

A New Set Of Measurements For The Materialism Scale

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Abstract

Materialism has always been a popular factor in marketing and consumer research. Until now, many researchers have still favoured Belk's materialism traits (1985) or Richins and Dawson's materialism scale (1992) in their works. However, previous literature suggested that the existing measurement did not capture the material distinctiveness of consumers (Atay and Sirgy, 2009; Mason, 2001). According to Mason (2001), materialistic consumers use their possessions to stand out of the crowd. Furthermore, recent failures of the existing materialism scales in explaining luxury brands related consumption have raised the question of whether it is time to review these measurements (Swami et al., 2009, Furnham and Valgeirsson, 2007). Working on the idea of materialism scale (Richins and Dawson, 1992) this paper presents a new 16-item scale developed to measure four components of materialism – namely *material success*, *material happiness*, *material essentiality* and *material distinctiveness* – and empirical evidence to support its validity.

1. Introduction

Veblen (1890) proposed that the demand for luxury brands is motivated by consumers' desires for social status or esteem, which can only be achieved by acquiring and displaying luxury goods and. And thus, there is no surprise that materialism has become one of the most popular factors in marketing and consumer research, especially in luxury brands and related studies (Faure and Tang, 2008; Chaudhuri and Majumdar, 2006; Corneo and Oliver, 1997). However, materialism – as popular as it is – is still being measured by scales developed over two decades ago while the world has changed intensely. In order to introduce a new approach to measuring materialism, this paper is structured as followed: the second chapter provides an overview of current measurements of materialism and conceptualizing the new scale. Chapter 3 reveals the methodology of scale development. The results from 4 studies are shown in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes the paper with summary and outlook for the new materialism scale.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Measurements of materialism

In economics terms, materialism is a value usually refers to “the pursuit of one's own material well-being” (Easterlin and Crimmins, 1991). Materialism is also described in social studies as “a personal value that encompasses concern with material things, competitiveness, and emphasis on making profit as opposed to human well-being” (Beutel and Marini, 1995). In marketing literature, the two most accepted materialism measurements are from Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992). The materialism traits measure materialism through three personal traits: possessiveness, nongenerosity, and envy (Belk, 1985). On the other hand, Richins and Dawson (1992) determine materialism by the importance a person place in acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness and possession-defined success. In the last three decades,

these two measurements have been employed in so many research for finding indication of materialism in consumer behavior from luxury brands (Zhao and Belk, 2002; Belk and Zhou, 2001; Corneo and Oliver, 1997; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Easterlin and Crimmins, 1991; Belk 1985) to counterfeit luxury brands (Lu and Lu, 2010; Wan et al., 2009; Swami et al., 2009; Furnham and Valgeirsson, 2007; Wee et al., 1995). But the two scales have not always been successful in explaining consumer behavior, especially in recent years (Swami et al., 2009; Furnham and Valgeirsson, 2007). In a research investigating the non-price determinants of intention to purchase counterfeit goods in Singapore, Belk's scale to measure materialism traits was adapted but failed the reliability test (Wee et al., 1995). The results from recent attempts using Richin's materialism scale to study materialism in the consumption of counterfeit luxury brands have also showed the inconsistency (Lu and Lu, 2010; Wan et al., 2009; Swami et al., 2009) and divergence between the 3 components of the scale (Wan et al., 2009; Furnham and Valgeirsson, 2007).

Belk introduced the materialism traits in the '80s while Richins and Dawson 18 item-scale was formed in early '90s. Since then, the world has changed significantly. Emerging markets such as China and those from old Soviet blocs have risen to power. China for example, is now one the largest market for luxury goods (The Economist, 2011). But what Chinese consumers are demanding is very different with consumers from the West because of various reasons, such as cultural factors and/or new wealth (KPMG, 2008). Therefore, a new materialism scale is required to deliver better measurement of materialism of consumers.

2.2 Scale conceptualization

The materialism scale (Richins and Dawson, 1992) provides a good framework for a new scale because it was built based on the idea that materialism is a value that guides the conduct of one's life. In a certain way, it has already included Belk's materialism traits in its three themes: *material success*, *material centrality* and *material happiness*.

“Material Success measures the extent to which one uses possessions as indicators of success and achievement in life, both in judging oneself and others.

Material Centrality measures the extent to which possessions are placed in the center of one's life.

Material Happiness measures the extent to which one believes that possessions are critical to satisfaction and well-being in life.” (Richins and Dawson, 1992)

Though it provided a good foundation to materialism, the 18-item scale of Richins and Dawson has concentrated on the relationship between one and his possession; and thus lacked the ability to measure status latent for each dimension. Among the 18 items, there are only 2 items dedicated to study the status latent– *Q3 I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success*, and *Q4 The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life*.

