The seemingly opposing socio-cultural forces of traditionalization and modernization have to be closely recognized in our attempt to profile the emerging Sri Lankan-consumer. The force of traditionalization gathered momentum in the post-1956 period, while the impetus of modernization was felt particularly in the post-1977 period. Escaping the attention of many, the two forces of traditionalization and modernization have been converging, over the recent past, giving rise to the post-modern consumer.

The chief implication for marketers in this regard is to find focal areas of fusion, and avoid an attempt to either hark back to the past for its own sake, or become overly modernist, and thus address only a small and alienated group of consumers, at best.

Discerning the fine line of fusion between the traditional and the modern impulses of the consumer is the challenge that the Sri Lankan marketer encounters. He also needs to identify the disparate socio-cultural and urban-rural groups that are variously impacted by post-modernist tendencies, which the marketer can ignore at his peril. Indeed, postmodernism appears to be a megatrend that has begun to unfold across the Sri Lankan marketplace at varying levels of intensity.

Key Words: Socio-cultural forces, Traditionalization, Modernization, Sri Lankan consumer, Post-modern consumer, Socio-cultural and urban-rural groups, Post-modernist tendencies, Post modernism, Sri Lankan market play.
1. Introduction

Few, if any, would argue the wisdom of placing the customer at the centre of business. It is a foregone conclusion. However, the Marketing mantra of the consumer as the hub of everything the company does, continues to be chanted without much evidence of its practice in many organizations.

The problem of the lack of a “customer focus” and its solution may not lie in the realms of mindset, education and attitude. The problem may be structural. The very location of Marketing within the modern firm means that, it exists to pursue each individual firm’s aims: basically to sell more, more profitably. Marketers within each firm may embrace the primacy of the “customer focus” as a venerable dictum, but only to the extent that it helps to achieve their ends. In this context, “customer focus” becomes just another way of looking in the mirror: how to sell what we make. This probably is the reason for the marketer’s growing competence for telling the customer, “Here I am, and this is my offer”, rather than listening intently to the customer who is crying out, “This is me, and here is what I need” (Liyanage U., 2009).

Listening to the Sri Lankan customer today is a task that is by no means easy. The seeming contradictions and the evident complexities of the customers’ needs are only compounded by their dynamic nature. The challenge of the Sri Lankan marketer is not to take one facet of the customer and leave out the other, because they seem to be at variance with each other, but rather, to see the apparent contradictions as veritable paradoxes, as competing realities that co-exist. The dominant forces of tradition and modernity are to be treated as such.

2. The force of Traditionalization

Definitions: The Oxford English Dictionary describes tradition as “customs, opinion or belief handed down to posterity especially orally or by practice”. According to Gross (as cited by Cook, 1993), tradition “paves past practices and beliefs which have a certain moral or spiritual prestige, and it would also link at least three generations, providing a sense of connectivity”.

Clearly, tradition is the connecting tissue holding generations together, those who live in the present, those who lived in the past and those who are yet to be born. Gross (1993) highlights the fact that a radical deviation from tradition leads to isolation, a loss of historical consciousness which indicates the broken continuity of generations. He adds that “tradition is a psychological prop” without which one would become disoriented and dysfunctional in society. Hence, traditions are a sort of a moral force which people use as a “security blanket” to live in the modern world.

Drivers: What are the forces at work, and the drivers that make a “harking back to the past and valuing that which is traditional” a reality in the Sri Lankan context? Indeed, what are the underpinnings of the return, and in some ways, to an indigenous and traditional ethos, and value system in modern society?
The answers to these vital questions with respect to the process of traditionalization lie in the evolution of our society through three distinct epochs: pre-1956, post-1956, and post-1977.

One of the main outcomes of colonization has been the spread of western values, ideas and institutions in the colony. Many social scientists believed that this would pave the way for a transition from tradition to modernity. Empirical evidence, however, has shown that the result has been the creation of a small westernized, native elite, and the ways of the larger population have not radically altered. In fact, after independence, the instruments of modernization, now in the hands of native leaders, have been employed to reinforce primordial identities and traditional institutions. As a result, traditional social institutions and cultural practices did not disappear (Hettige, 1995). In this larger context, it is not difficult to discern three epochs that were referred to as a basis for understanding the changing face of traditionalization.

The pre-1956 intelligentsia kept the wheels of the then administrative structure moving for the ruling classes, and produced through the schools and the universities, the ideologies, which gave the pivotal intellectual momentum to society. These ideologies were actively propagated through the mass media which were at their command. This social group belonged to an upper middle class which was bilingual, and at its upper end, cosmopolitan and markedly western orientated. One is reminded of satirist, the late Sooty Banda’s caricature of the western oriental gentleman (WOG) as opposed to the truly oriental gentleman (TOG). This “Kalu Sudha” or the pukkah sahib was then exposed to the socio-political currents of the post-1956 era.

