

The Role of Materialism in Life satisfaction: An empirical investigation of university students

Dr. Rabia Aftab¹, Saima Gul khattak², Leontia Pertila Fernandes³, Abel Thomas⁴

Department of Psychology
Bath Spa University Academic Centre Ras Al Khaimah

Abstract

Materialism is the attitude that material goods and worldly possessions contribute to the highest value in life. In this fast-developing world, materialistic lifestyles become a source of happiness because of our mental set, which is rooted in our childhood. Still, the fact is that materialism does not give real peace and life satisfaction. The present study was conducted to see the impact of materialism on life satisfaction among university students. The study sample consists of 100 university students (50 males and 50 females), ranging from 22 to 30 years from various departments of Aligarh Muslim University. Richins and Dawson (1992) materialistic values scale was used to measure materialistic value and satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al. 1985) was used to measure life satisfaction. Pearson product-moment correlation, t-test, and Step-wise regression were used for analyses. The findings of the study explored that there was a significant impact of materialism on life satisfaction. Materialism was found to be negatively correlated with life satisfaction along with its dimensions of centrality, happiness, and success. The results further revealed that there was no significant difference between males and females regarding materialism. The findings of the present study may lack generalizability because of the small sample from one university. Therefore, the researcher encouraged to use of a larger sample for future research.

Keywords: Materialism, life satisfaction, centrality, happiness, success, university students

Introduction

In today's world, psychologists and mental health practitioners focus on promoting well-being and enhancing life-satisfaction. In this fast-developing society with increasing economic activities, materialism is overgrowing. The negative consequences of materialism can't be ignored. Materialism is an emerging topic of research because of its negative consequences for individuals and society. Materialism can be defined as a worldly possession and give more value to worldly things. Materialistic people tend to place a greater value on external possessions and achievements, such as wealth, status, and physical appearance, than on internal qualities and relationships. This often leads them to prioritize extrinsic goals such as

fame, success, and social recognition over intrinsic goals like personal growth, meaningful relationships, and contributing to their community.

Belk (1985) and Richin (1992) have different views on materialism. Belk considered materialism as a personality trait, where individuals with higher levels of materialism exhibit negative traits such as envy, non-generosity, and possessiveness. Richin viewed materialism as a value, where individuals with higher levels of materialism prioritize acquisition centrality, happiness, and success. Kasser and Ryan (1993) further elaborated on Richin's view by proposing that materialism is a set of values that prioritize material possessions and wealth over other life goals, such as relationships,

personal growth, and community involvement. They also suggested that materialistic values are associated with negative outcomes, such as decreased well-being and increased social isolation. Materialism leads to various psychological illness such as depression and paranoia. Among adolescents, it was found that they are more prone to negative behavior such as alcohol and marijuana (Tim & Aaron, 2001). Materialism also leads to lower self-esteem (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialism increases the feeling of loneliness (Pieters, 2013). Moreover, materialism is also associated with behavioral disorders, such as antisocial behavior (Kasser & Ryan, 1993).

On the other hand, focusing on personal growth and fulfilling internal goals can lead to a greater sense of purpose and satisfaction in life. Prioritizing meaningful relationships, personal values, and experiences can also bring about a sense of connection and happiness. Everyone has different values and goals, and what may bring happiness to one individual may not be the same for another. However, the idea that materialism can distract from personal growth and happiness is a perspective that has been explored in psychology and philosophy.

Life-Satisfaction

Life-satisfaction is the overall cognitive evaluation of one's well-being, it is how one feels and think about one's life. There are two theoretical approaches to life satisfaction top-down and bottom-up. The top-down approach influences that personality differences in combination with dispositional factors influence life satisfaction. The bottom-up perspective

focuses on all the domains of life i.e., family, work-life, and spiritual life, which affect overall life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is connected to almost every aspect of life as it is the key to happiness.

Materialism and life-satisfaction

Materialism is generally defined as the tendency to prioritize material possessions and wealth over other values, such as relationships, personal growth, and community involvement. Kasser and Ryan's (1993) study found that people who placed a high value on material possessions had lower levels of life satisfaction and well-being, while Richins and Dawson (1992) found that materialism was associated with lower levels of psychological well-being. The research of Nickerson et al. (2007) examined a negative relationship between materialism and life-satisfaction. For materialistic people, money is central to happiness. Materialistic people get life satisfaction by acquiring more wealth and buying more material goods than non-material sources of joy (Richins, 1987). Materialistic people become addicted, and to satisfy them, they need more and more, and when they don't get what they want; they feel a lower overall life-satisfaction (Richins 1987). Another explanation of lower life satisfaction among materialistic people is when an individual becomes materialistic; he starts to run in the race of social comparison, which developed feelings of inequality, anger, injustice, or envy. That is why materialistic people are less happy not because they have less rather because they are compared from other people (Sirgy, 1998). Richins (2013) gives another

explanation of lower satisfaction among materialistic people as materialistic people have positive emotions before purchase, but after purchase, it fades quickly, and that leads to lower satisfaction.