Furthermore, materialistic people are said to pursue social recognition and status and using their possessions to distinguish themselves from others (Mason, 2001). Materialism is also often associated with conspicuous consumption, in which consumer satisfaction is derived from audience reaction rather than functionality of the item. In other words, materialistic people are

seen to focus on the consumption of “status goods” and unique consumer products to distinguish themselves (Lynn and Harris, 1997), hence the introduction of distinctiveness into the scale.

3. Methodology

3.1 Scale Design

The development of the scale closely followed recommended psychometric scaling procedures (DeVellis, 2003). First a convenience sample of 20 consumers –age between 25 and 50 with higher educational background in business related studies– was asked to describe the characteristics of materialistic people related to luxury brands usage behavior. Items were then generated from these responses. In addition, items were also generated from previously developed materialism scales and the materialism literature (Atay and Sirgy, 2009; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Richins, 1987; Belk, 1985). A pool of 70 items was generated. These items were then screened for ambiguity and reviewed by a panel of experts – luxury brands marketing professionals and academia. This pool was later trimmed to 47 items, including 18 items from Richins and Dawson (1992), via exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis. Through a number of other scaling procedures (factor analysis, reliability analysis and validity check) across several samples, a final scale consisting 16 items was retained – with none from the original scale. The final scale was then administered to consumers in Vietnam via a market research survey conducted by Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) – a market research agency.

3.2 The Sample

A convenience sample of 20 consumers –age between 25 and 50 with higher educational background in business related studies– was used for item generation. Three samples of students ($n=184$, 89 and 419) were used to examine the reliability and validity of the scales. All participants are undergraduate business students from a large university in Australia and they participated in the study as part of a course requirement. Of this group, 60 percent of the respondents were female and almost 90 percent were under 25 years old. The use of student sample is usually deemed as a potential limitation due to its homogeneity; however Richins and Dawson (1992) also used student samples in developing the original scale. And more importantly the results later showed scale components were found to be unwavering regardless to changes in demographic characteristics of a sample.

The final test was conducted with a consumer sample of $n=400$, from two biggest cities of Vietnam (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City). The gender ratio was 50-50, 34 percent of the respondent were under 25; the largest group (53 percent) was from 26 to 45 years old.

3.3 Data Collection Method

Online survey platform was used to aid data collection from the 3 student samples. English version of the questionnaire was used to collect data from student samples. For the consumer sample, TNS was contracted to collect the data. The questionnaire was prepared in Vietnamese with clear instructions in each section for interviewers. Data collection method was door-to-door interview. Household were chosen randomly from a data pool across the city. Respondents were also selected randomly within the household. If the chosen respondent was not at home, interviewers would come back later. Twenty percent of the completed questionnaire were subjected for quality controlled (QC). Respondents were revisited by QC team to go through a shorter survey consisting key questions to make sure the reliability of the whole study.

4. Results

The 16 items of Materialism Scale were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS version 19. Prior to performing the EFA, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. In all samples, inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above. The Kaiser Meyer-Olkin values for the three student samples were .775, .817 and .860 while KMO values for the consumer sample from Vietnam was .895, all exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1970; 1974) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

EFA and reliability analysis revealed the presence of four factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1. An inspection of the scree plot also supported the four-factor solution by showing a clear break after the fourth component (Catell, 1996). To aid in the interpretation of these four factors, Varimax rotation was performed. The rotated component matrix for the 3 student samples is shown in Table 1. Based on the result, four factors are namely *Material Success*, *Material Happiness*, *Material Essentiality* and *Material Distinctiveness*. Through four different occasions of the study, the original set of questions for *Material Centrality* was found to measure various factors and therefore it has to be replaced by *Material Essentiality*, which provides a more concrete appraisal of the belief that possessions are essential and responsible for everything in one's life. This belief is also found to be more in line with the whole idea of materialism and much clearer than the vague "the extent to which possessions are placed in the center of one's life" of the *Material Centrality*. And *Material Distinctiveness* measures the extent to which one uses possessions as a device to stand out of the crowd.

