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## Flourishing and Consumption: A Christian Perspective on Our Choices

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### Abstract

This article researches and analyzes the complex and multifactorial impact of the highly subjective, modern pursuit of human flourishing on consumer choice within the United States market. It offers a rigorous, academic examination through a Christian economic lens. The article details how the many expressions and definitions of flourishing – as optimal human well-being in physical, mental, social, spiritual, and other dimensions – influence U.S. consumer product and service choices. These choices span health and beauty, food and drink, physical and mental fitness, recreation, and personal development. Examples include everything from organic food to meditation apps and life coaching. This article draws on seminal research into the theories and behaviors that influence today's consumers. It examines how people's desires and needs for self-actualization affect purchasing patterns, and how markets have evolved to meet these needs. In this analysis, the authors introduce a practical analytical framework. This framework enables Christian consumers to question, reflect on, and better understand the complex psychology behind their self-actualization-related purchases. This allows them to make choices that are more informed and conscious, and better aligned with their values, in an increasingly vast and important market. Naturally, these choices will also reflect a Christian ethic of responsible resource stewardship, love, and responsibility to one's neighbor. As the Apostle Paul writes, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful, but not all things build up" (New International Version, 1978/2001 1 Corinthians 10:23).

*Keywords:* flourishing, consumer choice, Christian ethics, behavioral economics, wellness market.

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Consumption choices reveal the identity, aspirations, and anxieties of a person. The American market, ever-changing and contradictory, reflects one of its most perennial trends: flourishing. But what does it mean to flourish? Far from a generic "health and wellness" term, this state of total well-being – physical, mental, emotional, social, and

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spiritual—is a booming multi-billion-dollar market. Flourishing is a market that we enter through dozens of sometimes costly decisions every day, and it is the explicit expression of a national and global demand for more. The search for a better, more balanced, and more meaningful life within our own flesh is a market, and beyond that, a culture.

But at the root of these purchases lie many questions. Is this a true path of well-being, social coercion, or a pure and simple illusion served to us by the marketing and supply-side machine? This article not only looks at the psychology of consumption choices related to flourishing, but it also provides a long-neglected economic dimension by putting consumer choice theory (maximization of “utility” in a situation of scarcity) to work, to understand how the desire to flourish is concretely translated into purchases and how the market is built. Most importantly, we will help bring back a necessary Christian view to a society that often lacks any ethical and rational discernment over its consumption choices. Let us develop an ethical platform that questions our habits and helps us find our motivations that will truly honor our body, our mind, our Creator, and our neighbor, because “All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful, but not all things build up” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

## Flourishing: A Gigantic Societal and Economic Trend

Flourishing is a word, functioning at a higher level in all categories of life (physical, mental/emotional, social, spiritual, professional/intellectual, and environmental health), that is, at first glance, nothing new. The goal of flourishing as the basis of well-being is not only part of our anthropology rooted in theology and Aristotelian philosophy, but has become, on a macroeconomic scale, one of the most powerful megatrends.

### The Wellness Industry: Statistics and Growth Drivers

The wellness industry in the United States represents an unheard-of economic machine, with more than \$500 billion in annual spending and a consistent annual growth of 4%–5% (McKinsey & Company, 2025). The historical structural reallocation of spending is mostly fueled by millennials and Gen Z, who have placed the search for products and services that would lead to the best version of themselves at the top of their priorities.

Factors and statistics to understand this trend include:

- **holistic wellness:** The global wellness market (includes mental health, nutrition, fitness, sleep, etc.) was valued at \$4.9 trillion in 2024 and is projected to be valued at \$7 trillion in 2030 (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). This growth trajectory is a direct result of the demand for solutions to post-COVID concerns, the realities of

the daily grind, and the general demographic's desire to remain fit and healthy for as long as possible.

- **nutrition:** Organic food retail market sales in the United States reached \$61.67 billion in 2022 (LETIS, 2024), as a clear indicator of flourishing behaviors, i.e., practices related to physical and environmental health.
- **digital mental health:** The mental health apps market in the United States was worth \$2.42 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach \$5.1 billion by 2030 (Grand View Research, 2024). This category demonstrates high demand from users for technological and psychological solutions.
- **fitness and self-identity:** The global fitness industry size was valued to exceed \$202 billion and is expected to grow until 2030 (WodGuru, 2025). Here, it is essential to consider physical exercise as well as social signaling and belonging to a "well-living" community. The U.S. corporate wellness market was valued at \$18.4 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach \$24.8 billion by 2030 (Grand View Research, 2023).

