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The Influence of Spiritual Well-Being on Consumer Materialism: An Empirical Study from Turkey

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the relationship between spiritual well-being and materialism among consumers in Turkey, contributing to marketing literature and offering insights for developing effective marketing strategies. Design/methodology/approach: Data were collected in 2018 through an online survey from 1243 individuals aged 18 and above residing in Turkey. Spiritual well-being was measured using a 29-item scale with three sub-dimensions (transcendence, harmony with nature, and anomie), validated by Ekşi and Kardaş (2017). Materialism was assessed using a 6-item scale, validated by Richins (2004) and translated into Turkish by Tiltay (2014). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.890 for spiritual well-being and 0.767 for materialism, indicating good reliability. Findings: The results reveal that spiritual well-being significantly, albeit weakly, explains materialistic attitudes. Unexpectedly, transcendence and anomie, sub-dimensions of spiritual well-being, exhibited a positive (rather than negative) relationship with materialistic attitudes. Anomie was identified as the strongest predictor of materialistic attitudes. Conversely, harmony with nature showed no significant relationship with materialistic attitudes. Practical implications: The findings suggest that marketers should consider the complex interplay between spiritual beliefs and consumer materialism when formulating strategies, particularly in contexts like Turkey where specific spiritual dimensions may surprisingly correlate with materialistic tendencies. This study provides unique empirical evidence from Turkey on the under-researched link between spiritual well-being and materialism, offering counter-intuitive insights regarding the direction of some relationships.

Keywords: Spiritual Well-Being, Consumer Materialism, Consumer Behavior, Transcendence, Anomie, Turkey

Introduction

Extreme wealth disease is seen as one of the greatest criticisms of contemporary consumer societies in 21st century where consumption habits have changed rapidly. This disease, in a life where materialism dominates people, constantly moves the expectations of the people upward. There are studies on the subject that materialism reduces life satisfaction (Kau, Kwon, Tan & Wirtz, 2000; Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001).In this period that the excessive consumption is taken to centre and the dissatisfaction grows increasingly, people's differentiation pursuits has brought the concept of spirituality to the agenda. Spirituality as to its structure has intellectual, spiritual and inner components that include universal values. In terms of the consumption dimension, spirituality reduces the desire for conspicuous consumerism (Stillman, Fincham, Vohs, Lambert & Phillips, 2012). Researchers study on areas such as marketing, management, psychology, religion, philosophy, nursing, guidance and counseling (Kale, 2004; 2006) and the academicians, publishers and cultural researchers (Schneiders, 1989) in recent years have focused on the concept of spirituality.

According to Koenig, McCullough and Larson (2001) spiritualism is a personal search for understanding the answers to questions of a person about life, about the meaning of life, and related to what is considered sacred or supreme.

Spiritual beliefs and values may or may not be connected to the religion. A person who doesn't have religious beliefs can have spiritual dimensions (Dhamania, 2014). The spiritual needs are formed from trust, hope, love, integrity, desire to find the meaning and purpose of life, relationships, forgiveness, creativity, having experiences, sensuality, speech, consolation, rituals, pray and worships (Aslan & Konuk Şener, 2009).

Materialism, Spiritualism and Spiritual Well-being

Definition of Materialism

Materialism has different definitions made by different researchers. Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life. As an important life value (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002) materialism which is an enduring belief that happiness can be achieved through possessing specific objects (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Materialism is defined as a focus on lower order needs, such as physical comfort and safety, over higher order needs, such as self-expression, belonging, and quality of life (Inglehart, 1990). According to Dittmar et al., (2014) materialism is seen as an individual difference in

people's long-term endorsement of values, goals, and associated beliefs that centres on the importance of acquiring money and possessions that convey status.

Materialism concept has been frequently seen in academic studies after Belk (1985)'s research and there are also many studies in the marketing literature. Materialism is associated with status and profits. The characteristics of materialist consumers are the desire for status and seeking identity in society. The focal point of materialists is the feeling of ownership and purchasing (Santini, Júnior, Sampaio & Araújo, 2017).