Table 1: Rotate Component Matrix

Items	Student Sample 1 (n=184)				Student Sample 2 (n=89)				Student Sample 3 (n=419)				Consumer Sample (n=400)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Material Success. a		.736				.833				.788				.817		
Material Success. b		.833				.880				.840				.845		
Material Success. c		.840			.340	.766				.800				.826		
Material Success. d		.757	.307			.865				.816				.817		
Material Happiness. a			.696					.669				.705				.753
Material Happiness. b			.711					.796				.740				.730
Material Happiness. c			.791					.845				.830				.820
Material Happiness. d			.775					.750				.779				.772
Material Essentiality. a	.942				.734			.475	.855				.820			
Material Essentiality. b	.916				.914				.898				.878			
Material Essentiality. c	.944				.902				.878				.866			
Material Essentiality. d	.911				.844				.856				.831			
Material Distinctiveness. a				.838			.874				.847					.858
Material Distinctiveness. b				.857			.894				.854					.859
Material Distinctiveness. c				.421			.856				.706					.831
Material Distinctiveness. d				.742			.671				.720					.753

Over the 3 student samples, coefficient alpha estimates for the factors ranged from .863 to .906 for the success factor, from .813 to .859 for the happiness factor, from .824 to .969 for the essentiality, and .732 to .900 for the distinctiveness factor. Alpha for the overall 16-item scale

ranged between .849 and .910. The final consumer sample produced coefficient alpha estimates .929 for the success factor, .858 for the happiness factor, .936 for the essentiality, and .893 for the distinctiveness factor. In short, the Cronbach's alpha values are all well above the recommended criterion of 0.7 (Pallant, 2000), providing strong evidence for internal consistency of the scales.

5. Conclusion

Richins and Dawson's materialism scale (1992) has provided a good measurement of materialism in marketing and consumer research, especially those involved in luxury brands and related, for over two decades. But the world market has changed significantly since then, and now it requires a different measurement to capture materialism. After reliability and validity assessments, the new 16-item materialism scale has been proved to be in good standard and will provide reliable results.

The set of measurements developed in this study would contribute to the growing understanding of why consumers buy luxury brands as well as counterfeit luxury brands. As pointed out by earlier literature, other materialism scales were not able to grasp the importance of possession in the path to become more distinctive. *Material Distinctiveness* provides a set of measurement to take a hold of this idea. This is very important and will become handy in cross cultural assessment. For example, consumers with lower material distinctiveness would prefer to purchase a more conspicuous version of the brand as the needs for displaying the logo of luxury brands is so great whereas consumers with higher material distinctiveness would go after a more discreet version of a luxury brand to stand out of the crowd. All the questions for other components such as *Material Success*, *Material Happiness* and *Material Essentiality* were also reviewed and replaced with a better measurement for benefits of owning a possession, and evaluating the status latent.

Finally, the new materialism scale does not only answer the gap of contribute the marketing literature but also add valuable insights for luxury brands management. Further research employing the new set of measurements will provide luxury brands with better understanding of what drive consumers toward their brands so they can come up with more effective strategies and designs. In addition, the scale would also benefit many other marketing professionals who are in need of a tool to study consumer behaviour. As the new materialism scale measure the status latent and benefits of owning a possession, it can also be used as a tool to study any service related products. For example, a company that sells luxury cruise trips in tourism industry, a marketing executive for a private high school or even an anti-counterfeit agency fighting against fake luxury brands would find this scale useful and benefit from it. This research also suggest that the new set of measurement have a high generalizability as it was administered and got positive results in various locations (Australia, Vietnam), cross-culture (North and South Vietnam; Vietnamese and Australian). Future research and longitudinal study using the new scale to measure materialism of consumers is recommended.

6. References

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7. Appendix

Final Scale Items

Material Success Measures (1=“Strongly Disagree,” and 7=“Strongly Agree”)

- a. I like to own things that make people think highly of me
- b. I like to own expensive things than most people because this is a sign of success
- c. The only way to let everyone know about my high status is to show it
- d. I feel good when I buy expensive things. People think of me as a success

Material Happiness Measures (1=“Strongly Disagree,” and 7=“Strongly Agree”)

- a. Material possessions are important because they contribute a lot to my happiness
- b. When friends have things I cannot afford, it bothers me
- c. Acquiring valuable things is important for my happiness
- d. To me, it is important to have expensive homes, cars, clothes, and other things. Having these expensive items make me happy

Material Essentiality Measures (1=“Strongly Disagree,” and 7=“Strongly Agree”)

- a. Material growth has an irresistible attraction for me
- b. Material accumulation helps raise the level of civilization
- c. Growth in material consumption helps raise the level of civilization
- d. To buy and possess expensive things is very important to me

Material Distinctiveness Measures (1=“Strongly Disagree,” and 7=“Strongly Agree”)

- a. I usually buy things that make me look distinctive
- b. I like to own things that make people think of me as unique and different
- c. I feel uncomfortable when seeing a random person wears the same clothes that I am wearing
- d. I would rather pay more to get a more distinctive item