

# A Review on Materialism in relation to Personality and Quality of Life

## Abstract

As it has already been seen in previous researches that materialism is defined in varied forms by various authors. It is a field of great importance to various disciplines. Materialism is the acquisition of material objects in an individual's life. In the chain of review, the present review article is an attempt to highlight the relationship of materialism with personality and quality of life. It has been seen that various traits of personality and the Big Five have been linked to materialism in a number of studies. Neuroticism and conscientiousness are related to compulsive buying and materialism. A number of studies show that materialism is closely linked to lower quality of life and dissatisfaction with life.

**Keywords:** Materialism, Personality, Quality of Life

## Introduction

India is a developing country where majority of population is in young age. In the era of capitalism, the tradition of gifting is emerging at a high pace. Parents are inclined towards making them happy by giving them certain presents. These presents may lead the children to become materialistic. The consumption pattern of Indian youth shows that they are keen towards spending more and saving less. The late adolescents can easily be seen to be effected from brand consciousness and looking forward to their peers for possession of certain goods. Today's teen is experimenting and wants to try everything without thinking much about it. If their needs are not fulfilled they may turn aggressive or may follow ill methods to acquire these things. This acquisition of material objects in one's life is termed as materialism. A number of psychological correlates of materialism are studied in psychology. A detailed literature is provided under the heading Review of Literature in the later part of this paper.

## Aim of the Study

The aim of the present research paper is to provide an insight to the researchers in the field of materialism. The reviews available for psychological correlates of materialism (i.e. personality and quality of life) have been compiled in this review article. This article aims to provide framework for further empirical and theoretical research in materialism in India and abroad.

## Review of Literature

### Materialism

Materialism has been defined by various researchers and scholars in a number of ways. Various definitions and approaches to materialism have been mentioned in the review article by Behmani and Bargujjar (2018). Ward and Wackman (1971) stated materialism as "an orientation emphasizing possession and money for personal happiness and social progress". Twitchell (1999) defined materialism "is wasteful, it is devoid of other worldly concerns, it lives for today and celebrates the body, and it overindulges and spoils the young with impossible promises." Belk (1984) "materialism is the importance a person attaches to material possessions and the belief that certain possessions are the primary source of happiness". Materialism defined by Richins and Dawson (1992) is a "set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life". Kasser (2002) noted materialism to be a function of intrinsic and extrinsic goals; materialism is also a manifestation of insecurity and coping technique aimed at minimizing one's problems and satisfying the needs (Kasser, 2002). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) defined two types of materialism: instrumental materialism and terminal materialism. Inglehart (1981) developed a scale for materialism assessment. His scale is based on the theory of material socialization where materialism is strongly connected with economic insecurity (Inglehart, 1990). Defined materialism is, "an orientation emphasizing possessions and money for personal happiness and social progress" (Moschis & Churchill, 1978).

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Materialism, defined "as a value system that assigns primacy to possessions and the social image they project" (Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, & Bodenhausen, 2012). "Materialism is often an outward manifestation of deeper unmet psychological needs and insecurities." (Rindfleisch, Burroughs & Wong, 2008). Kasser (2003) defined materialistic values as "the belief that it is important to pursue the culturally sanctioned goals of attaining financial success, having nice possessions,

having the right image...and having a high status." In the US and Singapore culture, materialism has been stated as the 5Cs of Happiness": Car, Condominium, Credit card, Club membership and Cash (Swinyard, Kau & Phua, 2001). Various authors have defined and developed tools for materialism assessment in the field of psychology and marketing. Table 1 shows the approaches to materialism.