The class of intelligentsia that followed, post-1956, comprises almost in its entirety products of free education. They were essentially monolingual and operated within the state sector. They were clearly rooted in the soil and identified themselves with the generality of the people. Management and administrative cadres in the public sector, school principals, teachers and the university academia were the chief actors of this intelligentsia, in contrast to their alienated western oriented and cosmopolitan predecessors.

Importantly, the two social classes do exist at present in ideological and behavioural terms. The first, the western oriented class has lost its hegemony to the one that followed. However, the vestiges of the former and its ideological imprints are evident in the generation that followed. This social class is one which could be referred to as the Traditional Middle Class I (TMC I). The one that followed, as delineated earlier, is referred to as the Traditional Middle Class II (TMC II). Importantly, the power struggle and the conflicts between the two classes are manifest in many domains. The seats of power and authority in politics have shifted from the TMC I to TMC II. In professional contexts, and in the country’s formal private sector, the hegemony of TMC I continues though its marked decline is plain to see.

Matters of dress sense, pronunciation and intonation of the English language and its very use are often at the butt end of “indictments” on TMC II. Expressions such as “godaya” (backward bumpkin) used by TMC I to describe members of TMC II are indicative of this.

The key point that emerges from the foregoing analyses is that an indigenous, local value system and behavioural pattern have been firmly established in the Sri Lankan social landscape.
in the wake of the increasing dominance of the TMC II in the post-1956 period. The force of
traditionalization is indeed real.

**Expressions**: How does the force of traditionalization manifest itself and what is the tangible
evidence that would suggest its impact on society?

**Dress** is an indicator. The return of the “national dress” for men, not only in the political
domain, but outside it, is one manifestation of the force of traditionalization. The conscious
use of the vernacular, and of Sinhala expressions by the “descendents” of TMC I in order to
empathise with their audiences is another expression of the force of traditionalization.
**Salutations** such as “ayubovan” by the typically English–speaking and western oriented elite
are becoming apt and, in fact, fashionable.

The cinema and the **teledramas** also provide evidence of the force of traditionalization.
Teledramas such as *Yashoravaya* in the mid 1980s and a plethora of such teledramas thereafter
suggest the value that is increasingly placed on harking back to our traditions, and an outright
rejection of the lumpen and overtly western forces at work. Baladeva, the chief protagonist
of *Yashoravaya*, is the elder brother of a family of an aged couple and four children living in
the same house. Baladeva who adorns the traditional national dress and is rooted in tradition
is dismayed to observe his brothers and sisters pushed and pulled by the currents of
westernization and modernization. Their life styles are characterized by a ceaseless effort to
possess the symbols of success; their attempt at conspicuous consumption and the resultant
“uprootedness” and alienation from a socio-cultural milieu, which is truly theirs. Similar themes
have underpinned many teledramas and it is argued that they have provided a sense of “feel
good” and well-being among its viewers.

**Food habits** and **musical preferences** are other indicators that help measure the force of
traditionalization.

It has been argued that significant changes in food habits and musical tastes are typically
indicative of fundamental social changes. In the year 2000, Ogilvy and Mather conducted a
survey of food habits in Asia. Almost 50% of Sri Lankans interviewed said that “foreign food is
bad influence on my culture”, compared to 15% of Singaporeans. In Asia, the survey found
that Sri Lankans were the most sceptical in regard to food manufactures’ ability to re-create
authentic tastes. As many as 60% of Sri Lankans believe that their food is not as healthy as it
used to be.

The survey findings suggest that the Sri Lankan consumer continues to be entrenched in
tradition and food rituals. The consumer continues to embrace the richness and the relatively
non-complicated nature of the past, its food diversity and culture. It is the ritual, the involvement
and the elaborate preparation that the consumer is so accustomed to in regard to food that
makes the consumer concerned about the credibility of food brands. On the one hand, there
appears to be considerable concern that brands are taking short cuts in the preparation of a
meal, and on the other, that brands are ignoring the traditions and rituals pertaining to food, its
preparation and consumption. (Ogilvy and Mather, 2000).
The study indicates that the mother, more often than not, makes decisions regarding food for the family. Confused by the choice of food available, disorientated by conflicting rules and advice, and worse still, pressured by the loss of the traditional cooking skills of her mother, there appears to be a need for manufacturers, media and other authorities to be proactive in helping the mothers. By contrasting the mother’s ability to retain cooking skills against each country’s perceptions about how important those skills are to the bedrock of the family, three key clusters were isolated in the study.

In those markets where the mother’s ability to retain her cooking skills was low and yet whose cooking ability was central to the family’s sense of togetherness, mothers are in crisis. Thailand, Singapore and Korea are the key markets that fall into this sector. Secondly, in some markets, mothers are under pressure to perform and retain their skills base. Keeping her abreast and out of crisis is a task food brands should accomplish. Thirdly, where cultures place less importance on mothers’ cooking ability to strengthen family togetherness, manufacturers should recognize that these mothers too are open to new challenges. Here again, through the food survey, we see the traditional nature of the Sri Lankan consumer.

