

Research Paper

Association Between Gratitude and Materialism Among Indian College Students

Dr. Shravan Kumar Dixit^{1*}

ABSTRACT

The pursuit of materialism has been linked to misery. Conversely, gratitude - in its forms as a long-lasting emotional quality as well as a transient one - could contribute to happiness. Experiencing gratitude could lessen the need for material possessions. This study examined the relationship of materialism with gratitude in Indian context. Materialism Value Scale (MVS), and Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) were administered to 73 Indian college students ($M_{age} = 20.34$, $SD = 3.24$). Correlational analysis shows no relation ($r = -.019$, $p = .923$) between materialism and gratitude. These findings indicate that materialism is not related to gratitude in Indian context.

Keywords: *Materialism, India, Well-being, Gratitude*

While there is less agreement on how to mitigate materialism's pervasive negative effects on people, relationships, and society, many modern social theorists agree that it is a problem. Belk (1985) stated that materialism is a broad construct that encompasses psychological qualities like possessiveness, lack of generosity, and jealousy. He described materialism as the importance a consumer places on material possessions. Materialism was defined by Richins and Dawson (1992) as the value system that places an excessive emphasis on material possessions and riches. Contrary to post-materialism, materialism is characterised by Inglehart (2000) as a constant emphasis on lower-order demands for physical safety and comfort above higher-order wants like self-expression and quality of life. The set of objectives, attitudes, ambitions, and behaviours of the consumption-based culture was defined by Kasser using the phrase "materialistic value orientation" (Kasser et al., 2004).

If there is a genuine threat to psychological well-being from materialistic aspirations, it could be helpful to recognise psychological mechanisms that work against these aspirations. The feeling of thankfulness is one potential contender (McCullough et al., 2001, 2002). Gratitude is one of the positive other-oriented emotions that may have the ability to alter social cognition, motivation, and social connections in ways that are likely to lessen materialistic strivings and the detrimental consequences they have on psychological health.

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Feroze Gandhi College, Raebareli, India
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7622-5869>

*Corresponding Author

Received: August 15, 2024; Revision Received: October 30, 2024; Accepted: November 04, 2024

Association Between Gratitude and Materialism Among Indian College Students

Gratitude – either as a global personality disposition or as a temporary feeling or mood state – may be able to counteract materialistic strivings and their negative consequences on well-being. Gratitude has been characterised as “an estimate of gain coupled with the judgment that someone else is responsible for that gain” (Solomon, 1977, p. 316). Bertocci and Millard (1963) stated that gratitude is the recognition that one has been a recipient of someone else’s goodness, while Emmons (2004, p. 9) defined gratitude as “the recognition and appreciation of an altruistic gift.” Thus, thankfulness emerges from two cognitions: (a) that one has obtained a pleasant outcome and (b) that some external agent is accountable for it (McCullough et al., 2002).

Gratitude was conceptualised as a moral feeling by McCullough et al. (2001) because it usually stems from and leads to behaviour that is driven by concern for another person. They suggested that gratitude serves three purposes. Firstly, it can operate as a moral barometer by indicating that one has benefited from the kind deeds of others and offering a reading of the moral value of a circumstance. Secondly, it can serve as a moral incentive, as being grateful prompts one to act in a prosocial and charitable manner. Last but not least, it also serves as a moral reinforcing aspect since thanking a giver serves as a social reward and so motivates the benefactor to continue further prosocial actions in the future. Numerous studies have shown that, in addition to its moral implications, gratitude has a positive correlation with wellbeing—likely through a causal mechanism.

It would seem reasonable to investigate the potential that gratitude can lessen materialism given the beneficial affective and social improvements that it produces. Experiencing gratitude entails evaluating that one has benefited and is currently in possession of important resources as a result of the kind, deliberate, and hard work of another person. According to current theories about the relationships between affect and cognition, there is reason to believe that the evaluations linked to a particular emotion, such as thankfulness, may influence how people understand novel circumstances in order to make them seem compatible with the emotion that has been activated (e.g., Lerner and Keltner, 2000, 2001). Because of this, we anticipate that having gratitude—whether it be as a long-term affective characteristic or as a fleeting emotional or mood experience—should make people feel as though they are surrounded by kindness. As a result, those who are grateful should be less likely to pursue materialistic goals since they will generally perceive their lives as more stable and satisfying.

As far as we are aware, materialism and appreciation have a direct negative association (McCullough et al., 2002; Polak & McCullough, 2006). There are a few possible reasons why this link exists. For example, materialistic striving appears to center a person's attention on themselves and the things they lack and are attempting to obtain. On the other hand, acknowledging, appreciating, and relishing what one already has is a crucial component of thankfulness (McCullough et al., 2002). It seems that these two foci are incompatible. According to McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002), it would be extremely difficult for someone to be materialistic and appreciative at the same time.

According to Polak and McCullough (2006), experiencing thankfulness should make one feel as though other people are infused with goodness and security, which in turn will probably lessen the desire for worldly possessions. In keeping with this line of reasoning, we speculate that cultivating appreciation will increase life happiness and reduce the desire for materialistic pursuits.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The convenience sample consisted of 73 Indian individuals. There were 45 female participants and 28 male participants in the sample. The participants' average age was 20.34 (SD= 3.24). 89% of the participants were single. The data was gathered using a Google form. This form's link was distributed via emails and a number of social media channels. The Google Form's items were all made required to complete. As a result, no data was missing. There were no incentives for completing the survey, and participation was entirely voluntary.

