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Article

The duality of materialism: The complex impact on economic motivation

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Abstract: This study empirically examines the complex relationship between materialism and economic motivation, proposing an inverted U-shaped relationship. The research analyzes three dimensions of materialism: happiness pursuit, social recognition, and uniqueness, and their impact on economic motivation. The findings suggest that materialism, when balanced, positively influences economic motivation without causing adverse effects. This relationship remains consistent across demographic characteristics and life satisfaction levels, challenging the traditional negative view of materialism. The implications of these findings extend to marketing strategies, policy design, and infrastructure development, offering actionable insights for real-world contexts. This research underscores the importance of balancing materialistic values to foster sustainable economic growth and well-being.

Keywords: materialism; happiness pursuit; social recognition; uniqueness; economic motivation; inverted u-shaped relationship; economic policy

1. Introduction

In modern society, companies and brands utilize various advertising and promotional strategies to maximize consumers' desire to consume. These marketing activities often lead to an increase in consumer materialism. In fact, global advertising expenditures exceeded $700 billion in 2023, indicating the extent to which consumers are exposed to materialistic messages (Statista, 2023).

Materialism refers to an individual's tendency to place importance on material possessions and wealth as key values in life, evaluating their happiness and success through these material possessions (Richins and Dawson, 1992). While early studies primarily highlighted the negative effects of materialism on psychological well-being, recent research emphasizes its nuanced impact. For example, early studies such as Kasser and Ryan (1993) argued that making material success a central life goal can lead to lower self-actualization and higher levels of depression. Similarly, Kasser et al. (2004) reported that individuals with high materialistic values experience more psychological issues. However, more recent studies have explored the contextual and multidimensional nature of materialism, revealing both its positive and negative implications. For instance, Sirgy et al. (2021) distinguished between success materialism and happiness materialism, finding that success materialism positively influences future life satisfaction, whereas happiness materialism negatively affects current life satisfaction. Additionally, Zhang et al. (2024) investigated well-being measures and concluded that materialism's impact on life satisfaction varies significantly across cultural and socio-economic contexts, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions in marketing and policy design. Furthermore, Górnik-Durose (2020) demonstrated that the relationship between materialism and well-being is influenced by individual personality traits, highlighting the importance of

psychological diversity in understanding its effects. Similarly, Liang et al. (2020) revealed that materialism plays a mediating role between self-esteem and corrupt intentions, further illustrating its nuanced psychological implications. Recent findings by Lekavičienė et al. (2022) also suggest that emotional intelligence training can mitigate some of the negative outcomes associated with materialism, offering practical solutions for managing its adverse effects.

These recent studies suggest the possibility that the relationship between materialism and economic motivation may not be a simple linear one, but rather a nonlinear one. When materialism is excessively low, economic motivation may be lacking; conversely, when materialism is excessively high, negative outcomes may occur. This implies that the relationship between materialism and economic motivation could exhibit an inverted U-shaped pattern, where optimal outcomes occur at a moderate level. This perspective aligns with the Yerkes-Dodson law (1908), which found that the relationship between stimulus intensity and performance follows an inverted U-shaped curve, where performance peaks at a moderate level of stimulus. Moreover, Baumeister and Vohs (2007) expanded on this principle by highlighting that self-regulation operates similarly, where too little or too much regulation can be detrimental, but moderate regulation fosters success. These connections provide a modern application of the inverted U-shaped principle, demonstrating its relevance in diverse psychological and behavioral contexts, including economic motivation.

Therefore, this study assumes and seeks to validate that the relationship between materialism and economic motivation is nonlinear. Specifically, it aims to analyze how each of the three dimensions of materialism—happiness pursuit, social recognition, and uniqueness—relates to economic motivation and how these relationships vary depending on individual life satisfaction and demographic characteristics. By providing a more balanced understanding of materialism, this study is expected to offer valuable insights for future consumer behavior research and marketing practice.

2. Literature review and hypothesis

2.1. Materialism

Materialism refers to an individual's tendency to place importance on material possessions and wealth, evaluating their happiness and success through these material possessions (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Early studies predominantly approached materialism as a unidimensional construct. However, as the understanding of materialism's complex and multidimensional impact on individuals' lives has grown, more refined approaches have become necessary (Belk, 1985).