A survey conducted by Org-Marg Smart (1999) indicated that across diverse SEC groupings, the popularity of singers, whose music underpins a semi-classical and traditional base, were the most popular, rather than those with an overt western orientation. The overwhelming popularity of Gunadasa Kapuge, for instance, is indicative of this fact.
People’s Awards conducted by the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM), based on a nationwide survey conducted by the Nielsan Research Company in the years 2007 to 2009, interestingly showed that the most popular actress was Malini Fonseka and the most popular singers, Ameradeva and Nanda Malini. This is an indication of the value that the larger society places on “old forms” of music and drama which, importantly, are not considered to be “old fashioned”.

Values and Ideology are no doubt important indicators to measure the force of traditionalization. Are the old values in place, and have they been eroded by modernity and the influences of westernization and consumerism? An examination of these key questions with respect to Sri Lanka youth would be meaningful because they are most exposed, and are sensitive to the forces of modernization.

The National Youth Survey (2002 and 2009) indicates the dominance of traditional values among the country’s youth.

- Most youth (75%) stated that their main criteria for selecting a marriage partner were: good character, love, affection, care and companionship.

- Only 9% (male) and 6% (female) stated that divorce was acceptable, under any circumstances.

- Most females (75%) and males (65%) stated that pre-marital sex was unacceptable. It also appeared that the views on premarital sex were more relaxed and permissive among the Sinhala respondents than the Tamil and Muslim respondents (Emmanual Sara, NYS Conference paper, 2010).

- A total of 89% stated that prostitution of any form was unacceptable and that homosexuality was unacceptable (89%). Use of illicit drugs in any form was unacceptable among the youth (NYS, 2002).

- Matching the horoscopes of marital partners: As many as 48% of youth across ethnic groups consider the practice to be important compared to 70% Tamil youth (NYS, 2002).

- As many as 80% of youth consider themselves to be religious. In fact, 93% of them participate in religious activities on a regular basis. Religiosity does not vary with educational attainment, nor are urban-rural differences significant in this regard (NYS, 2002).

3. Force of Modernization

Definitions: Modernity is defined as “belonging to the present or to recent times, and not to the old or ancient; contemporary, current, present day, often a deliberate departure from tradition (adapted from Gross (1977) and cited in Udunuwaru and Liyanage, (2006).
In a Sri Lankan social context, exposure particularly to western values, ideas and institutions has had an influence on many socio-demographic classes. The influence on some has of course been greater than on others. The urban youth are a large group that has been most impacted. Here, a consumerist ideology is evident as a manifestation of the forces of modernization and westernization.

**Drivers:** What are the key drivers of modernization and how have they become a force that has shaped the thinking and behavioural patterns of the Sri Lankan consumer?

The post-1977 period, subsequent to the pre-1956 and the post-1956 periods that were referred to earlier in the delineation of the drives of traditionalization, is one in which modernity emerges as a social force and emerging pattern.

The liberalization policies, post-1977, not only helped jettison the rules and regulations that hitherto had impeded the free movement of goods, services and finances between the country and the world outside, but also substantially broadened the sphere of influence of many state agencies in areas such as internal trade, licensing, imports, exports and foreign exchange transactions. These steps created considerable space for the organised private sector and private entrepreneurs, both big and small, to embark upon various business activities. In addition to export-oriented operations that directly benefited from the new policy regime over the last two decades, many other sectors of the domestic economy have flourished in the domain of the private sector. Banking, finance, wholesale and retail trade, transport, communication, tourism, health services, legal services and construction are other sectors in which private firms have been actively involved (Hettige, 1995). As was observed earlier, progress in these sectors has continued, unabated.

Significantly, unlike in the public sector where salary and wage differentials are contained within reasonable limits based upon equity considerations, senior private sector executives receive salaries and a package of fringe benefits, which include, *inter alia*, the reimbursement of defined expenses and the use of automobiles. High salaries and attractive perquisites enjoyed by the senior executives of the private firms are comparable with those of their counterparts in the export production sector. A survey by Ernst and Young (2003) indicates that over a 10-year period (i.e., 1993-2002), the remuneration package of CEO’s of the top 25% of the companies, increased by 5.40 times, senior level managers by 4.17 times, and of middle level managers by 3.67 times. Ernst & Young confirm that increases over the last two years have followed a similar trend.

In addition to the entrepreneurs and top-rung executives of both the export production sector and the rest of the organised private sector, the liberalization policies pursued have resulted in a marked expansion of the urban informal sector, characterised by the proliferation of retail and wholesale outlets, providers of goods and passenger transport and an array of personal services. The expansion of this urban informal sector provided business opportunities for a significant number of urban entrepreneurs, hitherto marginalised in a closed economy.

