

Materialism: The road to happiness and life satisfaction among Singaporeans

Materyalizm: Singapurlularda mutluluğa ve yaşam memnuniyetine giden yol

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Abstract

Overseas research studies suggest that shopping can be utilised to establish individual identity and accord social recognition. In Singapore, shopping, an activity associated with materialism, is called a national pastime. Yet, only a handful of research studies have deliberated the roles of happiness and materialism in achieving life satisfaction compared to countries in the west. This study investigated whether materialism and happiness aid life satisfaction in Singapore. A New Materialism Scale was utilised to conduct a more holistic understanding of materialism, as scales utilised in earlier studies have not successfully explained consumer behaviour in recent years. For this study, 128 Singaporean undergraduates (69.5% female; 30.5% male) with a mean age of 21.82 years ($SD= 2.17$; age range 18-30), enrolled in the Psychology and Business programs at James Cook University, Singapore, were recruited. Results suggest that students between 18 and 30 relate material distinctiveness positively to life satisfaction; male respondents are as equally materialistic as female respondents; material success is most associated with Chinese students; material distinctiveness is linked to Indian students, while happiness levels moderate materialism levels and life satisfaction. An important implication of this study is the finding that there exists more to materialism in relation to life satisfaction and happiness among Singaporeans.

Keywords: Materialism, happiness, life satisfaction, Singapore

Özet

Yurt dışı araştırmalar alışverişin kişisel kimlik oluşturmak ve sosyal tanınmayı uyumlu hâle getirmek için kullanılabilirliğini öne sürmektedir. Materyalizmle bağdaştırılan bir etkinlik olan alışverişe Singapur'da milli hobi denmektedir. Yine de birkaç araştırma mutluluk ve materyalizmin yaşam memnuniyetine erişmedeki rollerini Batı ülkelerine kıyasla incelemiştir. Bu çalışma materyalizm ve mutluluğun Singapur'da yaşam memnuniyetine katkı sağlayıp sağlamadığını araştırmaktadır. Eski ölçekler son yıllardaki tüketici davranışını başarılı şekilde açıklamakta yetersiz kaldığı için daha bütünsel bir materyalizm anlayışı elde etmek amacıyla Yeni Materyalizm Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışma için Singapur'daki James Cook Üniversitesinde Psikoloji ve İşletme programlarında öğrenim gören 21,82 yaş ortalamasına ($SD= 2,17$; yaş aralığı 18-30) sahip 128 Singapurlu lisans öğrencisinden (%69,5'i kadın, %30,5'i erkek) faydalanılmıştır. Sonuçlar 18 ve 30 yaş arası öğrencilerin maddi farklılığı olumlu olarak yaşam memnuniyetine bağladığını, erkek katılımcıların kadın katılımcılarla eşit oranda materyalist olduğunu, maddi başarının en çok Çinlilerle bağdaştırıldığını, maddi ayırdediciliğin Hintlilerle, öte yandan mutluluk düzeylerinin de ılımlı materyalizm düzeyleri ve yaşam memnuniyetiyle bağdaştırıldığını öne sürmektedir. Bu çalışmadan yapılacak önemli bir çıkarım da materyalizmin Singapurlulardaki yaşam memnuniyeti ve mutlulukla ilgili daha çok faktöre sahip olmasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Materyalizm, mutluluk, yaşam doyumu, Singapur

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Introduction

Imminent Canadian-American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, whose works include *The Affluent Society*, posited that affluence creates unintended consequences and attracts scholarly attention over the rise of materialism as a social value (Galbraith, 1958). What is materialism? Put simply, it is the importance attributed to ownership and acquisition of material goods to accomplish major life goals (Richins, 2004). Material goods reflect the values individuals embrace (Richins, 1994). The Singapore's materialism index or the 5 Cs—car, condominium, credit-card, club-membership and cash (Keng, Jung, Jivan, & Wirtz, 2000)—identifies the acquisition of possessions integral to the Singaporean way of life (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Also, Singaporeans acknowledge shopping as a national pastime (Biston, 2007). Evidently, half a million citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2013) have access to high disposable income derived from parents, grandparents or part-time jobs (Wang, 2006), which contributes to a yearly spending of almost \$180 million (Leong, 2000).

