prior to the intervention. Therefore, the change in behavior is most likely an effect of the intervention period. The question is, however, if it solely was the information that initiated these changes in decision-making, or whether it was a result of the mindfulness training in combination with the information. Rosenberg (2004) argues that education increases consumers knowledge about marketing techniques and manipulations, while mindfulness training increases their cognitive awareness and ability to recognize how they respond to the manipulations as they encounter them. Based on their own experiences, both Sara and Jake believe that it was a combination of the two. Sara provided a detailed description of her thought process:

“...I almost think it might have been a combination of both. At the time, it was the fact that we had talked about it that made me think. But given that I had been meditating quite a bit continuously during that period, I think it got me... it probably led me into thinking about... that I felt, am I really in the mood for this? It made me think, what does my inner self feel...”

Sara explains that she believes that the information made her recognize the discount and evaluate the situation. However, she further explains that the mindfulness training made her observe her emotions and realize that she was not craving for ice cream. Because of the combination of the two components, *information* and *mindfulness*, she drew the conclusion that she was attracted to the product due to the discount rather than the ice cream itself. According to her experience, each element played its own part in the outcome. Sara’s theory regarding the role of mindfulness training in the outcome of the situation is supported by Langer’s (1989), as well as Brown and Ryan’s (2003) statements concerning how mindfulness training increases emotional awareness. One aspect that Sara did not mention, however, is her presence in the situation. As earlier discussed, mindfulness can be linked to increased cognitive awareness (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003; Rosenberg, 2004). If Sara happened to not be in a present state of mind during the situation, like the case of Jake and the chips, she would have acted on her impulses and most likely bought the ice cream based on her first reaction: that she wanted it because of the discounted price.

4.6 Mindfulness training as an antidote to consumption for fulfilment

As previously mentioned, mindfulness training has been proven to improve subjective well-being and increase life-satisfaction (e.g. Brown and Ryan, 2003; Gupta and Verma, 2018), which is argued to reduce consumption in the purpose of fulfillment (Rosenberg, 2004). Furthermore, increased emotional awareness which is an additional proven outcome of mindfulness practice (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003), is argued to enhance people’s ability to realize how satisfaction through consumption is temporary and unsustainable (Rosenberg, 2004).

During the intervention period, Anna had started realizing the underlying reasons behind her consumption behavior:

“...Whenever I want to shop online... I think ... before I didn't really think about that ... uh but now I've started to think about what the purpose is, why do I want to shop? And then I've

realized that most of the time I don't shop because I need stuff, but rather... but then I realize that... but now I'm probably shopping because I'm stressed about school, because I'm annoyed or because of some other reason...”

Anna started to identify that her overconsumption was a result of her unpleasant emotions, and that she used online shopping as a medication to calm her feelings of irritation, stress or anxiety. As suggested by Rosenberg (2004), increased emotional awareness is likely to develop people's ability to realize how satisfaction through external pleasures, which in Anna's case is mainly characterized by consumption of products, are only temporary. She came to the realization that her online shopping was a result of her emotions, rather than her actual needs. She experienced changes in her consumption behavior and stated that she felt like she had been shopping a lot less, at least for the first weeks of the intervention period. Anna explained that she had not picked up a parcel in over two weeks, something that happens rarely.

Once again, the question of whether it is the information or the mindfulness training that led to this change in mindset and behavior becomes relevant. A reasonable conclusion is, once again, that it most likely is a combination of both. Even though the information may have been the main reason to why she could notice and understand the background to her own behavior (Rosenberg, 2004), the mindfulness training can once again be linked to the cognitive presence (Brown and Ryan, 2004) and the fact that she analyzed the situation during the point of decision-making. Furthermore, Anna also explained that the mindfulness training had helped her control her irritation and anger, which further may have improved her well-being. This may be an additional reason to why she was able to control her online shopping, as she had expressed that her irritation sometimes was the reason behind her overconsumption.