Moreover, the open economy has brought forth a large number of development oriented non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Given their large operating budgets, usually financed...
by one or more donor agencies or by their parent-organisations, primarily in the West, they have become an important source of well-paid employment for a significant number of people with the requisite social attributes, skills and experience (Hettige, 1995).

The aforementioned groups that directly benefited from the shift from a nation-state framework to an emerging transnational socio-economic framework comprise the vital new urban middle class (NUMC). The significant discretionary incomes in the hands of the NUMC accompanied by its distinctive western orientation and expressive life styles, increasingly shaped by the exposure to television, internet/e-mail and foreign travel, in particular, have thrown segments of Sri Lanka’s society into the age of modern consumerism. Multiple television networks, the proliferation of modern restaurants in and around Colombo, luxurious office buildings and hotels, rapid expansion of the advertising industry, the increased number of luxury cars on the city streets, the rapid escalation in the use of mobile phones, the increasing number of credit card holders, are all tell-tale signs of the transformation of the urban landscape. The increasing number of up-scale private hospitals and nursing homes, the up-scale houses, rapid expansion of International Schools, and higher education in universities overseas essentially cater to the NUMC (Liyanage U., 2009).

The foregoing analyses spell the economic drivers that in the main have brought about the force of modernization that has increasingly shaped the thinking and behaviour of the Sri Lankan consumer.

**Expressions:** Conspicuous consumption and the overt life style of the NUMC are largely observed in a small segment of the population, particularly in the large cities. Importantly, the impact of the consumerist ideology is far more pervasive and has, in fact, spread even to the remotest villages. How else could one plausibly explain the increasing availability of Coca-Cola, instead of home-spun “sweet tea” in some remote nook or distant corner of the country or the adoption of western fashions by village folks in regard to clothing in particular? In this context, it is noteworthy that until recently, village youth who could not secure white collar employment and are not proficient in English did not wear the “western dress” for fear of being ridiculed by status-conscious villagers. New symbols of this nature have travelled through television, multi-national sales networks and migrants returning home from the Middle East, and have reached a broad spectrum of rural segments. The exposure to television should be singled out in this regard (Liyanage U., 1999).

The consumerist ideology championed by the NUMC has thus reached all corners of the country with varying impacts. Indeed, as observed earlier, those who are denied access to the NUMC life-style and do not possess the requisite socio-economic attributes constitute the vast majority of the country’s population. This, however, does not necessarily mean that all those who are so denied tend to abhor this life-style as illegitimate and immoral (Hettige, 1995). Many, in fact, admire and attempt to emulate the NUMC life style, at least in symbolic fashion. Herein lies the pivotal marketing implication of the emergence and spread of the consumerist ideology. Marketers may well endeavour to recognise the changing definitions of social status and the redrawing of the contours of social class structures as a direct consequence of the evolving social trends that have been recognized.
Status and individual identity are increasingly defined not in terms of social position (i.e., who you are) but rather, in terms of lifestyle (i.e., what you have). In other words, consumption patterns and acquisition of status symbols are increasingly replacing one’s occupation and heritage as key determinants of social status and personal identity. As already stated, the rising viewership of television in a transnational framework has progressively coloured people’s assessment of success criteria. “The good life” is increasingly defined in terms of ownership of things, and those who are privy to such ownership and consumption are held in high esteem in a rapidly changing social milieu. The phenomenal growth of the consumer durables market, although aided by the fall in prices of consumer durables with rapid changes in technology, and more recently that of the mobile phones market cannot be plausibly explained only in terms of economic factors. The explanation also lies in the emerging social forces and ideological shifts that have been delineated.

Traditionally, a wedding ceremony took place at the residence of the bride. A formal wedding reception in a hotel hosted by city-based urban people is a relatively recent development. This practice has now spread to the villages, something almost inconceivable a couple of decades ago. More recently, “home coming” receptions are increasingly held away from the bridgroom’s home - a case of conspicuous consumption. As another case in point, one could observe the garish display of opulence and overt forms of consumption by members of the NUMC in Nuwara Eliya during the festive season, which is a far cry from the staid behaviour of the typical holidaymaker of the past who principally sought solitude and calm in salubrious climes. The traditional pilgrimage to Sri Pada has lost its sanctity for many and is a mere pleasure-seeking endeavour. On poya days you see more people going to the sea-beach in the evening than to the temple. Yet another phenomenon that is observed is the increasing number of locals who travel for pleasure within the country, and the increasing number of the rich who travel abroad during vacations.

The attention paid to personal care, particularly by the young and the middle-aged, is a further aspect that demonstrates the urge to mimic the west. Once again the television has been used largely to market these products to a wider audience, with some programmes specifically devoted to how to use various personal care products and how grooming can change the appearance of a person. Personal care products account for 18% of the branded FCMG market in Sri Lanka (A C Nielsan, 2009).

