Consumerism in Saudi Arabia: Problems and Consequences

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Abstract: As capitalism expands globally, concern is growing over observed problematic consequences of rising consumerism in developed and developing nations, including the Arabian Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia. The rise of a consumer society in Saudi Arabia increases the challenges the country faces as it seeks sustainable development. Consumerism is exacerbating economic, environmental, social, psychological and physical health problems, which must be dealt with if the country is to enjoy future well-being, yet few systematic studies deal with this issue. This study focuses on the problematic consequences of consumerism in Saudi Arabia and the imperative for change.

Keywords: Consumption, Globalization, Social problems, Gulf countries, Saudi population, Pollution, Environment.

Introduction

We live in a world permeated by consumerism. While consumerism first arose in the West, by the late twentieth century, it was spreading to third-world countries, including Arab countries, particularly the Gulf States.

Production has traditionally been the focus of most scientific analysis being the most fundamental economic activity; theoretical and empirical interest in consumption studies has also been growing as reflected in the work of (Corrigan, 1997; Slater, 1997; and Miles, 1998) among others.

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Although consumption has its positive aspects, some classical theorists have also addressed its negative aspects, viewing consumerism as a threat to the social order. (Ritzer et al. 2001b: 411-414) points out that while Weber, Durkheim, Marx, and Simmel did not deal directly with consumption, some of their concepts are related to the topic. Weber ([1904]1958) views consumption as a threat to capitalist protestant ethic. Durkheim, (1964) identified consumption with society-threatening anomie. Marx’s ([1857-58]1973) negative view of consumption is reflected in his discussion of the concept of commodity. The capitalist market system makes relations between objects appear to be more powerful and real than relations between people, while the Marxists’ concept of control seems to extend from workers to consumers. Like workers, consumers are controlled by capitalism with its objective of increasing profit. Consumption is viewed as an opportunity for greater control marketing manipulation, and resulting in alienation. Simmel’s ([1907] 1978) critical thinking of consumption is apparent in his discussion of the growth of objective culture, wherein the growth of commodities overwhelms people’s ability to use them; instead it seems that people are used by them to create a senseless desire for more.

Consumption was central to the work of Veblen ([1899] 1994), who like Marx took a negative view of it. He was critical of the consumption practices of the leisure class because he valued workmanship and production (Ritzer et al., 2001b: 414).

More recent thinkers have also viewed consumption negatively, among others, Frank (1999) and Schor (1991, 1998). Ritzer (1993, 1996, 1998, 2000) acknowledges the positive aspects of McDonaldization; but since his primary interest is in the irrationalities of capitalist market systems, he can be seen in part, as critical of consumption (Ritzer et al., 2001b: 413).

As capitalism expands worldwide, rising consumerism is also raising concern among policy-makers regarding its observed problems and consequences in developed and developing nations, including the Arabian Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia has been identified as a consumer society (Abd-Elal, 1995; Al-Gamdi, 1988; Al-Khateeb, 1998: 172; Al-Saif, 2002; Al-Shanbary, 1998; Shukri, 1981). The spread of consumerism in Saudi Arabia increases the challenges the country faces as it seeks sustainable development. Excessive consumption is exacerbating economic, environ-
mental, social, psychological, and physical health problems which must be dealt with if the country is to enjoy future well-being.

**Purpose of the Study**

The study of consumption has important implications at both the macro and micro levels of the social analysis of the structure of society. Academic interest in consumption is increasing in sociology and other fields since the topic reflects private troubles and generates public issues. Few systematic studies are available in this area in Saudi Arabia. This study focuses on the problematic consequences of consumerism in Saudi Arabia and the imperative for change. Problematic aspects of consumption in Saudi Arabia include economic, environmental, social, psychological, and physical health problems.

**Methodology**

This study is based on the survey and analysis of secondary data relating to problems of consumption in Saudi Arabia. As part of the methodology, the data was gathered from published studies and reports available in English and in Arabic. Relevant statistics were obtained from Saudi Government publications, the World Bank, the United Nations and Global Market Information. These data were then analyzed to describe and explain the consumption patterns in Saudi Arabia and were related to the problematic aspects of consumption in the country which include economic, environmental, social psychological and physical health problems.

**Economic Consequences**

Economic problematic aspects of consumption include the growing influence of multinational corporations, the increasing dependency on import, credit indebtedness and decreased in-savings despite oil market fluctuations.

**The National Economy: Globalization and Dependency**

Creating a global economy means transforming the vast majority of largely self-sufficient people living in “underdeveloped” countries into consumers of Western goods provided by transnational corporations (Olson, 1998:194,195). The increasing influence of first-world corpora-
tions around the globe has fostered internationalization of the consumerist lifestyle. People are encouraged to substitute high-status foreign for lower-status domestic versions of products and to switch from non-commodified activities to commodified provision of these. This process is most highly developed in Europe but has been growing substantially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well, among both the middle class and the poor (Schor, 1999:48).

Multinational corporations’ policy is to homogenize human cultures and to create uniformity in consumer tastes. They focus on setting consumer aspiration to increase consumption and turning the individual into a “consumer being” (Abdu, 1992:62). They are also particularly concerned with opening markets in Gulf countries (Zaid & Abul-Enin, 1995:18).

Increasingly, the corporation, not the nation-state, has become the most important actor on the world stage in the globalization process. Multinational corporations operate largely on their own, this suggests that the balance of world power is firmly held by Western political elites and the corporate interests they represent (Clarke, 1996).

Economic globalization has exacerbated rather than alleviated the hierarchical relationships of the colonial era. Under General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) free market or free trade ideology, "underdeveloped" countries are positioned to lose control over local banks, manufacturing, agricultural insurance, information communication media, and other businesses to transnational corporations (Olson, 1998:192).

The Arab Gulf countries are among those which have attracted Western marketers of an array of goods promoting conspicuous consumption and which have been pressed to adopt more market-oriented policies. The last 25 years have witnessed western consumer trends flooding Arabian Gulf markets. Today’s Saudi market is an incomparable avenue for international products ranging from home computers to sporting equipment. Consumer goods, including durable and luxury items, are widely available through multinational corporations.

Arab dependency on the outside world began to grow in the 1960s as the volume of trade between the Arab region and the outside world steadily increased. Most of the Arab world’s external trade has been with capitalist industrial nations. The Arabs are still heavily dependent on the industrialized nations of the first world for food, manufactured goods, arms, western,
technology and mangerial know - how. The Arab world is now fully integrated into the world capitalist economic system (Barakat, 2000:295; Ibrahim, 1982:163). The Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar) represent a major global market, accounting for 26% of European, 22% of Japanese, 27% of Southeast Asian, and 14% of United States exports (Baker & Abu-Ismail, 1993).