Anna further explained that she shopped at fewer occasions, but far greater quantities whenever she purchased anything. As stated, she did not shop at all during the first weeks of the intervention. With regards to the last week, however, Anna described a perfect example of consumption behavior originating from her need for fulfillment, as discussed by Cushman (1990) and Rosenberg (2004). Her boyfriend had been out of town to visit his relatives and she had not been able to spend time with him. Occasionally, when she missed him, she turned

to internet shopping to fill the empty void caused by the lack of her boyfriend's presence. The fact that she thought about her boyfriend so much that she had to consume to satisfy herself shows lack of mindfulness and mental presence. Anna was, in this situation, overwhelmed by her thoughts and feelings. Considering the proven effects of mindfulness training on well-being, with regard to Rosenberg's (2004) statement about how being present in everyday life makes people more appreciative of the moment and less overwhelmed by the future or the past; it can be argued that the 30-day period of mindfulness training may have not been enough for Anna to be able to control herself from being drawn into her emotions and act on her impulses. It can be suggested that further mindfulness training would have enabled Anna to drag herself back to the present whenever she felt that she was drifting away in her thoughts, and further stopped her from being overwhelmed by her emotional state of mind (Keane, 2015). If that was the case, she would probably not have felt the urge to consume in this situation. Whether or not a longer period of mindfulness practice would affect Anna's cognitive behavior whenever she encountered similar cases in the future, would however require a longer period of study to observe.

4.7 Mindful consumption for fulfillment

Anna explained that she had become more aware of the consequences of her consumption behavior. She put emphasis on the economical aspect, most likely because of the fact that she is a student. According to Anna, the awareness of the consequences gave her anxiety and often also prevented her from purchasing anything, despite having added several products to her digital shopping cart. The anxiety and the fact that she rejected her purchases in the last minute were phenomena that Anna had not experienced before and could therefore considerably be an outcome of the intervention. This is likely a result of her increased emotional awareness (Langer, 1989; Brown and Ryan, 2003), in combination with her increased consciousness about the consequences of her consumption. Occasionally, however, Anna's awareness did not prevent her from fulfilling her purchases:

"...so every time I've bought something I've thought about it. And I've had anxiety because I actually realize that I don't really need it. But I've still chosen to ignore that information and shop anyway. And bear with the anxiety..."

She further continuous with an explanation of her behavior:

“...because I think that, if I don't shop, I'll... it'll take longer... or I'll still feel bad about school or other things that stress me out. Um... but if I go shopping, then the... the anxiety will go away for maybe a few hours. And then I think it's worth it, to have anxiety about that instead of the other things that stress me out and gives me anxiety...”

Anna explains that she is highly aware of the fact that the financial consequence of her purchase is giving her anxiety and that her desire to consume is solely based on her unpleasant emotions. However, Anna still chose to proceed with her purchases. She evaluated the situation and came to the conclusion that the anxiety from the original source outweighed the anxiety from her awareness of the economic consequences of her purchase. She has, thus, made a mindful decision to purchase in the sole purpose of temporary satisfaction. As explained by Cushman (1990) and Rosenberg (2004), consumption is an easy but only temporary solution to relieve unpleasant feelings. Rosenberg further argues that consumers that are self-aware enough will realize that temporary fixes through consumption is not a sustainable solution and seek more enriching ways to find satisfaction. Rosenberg's argument can, however, not be supported in this case, as Anna explains that she is fully aware of the fact that her desire to shop is solely based on her feelings of anxiety, but still consciously proceed with her purchases.

The mindfulness training seems to, once again, not have fully fulfilled its purpose in this regard. As mentioned, mindfulness practice is proven to improve mental well-being in several aspects and is therefore argued to reduce consumption that originates from poor mental health (Rosenberg, 2004). The mindfulness training has considerably not affected Anna's ability to control her emotions to the extent that she does not have to rely on consumption to relieve her unpleasant affections. Rosenberg's (2004) argument regarding mindfulness training as an antidote to consumption behavior that originate from the need for fulfillment can therefore not be supported in this particular scenario. There are arguably two alternative possibilities with regard to Anna's situation. Either the effects of mindfulness training are not sufficient enough to improve Anna's well-being to the extent that she does not need to turn to consumption for temporary releasement of her affections, or further mindfulness training is required to show more significant changes in Anna's mental health. Once again, observing effects from a longer period of mindfulness training is a topic of interest.