Therefore, this study aimed to see the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction empirically. For this purpose, this research will examine materialism with three dimensions' success, Centrality, and Happiness.

The present research pointed to resolve the following research questions

1. Is there a significant relationship between materialism and life satisfaction of university students?
2. Is there a significant impact of materialism on the life satisfaction of university students?

3. Is there significant gender difference between males and females in terms of materialism?

Objectives

1. To identify the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction of university students.
2. To identify the relationship between dimensions of materialism and life-satisfaction of university students.
3. To identify the impact of materialism on life-satisfaction of university students.
4. To examine the gender difference among university students in terms of materialism.

2. Method

2.1. Subjects: A sample of 100 university students from various departments of Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh has been selected. The participants range between 22 years to 30 years, and among them, 50 were males, and 50 were females.

Table 1

Demographic	N	Percentage%
Gender		
Males	50	50%
Females	50	50%
Age		
18-22yrs	34	34%
23-25yrs	22	22%
25above	44	44%

Religion		
Hindu	14	14%
Muslim	86	86%
Other	0	0
Level Of Education		
Under Graduation	36	36%
Under PG	27	27%
PhD	37	37%
Type Of Family		
Nuclear	44	44%
Joint	56	56%

2.2. Measuring Instruments

Richins and Dawson (1992) materialistic values scale

Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialistic values scale was used to measure the materialistic value. The scale consisted of 18 items and it is a five-point Likert scale ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scale included three subscales tap into three dimensions of materialism: Success, Centrality, and Happiness. Sample of the items include, "It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all

the things I like", "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes"

Satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al. 1985)

For measuring life-satisfaction, the satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al. 1985) was used; it has five items in a seven-point Likert scale from strongly agree = 1 to strongly disagree = 7. Sample of the items includes "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal", "So far I have gotten the important things I **want in life.**"

Results

Table 1: showing the descriptive statistics of materialism and life- satisfaction.

Variables	Mean	SD
Materialism	50.43	5.86
Life-satisfaction	21.49	4.42

The mean score of materialism is 50.43, and the standard deviation is 5.86, and the maximum score on the Material value scale is 90. So, the score of 50.43 represents 56 percent in absolute terms, which means that there are moderate materialistic tendencies in the sample. The mean score of life

satisfaction is 21.49 and the standard deviation is 4.42, and the maximum score of the life-satisfaction scale is 35. So the score of 21.49 shows 61 percent in absolute terms, which means that there is a moderate life-satisfaction within the sample.

In table 2 the gender differences were examined in terms of materialism; the table shows the value of mean and the value of t.

Table 2: showing the differences between males and females on materialism

Group	N	Mean	S. D	t	Sig.
Male	50	50.07	5.96	4.80	0.816
Female	50	50.87	5.86		

The mean score of male is 50.07 (SD =5.96) and the mean score of female is 5.86(SD=5.86) which means that there is no difference between males and females

regarding materialism. Females showing slightly higher score. Hence the hypothesis that is **there will be significant differences between males and females is rejected.**

Table 3: showing the correlation between materialism and life-satisfaction.

Variables	LS	M	H	s	c
LS	1	-.492**	-.259**	-.326**	-.262*
M	-.492**	1	.495**	.436**	.459**
H	-.259*	.495**	1	.281*	.294**
S	-.326**	.436	.281*	1	.255*
C	-.262*	.459	.294**	.255*	1

***Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels**

The correlation between life-satisfaction and materialism and its dimensions was found to be negative. The value of (r=-2.89) at 0.01 level, between materialism and life-satisfaction. This implies that when materialism is increased, life-satisfaction decreased. Further the dimensions of materialism viz success, Centrality, and Happiness were also show negative

correlation with life-satisfaction. The value of (r=-.259) at 0.01 for materialism and happiness, for materialism and success (r=-.326) at 0.01 level and for centrality (r=-.262) at 0.05 level.

To examine the predictive relation between materialism and its dimensions (success, Centrality, and Happiness) and life-satisfaction the step-wise multiple regression was conducted.

Table 4: showing the impact of materialism on life satisfaction.

Predictor	Beta -value	R	R ²	p
Materialism	-2.8	.492	.242	.000

Predictor: Materialism

Dependent variable: Life-satisfaction.

