

Antecedence of Materialism

Dr. M.A. Asoka Malkanthie

Senior Lecturer

Department of Marketing Management

Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce

University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Nugegoda,

Sri Lanka

maamalkanthie@sjp.ac.lk

Abstract

Materialism has become a major problem in the world. Materialistic consumers consume more and unnecessary things. Overconsumption is one of the major threats to the future of human survival. Hence, the intention of this research is to identify the antecedents of materialism in Sri Lankan context. Through the Literature review, the antecedents of materialism was identified as; depression, anxiety, self esteem, and stress. Positivist approach with deductive reasoning was used in this study. Individual adult person was taken as the unit of study of this research and this is a single cross sectional study. Sample of 450 adults was selected according to judgmental sampling technique representing nine provinces in Sri Lanka. Structured questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. Structural Equation Modeling was used to analyze the data. self esteem, depression, and stress significantly affect materialism. Self esteem and depression, negatively affect the materialism while “stress” positively affect the materialism

Key Words: Materialism, depression, anxiety, self esteem, stress

1. Introduction

Materialism is not a new concept. All the religious leaders as well as many researchers have discussed the negative aspects of materialism. The Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson and Weiner, 1989) defines the term as the “devotion to material needs to the neglect of spiritual matters.” Materialism is the degree of importance consumers attach to possessions (Belk, 1995). Rassuli and Hollander (1986) describe materialism as "a mind-set . . . an interest in getting and spending," Because of the materialism of consumers; they consume more and unnecessary things. Oskamp (2000) identified overconsumption, as one of the major threats to the future of human survival.

There are number of research studies on materialism but in Sri Lanka majority of the people are Buddhist. In Buddhism, materialism is concerned about sufferance and hardships undergone by man. There were two traditions of teaching at the Buddha’s time. In a very general way the Buddhist texts refer to these two kinds of religious traditions as Brahmana tradition and Samana tradition. These philosophical teachings presented are referred to as Sassatavada (Eternalism) which denotes some kind of spiritualism and Uchedavada denoting a kind of materialism. The two practices of the two philosophical traditions were “Attakilamathanuyogc (self-mortification) and “Kamasukhallikanyoga” (self-indulgence), and these two practices were the ones that were mostly accepted and followed during the time Buddhism arose in India.

The Buddha asked his followers not to resort to either of them. This is very clearly declared in his inaugural discourse Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta. Therein he says that these are two extremes generally followed by many and that those who opt to follow Buddhism should give them up. Further, he condemned “Kamasukhallikanuyoga”, the path of self indulgence, as low, vulgar the way of the average ordinary person, ignoble and unbeneficial (gammo pothujjaniko anariyo anathasariihito) with regard to the path of self mortification his criticism was less severe, for he did not describe it as low vulgar, the way of the average ordinary person, but said that it is painful (dukkha) ignoble and unbeneficial (Dukkho anariyo anathasamhito)

Therefore the findings of the research may be different from studies conducted in other cultural contexts. Hence, the intention of this research is to identify the antecedents of materialism in Sri Lankan context.

2. Literature Review

Materialism has been defined by various scholars in different ways. It has been defined as; a personal value (Richins & Dawson, 1992), a personality trait (Belk, 1985), an extrinsic motivation focus (Kasser & Ryan, 1993), a preference for products over experiences (van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), and a focus on lower-order needs at the expense of higher-order needs (Inglehart, 1990). Rassuli and Hollander (1986) describe materialism as "a mind-set . . . an interest in getting and spending." 'Materialism is the extent to which individuals attempt to engage in the construction and maintenance of the self through the acquisition and use of products, services, experiences, or relationships that are perceived to provide desirable symbolic value' (Shrum et al., 2013). This definition was used in this study to define materialism since it covers different aspects. Materialism was identified by many scholars as an outcome of negative experiences or behavior of people and consequences of materialism has being viewed as positive (Segev et al, 2015).