Two forms of materialism are proposed (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Positive instrumental materialism occurs when possessions and money make life more manageable, safer, or enjoyable. For example, material objects like photo albums strengthen interpersonal relationships while serving a symbolic value, a functional purpose, a personal narrative, and remind individuals of important relationships in their lives (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 2004, 2008). Detrimental terminal materialism occurs when consumption accord social recognition, status and external rewards that terminal materialists view tied to their wealth and possessions (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Materialism impacts economies positively when desire for goods enhances income and standards of living (Cherrington, 1980; Schor, 1991).

Consumption too increases wealth and living standards (Richins & Rudins, 1994). Consumer behaviour is determined by culture which shapes personality (Wallace, 1965). Cultural studies conducted in countries in the west show differences in consumption patterns between people of various ethnic groups (Saegert, Hoover, & Hilger, 1985) and geographic sub-groups with differing cultural values (Gentry, Tansuhaj, Manzer, & John, 1988). Similar consumer behaviour is also evident in Singapore where Chinese, Malay, and Indian, while remaining united as Singaporeans, have remained loyal to their cultures, customs, religion/values, and ways of life (Kwon & Kau, 2004), indicating that cultural values influence perception of materialism acquisition. The existence of Chinatown, Geylang, and Little India in 21st century cosmopolitan Singapore fulfills the cultural and social needs of each community.

However, material possessions have gained a disproportionate focus in the lives of individuals in mass-consumer societies where excess has generated discussions on the “dark side” of materialism (Dittmar, 2007). Studies examining positive effects of possessions have also highlighted negative effects, such as psychological maladjustment and lowered well-being, competition between perusals of caring for and relating to others; in addition, the quest for personal identity through consumption separates individuals from one another as they emphasize egoism while sacrificing altruism (Kasser, 2002; Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007; Yankelovich, 1981).

With consumption becomes “a leisure and lifestyle activity”, emphasis is placed on financial goals in one's life (Dittmar, 2004) because consumption is no longer simple sustenance (Belk & Pollay, 1985) but seen to fulfill needs like forming lasting relationships and maintaining identity (Richins, 1994). Findings also demonstrate how materialistic goal pursuing reduces happiness (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Kasser, 2002).

Happiness, as defined by Diener's model of subjective well-being (2000), comprises three components, namely, the cognitive appraisal of one's life including positive and negative affect, viewed as two separate dimensions but combined for overall perception of happiness (Pavot &

Diener 1993). Well-being can be looked at from two perspectives. The hedonic perspective refers to well-being as consisting subjective positive evaluations of an individual's life and recurrent experiences of positive affect, whereas the eudaimonic view retains that well-being is different because pleasure-producing activities are neither healthy nor favourable to an individual's well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

A meta-analysis of studies on materialism reveals a negative link between well-being and materialism (Wright & Larsen, 1993). Individuals may experience happiness if they exceed certain status standards, when the search for happiness starts all over again, making happiness short-lived (Michalos, 1985). A study exploring happiness and materialism found that happiness is negatively related to overall materialism in the United States of America (USA) and Singapore, and that adults in Singapore are less happy and more materialistic than those in USA (Swinyard, Kau, & Phau, 2001). The study pointed out that Singaporeans view happiness as a sense of achievement, as supported by telic theories emphasizing happiness as an end state (Diener, 1984). Thus, happiness can be achieved through the acquisition of material goods as higher levels of goods lead to higher levels of happiness in turn higher life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is the global judgement people make about the quality of their lives (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Two theoretical approaches exist on life satisfaction, namely, the 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' perspectives (Diener 1984; Headey, Veenhoven, & Wearing, 1991; Lance, Lautenschlager, Sloan, & Varca, 1989). The top-down perspective argues that differences in personality predispose people to be differentially satisfied with their lives (DeNeve & Cooper 1998; Steel, Schmidt & Shultz, 2008). The bottom-up perspective assumes overall life satisfaction depends on an individual's satisfaction in broad life domains such as family, friendship, work, and leisure (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004; Pavot & Diener, 2008; Veenhoven, 1996).

Furthermore, individuals from different cultures perceive life satisfaction differently because culture has a prevalent influence on an individual's values and goals (Diener & Lucas, 2000; Diener & Suh, 2000). Life satisfaction may generalise across cultures suggesting that individuals from different cultural settings often weigh life domains differently (Kousha & Mohseni, 2000; Matheny et al, 2002; Yetim, 2003). A study conducted in Singapore, attempting to measure the effect of materialistic inclinations on life satisfaction, found that individuals with low materialistic inclination were more inclined to treasure love, security, and friendship whereas those with high materialistic inclination choose success, wealth, and power (Keng et al, 2000). Wong, Rindfleisch and Burroughs (2003) found that materialism was negatively related to life satisfaction in the USA and Japan, and unrelated to life satisfaction in Singapore and Korea but positively related to life satisfaction in Thailand.

