

Chapter 17

A Discussion on Indian Consumers' Hedonic and Non-Hedonic Values

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at attaining a better understanding of the hedonic consumer value of materialism and non-hedonic values of happiness, life-satisfaction and religiosity. As a conceptual paper, the study refers to literature and prior empirical research with the objective of linking a significant body of literature on these apparently diverse constructs into a unifying theoretical framework. The study offers new research directions in the form of propositions for further empirical investigation.

GENESIS

The concept of the hedonic construct of materialism as an inherent constituent of lifestyle has been a profoundly dialectical construct. The issue has been of interest to a range of people – from the dilettante who have dabbled in its aura to the prophets whose homilies have castigated it as a source of retrogression towards spiritual bankruptcy.

The text book definition of materialism states that it is a personality – like trait which distinguishes between individuals who regard possessions as essential to their identities and their lives and those for whom possessions are secondary (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2005, p. 157 – 158). Over the last five decades, researchers have been paying increasing amount of attention to materialism (e.g. Belk 1983, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991; Kasser 2002; Richins 1987, 1994a, 1994b; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Mukerji 1983; Pollay 1986; Ward & Wackman, 1971)

The two major studies on Materialism and its scale development have been carried out by Belk (1984, 1984) and Richins and Dawson (1992). Belk viewed materialism as an integration of personality traits – possessiveness, non-generosity and envy. He proposed an indirect measurement system of personality through empirical determination of these three traits by using three subscales measuring each of these

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traits. On the other hand, Richins and Dawson (1992) conceptualised materialism as a value whose influence goes beyond mere consumption arenas. Their measurement scale for materialism in an individual is based on three dimensions or “orienting values” – acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness and possession defined success. The development of these scales has given a very potent tool to the researchers since they can quantify a concept as intangible, abstract and subjective as materialism.

The primary purpose of this article is to bring together apparently disparate and yet interconnected strands of research and present an integrated model of hedonic and non-hedonic values of consumer behavior. Materialism has been profoundly explored through literature and prior empirical research to provide possible directions for future research. The article has a secondary objective of stimulating more research in areas underexplored in the context of Indian consumers.

THE HEDONIC CONSTRUCT MATERIALISM: AS DEFINED IN MARKETING

O Shaughnessy and O Shaughnessy (2002) believe that the tendency towards materialism is an inherent constituent of human condition and it was widespread prosperity which fuelled the emergence of both marketing activity and consumerist behaviour simultaneously. Materialism, as a field of study, gained greater attention over last two and a half decades (e.g. Belk, 1984; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Richins & Dawson, 1992) and its causes and consequences (e.g. Larsen, Sirgy and Wright, 1999; Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Denton, 1997; Sirgy, *et. al.* 1998). The consumer researchers have studied materialism as a personality trait (Belk, 1984; 1985), as a consumer value (Richins 1987; Richins & Dawson, 1992), as a consumer attitude (Campbell, 1969), as an orientation towards money and possessions (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), as a way of life (Daun, 1983; Steiner, 1975), as an acquisitive ideology (Bishop, 1949) and Holt (1998) raised an important question as to whether materialism is more about “how” rather than “what” one consumes.

The evidence from Sociology shows that the desire to possess material things is present in most cultures (Mukerji, 1983) and it could be because such a desire is a basic human characteristic (Rubin, 1986). It raises a very important question as to how does one differentiate the “materialistic” from the “mundane”. The available research indicates towards the following differentiating criteria: a strong belief that possessions give pleasure which leads to seeking pleasure through possession rather than through other means such as personal relationships, experiences and achievements (see Richins & Dawson, 1992).

MATERIALISM IN INDIAN CULTURE

In Indian culture, materialism has been a widely-debated issue with both proposing and opposing schools of thought. However, the oral tradition of passing on knowledge from one generation to another may have resulted in poor documentary evidence. Chatterjee and Datta (1984) explained that “though materialism in some form or other has always been present in India, and occasional references are found in the *Vedas*, the Buddhist literature, the epics as well as in the later philosophical works, we do not find any systematic work on materialism, nor any organized school of followers as the other philosophical schools possess. But almost every work of the other schools states, for refutation, the materialistic views. Our knowledge of Indian materialism is chiefly based on these.”

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