In this context, Sirgy et al. (2013) classified materialism into three dimensions: happiness pursuit, social recognition, and uniqueness. The happiness pursuit dimension reflects the belief that material possessions are essential for a happy life, while the social recognition dimension represents the tendency to seek success and status through material possessions. The uniqueness dimension highlights the desire to express individuality through ownership of material goods.

Research on the effects of materialism on individuals' lives has reported mixed results. On the negative side, Kasser and Ryan (1993) argued that making material success a central life goal can lead to lower self-actualization and higher levels of

depression, while Kasser et al. (2004) found that individuals with high materialistic values tend to experience more psychological problems. More recently, Górnik-Durose (2020) demonstrated that the relationship between materialism and well-being is influenced by individual personality traits, highlighting the importance of psychological diversity in understanding its effects. Similarly, Liang et al. (2020) revealed that materialism plays a mediating role between self-esteem and corrupt intentions, further illustrating its nuanced psychological implications.

However, recent studies suggest that the effects of materialism may be more nuanced. For instance, Sirgy et al. (2021) distinguished between success materialism and happiness materialism, finding that success materialism can positively influence future life satisfaction. In particular, evidence indicates that materialism can play a positive role in relation to variables linked to economic achievement and goal attainment.

The complex influence of materialism can also manifest in its relationship with economic motivation. While excessive materialism may lead to negative outcomes, an appropriate level of materialism has the potential to drive motivation for economic success. This possibility underscores the multifaceted nature of materialism and its nuanced impact on individual behaviors and outcomes.

2.2. The relationship between materialism and economic motivation

Economic motivation refers to an individual's intrinsic drive to achieve economic goals. Robbins and Patton (1985) measured such motivation using the Goal Instability Scale, which demonstrated a strong connection between economic motivation and achievement orientation. Individuals with high economic motivation tend to set clear goals and make dedicated efforts to achieve them.

Previous studies have shown that economic motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing personal performance and quality of life. High levels of economic motivation are associated with improved job performance, increased income, career success, and even greater overall life satisfaction (Judge et al., 2005; Locke and Latham, 2002). Judge et al. (2005) highlighted that economic motivation is a key predictor of career achievement, further emphasizing its importance in organizational settings. Therefore, understanding the psychological mechanisms that can enhance economic motivation is essential. In this context, materialism can be considered a potential factor that boosts economic motivation. While earlier studies predominantly regarded materialism as a negative value orientation, an appropriate level of materialism may actually foster motivation for economic success and lead to positive outcomes. The relationship between materialism and economic motivation is likely not linear but nonlinear. This possibility can be explained by the Yerkes-Dodson law. Yerkes and Dodson (1908) found that the relationship between stimulus intensity and performance follows an inverted U-shaped curve, where performance peaks at a moderate level of stimulus. From this perspective, when materialism is too low, it may lead to insufficient economic motivation, whereas excessive materialism may result in psychological burdens or stress, ultimately diminishing economic motivation.

This nonlinear relationship is further supported by self-regulation theory. Baumeister and Vohs (2007) explained that optimal outcomes occur when

psychological traits or tendencies are at a moderate level, rather than being excessive or insufficient. In the case of materialism, an optimal level can stimulate healthy economic motivation, while excessive materialism may lead to maladaptive outcomes. Moreover, Baumeister and Vohs (2007) highlighted that self-regulation operates similarly to the Yerkes-Dodson law, where too little or too much regulation can be detrimental, but moderate regulation fosters success. Hagger et al. (2010) expanded on this theory, conducting a meta-analysis that confirmed the inverted U-shaped relationship between self-control and various performance outcomes. This connection between self-regulation and the Yerkes-Dodson law provides a modern application of the inverted U-shaped principle, demonstrating its relevance in diverse psychological and behavioral contexts, including economic motivation.

The principle of optimal levels proposed by the Yerkes-Dodson law and self-regulation theory reflects fundamental psychological mechanisms. For instance, the principle that "too little or too much can be problematic" is commonly observed across various psychological domains, such as learning, performance, and motivation (Inzlicht and Schmeichel, 2012). Although the exact optimal point or the strength of the relationship may vary depending on individual traits or situational factors, the underlying pattern of the inverted U-shaped relationship tends to remain consistent.

Baumeister and Vohs (2007) further demonstrated that while the optimal level of self-regulation may differ depending on the individual or the situation, the principle of moderation universally applies. Similarly, in the relationship between materialism and economic motivation, individual differences and contextual factors may influence the shape of the inverted U-shaped curve or the location of the optimal point, but the fundamental nonlinearity of the relationship is expected to hold.