Shrum et al., (2014) suggest that to understand the multifaceted functions of materialism in at least three ways. First, the general hypothesis is that materialism is problematic and the results are diminished well-being. Second, considering materialism as a stable trait variable. The third, considering materialism as an individual variation variable that lacks a specific focus on the underlying motivational processes that may mediate or moderate the relationship between materialism and well-being.

Materialism can be thought of as a cluster of related characteristics-traits, attitudes, and values focussing on assets and leading the selection of events and things. It is said to be that the more materialistic people generally tend to be acquisitive (a trait), having positive affect related to acquisition (an attitude), and placing high priority on ownership (a value) (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997).

Definition of Spiritualism and Spiritual Well-being

Spirituality is an unclear concept, and people are having difficulty in describing this concept (Dyson, Cobb & Forman, 1997). Generally accepted concepts of spiritual studies are; the inner world of the quiche, inner motivation, inner integrity, the intention of one's consciously searching for the meaning of life, mutual commitment in the life cycle of the energy that transcends all material concepts and categories, known world and beyond, by one's own self, social and natural environment, and spirituality that transcends the limits of human consciousness and can see the big picture (Chandler, Holden & Kolander, 1992; Kale, 2004; Pandey, Gupta & Arora, 2009; Standifer, Evans & Dong, 2010).

People use spiritual expressions while defining well-being (Hodder, 2009). Self-esteem is determined as a partial mediator of the spirituality–well-being relationship (Joshanloo & Daemi, 2015). The defining attributes of spiritual well-being are: (1) having a subjective feeling of happiness; (2) affirming the self-worth; (3) managing interpersonal relationships with an open, accepting attitude; and (4) possessing an internal "energy" (Yang, Yen & Chen, 2010).

Gomez and Fisher (2003) explain that there are four different dimensions of spirituality. The communal domain expresses in the quality and depth of inter-personal relationships, between self and others, and includes love, justice, hope and faith in humanity. The transcendental domain deals with the relationship of self with

some-thing or some-one beyond the human level, such as a cosmic force, transcendent reality or God, and involves faith towards, adoration and worship of, the source of mystery of the universe. The personal domain deals with how one intra-relates with oneself with regard to meaning, purpose and values in life. The environmental domain deals with care and nurture for the physical and biological world include a sense of awe, wonder and unity with the environment. The four domains of spiritual well-being integrate to form the overall spiritual well-being of individuals.

Spiritual well-being is involving the relationship of a person with a higher power within a certain system of religious beliefs, and the sense of meaning and purpose in life so meaning and purpose in life can be independent from a certain religious structure (Ekşi & Kardaş, 2017).

Research on Materialism and Spiritual Well-being

There are various studies which investigate relationship between materialism and different variables such as values, well-being, subjective well-being, and spiritual-well-being in literature. Kasser and Ahuvia (2002) investigated whether the values focused on money, image, and popularity were associated with lowered well-being or not, even in environmental circumstances supportive of such values. As expected by Kasser and Ahuvia (2002), the participants of the research who had strongly internalized materialistic values also reported lowered self-actualization, vitality and happiness, as well as increased anxiety, physical symptomatology, and unhappiness. Karabati and Cemalcilar (2010) study is primarily concerned with specifying value antecedents of materialism in Turkish adult sample and results provided strong evidence toward positive associations between self-enhancement motives and materialism. The findings also validate the central assumption in the literature that materialism diminishes well-being.

Materialism has generally held connotation that is associated with character deficiencies, self-centeredness, and unhappiness, and most extant research views materialism as having a negative influence on well-being (Shrum et al., 2014). Materialism is also associated with other negative indicators of well-being, such as loneliness (Pieters, 2013), depression (Mueller et al., 2011), and low self-esteem (Christopher, Drummond, Jones, Marek & Therriault, 2006; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Nelson (2009) has found that materialism leads to lowered mental well-being, and that spirituality is negatively correlated with the endorsement of materialistic attitudes.