The shift of emphasis from a social position to a consumption-based lifestyle is again reflected in the remarkable change that has taken place in the way different strata of people occupy seats in local cinema halls. Two decades ago one could observe the uninhibited manner in which people from different social strata would occupy the “appropriate” class of seats in a cinema hall. The poor would almost invariably sit in the “gallery”, followed by lower middle class viewers, and so on. Interestingly, the gallery and second class seats became sparse and owners of cinema halls did respond accordingly by reducing the number of seats in the “gallery” from 42,261 in 1980 to 8500 as early as in 1991 (Central Bank Report, 1992). While there has been a general decline in cinema attendance consequent to the spread of television, the shortfalls witnessed in the gallery is not paralleled by a decline in respect of the more expensive seat categories (Hettige, 1995). Interestingly, most cinema halls do not any longer have the “gallery”. Clearly, people from lower social strata intending to buy more expensive tickets is again indicative of the emerging social patterns.
Traditionally, the honorific title "Mahattaya" was employed to refer to feudal/state functionaries (via, "Korale or Vidane Mahattaya"). Interestingly, up-scale traders who evince a consumption-based life style and by conventional classification belong to a lower social stratum are now referred to as "mudalali mahattaya" (or plain "mahattaya"), a clear manifestation of consumption replacing occupation and heritage as the defining criterion of social status and personal identity.

The increasing and significant penetration of particular products in the FMCS category is again indicative of the force of modernization. The growth trajectory of many FMCS products has continued unabated. Over the past two years alone, significant growth can be witnessed in the following self-expressive (rather than functional) products.

Over 30% value growth is witnessed in the following self-expressive product categories as a comparison between year-to-date statistics of April 2009 versus April 2010 (TNS Lanka, May 2010).

- Creams and lotions
- Deodorants
- Perfumes and Colognes
- Sanitary napkins
- Shampoos and Conditioners
- Face wash

Based on a study of regular users of fast food restaurants in Colombo and Kandy by TNS Lanka (2010), the following interesting trend towards modernity is evident.

Table 01: Fast Food Restaurant Regular User Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIO – Economic Class</th>
<th>Percent of Regular Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEC A1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEC A2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEC B1</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEC B2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEC C</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEC D</td>
<td>01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TNS Lanka 2010

Nearly 62% of the customer base of fast food restaurants in Sri Lanka consists of lower SEC groups.
The increasing penetration of supermarkets in urban and particularly rural areas augers well for the growth of modern trade.

**Table 02: Supermarket Penetration Growth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>May 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TNS Lanka May, 2010

Another key manifestation of modernization is the brand as apposed to price sensitivity as is evident in the penetration of the more expensive Dulux paints. The same pattern is witnessed in a number of FMCG and household goods categories.

**Table 03: Household Penetration of Decorative Paints**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Household Penetration (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dulux</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilac</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Paints</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permoglaze</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TNS Lanka, May 2010

### 4. Force of Postmodernization

**Definitions:** The Compact Oxford English dictionary defines postmodernism, “as a style and concept in the arts, characterized by distrust of theories and ideologies and by drawing of the attention to conventions.” Webster’s dictionary defines it as “… movements in reaction to modernism that are typically characterized by a return to traditional material and forms (as in architecture) while not totally abandoning elements of the modern form”.

In architecture, for example, in Sri Lanka, one witnesses the growing tendency among the SEC groupings, in particular to use cement floors and old, traditional benches and such furniture, typical of a pre-modern era. Interestingly, the lower SEC groups are attempting to upgrade from cement floors to glossy floor tiles, while the upper SEC groups in a rather strange way are attempting to upgrade through a return to, say, cement floors in the design and construction of their houses. However, there is of course no attempt to jettison the modern equipment and paraphernalia that provide the conveniences and comforts of modern living.

The coming together, indeed the confluence of the forces of traditionalization and modernity brings forth a third distinct “stand alone” force of postmodernism and with it, the emergence
of the postmodern consumer. The force of postmodernism is a synthesis of the forces of traditionalization and modernity discussed earlier, but, importantly, it transcends both, and has an identity and force of its own.

**Drivers:** The emergence of postmodernism is a reaction to modernism, as was first witnessed in architecture. It was a reaction to blandness, hostility and utopianism. Definitive postmodern architecture such as the work of Michael Graves rejected the notion of “pure form” or “perfect” architectonic detail; instead, conspicuously drawing from all methods, materials, forms and colours available to architects. The emphasis on personal, subjective preferences and variety over the objective, ultimate truths and principles is characteristic of postmodernism. (Wikipedia, Postmodernism).

Similar drivers as those described above bring forth a behavioural consumption pattern that has the features of both tradition and modernity. Indeed, it is a fusion, a confluence, of forces, and the postmodern consumer can and must be seen as distinct from the traditional and modern consumer.

