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Cross-cultural differences in materialism

Güliz Ger^a, Russell W. Belk^{b,*}

^a Faculty of Business Administration, Bilkent University, 06533 Bilkent, Ankara, Turkey

^b David Eccles School of Business, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112, USA

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Abstract

Materialism was explored in twelve countries using qualitative data, measures of consumer desires, measures of perceived necessities, and adapted versions of the Belk (1985) materialism scales with student samples. The use of student samples and provisional evidence for cross-cultural reliability and validity for the scales, make the quantitative results tentative, but they produced some interesting patterns that were also supported by the qualitative data. Romanians were found to be the most materialistic, followed by the U.S.A., New Zealand, Ukraine, Germany, and Turkey. These results suggest that materialism is neither unique to the West nor directly related to affluence, contrary to what has been assumed in prior treatments of the development of consumer culture.

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1. Consumer culture, consumption orientation, and desire

The consumption-based orientation to happiness-seeking that is commonly labeled materialism has generally been seen as a Western trait that has achieved an elevated place in industrial and post-industrial life (e.g., Campbell, 1987; Leach, 1993; McCracken, 1988; McKendrick et al., 1985; Williams, 1982). It is

* Corresponding author. E-mail: mkttrwb@business.utah.edu, Tel: +1 801 581-7401, Fax: +1 801 581-7214.

a trait with implications for a wide spectrum of consumer behaviors (Belk, 1985; Richins and Rudmin, 1994; Dittmar and Pepper, 1994). While high level consumption for the sake of pleasure has existed for a few people in many different cultures throughout history, it has spread to entire populations only within the past century (Belk, 1988; Carrier, 1992; Mason, 1981; Page, 1992). Like a technological innovation, materialism now seems to have diffused to ever more of the world's people. This paper uses qualitative data and a modified psychometric measure of materialism to explore whether the same sort of happiness-seeking through consumption thought to characterize much of North America and Europe is developing in other parts of the world.

Recent analyses of globalism suggest that consumer culture is spreading from the West to other parts of the world (e.g., Belk, 1995; Featherstone, 1990; Mattelart, 1989/1991; Sklair, 1991). Stimulated by mass media, international tourism, and multinational marketing, consumers of even the so-called Third World seem to be starting to want luxury consumer goods similar to those of the West, even before they have adequate nutrition (Belk, 1988; Vilanilam, 1989, Wallack and Montgomery, 1991). This is quite different from the historic pattern in the West where minimal levels of health and wealth were achieved before high level consumption desires became dominant.

Materialism, as a consumption-orientation, has been defined as "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction" (Belk, 1985). Belk's scale of materialism consists of three dimensions: possessiveness, envy, and nongenerosity. Earlier measures of materialism are reviewed by Richins and Dawson (1992). In the Richins and Dawson (1992) conception, materialism is defined as an instrumental or terminal value (Rokeach, 1973). Although they share some adapted items in common with the measures of Belk (1985), the value measures of Richins and Dawson (1992) construe materialism as an enduring belief in the desirability of acquiring and possessing things, and as consisting of three components: acquisition centrality, the role of acquisition in happiness, and the role of possessions in defining success. As with the Belk (1985) scales, these scales were developed and tested solely in a United States context.

2. Consumer culture across cultures

Recent arguments in psychology have stressed the need to rethink concepts developed in the West and suggest that cross-cultural studies are a more

powerful method for the study of behavioral phenomena that may not be universal (Kağıtçıbaşı and Berry, 1989; Kline, 1988). Although both the Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992) scales have been used with moderate success in other Western cultures (Bryce and Olney, 1991; Dawson and Bamossy, 1991; Dittmar, 1992; Dittmar and Pepper, 1992; Rudmin, 1988; Williams and Bryce, 1992), their applicability in non-Western cultures appears more problematic (e.g., Boski, 1992; Gould, 1992; Mehta and Keng, 1985; Ross, 1991). Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) found that some items in the Belk scale had little or no meaning in Niger, and Richins and Dawson's scales seem subject to the same criticism. Wallendorf and Arnould's (1988) results also call into question the cultural universality of a Western conception of materialism. This requires empirical testing, which is the focus of the present study.