Researchers argue that materialism is a coping mechanism for people whose intrinsic needs such as safety, competency, self-worth and belonging are not fulfilled (Chang and Arkin, 2002; Kasser, 2002). In line with the above discussions on dealing with stress, individuals affected by significant life-events tend to adopt various consumption practices (Moschis 2007). These consumption practices include eating out (for example, at restaurants) (Andreasen 1984), excessive shopping (Heckhausen & Schulz 1995; Sneath et al, 2009), alcohol abuse (Heatheron & Baumeister 1991; Hirschman 1992), binge eating (Faber et al. 1995), materialism (O'Guinn & Faber 1989) and gambling (Duhachek 2005).

By adopting such behaviours in a traumatic situation, individuals tend to avoid or ignore the negative feelings induced by the tragic event (Ruvio et al, 2014). For example, in a longitudinal study with homeless people in the UK, McNaughton (2008) found that people tended to engage in substance abuse as a way of: 1) escaping from their material reality, 2) assimilating to their new environment, and 3) coping with the trauma in their prior life. Further, in a study with victims of hurricane Katrina in 2005, Sneath et al, (2009) found that, with the depressive state created from the loss of possessions, and a feeling of a lack of control, survivors engaged in impulsive and/or compulsive buying as a coping mechanism. More recently, Nishio, Ishida and Takeuchi (2014) as cited in Jayawickrama et al, 2014, conducted a study with survivors affected by the 2011 Tohoku earthquake in Japan, and found that consumers increased purchases of health and eco-products in the long run as individuals became more environmental friendly as a result of the disaster experience.

Having conceptualised the consumer mental state of stress from a vulnerability perspective, as Baker et al,(2005) suggest, individuals with stress adopt coping strategies such as distancing or regulating their emotions through actions related to consumption as described above. Such responses to stress can be justified from another theoretical perspective: escape theory. It postulates that people adopt certain consumption behaviours (for example, alcohol and drugs) to escape from self-awareness, which includes 'escaping' from their stress state (Wicklund 1975 as cited in Jayawickrama et al, 2014). Overall, in light of 'escape theory' and the 'consumer

vulnerability perspective', the above examples show that some consumption practices can become coping mechanisms to deal with stress.

Based on the literature review following hypotheses were developed:

H1. Depression has a positive association with materialism.

H2. Anxiety has a positive association with materialism.

H3. Self-esteem has a positive association with materialism

H4. Stress has a positive association with materialism.

3. Methodology

Research philosophy used in the study is positivist approach with deductive reasoning. In other words quantitative research was carried out while testing the hypotheses developed on a priori basis. Individual adult person was taken as the unit of study of this research and this is a single cross sectional study. Sample of 450 adults was selected according to judgmental sampling technique representing nine provinces in Sri Lanka. Structured questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. Research assistant for this project was the main coordinator for the data collection process supported by the principle researcher. Measurement properties were validated, and then the hypotheses were tested. Structural equation modeling was used for testing the hypotheses.

3.1 Operationalization of the variables

3.1.1 Materialism

Richins and Dawson (1992) developed a scale to measure materialism and widely used this scale by many researchers thereafter. Segev et al, (2015), Ogden and Cheng, (2011), Lipovčan et al, (2015) are some of the examples for recent use of Richins and Dawson (1992)'s scale of materialism. Hence, Richins and Dawson (1992)'s scale of materialism is used in this research to measure materialism.

3.1.2 Self Esteem

Self esteem becomes increasingly important to gain the respect and appreciation of others. People have a need to accomplish things and then have their efforts recognized. People need to sense that they are valued and by others and feel that they are making a contribution to the world (Maslow 1943). Rosenberg (1965), Self-Esteem Scale, a widely used self-report instrument for evaluating individual self-esteem is used in this research to measure self esteem since it is still used by current researches to measure self esteem (e.g. Segev et al,(2015)).

3.1.3 Depression

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck et al, 1988) and the Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression (HRSD; Hamilton, 1967) were the most commonly used assessments of depression in research and clinical practice. But later, McGreal and Joseph (1993) developed Depression–Happiness Scale (D–H–S) to measure the happiness and depression status. This is a self-report scale which contains 25 items representing a mix of affective, cognitive, and bodily experiences. Each item is rated on a four point scale: *never* (0), *rarely* (1), *sometimes* (2), and *often* (3). 12 of the items concerned positive (Happiness) thoughts, feelings, and bodily experiences and 13 concerned negative (Depression) thoughts, feelings, and bodily experiences. Due to the weaknesses of this model, Joseph and Lewis (1998) tested this model again and the indicators that scored more than 0.6 in their study was taken for this study to measure the depression.