4.8 Mindful consumption for fulfillment as an outcome of mindfulness training

As earlier mentioned, mindfulness training makes us more aware of our emotions, thoughts and sensations; and makes us more aware of what is going on within our minds (Keane, 2015). As previously discussed, a reappearing issue during both Anna's and Sara's intervention periods was that the mindfulness training brought their underlying and suppressed emotions to the surface and intensified their unpleasant feelings. In Anna's case, her underlying emotions of anxiety and stress became intensified when she practiced mindfulness during her exam period.

Sara explained that she had been going through a period with a lot going on in her life lately. Like Anna's experience, mindfulness training had resulted in Sara's suppressed feelings being brought up to the surface:

"...because I've been in a period right now with a lot going on in my life... And um... in combination with the meditation practice... it made me think even more. I think it really brings certain feelings to the surface, that I've now realized afterwards. That I've kind of repressed. So that sometimes led to more overconsumption than before. But I feel now afterwards, now at the end, that I needed to kind of process those feelings... that it needed to happen in order for me to work through them..."

The emphasis she had to put on these emotions led her to overconsuming. The mindfulness training had indirectly resulted in Sara's food consumption increasing. This was most likely an outcome of a habitual cognitive response from Sara, with the purpose of soothing the effect of those unpleasant feelings with the satisfaction she got from food. This assumption can, like in the previous case of Anna, be supported by Cushman's (1990) and Rosenberg's (2004) statements regarding how consumers tend to turn to consumption as a solution to instant relief of unpleasant emotions. In previous studies conducted by Geiger et al., (2020), cases of increased consumption as an outcome of mindfulness training had been identified. Those cases were however different from this one, as the subjects became more curious and interested in trying out new things because of increased mindfulness, rather than because of increased anxiety as a result of the training.

What should be considered in this case is that Sara was aware of her overconsumption and the fact that she consumed solely in the purpose of toning down her unpleasant emotions. She

expressed that she got better at handling these situations every time they appeared, as she was constantly conscious that it was the wrong approach to take. She felt that she had to deal with those emotions in order to work herself through them. As explained by Creswell (2017), unpleasant feelings such as anxiety and discomfort during the initial stages of mindfulness training are not unusual, but rather considered as an important part of the psychotherapeutic process, as it helps the practitioner realize that these reactions are temporary and further learn how they should deal with them as they occur. It is therefore not unreasonable to argue that Sara had to go through this stage of increased anxiety and limited period of reduced subjective well-being, in order to work with her feelings and benefit her long-term mental health. If that is the case, Sara's long-term improvement in well-being would directly affect her future consumption behavior; as she, according to Rosenberg (2004), would no longer have to relieve her negative emotions with food consumption to the same extent. However, whether the intervention has further affected Sara's consumption practices in the long term would require a longer period of observation to say for sure.

4.9 Excessive or necessary consumption?

With regards to Sara's case of increased food consumption due to her unpleasant emotions, as well as Anna's increased internet shopping because of her anxiety, the discussion can be made whether their consumption behavior can, in fact, be classified as excessive based on the definition of overconsumption. In both cases the consumers have made an active and mindful decision to consume, with regards to all the available information and without influence by external factors and manipulations, as defined by Sheth et al., (2011). It is rather the internal factors, in the form of their unpleasant emotions, that has been the source of influence on their behavior. Referring to the definition of overconsumption used in this thesis:

“Regular consumption turns into overconsumption when the level of consumption results in negative economic or environmental consequences; or have a negative impact on individual or collective well-being (Sheth et al, 2010). During these circumstances, the side-effects of this type of consumption behavior outweighs the intended value that is produced by consuming the product or the service (Quelch and Jocz, 2007).” (see section 2.1)