Hudders and Pandelaere (2012) investigate the relations between luxury consumption, materialism and cognitive and affective subjective well-being aspects simultaneously, in Dutch-speaking Belgium. The results show that materialistic consumers are more inclined to consume luxury goods than less materialistic

consumers, luxury consumption leads to enhanced positive mood, diminished negative mood and increased satisfaction with life.

One of the concepts thought to influence materialism is spiritual well-being. Some researches show that spiritual wants which are about self-actualization conflict materialistic desires (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004; Rindfleisch, Burroughs & Wong, 2008; Rothschild, Abdollahi & Psyzczynski, 2009; Stillman et al., 2012).According to Stillman et al., (2012) most spiritual tenets argue that materialism and spiritual life are incompatible, so the conflict between spirituality and materialism is striking. In this conflict; self-enhancement values (epitomized by materialistic pursuits such as conspicuous consumption) and self-transcendence values (epitomized by spirituality and religion) are oppositional and conflicting. For this, the sense of spirituality should correspond to a diminished desire to consume conspicuously because conspicuous consumption exemplifies self-enhancement. Also they found that higher levels of spirituality correspond to a decreased desire to consume material goods in a conspicuous manner.

In another research about spiritual well-being and materialism, it was determined that the communal well-being was negatively related to perceptions of the active/illegal dimension is the passive dimension and was positively related to perceptions of the 'no harm, no foul' dimension and the 'doing good'/recycling dimension. Materialism was positively associated with perceptions of actively benefiting from illegal actions, passively benefiting at the expense of the seller, actively benefiting from questionable but legal actions and benefiting from 'no harm, no foul' actions (Chowdhury & Fernando, 2013).

The last study that is mentioned in the relevant section is Shrivastava et al., (2017)'s study. They investigated whether experimentally primitive participants with spirituality-related, mortality-related, and neutral texts, affects materialistic attitudes among Dubai residents. There were no significant differences in mean self-reported materialism scores between conditions.

In the light of previous findings and discussions on materialism and spirituality, the purpose of the current study is to contribute the marketing literature on forward over the effects of spiritualism and materialism and to create awareness for the marketing professionals in developing marketing strategies as one of the pioneer study by understanding whether the consumers in Turkey make a connection between spiritual well-being and materialistic attitudes or not.

From the above mentioned purpose, in the study, the effects of spirituality, which includes intellectual, spiritual and inner components, on materialism which is supposed to dominate people more and more is investigated. According to purpose of the study research hypotheses are;

H1: Spiritual well-being affects individuals' materialistic attitudes negatively.

H2: The level of spiritual well-being's sub-dimensions affect individuals' materialistic attitude level negatively.

H2a: There is a negative effect transcendence sub-dimension of spiritual well-being level on individuals' materialistic attitude level.

H2b: There is a negative effect harmony with nature sub-dimension of spiritual well-being level on individuals' materialistic attitude level.

H2c: There is a negative effect anomie sub-dimension of spiritual well-being level on individuals' materialistic attitude level.

Method

Model

Model 1 is the simple linear regression model for H1. It is established to determine whether the individuals' materialistic attitudes will be affected by their spiritual well-being levels negatively, is valid or not.

$Y_1 = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + Ɛ$ (Model 1)

Y_1=Materialism (MAT)

X_1=Spiritual well-being (SWB)

Model 2 is the multiple linear regression model for H2 (H2a, H2b, H2c). It is established to determine whether the individuals' materialistic attitudes will be affected by their spiritual well-being sub-dimensions (transcendence, harmony with nature, anomie), is valid or not.

$Y_1 = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_{2+} \beta_3 X_{3+} Ɛ$ (Model 2)

Y_1= Materialism (MAT)

X_1=Transcendence

X_2= Harmony with nature

X_3=Anomie

Sample

The population of the study is consisted of people 18 and older living in Turkey. In the selection of the sample the simple random sample selection method was used. The survey was conducted in January 2018 as online survey. It was announced initially on e-platforms as Whatsapp-Twitter- Facebook. And the participants were asked to support the spread of the survey in their e-platforms. 1279 participants were reached within the scope of the research. The 17 participants' surveys were excluded from the study because they were the Turkish people living abroad. And 19 surveys excluded cause of not providing suitable data for analysis. 1243 of the 1279 surveys provided

suitable data for conducting the analysis. 1243 participants took place in the research that are capable of representing the population, 18 years and upper age, to be living in Turkey.

