

Relationship of Materialism With Self-esteem and Well-being Among Indian Participants

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ABSTRACT

Materialism involves prioritizing the acquisition and possession of tangible goods as a primary life goal. It is often linked to the belief that acquiring and owning physical items is essential for happiness and personal fulfillment. There is a lack of research on materialism in India. This study examined the relationship of materialism with self-esteem and well-being in Indian context. Materialism Value Scale (MVS), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were administered to 65 Indian participants ($M_{age}=21.12$, $SD=3.43$). Correlational analysis shows no relation ($r=.014$, $p=.915$) between materialism and self-esteem. Moreover, no relationship ($r=-.015$, $p=.906$) was found between materialism and well-being. These findings indicate that materialism is not related to self-esteem and well-being in Indian context.

Keywords: *Materialism, India, Well-being, Self-esteem*

Numerous academic disciplines and viewpoints have been used to study and analyse materialism, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and religion (Ger & Belk, 1999). The psychological study of materialism has looked at the reasons for people's engagement in different forms of consumerism and the materialist ideals they hold, as well as the effects these behaviours have on the individual.

Richins and Dawson (1992) offered an alternate perspective, arguing that materialism was a set of ideals that an individual may adhere to. They specifically suggested that materialistic people prioritise consuming because they think it makes them happy and that goods define success. Materialism is a value system that places a strong focus on financial riches in personal relationships. They claim that materialism as a whole consists of three elements: acquisition centrality, which is the idea that one should prioritise acquiring possessions and using them to achieve happiness; acquisition as a pursuit of happiness, which is the idea that obtaining possessions is necessary for happiness; and possession-defined success, which is the idea of using possessions as a yardstick for evaluating one's own and other people's success.

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Money is seen as the ultimate source of happiness, the ultimate goal of life, and the measure of success. Despite having its roots in Western capitalist society, materialism has become widely accepted in Indian society as a result of economic reform and the rapid rise of market economy.

Materialism and self-esteem

According to Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, and Sheldon (2004), people frequently acquire tangible wealth as a means of making up for unfulfilled psychological demands, such as low self-esteem. There is a lot of empirical data to back up this viewpoint. For instance, research has shown that materialism is more prevalent in those with lower self-esteem (De Veirman, Hudders, & Cauberghe, 2017). It has been demonstrated that when people are self-doubting, they increase their material riches in order to boost their sense of self-worth, self-status, and decrease self-uncertainty (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Noguti & Bokeyar, 2014). Lastly, research has shown that people who have low self-esteem are more inclined to purchase goods linked to status symbols in order to improve their perception of themselves (Chaplin & John, 2007; Lee & Shrum, 2012). Therefore, materialism could be one way that people safeguard and enhance their sense of self.

Materialism and well-being

Thousands of commercials persuade us every day that having money, belongings, and the ideal appearance makes one happy, valuable, and successful (Dittmar, 2008; Kasser & Kanner, 2004). However, a multitude of philosophical and religious viewpoints from various eras and cultures contend that centring one's life on accumulating wealth, material belongings, and social standing weakens one's spirit and lowers one's standard of living (for critiques, see Belk, 1983; Elgin, 1993).

According to early research, Americans who believe that acquiring wealth and material possessions is crucial to happiness and success in life report lower levels of vitality and self-actualization, less happiness and life satisfaction, and higher rates of depression, anxiety, and general psychopathology.

Numerous subsequent researches have confirmed and expanded upon the initial findings, which show a negative correlation between materialism and personal well-being. Numerous measures of materialism, including Likert-type surveys (Richins, 2004), projective measures (Chaplin & John, 2007), measures of relative goal importance (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), and reaction times (Schmuck, 2001; Solberg, Diener, & Robinson, 2004), have been used to document these results. Apart from the well-being outcomes mentioned earlier, materialism has been linked to several other constructs as well, such as self-esteem (Ryan et al., 1999), dysfunctional consumer behaviours (Dittmar, 2005), physical health issues (Niemic, Ryan, & Deci, 2009), positive and negative affect (Christopher & Schlenker, 2004), and psychopathology diagnoses made by interviewers (Cohen & Cohen, 1996).

