



Examining the Causal Relationships Between Materialism, Status Consumption and Life Satisfaction

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the causal relationships between materialism, status consumption and life satisfaction. Status consumption scale (Eastman et al, 1999), short form of the material values scale (Richins, 2004) and life satisfaction scale (Mai and Tambyah, 2011; expanded from Richins and Dawson, 1992) were used in this study. We carried out surveys on 464 consumers. We used reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, Pearson correlation analysis and structural equation modeling. Consequently, we found that there is a negative and significant relationship between materialism and life satisfaction; there is a positive and significant relationship between materialism and status consumption and there is a positive and significant relationship between status consumption and life satisfaction.

Keywords: Materialism; Life Satisfaction; Status Consumption; Structural Equation Modeling.

1. Introduction

Turkish society became more close to being a conspicuous consumption society by means of electronic consumer goods along with every new generation (Orcan, 2008). Particularly, as a consequence of the free market policies in 80's, Turkey has started to become more close to being a consumer society. Ozal worked hardly to improve the conditions of the middle class and tried to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor (Laciner, 2013). Seeds of consumption codes were spread in those years and grew until nowadays.

Baudrillard states that consumers consume indicators and symbols, they do not consume simple materialistic objects (Orcan, 2008; Bocoock, 2009). In consumer societies, lifestyles are individualized; individuals want self-enhancement and self-expression, go after the new and the latest fashion, like adventures, take risks and enjoy life because there is only one life to live (Featherstone, 2013). There is a relationship between consumption and desires through selling consumer goods to most of the consumers using indicators and symbols in societies which adopt Western capitalism (Bocoock, 2009). The need for getting into a specific identity with the help of purchased clothes or specific furniture does not get lost even in the period of recession (Bocoock, 2009). Consumption has become a style of entertainment and leisure alongside being an act of satisfying basic needs (Orcan, 2008). This is why we try to examine the relationships between materialism, status consumption and life satisfaction in the current study.

This study is structured as follows: first we examine the concepts of materialism, status consumption and life satisfaction. In the second part, we present our method and in the third part, we observe the results and conclude with a discussion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Materialism

Getting pleasure by consuming is synonymous with the fullness of life and the action of getting rid of the material objects that we do not like any more has been one of the most exciting emotions. Therefore there is a situation which can be explained as “I shop, therefore I am” (Bauman, 2013). Likewise, contemporary societies are materialistic, hedonistic and they highlight ownership of possessions (Odabasi, 2013). Being the opposite of voluntary simplicity, materialism can be stated as the importance given by consumers to worldly values and becomes prevalent through the media (Odabasi, 2013). Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as the importance of owning possessions to reach happiness. Literature on materialism shows that the concept can be regarded as a value (Richins and Dawson, 1992; Holt, 1995), a personal trait (Belk, 1985; Holt, 1995), a consumption style (Holt, 1995) or an attitude (Moschis and Churchill, 1978) and basically focuses on the importance, the need and owning of possessions and depending on them (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Wright and Larsen, 1993). Materialism being whether a positive or a negative trait has been discussed in the literature by Belk (1985, 2001). However, Fournier and Richins (1991) suggest that instead of labeling material consumption either good or bad, one need to focus on whether individuals or societies perceive possessions as instruments for achieving valued goals. Furthermore, Inglehart (1981) discusses materialism *versus* post-materialism which can be named as non-materialism.

Non-materialism emerges with experiential consumption when the value is connected to experiences or as a consequence of play consumption when the value is linked with other people (Holt, 1995). Expenditures such as travel, dining, art and music can be seen as proper spending not materialistic consumption (Belk, 2001). Moreover, Belk (2001) implies that a materialistic trait can be traced back to one’s childhood.

Scales related to materialism are Moschis and Churchill’s (1978) Materialistic Attitudes (MMA), Inglehart’s (1981) Materialism-Post materialism scale, Belk (1984,1985)’s Materialism Scale, Richins and Dawson (1992)’s Material Values scale, Ger and Belk (1996)’s Materialism scale and Richins’s (2004) short form of the Material Values Scale.