Scales utilised by Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992) have been unsuccessful in explaining consumer behaviour in recent years (Furnham & Valgeirsson, 2007; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2009) because they were utilised in the West and may not have factored in consumer demands of the East which may be influenced by cultural factors or new wealth (KPMG, 2008). The New Materialism Scale developed by Trinh and Phua (2012) seeks to understand the evolving nature of materialism; it has a high generalizability—this became evident when it was administered in Australia and Vietnam making it suitable for cross-cultural utilization. Thus, the scale was deemed suitable for the sample population of this study comprising Chinese, Malay, and Indian participants.

Hence, this study investigates if materialism and happiness aid in life satisfaction among Singaporeans as the relationship of materialism, happiness and life satisfaction has hardly been studied. The hypotheses are: (1) Both male and female Singaporeans place equal importance on the acquisition of material goods; (2) Chinese associate with material success which means possessions symbolize achievement, success, generate social recognition and status; Indians associate with material distinctiveness in which material possessions are utilised as a means to

stand out of the crowd; Malays do not associate with any facet; and (3) happiness will moderate the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction.

Method

Participants

128 Singaporean undergraduates (69.5% female; 30.5% male) at James Cook University, Singapore campus participated in this study. They had a mean age of 21.82 years ($SD= 2.17$; age range 18-30). The ethnic composition of the sample stood at 70.3% Chinese, 20.3% Indian, and 9.4% Malay. Convenience sampling strategies were utilised through flyers posted on the campus notice board, the SONA system (a computerized system), in-classroom announcements and outreach on campus. The convenience sampling technique was chosen as it entails drawing samples that were easily accessible and willing to participate in the study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This study was conducted in a classroom. A correlation research design was utilised to investigate the relationship between life satisfaction (criterion, DV), materialism, and happiness (predictors, IV).

Measures

New Materialism Scale. The New Materialism Scale (Trinh & Phau, 2012), featuring 28 questions, assesses the importance consumers place on the acquisition of material goods. It consists of four sub-scales, namely, success, happiness, essentiality, and distinctiveness, which were scored on a specially created 7- point Likert scale to measure materialism.

The original Likert scale, being too broad-based as it displayed only two measurements, 1 = *Strongly Disagree* and 7 = *Strongly Agree*, was unable to provide a further breakdown to capture an accurate reading of a participant's degree of materialism. The new Likert Scale allowed 7 points to be plotted to reflect the new breakdown from 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Slightly Disagree*, 4 = *Neither Agree nor Disagree*, 5 = *Slightly Agree*, 6 = *Agree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*. Scores attained by each participant were calculated by summing up ratings with total scores ranging from 1 to 112; higher scores reflected greater materialism. The New Materialism scale demonstrated good reliability above the recommended criterion of $\alpha = .70$ (Pallant, 2000)—the Cronbach's alpha were $\alpha = .90$ for the success factor, $\alpha = .81$ for the happiness factor, $\alpha = .74$ for the essentiality factor, and $\alpha = .79$ for the distinctiveness factor.

Satisfaction with Life Scale. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) which assesses a participant's global judgment was utilised to measure each participant's life satisfaction. The five items of the SWLS is designed to assess the cognitive aspects of well-being and scored on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *Strongly disagree*, to 7 = *Strongly agree*. All five items were keyed in a positive direction to ensure that total score could be attained for all five responses. The total score was attained by adding up the scores of each of the five responses, ranging from 5 to 35, with 20 representing the neutral point (Pavot & Diener, 2008). The SWLS was chosen because the psychometric assessment of its 5-item questionnaire has established its single factor, test-retest reliability, internal consistency, construct, concurrent, and discriminant validities (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Pavot & Diener, 2008). The SWLS displayed strong psychometric properties for this sample (Cronbach's alpha $\alpha = .84$). The SWLS has been utilised in a number of cross-cultural studies previously to examine life satisfaction and subjective well-being; within certain populations, normative ranges for scores on the SWLS are fairly well-established (Pavot & Diener, 2008). Supporting this, Pavot and Diener (1993) presented average SWLS scores from five independent samples from studies conducted in the USA in which college students participated, with mean scores on the SWLS ranging from 23.0 to 25.2, standard deviations ranging from 5.8 to 6.4. Thus suggested college students in the United States tend to

score in the 'slightly positive' range on the SWLS (Pavot & Diener, 2008). Hence, this scale was chosen because of its cross-cultural validity and reflection of its normative range of scores for student population as the population of this study were Singaporean Chinese, Malay, and Indian undergraduates.