The key driver here is the avoidance of the possibility of being uprooted and alienated from the deep-going social programmes and processes on the one hand, and the avoidance of being stuck in the past and old fashioned, on the other. This struggle to embrace the “new”, but not abandon the “old”, altogether, provides the consumer with the psycho-social energy to spawn a combination of the two, not one sitting next to the other, but an active inter-play of the two to produce a single core.

The rise of the postmodernist consumer can be illustrated as follows:

![figure 02: The rise of the postmodern consumer](image)

The movements of traditionalization and modernization as described previously are illustrated above. The shaded area in the Figure 02 above illustrates the space in which the postmodern consumer emerges.
Adapting the conceptualization of Herbert Mead, it is argued that the duality of the “I” (the private, inner self which is not readily evident to oneself and arguably, shaped largely by forces of traditionalization, especially in early childhood) and the “Me” (the public self which expresses itself situationally and is projective, and arguably shaped largely by the forces of modernization), do co-exist.

They can be illustrated as follows:

*Figure 03: The Co-existence of the I and Me*

The hybrid *IME* or the *MOD-TRADI* consumer has the characteristics of both strands, but as described earlier, has an identity and a behavioural pattern of his own.

**Expressions:** the dress code of men, the traditional national dress-type top or shirt, and the western trousers are followed by many politicians. It is not uncommon among the business community, too. The expensive sarong and shirt combine is an acceptable form of dress at many elite social gatherings. The increasing preference for cotton and linen as opposed to
silky, synthetic clothing is also commonplace among the upper economic classes. It is increasingly followed by other groups.

The traditional saree is now reserved for special and formal occasions and many females, especially of the upper socio-economic classes, now wear, instead, trousers and blouses, the latter being an improvisation of the western form. Many professional women now are also attired in a near unisex trouser-blazer outfit.

A vivid metaphor that characterizes and portrays the postmodern “IME” or the “Modtradi” consumer is a youth clad in a faded pair of jeans and a branded T-shirt, and the adornment of the conspicuous “pirith nool”. The religious “pirith nool” thick and showy is a symbol of traditionalization and the pair of faded jeans is an expression of modernity. Both co-exist and are congruent in the eyes of the post-modern consumer. Paradoxically, the “pirith nool” now plays the projective “Me” role, and the faded jeans are no longer an imposition on the reflective “I”, the private self. There is a fusion of the two symbols and they co-exist in harmony!

**Musical** preferences are another manifestation of the force of postmodernism. The local Superstar television events have captured the imagination of a nation and appeal to a wide audience across all SEC groupings. These mega TV events are unmistakably modelled on the American Idol, but their localization is equally unmistakable. Interestingly, the judges at the events, unlike their American counterparts are wont to shower praise on the young and talented participants. Criticism is spared and an attempt to introduce a critical judge in one event to make the counterpoint, as it were, seemed contrived and rehearsed. The local feminine cultural ethos as opposed to the masculine American cultural values is another indication of an apparently western and modern **behavioural** orientation (ME) but a traditional **attitudinal** orientation (I). The new “IME” consumer vividly plays its role on the stage of the Superstar.

Interestingly, the stage and backdrop of the Superstar TV events are modern in their design and layout. But the songs that are typically sung by the participants belong to an era that many of the participants themselves were not a part of. This significant phenomenon can be evocatively described as the “reincarnation of Jothipala through the Superstar TV reality shows”. The songs of Jothipala, Milton Perera, Milton Mallawarachchi and Ameradeva were those hot favourites of many participants (traditionalization) fused with a rendering that is typically modern. The postmodern audience had no difficulty in appreciating the duality that is presented as one unified whole.

The popularity of Bathia and Santhush can also be largely attributed to the creative fusion of the traditional and modernist musical trends. The modern rendering of the traditional rhythms are a case in point in this regard.

**Food** habits of the postmodern consumer have a traditional base. The *polsambol* and the *kiri hodi* are very much a part of our regular menu, across SEC groupings. However, sausages at home and regular visits to the likes of McDonalds are not uncommon. This fusion is perhaps best expressed in the McDonald’s *Mac-bath*. 

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The Sri Lankan Post-modern Consumer
Language and its use in particular contexts is another manifestation of the confluence of the traditional and modernist tendencies. “Singlish” and “Tamilish” expressions often creep into everyday conversation of especially the youth, across multiple SEC groupings. This tendency is reflected in many interactive TV and radio programs, where English words and phrases are liberally interspersed with the vernacular.

In casual conversations among many youth who may well express themselves in the English language in formal officials settings opt to speak in the blended “Singlish” or “Tamilish” format. The ease with which they do so is again indicative of the postmodernist IME and the modtradi consumer referred to earlier.

Brands that have meaningfully fused the modern and traditional appeals to form a harmonious and holistic offering seem to fare well in the market place.

The inclusion of cloves (traditional) into a modern toothpaste as in Clogard has paid off. Conversely, brands of toothpaste that have failed to include the modern dimension in a value-creating sense as in the case of Supiriviki has remained a small and insignificant brand.

