

Unpacking The Good Life Dialectic through Phenomenological Research Methodology

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In emerging economies, rising consumption stands in for development and progress. Driven by corporate-led globalization, most developing countries have adopted the prevailing neoliberal economic model centered on growthism. This dominant economic model depends on and promotes a perception of consumers' insatiable desires as its most significant drive necessitates a search for alternative economic models, alongside alternative definitions of the good life. The most important question here is how to conceptualize socio-culturally- and economically-prudent alternative pathways to a sustainable and just world for all that is particularly relevant for the Global South? This is a critical question that is particularly salient in the Global South where still the majority live a life of extremely low material throughput in societies where the feeling of community is still very alive, undoubtedly because of the lack of access to material opulence that can support individualistic living. It is a fact that most of these communities are extremely patriarchic, do not value individual freedom, and help perpetuate systemic oppression to specific sections of the society (e.g., as documented in several Vikalp Sangam case studies). Any alternatives definitely need to have better socially just outcomes, but does that mean these people have to go through the cycle of extreme individualization dependent on material opulence, leading to acute meaninglessness and then eventually realizing the need for a living in a community setting that can meet our broader needs through non-material need satisfiers?

This paper presents the conceptual framework of The Good Life Dialectic that captures how the everyday sphere, macro-economic sphere, and the non-market/non-material sphere interact and that interaction impacts one's consumption choices by shaping her socio-cultural disposition and conditioning, and the notion of good life. This employs phenomenological research methodology from within the interpretivist stream. I develop a phenomenological research methodology-based conceptual framing based on the notion of the good life and a step-by-step methodological approach based on that framing to gain an in-depth understanding of how consumers being socio-culturally situated identity projects-driven subjects embed consumer goods as integral parts of their life narratives and how that, in turn, acts as the drivers

of their consumption. The elaborated steps of interpreting collected consumer narratives are presented with examples from empirical research conducted in a few Indian cities. This approach offers critical reflections on diverse issues that may arise while employing this methodology in similar contexts like India are then discussed. The conclusion highlights how this understanding of consumers could make a novel contribution to sustainable consumption literature. The novelty of this conceptual framing is that it incorporates the notion of good life as a conceptual category and how it impacts consumption choices through shaping one's life-narrative. This framework allows us to empirically evaluate how far one's good life definition is materialistically oriented or how far non-material need-satisfiers feature.