## Methodology and Decoding Our Purchases: The Psychological and Economic Trap of Illusion

### Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Discernment

Faced with the market's growing complexity of this interface between faith and practice, a single disciplinary prism is never enough to fully understand its nature. For that reason, the methodology chosen for this study is the rigorous intersection of three distinct disciplines: economic analysis (consumer choice theory, utility theory) to understand what and how our purchases are composed, behavioral psychology (bounded rationality, cognitive biases) to explain how consumers are so deeply vulnerable to this market of illusion, and, of course, theological framework, which will be the necessary theological filter and, in the end, provide the moral "why" that can help us distinguish the pure from the materialistic exploitation. This truly interdisciplinary approach is a must in a well-rounded study of how market forces and spiritual beliefs overlap in our buying habits.

### Emotional Utility: The Price of the Promise

Consumption will be analyzed through the lens of consumer choice theory. However, in the flourishing market, there is a significant departure from perfect rationality. This is precisely the reason why the Christian ethical framework finds all its methodological strength, both as a filter and a de-biasing mechanism.

Utility is the satisfaction or perceived benefit that a consumer feels in consumption (Bentham, 1789/2000). In this market, the utility is taken to an emotional and symbolic

level. Organic food is about health care, and at the higher level, stewardship “virtue” (Dubois & Laurent, 2018). The meditation app offers a shortcut to inner emotional balance. The consumer, for the same functional purpose, is willing to pay a premium on the added value (meaning) of transformation and virtue, an added value that has nothing quantitative. This non-quantifiable added value in the field of health contributes to perceived flourishing and, thus, a significant increase in willingness to pay a higher price.

**Illustration: Alkaline Water.** In the functional beverage industry, some alkaline waters are sold for 10 times more than generic spring water. The main benefit claimed is neither superior hydration nor a scientifically proven value. It is the emotionally charged promise of optimal body pH and cellular detoxification.

**Expert Opinion.** Dr. Élise Moreau (2019), a consumer behavior expert, states that “Consumers value not only the tangible attributes of a product, but also the emotional and symbolic benefits they associate with it.” She adds, “The modern consumer values the story, the hope of transformation, far more than the tangible product itself. We are selling symbolic salvation, not mineral water” (p. 112).

### **Bounded Rationality and Information Asymmetry**

Perfect rationality principle, we now know, is rarely, if ever, followed. Bounded rationality (Simon, 1957) considers that we choose within the confines of our cognitive biases and decision-making heuristics (mental shortcuts). In our search for flourishing, consumers are prey to information asymmetry (Akerlof, 1970) due to the fact that they often have less information than sellers, who, on the contrary, have the means to mislead consumers via labels.

Emotions such as fear of illness, need for belonging, body image issues, or optimistic bias lead to irrational purchases (Kahneman, 2011). The emotional and – sometimes, existential – investment we make in the desire to flourish makes us, as consumers, vulnerable to less-informed purchases that often promise fast or even miraculous results.

### **Case Study 1: The Sophie Dilemma – Detox Debt**

Sophie, a 32-year-old woman from California, spent hundreds of dollars on detox supplements she discovered through influencer marketing. “I was so obsessed with ‘purifying’ my body that I never really cared about scientific evidence. It was more emotional than rational,” she explained.

**Key Fact.** In the United States, 48% of social media users made impulsive purchases after seeing something online, and 68% regretted it afterwards (MoneyPlus Advice,

2024). Also, 32% of Americans trust the advice of their favorite influencers (Money Geek, 2025). The flourishing market sidesteps any economic logic by piggybacking on psychological biases and vulnerabilities.

**Expert Opinion.** “The consumer is not a rational machine. Their decisions are deeply anchored in their emotions, their memories, the stories that they tell themselves about themselves and the world” (Chen, 2017, p. 48).

## **The Brand: Promise of Transformation and Social Identity**

In an emotional market in which the consumer is confused by too many offers, the brand is the cornerstone of a flourishing economy. A strong brand sells a promise of identity, aspiration, and solution (Keller, 2013).

- **Trust and Credibility:** A trustworthy and expertise-inspiring brand is essential in the health and wellness sector. A user is more likely to pay more for a promise of flourishing that he or she believes is attainable.
- **Identity and Belonging (Signaling):** Signaling (Spence, 1973) is the economic process through which a firm communicates credible information to the market. In the same way, flourishing brands allow a consumer to express an identity and signal a social status or a set of values. The brand choice is, thus, an identity choice.