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) is a 29-item self-report measure extensively used for evaluating happiness (Hills & Argyle, 2002). Cited as one of the most widely used measures of happiness (Cruise, Lewis, & McGuckin, 2006), the OHQ addresses nine constructs of happiness—namely, social interest and extraversion; humour; sense of purpose; awe and aesthetic appreciation; autonomy and locus of control; self-efficacy; perception of physical good health; self-esteem and self-acceptance. Scores were measured by the Likert scale from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree*. The scores were calculated by summing up all scores and dividing total scores for each participant by 29. This was done to attain the total score which ranged from 1 to 6. The OHQ demonstrated good internal consistency for the sample (Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .86$).

Demographic Information Form. Demographic details were extracted from the Religious Importance Scale, Importance Sub-Scale (Putney & Middleton, 1961) and Life Values or the sub-scale of Financial Security—by being safe and protected from misfortune and attack taken from List of Values (Kahler, 1983) incorporating Age, Working Status, Gender, Ethnicity, University Course, Monthly Income, Monthly Expenditure, Religious Beliefs (e.g., I find that my ideas on religion have a considerable influence on my views in other areas like shopping).

Procedure

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Human Resource Ethics Committee of James Cook University. Upon arrival at the designated classroom, participants were presented an information form and an informed consent form describing the study. Once informed consent was obtained, the researcher explained the various forms issued and clarified doubts/enquiries raised by participants. It was also reiterated that participants had the right to withdraw at any time and reminded they were participating in the study on a purely voluntary basis.

The demographic information form and three questionnaires—New Materialism scale, Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and Satisfaction with Life Scale—were presented to each participant. The researcher then uttered: 'Present in front of you are four forms, namely a Demographic Information Form, New Materialism Scale, Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and Satisfaction with Life Scale. Please complete these forms without changing your responses. You have approximately 30 minutes to complete your questionnaires. You may begin now. Thank you'.

Participants took an average of 20 minutes to complete the study. Upon completion, participants were debriefed regarding the research. This study conducted during the second and third trimesters of academic year 2013, spanned 4 months from July to October.

Data Analyses

Materialism is measured by the unique materialism index (Keng et al, 2000), which also accords social status. A correlation analysis was carried out to analyse the strength and direction of the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction. AMANOVA was conducted to explore association of materialism facets on ethnicity. An independent *t* test was carried out to compare levels of materialism between males and females in Singapore. Happiness was controlled for in this study because a considerable number of studies confirm that the higher an individual affirms materialistic goals, the less happy and satisfied individuals are with life (Belk, 1985; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Richins, 1995; Richins & Dawson, 1992). A moderation testing was carried out to examine if happiness had a moderating effect on the (hypothesized) relationship between

materialism and satisfaction with life. All analysis of data was carried out using IBM SPSS version 22.0.

Results

Descriptive statistics of continuous data conducted for materialism included material success, material happiness, material essentiality, material distinctiveness, happiness and satisfaction with life (see Table 1). From the descriptive statistics, students in the age range of 18 to 30 reported highest on material distinctiveness, above average levels of happiness and average levels of life satisfaction.

Table 1. Materialism, happiness and life satisfaction: descriptive statistics (n=128)

Variable	Variable level	M	SD
Materialism	Materialism total	58.937	13.038
	Material Success	15.5	5.48
	Material Happiness	11.99	4.98
	Material Essentiality	12.87	5.277
	Material Distinctiveness	18.58	4.85
Happiness		4.21	.528
Satisfaction with life		23.23	5.78

The summary of correlations between materialism and life satisfaction is presented in the matrix in Table 2. Greater rating of material distinctiveness is positively related to life satisfaction ($r^2 = .29, p < .01$). [r^2 represents the correlation coefficient.] An independent t test was conducted to compare levels of materialism for male and female participants. There was no significant difference in levels of materialism for male ($M = 69.08, SD = 13.18$) and female participants, ($M = 58.44, SD = 13.02$); $t(126) = .65, p > .05$ (two-tailed).