Measures

Materialism

Material Values Scale: Measurement Properties and Development of a Short Form-MVSSF which was developed by Richins (2004) and translated to Turkish by Tiltay (2014) was used to assess participants' level of materialistic attitudes in the study. MVSSF has three sub-dimensions as centrality, success, and happiness. All sub-dimensions have 2 items. The scale is made up of 6 items totally. Current research's Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0,76. The scale is in the form of 5 Likert type scale (5: Totally agree, 4: Agree, 3: Undecided, 2: Disagree, 1: Totally disagree).

Spiritual Well Being

Spiritual Well-being Scale-SWS which was developed by Ekşi and Kardaş (2017) was used to assess participants' level of spiritual well-being. SWS has three sub-dimensions as Transcendence, Harmony with nature and Anomie. Transcendence has 15 items, harmony with nature has 7 items, and anomie has 7. All scale is made up of 29 items. Current research's Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0, 89. The scale is in the form of 5 Likert type scale (5: Totally agree, 4: Agree, 3: Undecided, 2: Disagree, 1: Totally disagree).

Beside SWS and MVSSF, demographic information (gender, age, educational status, income level) of the participants was asked in the survey as multiple choices -in closed-ended form. Occupation and place of residence in Turkey questions were asked in an open-ended form.

Findings

Demographic Variables

The demographic information of participants is given in Table 1 as frequency and percentage.

Table 1: Demographic Variables

	%	f
Gender		
Female	62	777
Male	37	466
Education		
High school and less	12	149
University and upper	88	1094
Income		
3000 TL and less	44	550
3001 TL and upper	56	693
Age		
18-25	23	296
26-35	31	392
36-45	24	301
46-55	16	199
Upper 56	4	55
Region		
Mediterranean	5,14	64
Aegean	7,16	89
Marmara	32,34	402
Blacksea	23,89	297
Central Anatolia	24,13	300
Eastern Anatolia	0,64	8
Southeast Anatolia	6,67	83

Linear regression analysis

The results of Model 1, which examines the effect of spiritual well-being -overall -of individuals on materialism, are given in Table 2.

According to the obtained results, the explanatory power of the spiritual well-being level on materialism is (Adj R^2) 0,026. Based on F statistics (F=34,625; p=0,000) the model is significant. As a result of the regression analysis, β = 0,247 coefficient (t = 5,884; p = 0,000) representing the spiritual well-being scale was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the individual's level of spiritual well-being increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0,247.

The results of Model 2, which examines the effect of spiritual well-being -three sub-dimensions- of individuals on materialism, are given in Table 2.

According to the obtained results, the explanatory power of the spiritual well-being's sub-dimensions (transcendence, harmony with nature and anomie) on materialism is (Adj R^2) 0,085. Based on F statistics (F= 39,339; p=0,000) the model is significant.

Based on the regression analysis, β = 0,082 coefficient (t=3,485; p=0,001) representing the transcendence sub-dimension was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the individual's level of transcendence increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0, 82.

Based on the regression analysis, β = 0,044 coefficient (t=0,97;p=0,332) representing the harmony with nature sub-dimension was determined. And the relation between harmony with nature and materialism was not statistically significant.

Based on the regression analysis, β = 0,229 coefficient (t=10,178; p=0,000)) representing the anomie sub-dimension was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the individual's level of anomie increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0,229.

Table 2: Regression analyses with materialism as the dependent variable

Dependent variable: Materialism					
Independent variable	β	t-test	p	F test	Adj. R^2
Spiritual well-being -overall	0,247	5,884	0,000	34,625 (p=0,000)	0,026
Transcendence	0,082	3,485	0,001	39,339	0,085
Harmony with nature	0,044	0,97	0,332	(p=0,000)	
Anomie	0,299	10,178	0,000		

According to the results of regression analysis, "the research Model 1, which expects that individuals' materialistic attitudes will be affected by their spiritual well-being levels negatively" is not valid.

