

# Exploring Cognitive Functions of Demand through the Teachings of Abhidharma

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**ABSTRACT:** Economics and Abhidharma (in-depth dharma teachings by the Buddha) rarely emerge together in interdisciplinary discussions due to the contradictory nature of the two disciplines. Economics is identified as the dismal science which attempts to understand how limited resources should be distributed in a way that satisfies unlimited wants so as to maximize satisfaction (utility) with demand being one of the core concepts. It is known that the demand occurs because of three reasons: willingness to buy, the ability to pay now, in the present. With the surfacing of neuroEconomics which looks at how thoughts and brain functions when making decisions, Abhidharma can be very useful in providing insights as to how thoughts functions. According to Abhidharma, “greed” is the nucleus when demand is looked in a micro-level. *Citta* (Consciousness), also known as thoughts and *chaitasika*, identified as the thought processes in Abhidharma, can be used to guide and provide a different outlook to the concept of ‘demand’ in Economics. This paper hopes to pursue the knowledge of eight folds in *lobha* (greed); one of the theoretical elements of Abhidharma in assessing how demand in Economics occurs.

**KEYWORDS:** Abhidharma, Demand, NeuroEconomics, Greed, Micro-analysis

## Introduction

Economics is a social science known for understanding how resources should be allocated in a world where wants are unlimited and resources needed to satisfy these wants are limited. Economics focuses on how these resources are efficiently allocated so as to maximize utility. In the recent decade, social scientists have attempted to merge and engage more in interdisciplinary analysis especially in the field of Economics. Psychology and Economics merged into behavioural Economics, complex systems and Economics merged into complexity Economics are examples and such cross-overs are gaining much interest among academia.

However, Buddhist Economics, economic analysis where Buddhist philosophy is used to critically evaluate economic concepts, has not evolved beyond Schumacher’s “Small is Beautiful”. In this paper, an attempt is made to explore the concept of demand through the vision of deepest teachings of the Buddha – known as Abhidharma.

## ***Brief introduction about Abhidharma***

The Sanskrit term Abhidharma means “concerning (abhi) the teachings (dharma)” (Thera 1987). In the Buddhist exegetical tradition this term means “further” or “higher” teaching, and it refers both to the doctrinal investigations of the new scholastic movement and to the body of texts yielded by Abhidharma’s systematic exposition of Buddhist thought. Unlike the earlier Buddhist discourses that are colloquial in nature, the Abhidharma method presents the Buddha’s teachings in technical terms that are carefully defined to ensure analytical exactitude. In content, Abhidharma is distinctive in its efforts to provide the theoretical counterpart to the Buddhist practice of meditation and, more broadly, a systematic account of sentient experience. It does so by analyzing conscious experience. The Abhidharma mainly comprises of four parts.

Table 1. The Abhidharma parts

Category	Description
1) Citta (Consciousness)	Explained in a separate section
2) Cetasika (Mental states)	These are the 52 states that are associated with consciousness, that arise and perish together with consciousness, that have the same object and basis as consciousness, are known as Cetasika. There are four properties of Cetasika. (Thera N M, 1987) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cetasika arises together with consciousness</li> <li>• Cetasika perishes together with consciousness</li> <li>• Has an identical objective with consciousness</li> <li>• Has a common basis with consciousness</li> </ul>
3) Rupa (Matter)	Rupa is not matter as in the metaphysical substance of materialism. Instead, it means both materiality and sensibility – signifying, for example, a tactile object both as that object is made out of matter and that the object can be tactically sensed. In fact, rupa is more essentially defined by its amenability to being sensed than its being matter: just like everything else, it is defined in terms of its function, what it does, not what it is. As matter, rupa is traditionally analysed in two ways: as four primary elements and, 24 derived elements. (Thera N M, 1987)
4) Nirvana (Enlightenment)	One of the main ideas of Buddhism is that of rebirth. All suffering is caused due to rebirth. How do we escape the repeating cycle of birth and thereby cease all suffering? The answer is by attaining Nirvana. It is the equivalent of heaven in Buddhism. Nirvana is attained via destroying all of 10 sins which are known as fetters.

### ***Citta or Consciousness***

There are several ways that Citta is classified. However, these are not further explored here due to the word limitations. Therefore, we directly attempt to understand the four categories of Citta.

- 1) Kamavacara Citta – Consciousness pertaining to the Sensuous Sphere (54 Citta)
- 2) Rupavacara Citta – Consciousness pertaining to the Form Sphere (15 Citta)
- 3) Arupavacara Citta – Consciousness pertaining to the Formless Sphere (12 Citta)
- 4) Lokuttara Citta – Supramundane Consciousness (08 Citta)

Altogether summing up to 89 Cittas or types of Consciousness.

### ***Kamavacara Citta***

The 54 Kamavacara Citta can be divided into 3 main parts.

- 1) Kusala Citta (Moral Consciousness. 24 Cittas)
- 2) Akusala Citta (Immoral Consciousness. 12 Cittas)
- 3) Ahetuka Citta (Rootless Consciousness. 18 Cittas).