What can be expected when cultures are compared on materialism? One possibility is that the rise of the consumer culture and the accompanying materialism may be related to affluence. This is the thesis by Inglehart (1971, Inglehart (1981, Inglehart (1990), with the stipulation that after a certain level of affluence is reached and lower order needs have been met, materialism will peak and begin to decline as consumers turn to higher order needs. However, the lack of decline in materialism in affluent nations like the United States and Japan casts doubt on this projection (e.g., Flanagan, 1979; Marsh, 1975). Moreover, it is not clear that Inglehart's political interpretation of materialism is compatible with the behavioral interpretations of the construct by consumer researchers. His measures are based on respondents selecting from a fixed set of goals, those which they see as high priority, and the 'materialistic' goals in the most common form of his instrument are 'maintain order in the nation' and 'fight rising prices.' Thus despite the plausibility of Inglehart's hypothesis, the evidence for it is mixed and based on measures that have little apparent relationship to materialism as conceptualized by Belk (1985) or Richins and Dawson (1992).

Most of the prior literature on consumer desire suggests that it arose in Europe and the United States during the 17th through 20th centuries because consumers were more affluent and marketing was more effective in stimulating modern imaginative hedonism in these countries (e.g., Campbell, 1987; Leach, 1993; Lears, 1983; McCracken, 1988; McKendrick et al., 1985; Mukerji, 1983; Williams, 1982). By this logic, since retailing, advertising, packaging, and development of novel consumer goods remain stronger in the West and newly affluent Asian nations, we would expect the more affluent consumers in Western and wealthier Asian countries to be more consumption oriented.

Another view is that with globalism and Westernization, developing countries are emulating images of Western lifestyles. The literature suggests a demonstra-

tion effect in which consumers in less economically developed nations try to imitate the more extravagant consumption of consumers from more economically developed nations with whom they come in contact (e.g., Pearce, 1989, pp. 216–228). But such imitation may be based on an exaggerated stereotype of ‘Western’ consumption. These stereotypes are provided by the Western media products that are now becoming common in the non-Western world, so that non-Westerners may want to consume according to an exaggerated image of Western consumption that Western consumers themselves seldom reflect (Belk, 1988, Lee, 1989). This effect is similar to consumer over-assimilation among immigrants (Hirschman, 1981; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). The observation that materialism may be on the rise in less economically developed countries leads to the proposition that the have-nots want more than the haves because they feel a keener sense of relative deprivation (Shultz et al., 1994). Similarly, despite the difference in his conceptualization of materialism, Inglehart’s (1971, 1981) scarcity hypothesis – that value is placed on things that are in relatively short supply – leads to the expectation that greater scarcity creates stronger consumption orientations. This desire-based prediction is paralleled in the suggestion that the work ethic is now stronger in many less affluent non-Western countries than in more affluent Western countries because desire is greater there (Furnham, 1984; Furnham and Muhiudeen, 1984). Therefore, paradoxically there is some reason to expect less affluent nations to be more materialistic. Depending upon whether the level of materialism continues to be high in relatively affluent Western countries, this expectation may or may not be opposed to the arguments that historically affluence leads to materialism spreading from the West outward. Thus, it is critical that we investigate the extent of consumption orientation in a variety of cultures – Western and non-Western, and affluent and nonaffluent.

3. The study

The present research sought to explore materialism across cultures and to address the concern that the existing conceptualizations and measures of materialism are more appropriate to the United States than to other cultures. Focus group data and journals or depth interviews were collected in four different countries (France, Romania, Turkey, and the United States) to provide greater depth in understanding the meaning of materialism across cultures. These groups and individuals were asked to talk about the role of possessions in life satisfaction, good and bad uses of possessions, and what materialistic and

nonmaterialistic people are like. Psychometric measures of materialism were collected in twelve countries, including the four where qualitative data were collected. Both in order to understand materialism better and in order to provide criterion measures with which to examine the validity of quantitative materialism scores, respondents from all twelve countries were also asked to name things they treasured, desired, or would miss not having and to indicate which items on a fixed list of consumer goods and services they regarded as necessities. The scales used were modified forms of the Belk (1995) scales. The Richins and Dawson scale (1992) was not available at the start of our study, and the Belk scales were the most widely used. Working with the original conceptualization, some of Belk's items were deleted or modified, and additional items were developed to enhance cross-cultural appropriateness (see Ger and Belk, 1990, for an interim status report on this project). The scale structure, reliability, and validity was explored across cultures and levels of materialism in the twelve countries were compared using the new scale. The present report details results of these inquiries and discusses initial results concerning patterns of materialism among students in these countries.