Import of goods and services to Saudi Arabia increased from SR 4,990 billion in 1970 to SR 162.558 billion in 2002 (United Nations, 2004). Imports by major commodity groups have also increased, from SR 3.2 billion in 1970 to SR 113.2 billion in 2000 (Cordesman, 2003:8). According to (The Economist Intelligence Unit report, 2004; 57) on Saudi Arabia, the year-on-year increase in the value of imports in the third quarter of 2003 was a striking 38%. Transport equipment and electrical equipment and appliances represented the dominant import sectors, with each rising by around 33% in value. Since 2000, metals machines, appliances, and equipment have represented an increasing portion of imports (totaling some 55.3%), and, together with foodstuffs, now constitute nearly three-quarters of the total value of imports. The metals, machinery, appliances, and equipment category, which includes the high-value market for imported transport equipment, has risen from 50.3% (at cif rates) of overall imports in 2000 to 55.3% in 2002, when their total value increased by 7.2% over that in 2001. Foodstuffs (including beverages) accounted in 2000 for almost 18% of the total import market (from 11% in 1992).

According to (Global Market Information report, 2004), Saudi consumer expenditures on goods increased substantially during the 1990-2003 period. Consumer expenditures on durable goods increased from SR 22,870.00 million to SR 39,400.13 million. Semi-durable goods expenditures increased from SR 16,968.00 million to SR 30,911.22 million, and nondurable goods expenditures rose from SR 53,099.00 million to SR 97,044.70 million.

**The Household Economy: Credit Indebtedness and Decreased Savings**

Social theories of consumption hold that the inflated spending norms raise aspirations, thereby leading to more spending and, all too often, inflating debt (Schor, 1999:45).

Excessive television viewing has been found to correlate with spending more and saving less (Schor, 1999:45). As commercial television has rapidly
advanced around the world, everywhere it has proved exceptionally effective at stimulating buying urges. Aside from sleeping and working, watching TV is the leading activity in most consumer societies (Durning, 1992:125,126). In addition to carrying many commercial messages, television programming reinforces consumerist values.

Saudi Arabia had become far more exposed to the world’s media by the late 1950s. The country had over six million television sets in 1999, and over 260 per 1,000 people in 2000. Most educated Saudis now have satellite dishes. Over 95% of the Saudi people have exposure to the radio (Cordesman, 2003:12). Television advertising has been ranked as a main source of information and influence on Saudi family purchasing behavior, particularly among children (Al-Saud, 1997). The Saudi government estimates that the average Saudi spent 50 to 100% more time watching television in 2000 than his or her U.S. or European counterpart (Cordesman, 2003:234).

The spread of the credit card industry encourages consumers to spend money, in many cases far beyond their means. Credit card companies make their profit by charging interest on unpaid debt. Western studies show that those with limited incomes will suffer from debt (Obid, 1997:88).

According to (Al-Hayat daily, 1997), credit cards usage in the Gulf States is the highest in the world. It has been estimated that charges to Visa cards more than doubled during one year, reaching 5.3 billion dollars compared with 2.6 billion the year before. In the Gulf countries, (Al-Rahmani, 1999:34) found a rise in debt among low-income classes as a result of the lure of credit cards and bank loans to buy cars or luxuries such as holiday travel.

In Saudi Arabia, the use of consumer credit is gradually increasing. Between 2002 and 2003, expenditures by MasterCard cardholders rose from US $ 420.00 to US $460.00 million, the number of MasterCards issued rose from 2,660,000 to 3,090,000 and the number of MasterCard transactions rose from 1,860,000 to 2,150,000 (Global Market Information, 2004).

On the other hand, bank claims on the Saudi private sector show an increase in debt. During the 1990-2003 period, private sector debt to banks rose from SR 70,985.70 to SR 228,486.00 million, which is a 221.9% growth (Global Market Information, 2004).
According to *(Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* daily, 2003:7), the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority reported that the total value of consumer loans provided by Saudi banks grew to SR 60.2 billion ($16 billion) in the third quarter of 2003, up from SR 49 billion ($13.1 billion) in the corresponding period of the previous year, which is a 22.7% growth.

As people’s aspirations, encouraged by lenders, grow beyond their incomes, they become comfortable with the idea of buying on credit. There are fewer tendencies to delay purchases until they had accumulated the cash to pay for them.

The situation becomes even more problematic in Saudi Arabia than elsewhere for several reasons. **First**, the country is vulnerable to oil price fluctuations; the decline of oil prices that began in the mid-1980s diminished national resources even as population growth led to increasing demand for social spending. Accordingly, average household income has declined from around $18,000 in 1980-among the highest in the world-to less than a third of that today (Doumato, 2003:250). Analysts agree that Saudi Arabia’s per capita income has declined to around 40% of its peak at the height of the oil boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s, although the resulting figure is still high by the standard of most developing countries. The World Bank estimates that Saudi Arabia’s per capita income totaled $7,230 in 2000, compared with $34,100 for the United States (Cordesman, 2003: 244).

Thus, since the oil windfall of the late 1970s, Saudi Arabia’s economy has suffered a mighty fall, with the government running a deficit each year since 1983, and U.S.$17 billion being sent abroad through remittances by foreign workers (Doumato, 2003:250). **Second**, declining real oil revenue in affecting per capita income has been Saudi Arabia’s continuing high population growth rate. **Third**, despite the oil revenue decline, Saudi Arabia’s private consumption rose from $34.5 billion to $52.0 billion between 1980 and 1995. This growth in consumption reflected both the impact of population growth and a growing social dependence on imports and services. Private consumption rose from 22% of the GDP in 1980 to 35 in 1997 and to 41% in 1998, decreasing slightly to 33% of GDP in 2000. **Fourth**, reflecting rising consumption, gross domestic savings dropped precipitously from 62% of GDP in 1980 to 35% in 1997, 25% in 1998, and 16% in 2000 (Cordesman, 2003:245,246).
Rampant Population Growth and Environmental Consequences

Compounding the problematic economic consequences of consumerism in Saudi Arabia is the rampant population growth and its impact on the environment.

The population of the Arab world grew from 76.7 million in 1950 to 253.4 million in 1995 and is expected to reach 474.5 million by 2025 (Al-Tarabulsi, 1998:151). Saudi Arabia’s population increased at least by 300% between 1973 and 2000, reaching 22.01 million in 2000 (Cordesman, 2003:6). The native Saudi population increased at an estimated average annual rate of 3.5% during 1995-2000 (Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, 2001:265). The propensity for large families continues; the fertility rate is 5.5 children born per woman (Doumato, 2003:251). Life expectancy is 71 years (Barakat, 2000:46).

The result has been a youth explosion. By far the most influential demographic factor impacting on consumption patterns in Saudi Arabia is the burgeoning youth market. Roughly 42.5% of the Kingdom’s population was fourteen years or younger in 2002 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2002:38). This poses a problem of creating new jobs for this generation and meeting their expectations of high living standards.

The World Bank estimates that the population will increase to 32.1 million in 2015 and 46 million in 2030 (World Bank, 2001:46; World Bank, 2002: 50). According to (Awd, 2001:186), Riyadh alone, which has 4 million people, now, is expected to have 10.5 million by 2021.