The number of herbal based products introduced by large multinational companies is evidence of the postmodernist tendencies that one has to ride, rather attempt to get rid of.

The market penetration of Samaposha, a breakfast product, for example, has a “modtradi” appeal. It falls between the modern cereals on one side and the traditional and inconvenient to prepare Kola Kande, on the other. The significant growth of alternative medicine and herbal products, in the developed world in particular, provides evidence of the mega trend of postmodern consumerist tendencies that have come to stay and grow.

Evidence: Empirical evidence of postmodernist tendencies was gathered in a study conducted by Aviva Insurance Company in 2009. A total of 260 respondents participated in the survey. They were executives around 30 years of age in Colombo and had a personal e-mail account, spent over four hours per week browsing the Internet, belonged to a social network and regularity watched international news.

A single question was posed to the respondents: “List ten things you want to do most before you retire”. The responses that were clustered can be summarized as follows:

Table 04: Listing of aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Frequency of listing (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfy</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustain</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Satisfy” refers to, “have fun and enjoyment and live an adventurous life”. Such responses are akin to a consumerist and modernist tendency. “Serve” refers to taking care of family and loved ones and helping society. “Sustain” refers to developing one’s own business or source of income and being healthy. “Sense” refers to purpose of life and leading a spiritual life. These responses on the other hand are akin to a more traditionalist value system and tendency. The co-existence, indeed, the equal weightage attached to each of the facets in this case is suggestive of the fact that the traditionalist and consumerist/modernist tendencies are in harmony and in sync with each other.

The study by Udunuwara and Liyanage (2008) on the effectiveness of modern versus postmodern advertising appeals also provides empirical evidence of postmodernist tendencies in the Sri Lankan market.

The first step of the study was to find the most suitable post-modern appeals. Seven such advertisements were listed, representing individual brands. Of them, three advertisements were short listed. The next step was to identify the most suitable advertisements to represent modern appeals (of the same brand selected for traditional appeals). Three were selected. For each brand, two advertisements were selected so as to feature one advertisement that represents postmodern appeals and the other representing modern appeals.

The categorization of advertisements into modern and postmodern was based on the content analysis. Subsequent to the content analysis, a questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaire was given to 180 young students, aged between 18-25 years of age. They were selected from two universities, namely, the University of Colombo and the Australian College of Business and Technology in Colombo, so as to have a mix of representatives from different socio-economic groups.

Table 05: Criteria used to select advertisements consisting of Postmodern and modern values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern Values</th>
<th>Postmodern Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dress of the person who plays the major role in the advertisement.</td>
<td>Dress of the person who plays the major role in the advertisement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of family hierarchy.</td>
<td>Children worshiping adults, respect for adults and displaying family unity and family hierarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern and latest artifacts.</td>
<td>Closeness to nature; paddy fields, lakes ancient cities and religious rituals and activities engaged in by “modern” actors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of English expressions and modern festivals in the advertisement.</td>
<td>Postmodern festivals and their symbolism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 06: Description of TV commercials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Television Commercial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A happy little baby boy with a smile is in water, wearing a life jacket and he is looking at someone. He has been looking at the gentleman who is whistling and seated on a tall chair.</td>
<td>Anchor “Fussy Parents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young parents with their small son getting ready early in the morning to welcome the elderly ladies dressed in pure white for a “Kiri Amma Dana”. The mother, father and the baby boy are engaged in the ritual.</td>
<td>Anchor “Ceremony”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group of students sing the song of the brand in a classroom with a famous singer, who is acting as the teacher, wearing the national dress.</td>
<td>Lanka Bell Promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement showing paddy fields, lakes, a temple on a mountain, oil lamps …… basically, a happy modern nation.</td>
<td>Lanka Bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother wakes up early in the morning and makes juice for the family that is reluctant to have it. But when the mother puts a few drops of juice in the mouth of the family members, they wake up and they cannot resist the taste.</td>
<td>“Truly Sri Lankan” Sunquick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small boy is getting ready to go out with his grandmother and sister. He starts chasing a crow perched on a tree. The grandmother stops him by saying that it is an indication of a visitor’s arrival. The actors belong to the modern world.</td>
<td>Sunquik “Thagi Dena Kalawa”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings of the survey

The highest recall rates were recorded for all the traditional advertisements, namely, for brands Sunquick, Lanka Bell and Anchor. On average, the recall rate of the company or the brand remained low for both appeals. But in comparison, the recall of the company and the brand corresponding to postmodern advertisements was higher than that for modern advertisements.
Table 07: The mean scores of the advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anchor</th>
<th>Lanka Bell</th>
<th>Sunquick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Postmodern</td>
<td>Modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>.5845</td>
<td>.7267</td>
<td>.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>.555</td>
<td>.6829</td>
<td>.6655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focal Character</td>
<td>.5688</td>
<td>.704</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visuals</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean value of all postmodern advertisements was 0.728, whereas the mean value of the modern advertisements was 0.565. The data suggests a difference between the preference for postmodern versus modern advertisements. Values were obtained by getting the respondents to record the preference for a particular advertisement, by giving a rating out of 100 for each advertisement, with respect to four criteria: theme, music, focal character and visuals.