Based on this theoretical discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Materialism and its dimensions (happiness pursuit, social recognition, uniqueness) will have an inverted U-shaped relationship with economic motivation.

Hypothesis 2: The inverted U-shaped relationship between materialism and economic motivation will be consistent regardless of individual and demographic characteristics.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and data collection

To test the hypothesized inverted U-shaped relationship between materialism and economic motivation, this study conducted a consumer survey across five major South Korean cities (Seoul, Busan, Daegu, Incheon, and Gwangju) from March to May 2023. The sampling process combined purposive and convenience sampling methods to ensure demographic diversity while managing resource constraints. Participants were recruited through various channels including universities, community centers, and local businesses. The data collection followed a structured procedure where questionnaires were distributed to potential respondents after obtaining their consent to participate. Research assistants provided detailed information about the study's purpose and confidentiality measures, and arrangements were made to collect the completed questionnaires within 4–7 days. To maximize response rate, follow-up

reminders were sent two days before the collection date. Of the 350 distributed questionnaires, 315 were returned (90% response rate), and after excluding 12 incomplete responses (those with more than 20% missing data), 303 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis (86.6% valid response rate). The remaining missing data (less than 5% per variable) were randomly distributed and handled using maximum likelihood estimation, following established practices in social science research (Schafer and Graham, 2002). The final sample (N = 303) demonstrated reasonable demographic distribution. As shown in **Table 1**, 41.6% were male and 58.4% were female. Regarding marital status, 58.4% were married and 41.6% were single. The majority of respondents (70.3%) held bachelor's degrees, while 21.5% had master's degrees or higher, and 8.3% had below bachelor's degrees. The age distribution was concentrated in the 21–30 years range (65.7%), followed by 31–40 years (18.2%).

While convenience sampling may limit generalizability, several measures were implemented to enhance the study's validity: (1) geographic diversity through multi-city sampling, (2) demographic quota monitoring during data collection, (3) statistical tests for non-response bias, and (4) comparison of sample characteristics with national population demographics. The high response rate and low missing data rate suggest satisfactory quality of the collected data.

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Variables	***N***	**%**
Number of Cases	303	
Gender		
Male	125	41.6
Female	178	58.4
Marital Status		
Married	177	58.4
Single	126	41.6
Education		
Below bachelor degree	25	8.3
Bachelor degree	213	70.3
Master degree and above	65	21.5
Age		
Younger than 20	6	2.0
21–30	199	65.7
31–40	55	18.2
41–50	32	10.6
51–60	10	3.3
Above 61	1	0.3

3.2. Constructs and measures

3.2.1. Materialism

The materialism scale was adapted from Richins and Dawson (1992) and modified by Sirgy et al. (2013). According to Sirgy et al. (2013), materialism can be best conceptualized by three dimensions: happiness, social recognition, and uniqueness. Specifically, materialism can be reflected through these three sources of motivation: (1) material possession can lead to happiness, (2) material possession as a symbol of success and achievement, which in turn generate social recognition and status, and (3) material possessions make people feel unique and distinctive from others (Islam et al., 2018; Lekavičienė et al., 2022; Liang et al., 2020). Each dimension was measured using three items, for a total of nine items: For the happiness dimension (i.e., 'Having luxury items is important to a happy life,' 'To me, it is important to have expensive homes, cars, clothes, and other things. Having these expensive items makes me happy,' and 'Material possessions are important because they contribute a lot to my happiness'); for the social recognition dimension (i.e., 'I love to buy new products that reflect status and prestige,' 'I like to own expensive things more so than most people because this is a sign of success,' and 'I feel good when I buy expensive things. People think of me as a success'); and for the uniqueness dimension (i.e., 'I enjoy owning expensive things that make people think of me as unique and different,' 'I usually buy expensive products and brands to make me feel unique and different,' and 'I usually buy expensive things that make me look distinctive').

3.2.2. Economic motivation

The Economic Motivation measure was adapted from the Goal Instability Scale developed by Robbins and Patton (1985). This scale was designed to measure Achievement Orientation in Life and has been extensively tested for reliability and validity. The scale consists of five items where respondents rate their agreement on a five-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree): "I don't seem to make decisions by myself," "I seem to lose my sense of direction in life," "It's easier for me to start than to finish projects," "I don't seem to get going on anything," and "I don't seem to have the drive to get my work done." All scores were reverse coded to ensure that higher scores reflect higher economic motivation.