Moschis and Churchill’s (1978) scale consists of 6 items to measure the orientation emphasizing money and possessions for personal happiness and social progress. Inglehart’s (1981) scale consists of 12 items which measure materialism and post-materialism. Belk (1984, 1985)’s scale consists of 24 statements that involve personality traits such as envy, possessiveness and non-generosity. This scale seems to have lower reliability according to Richins and Dawson’s (1992) study. According to Richins and Dawson (1992), materialistic values consists of three factors such as happiness (the belief that possessions are essential to satisfaction and well-being in life), centrality (the extent to which one places possession acquisition at the center of one’s life) and success (the extent to which one uses possessions as indicators of success and achievement in life). Ger and Belk (1996)’s Materialism Scale consists of subscales such as new no generosity, new possessiveness, new envy and preservation which is a new trait added to Belk (1985)’s scale. Richins (2004) examined 3 item, 6 item and 9 item short forms of the Materialism scale and found that the 9 item version is more applicable. Wright and Larsen (1993) carried out a meta-analysis on the literature concerning materialism and life satisfaction. They found that Richins and Dawson (1992)’s scale was more reliable among others. Thereby, we use the short form of this scale (Richins, 2004) in the present study.

2.2. Status Consumption

Bocock (2009) notes that people are creatures who produces and consumes symbols. In a world surrounded by symbols, consumers integrate their identity into identities of various goods and services. Brands are perceived notably important for creating an identity, a sense of achievement and an identification (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004). Comparing themselves with others, consumers try to differentiate themselves and climb the social ladder with the help of consumption. As a result of this, they become status-seekers. Status symbols vary in terms of social class, age and gender and each may have different ideas of status symbols (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004).

Kilsheimer (1993) defines status consumption as “conspicuous consumption that a person does to display his/her status or prestige to the surrounding others”. Eastman et al. (1999) define status consumption as “the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer or symbolize status for both individuals surrounding others”. Status consumption oriented consumers desire the acquisition of products or brands that conveys status symbols (O’Cass and Frost, 2002). Status consumption scale consists of one dimension and it embraces the desire for status and conspicuous consumption (Eastman et al, 1999). Conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) is about the want of status using goods or instruments and in this context goods have symbolic values more than functional values. Conspicuous consumption and status consumption are two different phenomena for some researchers (Heaney et al., 2005; O’Cass and McEwen, 2004) and these two concepts can be used interchangeably for some others (Kilsheimer, 1993). O’Cass and McEwen (2004) explains the difference between these two concepts by indicating that conspicuous

consumption is affected by both self-monitoring and interpersonal influences and is more stable across gender compared to status consumption. Eastman et al. (1999) developed a five item scale for the status consumption which consists of one dimension. We utilize from this scale in our study.

2.3. Life Satisfaction

Overall life satisfaction which is also named as life quality (Sirgy, 1998) can be defined with global well-being or satisfaction with life in general (Mai and Tambyah, 2011). Leelakulthanit et al. (1991) found that satisfaction with possessions result to being satisfied with life. We used Mai and Tambyah (2011) scale to measure life satisfaction which is expanded from Richins and Dawson (1992).

2.4. Development of the Hypotheses and the Research Model

Some studies found that there is a *negative* relationship between materialism and life satisfaction (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Wright and Larsen, 1993; Sirgy, 1998) and for some others (Budiman and O’Cass, 2007), this relationship can be *positive*. In a similar way, Budiman and O’Cass (2007) state that consumers who hold strong materialistic values believe that acquiring possessions and consumption are necessary for life satisfaction. On the other hand, Sirgy (1998) explains the negative correlation between materialism and life satisfaction with the materialists ‘experience of dissatisfaction about their own standard of living as a reason of setting their standard of living goals unrealistically high.

Thereby we propose:

H1: There is a negative relationship between materialism and life satisfaction.