Table 08: Ranking of the most preferred advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anchor</th>
<th>Lanka Bell</th>
<th>Sunquick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Postmodern</td>
<td>Modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In an attempt to see how the respondents ranked the advertisements, it was evident that postmodern advertisements were given a higher rank (i.e., preference) than modern advertisements.

5. Implications of Postmodernism

The post-modernist tendencies that are unfolding at present have the potential to become a megatrend that will markedly affect all sectors and classes of the Sri Lankan society. Postmodernist and consumerist tendencies have to date, and will in the future, impact different SEC groupings and urban-rural segments differently. Importantly, it is the challenge of the marketer to discern the varying impacts of postmodernism on disparate market segments, over time.

The TMC I referred to earlier, it appears has, on the one hand become more westernized in some respects, while on the other, retaining some traditional values and customs. For instance, the emergence of the western bridal gown rather than the bridal saree, one would typically witness in a western wedding, is contrasted with the traditional customs such as the poruwa ceremony and the worshiping of parents by the bride and the bridegroom at the wedding. And the music played at these well attended high-profile wedding ceremonies of TMC I is most likely to feature traditional local melodies.
The TMC II referred to earlier is also impacted by postmodernist tendencies. They are likely to be influenced by the force of westernization, one facet of the postmodern consumer. For instance, the Sinhala/Tamil speaking young consumer will, without any inhibition, greet his friends with the western “Hi and bye” salutations. The tendency to incorporate more of these western forms and expressions seems inevitable in the wake of the unfolding currents of postmodernism.

Some sub-groups of the NUMC referred to earlier who have markedly benefited from the liberalization of the economy, post-1997, and are exposed to overt western life styles and social values, have, it is argued, evinced a deviant behavioural pattern that can perhaps be described as an aberration of postmodernism, in fact, a kind of vulgarization of it.

The musical forms which erode and distort the traditional foundations of their constructions is in marked contrast to the postmodernist incorporation of western forms and their fitting fusion with traditional musical forms. These attempts to remove and debase the traditional roots is clearly seen as an aberration.

The dress and attire of some of the youth who go beyond the modernist and the postmodernist genre belong to a small group of youth in particular who are not “rooted” in the mainstream social milieu. They spend large sums of money to tattoo their bodies and pierce their ears. These alienated youth may well be likened to the hippies of the eighties who represented a socially reactionary small grouping in some western nations.

In its less extreme form, one could witness tendencies that distort the postmodernist tendencies on our local television channels. Sexually overt TV commercials, programmes that encourage young females to engage indulgently and in a rather flirtatious manner with male film stars, the debased dancing competitions that are devoid of our cultural underpinnings, are illustrative of the “vulgarization” of the post-modernist tendencies. Importantly, these attempts are repeatedly rejected by the larger mass of consumers as empirically evidenced in the study of Nilaweera and Weeratunge (2005).

Postmodernism as it unfolds may have dysfunctional implications insofar as the Economically Alineated Groups (EAG) of Sri Lankan society are concerned. Unemployed or under-employed but educated rural youth in particular will form a significant segment of this group. These economically disadvantaged consumers will be exposed to the postmodernist project undertaken by many social actors, and they will be influenced by it. However, their inability to participate in the consumption activities that will often form the pith and substance of TV commercials and the social symbolism of “the good life” is likely to frustrate them. This, in its extreme form, can potentially give rise to anti-social activity and an attempt to usurp the very postmodernist project of the market place. The extent and magnitude of the frustration and the ability of the EAG to mobilize the physical and human resources to mount such an attack on the prevailing socio-economic structure is also dependent largely on the political power and clout they could and will wield.
6. Conclusion

The harmonization of the traditionalist and modernist forces gives rise to postmodernist tendencies in the Sri Lankan marketplace. A mis-match of the two produces either an overly traditional, and therefore, an old fashioned and obsolete proposition or a hyped rendering of an overt western and modernist proposition. The former lacks appeal in that it may be considered to be desirable, at best, but not necessarily, desired. The latter will be treated, other than by an insignificant minority, as an aberration; as one which lacks relevance and social acceptance.

The challenge of today’s marketer is to sense the emerging postmodernist propensities of the emerging consumer and develop propositions and products that avoid the two extremes of being either overly traditionalist or modernist. Such an endeavour must be based on the recognition of the points of confluence and fusion that appeal to a new breed of postmodern consumers. This in turn would be possible only through a deep-going understanding of the psyche and the behaviours of the new and emerging postmodern Sri Lankan consumer.

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