Population growth leads to greatly increased demands for water, electricity, goods and services, and oil revenue to support social spending. Given the increasing size of the population, the government faces a situation in which consumer expectations may be difficult to meet.

Natural Resource Depletion

Oil. Saudi Arabia is dependent on a petroleum-based economy that is sharply vulnerable to changes in the world oil market. Declining oil prices and revenues affect the government’s ability to import goods. The Kingdom relies on oil revenues for around 90% of its export earnings, about 70% of state revenues, and 40% of its GDP. The Energy Information Agency (EIA) of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)’s 1997 Report on Saudi Arabia illustrates the importance of the petroleum sector to the Saudi economy in
simple terms. The report shows that in 2000, an average annual change of
even $1 in the price of a barrel of oil can cut or raise the Saudi GDP by $2.5

Saudi Arabia’s oil income will not be sufficient to meet its social and
economic needs forever; it is estimated that the nation has only more
than some eighty years of proven oil reserves (Cordesman, 2003: 23,383).
Although consumerism continues there, as (Jones & Martin, 1999:18)
point out, “it is a mistake to equate spending with affluence.” According
to The International Monetary Fund (IMF), living standards in Saudi
Arabia had slipped from among the world’s highest in 1981 to the level of
a middle-income nation in 1993 (The Financial Times, 1993). The
International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecast increasing levels of
indebtedness as a result of Saudi policies and has recommended further
readjustment of development policies to reflect more accurately the
market values of international finance (Caufield, 1997). The government
budget has been funded by domestic borrowing, which is now becoming
scarce (Yamani, 2000:73). This has necessitated a government policy of
cutbacks manifested in reductions in social security benefits and
education spending and higher prices for petrol, water, electricity,
television service, and hospital care.

In the Gulf countries, supplying the demands of the increasing
population for durable and nondurable goods necessitates the increased
production of oil to gain the revenue used in part to import such goods.
Oil is a nonrenewable resource. Saudi Arabia’s estimated remaining
eighty years of proven oil reserves will be exhausted earlier if consumer
demands force stepped-up oil revenue. The longer Saudi Arabia can
stretch out its oil reserves, the more time it buys to develop other
economic sectors to ease the eventual transition to a non-oil-based
economy.

Water demand. In the arid Arab world, water shortages are expected
to pose a particular problem as population pressures increase. (Al-
Tarabulsy, 2001:151) cites a predicted shortage of 282 billion cubic meters
by the year 2030. Already, the share of water per person in the Arab
world is lower than the world average. Whereas the Arab gets less than
1,707 billion cubic meters yearly, the world average per person is 12,900
billion cubic meters.

According to (Cordesman, 2003:301), water use is extraordinarily
high for a nation at Saudi Arabia’s overall level of economic development, averaging about ninety gallons per person per day, about twice the international average. In Saudi Arabia, the demand for water will also increase with population growth. While the supply is ample today; it relies to a great extent on nonrenewable resources, promising serious shortage in the future. (Al-Elikm, 1995:7) anticipated that water shortages in the Arab countries could cause conflict over water resources. He complained of a lack of strategies to reduce water consumption in the region. He predicted that if the high population growth rate persists in the region, water shortages will double. While it is expected that the population will increase to more than double between 2000 and 2030, from 295 million to 743 million, water shortages during the same period are expected to increase more than eight folds from 30 cubic meters to 260 billion cubic meters. Population densities in cities are already growing faster than proper water infrastructure can be built. (Al-Sudani & Al-Mehamid, 2000) warn against a drinking water shortage in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the expected water shortage will adversely impact Saudi economic and social development (Awd, 2001:187).

For the Saudis, water is not only an economic problem that inevitably grows with population but a major strategic vulnerability. Saudi Arabia’s annual rainfall is less than 100 millimeters in most areas. It has only about 2.33 million cubic kilometers of internal renewable water resources. These water resources provide only minimal amounts of water even for Saudi Arabia’s current population. They total about 156 cubic meters per person - less than one-seventh the total for a citizen of the United States (Cordesman, 2003:299).

About 82% of Saudi Arabia’s total present water use consists of non-renewable or "fossil" water obtained from deep wells; 14% is surface and shallow ground water, 4% is obtained from desalination and less than 1% is reclaimed or retreated water (Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, 2001:229). Saudi Arabia also produces some 1.5 million cubic meters of wastewater a day, but only 340,000 cubic meters, around 23%, is used for agricultural purposes (Ministry of Planning, 2000-2004:95-99).

At the same time, 75% of the water in the central and eastern Saudi regions still comes from nonrenewable underground lakes. These reserves will be exhausted within eighty years at present rates of water usage, if not substantially sooner (Cordesman, 2003:301). This depletion of
natural water will eventually confront Saudi Arabia with far more serious problems than it faces today (Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, 2000:224-227).

Saudi Arabia’s rapid increase in population is causing its natural water resources to drop sharply. The World Resources Institute and the World Bank estimate that Saudi per capita natural water resources dropped from 537 cubic meters in 1960 to 156 cubic meters in 1990 and project that they will drop to 49 cubic meters by 2025 (Cordesman, 2003:300).

Saudi Arabia must depend on an extensive system of desalination plants for its drinking water. The production of desalinated water increased from 4.4 million gallons per day in 1970 to 491.6 million gallons per day in 2000 (Cordesman, 2003:300).

A Saudi briefing issued in April 2002-based on Ministry of Agriculture and Water figures-estimated that Saudi water consumption would raise from 7 million cubic meters per day in 2002 to 11.3 million in 2022. This estimate was based on estimated population growth from 23.4 million in 2002 to 38 to 48 million in 2022, with a nominal estimate of 43.0 million. The cost was estimated to total 180 billion riyals from 2002 to 2022, including funds for the construction of new desalination plants and rehabilitating old ones, costs for operations, and maintenance fees. Preserving natural water supplies and wellhead supplies will cost another 70 billion riyals, increasing distribution will cost 40 billion riyals, and providing modern sewage and waste water recovery capability will cost 130 billion riyals. The total price of future water related projects will be 400 billion riyals. The Saline Water Conversion Corporation (SWCC) estimates the total cost of meeting the Kingdom’s growing demand for desalinated water alone at $54 billion by 2020 (Cordesman, 2003:302,303).

The Seventh Development Plan (2000-2004) also projected a continuing massive increase in Saudi Arabia’s water needs: The total demand for water is projected to increase from 21.1 billion cubic meters in 2000 to 22.5 in 2004 and 27.8 in 2020. Water demand is estimated to increase by an annual average of 1.3% desalinization and 1.4% during 2000-2020. Domestic demand for water is projected to increase from 1.8 billion cubic meters in 2000 to 2.0 in 2004 and 3.10 in 2020. Water demand is estimated to increase by an annual average of 2.4% during
2000-2004 and 2.8% during 2000-2020. Industrial demand for water is projected to increase from 0.47 billion cubic meters in 2000 to 0.60 in 2004 and 1.66 in 2020. Water demand is estimated to increase by an annual average of 5.0% during 2000-2004 and 6.5% during 2000-2020. Agricultural demand for water is projected to increase from 18.8 billion cubic meters in 2000 to 19.9 in 2004 and 23.0 in 2020. Water demand is estimated to increase by an annual average of 1.1% during 2000-2004 and 1.0% during 2000-2020.