Author	Description	Dimension
<i>Personality Materialism (Belk, 1985)</i>	viewed materialism as a function of an individual's personality traits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• envy</li> <li>• non-generosity</li> <li>• possessiveness</li> </ul>
<i>Value materialism (Richins and Dawson, 1992)</i>	defined materialism as a "set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acquisition</li> <li>• centrality</li> <li>• happiness</li> <li>• success</li> </ul>
<i>Aspiration index (Kasser and Ryan, 1996)</i>	materialism is viewed as a function of intrinsic and extrinsic goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intrinsic goals</li> <li>• extrinsic goals</li> </ul>
<i>Inglehart's materialism scale (Inglehart, 1981)</i>	adult materialism is interlinked with formative feelings of economic insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• materialistic values</li> <li>• post-materialistic values</li> </ul>
<i>Moschis and Churchill's materialism scale (Moschis and Churchill, 1978)</i>	defined materialism as, "an orientation emphasizing possessions and money for personal happiness and social progress."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• six-item Scale based on Adolescent Materialism</li> </ul>
<i>Money attitude scale (Yamauchi and Templer, 1982)</i>	developed the money attitude scale that is consistent with conceptualization of materialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• distrust/anxiety</li> <li>• retention/time</li> <li>• power/prestige</li> <li>• quality</li> </ul>
<i>Possession satisfaction index scale (Scott and Lundstrom, 1990)</i>	measure an individual's attitude towards money and material objects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what possessions can do</li> <li>• what possessions cannot do</li> <li>• public image</li> <li>• success equal possessions</li> <li>• money is better</li> </ul>
<i>Youth materialism scale (Goldberg et al., 2003)</i>	to understand materialism among children and youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10-item scale based on Richins and Dawson's and Belk's materialism scales.</li> </ul>
<i>Terminal vs. instrumental materialism (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Scott, 2009)</i>	Noted that materialism is neither good nor bad; Scott developed materialism scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• instrumental materialism</li> <li>• terminal materialism.</li> </ul>
<i>Atay &amp; Sirgy, 2009</i>	Believed that possessions bring happiness, symbolizes success and people feel distinctive because of them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• happiness</li> <li>• success</li> <li>• distinctiveness</li> </ul>
<i>Consumer involvement scale (Schor, 2004; Bottomley et al., 2010)</i>	Viewed childhood materialism, referring to media's influence on children's behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consumer orientation</li> <li>• dissatisfaction</li> <li>• brand awareness</li> </ul>
<i>The New Materialism Scale (Trinh &amp; Phau, 2012)</i>	Based on Richins and Dawson's materialism scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• material success</li> <li>• material happiness</li> <li>• material essentiality</li> <li>• material distinctiveness</li> </ul>
<i>Materialism scale (Manchanda, Abidi &amp; Mishra, 2015)</i>	Based on Richins and Dawson and Trinh and Phau Scale.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• material Satisfaction</li> <li>• material Significance</li> <li>• material Individuality</li> </ul>

**Personality and Materialism**

Personality has been stated as the individual differences in the characteristic pattern of thinking, behaving and feeling. Personality focuses on two main areas i.e. understanding individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking and how various parts of an individual comes as a whole. Allport (1937) defined personality as "the dynamic organization with in the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment." Personality has been consistently linked with materialism and the Five Factor Model of Personality. In a study conducted by Otero-Lopez & Villardefrancos (2013), it was found that materialism plays an important role in neuroticism, extraversion and agreeableness with excessive buying. Extraversion is positively related to materialism, while openness and agreeableness shows negative relation with materialism. Concerns about one's death and personal insecurity were found to be positively correlated with materialism in a study by (Christopher, et al. 2006). Personal insecurity plays a mediating role in the concerns about death and high level of materialism. It was also found that materialism and depression are correlated with compulsive buying. (Mueller, et al., 2011). Another finding supports that people who focus on money and goods may experience feelings of insecurity, poorer interpersonal relationships and low sense of self-esteem (Kasser & Kasser, 2001).

Individuals scoring high on Richins and Dawson's Material Value Scale (1992) experiences lower life satisfaction, their want for money is unending, do not like to share, and poor adjustment with emphasis on financial security, whereas low scoring individual prioritize interpersonal relationships (Wong, 1997). Self-monitoring is positively correlated to materialism (Chatterjee & Hunt, 1996). People with strong materialistic orientation are socially anxious, self conscious and are often conforming (Schroeder & Dugal, 1995). There exist differences in the consumption patterns of the individuals based on the level of their materialistic values. People high on materialism depicts consumption of good related to status such as luxury goods showing high public visibility which helps to show off their prestige (Holt, 1995; Richins, 1994; Wong, 1997). Non-materialists or people who are low on materialism value close relationships, focus on things bringing pleasure and carry remembrance of interpersonal relationship (Richins, 1994). Watson (2015) tried to find the relationship between the five factor model of personality with both trait and value based materialism scales. Materialism is strongly correlated with the dimension of neuroticism and lower levels of agreeableness. (Belk, 1984), while correlating the trait based materialism approach found that factors like anger hostility, low actions, lack of modesty, low levels of trust and self consciousness predicted materialism. While studying the value based materialism (Richins and Dawson, 1992) the predictors of materialism were, low modesty, self consciousness and low straight forwardness. Anxiety and low actions