3.1. Samples

Focus group data were collected in the United States, Western Europe, Romania and Turkey. The Western European data were collected at INSEAD, an international institution located in France, composed primarily of Europeans, with the majority being French, English, and German. Here two separate groups of MBA students completed personal materialism journals and a subset participated in focus groups. Similar procedures were followed in the United States and Turkey, with undergraduates (primarily business majors) and MBA students. In the United States 49 students conducted two depth interviews each and transcribed these interviews as well. In Romania 12 students also provided materialism journals, and focus groups were conducted with 26 students, urban professionals, and rural farmers. A total of 106 people participated in the focus groups for the four countries. Focus group sizes ranged from three to eight people. Participant ages averaged in their twenties for each country. These groups were approximately two-thirds male, except in the United States where an equal number of males and females participated in single sex focus groups. The focus groups, interview transcriptions, and journals were in Turkish, English, and Romanian, with English being used at INSEAD where it is the *lingua franca* of the school and students.

For materialism scale development and testing, a convenience sample of 1729

respondents was taken, consisting of undergraduate (primarily business major) and MBA students in Fontainebleau (France), London (U.K.), Saarbrücken (Germany), Stockholm (Sweden), Ankara, İstanbul, Trabzon, and Eskişehir (Turkey), Salt Lake City, Ames, and Norfolk (U.S.A.), Dunedin (New Zealand), Tel Aviv (Israel), Craiova (Romania), Kiev (Ukraine), Bangkok (Thailand), and Bombay (India). In France, the questionnaire was administered at INSEAD and for analysis purposes these students were grouped with the others of the same nationality. These countries were chosen to provide as wide as possible a range of economically developed/affluent countries (U.S.A., Sweden, Germany, France, U.K., and New Zealand), and less economically developed/less affluent non-Western countries (India, Thailand, Romania, Ukraine, Turkey, Israel).

Business and MBA students were used as respondents to keep some individual difference variables such as age, education, and socioeconomic status relatively homogeneous. Such homogeneity is desirable in order to make meaningful cross-cultural comparisons (Lonner and Berry, 1986; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983; Zavalloni, 1980). The tradeoffs are that demographic comparisons within countries become meaningless due to the limited range of demographic characteristics sampled, and that the samples cannot be taken as representative of their countries. Socioeconomic status, which may be related to materialism and which is an important confounding variable in cross-cultural psychology (Kağıtçbaşı and Berry, 1989), was kept relatively constant by using business and MBA students, although those in the less affluent countries are probably more elite within their countries. The mean age in the total sample was 24.5 (the range was 17 to 43, with most between 18 and 30). Only the Turkish sample includes nonbusiness (cinema, fine arts, architecture, educational psychology) students, and they were excluded from all of the cross-cultural comparisons, but included for other purposes. Forty-three percent of these respondents were female. Participants were recruited from the classes taught by the researchers and their colleagues in different institutions without any incentives, and the questionnaire was administered in classrooms. A separate sample of 122 (30 Turkish, 22 European [INSEAD], and 70 American) students were recruited from the same respondent populations to serve as 'judges' for coding how materialistic various wishes elicited from respondents were (these judgments were used as one of the validity measures).