**Electricity demand.** Saudi domestic energy use has been wasteful. Electricity consumption increased by 315% during 1982-2000, rising to 110,611 million kilowatt hours (Cordesman, 2003:12). Total consumption multiplied at an annual rate of 4.2% during 1994-1998, while the peak load grew by an annual average of 2.7% (Ministry of Planning, 2000-2004: 222). Per capita electricity consumption also increased, from 321.3273 kilowatt hours in 1970 to 5,116.843 kilowatt hours in 2001 (World Bank, 2004).

Population and economic growth will increase future Saudi electricity demand at least as sharply. The World Energy Council forecasts an electricity demand increase from 22 gigawatts in 2000 to 58 gigawatts by 2020. The Seventh Development Plan estimated that total demand for electric power would grow at an average rate of 5.2% through 2004 and 4.5% per year through 2020. Meeting the rise in demand will be very expensive. According to some Saudi estimates, the economy must fund an increase in the total average need for electric power to over 60,000 megawatts in 2023. Saudi Arabia also must provide a substantial additional capacity to meet the needs of peak periods, largely for air conditioning. This means an estimated need for up to 69,500 megawatts of total capacity (Cordesman, 2003:294).

Saudi figures indicate that meeting this need for power could require an investment of $115 billion by 2020, with $63.2 billion going for generation, $33.6 billion for new transmission capacity, and $20 billion for upgrading the existing transmission system. The Saudi Ministry of Industry and Electricity has stated that an investment of $117 billion is required over the next twenty-four years, averaging $4.9 billion a year (Cordesman, 2003:295). According to some estimates, 8% to 10% of Saudi investments will have to be diverted to develop Saudi power generation capacity (Bloomberg, 2001; Middle East Economic Survey, 2000).
Environmental Degradation

The consumer society’s exploitation of resources threatens to exhaust and obstinately harm forests, soils, water, and air. Spending on housing, electricity, fuel, and transportation is damaging to the environment.

In the United States for example, an estimated two-thirds of carbon dioxide emissions stem from fossil fuel use. The fossil fuels that power the consumer society are its most ruinous input. Wresting coal, oil, and natural gas from the earth permanently disrupts countless habitats; burning these fuels causes an overwhelming share of the world’s air pollution; and refining them generates huge quantities of toxic waste (Durning, 1992: 51, 52).

(Durning, 1992:52) found, based on United Nations data, that as income rises, consumption of ecologically less damaging products such as grains only slowly rises. In contrast, purchases of cars, gasoline, iron, steel, coal and electricity, which are all ecologically more damaging to produce, multiply rapidly.

The furnishing of the consumer lifestyle with such facilities as automobiles, air conditioning, throwaway merchandise and wrapping, can only be provided at great environmental cost. The consumer society’s way of life depends on continuous inputs of the commodities that are most harmful to the earth to produce: energy, chemicals, metals, and paper. Its main ecological danger is its encouragement of consumerism, but advertising also uses up a lot of electrical energy, paper, and wood.

Numerous areas of environmental concern are closely linked with increasing energy generation: (Redclift, 1996:80,83) cites major environmental accidents and risks, water pollution, land-use disturbance, radiation and radioactivity, the disposal of solid wastes, hazardous air pollution, acid deposition, and anthropogenic climate change. He points out that pollution is generated not only by disposing of products, but also as a result of much higher levels of personal mobility. As urban densities grow and more people travel farther to work, the private car has assumed more, rather than less, importance in personal commuting. (Al-Saif, 2002:20) adds such other areas of environmental concern as the depletion of non-renewable resources, the destruction of the ozone layer in the stratosphere, and acidification of soils and surface water.
According to (The Economist Intelligence Unit report, 2004: 27) on Saudi Arabia, a number of serious environmental issues are: air pollution caused by heavy reliance on cars and the oil and petrochemicals industries; overuse of the country’s limited water resources, which are obtained principally through tapping underground aquifers and the desalination of sea water; shortage of municipal facilities; and contamination of the land from the improper disposal of hazardous industrial and military waste, with the desert often used as a dumping ground. Although the government has acted to deal with these environmental challenges, there are no strong and influential voices in the Kingdom affirming the importance of these issues.

In the Gulf countries, supplying the demands of the increasing population for consumer goods necessitates the increased production of oil to gain the revenue used in part to import such goods. One source of pollution in the Gulf is oil refining, which generates huge quantities of toxic waste (Al-Rahmani, 1999:44; Al-Saif, 2002:26). A director of a major Saudi fish processing company director complained, for example, that because of toxic wastes they had suffered a loss of 30 million Saudi riyals and that fish prices had increased from 10% to 30% (Al-Ali, 1995:127).

Another source of pollution in Saudi Arabia is the increasing number of cars. The fuel burned by each one contributes to air pollution. Automotive emissions are the major source of air pollution in the country. (Al-Fouzan, 2003) indicated that the expansion of the city of Riyadh and the reliance of people on private cars have resulted in increased congestion, travel time and environmental pollution. The growth in car importation and in ownership of private cars, particularly, suggests that the level of urban pollution associated with motor vehicles will continue to rise, together with urban congestion. According to the Saudi (Ministry of Planning, 2002: 347), total vehicle importation (passenger’s cars and Jeeps, buses, trucks, special vehicles, and other cars) rose from 22,922 in 1970 to 298,857 in 2002. With regard to passenger cars and Jeeps alone, total imports rose from 8,334 in 1970 to 241,245 in 2001. The number of passenger cars in use has increased substantially, from 764,000 in 1980 to 2,762,900 in 2003 (Global Market Information, 2004). Possession of passenger cars (per 100 households) has increased gradually between 1977 and 2003, from 87.89 to 99.16
(Global Market Information, 2004). The number of registered vehicles also rose dramatically from 60,000 in 1970 to 9,484,891 in 2003 (Cordesman, 2003:11; Ministry of Planning, 2003).

Air travel is also growing phenomenally. Airplanes pollute voluminously at higher altitudes. Planes are responsible for almost 3% of carbon emissions worldwide from fossil fuels, and other emissions may greatly amplify their responsibility for global warming (Durning, 1992:85). Between 1970 and 2000 in Saudi Arabia, air passenger traffic rose from 17 to 153 million kilometers and incoming air cargo weight rose from 248,000 tons to 2,898,000; rail freight tons rose from 34 to 822 million, and passenger kilometer miles rose from 39 million to 288 million (Ministry of planning, 1970-2001).

