Escape Theory and Materialism: An Experimental Paradigm for Self-blame
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Introduction

- Ward and Wackman (1971) define materialism as “an orientation emphasizing possessions and money for personal happiness and social progress” (p. 426).
- Escape theory (Donnelly, Ksendzova, Howell, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2016) explains materialistic people’s behaviour with six steps.
- The second step posits that materialists both see themselves as inadequate and engage in significant self-blame for personal shortcomings.
- Much of the research on materialism is correlational (Kasser et al., 2014; Donnelly et al., 2016; Dittrich, Bond, Hurst, & Kasser, 2014). Experimental research can help provide evidence of causality.

Hypotheses

In a pool of materialistic participants, those primed to experience self-blame will:

1. Demonstrate significant bias toward products high in materialistic value.
2. Display intensified materialistic tendencies.

Materialists vs. Non-Materialists

- Materialists
- Non-Materialists

Self-blame
Self-criticism
General Life Dissatisfaction

A visual example of certain wellbeing differences between materialists and non-materialists (Donnelly et al., 2016).

Methods

PART 1

Material Values Scale-Short Form
Belk’s Materialism Scale
Aspiration Index

PART 2

Decoy Questionnaire

Everyone

Website Design

Expected Results

In a sample of participants with materialistic orientations, those primed with self-blame are expected to:

- Surpass a given budget of CAD$5,000.00
- Regret purchases.
- Buy compulsively (e.g., check-out with more products).
- Purchase products aimed toward enhancing physical appearance, even if harming self or environment.
- Purchase products worn on-person or designed to be used publicly.
- Purchase products that ensure acceptance among the more serious consumers in that market.

Hypothized Probability of Adhering to Materialistic Values

Examples of expected consumer behaviour between materialists who are primed with self-blame, materialists who are not primed, and non-materialists.

Key References


Implications

If the hypotheses are supported, the proposed study will:

- Enrich understandings of materialistic behaviour.
- Add experimental evidence for the causal role of self-blame in the maladaptive materialistic attitude toward wealth and material objects.
- Facilitate further research for methods of countering rising levels of materialism in a young generation of individuals.

Examples of Product Structure

High Materialistic Product
- Flashy with special features that signal status.
- Emphasis on social gains rather than function.
- Improves personal appearance in some way.
- Quality advertised as extension of consumer.

Low Materialistic Product
- Environmentally friendly.
- Built to last.
- Good for health (e.g., no artificial chemicals).
- Focus on function rather than prestige.

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