## **Case Study 2: The Signaling of the Wellness Tribe**

The high-end sportswear market is a clear demonstration of the fact that we buy identity first, fabric second. Buying premium \$150 leggings is a way of signaling status, dedication, and belonging to the exclusive wellness tribe. The price is not a bug, but a feature. The recent explosion of yoga retreats is a similar case with a very strong social dimension of being in community and social status gain (Thompson & Williams, 2019, p. 105).

**Expert Opinion.** “The most successful flourishing brand is not one that only sells a product, but one that sells a transformation. A better version of oneself, a solution to a quest for meaning. It is an extremely powerful psychological and emotional lever in modern commerce,” (Dubois, 2021, p. 88).

## **Demand Elasticity and the Price of Flourishing**

Price elasticity of demand is a measure of the sensitivity of the quantity demanded to price changes (Perloff, 2018). Essential health-related products are, thus, often relatively inelastic (consumers buy flourishing despite price changes). Luxury or discretionary products have more elastic demand.

**Illustration.** Organic food in the United States has experienced a significant increase in price without a commensurate decrease in purchases from health-conscious consumers (LETIS, 2024). It shows a relatively inelastic demand. On the other hand, the demand for a niche superfood or a premium subscription to a meditation app will drop much faster in the event of a price increase. The more a product is perceived as necessary for essential flourishing, the more a consumer is willing to pay.

## **The Christian Framework: The Four Pillars of Discernment for Authentic Flourishing**

The Christian consumer is not called to maximize personal utility but to ground their decisions in eternal principles. Faith gives them an ethical filter and a de-biasing factor for enlightened consumption (Chester, 2013). Injecting these values into the model adjusts the input variables of the classical economic model. It puts the eternal relation value above the ephemeral temporal utility that the market aspires to maximize.

### **Pillar 1: Responsible Management (Stewardship) - Stop Buying Your Own Slavery**

Stewardship is based on the recognition that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). God has entrusted it to us, and we are responsible for its management to serve Him and our neighbor better (Piper, 2007).

**Application.** Expenditures must support our capacity to serve others. Stewardship covers all decisions that directly affect our physical and mental health: diet, physical activity, rest, self-care, and learning. It protects us from body idolatry and servitude to an unattainable ideal of beauty (Colossians 2:23).

**The Danger.** Debt for the obsession with physical perfection is a form of slavery. In the United States, more than 100 million people are in debt due to medical bills or insurance denials (Levey & Satija, 2022). A wrong decision passes us from steward to slave – a debt that binds us to the world instead of setting us free for God’s plan.

### **Pillar 2: Contentment and Moderation – Winning Freedom from the “Always More” Race**

Contentment (positive state of satisfaction regardless of external possessions) (Philippians 4:11–13) and moderation (avoidance of excess) (Titus 2:12) are the antidote to chronic dissatisfaction fueled by wellness culture.

**Application.** Contentment is active gratitude that sets us free from the permanent need to possess to feel complete or fulfilled. It calls us to be a heart full of what we already

have. Moderation is the will to avoid excess and the pointless accumulation of marginal products.

**The Contentment Test.** Is this purchase made from a place of gratitude for what I have or anxiety about what I do not have?

**Expert Opinion.** Pastor David Miller (2015) reminds us that “True flourishing is not found in the latest miracle pill or the trendy, exclusive diet, but in the contentment of the heart and the soul at peace with God,” (p. 102).

### **Pillar 3: Wisdom and Discernment – Filtering the False Prophets of Wellness**

Wisdom (practical judgment, proven by experience) and discernment (the capacity to make distinctions) (Carson, 1984) are two fundamental biblical virtues in the face of information asymmetry. The consumer must be critical, check their sources, beware of promises of miraculous and immediate results, and question a professional.

**Application.** Wisdom is the filter of veracity. It supposes a critical shifting of the product claims. A Christian consumer might ask themselves the following questions:

- Do I really need this expense to flourish?
- Is this promise of flourishing supported by recognized and solid scientific evidence, or is it, above all, emotional marketing?
- Does my purchase separate me from God and others or make me selfish?

**Illustration (Training and Coaching).** For certain complex purchases (coaching, real estate), wisdom consists of seeking the wise counsel of a reliable person and a collective vetting rather than only that of the seller’s authority. This peer-based discernment protects us where individual research is powerless.

### **Pillar 4: Love for Neighbor – Making Consumption an Act of Justice**

Love for neighbor (Matthew 22:39) requires that our choices have a collective scope. Personal flourishing cannot be dissociated from the flourishing of the community and creation (Genesis 2:15).

**Application.** Choosing fair trade products, being transparent about their supply chain, and guaranteeing social and environmental justice becomes an act of love. It means opting for ethically made sportswear that guarantees fair wages, environmentally friendly detergents, or organic and local foods, even if more expensive.

