

# The background of materialism psychology essay



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Interest in the topic of materialism and its influence is overt as early as in the Greek philosophers. Studies of materialism have increased in recent years and most of those studies verified different aspects of materialism which involved social or individual consequences. However, still other research revealed that materialism is neither bad nor good. It also represented a socially construct that vary depending on a society's value system. If a society's value system changes, thus the evaluation of materialism will change as well (Kilbourne, et al., 2009).

On an individual level, research shown that in general materialism is inversely associated with well-being, self-esteem, quality and satisfaction of life. Besides, materialism also seems to be positively correlated with psychological and physical difficulties (Roberts & Clement, 2007).

However, with regard to society, research indicate that materialism is a negative influence of the environment, in which it leads to less charitable donation, reduce time spent together as a family and decrease involvement in communities (Roberts & Clement, 2007).

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Studies until today focus more on the social characteristics and personality trait that are correlated with materialism either as an antecedent or as a consequence (Vincent & Othman, 2012). Furthermore, contemporary research also focuses materialism in terms of values and aspirations (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008).

## **Definitions of Materialism**

A number of different, although similar, definitions of materialism have been developed over time (Kilbourne, Grunhagen, & Foley, 2005). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, its refer materialism as a “ devotion to material desires and needs, to the neglect of spiritual matters; a way of opinion, tendency and life based entirely on material interests” (Roberts & Clement, 2007).

According to Ward and Wackman (1971), materialism is “ an orientation which considers money and material objects as critical for social progress and personal happiness. However, Inglehart (1981), a political sociologist defined materialism as “ an economic orientation to life such as a structural or cultural variable or give priority to economic values that are exceed other values for instance friendship, civil power and freedom”. Thus, materialism is a preoccupation in favor of lower needs for physical safety and material comfort and neglects the higher needs for belonging, quality of life and self-expression.

Belk (1985), describe materialism as an “ importance a consumer attaches to the worldly possessions” and as personality trait which consist of three elements which are envy, nongenerosity and possessiveness. At the higher

levels of materialism, that possession assumes a central place in an individual's life and is believed to provide the greater sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. These behaviors and traits may be the indicators of a tendency toward materialism (Shrum, et al., 2012).

Despite of these, Richin and Dawson (1992), regard materialism as a personal or material value that is “ reflected by individual's beliefs about the importance as they obtain possessions”. It also involves the acquisition of happiness, success and centrality.

While these definitions of materialism, it might vary slightly, but they have much in common. In broad, materialism can be considered as any excessive rely on consumer goods to obtain the end states feeling of pleasure, heighten self esteem, higher social status and develop good interpersonal relationship (Bindah & Quah, 2012).

## **Level of Materialism**

According to Ogden and Cheng (2011) a comparative research to determine the cultural dimension and materialism comparing between Canada and China, found that materialism level was higher in China than in Canada. The prominent dimensions of Chinese materialism were pursuit of success and happiness while Canadians were acquisition of centrality. So, the Chinese were more interested in acquiring possessions to seek happiness and show wealth while Canadians tend to think that possessions are more central to their lives. Besides, this also display that the nature of materialism varied between the culture of the two countries especially with the popular view that the West leads the world in a materialistic consumer culture. According to

Olivia, Tong and Wong (2012) Romanian students were the most materialistic and Swedes were the least in a cross-cultural study among 12 nations in the Europe, Asia and United States. This may be due to materialism is highest in countries which are economically and socially dynamic.

According to Siang and Talib (2011) in their investigation of materialism attempt to examine the linkage between materialism and satisfaction of life among Malaysian undergraduates students in Malaysia have revealed that 13.9% of undergraduates exhibited mild materialism, 70.5% indicated average materialism and remaining 15.6% reported having high materialism. In short, more than half (50%) of the participants were in the average level for the materialism. Besides, the comparison of mean scores of Material Value Scale (MVS) subscales of the materialism in undergraduate, rating Possession defined success ( $16.97 \pm 3.417$ ), Pursuit of Happiness ( $14.39 \pm 2.641$ ) Acquisition of Centrality ( $14.15 \pm 2.96$ ). This indicated that most of the participants treated possession achievement as the basic for success.

In addition, according to Fah, Foon and Osman (2011) a study conducted to examine the purchasing behavior of Malaysian and its association between tendency to spend, perceived social status, advertising appeals and materialism indicated that majority of the participants agreed that materialism is important for them to have nice things, to buy anything and will feel happier if they can afford to buy more things, 84.2% of the participants had high level of materialism, followed by 15.0% of them and remaining 0.8% which is the only participant who had low level of materialism.