The increase use of consumer goods results in increasing volumes in disposable waste (Al-Rahmani, 1999:34). Households are the primary source of daily waste in the Gulf States. It has been estimated that each Gulf resident is responsible for the annual generation of between 750-900 kilograms of household waste (municipal waste); while in Western Europe each person is responsible for 350 kilograms (Al-Kabs, 1997). The main means of disposal are usually incineration, composting, landfill, and recycling/re-use, all of which constitute major environmental problems in themselves. In Saudi Arabia, (Firq, 2005) pointed out that in 500,000 housing units in Jeddah city, each resident is generating daily on average 1500 grams of disposable waste, the total daily disposable waste is on average 3000 tons, and the annual volume reaches 108,0000 tons. He also indicated that the total disposable waste during the last 23 years reached on average 21,000,000 tons and predicted reaching 42,000,000 tons during the next 23 years. In Saudi Arabia in particular, the disposable waste problem increases during the Hajj with the arrival of huge numbers of pilgrims. The proliferation of fast-food restaurants in Saudi Arabia also produces an enormous amount of trash, some of which is nonbiodegradable.

Another problem in Saudi Arabia associated with consumption and exacerbating the disposable waste is the trend toward a throwaway economy. The throwaway economy undermines durability. Capitalism thrives on planned obsolescence and disposability, on replacement instead of repair. Consumption of materials expands dramatically, as people accumulate more goods, and as waste proliferates. The materials
economy is dominated by rapid obsolescence, unrepairable goods, excessive packaging, and changeable shifts in fashion.

In addition, in the throwaway economy, packaging becomes an end itself. Every imaginable consumable is mounted on cardboard, wrapped in paper, or sealed with plastic. Gift-wrap itself comes ornately wrapped. The wrapping boom is catching on in Saudi Arabia as elsewhere. Spending money for gift wrapping and using invitation cards for special occasions such as weddings, baby showers, graduations, birthday parties, promotions, retirements, hospitalizations, and housewarmings is becoming customary and common particularly among the Saudi middle and upper classes.

As disposables proliferate in the consumer society, so does the disposable waste problem. Some effort is being made in Saudi Arabia toward recycling of materials.

**Social Consequences**

Social problematic aspects of consumerism include: growing consumption aspirations, rising social inequality, displaying conspicuous consumption, and tendency toward emphasis on material values.

**Growing Aspirations: Luxuries Become Necessities**

For capitalism, at its early stage, production is mainly for consumption, but as surplus production increases in advanced capitalism, the purpose becomes to create continuous new needs to sell the surplus. Thus, consumption becomes the focus of production.

With the spread of consumption, academicians have focused on the importance of distinguishing between “needs” and “wants” (Illich, 1975; Porrritt, 1984; Schumacher, 1973). Essentially, needs require satisfaction, but the way that they are satisfied can vary widely, and consumer societies may successfully create new “wants” without satisfying even basic needs (Redclift, 1996:7). Creating new needs for certain goods is done through advertising. Efforts are made to present an image of the good life to advertising targets and to convince them to achieve it by purchasing certain luxury goods and /or services. Whether or not the goods and services have any intrinsic value, their image is manipulated and their price set high so that their acquisition will be generally viewed as a status symbol (Al-Rahmani, 1999:33). Once targeted audiences are
persuaded that they “need” certain nonessential goods or services in order to confirm their social status in their own and others’ eyes, the process of transforming these acquisitions from “wants” to “needs” is successfully completed. Yet the advertising industry does not rest. Responding to capitalism’s need for economic growth, every day new nonessential products and services appear which render old ones obsolete.

Whereas once people knew only their more materially successful relatives or neighbors as role models for their own aspirations, today TV and other media have familiarized people with standards higher than many previously knew existed. A new comparison process has evolved in which everyone observes and aspires to the standards set by the upper-middle class and the rich as the media presents these. (Schor, 1999:43) contends that a new consumerism has emerged which is more upscale in the sense that there is more aggressive rather than defensive consumption positioning.

Television has become increasingly important in providing information about the spending patterns of others, but television presents a heavily skewed picture of spending patterns, portraying almost exclusively the upper middle-class and the rich. This leads to an inflation of people’s perceptions of others’ lifestyles. Types of programs viewed also affect this upward distortion: for example, soap operas yield a larger upward bias than do other programs (Schor, 1999:44). People in Saudi Arabia are now more likely to compare themselves with, or aspire to the lifestyle of, those far above them in the economic hierarchy. In other words, people are more likely to engage in upward consumption comparison.

Unless consumers opt out of the status race, all but the wealthiest find themselves on an eternal treadmill on which they must forever strive to stretch their incomes to cover purchase of the latest status-enhancing luxuries. Since many fail in this endeavor, heavy consumer indebtedness and even personal bankruptcy have mushroomed in consumer societies. According to (Schor, 1999:46, 50), the competitive spending process in the U.S. has undergone major, highly problematic changes since approximately 1980. The difference between what people aspire to and the income they have available to spend has increased enormously. As upscale lifestyles increasingly dominate aspirations, the aspiration gap
grows. This increasing gap creates a persistent dissatisfaction among consumers that cannot be cured at any level of absolute income.

In Saudi Arabia, television advertising has been ranked as a main source of information and influence on family purchasing behavior, particularly among children (Al-Anad, 1993; Al-Hedithi, 2000; Al-Saud, 1997; Omasha, 2003). (Awad, 1994:187) indicates that 90% of the advertising on the three Arabian channels - Saudi Arabia, MBC, and Dubai - is for foreign durable and luxury goods. These goods are Japanese, American, and European, and most are the products of multinational corporations. The expectation is that these advertisements may create endless wants among Saudis.

Identifying various consumer items as necessities rather than luxuries has somewhat increased in Saudi Arabia. As a result, rather than saving their surplus earnings, some Saudi consumers may spend them for the latest luxuries or use them toward paying off indebtedness for past indulgences.

Social Inequality and the Threat of Social Unrest

The role of spending in reproducing inequality is to some extent very modern. In previous eras, birth, history, and caste determined status, spending played only a subsidiary role in the maintenance of social position. Consumption was more constrained by status position, as evidenced by cultural taboos not to spend “out of one’s station” (Schor, 1999:40).

Urbanization, formal education, and the disappearance of traditional social relationships have rendered spending more salient in establishing social position and personal identity. Thus, in the modern consumer society, commodities take on a new kind of symbolic importance. People are now more likely to believe that the “good life” can be had from material goods. Growing numbers of people believe that large houses, vacation homes, swimming pools, and travel abroad, really nice clothes, a lot of money, and second cars are symbolic of a good life (Schor, 1999:45).

Socially visible or “conspicuous” consumption is a major strategy in a consumer society used by high-status groups to retain supremacy. Competitive consumption feeds a system of widening class distinctions wherein people aspire to a level of consumption that others have achieved
(Rosenblatt, 1999:9). Competitive consumption widens the gap between those who have and those who have not, the fortunate and the unfortunate (Durning, 1992:22). Widening the gap will result in a sense of lack of a fulfilling life on the part of the poor and the lower-middle class, who will suffer deprivation and relative poverty (Common, 1995).