3.2.3. Covariates

This study incorporated two key constructs and demographic variables (gender, age, and marital status) as covariates: satisfaction with standard of living and life satisfaction. Both constructs have been extensively discussed in well-being studies and are known to be related to materialism. Satisfaction with standard of living was measured using five semantic-differential items derived from Ogden and Venkat (2001). Respondents evaluated their satisfaction with their family's standard of living, possessions, and financial situation using the following word pairs: happy/angry, good/bad, fulfilled/disappointed, contented/frustrated, and pleased/displeased. Life satisfaction was measured using Campbell et al.'s (1976) scale, which has been validated in numerous studies (Diener, 2009; Zhang et al., 2024). Respondents rated their overall life satisfaction using five semantic-differential items: boring/interesting, useless/worthwhile, full/empty, discouraging/helpful, and disappointing/rewarding.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Test of the measurement model

This study used confirmatory factor analyses to evaluate the psychometric properties of the measures. After deleting one item with low loadings (EM5), the measurement model provided a good fit to the data (x^2 = 135.457, p = 0.000, df = 59; CFI = 0.971; GFI = 0.935; NFI = 0.949; RMSEA = 0.066). All factor loadings were significant with acceptable composite reliability (CR > 0.833) and average variance extracted (AVE > 0.575) (**Table 2**). The convergent and discriminant validity were confirmed as the AVE of Economic Motivation was greater than its maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV). For the three dimensions of Materialism (Happiness, Social recognition, and Uniqueness), their high correlations were expected as they constitute the same construct, explaining their AVE being lower than MSV and ASV in some cases (**Table 3**).

Table 2. Convergent validity and reliability of measures.

Constructs	Variables	Coefficient	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	CR
Materialism-Happiness (HAPPY)	Mat1	0.847	0.840	0.632	0.834
	Mat2	0.777			
	Mat3	0.758			
Materialism-Social Recognition (SOR)	Mat4	0.834	0.881	0.715	0.846
	Mat5	0.865			
	Mat6	0.838			
Materialism-Uniqueness (UNIQ)	Mat7	0.851	0.883	0.717	0.834
	Mat8	0.846			
	Mat9	0.844			
Economic Motivation (EM)	EM1	0.831	0.840	0.575	0.833
	EM2	0.823			
	EM3	0.683			
	EM4	0.683			
x^2 (p value) = 135.457 (0.000), df = 59, CFI = 0.971; GFI = 0.935; NFI = 0.949; RMSEA = 0.066					

Table 3. Discriminant validity of the measures.

Construct	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	Happy	SOR	UNIQ	EM
Happy	0.834	0.632	0.764	0.503	0.795			
SOR	0.846	0.715	0.974	0.581	0.874	0.846		
UNIQ	0.834	0.717	0.974	0.577	0.863	0.987	0.847	
EM	0.833	0.575	0.012	0.005	0.005	−0.067	−0.108	0.758

4.2. Test of common method bias

Given that the data were collected using self-report survey, there is a possibility of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To examine the degree to which common method bias may have influenced study results, this study tested for this bias with respect to the constructs. Guided by Cote and Buckley (1987), four models were

tested. M1 is the null model that assumes correlations among the measures can be explained by random error ($\chi^2_{(78)}$ = 2678.989, $p < 0.001$); M2 is the trait-only model in which each item was loaded on its respective scale ($\chi^2_{(59)}$ = 135.457, $p < 0.001$); M3 is the method-only model in which all items were loaded on one method factor ($\chi^2_{(64)}$ = 651.030, $p < 0.001$); and M4 is the trait and method model where variance among measures can be explained by traits, method, and random errors ($\chi^2_{(45)}$ = 61.623, $p < 0.001$). The results of Chi square difference tests for trait factors indicate that there are significant trait factors in the measurement model [for M2–M1 ($\Delta\chi^2_{(19)}$ = 2543.532, $p < 0.001$) and for M4–M3 ($\Delta\chi^2_{(19)}$ = 589.407, $p < 0.001$)]. The results of Chi square difference tests for the method factor also indicate that there is a significant method factor in the measurement model [for M3–M1 ($\Delta\chi^2_{(14)}$ = 2027.959, $p < 0.001$) and for M4–M2 ($\Delta\chi^2_{(14)}$ = 73.834, $p < 0.001$)]. The results as a whole indicate that common method bias is not a significant threat in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4.3. Hypothesis testing