For this analysis, Akusala Citta is the most significant out of the 54 Kamavacara Cittas (Thero 2016).

### ***Demand in Economics***

Demand is an important concept in Economics which denotes the relationship between the quantity bought against the price of a particular commodity. However, it is known that such demand occurs when there exists “willingness” and the “ability” to buy (Samuelson 1973). The

“ability” highlights the monetary capacity while the “willingness” emphasizes the cognitive capacity in which the demand could occur. While Economics explores the monetary capacity in-depth, cognitive capacity is not mainstreamed in theory despite numerous authors seek to explore this subject in psychology and Economics. While psychology explores cognitive functions of choice theory, it is important to further explore what goes through a person’s mind when a demand occurs leading towards a micro-analysis.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the works of mind through the teachings of Abhidharma when demand occurs.

## Discussion

According to Abhidhamma, wants and needs arise as a cause of unsatisfying “greed” in humans. Greed also known as Lobha consists of 8 folds (Thero 2016).

1) Unprompted, accompanied by pleasure and connected with wrong view

Example: Consider a case of someone pleurably stealing with the belief that “it’s okay to steal from rich people” or enjoying a meal pleurably with the belief that “this food is given to us by God” without being prompted by someone to do so.

2) Prompted, accompanied by pleasure and connected with the wrong view

Example: Consider a similar case as (1) of someone as above but being prompted by someone else to do so.

3) Unprompted, accompanied by pleasure and disconnected with the wrong view

Example: Consider someone eating a cake with pleasure without the belief that it was God-given.

4) Prompted, accompanied by pleasure and disconnected with the wrong view

Example: Consider someone stealing a pen with pleasure after being prompted by someone else to do so without the belief that it was God-given.

5) Unprompted, accompanied by indifference and connected with the wrong view

Example: Consider someone drinking alcohol without pleasure with the belief that it is God-given without being prompted to do so.

6) Prompted, accompanied by indifference and connected with the wrong view

Example: Consider the same case as (5) but after being prompted by someone else to drink alcohol.

7) Unprompted, accompanied by indifference and disconnected with the wrong view

Example: Consider a case of someone stealing without the belief about a God without being prompted by someone to do so and without being prompted to do so.

8) Prompted, accompanied by indifference and connected with the wrong view

Example: Consider the same case as (7) but after being prompted to do so.

Greediness can either be accompanied by pleasure or be accompanied by indifference.

This term is derived from “dis” which means to see, to perceive. It is translated as view, belief, opinion, etc. When qualified by “miccha” this means wrong view or wrong belief. The kind of belief that is referred here is that there is no result in wrong actions or belief of an almighty God.

Cittas can either be accompanied by or disconnected with wrong view.

As the term suggests, “Prompted” means an action induced by someone else whereas “Unprompted” means an action that is done without any external or internal inducement, or any premeditation.

Given these eight folds, we can highlight that feelings (accompanied pleasure or indifference), perception (view) and the influence (whether its oneself or someone else) are the roots for a demand to occur.

### *Synthesizing feelings, perception and influence into Economics of demand*

A person would buy something assuming that its consumption would bring either happiness or indifference to the consumer. Consumption would bring a person happiness if this particular good is

something long-awaited like a buying a dream-fulfilling car as opposed to consuming the third and the fourth ice-cream in Economics understood as the diminishing marginal utility which would bring indifference to this particular consumption.

The perception that is being discussed here is philosophical and denies the utilitarian concept; that more consumption leads to more happiness and utility. This argument is brought forward by Schumacher (1973) in his book *Small is beautiful* and aligns with the Economics concept of gross domestic happiness which does not align with monetary and utilitarian values.

As mentioned above, Abhidharma brings in two kinds of influences; being prompted and unprompted. A demand could happen with another person's influence such as advertising or on his or her own accord. The ideology of demand creation is brought into account here.

## Summary

The purpose of this paper was to bring in some concepts of Abhidharma to explain cognitive functions when demand occurs. Buddhist philosophy and Economics rarely could emerge as interdisciplinary given the contradiction between the two philosophies. Buddhist concepts dismiss the fact that more consumption brings more utility or more happiness while mainstream Economics emphasizes the utilitarian concept which states that more consumption brings in more happiness. While taken such stances in both disciplines, we attempt to explore the cognitive functions of when demand occurs through the lens of Buddha's teachings; Abhidharma also known as dharma in-depth. According to Abhidharma, Cittas (Consciousness) pertaining to demand is mainly greed. This is also identified as the driven factor for demand.

Given the eight folds of greed, we have identified that there exist three functions; feelings, perception and influence that goes through one's mind when demand occurs.

Demand occurs when a person is happy or indifferent about that particular demand. With such feelings comes the illusion that consuming or demanding more could bring in more happiness to a person and such instances are either influenced by another person or could arise due to one's own thoughts.

The paper seeks to merge two concepts and do a micro-analysis of a common concept; demand despite the contradictory opinions within the two philosophies which could pave the way towards further research between Abhidharma and Economics.

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