Depending on how the definition is interpreted, it can be argued that the intended value that is produced by the consumption practices in Sara's and Anna's case, which is to suppress their negative emotions; may or may not in fact outweigh the side-effects of the consumption. This

does mainly depend on their own values and priorities. The side-effects in these cases include for example the environmental impact, the financial consequences, and negative effects on their well-being. Clearly, as they are highly aware of their decisions and its consequences, the intended benefits at the point of consumption outweighs the negative consequences, at least according to themselves. Thus, it is possible that Anna and Sara do not perceive their consumption as excessive at the point of consumption, but rather vital to their mental health.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The purpose of this qualitative thesis was to analyze the perceived changes of individual consumers decision-making and consumption behavior, in relation to mindless consumption and consumption behavior that originate from the need for fulfillment, as a result of mindfulness training in combination with education. The participants went through a 30-day long mindfulness intervention period, with the aim to increase their mindful capacity and improve their subjective well-being. The following research questions were proposed:

1. *How does consumers perceive that mindfulness training in combination with education affects their decision-making at the point of consumption?*
2. *How does consumers perceive that mindfulness training in combination with education affects their regular and habitual consumption behavior?*

Perceived effects of mindfulness training and education on decision making

With regards to changes in decision-making, the analysis of the findings indicated that increased mindfulness through mindfulness training in combination with education, affected consumers decision-making by increasing their awareness at the point of consumption. The increased awareness in combination with increased consciousness towards marketing and advertising techniques, showed several cases in which the consumers were able to make mindful decisions based on all the information they had available without the influence of external manipulations, as described by Sheth et al., (2010) within the notion of mindful consumption. Increased awareness of marketing and advertising techniques at the point of decision-making showed indications of reducing their intended effects, as suggested by Rosenberg (2004). Additionally, cases where increased emotional awareness as a result of mindfulness training enabled the consumers to realize their inner needs and reject external temptations were also identified, which could be further related to additional arguments proposed by Rosenberg (2004). Mindfulness training in combination with education can therefore be considered an effective approach to foster mindful decision-making among individuals, as well as preventing the intended effects of manipulative techniques on the marketplace.

Perceived effects of mindfulness training and education on consumption behavior

With regards to perceived changes in consumers regular and habitual consumption behavior, the findings indicated that consumers experienced multiple cases of prevented mindless consumption; as they became increasingly conscious at the point of decision-making, as well as becoming more aware of their actual needs and wants. Consumers were thus, as argued by Sheth et al., (2010), able to make mindful consumption decisions, solely based on their own values and preferences, without experiencing automatic and impulsive decisions as an outcome of a passive state of mind at the point of consumption. As an outcome of increased awareness at the point of consumption, the participants expressed that they were able to prevent their undesirable consumption behavior that originated from mindless and habitual impulses, as well as preventing their behavior to be further influenced by external manipulations in forms of marketing campaigns and discounts. Rosenberg's (2004) argument regarding how mindfulness training in combination with education would induce changes in consumption behavior within the context of mindless consumption, could thus be supported by the findings.

However, increased awareness towards consequences of the consumption did not, in several observations, affect consumption behavior that originated from the consumer's need for fulfillment. Consumers rather tended to make mindful decisions to consume in the sole purpose of temporary satisfaction, to relieve their unpleasant feelings of stress and anxiety. Rosenberg's (2004) suggestion regarding how consumers that are self-aware enough to realize that temporary fixes through consumption is not a sustainable solution and seek more enriching ways to find satisfaction, could thus not be supported. This consumption behavior seems to rather purely be a consequence of poor well-being. Two alternative conclusions can be drawn with regard to this information. The first conclusion is that, even though mindfulness training has been proven to improve subjective well-being among practitioners (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Carmody and Baer, 2008; Gupta and Verma, 2018), the effects on well-being are not always significant enough to prevent consumption in the purpose of fulfillment. There may be cases where the individual's unpleasant feelings are considerably too severe to manage with mindfulness training exclusively. The alternate conclusion is that the limited duration of the 30-day intervention is too short to show significant improvements in well-being that would contradict with consumption behavior that originates from poor mental health.

Theoretical implications

Previous studies have identified cases where mindfulness training showed an increase of consumption in new forms, as consumers became more curious and interested in trying out new things (Geiger et al. 2020). The findings of this study, however, showed cases where one of the participants undesirable consumption was initially enhanced during a period of time, due to increased anxiety as an outcome of mindfulness training. The mindfulness training supposedly aggravated the participant's underlying and suppressed feelings of anxiety, which further resulted in increased food consumption with the purpose of soothing the unpleasant reaction. This period of increased overconsumption was most likely a side-effect of the psychotherapeutic process of mindfulness training, as described by Creswell (2017). Although the increase in undesirable consumption was temporary, the experience of the participant indicates that mindfulness training can not always be expected to reduce overconsumption, which has been the main argument within the discipline, but in some cases rather enhance it.

