

Frugality as a social virtue: Role of education sector in fostering a new megatrend critical for a sustainable future

by Rajnish Tiwari | *Fresenius University of Applied Sciences (Hochschule Fresenius), and Center for Frugal Innovation, Hamburg University of Technology*

The need for ecological, social and economic sustainability is being increasingly recognized in the societal and scholarly discourses. However, most innovation trajectories employed by firms for creating sustainable solutions are based on conventional technological and growth paradigms that seek greater performance and higher revenues ([Dosi, 1982](#); [Le Bas, 2016](#)). As a result, sustainable innovative products often end up being costly in consumer perception creating a vicious circle: perceived high costs have a negative impact on product adoption, while a resulting lack of economies of scale in turn further increases costs.

Historically, frugality or thrift – loosely defined as judicious and prudent use of resources – has been a social virtue propagated by virtually all major schools of philosophy and ethics as well as by religion. It was, however, crowded out in the post-World War II era of affluence and by the need of economic growth in saturated markets ([Tiwari et al., 2017](#)), even as firms have often sought to (artificially) reinforce demand, e.g. by employing methods such as planned obsolescence ([Slade, 2007](#)). The European Parliament has in recent years sought to bring down instances of planned obsolescence, and has encouraged reparability of products that can enhance a more frugal approach in the society.

Recent studies conducted in advanced economies demonstrate that frugal innovations in general may have a positive impact on sustainability as they seek to minimize use of resources, see e.g. [Tiwari and Herstatt \(2020\)](#). Frugal innovations, however, also face challenges of acceptance in firms and by consumers alike, who sometimes associate themselves with technological inferiority. On the other hand, consumers that embrace a frugal lifestyle out of conviction (“voluntary simplicity”) show a greater acceptance for frugal solutions.

This paper proposes a conceptual model for fostering frugality that arguably represents a new megatrend in the face of depleting natural resources, loss of biodiversity and growing global population. For this purpose, the model draws on a multidimensional understanding of affordability, which includes financial, societal, environmental and infrastructural affordability as a core pillar for frugal products and services ([Achtelik et al., 2023](#)). The model follows a three-pillar approach: It first identifies the key drivers of frugality and their impact on its likely emergence as a megatrend. Next, it identifies major barriers to adoption, and finally it identifies avenues where institutions of academic education can help foster this megatrend by overcoming barriers to adoption in the countries of the European Union ([Papageorgiou and Kokshagina, 2022](#)).

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