There is a positive and significant relationship between materialism and status consumption (Fournier and Richins, 1991; Eastman et al., 1997, Lynn and Haris, 1997; Eastman et al., 1999; Mason, 1981; Heaney et al., 2005; Shafer, 2000; Roberts, 2000; Wang and Wallendorf, 2006; Goldsmith and Clark, 2012). Furthermore, among the components of the status consumption only success shows a positive relationship with status consumption (Mai and Tambyah, 2011). Thereby we propose:

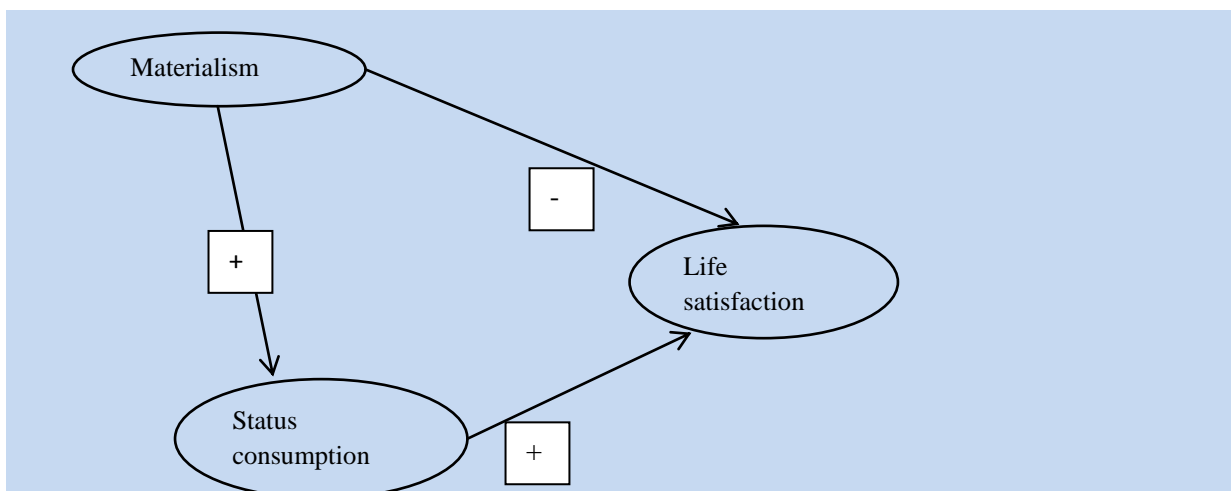
H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between materialism and status consumption.

Mai and Tambyah (2011) assert that there is a positive relationship between status consumption satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Thereby we propose:

H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between status consumption and life satisfaction.

Figure 1: Research Model



3. Methodology

3.1. Respondents and Procedure

Data were collected in Turkey from a total of 464 consumers. City living, increases the conscious of having a style, in another words, it increases the need of consumption in an area to represent the distinctive characteristics of a

particular group and individual choices (Bocock, 2009: 27). As a consequence of this our respondents are urban individuals. Sample characteristics can be seen in Table 1. Sample collection was conducted between November 2015 and February 2016.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics					
Gender	Frequency	%	Marital status	Frequency	%
Male	276	59.5	Single	375	80.8
Female	177	38.1	Married	75	16.2
Did not specify	11	23.7	Did not specify	14	30
Age	Frequency	%	Occupation	Frequency	%
18-25	318	68.5	University student	268	57.8
26-30	68	14.7	Academic	65	14
31-35	44	9.5	Civil servant	7	1.5
36-40	17	3.7	Engineer	7	1.5
41 and over	2	0.4	Teacher	11	2.4
Did not specify	15	3.2	Banker	4	0.9
Education	Frequency	%	Other		
Elementary	4	0.9	Did not Specify	80	17.2
High school	7	1.5	Income	Frequency	%
Undergraduate	303	65.3	0-500	175	37.7
Postgraduate	137	29.5	501-1500	108	23.3
Did not specify	12	2.6	1501-2500	20	4.3
			2501-3500	32	6.9
			3501-4500	76	16.4
			4500 and over	18	3.9
			Did not specify	35	7.5

3.2. Measures

We used Richins's (2004) short form of the Material Values scale (MVS), Eastman et. al.'s (1999) Status Consumption Scale and Mai and Tambyah (2011)'s life satisfaction scale which is expanded from Richins and Dawson (1992). The rationale behind using the short form of the Material Values scale is that shorter and simpler items are generally easier to respond and more reliable as implied by Bearden and Netemeyer (1999). Richins (2004) explored the various short forms of the materialism scale and found that short form of MVS which contains 9 items is more applicable. All of the questionnaires were in English and translated into Turkish, then back translated into English as McGorry (2000) suggested.