**Illustration.** A Christian consumer can choose to buy their sports clothing from a brand that guarantees fair-trade practices and fair wages all along the production line. Or they

can favor an organic restaurant with a reasonable local sourcing policy. These decisions contribute to human and planetary flourishing.

**Expert Opinion.** Father Jean-Luc Dubois (2016) reminds us that “The well-being of our body is intrinsically linked to that of our community and the planet in which we live. Personal flourishing must never be bought at the price of injustice to others” (p. 65).

### **Beyond Individual Choice: Practical Advice for a Flourishing Life**

How can we apply these principles every day when facing tempting offers?

**Define your deep "why":** Are you moved by a true need for flourishing, by external constraints, or simply by the desire for a shortcut? Honest self-reflection is essential.

**Do your research and compare it with discernment:** Do not take the word of a brand or an influencer. Be a critical consumer in the service of your flourishing. Seek to verify recognized sources.

**Opt for simple and moderate first:** The simplest and least expensive solutions are often the most natural and lasting for flourishing (eating well, exercising, sleeping well). Multiplying products for only marginal benefits will eventually become a source of clutter and anxiety.

**Think true cost and true impact:** The ecological footprint and the cost to the community or future generations are often hidden. Choosing sustainable and ethical businesses is also an act of stewardship and contributes to a more just and collective flourishing.

**Invest in relationships and service:** Flourishing is inextricably linked to the quality of our relationships. Quality time with loved ones and community involvement are more important for health than a new fitness tracker. Service to others is a deep source of flourishing (Acts 20:35).

**Practice contentment and gratitude:** Be grateful for what you have. Cultivate thankfulness for the simple gifts of life. True flourishing comes from a state of mind and healthy life-giving relationships.

**Seek spiritual discernment:** Pray for wisdom in your consumption choices. Ask God for the grace to be a good steward, to be generous with your purchasing power, and to give a higher meaning to your life choices, to be able to flourish as much as possible, and bring Him glory.



## Conclusion: Towards Enlightened, Ethical, and Spiritual Consumption for Flourishing

The flourishing market, with its permanent cascade of promises and offerings, represents a major ethical and economic issue. Skillfully, it profits from our bounded rationality to monetize a deep spiritual aspiration. However, this challenge is also an opportunity. By applying a Christian perspective and turning consumption into an act of stewardship rather than a simple act of desire, we commit to the path of authentic flourishing.

Our four-pillar discernment framework—Stewardship, Contentment, Wisdom, and Love for Neighbor—equips consumers with concrete tools to deconstruct the marketing illusion and to align their purchasing choices with their deeper values. Faith transforms consumption from a source of anxiety and chronic dissatisfaction into a path towards freedom and contribution to the common good (Chester, 2013).

Breaking free from the always more cycle, the Christian consumer can redirect their purchasing power toward goods and services that contribute to lasting flourishing, that honor the body as a temple, and that serve the common good. Ultimately, true flourishing is not a commodity, but the fruit of an aligned, intentional, and generous life. These principles are necessary not only for individuals but for the building of a more ethical market and a more just society.

### Act Today: The 3-Step Action Plan

1. **Ask yourself the deep “why”:** Is my purchase motivated by a real need (Stewardship) or by fear and social pressure (Illusion)?
2. **Apply a discernment filter:** Before purchasing, make sure the product claim is supported by verified evidence (Wisdom) and is not a vague promise.
3. **Invest relationally:** Give priority to expenditures that support healthy relationships, service to others (Love for Neighbor), and gratitude (Contentment), because lasting flourishing is always found in connection, never in possession.

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### About the Author

Armél Kono is from Cameroon. He lives in Chesapeake, Virginia (USA) with his wife and four children. For over a decade, he has focused on organizational issues relating to management, marketing, strategy, distribution, business ethics, and organizational design. Drawing on his expertise in corporate culture and performance, Armél Kono has co-developed systems with various organizations to meet market demands, helping them achieve operational and ethical excellence.

He is the founder of Hippomind, a marketing and strategy consulting firm. He also founded AurPur, a company whose core business is commercial and residential cleaning, with a green focus. Armel Kono has held strategic positions within multinationals based in Cameroon, his home country.

He holds two master's degrees, one in organizational management and the other in marketing strategy, from the Advanced School of Economics and Business at the University of Douala in Cameroon. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Business at the School of Business and Leadership (SBL) at Regent University in Virginia, USA. Armel Kono approaches problem-solving with a collaborative, critical, and systemic approach to understand the underlying mechanisms of organizational success.

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