In Model 2, which tests whether the individuals' materialistic attitudes will be affected by their spiritual well-being's sub-dimensions (transcendence, harmony with nature, anomie), only two of the dimensions -transcendence, anomie- are found to be significant.

Although negative correlation between spiritual well-being and materialism has been frequently cited in the literature it has been found, in current research, that there is a positive relationship between these. Based on this finding, the researchers preferred to investigate whether this situation was affected from demographic variables or not.

And six more regression analysis was performed according to the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Simple regression results are given in Table 3 to examine whether the level of spiritual well-being of individuals affects materialism on the basis of gender, income, and education variables.

Table 3: Regression analyses with materialism as the dependent variable on demographic variables

Dependent variable: Materialism					
Independent variable:	β	t-test	p	F test	Adjusted R^2
Gender					
Male	0,173	2,661	0,008	7,084	0,013
Female	0,298	5,319	0,000	28,288	0,034
INCOME					
3000 TL and less	0,238	3,541	0,000	12,537	0,021
3001 TL and upper	0,210	3,919	0,000	15,362	0,020
EDUCATION					
High school and less	0,341	2,526	0,013	6,381	0,035
University and upper	0,228	5,152	0,000	26,543	0,023

Gender

According to the obtained results, on the basis of gender, the explanatory power of the spiritual well-being level of males on materialism is (Adj R^2) 0,013. Based on F statistics (F= 7,084; p=0,008) the regression is significant. As a result of the regression analysis, β= 0,173 coefficient (t=2,661;p=0,008) representing the spiritual well-being level of males was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the males' level of spiritual well-being increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0,173.

According to the obtained results, on the basis of gender, the explanatory power of the spiritual well-being level of females on materialism is (Adj R^2) 0,034. Based on F statistics (F= 28,288; p=0,000) the regression is significant. As a result of the regression analysis, β= 0,298 coefficient (t=5,319;p=0,000) representing the spiritual well-being level of females was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the females' level of spiritual well-being increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0,298.

Income

According to the obtained results, on the basis of income level, the explanatory power of the spiritual well-being level of participants- 3000 TL and less income- on

materialism is (Adj R^2) 0,021. Based on F statistics (F= 12, 537; p= 0,000) the regression is significant. As a result of the regression analysis, β= 0,238 coefficient (t=3,541;p=0,000) representing the spiritual well-being level of participants- 3000 TL and less income- was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the participants'- 3000 TL and less income- level of spiritual well-being increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0,238.

According to the obtained results, on the basis of income level, the explanatory power of the spiritual well-being level of participants- 3001 TL and upper income- on materialism is (Adj R^2) 0,020. Based on F statistics (F= 15, 362; p= 0,000) the regression is significant. As a result of the regression analysis, β= 0,210 coefficient (t=3,919;p=0,000) representing the spiritual well-being level of participants- 3001 TL and upper income- was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the participants'- 3001 TL and upper income- level of spiritual well-being increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0,210.

Education

On the on the basis of education level, the explanatory power of the spiritual well-being level of participants-high school and less- on materialism is (Adj R^2) 0,035. Based on F statistics (F= 6,381; p=0,013) the regression is significant. As a result of the regression analysis, β= 0,341 coefficient (t=2,526;p=0,013) representing the spiritual well-being level of participants- high school and less- was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the participants'- high school and less- level of spiritual well-being increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0,341.

On the on the basis of education level, the explanatory power of the spiritual well-being level of participants- university and upper- on materialism is (Adj R^2) 0,023. Based on F statistics (F= 26,543; p=0,000) the regression is significant. As a result of the regression analysis, β= 0,228 coefficient (t=5,152; p=0,000) representing the spiritual well-being level of participants- university and upper- was obtained positively and statistically significant. According to this, as the participants'- university and upper- level of spiritual well-being increases by one unit, materialism increases by 0,228.