First we carried out a pilot study with 100 consumers. Then we tested the scales for reliability concerns and found that all of the scales are reliable (Cronbach Alpha for the Status Consumption scale= 0.72¹; Cronbach Alpha for the Life Satisfaction Scale= 0.896; Cronbach Alpha for the Materialism scale= 0.846). Then we tested our analyses with 464 consumers. For all of the scales we replaced missing values with the series mean. Scales were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale (1= definitely not agree; 5= definitely agree).

4. Findings

Our extraction method is Principal Component Analysis and our rotation method is Varimax with Kaiser Normalization for the exploratory factor analysis. Eigenvalues above 1.0 were considered in the analyses. Only

¹ Two out of five items were removed to increase reliability.

factor loadings of 0.50 or above are reported for EFA as suggested by Hair et al. (1998). Results of the exploratory factor analyses for all of the scales are showed in Table 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2: EFA Analysis for the Status Consumption Scale		
Question No	Item	Factor Loadings
Q1M2	I am interested in new products with status.	.900
Q1M3	A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal.	.788
Q1M1	I would buy a product just because it has status.	.784
Total variance explained= 68.200%, KMO = 0.617, Bartlett's test of Sphericity Chi Square = 409.302, df=3, p<0.05		

According to table 2, factor loadings are between 0.78 and 0.90. Scale consists of one dimension and three items, although the original scale consists of one dimension and five items.

Table 3: EFA Analysis for the Life Satisfaction Scale		
Question no	Item	Factor Loadings
Q2M3	In general, I can say I have a good life.	.921
Q2M2	Generally, I'm satisfied with my standard of living.	.918
Q2M1	Generally, I'm satisfied with my life as a whole.	.888
Total variance explained= 82.703%, KMO = 0.743, Bartlett's test of Sphericity Chi-Square = 842.694 df=3, p<0.05		

According to table 3, factor loadings vary between 0.88 and 0.92. Scale consists of one dimension and three items as it is in the original scale.

Table 4: EFA Analysis for the Materialism Scale (Rotated Component Matrix)		
Question No	Item	Factor loadings
Success and Centrality		
Q3M1	I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes.	.741
Q3M5	I like to own things that impress people.	.728
Q3M12	I like a lot of luxury in my life.	.712
Q3M8	I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.	.675
Q3M4	The things that I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in my life.	.643
Happiness		
Q3M18	It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.	.824
Q3M17	I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	.726
Q3M15	My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.	.681
Total variance explained= 53.294%, KMO = 0.848, Bartlett's test of Sphericity Chi-square=1107.947; df=36, p<0.05		

One item is extracted from the EFA analysis as it does not have a factor loading above 0.50. In the short form of the Materialism scale, there are three dimensions. In our study, we found two dimensions such as "success and centrality" and "happiness". As can be seen, dimensions "success" and "centrality" in the original scale are combined into one dimension named "success and centrality" in the present study.

We also tested the correlations among variables and reliabilities of each scale in the model as indicated in table 5. All of the correlations between variables are below 0.80 and all of the scales are reliable as they are above 0.60 suggested by Hair et al. (1998).

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Results, Mean, SD and Cronbach Alpha Reliabilities

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alpha	STATUS	LIFE	SUCCEN	HAPP
STATUS	3.29	1.04	0.764	1	.034	.289**	.191**
LIFE	3.58	1.00	0.894	.034	1	-.186**	-.186**
SUCCEN	2.53	0.87	0.786	.289**	-.186**	1	.485**
HAPP	2.99	0.94	0.683	.191**	-.186**	.485**	1

*SUCCEN: success and centrality, HAPP: happiness, LIFE: life satisfaction, STATUS: status consumption, **.* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Lastly, we performed measurement model and structural equation model among endogenous and exogenous variables to test the causal relationships with the help of AMOS v.16.0 software. Fit indices are acceptable such as CMIN/DF < 5 (Marsh and Hocevar, 1985), RMSEA < 0.08 (Byrne, 2010), GFI, CFI and IFI > 0.90 (Bollen, 1989; Bentler, 1992; Engel et al., 2003) for the measurement model as can be seen in table 6. Fit indices are CMIN/DF: 3.345, RMSEA: 0.071, GFI: 0.972, AGFI: 0.940, CFI: 0.973, IFI: 0.973, NFI: 0.962. Factor loadings were found to be higher than 0.50. Factor loadings vary between 0.62 and 0.95. All of the parameters in the model are statistically significant ($t > 1.96$). Materialism is negatively correlated with life satisfaction ($r = -0.287$) and status consumption is positively correlated with life satisfaction ($r = 0.084$) and with materialism ($r = 0.316$).