This seems also to be true in Arab countries (Barakat, 2000:299). (Ibrahim, 1982:166) has observed that in Egypt, inflation hits the poor, the lower-middle class, and those on fixed incomes more than other categories of the population. The widening gap is accompanied by provocative displays of conspicuous consumption on the part of the upper class, especially the "nouveau riche", which create feelings of deprivation among those who "have not." If they cannot afford any semblance of such consumption themselves, their frustration can turn into alienation which breeds social unrest.

Similarly, a large, potentially influential young Saudi generation is coming of age which is disgruntled by the prospect of downward social mobility they see before them if Saudi Arabia cannot sustain its consumer society. (Yamani, 2000:9) has described their frustrations; they realize the disadvantages of Saudi economic dependency on oil, a non-renewable resource. They lack both the certainties of their grandparents and the economic security of their parents. They fear that the living standards their parents enjoy cannot possibly continue.

A study carried out by the Saudi Economic Studies Centre in 1998 concluded that already the average household income in Saudi Arabia had dropped to less than a third of what it was in 1980 and that, with the government running a deficit each year and U.S. $17 billion being sent abroad through remittances by foreign workers, the majority of young Saudis today could not hope to duplicate the financial security experienced by their parents’ generation (Doumato, 2003:250).

Saudi youth observe the wastefulness of their parents particularly during feasts, when, as one respondent put it, for every one hundred guests, a hundred things are wasted. Some youth condemn the luxuries of consumer society and blame the global economic system (Yamani, 2000:80). Western consumer goods are widely available to Saudi youth, ranging from mobile phones and the Internet to videos of the latest Hollywood films, western music, satellite television, and the other consumer accessories of youth culture. However, some youth feel that,
despite its attractions, a consumer society fosters an apparently superficial way of life (Yamani, 2000:133).

**Conspicuous Consumption and Household Stress**

As (Schor, 1999:45) explains, the existence of a work and spend cycle has a number of implications. First, it suggests an addictive aspect to consumption. Over time, people become habituated or "addicted" to the level of consumption which they are attaining.

People in the Gulf States displayed conspicuous consumption lifestyle during the oil boom years (Al-Abadi, 1990:14), and, according to (Zaid & Abu-Elenin, 1995:11), changing people’s spending habits is difficult. (Abdu, 1992:62) indicated that the spread of consumerism in both Gulf and non-Gulf Arab countries in the fifteen years prior to his study created difficulties among the upper and middle classes in controlling personal consumption accompanied by resistance to changing spending patterns. (Duesenberry, 1949) long ago suggested that personal expenditures rise with increasing income but do not decline with falling income. (Ibrahim, 1982:88) also found that people can adjust quickly to a higher standard of living but not vice-versa.

Even in cases in which failure to achieve middle-class status dooms one to a low "quality of life," the pressure on individuals and households to spend in order to achieve some measure of status can be intense (Schor, 1999:41). In recent years, Saudi parents, particularly fathers, have come under increasing pressure to spend on luxury items, domestic help, wedding expenses, jewelry, cars for teenagers, electronic devices, the latest video games, playgrounds, gifts for special occasions, and holiday traveling. This may on occasion result in marital or family fraction and impose a burden on the family budget. In the United States, where high levels of credit indebtedness prevail, studies commonly identify money arguments as the most prevalent reason for marital tensions.

**Tendency toward Emphasis on Material Values**

(Al-Nouri, 1990:115) contends that a culture which focuses on demonstrating wealth does so at the expense of the intellectual and human aspects of life. (Al-Abadi, 1990) & (Abdu, 1992) indicate that in the Gulf countries, changes in material aspects of culture are exceeding immaterial changes. Emphasis is on importing durable and luxury goods.
when it should be on acquiring thinking skills and positive attitudes toward reading, learning, and efficiency; respect for and competence at work; respect for society’s laws (such as traffic laws); and promoting achievement motivation. These concerns are emphasized in Islamic teachings and are not alien to traditional Arab culture. As (Rosenblatt, 1999:3) points out, civilization requires more than the possession of materials goods. Human development is equally important. In Saudi Arabia, there is a growing awareness at the governmental level as well as among individuals of the importance of human development.

Associated with the spread of consumerism and the tendency toward emphasis on material values is the rise of role models of conspicuous consumption. With the rise of the new wealthy leisure class described by Veblen, wealth had merit whatever its source. The leisure class was so named because its activities stressed leisure, not work. Whereas the old view had honored wealth as the result of productive efficiency, now wealth and waste were admired per se. The rich no longer served as role models of what hard work and prudence could achieve. As a result, if workers’ incomes increased, they were more likely to spend them imitating the lifestyles of the rich in displays of wasteful consumption. Veblen worried that they would stint on necessities to keep up appearances (Stabile, 1996: 696). The patterns of consumption in Saudi Arabia suggest somewhat tendency in this direction.

Today the global media play a major role in advancing material values by presenting role models of the consumer lifestyle. Saudi society has become far more exposed to the world’s media in recent years. In 1999, Saudi Arabia had over six million television sets, 265.4814 televisions sets per 1,000 people (Cordesman, 2003: 12). Ownership of satellite TV systems has increased dramatically between 1990 and 2003 from 0.37 to 60.77 per 100 households (Global Market Information, 2004). Saudi Arabia became a major user of the Internet, and had forty-two Internet service providers in 2001(Cordesman, 2003:12).

Like most communications media, television uses comparatively little energy or material. The messages are the problem: commercial television promotes restless craving for more material wealth by portraying the high consumption life-style as a model to be emulated (Durning, 1992:125). Television advertising encourages consumption of unhealthy food and drink. Celebrities renowned for their physical
attractiveness or athletic prowess star in advertisements, sending the message that beauty and brawn are more important than intellectual or spiritual capacities. Sex and violence programming attracts viewers by appealing to people’s baser instincts, undermining traditional morality. Few of the people featured in commercial TV programs or commercials serve as positive role models for making significant contributions to society.

(Ritzer, 2001a:215) has rightly pointed out that today, consumer goods have other origins and other meanings than those associated simply with social class. In consumption, we no longer emulate the leisure class exclusively as Veblen indicated. We are increasingly likely to emulate the consumption patterns associated with a wide array of ‘lifestyles’ or ‘status’. A variety of social groups with different tastes and lifestyles also provides leadership in emulating the glamorous lives of beautiful people - primarily actors, popular musicians, fashion models, and professional athletes. This phenomenon suggests that perhaps celebrity status, rather than class, is a more important variable when studying consumption practices. Consumers today are surrounded by advertisements and popular culture and study media images more closely than they do the consumption habits of the leisure class. They now emulate images displayed on television, billboards, advertisements, and music videos. These images, which flow from a wide range of class, status, and lifestyle groups, are a ‘mediating factor’ that influences consumer behavior.