predicted possessiveness; depression and straightforwardness predicted envy (Watson, 2015). Materialistic people are more inclined towards deviant workplace behaviours showing little concern for social responsibility (Deckop, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2015; Kolodinsky, Maden, Zisk, & Henkel, 2010). Materialism is also negatively associated with pro-social and pro environmental attitude (Kasser, 2018). A negative relationship was found between gratitude and materialism. People putting more emphasis on material possessions and wealth are generally less happy along with being dissatisfied with life, experiencing negative emotions. They tend to develop mental disorders. On the contrary, people low on materialism is grateful and much happy. They experience positive emotions and are satisfied with their lives (Polak & McCullough, 2006). Rose, 2007 studied the association of narcissism and compulsive consumption pattern. It was found that impulse control and materialism mediated the development of narcissism and compulsive consumption. The results depicts that an individual's personal values and impulse control results in addictive buying. In a number of studies money management has also been linked to materialism. People who care less about money management emerge out to be high on materialism (Garoarsdottir & Dittmar, 2012). A study showed that people who believe that material possessions are linked to happiness have negative relation with money management. It was also seen that conscientiousness plays a major role in money management. Conscientiousness is the important trait for predicting money (Donnelly, Iyer & Howell, 2012). Research suggests that conscientiousness has been linked to positive financial attitudes (Brandstatter, 2005). Previous findings demonstrate that emotionally unstable people are prone to debt (Nyhush & Webley, 2001) and at higher risk of showing compulsive behaviour (Brougham et al., 2011; Dittmar, 2005). Big Five factors were correlated with compulsive buying and the results revealed that neuroticism correlated positively with compulsive buying (Flynn, 2009). Researches confirm the relation between narcissism and materialistic values (Roberts and Robins 2000). Furthermore, materialism and emptiness have also been seen to correlate negatively to compulsive buying where materialism mediates the relationships between compulsive buying and narcissistic grandiosity (Zerach, 2015).

**Quality of life and Materialism**

The term 'Quality of life' consists of an individual's assessment of how good his life is in terms of various aspects of his life. Sirgy (1998) explained how materialism contributes to life dissatisfaction. The satisfaction of an individual with standard of living is known by comparing one's actual standard of living to set goals. People high on materialism experiences dissatisfaction with life, they set their goal standard of living extremely high, which causes distress. He reasoned that while considering the standard of living, materialistic people tend to use affective-based expectations in the place of cognitive based expectations. Evaluations about

one's emotional reactions to various happenings in life, dispositions, sense of life fulfillment and satisfaction, also satisfaction with work and personal relationship makes of the quality of life (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Roberts & Clement (2007) studied the relationship between the three dimensions of materialism and eight dimensions of quality of life. It was found that overall materialism and happiness was negatively correlated to all the eight dimensions of quality of life. People who are highly materialistic are less satisfied with their 'life as a whole' and also with the 'specific life domains' as compared to those who were less materialistic (Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001). The standard of living is judged by the use of standard of comparison in an individual's life. If the standard of comparison increases, people rate their standard of living negatively leading to dissatisfaction in life (Atay, et al. 2009). In a cultural comparison of materialism among the Malaysians, Chinese and Indians it was observed that there were strong negative relationships between materialism and life satisfaction, however, Indians did not showed any significant relationship (Rakrachakarn, Moschis, Ong & Shannon, 2015). It has been seen that before buying an article people high on materialism feels high expectations but after the purchase is made; their expectations are not met leading in diminished positive emotions. To maintain the positive emotions, a materialistic individual then search a new article for purchase; this lasting dissatisfaction with the acquisition of objects results in diminished assessment of well-being (Richins, 2013). People with beliefs such as owing material goods will cause happiness often experience low life satisfaction and positive emotions, accompanied by high negative emotions (Lipovčan, Larsen & Brkljačić, (2015).

#### **Conclusion**

As mentioned earlier, materialism is interlinked with a number of psychological processes like, self esteem, well- being, happiness, gratitude, mental health, life satisfaction, etc. (Behmani & Bargujjar, 2018). In the chain of review of literature, this article reviewed the relationship between materialism with personality and quality of life. Studies are being conducted on these concepts consistently in the field of psychology and management. It has been seen that the Big Five are related to materialism and compulsive buying. The personality traits like narcissism, insecurity, impulsive behaviour, etc are positively related to materialism. The individuals with high materialistic values experiences lower quality of life. These individuals have less life satisfaction and diminished well-being.

#### **Future Direction**

There are limited studies which depicts the direct link between the Big Five Factors and materialism. However, the association is spotted in some studies where materialism plays a mediating role. While studying quality of life and materialism it has been observed that in most studies related terms to quality of life are used. The direct study of quality of life with materialism were not found. There are no Indian studies available on personality and quality of life in relation to materialism. Future efforts are

required to obtain concrete findings about the relationship with materialism, personality and quality of life.

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