Additionally, the discussion can be made whether mindful consumption in the purpose of fulfillment can, in fact, be classified as excessive based on the definition of overconsumption. Cases were identified where the participants made mindful decisions to consume with the sole purpose of soothing their unpleasant emotions, despite being aware of the overall consequences of their behavior. Depending on how the definition of overconsumption by Sheth et al., (2010) and Quelch and Jocz (2007) is interpreted, it could be argued that the intended value that is produced by the consumption practices in those cases, which is to suppress their negative emotions, may or may not in fact outweigh the side-effects of the consumption. This could arguably be a question of individual priorities. Additionally, even though the goal of fostering mindful consumption has been fulfilled in these scenarios, increased mindfulness has not been enough to affect the participants actual consumption behavior in the purpose of fulfillment. This indicates that mindful consumption does not prevent consumption that derives from poor well-being.

This could further be an explanation to why overconsumption has become such an unmanageable issue in modern society, and why education about the consequences of overconsumption has been insufficient in inducing change, as discussed by Prothero et al.

(2011) and Bahl et al. (2016). Social media could be considered as one of the underlying factors that has brought the anxiety and stress among the younger generation to such a high rate. Consumption of goods or food is an easy, accessible, legal, and not least instant solution to temporary satisfaction and alleviation of unpleasant emotions. Additionally, consumption of objects or food have arguably light consequences if compared to other types of consumption in forms of drugs, alcohol or gambling. Cases like the one's observed in this study shows how neither information nor awareness of the consequences of one's consumption behavior is always enough to prevent these consumption practices to take place. The focus lies entirely on improving well-being and it is not unreasonable to argue that sole mindfulness practice may, in some cases, be insufficient within this regard. Even though mindfulness training could work as a supplement to improvements in well-being, larger and broader efforts may be required to deal with consumption issues within this area. However, further studies are required to say for sure.

Practical implications

Based on the findings in combination with previous studies within the field (Gupta and Verma, 2018; Subramaniam and Helm, 2019), a proposition could be made that government support for efforts in establishing a mindfulness training routine at a young age, preferably in schools, could have strong positive effects on younger consumers decision-making and further influence their control over their own consumption behaviors. Furthermore, educating consumers regarding the effects of marketing and advertising techniques and how they are developed to exploit on impulses and automatic cognitive responses, is another practical proposition within the context of reducing undesirable overconsumption among individuals. The described experiences of the participants in this study with the support of suggestions made by the academia (Rosenberg, 2004), indicates that knowledge in combination with cognitive awareness at the point of consumption will reduce the intended effects of external manipulations such as discounts or marketing campaigns. Thus, consumers will be able to avoid being sub-consciously influenced by these variables in their decision making at the point of consumption.

Furthermore, an additional suggestion based on the results of this thesis in combination with previous studies (Spijkerman et al. 2016; Economides et al. 2018), is that online mindfulness applications are a feasible and widely accessible alternative for fostering mindfulness, and

most likely also an effective approach in fostering mindful decision-making within the context of consumption. What should be taken into consideration, however, is the possibility that mindfulness training may initially aggravate feelings of confusion, discomfort or anxiety (Creswell, 2017); which may further interfere with commitment to training and in some cases even enhance overconsumption that originate from the desire for satisfaction and fulfillment. This was exemplified in one of the participants cases in this study. However, as this seems to be an important side-effect of the psychotherapeutic process in all kinds of formal mindfulness training, it's important to express that these reactions could be current to some practitioners, even though they are not harmful to individuals that do not suffer from more severe psychological illnesses.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

It can be suggested, based on the findings with support of the literature, that mindfulness training in combination with education most likely do affect consumption decision-making in the context of mindless consumption. However, the question of how influential the mindfulness training is in relation to the information remains. This is a question that unfortunately cannot be further assessed based on the findings of this thesis. One way to qualitatively address this question is to set up a control group which solely receives information without completing mindfulness practice. Comparison of data derived from the different groups could provide indications on how the experience from sole information differs from the combination of the two components. This could, nonetheless, be a topic of interest in future research, which would further show the separate impact of each and one of the two components in comparison to the effects of the combination of the two.