Table 2. Correlation between materialism and life satisfaction

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Satisfaction with life	-	-.19	-.31**	-.17	.29**	-.15
2. Material success		-	.26*	.18	-.19	-.51**
3. Material happiness			-	.58**	.16	.79**
4. Material essentiality				-	.19	.77**
5. Material distinctiveness					-	.44**
6. Material sum						-

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Testing of Assumption for MANOVA

Prior to carrying out a one-way MANOVA, preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-

covariance matrices and multi-collinearity. No serious violations were noted. First, there was an adequate sample size of 128 which ensured that there were more subjects in each cell than the number of dependent variable hence meeting the sample size assumption. Secondly, the assumptions for normality, univariate and multivariate outliers were met using the mahalanobis distance. As the mahalanobis distance did not exceed the critical χ^2 for $df = 5$ (at $\alpha = .001$) of 20.515 for any cases in the data file, it indicated that multivariate outliers were of no concern. Thirdly, the assumption for homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices was met using the Box's test of Equality of Covariance Matrices which had a value of $p > .001$. Lastly, the assumption of equality of variance was met using the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances. Since this assumption was not violated, Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) suggest an alpha level of .025 or .001 rather than the conventional .05 level. As such, for the multivariate test, the Wilk's Lambda was utilised as it is recommended for general use in MANOVA analysis without any assumption violation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A one-way MANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of materialism facets on ethnicity. Participants were divided into Singapore's three main ethnic groups, namely, the Chinese, Indian, and Malay.

There was a statistically significant difference in ethnicity for materialism facets, $F(8, 244) = 19.72, p < .001$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .37$ thereby confirming the second hypothesis. A Tukey post-hoc analysis was run to further analyse the differences. It was found that Chinese ($M = 18.19, SD = 3.80$) values material success significantly more than Malay ($M = 9.50, SD = 1.04, p < .001$) and Indian ($M = 8.69, SD = .71, p < .001$) whereas Indian ($M = 22.08, SD = .89$) values material distinctiveness more than Chinese ($M = 17.76, SD = .48, p < .001$) and Malay ($M = 17.17, SD = 1.31, p < .001$).

When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, material success reached statistical difference, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .568, $F(2, 125) = 84.56, p = .001$, partial eta square = .58. Material distinctiveness also reached statistical difference, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .121, $F(2, 125) = 9.74, p = .001$, partial eta square = .135.

Test of Assumptions in Multiple Regression

Before interpreting the results of hierarchical multiple regression, a number of assumptions were tested. Histograms and box plots indicated that each variable was normally distributed and free from univariate outliers. An introspection of the normal probability plot of standardised residuals and the scatterplot of standardised residuals against the standardised predicted values indicated that assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity of residuals were met. The mahalanobis distance did not exceed the critical χ^2 for $df = 5$ (at $\alpha = .001$) of 20.515 for any cases in the data file indicating that multivariate outliers were not of concern. The assumption of multicollinearity was met. All independent variables reflected Variance Inflation Factor values that were below the given cut off of 10 for the three predictors. This indicated that multicollinearity would not interfere with the ability to interpret the outcome of the hierarchical multiple regression. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between life satisfaction and materialism, and whether it is moderated by happiness levels.

Happiness Levels

To carry out this analysis, materialism and happiness were centered and an interaction term was created from the two-centered independent variables. The two-centered variables were entered into block 1 of the hierarchical multiple regression. Happiness and materialism account for 37.1 % of the variance in satisfaction with life, ($R^2 = .37, F(2, 125) = 36.91, p < .001$). An interaction term created was next entered into block 2. It showed that the interaction term was able to further explain a significant additional variance of 2.2 %, ($R^2 = .022, F(1, 124) = 4.49, p = .036$).

Simple slopes for the relation between materialism levels and life satisfaction were tested on low (-1 *SD* below the mean) and high (+ 1 *SD* above the mean) levels of happiness. Simple slopes test revealed a significant negative relation as with high levels of happiness, life satisfaction decreased as materialism levels increased as seen in Figure 1.

