# Chapter 3

# Standard of Living Versus Quality of Life

## Chapter Overview

A sustainable vision promotes a good standard of living that is compatible with true happiness, health, well-being, and equality on a healthy planet. We are presently a hyperconsumptive, hyperindividualistic, throwaway economy, which is now being tempered by the reality of recognizing what people really want, and not what marketers are trying to tell them they want in order to sell products they never knew they needed. As people start to recognize that they want more quality in their lives and not just more things, the consumer vision will start to buckle and allow other models of living to be expressed. A good standard of living with comfort and luxury is great, but it should also encompass a quality that makes life wonderful and healthy and not one of stress and fear of the future in which the living environment is continually degraded.

The consumer mentality has created a system that assaults us all with vast amounts of pollution and toxins in order to supply consumers with cheap and plentiful products that marketing and advertising convince us we need. As you start to make choices that benefit you, the pollution and toxins will also diminish because you, the new sovereign consumer, will now demand and receive eco-friendly products that are safe and biodegradable. This kind of feedback loop (covered in chapter 4) is really positive for a change. When you focus on quality of life factors, you begin to see what factors of standard of living are really necessary.

## Vocabulary Terms

affluence

affluence gap

affluenza

American Dream

brainwashing

branding

business as usual

commodities

consumer norms

consumerism

co-optation

cultural commons

elites

environmental protection

functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)

globalization

industrialized society

libertarian political system

monopoly

neuromarketing

new market society

placebo effect

quad stack

quality of life

relative poverty

sovereign consumer

subliminal messaging

sustainable development

technological lifestyle

throwaway economy

transparency

triple bottom line (TBL)

unbranded goods

## Terms With Definitions

**affluence—**An abundant supply of material goods and services as a result of discretionary income or availability of credit well above that required for meeting basic needs.

**affluence gap—**The wide difference between affluent societies and poor societies.

**affluenza—**A socially-derived condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more material things.

**American dream**—While the dream has changed since the American Revolution, it still is embodied in an idealof freedom that includes a promise of the possibility of prosperity and well-being, and an ability to pursue happiness.

**brainwashing—**Term used to indicate attempts to change the thoughts and beliefs of another person against that person’s will.

**branding—**The visual, emotional, and cultural image that you associate with a company or a product.

**business as usual—**The operations of businesses and the political system that promote a consumer lifestyle.

**commodities—**Goods that are interchangeable and usually uniform across producers. Quality and grades are usually standardized.

**consumer norms—**Social norms that have been accepted as standard within a consumer mindset.

**consumerism—**An economic and social system based on the creation and buying of consumer goods and services.

**co-optation—**Assimilating, controlling, or winning over a dissenting group to another established group or culture; in this case, one that promotes consumerism over other mindsets.

**cultural commons—**The sum of all cultural aspects shared by all people in a specific location. This includes shared sense of place, languages, understanding of place both historically and presently, seasonal and holiday festivals, cultural values and norms, among other aspects that define a community as unique.

**elites—**Generally refers to a privileged, often wealthy class that has considerable power within its sphere of influence.

**environmental protection—**The practice of enacting legislation from local to international levels to improve environmental quality and manage natural resource use for the benefit of human need or simply to preserve special areas.

**functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)—**A specialized type of magnetic resonance imaging that is not evasive and allows measurement and visualization of blood flow changes during neural activity in the brain or spinal cord.

**globalization—**While numerous definitions abound, generally a global free-market capitalism with western ideals of commerce that severely affects localized cultural commons.

**industrialized society—**Currently can refer to a society that uses technology and extensive fossil fuels to enable mass production of goods that support a consumer mindset.

**libertarian political system—**In early U.S. history, this perspective emphasized personal liberty with as little government intrusion as necessary.

**monopoly—**Generally describes when an individual or group of individuals within a specific enterprise have complete control over the market and services associated with that enterprise. For instance, a famous robber baron, John D. Rockefeller, controlled much of the U.S. oil market in the late 1800s.