Additionally, as earlier mentioned, the reason behind the unchanged consumption behavior that originate from the need for fulfillment could not be determined based on the findings of this thesis. A first explanation is that mindfulness training, in some cases, is not a sufficient solution to improve well-being to a point where consumption for fulfillment is prevented. A second explanation could be the limited period of the intervention. Even though the academic literature points towards the second hypothesis, further studies with observations during a longer period with consistent mindfulness training, preferably six months or further, is an additional subject of interest. During a longer intervention period, studying changes in actual consumption behavior in terms of spending or through individual journals can be an

additional topic of interest, as confounding variables are not as significantly influential on the data.

6. References

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Appendix A – Interview guide

Interview guide: one-on-one post-intervention semi-structured interviews

- **Effects of mindfulness training**

How did the intervention period go?

Have you experienced any overall changes since the start of the intervention period?

Would you consider mindfulness training to have affected your mindfulness and well-being?

Have you reflected upon the things we talked about prior to the intervention period? Do you have any comments regarding these?

Do you experience any changes in your consumption practices or your mindset prior to consumption since the start of the intervention period?

- **Mindlessness and mindless consumption**

Have you reflected upon or encountered cases of mindlessness and mindless consumption in your daily life since our last meeting?

Have you experienced any changes in relation to mindlessness and mindless consumption since the start of the intervention period?

Do you feel more mentally and emotionally aware in general?

Do you feel more mindful prior to consumption decisions?

Do you feel more aware about marketing techniques and how they affect you in your consumption decisions?

- **Need for fulfillment**

Have you reflected upon or encountered cases of consumption in relation to the need for fulfillment?

Do you feel like your subjective well being has changed since you started with mindfulness training?

Have you experienced any changes in relation to consumption in relation to the need for fulfillment or consuming your way to happiness?

Do you feel more emotionally aware and more conscious about how consumption is used as a tool of satisfaction and how advertisers are exploiting the need for fulfillment to induce consumption?

- **Overconsumption**

During our last meeting you stated some different types of overconsumption practices that could be current in your case? Have you experienced any changes in these types of consumption in particular? (adapted to each specific interview depending on what was discussed prior to intervention period)

Have you identified any new overconsumption practices since?

- **Mindfulness training**

Did you interfere with any issues during training?

Did you find it hard to commit to training?

What are your thoughts on the online sessions? Where they hard to conduct? How was the length?

Did you feel focused during the sessions?

What do you think about the feasibility of the training program to the general public?

- **Concluding questions**

Do you think increased mindfulness correlates with increased control over ones consumption and consumption decisions?

Do you think increasing mindfulness through mindfulness training could be an effective tool to reduce overconsumption?

Would you consider education or increased mindfulness to be most effective? Or both?

Final comments?

Appendix B – Questionnaire

Mindfulness and consumption behavior

This survey consists of four separate sections. Each section consists of 5 to 18 scale-based questions. Indicate your agreement with each question by choosing one of the statements beneath them. Please be open and honest in your responding. Answer according to what really reflects your point of view rather than what you think your point of view should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item. Your answers are strictly confidential and will only be used anonymously for the purpose of this study. Thank you!

*** Required**

1. Name: *

2. Age:

3. Gender

Mark only one oval.