The most common purchase reported were clothing (35.6%), recreational electronics such as music player or television and active recreational equipment are consist of 13.2% (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012). Besides, the higher materialistic level of young adults are characterized as internet savvy, fashion trendsetters, receptive to new products and media influence. These young adults also describe as expecting immediate gratification and loving adventures thus they prefer action over observation, directness over subtlety and cool all else. In addition, higher in materialism level been found significantly associated with luxury purchase, compulsive buying, conspicuous consumption and high fashion involvement (Xu, 2008).

## **Gender and Materialism**

Research shows that materialism is interrelated with compulsive buying. Compulsive buyers are also materialistic people (Eren, Eroglu, & Hacıoglu, 2012). Consumer research indicated that compulsive buying is associated with gender difference. It is reported that woman tend to buy symbolic and self-expressive items associated with emotional and appearance aspects of self, while men tend to impulsively purchase leisure goods and instrumental associated with activity and independence. Besides that, for woman, “either” self-concept discrepancy or high materialism is “sufficient” to develop psychological buying consideration. For men, “both” self-discrepancy or high materialism are “necessary” to generate psychological buying consideration (Mueller, Claes, Mitchell, Faber, Fischer, & de Zwaan, 2011).

On the other hand, according to Bindah and Othman (2012a), there is a gender difference in materialism. Research conducted in Malaysia noted that <https://assignbuster.com/the-background-of-materialism-psychology-essay/>

young female adults are more positively associated with materialistic values as compare to male adults.

In addition, according to Weaver, Moschis and Davis (2011), it is also stated that female are more likely to engage in compulsive buying as compare to male in Australia.

A number of studies have verified that male and female socialized in diverse ways and these gender differences are also obvious in consumer socialization. Furthermore, adolescents female and males are related diversely to their peers. Females propose more consumption related communication with peers. Thus, the relationship between materialism and female gender perhaps is due to how female are affected by socialization agents.

Moreover, it is also supported by Ogyden and Venkat (2001), where females tend to be more materialistic as compared to males with their higher agreement with the statement that possessions will reflect the self and rating possession as important as a self-identity.

Besides, it is obvious that woman are more likely to shop than man and seem to enjoy shopping as compare to male. In addition, women are more likely to be interested by different factor than man as part of the general impact of gender on consumer behavior. For instances, they have been displayed to have various attitudes toward credit and money and toward expressing love and gaining success in the home that will affect shopping behavior. Thus, higher materialism in female as compared to male is also associated with shopping motivation (Goldsmith, Flynn, & Clark, 2011).

However, it appeared that female and male had considerably different evaluations about the level of materialistic values. Specifically, female adults were found to have more positive attitude toward material value as compared to male counterpart. This finding revealed that female had higher level of personal materialism in comparison to male counterpart (Cherrier and Munoz, 2007).

According to Rinaldi and Bonanomi (2011) the finding about gender and attachment to money, also indicate that females tend to possess instrumentalism and materialism than male.

However, according to Olivia, Tong, and Wong (2012), a research conducted among adults students in Hong Kong show that male's attitude toward possessing materialistic goods is higher than female. It is also supported by Achenreiner (1997), where several researches reported that males are more likely to be materialistic than female.

Moreover, in two different researches with primary to secondary school children, it was found that boys tend to be more materialistic than girls. This is because boys placed more importance on financial success as compared with girls. Furthermore, in a comparative study of undergraduates students from three countries which is China, Mexico and USA show that, males were more likely to be materialistic than female in the Chinese sample, however there is no gender differences in USA and Mexico (Karabati & Cemalcilar, 2010).

According to Larsen, Sirgy and Wright (1999), males are more likely materialistic than female even when they were young, girls tend to more



interested in people while boys in things. Thus, this difference may be related to the male tendency to value the intrinsic and instrumental function of things; and the female tendency to value the expressive and relationship-enhancing function of things.

On the other hand, a study has shown girls are more sharing and less materialistic. For woman, they constitute a part of social relation; while male are goods aids in establishment of power. In addition, previous research with adults has stated that the closeness to mothers is negatively associated with materialism, while the closeness to father is positively associated with materialism (Flouri, 2004).

## **Age and Materialism**

According to Wei and Talpade (2009) in comparing age related difference in consumer materialism, there are two different types of ages which are cognitive age and chronological age. Cognitive age is defined as “feel age” is measured using a statement “I feel as though I am in my...” Chronological age, expressed in days, months or years for example “how old are you?”. It is also shown that cognitive age is positively associated with materialism while chronological ages, those who “feel” older are more likely to be materialistic. Thus, age has impact on materialism.

According to John (1999) model, there is a qualitative differences between vary age groups in their understanding of the value of possession, but do not assign whether materialism increase with age. In addition, according to Chan and Prendergast (2007) there is failed to find an association between materialism and age in adolescents. Besides, according to Goldberg, Gorn,

Peracchio, and Bamossy (2003), there was no difference between younger (9-11) and older (12-14) youth on materialism. Thus, age has no impact on materialism.