3.1.4 Subjective Experience of Anxiety

According to American Psychological Association adopted from *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) tested by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) was used in this study to measure the anxiety. According to DASS there are four dimensions of anxiety, namely; automatic arousal, skeletal musculature effects, situational anxiety and subjective experience of anxiety. In this research only subjective experience of anxiety was taken since this is not a research targeting to clinical patients.

3.1.5 Stress:

Oxford English dictionary defines stress as a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) tested by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) was used in this study to measure the stress. According to DASS scale stress has been measured under four dimensions, namely; difficulty relaxing, Nervous arousal, easily upset, over reactive, impatient.

4. Analysis and interpretation

4.1 Factors affecting materialism

In the first stage of the analysis factor loading values were taken from confirmatory factor analysis and the results are given in Table 4.1. According to the table 4.1, the standardized regression weights are higher than 0.5 and most of them are higher than 0.7. Therefore, validity of the indicators to measure dimensions can be ensured through the estimated regression weights of the indicators.

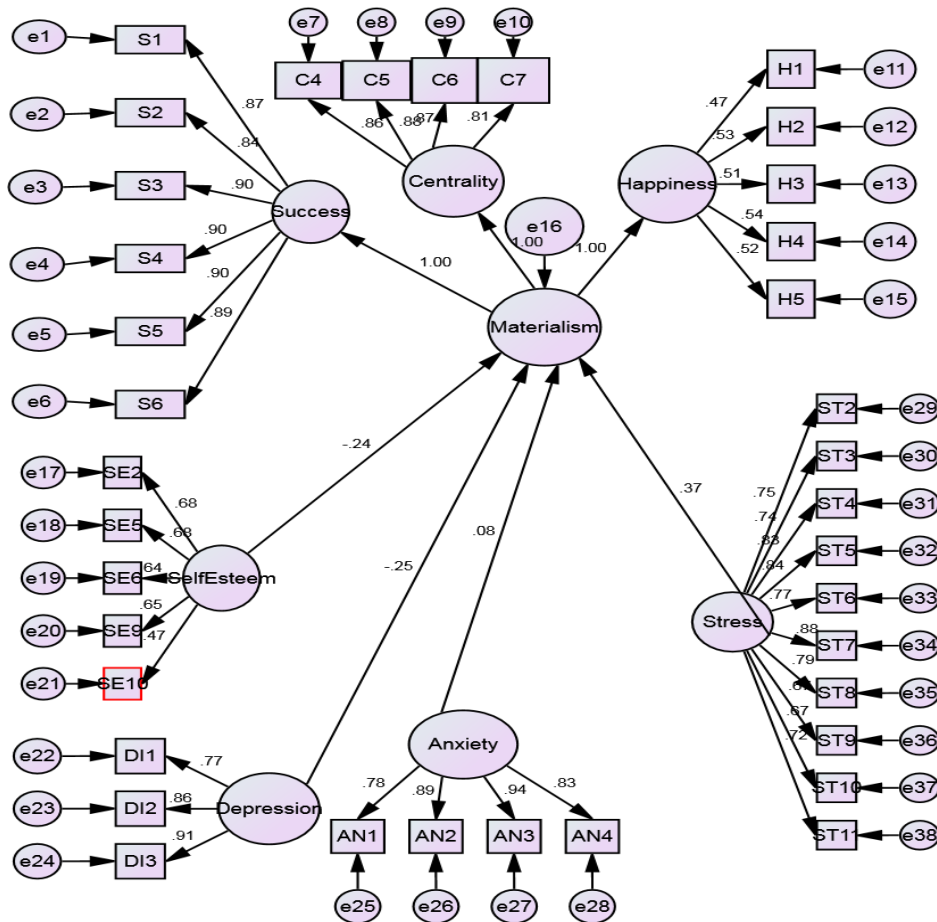
Table 4.1- Factors loading values

| | Estimate |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Materialism <--- SelfEsteem | -.242 |
| Materialism <--- Depression | -.250 |
| Materialism <--- Anxiety | .079 |

