### What's Materialism? Testing the Two Dominant Perspectives on Materialism

**Srikant Manchiraju and Zlatan Krizan**
**Iowa State University, USA**

Keywords: Materialism, personality, value

### Introduction

Materialism is defined as "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions" (Belk, 1984, p. 291). However, scholars (e.g., Larsen, Sirgy, & Wright, 1999; Shrum et al., 2012) have noted that the existing conceptualizations of materialism, and by extension measurement scales, have several drawbacks such as negative priori association and poor scale reliability (Larsen et al., 1999). Materialism is an important concept, which has implications for policy makers, marketers and consumers (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Given the importance of the topic, in the present study the two dominant perspectives on materialism in consumer behavior and marketing, namely personality and value materialism, are analyzed (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002). Specifically, the present study addresses three questions related to two materialism conceptualizations: (1) identifying conceptual dimensions, (2) identifying degree of overlap between the two dimensions, and (3) evaluating the discriminant validity for the two dimensions.

### Literature Review

Ger and Belk (1996) viewed materialism as a function of an individual's personality traits. According to Ger and Belk, there are four dominant traits that govern materialism—envy, non-generosity, possessiveness, and preservation. On the other hand, Richins (1994) explained materialism as a value (i.e., enduring belief which guides actions and judgments, Rokeach, 1973, p. 161). According to Richins, the three dominant values in the context of materialism are acquisition centrality, happiness, and success. Extant literature and scientific studies have noted the importance of materialism for everyday life (e.g., Larsen et al., 1999) and consumption (e.g., teenager fashion consciousness, Parker, Hermans, & Schaefer, 2004). Furthermore, several studies have documented the negative relationship between materialism and happiness/life satisfaction (e.g., Kasser, 2002).

### Method

An online survey was used to collect data. Respondents in the sample came from across the United States (ages 18 to 65 years; mean, 29). Of the 349 usable responses, 59% were from men. The survey consisted of items related to personality materialism (Ger & Belk, 1996, 21 items), value materialism (Richins & Dawson, 1992, 18 items), the satisfaction with life scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), and happiness scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), along with demographic related items.

### Results

Structural equation modeling and regression analyses were employed to address the research questions. Consistently, the data were subjected to three stages of analyses: (1) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to compare goodness-of-fit (GFI) of alternative measurement models for personality and value materialism separately, (2) CFA to test fit of alternative measurement models for personality and materialism combined, and (3) regression analyses related to the two perspectives to identify discriminant validity based on previous literature related to life satisfaction and happiness (e.g., see Bryant & Cvengros, 2004).

Personality materialism was subjected to three competing measurement models: (1) one-factor, (2) four-factor, and (3) one-factor parceled. The GFI for the models are ($\chi^2$=1018.6, $df$=189, $p$=0.000, CFI=0.62, TLI=0.58, RMSEA=0.11, SRMR=0.09, $R^2$=20.2), ($\chi^2$=613.6, $df$=183, $p$=0.000, CFI=0.81, TLI=0.78, RMSEA=0.08, SRMR=0.08, $R^2$=47.9), and ($\chi^2$=49.21, $df$=14, $p$=0.000, CFI=0.96, TLI=0.94,

RMSEA=0.09, SRMR=0.03, $R^2$=44.7) respectively. Likewise, value materialism was subjected to three competing measurement models: one-factor, (2) three-factor, and (3) one-factor parceled. The GFI for the models are ($\chi^2$=932.57, $df$=135, $p$=0.000, CFI=0.66, TLI=0.61, RMSEA=0.13, SRMR=0.1, $R^2$=35.5), ($\chi^2$=448.05, $df$=132, $p$=0.000, CFI=0.86, TLI=0.84, RMSEA=0.08, SRMR=0.06, $R^2$=55.2), and ($\chi^2$=33.27, $df$=9, $p$=0.000, CFI=0.97, TLI=0.95, RMSEA=0.09, SRMR=0.03, $R^2$=67.0) respectively. The statistical analyses at this stage revealed that the GFIs for the two measures are adequate when one-factor parceled approach is considered. The scale reliabilities for one-factor (un-parceled) materialism scales were $\alpha$=0.51 and $\alpha$=0.85 for personality and value materialism respectively.

In the second stage, four competing measurement models were tested: (1) one-factor parceled, (2) seven-factor, (3) one-factor-one-second-order, and (4) two-factor-two-second order. The analyses revealed poor GIFs for all the four measurement models. Relatively, the best GFI was demonstrated by seven-factor model ($\chi^2$=1778.62, $df$=681, $p$=0.000, CFI=0.78, TLI=0.76, RMSEA=0.07, SRMR=0.08, $R^2$=54.2). In other words, these results indicate that personality and value materialism are two distinct constructs. Furthermore, the shared variance between the two conceptualizations was 21 percent, which is relatively low if the two conceptualizations are considered to be isomorphic (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002).

In the third stage, regression analyses were performed with life satisfaction or happiness as dependent variable and personality or value materialism as independent variable. Statistical analyses revealed that personality materialism was marginally negatively related to life satisfaction ($\beta$=-0.15, $p$=0.01) and happiness ($\beta$=-0.10, p=0.07). Conversely, value materialism was strongly positively related to life satisfaction ($\beta$=-0.32, p<0.000) and happiness ($\beta$=-0.28, p<0.000). These analyses corroborate the findings of the stage two—personality and value materialism conceptualizations reflect two distinct constructs.

## Conclusion

Larsen et al. (1999) reviewed materialism research extensively, and noted that several propositions contradicted one another. Consistently, as per the present study's results, such contradictions within materialism research can be explained because researchers often use findings from previous studies that may have either employed personality or value materialism scale (broadly classified as materialism scale). Recently, Shrum et al. (2012) proposed reconceptualization of materialism, and underscored the importance of a materialism scale development for the proposed materialism reconceptualization. The present study findings corroborate Shrum et al.'s proposition.

## References

Ahuvia, A. C., & Wong, N. Y. (2002). Personality and values based materialism: Their relationship and origins. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 12*, 389-402.

Belk, R. W. (1984). Three scales to measure constructs related to materialism: Reliability, validity and relationships to measures of happiness. *Advances in Consumer Research, 11*, 291-297.

Bryant, F. B., & Cvengros, J. A. (2004). Distinguishing hope and optimism: Two sides of a coin, or two separate coins? *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 23*, 273-302.

Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*, 71-75.

Ger, G., & Belk, R. W. (1996). Cross-cultural differences in materialism. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 17*, 55-77.

Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Larsen, V., Sirgy, J. M., & Wright, N. D. (1999). Materialism: The construct, measures, antecedents, and consequences. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal, 3*(2), 78-110.

Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation, *Social Indicators Research, 46*, 137-155.

Parker, R. S., Hermans, C. M., & Schaefer, A. D. (2004). Fashion consciousness of Chinese, Japanese and American teenagers. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, 8* , 176 – 186.

Richins, M. L. (1994). Special possessions and the expression of material values. *Journal of Consumer Research, 21*, 522-533.

Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. (1992). A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Research, 19*, 303-316.

Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Shrum, L. J., Wong, N., Arif, F., Chugani, S. K., Gunz, A., Lowrey, T. M., Nairn, A., Pandelaere, M., Ross, S. M., Ruvio, A., Scott, K., & Sundie, J. (2012). Reconceptualizing materialism as identity goal pursuits: Functions, processes, and consequences. *Journal of Business Research*, in press.