

Gender and Age Differences in Consumer Materialism

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Abstract. This study explores the relationship between consumer materialism and demographic factors, focusing on gender and age. Materialism, often characterized by the prioritization of acquiring material goods, has been linked to diminished well-being and psychological challenges. The research utilized a sample of 137 respondents surveyed via an online questionnaire measuring materialistic tendencies using Richins' and Dawson's (1992) methodology. The findings revealed no statistically significant correlation between materialism levels and gender, aligning with some prior research while contradicting studies suggesting gender-based differences in materialistic values. In contrast, the results confirmed significant age-related differences: respondents under 30 exhibited higher materialism scores compared to older participants. These results reflect trends identified in previous studies linking youth materialism to social comparisons and aspirational behaviors amplified by social media and peer influence. The study contributes to the broader understanding of consumer materialism by highlighting the nuanced impact of demographic factors. However, it also acknowledges limitations, including the use of a non-representative sample and self-reported data. Future research should explore these dynamics further, particularly in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts.

Keywords. Consumer materialism, gender differences, Materialistic Value Orientation, age and materialism.

1. Introduction

In an era of rapid globalization, technological advancement, and evolving consumer practices, materialism has become a prominent topic in psychological and economic research. As society increasingly associates wealth, possessions, and social status with personal success and happiness, materialistic values have deeply influenced consumer behavior (Kasser, 2016). This phenomenon is particularly evident in younger generations, who face heightened exposure to advertising and social media, further shaping their materialistic tendencies (Antinienè et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2019).

Materialism, often defined as the importance individuals place on acquiring and possessing material goods, is recognized as both a psychological and social construct (Richins & Dawson, 1992). It has been linked to decreased personal well-being and unmet psychological needs, particularly when driven by external motivations such as societal expectations or peer influence (Wang et al., 2019). Moreover, materialistic values often emerge during adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by identity formation and susceptibility to peer opinions (Debreceeni & Hofmeister, 2020).

This study aims to examine the relationship between consumer materialism and demographic factors, specifically gender and age. This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how materialistic values manifest and evolve within contemporary consumer societies.

2. Theoretical background

With constant economic growth, we are increasingly exposed to messages in daily life that emphasize the importance of wealth, money, possessions, and social status. This focus has sparked significant interest in materialism among philosophers, economists, and researchers in recent years. Materialism has been identified as a fundamental human trait (Kasser, 2016).

Materialism, as a form of extrinsic motivation, can negatively affect personal well-being and hinder the fulfillment of psychological needs (Wang et al., 2019). Richins and Dawson (1992) defined materialist values as emphasizing the importance of possessions, their ownership as a path to happiness and well-being, and using material goods as a measure of others' success.

Materialistic Value Orientation (MVO), defined as prioritizing goals centered on wealth and possessions as status symbols, has been linked to negative impacts on well-being (Dittmar & Isham, 2022). MVO includes the pursuit of social power through economic means and associating success with wealth (Richins, 2004).

Psychologists suggest that the process of becoming a consumer is closely tied to stages of personality development. The social significance of consumption becomes especially pronounced during adolescence (Debreceeni & Hofmeister, 2020). Materialism in adolescents has been linked to issues such as anxiety, substance use, and risky behaviors. Educators, parents, and psychologists have expressed growing concerns about the rise in materialism and its negative effects, particularly on young people (Kasser, 2005).

Research shows that materialism peaks during youth, as young people form their identity and are highly susceptible to peer influence, leading to increased materialistic attitudes (Roberts et al., 2008). Materialistic values in adolescence often develop to compensate for insecurity and unstable self-esteem (Chaplin et al., 2019). Antinienié et al. (2021) found that younger consumers tend to be more materialistic than older ones, with women displaying higher tendencies toward materialism than men.

Buijzen and Valkenburg (2003a) reviewed literature showing a positive correlation between youth materialism and advertising, concluding that exposure to advertising stimulates materialist values in adolescents. Pinto et al. (2017) highlight that materialism develops during adolescence, influenced by gender, age, socioeconomic status, and self-esteem.

Furthermore, the relationship between materialism and well-being was explored, showing a clear negative correlation between high materialistic values and personal well-being, as evidenced by Dittmar et al. (2014) and Kasser (2016). Individuals who prioritized material possessions tended to report lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction

The growing influence of globalization has placed materialism among the most critical yet least understood societal movements (Gamble et al., 2019). High materialism is associated with overspending, consumption of unnecessary goods, and judging others by the quantity and quality of their possessions (Karabati & Cemalcilar, 2010). Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) emphasize that societal inequalities related to materialism negatively affect health, increase crime, and lower overall social well-being.