Table 4 shows that there is 24 percent of variance (P value=.000) is explained by the regression model, which indicates that materialism affects life-satisfaction. Thus the hypothesis that there would be a

significant impact of materialism on the life satisfaction of university students accepted.

4. Discussion

The present research aims to explore the relationship of materialism with life-satisfaction. Happiness from materialistic

values is temporary. Although various researches have been conducted that studied the impact of materialism on life-satisfaction on Indian students, it remains largely ambiguous and warrants research. This research aims to see the impact of materialism on life-satisfaction students. The result of the study explored that materialism was negatively related to life-satisfaction, which means those who buy material goods just for satisfaction and happiness; in reality, they are not satisfied with their life. This can be explained as by the study of Sirgy (1998) that materialistic people compare themselves with other which results in feelings of inequality anger, injustice. Thereby reduces life-satisfaction. The result is supported by Richins and Ryan (1992) and Kasser and Ryan (1993). Moreover, dimensions of materialism viz Happiness, centrality and success were also found to be significantly negatively related to life-satisfaction. Further, this study finds out that in the sample of this particular research, there is a moderate level of materialism. The study found no gender differences in terms of materialism results supported by the earlier finding of (Sidhu & Foo, 2015); they explored males and females did not differ in terms of materialism. However, females were found to have higher materialism in comparison to males in our study. The results of the study examined that materialism was found to be a significant predictor of life-satisfaction. These results are consistent with the findings of (Siang & Talib, 2011). They conducted their study on the undergraduate students of Malaysia to see the link between materialism and life-satisfaction and found a

negative relationship with a significant amount of variance.

References

- [1] Diener ED, Emmons RA, Larsen RJ, Griffin S, "The satisfaction with life scale", *Journal of personality assessment*, vol. 1, Feb 1985 ,pp.71-5.
- [2]Fergusson DM, McLeod GF, Horwood LJ, Swain NR, Chapple S, Poulton R, "Life satisfaction and mental health problems (18 to 35 years)", *Psychological medicine.*, vol.11 ,Aug.2015 ,pp2427-36.
- [3]Ger G, Belk RW. "Cross-cultural differences in materialism", *Journal of economic psychology*, vol.1, Feb, pp.55-77.
- [4]Kasser T, Ryan RM, "A dark side of the American dream: Correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration", *Journal of personality and social psychology*, vol.2,Aug 1993 ,pp.410.
- [5]"Materialism" (2015) The Collins English Dictionary. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/materialism>. Accessed 23 Oct 2015.
- [6] Nickerson C, Schwarz N, Diener E. "Financial aspirations, financial success, and overall life satisfaction: who? and how?", *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol.8 ,Dec2007.pp.467-515.
- [7] Pieters,R, "Bidirectional Dynamics of Materialism and Loneliness: Not Just a Vicious Cycle", *Journal of Consumer Research*,vol.40,Dec 2013, pp.616-631,doi.org/10.1086/671564.

- [8]Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. "A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation." *Journal of consumer research*,vol. 19,Jun2013,pp. 303-316.
- [9]Richins ML. Media, materialism, and human happiness. *ACR North American Advances*. 1987.
- [10]Richins ML. "When wanting is better than having: Materialism, transformation expectations, and product-evoked emotions in the purchase process",*Journal of Consumer Research*, vol.40, Jun 2013 pp.1-8.
- [11]Sidhu JK, Foo KH. "Materialism: The road to happiness and life satisfaction among Singaporeans", *Journal of Happiness and Well-Being*, vol.3,2015,pp.77-92.
- [12]Srikant M. "Materialism in consumer behavior and marketing: A review. *Management & Marketing"* ,vol.8, Apr 2013,pp 329.
- [14]Sirgy MJ. "Materialism: The construct, measures, antecedents, and consequences. *Academy of Marketing "*,*Studies Journal*., vol.3,1999,pp.78-110.
- [15]Tim, K., & Aaron, A. (2001). Materialistic values and well-being in business students. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 32(1), 137–146. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.85>
- [16] Kasser T, Ahuvia A. "Materialistic values and well-being in business student", *European journal of social psychology*, vol.32,Jan .2002,Jan,pp.137-46.
- [17]Naz S. "Relationship of life satisfaction and job satisfaction among Pakistani army soldiers. *İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi*", vol.7, 2015,pp.7-25.
- [18] Landry MB. "The effects of life satisfaction and job satisfaction on reference librarians and their work", *R.eference & User Services Quarterly*, vol.1,Dec. 2000,pp.166-77.
- [19]Sahraei M, Alipour O, Alipour H. "The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Life Satisfaction", *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)* ,vol.30,May.2016 ,pp.1720-4.