Meanwhile, according to Bindah and Othman (2012a) revealed that age was a strong predictor of materialistic value. The study in Malaysia found that younger adolescence in the age group around 19 years old and below tended to be more materialistic than older counterpart in the age group of 20 to 29 years old.

La Ferle and Chan (2008) also stated that older adolescents were less materialistic than younger adolescents in Singapore. It is also supported by Gu and Hung (2009) where adolescents in the age group of 15-19 are more materialistic when compared with age group of 40-49 which is the parent generation. It showed that adolescents are more materialistic than the parent generation in terms of susceptibility to social influence, acquisition centrality and novelty-seeking.

Furthermore, according to Chaplin and John (2007) self-esteem will decline dramatically at the ages of 12-13, and then rebound at late adolescence around ages 16-18. Thus, with the strong connection between self-esteem and materialism, it is proved that age related pattern in self esteem will result in age differences in materialism. The findings revealed that materialism rise from middle childhood to early adolescence and drop from early to late adolescence. So, age differences in materialism exist among adolescents and children. It also displays that early adolescents from ages of 12-13 tended to be more materialistic than younger children at the aged of

8-9. Late adolescents around ages of 16-18 found to be less materialistic than early adolescents at the aged of 12-13 (Chaplin & John, 2007).

However, according to Chan, Zhang and Wang (2006) individual will become more materialistic with age and indicated that older adolescents tend to be more materialistic as compare to young adolescents. It is due to having greater contact with those older more successful individuals who possess luxury items as desirable status symbols. Thus, the older adolescents will look to these more successful people and use them as model leader and strive to emulate their consumption behaviors.

Besides, according to Flouri (2004) studies also demonstrated that the materialistic attitudes in children will increase with age because as children aged, they are more exposure to advertising and shopping experience and greater consumer knowledge (Flouri, 2004).

Furthermore, according to La Ferle and Chan (2008) research also indicates that endorsement of materialistic values will diminish with age where materialism will obtain a maximum level in the early adolescence stage when adolescence was experienced a decline in self-esteem. By late adolescence, self -esteem will rebound and the inclination to require materialism possession for self-define will decrease as well.

## **Different Perspectives on Materialism**

Life course model. It provides a relevant model to study materialism in human behavior. The life course paradigm offers a contemporary approach to integrating and accommodating various perspective and theoretical perspective into a multi-dimensional theoretical framework. This model can

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be divided into three broad categories: circumstance and event that arise at a specific point in time (T1) in a person's life course, processes facilitated or caused by these events and the outcomes of these processes that occur at later points in time (T2)(Weaver, Moschis, & Davis, 2011).

The life course model suggests that circumstances and life-event experiences create social, emotional and physical demands in which one must adapt. As one adapts to the changing demands of his or her circumstances by using coping responses, socialization, human capital development, these processes will result in their changing pattern of behavior and thought. These processes are moderated by situational variables which consist of three possible life course perspectives which are the normative, stress and human capital (Weaver, Moschis, & Davis, 2011).

Life events/ Circumstances (T1)

Gender role

Disruptive family event

Parent ' s educational attainment

Antecedents Processes Outcomes

Normative

Peer communication

Materialism (T2)

Stress

Perceived stress

Human Capital

Socio-oriented communication

Figure 1. 0 A general conceptual life course model of materialism from Moschis, (2007).

Normative perspectives posit that individuals follow a socialization process, as a natural outcome, acquiring skills, learning and attitudes relevant to the roles as an adaption to the demands of the environment. One will learn to perform the different roles through the process of socialization, and one will gradually change his or her identity to fit the anticipated or assumed role. Each role is communicated by socialization agents, for example, peers, parents and television programming (Benmoyal-Bouzaglo & Moschis, 2010). Studies have revealed that compulsive buying and materialism are highly correlated. It also stated female tend to engage in compulsive buying than male. The normative perspective also attributes the prevalence of materialism in female to vary social norms that apply to male and female (Weaver, Moschis, & Davis, 2011).

Stress perspective holds that the life course is essentially a matter of striving to achieve equilibrium between positive, negative and neutral life events (stressor). In this context, individuals are constantly striving to build their own balancing (coping) strategies. These balancing efforts initially acquire more effort but over time it can be reinforced and become conditional responses that result in the development of behavioral and attitudinal

orientations. The stress perspectives suggest that the perceived stressfulness in a disruptive family event predict stronger materialistic value. Besides, family disruption will impair the self-esteem of children, and low self-esteem is a strong predictor of materialism as well (Weaver, Moschis, & Davis, 2011).

