What Motivates People to Be Materialistic? Developing a Measure of Instrumental-Terminal Materialism

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Developing a Measure of Instrumental-Terminal Materialism

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Materialism is an important construct that has gained considerable attention from marketing researchers, mainly due to its demonstrated impact on consumers’ quality of life. Accordingly, it is essential to understand how materialism develops and how it affects quality of life is essential to take preventive actions against materialism, it is probably even more important to understand the real motives to become materialistic. Richins and Dawson (1992) have suggested, based on values research, that materialistic people value their material possessions more highly than they do other goals in life. This conclusion begs asking the question, why is this so? What is the motivation behind valuing material possessions so highly? Richins and Dawson (1992) conceptualized materialism as a value and explained the motivation to acquire material things through three belief systems: acquisition centrality, happiness, and success. We argue that the core meaning of materialism as reflected in the Richins and Dawson’s Material Value Scale (MVS) has been confounded between the instrumental and terminal values. Acquisition centrality is, in essence, instrumental materialism whereas happiness and success are essentially terminal values (linking the perceived importance of materialism in life to specific end goals such as happiness and success).

This paper seeks to help researchers better understand the motivation behind the high value placed on material possessions and presents a new measure of instrumental-terminal materialism (MITM) that focuses on how materialism (instrumental value) motivates the attainment of three major life goals or terminal values: happiness, social recognition, and uniqueness. In other words, materialistic people have (1) the motive to seek happiness and the instrumental belief that having material possessions is key to happiness; (2) the motive to seek social recognition by significant others and the instrumental belief that having material possessions is key to social recognition; and (3) the motive to seek uniqueness (i.e., develop an identity that sets the person apart from the crowd) and the instrumental belief that having material possessions is key to asserting one’s uniqueness. Because previous materialism scales do not measure these three motives of materialism comprehensively, we set to develop a new measure of instrumental-terminal materialism (MITM).

We developed our MITM by following the scale development procedures proposed by Churchill (1979) and DeVellis (1991). Six separate studies conducted in the United States provided evidence for dimensionality, internal consistency, discriminant validity, and non-susceptibility to social desirability bias for the second-order factor model (i.e., one higher order materialism factor that comprised of all three first-order factors). We also compared the MITM with the original and shorter versions of the MVS. The results showed that the MITM outperformed the MVS in terms of internal consistency and dimensionality.

To assess nomological validity, relationships between materialism (and its dimensions) and three constructs (i.e., personal values, social influence, and physical appearance concern) were examined. As expected, excitement, being well-respected, and security values had positive and significant correlations with overall materialism and its three dimensions. Self-respect and a sense of accomplishment values were positively and significantly correlated with the social recognition and uniqueness dimensions, but not significantly correlated with the happiness dimension. Because the happiness dimension implies acquiring things for the sake of happiness, and because this dimension does not necessarily relate to signaling status and prestige to other people, non-significant relationships between happiness and these two values (self-respect and a sense of accomplishment) make theoretical sense. Social influence in buying behavior can be defined as the impact of family and peers on consumer behavior (in addition to the impact of media and advertising). As expected, social influence and materialism were positively correlated. The materialism dimensions that are more related to other people (i.e., social recognition and uniqueness) had higher correlations than the materialism dimension that is not directly related to other people (i.e., happiness).

Materialism is defined as acquiring possessions and some of those possessions, such as jewelry and watches, are related to physical appearance. Accordingly, we found that physical appearance concern is positively correlated with materialism’s three dimensions as well as the materialism scale as a whole.

Most measures presented in the consumer research literature seem to have been developed in the United States. However, many of these measures have been used in other countries, and the results are assumed to be comparable with the results in the US (Cheung and Rensvold 1999; Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998). Because there are cultural differences and translation problems, it is important to assess the structure of the measure and its reliability and validity across different cultures when developing a new measure. To this end, data were collected from five countries with divergence in language, ethnicity and religion: Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Korea, and Turkey. Before testing for measurement invariance, a baseline model was estimated by running second-order confirmatory factor analyses for each country separately. Results showed that the model fit the data well for each country. A series of nested tests was conducted at increasingly more stringent levels to test for three specific purposes identified by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998, 82): “exploring the basic structure of the construct cross-nationally, making quantitative comparisons of means across countries, and examining structural relationships with other constructs cross-nationally.” The results revealed that the MITM is invariant across different countries, suggesting that the new measure can be used in other countries with confidence.

Overall, based on 11 studies involving 983 university students and 1,039 adult respondents, we believe that the MITM will help...
researchers conduct more reliable and valid materialism-related research both in the United States and cross-culturally.

REFERENCES