To address our research questions about the relationship between materialism and economic motivation, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses. The results, as shown in **Table 4**, support an inverted U-shaped relationship for both overall materialism ($\beta = -2.11$, $p < 0.001$) and its dimensions (Happiness: $\beta = -1.01$, $p < 0.001$; Social Recognition: $\beta = -1.07$, $p < 0.001$; Uniqueness: $\beta = -1.67$, $p < 0.001$). This inverted U-shaped relationship is a critical finding, suggesting that materialism can enhance economic motivation at moderate levels but may diminish it when excessively high or low. By highlighting this nonlinear relationship, our study contributes to a nuanced understanding of materialism's impact on economic behaviors.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing results.

	DV: Economic Motivation		
	Materialism (*p*-value)	**Materialism2 (*p*-value)**	***R* square**
Overall	2.56 (***)	−2.11 (***)	0.32
Happiness	1.41 (***)	−1.01 (***)	0.20
Social Recognition	1.50 (***)	−1.07 (***)	0.23
Uniqueness	2.10 (***)	−1.67 (***)	0.29
High LS	1.83 (**)	−1.51 (**)	0.17
Low LS	2.87 (***)	−2.47 (***)	0.34
High SOL	2.12 (***)	−1.70 (**)	0.27
Low SOL	2.09 (**)	−1.89 (**)	0.13
Male	2.44 (***)	−2.00 (***)	0.29
Female	2.57 (***)	−2.10 (***)	0.32
Married	2.45 (***)	−1.93 (***)	0.35
Unmarried	0.04 (n.s.)	−0.96 (n.s.)	0.01
High age	2.93 (***)	−2.67 (***)	0.22
Low age	4.06 (n.s.)	−3.45 (n.s.)	0.35

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$.

Further analyses revealed this relationship persists across different levels of life satisfaction (High LS: $\beta = -1.51$, $p < 0.01$; Low LS: $\beta = -2.47$, $p < 0.001$) and standard of living (High SOL: $\beta = -1.70$, $p < 0.01$; Low SOL: $\beta = -1.89$, $p < 0.01$). The relationship also held across gender (Male: $\beta = -2.00$, $p < 0.001$; Female: $\beta = -2.10$, $p < 0.001$) and marital status (Married: $\beta = -1.93$, $p < 0.001$), although it was not significant for unmarried individuals ($\beta = -0.96$, n.s.). Age-based analyses showed significant effects for higher age groups ($\beta = -2.67$, $p < 0.001$) but not for lower age groups ($\beta = -3.45$, n.s.).

5. Discussion

This study empirically examined the relationship between materialism and economic motivation. Specifically, we investigated whether the three dimensions of materialism (happiness pursuit, social recognition, and uniqueness) show an inverted U-shaped relationship with economic motivation, and how this relationship varies according to life satisfaction, standard of living satisfaction, and demographic characteristics. The results revealed an inverted U-shaped relationship between materialism and economic motivation, which was consistently observed across most groups.

The findings of this study provide several important implications when compared to existing materialism research. First, it presents a differentiated perspective from previous studies that regarded materialism as a negative value system. Richins and Dawson (1992) presented a critical view of considering material possession and acquisition as indicators of life success, and more recently, Liang et al. (2020) explained the negative influence of materialism on corrupt intention through self-esteem. Islam et al. (2018) also pointed out that materialism and social comparison could lead to negative consumption behaviors such as compulsive buying. However, this study demonstrates that materialism, at an optimal level, can positively influence economic motivation, thereby broadening the understanding of its role in consumer behavior.

Second, this study shows that the multidimensional characteristics of materialism proposed by Sirgy et al. (2013) are also valid in relation to economic motivation. Sirgy et al. (2013) presented three dimensions of materialism and analyzed their relationship with life satisfaction. Furthermore, this study is differentiated in that it revealed these multidimensional characteristics show consistent patterns in relation to economic motivation, and specifically discovered that this relationship follows an inverted U-shaped curve.

A particularly noteworthy point is that the inverted U-shaped relationship between the three dimensions of materialism and economic motivation remained largely consistent even when considering various demographic characteristics. Since the influence of materialism on individual values and behavior can vary depending on the situation and context (Richins and Dawson, 1992), this study analyzed differences according to key demographic characteristics. The results showed that the inverted U-shaped relationship between economic motivation and all three dimensions of materialism was maintained even when controlling for demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and marital status. These findings underscore the robustness of

the inverted U-shaped relationship, suggesting its potential universality across diverse demographic groups.