**neuromarketing—**The use of several brain and body measuring techniques used to study the effects of emotional and intellectual brain activity to specific marketing stimuli.

**new market society—**A society that began with the ideas of modern capitalism during the Industrial Revolution.

**placebo effect—**When a measurable, observable, or perceived improvement in a health condition not attributable to any actual treatment occurs; often the simple belief that a treatment exists can cause an improvement in as many as one in three people.

**quad stack—**A model for sustainability decision making where economics, society and culture, psychology, and environment are all nested together. All must be considered equally.

**quality of life—**A term that describes the general well-being of individuals and society as a whole. It encompasses multiple measures such as environmental, psychological, and physical health; education; recreation; leisure time; sense of belonging to place; and many others.

**relative poverty—**Having too low of an income to achieve societally expected amounts of material possessions and services although they are available.

**sovereign consumer—**Where the consumer has the purchasing power to influence the design, construction and manufacturing, marketing, and pricing of consumer goods. It is based on the idea of transparency and consumer preference.

**subliminal messaging—**The idea that subversive buried or hidden messages within regular communications can affect consumer preference and choice; generally not shown to be true except when the consumer is already swayed to that choice.

**sustainable development—**Mindful development using principles of sustainability. It does not imply bigger, but better.

**technological lifestyle—**Describes a society such as in developed countries where technology is a major component of the standard of living. It tends to provide for consumer comforts and luxuries.

**throwaway economy—**Describes a society where convenience becomes paramount, and excessive production of goods is reasoned to mean more jobs and economic growth. Since more goods are produced than are needed, the tendency is to create short-lived goods that must be frequently replaced.

**transparency—**Implies a social and economic system with openness, clear communication, and full [accountability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accountability).

**triple bottom line (TBL)—**Where environment, society, and economics interact to create more sustainable and mindful decision making. Depending on the specific model used, it can use all three components (nested model) or just combinations of two components.

**unbranded goods—**Raw goods, such as flour or wood, that have no corporate logo associated with them.

## Extended Learning Activities

1. Look at three aspects of your life in which your needs are not satisfied. Analyze what is causing the dissatisfaction and where it originates. What would you like to change to satisfy those needs? What are the barriers to making those changes and what can you do to overcome those barriers?
2. Describe a recent advertisement that you saw that suggests if you purchase it, your life will be easier or better. Explain how you think the purchase of this product might or might not result in those claims. Does advertising affect how and when you purchase certain items? How?
3. Watch the video titled *Affluenza* (link is included in the Web Links section that follows). How does the message in this video relate to the ideas posed in this chapter? Do you believe the video accurately depicts the life of those in the United States? Why or why not? Do you believe people are ready for a different way of life? Why or why not?

## Research and Response Questions

1. How much does the average American consume in terms of wants instead of needs? How does this consumption affect those in developing countries? What evidence can you find to suggest that making more money and buying more stuff increases one’s overall well-being or happiness?
2. Find a community that uses the quad stack model or the triple bottom line. Is this community happier or does it have an increased sense of well-being compared to one that uses the business as usual model? On what evidence did you base your conclusions?
3. How do you think advertising affects children’s attitudes toward the environment and other people? Find some forms of advertising that are geared toward children and describe what in the advertising entices children to purchase the product. What message do children get from the advertisements?

## Web Links

[AFFLUENZA.ORG](http://www.affluenza.org/)

[Affluenza: PBS Program on the Epidemic of Overconsumption](http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza/)

[Consumption and Consumerism — Global Issues](http://www.globalissues.org/issue/235/consumption-and-consumerism)

[Global Issues: Social, Political, Economic and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All](http://www.globalissues.org/)

[Neuromarketing: Where Brain Science and Marketing Meet](http://www.neurosciencemarketing.com/blog/articles/what-is-neuromarketing.htm)

[Sierra Club](http://www.sierraclub.org/)