Conclusions

The currents study's results indicate that the spiritual well-being explain the materialistic attitudes significantly but at a low level. As the level of spiritual well-being increases, the level of materialism also increases. This situation surprisingly differs from the general literature (Stillman et al., 2012; Chowdhury & Fernando, 2013; Arndt et al., 2004; Rindfleisch et al., 2008, Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002).

Among the studies we reached, the research of Shrivastava, Pietschnig, Yousuf and Kassi (2017) is the only study that resemblance with current study's results.

Shrivastava et al., (2017) research results show that spirituality does not affect materialism in Dubai case.

In another study, which investigated the relation between materialism and life satisfaction, materialism was negatively correlated with life satisfaction for Americans but was positively correlated for expatriates or Dutch (Dawson & Bamossi, 1991). Although the study of Dawson and Bamossi (1991) is not directly related with spiritualism its results show that some variables that are likely to influence materialism can reveal different outcomes in different cultures.

Another consequence of the current study is that the transcendence and anomie - sub-dimensions of spiritual well-being- have positive relations with materialism opposite to expectations. Especially the anomie is found as the most powerful sub-dimension that explains materialistic attitudes. Harmony with nature, another sub-dimension of spiritual well-being, is found to have no significant relation with materialistic attitudes.

The fact that the anomie is the strongest sub-dimension in explaining the materialism can be explained with the anomie items structures which are directed the unhappiness and search of the individuals. In current study, those who have high anomie scores have higher materialist tendencies. Shrum et al., (2014) expresses that many people believe in that the materialism make them happier. On United Nations Development Programme World Happiness Report (2017) Turkey ranks 69th among 156 countries. With the support of this finding, relatively, as in the context of current research's sample, the unhappiness of people living in Turkey may be assessable increasing the materialism.

In the current research sample, contrary to expectations, a positive relationship between spirituality and materialism has been examined. To understand whether this situation can be affected by demographic variables researchers investigated demographic variables. According to the results of gender variable, it was determined that as the spiritual well-being increases materialism increases both in females & males. However, it was determined that the spiritual well-being effect on materialism was more significant and stronger in females than males. Deb, McGirr, and Sun (2016)'s research results showed that the female students were found to be more spiritual than males, and females' spiritual and existential well-beings were significantly higher than males. These results are contrast to the findings of Eastman, Fredenberger, Campbell, and Calvert (1997) and Kasser and Ryan (1993) researches. They found out that the males were more materialistic than females.

According to the results of income variable, it was determined that as the spiritual well-being increases materialism increases both in low and high income groups. However, it was determined that the spiritual well-being effect on materialism was more significant and stronger in low income groups than high income groups. This result has a similarity with the results of Deb et al., (2016)'s research findings as

"university students coming from high-income families, are more inclined to spirituality". Contrast to current research, (Kasser, 2002) found out that the higher income adults' well-being and materialistic values have negative relation.

It is thought in Turkey that as the level of education increases, the income of people increases relatively; based on this perspective between income and education, the current study's results similarly show that the spiritual well-being effect on materialism was stronger in low level of education groups than high level of education groups.

This study is thought to be an intense study depending on its features; it has questioned the effect of spirituality on materialism which can be considered as one of the sensitive issues in Turkey; despite the sensitivity to the subject suitable data for analyses has been reached to %97,1; study covers all regions of Turkey; without a demographic constraint, a large group of people aged 18 years and upper have been attended online voluntarily.

Unlike the literature and the expectations of the researchers, the emergence of different results in the study has given rise to new questions. Especially the question of why the spiritual well-being increases materialism rather than reduces come to agenda. It is estimated that the reasons for this situation may be due to the effects of socio-cultural differences and may be due to the concept of spiritualism itself which is being discussed as a difficult concept to describe.

According to the surprising results of Turkey case, it is considered that the reasons of the effect of spiritualism on materialism should be investigated deeply in future studies.

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