Measures

- **Materialism:** Participants' levels of materialism were assessed using the Richins (2004) Material Values Scale (MVS), which has been translated into Hindi. Two language experts translated the scale utilising the forward and reverse translation approach. This 15-item test assesses people's beliefs about the importance, success, and enjoyment of material possessions. A remark like, "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes," is an example. On a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting strongly disagree and 5 denoting strongly agree, participants responded. The scale's Cronbach's alpha (.87) was sufficient.
- **Gratitude:** The inclination to feel thankfulness was measured using the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). "I have so much in life to be grateful for" is one of the six likert-type things in the list. Participants' answers varied from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It does, however, have two reverse-scoring items to prevent response bias. The dependability of the Gratitude Questionnaire's internal consistency has been proven. Hindi version of the scale was used (Dixit & Sinha, 2021).

Procedure

On the initial page of the Google Form, participants received an explanation regarding the purpose of the study and its components. Participants were provided consent papers so they could choose to participate in the study willingly. They also have to disclose information regarding their place of residence, marital status, age, and gender. The researcher provided written instructions to the participants. You could fill out the surveys whenever you wanted.

Data Analyses

Data analysis was done with SPSS version 29. An examination of correlation was carried out. The correlation between two variables was measured using the Pearson correlation coefficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Q-Q plots and histograms were observed for each variable to confirm that the data was normal. In addition, SPSS was used to perform the Shapiro-Wilk normalcy test (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). It was discovered that the scores for all two variables were distributed regularly. The materialism scores (M=44.87, SD=4.78) had a skewness and kurtosis of -.083 and .918, respectively (Doane & Seward, 2011). The gratitude scores (M=17.42, SD=1.91) had a skewness and kurtosis of -.284 and -.423, respectively.

There was no association between materialism and gratitude, according to the results of the bivariate correlational study (two-tailed) ($r = -.019$, $p = .923$). These results went against the theory that was put out (see Table 1). It was possible that some items were inappropriate in

Association Between Gratitude and Materialism Among Indian College Students

an Indian setting. The Indian participant's answers could also contain some social desirability biases because materialism is viewed negatively in Indian culture.

Table 1 Mean, standard deviations and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1
1. Materialism	44.87	4.78	
2. Gratitude	17.42	1.91	-.019

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

Limitations and future direction

The possibility of a statistically significant result in a correlational investigation increases with sample size. The medium effect sizes could be captured by the sample size. However, I do advise a large sample size for the future study. Participants who were under 25 made up the majority. This restricts how broadly the findings can be used. This investigation contained no causal elements. It would be interesting to see how gratitude impacts materialism.

REFERENCES

- Bertocci, P. A., & Millard, R. M. (1963). Personality and the Good: Psychological and Ethical Perspectives. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 3(1), 134. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1385034>
- Dixit, S. K., & Sinha, J. (2021). Adaptation and validation of the gratitude questionnaire (GQ-6) for the Indian context. *Current Psychology*, 42(11), 8722–8732. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02143-2>
- Doane, D. P., & Seward, L. E. (2011). Measuring skewness: A forgotten statistic? *Journal of Statistics Education*, 19(2), 1-18. doi: 10.1080/10691898.2011.11889611
- Emmons, Robert A., 'The Psychology of Gratitude: An Introduction', in Robert A. Emmons, and Michael E. McCullough (eds), *The Psychology of Gratitude*, Series in Affective Science (New York, 2004; online edn, Oxford Academic), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195150100.003.0001>, accessed 6 Aug. 2024.
- Inglehart, R. (2000), 'Globalization and postmodern values', *Washington Quarterly* 23, pp. 215–228.
- Kasser, T., R.M. Ryan, C.E. Couchman and K.M. Sheldon: 2004, Materialistic values: Their causes and consequences, in T. Kasser and A.D. Kanner (eds), *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World (American Psychological Association, Washington, DC)*, pp. 11–28.
- Lerner, J. S., & Keltner, D. (2000). Beyond valence: Toward a model of emotion-specific influences on judgement and choice. *Cognition & Emotion*, 14(4), 473–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/026999300402763>
- Lerner, J.S. and D. Keltner: 2001, Fear, anger, and risk, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, pp. 146–159
- McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. A. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(1), 112–127. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.82.1.112>
- McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S. D., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. B. (2001). *Is gratitude a moral affect?* *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(2), 249–266. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-2909.127.2.249>
- Polak, E. L., & McCullough, M. E. (2006). Is gratitude an alternative to materialism? *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 7(3), 343–360. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-005-3649-5>

Association Between Gratitude and Materialism Among Indian College Students

- Richins, M. L. (2004). The Material Values Scale: Measurement Properties and Development of a Short Form. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(1), 209–219. <https://doi.org/10.1086/383436>
- Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. (1992). A Consumer Values Orientation for Materialism and Its Measurement: Scale Development and Validation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(3), 303. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209304>
- Shapiro, S. S., & Wilk, M. B. (1965). An analysis of variance test for normality (complete samples). *Biometrika*, 52(3), 591-611.
- Solomon, R.C.: 1977, *The Passions*, Anchor Books, Garden City, NY.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Dixit, S.K. (2024). Association Between Gratitude and Materialism Among Indian College Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(4), 929-933. DIP:18.01.087.20241204, DOI:10.25215/1204.087