Commercialization of the household economy has led to the diminishment of people’s practical reliance on one another and the decline of traditional community, a sense of common identity and community, and little attachment to those who live nearby. Shopping centers threaten the small-shops-and homes character of cities (Durning, 1992:129,134). In Saudi Arabia, material values began to threaten traditional values emphasizing interpersonal relations.

Conspicuous consumption in Saudi Arabia impacts on migrant laborers to the country as well as natives. The rapid increase in wealth experienced by migrant laborers in the oil-rich Arab countries has led to new consumption patterns as these laborers have been exposed to endless demonstrations of the latest productions of the first world. The durable goods consumption patterns of Egyptians working in Saudi Arabia, for
example, usually reach a higher order: either they acquire a second one of everything, such as cars or TVs, or more sophisticated items such as videotapes, stereo systems, expensive rugs, and expensive imported clothes. Egyptians who may not have quite the same level of income or savings from working abroad begin to crave similar consumption beyond basics or even average luxuries. Those who cannot afford to consume at the same level but who belong to the same reference group soon develop an irresistible urge to be seconded to an oil-rich country. In addition, the returnee to Egypt faces adjustment problems vis-à-vis premigration work, earnings, and expenditure patterns. Since it is often difficult for returnees to live on a relatively modest Egyptian salary after having been used to lavish spending, for four years, they begin to dip into their savings until that money is nearly exhausted. Thus the lavish expenditure habits of oil-rich country citizens spread to migrant laborers in these countries and, in turn, to the capital-poor countries. The only difference, of course, is that the latter cannot afford it (Ibrahim, 1982: 87, 88).

**Psychological and Physical Health Consequences**

Numerous aspects of a consumer society have a deleterious effect on psychological and physical health. These include the replacement of human relationships with commodities as superficial material values triumph over time-honoured interpersonal ones leading to psychological isolation and cultural alienation, particularly among those who fall behind in the status race for luxury goods. The stress of the race, often compounded by debt, can damage physical as well as psychological health. The concomitant rise of urbanization and physical mobility which can separate people from extended kin enhances feelings of anonymity and isolation. In addition, the prevalence of restaurant and particularly fast-food restaurant dining in the consumer society encourages obesity with its attendant health risks.

**Depression**

(Durning, 1992:23) points out that psychological evidence show that the relationship between consumption and personal happiness is weak. Worse, he says, two primary traditional sources of human fulfillment – social relations and leisure – appear to have withered or stagnated in the rush to riches. Many denizens of consumer society have a sense that their
world of plenty is somehow hollow – that, hoodwinked by a consumerist culture, they have been fruitlessly attempting to satisfy with material things what are essentially social, psychological, and spiritual needs.

(Argyle, 1987) found that the main determinants of happiness in life are related not to consumption at all, but to satisfaction with family life, especially marriage, followed by satisfaction with work, leisure to develop talents, and friendship. While over the past century, the mass market has taken over an increasing number of the productive tasks once provided within the household, diminishing people’s particular reliance on one another to meet material needs (Durning, 1992:44). (Barakat, 2000:931) points to studies in the United States showing that increased spending on such goods as houses, cars, and clothes has led to debt and longer working hours in lieu of spending more time with family and friends. These studies show that those who consume more and spend more time on the Internet are less happy.

(Durning, 1992:145) observed that in the United States, now arguably the most wasteful society in human history, only in this past century did consuming rather than saving gain acceptance as a way of life. The new morality emphasizes not saving but expanding consumption. Americans have forgotten the wisdom of their forefather Benjamin Franklin, who wrote, “Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. There is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one”.

(Lane, 1994:521) points out that since the mid-1960s, advanced and rapidly advancing economies have witnessed a rising tide of clinical depression and dysphoria, a decline in mutual trust, and a loosening of social bonds. Most studies show that above a minimal level, income is irrelevant to one’s sense of well-being, but companionship and social support increase well-being. Since shopping and consumption are increasingly solitary activities, and watching television is not genuinely sociable, the increased time devoted to these activities may contribute to rising levels of depression. Lane contends that advanced societies are more likely to increase “utility” if they maximize friendship opportunities rather than the getting and spending of wealth.

Many in consumer societies have a sense that people’s self-respect and senses of self-worth have been shaken, generating a greater demand for material status symbols. People are more concerned with appearances
than with traditionally valued capabilities. A mutual intolerance between the young and old has emerged (Olson, 1998:194,195).

There is much talk of the emptiness of modern life (Rosenblatt, 1999: 10). Many consumer societies have a sense that consumerism has created impoverishment of man’s inner world, producing a feeling of moral emptiness, destroying the affection of man for fellow men, generating selfishness, and finally isolating and alienating man from society, leaving him with a divided personality. Saudi Arabians would do well to ponder these findings and consider the extent to which they may fall into the same trap. According to *(Al-Sharq Al-Awsat daily, 2000)*, a recently conducted survey revealed that 30% of arrivals to the private and public psychiatric clinics in Saudi Arabia suffer from depression. A psychologist at the King Faisal Research Centre in Riyadh estimates that up to 10% of the local population suffers from depression. The specialist also revealed a rising suicide phenomenon, especially amongst people who do not receive any therapy.

**Increasing Obesity**

Increasing obesity in Saudi Arabia is visible. A plethora of fast-food chains and restaurants are becoming part of the Saudi people’s daily eating regime. It is believed that 70% of the Saudi population eats out at least once a day (Global Market Information, 2004).

Attacks against the fast-food industry’s harmful effects on health have mounted over the years (Ritzer, 2001a:34). In the Arabian Gulf countries, *(Al-Rahmani, 1999:44)* has warned of the dangers to children and youth posed by fast food consumption. The danger is posed by the content of most fast food: a lot of fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar. Such meals are the last things Saudis need, suffering as many of them do from obesity, high cholesterol levels, and high blood pressure. In the Gulf States, according to research done by Abdu-Alrahman Musaiger an academic at the Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research, the prevalence of obesity ranges between 30% and 60% *(The Economist, 1999:48)*.

Several studies have pointed to an alarmingly high incidence of obesity in Saudi females, who on average are reported to be more obese than their European counterparts (Al-Rehaimi, 1992). The Saudi National Survey Sample Data from 1990 to 1993 showed that 49.15% of women and 29.94% of men between 30 and 70 years of age were obese.
(Alsiif et al., 2002). (Al-Nuaim et al., 1996a:552) found a high prevalence of overweight and obese Saudi subjects, particularly females. These conditions were more prevalent among high income and illiterate subjects who resided in urban communities. The prevalence of obesity in Saudi Arabia was among the highest reported when compared with other countries, whether using the WHO criteria or U.S. criteria for defining overweight and obesity. A study done in Saudi Arabia in 1996 found that 45% of men and 52% of women were overweight (The Economist, 1999:48). According to (Global Market Information report, 2004), 25% of the Saudi population was classified as obese in 1990, and by 2000 this percentage had reached almost 27%.

A study by (Al-Nuaim et al., 1996b: 1000) found a high prevalence of childhood obesity among Saudi male children attending public schools. Since the prevalence of obesity increases with age and an unprecedented 60% of the Saudi population are less than 30 years old, the prevalence of obesity is expected to multiply in the near future.