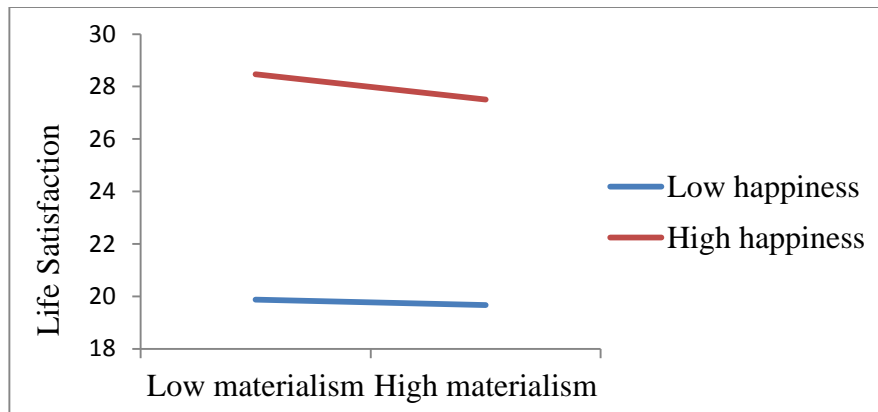


Figure 1: Relationship between happiness levels and materialism levels on life satisfaction

Overall, the results suggest that male participants are as equally materialistic as female participants, materialism levels and life satisfaction are moderated by happiness levels; among the respondents, the Chinese associate with the facet of material success the most whereas the Indian associate with material distinctiveness, and material distinctiveness is positively related life satisfaction.

Discussion

This study aims to understand the relationship of materialism, happiness, and life satisfaction among Singaporean undergraduates aged 18 to 30. First, results show that material distinctiveness was positively related to satisfaction with life. Shopping, a national pastime in Singapore (Biston, 2007), is being utilised to develop individual identity (Holt, 1997). Thus, students aged 18 to 30 appear unique through possessions they own and stand out to heighten their image (Mason, 2001). They have linked materialism to conspicuous consumption where consumer satisfaction is derived from audience reaction (Trinh & Phau, 2012). Further, material possessions provide an insight into the values students embrace; earlier research posited that consumers accentuate the material significance of image (Belk, 1988; Mowen, 1995). Possessions become a means of achieving distinguishable existence (Simmel, 1978). Hence consumers under 30 are aware of their image (Beaudoin, Moore, & Goldsmith, 1998). In addition, a product predominately consumed publicly and dominates public consumption satisfy expression of identity (Kaiser, 1990; Morganosky & Vreeman, 1986) as such commodities provide an opportunity for individuals to impress others (Gould & Barak, 1988).

This is elucidated by the theory surrounding the notion of identity which justifies that individuals purchase particular possessions to substantiate their definition of themselves and to clarify their identity in society (Sirgy, 1982). In Singapore, such a phenomenon could have resulted from the national identity of being 'Uniquely Singapore'. Being a tourism hub has given Singapore the opportunity to continually re-invent herself. Singapore does this by introducing new, effective and creative attractions so as to stand out in comparison to her competitors. For example, the Singapore Flyer is the only such tourist attraction in Asia, and the Singtel-Singapore Grandprix Formula One Night Race, the only one in the world. This means that the culture of embracing

material distinctiveness by youth in Singapore may have been derived from this viewpoint and resulted in the use of material possessions as a platform to stand out among their peers.

Secondly, results from the independent *t* test show that male and female Singaporean students are equally materialistic. This finding differs from earlier research conducted in the west which suggests that men are more materialistic (Eastman, Calvert, Campbell, & Frendenberger, 1997) and that they demonstrate more self-monitoring traits than women (O' Cass, 2001). Additionally, this finding contrasted with a more recent study on materialism conducted in Singapore which found that women were more materialistic (Li, Patel, Balliet, Tov & Scollon, 2011). An explanation may come from the demographic data collected. Most participants agreed that the list taken from Kahler's List of Values (1983), especially Financial Security or being safe and protected from misfortune and attack, was important. Previous research highlights that materialists consider personal financial security an important value and interpersonal relations less important (Kahle, Beatty, & Homer, 1986).

This finding also supports previous research that women are linked to fashion whereas men are linked to durable goods, like cars (Bloch, 1981). In Singapore, men and women may be equally materialistic owing to the existence of the five Cs (Keng et al, 2000). Even though individual Singaporeans may not endorse such ideas, the mere belief that some Singaporeans endorse these ideas may be enough to influence behaviour (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shetyenberg, & Wan, 2010; Zou, Tam, Morris, Lee, Lau & Chui, 2009).