It is evident from prior studies that materialism has a negative correlation with self-esteem. Moreover, materialism also has negative relationship with well-being. According to my knowledge no correlation study has been conducted regarding materialism in India. I hypothesize negative correlation between materialism and self-esteem. Apart from it I also hypothesize negative correlation between materialism and well-being.

METHOD

Participants

The convenience sample comprised 65 Indian participants. The sample consisted of 26 males and 39 female participants. The mean age of participants was 21.12 (SD= 3.43). Most of the participants were unmarried (84.6%). Google form was used to collect data. The link of this form was sent through various social media platforms and emails. All items of the google form was made mandatory to attempt. Therefore, there was no missing data. The survey was voluntary to participate in, and there were no rewards for finishing it.

Measures

Materialism

The Hindi translated version of material values scale (MVS) by Richins (2004) was used to measure the materialism as a value among participants. Translation of the scale was completed using the forward and backward translation method by two language experts. This 15-item measure evaluates people's value placed on material belongings as a path to success, happiness, and importance. "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes," is an example of a statement. Participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 being strongly disagreed, and 5 being strongly agreed). Cronbach's alpha (.87) of the original scale was adequate.

Self-esteem

To measure self-esteem of the participants Rosenberg's self-esteem scale was used (Rosenberg, 1965). It is a 10-item scale that measure global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be unidimensional. All items are answered using a four-point likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Some sample questions are: (1) On the whole I am satisfied with myself, (2) I feel I do not have much to be proud of. Items 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are reverse scored. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. Internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for these subscales ranged from .83 to .89 (Gray-little, Williams & Hancock, 1997).

Well-being

Well-being was measured using the well-known Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). This measure comprises 5 items (e.g., 'In most ways my life is close to ideal,' 'If I could live my life over again, I would change nothing'). This scale has a 2-month test-retest correlation coefficient of 0.82 and coefficient alpha of 0.87 (Diener et al., 1985).

Procedure

The goal of the study and its various parts were explained to participants on the first page of the Google Form. Consent forms were given to participants so they may voluntarily take part in the study. In addition, they had to provide details about their age, gender, marital status, and place of residence. Participants received written instructions from the researcher. The questionnaires could be completed at any time.

Data Analyses

Data was analysed using SPSS version 29. Correlational analysis was conducted. Pearson correlation coefficient was used as a measure of relationship between two variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For all variables, Q-Q plots and histograms were displayed to verify that the data was normal. Additionally, Shapiro-Wilk's normality test was run in SPSS (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). The scores for all three variables were found to be normally distributed. The skewness and kurtosis of the materialism scores (M=46.63, SD=4.91) were -.081 and .923, respectively. The participants' self-esteem scores (M=27.17, SD=3.55) showed a kurtosis of .587 and a skewness of .010 (Doane & Seward, 2011). Moreover, the skewness and kurtosis of the well-being scores (M=21.38, SD=5.51) were -.397 and -.677, respectively.

Results of the bivariate correlational analysis (two-tailed) does not indicate any relationship between materialism and self-esteem ($r = .014$, $p = .915$). No relationship was found between materialism and well-being ($r = -.015$, $p = .906$). These findings were contrary to both hypotheses (see Table 1). One explanation for these findings would be that materialism scale was not validated in India. Some questions may not be appropriate for the Indian context. There may also be some social desirability biases in the responses of the Indian participant as in Indian culture materialism is considered a very negative value.

Table 1 Mean, standard deviations and correlations

| Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 |
|----------------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. Materialism | 46.63 | 4.91 | | |
| 2. Self-esteem | 27.17 | 3.55 | .014 | |
| 3. Well-being | 21.38 | 5.51 | -.015 | .284* |

Note. SD= Standard deviation. * $p < .05$

Limitations and future direction

In a correlational study, the likelihood of a statistically significant finding rises with sample size. The sample size was sufficient to capture medium effect sizes. For next research, I do recommend a big sample size, though. The majority of participants were under 25 years old. This limits how widely the results may be applied. There was no causal component to this investigation. It would be intriguing to observe how consumerism affects wellbeing and self-esteem.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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