The consumer class diet generally is too rich in fats. The price the consumer class pays for its meat-rich diet is high death rates from the so-called diseases of affluence – heart disease, stroke, and cancer of the breast and colon (Durning, 1992: 67, 68). People in consumer societies commonly dine on meat, processed and packaged foods, and high-caloric beverages in disposable containers. Mothers, particularly those working outside the home, may substitute infant formula for breast milk despite the known association of the former with higher rates of infant mortality (Schor, 1999:48). Commerciogenic malnutrition has increased as people substitute Coca-Cola and potato chips for healthier traditional food.

Mass media, especially televised food advertisements, have played an important role in modifying Saudi dietary habits, which have changed drastically as incomes increased in the decades following oil discovery. The traditional diet of dates, milk, rice, brown bread, fresh vegetables, and fish changed to include junk food and fewer green vegetables and fruits (Farthing, 1991; Musgrave et al., 1981; Stults et al., 1982). (Musaiger, 1993) says that food subsidy policies have also adversely affected food habits in the Gulf States by encouraging the intake of fat, sugar, rice, wheat flour, and meat. The deterioration of diet quality has occurred not only in Saudi Arabia but in the surrounding Gulf countries as well (Musaiger & Gregory, 1992; Musaiger, 1994).
According to (Global Market Information, 2004) report, Saudi consumer expenditures for oil and fat between 1990 and 2003 increased by 72.9% from SR 666.00 million to SR 1,151.69 million. Food expenditures in Saudi Arabia is dominated by meat particularly poultry, which accounted for 4.8% of total food expenditures in 2003. Meat expenditures were over ten times (SR 13362.33 million) that of dairy product including milk, cheese, and eggs, which accounted for only SR 1195.60 million for the same period. Per capita consumption of poultry meat increased from 16.5 kg in 1979 to 35 kg in 2000 based on a population of 21 million including 6.5 million expatriates.

Health Problems Associated with Smoking

Since 1950s, cigarette smoking has become widespread in Saudi Arabia. From 1961 to 1987, tobacco imports increased forty fold (Al-Tamimi et al., 1996). According to (Al-Bayan, 2005), a specialized report ranks Saudi Arabia in the 4th position in the world in terms of importing tobacco and cigarettes. More than 15 million cigarettes are sold in Saudi Arabia annually. The kingdom spends annually SR 1.8 billion on tobacco imports.

The Saudi Charitable Anti-smoking Association announced that Saudis annually spend SR 12 billion on smoking. The association added that the Saudi smokers annually consume 99 tons of tobacco. The kingdom is ranked fourth in the world in terms of the smokers ratio amongst the local inhabitants. The existing 6 million smokers in the kingdom spend SR 33 million on tobacco on daily basis (Al-Yaum, 2004).

Various surveys indicate that 20 percent - 40% of the male populations are regular smokers, while the figures for female are somewhat less (Peto et al., 1992; Saeed et al., 1989). Smoking among the teens is also spreading. More than 600,000 school students under the age of 22 are smoking (Rasooldeen, 2005).

(Schultz et al., 1998) pointed out that in Saudi Arabia there is little knowledge among the population about the risks of smoking, and consumption of 60 - 80 cigarettes daily is considered quite ordinary by many. Several studies have pointed out the dangers of cigarette smoking. There is an increasing evidence of the link between smoking and lung cancer and nearly every organ of the body (Federal Drug Administration,
2004; Schultz et al., 1998). Lung cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer deaths in males, according to a recent study in the Eastern Province in Saudi Arabia, and both morbidity and mortality can be expected to rise sharply if present smoking patterns continue unabated (Al Tamimi et al., 1996). Nearly 23,000 people die annually in Saudi Arabia of smoking-related diseases (Shaikh, 2004). By 2006, lung cancer is expected to become the first death cause amongst Saudi men (Al-Bayan, 2005).

There is also an increased use of water-pipe smoking notably among male and female youth in Saudi Arabia. This trend presents a new challenge for health care providers. The few scientific studies regarding the adverse health consequences of water-pipe smoking point to dangers that are similar to those associated with cigarette smoking malignancy (EL-Hakim & Uthman 1999), and impaired pulmonary function (Al-Fayez et al., 1988). Additional dangers not encountered with cigarette smoking are infectious diseases resulting from pipe sharing (El-Barrawy et al., 1997). (Zahran et al., 1985) report showed that the carboxyhemoglobin was measured in 1832 healthy Saudi Arabian males after smoking for 10 to 40 minutes. The mean carboxyhemoglobin concentrations were higher among water-pipe smokers (10.1%) than among cigarette smokers (6.5%) or nonsmokers (1.6%), and a linear relationship was found between smoking intensity and carboxyhemoglobin.

**Conclusion**

The rise of a consumer society in Saudi Arabia increases the challenges the country faces as it seeks sustainable development. Intensification of consumption has led to several problematic consequences. For example, this study implies that economic concern with consumerism in Saudi Arabia stems from the growing influence of multinational corporations, increasing dependency on import, credit indebtedness and decreased in-savings despite oil market fluctuations. In addition, it has generated environmental problems including natural resource depletion along with rampant population growth, ecological danger, air pollution and increasing volumes in disposable waste. Social problematic aspects of consumerism have been recognized such as growing consumption aspirations, rising social inequality, displaying conspicuous consumption, and the tendency toward emphasis on
material values. Psychological and physical health threats posed by depression, increasing obesity and diseases related to smoking have emerged.

Excessive consumption must be dealt with if the country is to enjoy future well-being. Although the Saudi government has made one of the Seventh Development Plan (2000-2004) goals to rationalize consumption, no strong and influential voices in the Kingdom are affirming the importance of this issue. An effective policy for strategy and action is urgently needed and serious efforts should be devoted to spread public knowledge and awareness regarding their consumption patterns.

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ظاهرة الاستهلاك في المملكة العربية السعودية
المشكلات والنتائج المترتبة

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ملخص: زاد الاهتمام بظاهرة الاستهلاك وما يرتبط بها من مشاكل في كل من الدول المتقدمة والدول النامية بما في ذلك دول الخليج ومنها المملكة العربية السعودية، مع انتشار النظام الرأسمالي عالمياً. وعلى الرغم من تفاقم المشكلات الاقتصادية والبيئية والاجتماعية والصحية المترتبة على تنامي النزعة الاستهلاكية، فإن الدراسات في هذا المجال مازالت محدودة. وينصب اهتمام هذا البحث على دراسة المشكلات المترتبة على تنامي النزعة الاستهلاكية في المملكة العربية السعودية، وهي حقيقة من الضروري مواجهتها للنهوض بالمجتمع وتحقيق التنمية المستدامة.

المصطلحات الأساسية: الاستهلاك، السلوب، المشاكل الاجتماعية، دول الخليج، سكان السعودية، التلوث، البيئة.