Inglehart's sociological post-materialism hypotheses (Inglehart 1971, 1990; Inglehart & Abramson, 1994) provide an insight into the development of a materialistic society like Singapore which has developed from a fishing village to a global phenomenon. The scarcity hypothesis explains the degree of priority individuals place on materialism which reflects socio-economic circumstances, attaching considerable value to relatively scarce goods (Inglehart, 2000). Researchers have established that materialism is more prevalent in individuals from the low socio-economic strata (SES; Flouri, 2004) because greater economic insecurity places higher emphasis on materialistic pursuits. An explanation maybe that individuals experience insecurity and lower levels of personal autonomy which in turn lead them to seek security and control through extrinsic pursuits like image, popularity and financial and material acquisitions (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Another indication why both genders are equally materialistic may come from the demographic form in which participants filled out their working status. The majority of participants either worked part-time or full-time. In line with this finding, in Singapore, there exist more than 500,000 citizens between the ages 18 and 29 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2013) who have access to high disposable income derived from parents, grand-parents or part-time jobs (Wang 2006) which contributes to a yearly spending of almost \$180 million (Leong, 2000).

Thirdly, results from post hoc analysis conducted on ethnicity suggest that material success is valued by the Chinese, material distinctiveness is valued by the Indian, and the Malay value no particular facet of materialism.

Culture shapes personality and in turn determines consumer behaviour (Wallace, 1965). Singapore's three main races of Chinese, Malay, and Indian while remaining united have remained loyal to their unique culture, customs, religious-values and way of life (Kwon & Kau, 2004). This means their cultural values may influence their perception of materialism acquisition. Valuing material success by the Chinese could be due to cultural norms passed down generations to adhere to group norms, such as in protecting one's "face" which in turn may explain the existence of heightened image consciousness among the Chinese, evident by their selection of products which are socially visible (Kwon & Kau, 2004). Jhally and Livant (1986) suggested that materialistic individuals are concerned with social comparison and their standing in relation to others; hence, perceived happiness and self-esteem are based on the ratio of what one has compared to what

others have. In addition, a study by Wirtz and Scollon (2012) utilising a Singaporean sample found that adult Singaporean and college students equated high material success with having a higher life quality.

The Indian valuing material distinctiveness may derive support from cultural norm of caste beliefs. In Singapore's meritocratic society, the caste system has little functional value except when Indians utilise it as a cultural marker to distinguish members (Wu, 1982). Yeo's study (1997) found that Singaporean Indians placed an emphasis on product quality rather than brand when it comes to making purchases. The Malays place no association with any facet of materialism as Islam is an integral part of the Malay community (Li, 1989); the Malay idea of *rezeki* or belief in the pre-determination of an individual's economic destiny, may result in fatalism and a "lack of will to go on striving, hence placing their full trust in "Allah" to provide for them in times of need and distress (Bedlington, 1971; 1974).

Therefore, cultures may differ on the extent to which material goods and services are emphasized as differences in cultural capital within cultures may lead to differences in appreciation for conspicuous consumption (Berger & Ward, 2010; Üstüner & Holt, 2010).

Lastly, results show that happiness moderates the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction—when high levels of happiness exist, life satisfaction decreases while materialism levels increase. A possible explanation for this finding may be the assumption that owning more possessions make individuals happier may be unjustified (Richins & Rudin, 1994). Instead, studies have suggested that though acquisitions or an increase in income heightens an individual's life satisfaction albeit temporarily as pleasures derived from improvements quickly wanes and one's satisfaction/ dissatisfaction reverts to previous levels (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Inglehart & Rabier, 1986; Scitovsky, 1976). Studies agree that the relationship between income and well-being is predominantly assumed to be curvilinear, such that happiness rises with income up to a certain point but levels off as income continues upward (Bernhard, 2010; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Schnitker, 2008). This is because relative income affects life satisfaction. Further, as people acquire more income and material possessions, they adapt to their current level such that it is no longer deemed sufficient, and regardless of how much income people make, money is not a direct route to happiness (Ciszkentmihalyi, 1999).

In line with this finding, evidence proposes, that wealth is not proportional to happiness (Ciszkentmihalyi, 2000; Myers, 2000; Van Boven, 2005). Even if material goods add to quality of life, the cost/benefit relation is not linear and there is a point past which no improvement in life satisfaction is obtained from additional possessions. As illustrated by curve A in Figure 2, material resources add to perceived quality of life up to a certain point after which returns diminish; in fact, some research suggest that acquiring additional material possessions over a certain threshold might in fact reduce happiness, as shown by curve B in Figure 2 (Ciszkentmihalyi, 2000).