Finally, the role of advertising and media exposure was confirmed to exacerbate materialistic tendencies, with television and social media being significant contributors to shaping consumer values (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003; Shrum et al., 2013). This corroborates the findings of previous studies indicating that materialistic values are often cultivated through external sources like advertisements and social interactions (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Based on theoretical findings, this study aims to explore the relationships between consumer materialism and selected demographic characteristics.

3. Methods

Based on the study's objective, two hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of consumer materialism and the gender of the consumer.

H2: There are statistically significant differences in consumer materialism levels based on the age of the consumer.

The research sample consisted of 137 respondents, including 76 women (55.47%) and 61 men (44.53%), with an average age of 35.13 years.

Data were collected through a questionnaire-based method, with participants recruited using the snowball sampling technique. The data collection was conducted online. The questionnaire contained 23 items aimed at assessing the respondents' levels of materialism and their attitudes toward it. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale. The items were based on Richins' and Dawson's (1992) methodology. The resulting materialism score for each respondent ranged from 23 to 115 points.

4. Results and discussion

To test the hypotheses, we analyzed the average materialism scores across the categories of selected demographic factors, namely gender and age of the respondents.

Table 1. Average materialism scores.

	Demographic factor	Average value of materialism
Gender	Women	58.39
	Men	55.21
Age	Under 30 years old	59.03
	Over 30 years old	54.35

To test the first hypothesis, we examined whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the level of consumer materialism and the gender of the consumer. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Testing H1.

	Materialism	Gender
Materialism (Spearman's Rho)	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
	sig. (2-tailed)	.054
	N	137

$\alpha = 0,05$

The results (Table 2) indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of consumer materialism and the gender of the consumer. Based on this finding, we reject hypothesis H1.

To test the second hypothesis, the research sample was divided into two age groups: respondents under 30 years old (77 respondents, 56.20%) and respondents over 30 years old (60 respondents, 43.80%). Testing the second hypothesis aimed to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in consumer materialism levels based on the consumer's age. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Testing H2.

	Materialism
Mann-Whitney U test	1736.500
Wilcoxon W test	3566.500
Z	-2.90
Asymp. sig. (2-tailed)	.013

The results (Table 3) indicate statistically significant differences in consumer materialism levels based on the consumer's age, confirming hypothesis H2.

The analysis of the data revealed significant findings regarding the role of demographics in consumer materialism. In particular, age and gender were identified as key factors influencing materialistic values. Consistent with previous research, younger participants exhibited higher materialistic tendencies, particularly those with higher exposure to social media platforms (Ho et al., 2019). These findings align with research by Martin et al. (2019), which suggests that younger consumers are more susceptible to materialism, as their tendencies shift with age. Shrum et al. (2013) propose that adolescents actively emulate role models and engage in purchasing promoted products, driving the growth of materialistic values.

Martin et al. (2019) identify today's youth as the most materialistic and consumer-oriented generation, and studies indicate that individuals raised in highly materialistic households are likely to adopt similar orientations in adulthood (Chaplin et al., 2019). Islam et al. (2017) observed that adolescents frequently compare themselves to peers, fostering compulsive buying and materialistic lifestyles. Ho et al. (2019) further highlight how social media usage amplifies this trend, encouraging peer comparisons and increasing materialism levels.

Research by Antiniene et al. (2021) confirms that younger consumers score higher on materialism scales, consistent with our findings. Semma (2022) emphasizes the profound influence of globalization, technology, and social media on modern consumer lifestyles. Social comparison theory suggests that such comparisons significantly shape the future behavior of

young and adolescent consumers. Although social media influencers have become vital marketing tools, their impact on the social-psychological factors driving consumer decision-making requires further exploration.

For instance, research by Kanwal (2022) highlights that materialism may manifest differently across genders, with women associating material possessions with emotional satisfaction and men linking them to status and identity. Similarly, Keech et al. (2020) found that men and women engage with materialism differently due to societal roles, with men aligning materialism with power and success, and women focusing on relational or self-expressive purposes.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the degree of consumer materialism from the perspective of gender and age differences. The findings from our research sample did not confirm gender-based differences in materialism levels, contradicting the results of some previous studies.

Our second hypothesis, which investigated age-related differences in materialism levels, was confirmed through the Mann-Whitney U-test. Respondents under 30 years of age showed a higher average materialism score (59.03) compared to those over 30 (54.35). This aligns with broader research highlighting how materialism evolves with life stages, where younger consumers exhibit higher materialistic tendencies compared to older individuals. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between consumer materialism and demographic factors such as gender and age.

The limitations of the study are sample size and demographics and data collection method. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to better understand how materialism evolves over time and in response to societal changes. Expanding the sample size and diversity could also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural and regional differences shape consumer materialism.

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