- Man
 Female
 Other

4. Field of work/studies

Satisfaction
with the scale
(SWLS)

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

5. 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Slightly agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Slightly disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

6. 2. The conditions of my life are excellent. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Slightly agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Slightly disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

7. 3. I am satisfied with my life. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Slightly agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Slightly disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

8. 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Slightly agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Slightly disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

9. 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Slightly agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Slightly disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

**Mindful
Attention
Awareness
Scale
(MAAS)**

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experiences. Using the 1-4 scale, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

10. 1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later. *
- Mark only one oval.*
- Almost always
 Very frequently
 Somewhat frequently
 Somewhat infrequently
 Very infrequently
 Almost never
11. 2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else. *
- Mark only one oval.*
- Almost always
 Very frequently
 Somewhat frequently
 Somewhat infrequently
 Very infrequently
 Almost never
12. 3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present. *
- Mark only one oval.*
- Almost always
 Very frequently
 Somewhat frequently
 Somewhat infrequently
 Very infrequently
 Almost never
13. 4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way. *
- Mark only one oval.*
- Almost always
 Very frequently
 Somewhat frequently
 Somewhat infrequently
 Very infrequently
 Almost never
14. 5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention. *
- Mark only one oval.*
- Almost always
 Very frequently
 Somewhat frequently
 Somewhat infrequently
 Very infrequently
 Almost never
15. 6. I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time. *
- Mark only one oval.*
- Almost always
 Very frequently
 Somewhat frequently
 Somewhat infrequently
 Very infrequently
 Almost never
16. 7. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing. *
- Mark only one oval.*
- Almost always
 Very frequently
 Somewhat frequently
 Somewhat infrequently
 Very infrequently
 Almost never
17. 8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them. *
- Mark only one oval.*
- Almost always
 Very frequently
 Somewhat frequently
 Somewhat infrequently
 Very infrequently
 Almost never

18. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I am doing right now to get there. *

Mark only one oval.

- Almost always
- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Very infrequently
- Almost never

22. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past. *

Mark only one oval.

- Almost always
- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Very infrequently
- Almost never

19. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing. *

Mark only one oval.

- Almost always
- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Very infrequently
- Almost never

23. I find myself doing things without paying attention. *

Mark only one oval.

- Almost always
- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Very infrequently
- Almost never

20. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time. *

Mark only one oval.

- Almost always
- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Very infrequently
- Almost never

24. I snack without being aware that I'm eating. *

Mark only one oval.

- Almost always
- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Very infrequently
- Almost never

21. I go to places on "automatic pilot" and then wonder why I went there. *

Mark only one oval.

- Almost always
- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Very infrequently
- Almost never

Appendix C – Coded interviews

Coding categories:

Mindful consumption and mindful decision-making,

Consumption for fulfillment,

Mindless consumption,

Effects of intervention linked to subjective well-being,

Effects of intervention linked to cognitive awareness,

Identifying marketing techniques,

Increased consumption linked to mindfulness training,

Comments regarding the effects of information and mindfulness training,

Goal and mindset,

Changes in consumption behavior and mindset

Interview 1 – Sara: Translated version

2021-04-13

Duration: 22:14

Format: Video interview.

Access: <https://1drv.ms/w/s!AtvDEGKgaGNVtRALrIUvviY5P1wK?e=6GtakA>

Interview 2 – Anna: Translated version

2021-04-15

Duration: 26:01

Format: Video interview.

Access: <https://1drv.ms/w/s!AtvDEGKgaGNVtRIQWVt4DNWYVpV4?e=EzkXpg>

Interview 3 – Jake: Translated version

2021-04-17

Duration: 25:10 min

Format: Video interview.

Access: <https://1drv.ms/w/s!AtvDEGKgaGNVtRRjG8lkGD9VJ3FW?e=9ABF2r>

Appendix D – Original transcripts

Interview 1 – Sara: Original transcript

2021-04-13

Duration 22:14

Format: Video interview.

Language: Swedish.

Access: <https://1drv.ms/w/s!AtvDEGKgaGNVtRb6p5vKwpE1UR-e?e=p4vvft>

Interview 2 – Anna: Original transcript

2021-04-15

Duration: 26:01

Format: Video interview.

Language: Swedish.

Access: <https://1drv.ms/w/s!AtvDEGKgaGNVtRhi40jVR3MVP822?e=kO4nZd>

Interview 3 – Jake: Original transcript

2021-04-17

Duration: 25:10 min

Format: Video interview.

Language: Swedish.

Access: <https://1drv.ms/w/s!AtvDEGKgaGNVtRoDXIPKZzKPcIBM?e=V5WZOq>