The bottom-up theory of subjective well-being suggests that life satisfaction is guided by situational factors that influence the sense of well-being in specific life domains. A life domain particularly cited is material life which houses emotional reactions related to material possessions, household income, savings, investment and other material resources related to personal wealth. Thus, life satisfaction/dissatisfaction judgments are directly influenced by how one feels about this domain (Sirgy et al, 2013).

Graph 1. Hypothetical relationship between material wealth and individual happiness

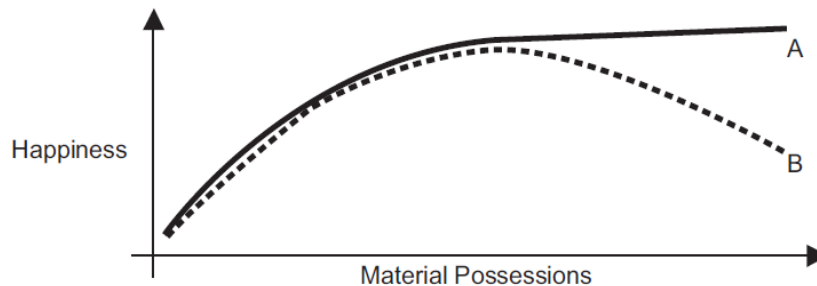


Figure 2. Hypothetical Relationship between Material Wealth and Individual happiness (Borrero, 2010).

Research has established that the negative relationship between materialism and life satisfaction is mediated by evaluations of standard of living (SOL). Furthermore, materialistic people are less satisfied with material possessions and in turn, less satisfied with life than non-materialistic individuals (Sirgy et al, 1998). Sirgy et al. (1998) proposed that materialistic people have lower SOL evaluations because such individuals have inflated expectations and they commonly utilise inflated standards when evaluating their SOL, compared to individuals who are non-materialistic with more realistic expectations. Sirgy et al. (1998) elaborated on and delineated six various types of expectations and how materialistic people use them—their ideal view of SOL; what they feel they deserve in terms of financial resources; what they need to maintain a certain lifestyle; what they have predicted all along in attaining a certain level of personal wealth; how far they have progressed in relation to what they had in the past and how much personal wealth they were able to amass based on their ability (through their educational background, inheritance and socio-economic status). In addition, materialistic individuals favour repeated evaluations of their SOL utilizing ideal, deserved, and need-based expectations. This results in negative evaluations of SOL, contributing to feelings of life dissatisfaction (Sirgy et al, 2013).

There were two main limitations in the current study. First, the male sample was smaller in proportion to the female sample utilised. An equal proportion would have been preferred as gender differences were being tested for as well as to avoid potential gender bias (Christensen, 2007, p. 103). Second, a specific education group—namely, undergraduates and income range served as criteria in the sample—limit the possibility to generalise findings from this study to other education and income groups in Singapore.

Future research could ensure that an equal gender sample size be utilised for a more holistic representation and to provide a better insight into gender and materialism in today’s globalised world. Future research could also include a wider range of educational and income groups and working adults at different life stages. This would allow for generalisation of findings to other social economic and educational groups making up Singapore’s society. Furthermore, it would allow for comparison to be made among the various groups and pave the way for any potential trends. Lastly, further analysis should be carried out to understand the changing aspect of materialism influencing happiness and life satisfaction and understand other constructs apart from materialism that contribute to happiness, in turn life satisfaction among Singaporeans.

In conclusion, materialism and happiness appear to be interrelated in Singapore especially among undergraduates aged 18 to 30. This finding has multiple implications. It would provide a new insight into the changing aspect of materialism especially in relation to the facets of

materialism which young Singaporeans associate including the resulting impact it has on their happiness as well as life satisfaction levels. It is also important to study the motivation of this group of Singaporeans as they would be the leaders of tomorrow and their preferences would impact their lifestyle. It creates greater awareness of the realisation that high levels of happiness can be achieved by experiencing low levels of materialism. In other words, high levels of materialism need not result in high levels of happiness. Contrary to what many people may feel, that is, achieving high levels of happiness can only come about when one experiences high levels of materialism, may not be true. Thus, perhaps the next time when one steps out to visit a mall, it may be wise to remember that happiness does not necessarily come in a shopping bag.

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