According to Roberts, Tanner, and Manolis (2005), materialism is the consequence of divorce. As compare to others from intact home, it is shown that adolescents and young adults of divorced parents will express higher levels of materialism. Moreover, it is demonstrated that children who are experiencing the disruption of their families, are more likely to place more emphasis on material possession as an effort to adjust to their new roles in a disrupted family. In addition, it has been reported that divorce will produce self-doubt in children. Thus, people may count on materialistic acquisitions for a sense of security.

Human capital perspective refers to the efforts (qualifications, skills, knowledge and resources) taken to influence future income and consumption. However, human capital is influenced by factors varying from macro level setting (e. g. culture) to micro level (e. g. family, work) settings (Moschis, Ong, Mathur, Yamashita, & Benmoyal-Bouzaglo, 2011). The development of materialistic orientation is affected by environmental factor that impede or facilitate the acquisition of human capital. Other than that, development researchers also view family as a source of human capital that can influence their children in materialistic value regarding the family communication between them (Weaver, Moschis, & Davis, 2011).

According to Chan and Prendergast, (2007) family environment communication will influence the endorsement of materialistic value.

Children in families that practice socially oriented communication which is family communication environment that restrains children from obtaining independence in decision making, demonstrate higher levels of materialism, while children in families that practice concept oriented communication which is a family communication environment that motivates children to develop their own views about the world and making their own decisions display lower level of materialism.

Self-determination theory. According to Ryan and Deci (2000) self determination theory holds that people have three innate need that drive successful self-regulation, personality integration and self-motivation. They are autonomy, relatedness and competence. In fact, materialistic people are able to fulfill their intrinsic needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence. Autonomy is the desire to engage in selected behaviors that are coherent with one's personality and strength (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011). Autonomy requires internal regulation of behavior, while materialists occupy a high level of public self-consciousness which involves a disposition to social regulation of social comparisons and behavior especially in terms of material outcomes (Deckop, Jurkiewicz, & Giacalone, 2010). Relatedness refers to the desire to feel connected with others and a sense of belonging. However, materialistic people are less successful in addressing relatedness because they generally feel a sense of disconnection from others and society, mostly due to having difficulties in establishing trust and close relationships (Deckop, Jurkiewicz, & Giacalone, 2010). Competence is a

desire to influence one's environment and obtain valued outcomes within it (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011). Indeed, materialism focuses directly on the achievement of material possessions and money as evidence of competence (Deckop, Jurkiewicz, & Giacalone, 2010).

**Social cognitive theory.** According to Bandura (2001) the capacity to practice control over the quality and nature of one's life or human agency, is the essential of humanness and a strong determinant of adaptation, self-renewal and self-development. The social cognitive theory of self-efficacy state that unless people have ability to produce desired outcomes by their actions, they have little incentive to persevere in difficulties or to act, as such self-efficacy is a critical factor in psychosocial well-being. Motivational perspective not only emphasized the role of the belief that individuals hold regarding the relationships between the actions and outcome in perceived self-efficacy. It also included the locus of control such as, confidence beliefs, agency beliefs and expectancy belief that has emphasized the role of personal agency beliefs in successful life outcomes. Thus, it suggests that materialism must be positively related to desire control which should be positively related to psychological well-being and adjustment. In fact, a desire of control is an important determinant of adaptive or maladaptive behavior like materialism (Flouri, 2005).

**Social comparison theory.** According to Festinger (1954), people will have a drive to assess themselves by comparing with others when objective means are not available. People can decide to compare themselves with others who are better off (upward comparison) or with others who are worse off (downward comparison) to boost their self esteem or even with idealized



media images. According to Zhang and Kim (2013) a research conducted with Japanese consumers showed that upward social comparison has a positive relationship in a higher purchasing intention and higher demand for worldly possession. Furthermore, individual who engage in social comparison, especially materialism with remote referents like idealized media images will create inflated and unrealistically high expectation of their model's standard of living (Chan & Prendergast, 2007).

Materialism as a value orientation. According to Richins and Dawson (1992) materialism is viewed as a value which is describe as an organizing central values that direct people behavior and choices in daily life. It is an enduring concept that developed over time through the socialization process. It centered on three main dimensions: happiness, success, and centrality. Acquisition of the pursuit of happiness suggests that possessions are vital for an individual well being and satisfaction in life. Possession defined success relate to the role that possessions play as evidence of success. Acquisition of centrality is refers to an individual who make possession the focus of their lives. Thus, the value of possessions for the materialistic individual lies in their ability to project a desired self image and confer status (Muncy & Eastman, 1998). Individual will consider being materialistic as a function of their approval of these beliefs (Shrum, et al., 2012). Thus, utilizing the value-based definition of materialism, " values" is referring to " enduring belief about what is fundamentally important" (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). In this research, the theory of materialism as a value orientation will be used to support this study.