Table 6: Measurement Model

Path			Standardized Regression Weights	S.E.	C.R.	P
Q2M3	<---	LIFE	.891			
Q2M1	<---	LIFE	.804	.045	21.300	***
Q2M2	<---	LIFE	.888	.041	23.957	***
SUCCEN	<---	MATERIAL	.726			
HAPP	<---	MATERIAL	.668	.159	6.238	***
Q1M2	<---	STATUS	.954			
Q1M1	<---	STATUS	.621	.058	11.140	***
Q1M3	<---	STATUS	.631	.059	11.256	***

SUCCEN: success and centrality, HAPP: happiness, MATERIAL: materialism, LIFE: life satisfaction, STATUS: status consumption, CMIN/DF: 3.345, RMSEA: 0.071, GFI: 0.972, AGFI: 0.940, CFI: 0.973, IFI: 0.973, NFI: 0.962

Structural equation model shows that all of our hypotheses are accepted as shown in table 7. We used Maximum Likelihood method. Results indicate that the model demonstrates acceptable fit. When MATERIAL goes up by 1 standard deviation, STATUS goes up by 0.316 standard deviations. When MATERIAL goes up by 1 standard deviation, LIFE goes down by 0.348 standard deviations. When STATUS goes up by 1 standard deviation, LIFE goes up by 0.194 standard deviations. Fit indices are acceptable.

Table 7: Structural Equation Model

Path		Standardized regression weights	S.E.	C.R.	P	
STATUS	<---	MATERIAL	.316	.126	4.761	***
LIFE	<---	MATERIAL	-.348	.111	-4.742	***
LIFE	<---	STATUS	.194	.045	3.452	***
Q2M3	<---	LIFE	.891			
Q2M1	<---	LIFE	.804	.045	21.300	***
Q2M2	<---	LIFE	.888	.041	23.957	***
SUCCEN	<---	MATERIAL	.726			
HAPP	<---	MATERIAL	.668	.159	6.238	***
Q1M2	<---	STATUS	.954			
Q1M1	<---	STATUS	.621	.058	11.140	***
Q1M3	<---	STATUS	.631	.059	11.256	***

SUCCEN: success and centrality, HAPP: happiness, MATERIAL: materialism, LIFE: life satisfaction, STATUS: status consumption, CMIN/DF: 3.345, RMSEA: 0.071, GFI: 0.972, AGFI: 0.940, CFI: 0.973, IFI: 0.973, NFI: 0.962

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to explore the causal relationships between materialism, status consumption and life satisfaction. We carried out reliability analysis, exploratory factor analyses, Pearson correlation analysis and structural equation modeling. In our study materialism consists of two dimensions such as “success and centrality” and “happiness”. We found that there is a negative relationship between materialism and life satisfaction. This finding supports the previous research (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Wright and Larsen, 1993; Ahuvia and Wong, 1995; Sirgy, 1998). Furthermore, the current study shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between materialism and status consumption. This finding supports the research of Fournier and Richins, 1991; Eastman et al., 1997, Lynn and Haris, 1997; Eastman et al., 1999; Mason, 1981; Heaney et al., 2005; Shafer, 2000; Roberts, 2000; Wang and Wallendorf, 2006; Goldsmith and Clark, 2012. Moreover, there is a positive and significant relationship between status consumption and life satisfaction according to the current study. This finding supports the previous research of Mai and Tambyah (2011). Companies should consider the more materialistic and status oriented consumers in their marketing strategies if they want to target these consumers.

One limitation of the study is that the sample mostly consists of students. A more heterogeneous sample such as consisting different incomes, ages and social classes may give different results. Socioeconomic status measure is also used in Ahuvia and Wong (2002)’s study. Furthermore, comparisons can be made among emerging markets including Turkey.

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