While this relationship was relatively weaker in certain groups (e.g., unmarried group, younger age group), suggesting that the influence of materialism on economic motivation may vary in intensity depending on an individual's life cycle or social role, the overall inverted U-shaped pattern remained consistent, indicating that our findings may represent a universal phenomenon. Although this study was conducted in a South Korean context, the inverted U-shaped relationship between materialism and economic motivation may hold in other cultures as well. Future studies should examine whether similar patterns are observed in different cultural settings and explore how cultural factors influence this relationship.

The academic implications of this study are as follows. First, it suggests the need to reconsider the existing negative perspective on materialism. Second, by empirically identifying the nonlinear relationship between materialism and economic motivation, it has expanded the theoretical horizon in this field. Third, by revealing that the influence of materialism can vary according to demographic characteristics, it has presented important moderating variables to be considered in future research.

Furthermore, the implications of these findings extend to policy innovation and infrastructure development. Policymakers can utilize the findings of this study to design policies that balance materialistic values in society, ensuring that materialism does not lead to negative societal consequences while also harnessing its potential to drive economic motivation. Additionally, infrastructure projects that facilitate access to economic opportunities could benefit from considering materialism's role in shaping economic behaviors, ultimately supporting policies that promote sustainable economic growth and well-being.

The practical implications are as follows. First, it suggests the need for companies to consider consumers' materialistic tendencies more carefully in developing marketing strategies. In particular, excessive materialistic messages may have adverse effects, making it important to deliver messages at an appropriate level. Second, policymakers need to consider appropriate levels of materialism when establishing policies for economic motivation. Third, educational institutions can utilize these research findings in developing educational programs for forming healthy materialistic values. Although the research was conducted in a single cultural context (South Korea), the findings could have broader implications. Future studies could explore the applicability of these findings in other countries with different cultural contexts to assess the generalizability of the inverted U-shaped relationship between materialism and economic motivation.

The limitations and future research directions are as follows. First, due to the cross-sectional research design, there are limitations in clearly identifying the causal relationship between materialism and economic motivation. Future longitudinal studies are needed to verify this causal relationship. Second, as the study was conducted in a single cultural context of Korea, there are constraints on generalizing the results. Future comparative studies across different cultures are needed to assess how cultural factors influence the relationship between materialism and economic motivation. Future comparative studies across different cultures are needed. Third, the use of convenience sampling method limits the representativeness of the sample.

Future research should apply more systematic sampling methods. Fourth, exploration of other variables that moderate the relationship between materialism and economic motivation is needed. For example, research is needed on how individual values, personality traits, and socioeconomic status affect this relationship.

6. Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study holds significant academic value in empirically identifying the complex relationship between materialism and economic motivation. The discovery of an optimal level of materialism that enhances economic motivation provides valuable insights into consumer behavior, suggesting that materialism should not be viewed solely through a dichotomous lens of positive or negative. Specifically, this study highlights the non-linear, inverted U-shaped relationship between materialism and economic motivation, demonstrating that materialism at an optimal level can enhance economic drive while avoiding the adverse effects associated with excessive or insufficient materialism.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the three dimensions of materialism—happiness pursuit, social recognition, and uniqueness—exhibit consistent patterns in their relationship with economic motivation, offering a more nuanced perspective beyond the conventional binary view of materialism as wholly positive or negative.

These findings provide a deeper understanding of the role materialism plays in consumer behavior and its implications for practical applications. They offer actionable insights for developing marketing strategies, policy design, and educational programs that integrate the concept of materialism while considering its optimal influence on economic motivation.

By examining the multidimensional nature of materialism and its nonlinear effects, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of materialism's role in economic behaviors. It is hoped that this research serves as a stepping stone for future studies to explore materialism's contextual and balanced applications in consumer psychology and marketing practices. Given that this study was conducted in South Korea, future research could benefit from exploring the cross-cultural implications of these findings and examining whether the relationship between materialism and economic motivation holds in different cultural contexts.

Moreover, the implications of this study extend to policy innovation and infrastructure development, suggesting that policymakers and infrastructure developers should consider the balanced role of materialism in shaping economic behavior and social well-being. These findings may guide future studies on how materialism can be integrated into public policies and infrastructure projects to foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

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