| | | Estimate |
|-------------|-----------------|----------|
| Materialism | <--- Stress | .365 |
| SE10 | <--- SelfEsteem | .573 |
| SE9 | <--- SelfEsteem | .651 |
| SE6 | <--- SelfEsteem | .640 |
| SE5 | <--- SelfEsteem | .675 |
| SE2 | <--- SelfEsteem | .676 |
| DI3 | <--- Depression | .907 |
| DI2 | <--- Depression | .864 |
| DI1 | <--- Depression | .773 |
| AN4 | <--- Anxiety | .835 |
| AN3 | <--- Anxiety | .938 |
| AN2 | <--- Anxiety | .894 |
| AN1 | <--- Anxiety | .785 |
| ST2 | <--- Stress | .748 |
| ST3 | <--- Stress | .742 |
| ST4 | <--- Stress | .828 |
| ST5 | <--- Stress | .835 |
| ST6 | <--- Stress | .768 |
| ST7 | <--- Stress | .877 |
| ST8 | <--- Stress | .789 |
| ST9 | <--- Stress | .672 |
| ST10 | <--- Stress | .672 |
| ST11 | <--- Stress | .718 |

In the next level of the research, the impact of Self Esteem, anxiety, depression and stress on materialism was tested. The results of the test are given in Graph 4.1. According to the graph 4.1, self esteem, depression, and stress significantly affect materialism while anxiety has no significant impact on materialism. The standard regression values are -0.242 , -0.25 , 0.278 and 0.365 respectively. Self esteem and depression, negatively affect the materialism while “stress” positively affect the materialism

Graph 4.1 Antecedents of Materialism



4.2. Model fit

According to the chi-square test, the model does not fit with the data since the p value is lower than 0.05. But, this can happen due to the small size of the sample. In considering RMSEA illustrated in Table 4.2, the value is lower than 0.05 (0.005). GFI value as illustrated in Table 4.3 is 0.710 and CFI value according to the Table 4.4 is 0.779. GFI and CFI values are close to 1. In considering the results of the model test, the first hypothesis, “*Depression* has a positive association with materialism,” is rejected and found that there is a negative significant relationship between depression and materialism (Standard Regression Weight = -0.250). The second hypothesis of the study, “*Anxiety* has a positive association with materialism” is rejected since it is not significant. The third hypothesis “*Self-esteem* has a positive association with materialism” is rejected and found out that there is a (Standard Regression Weight = -0.242) negative, significant relationship between self esteem and materialism. The fourth hypothesis, “*Stress* has a positive association with materialism” is accepted and found that there is a moderate positive and significant impact on materialism (Standard Regression Weight = 0.365).

Table 4.2- RMSEA

| Model | RMSEA | LO 90 | HI 90 | PCLOSE |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Default model | .005 | .002 | .009 | .000 |

| Model | RMSEA | LO 90 | HI 90 | PCLOSE |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Independence model | .076 | .072 | .079 | .000 |

Table 4.3- RMR, GFI

| Model | RMR | GFI | AGFI | PGFI |
|--------------------|------|-------|------|------|
| Default model | .198 | .710 | .536 | .364 |
| Saturated model | .000 | 1.000 | | |
| Independence model | .417 | .178 | .132 | .169 |

Table 4.4- Baseline Comparisons

| Model | NFI Delta1 | RFI rho1 | IFI Delta2 | TLI rho2 | CFI |
|--------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------|
| Default model | .461 | .426 | .480 | .444 | .779 |
| Saturated model | 1.000 | | 1.000 | | 1.000 |
| Independence model | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |

5. Discussion

In Sri Lankan context, self esteem, depression, and stress significantly affect materialism but self esteem and depression, negatively affect the materialism while “stress” positively affect the materialism. These findings are in line with the findings of Moschis, 2007. His discussions were dealing with stress and he explained how individuals affected by significant life-events tend to adopt various consumption practices (Moschis 2007). But the findings of Chang and Arkin, 2002; Kasser, 2002, and Sneath et al, (2009) is contradict with the findings of the research since there is no significant impact from anxiety while depression and self esteem negatively affect materialism. In that case we can argue that in a Buddhist based culture, people avoid materialistic things when they are in a depression and when they have high self esteem.

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