3.2. Questionnaire

An English language version of the questionnaire was administered in all countries studied where the students were fluent in English. This included all

countries except Turkey, Romania, and Ukraine. Albaum et al. (1989) suggest that keeping the original language when possible in test instruments administered cross-culturally leads to the same results as a well-translated questionnaire, and may be more reliable and valid because it avoids potential translation problems if the sample is fluent in the language of the researcher. A technique widely used as a partial safeguard on certain types of equivalence, translation and backtranslation, was employed in preparing the Turkish, Romanian, and Ukrainian versions of the questionnaire.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 34 five-point Likert scale items aimed at measuring materialism. They included Belk's original items, some of which were modified, as well as some new items. The items retained after factor analysis and item analysis are shown in Table 1, with modifications and additions noted. The new items and the modifications were generated by a cross-cultural research team (the authors) in an effort to overcome problems of cultural specificity and moderate internal consistency in the original scales. Item order was randomized. A second part of the questionnaire consisted of three open-ended questions asking the respondents to list five products that it was important to them that they owned, five products that they wanted to buy, and five products they felt bad about not owning. These questions were intended for use in validation and tell us something about the similarity in consumer desires among the world's business students. The last part of the questionnaire listed 20 products and services (e.g., house, car, air conditioning, VCR, color TV, air travel, computer), and asked the respondents to indicate whether they thought of each item as a luxury or a necessity. The proportion of items judged to be necessities was used for validation purposes as a surrogate measure of materialism. A large number of these items were from the set that Livingstone and Lunt (1992; Lunt and Livingstone, 1992) found to be 'contested goods', seen by some as necessities and others as luxuries, although their work was not known to us at the time of our study. It was assumed that as materialism grows, more former luxuries come to be seen as necessities. This is consistent with the literature on the development of consumer culture.

3.3. Coding of the open-ended questions: Products valued and owned, and desired

Responses to the open-ended questions about products owned and valued, wanted, and that respondents missed not owning were content analyzed, classified, and coded. After all the items mentioned had been listed, we collapsed similar or related items into 30 classes of things. For example, piano, violin, and

saxophone were classified as musical instruments, and dresser, armchair, and table as furniture. Then the three groups of judges ranked the classified items according to how materialistic these desires were seen to be. A materialistic person was defined for the judges as: 'a person who is consumption-oriented and places strong emphasis on worldly possessions as sources of satisfaction in life.' The mean ranks of each of the 30 classes of items were plotted for each of the three groups of judges and clustered into high, medium, and low levels, based on the visual inspection. The middle set was omitted. There were no substantial disagreements between the ranks assigned to the items in the high and low sets by the European, Turkish, and American judges. The high set is called materialistic (e.g., money, plane, yacht, real estate), and the low set nonmaterialistic (e.g., love, family, pets, education). The proportion of the total mentions of materialistic items named in a respondent's ownership and 'wish' list was used for validation purposes as another surrogate for materialism. Three such scores were calculated corresponding to the three open-ended questions: (1) owned items regarded as important ('Own'), (2) items the respondent wanted to buy ('Want'), and (3) items the respondent felt bad about not owning ('Miss').

4. Results

4.1. *Focus groups, journals, and interviews*

Detailed results from the individual and group discussions of materialism-related topics are reported elsewhere (Ger and Belk, 1994). We concentrate here on a summary of these results as they bear upon understanding and measuring materialism. The critical issue in this respect is what participants in each of the four cultures studied regard as materialism. There are some important differences in the understandings and evaluations of materialism in the U.S., Western Europe, Romania, and Turkey, but the similarities are more striking and dominant. Shared understandings of materialistic consumption among these samples include:

1. Materialism is a competitive striving to have more than others.
2. Materialistic people believe possessions will make them happy.
3. Materialism involves valuing things more than people.
4. Materialistic people display an excessive, if not obsessive, desire to acquire and keep possessions, including objects, people, and memories (e.g., symbols of their experiences in the form of photos, mementos, and other souvenirs).
5. Materialism is a weakness displayed by insecure people.

Despite these similarities, there are nuances in the acceptance of these ideas across cultures. Americans are the most apt to see materialism as excessive and as a weakness (4 and 5 above). Western Europeans were especially likely to cite Americans as materialistic and saw them as crass and ostentatious *nouveaux riches*. Turks showed less of a tendency to associate materialism with the United States, but also associated it with *nouveau riche* ostentation. Turks, and to a lesser degree Western Europeans, were also more likely to see materialism as something that might benefit the family of the materialist rather than just the individual. Romanians were the least likely to see materialism as a weakness. They tended to stress its more utilitarian aspects (what Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) called instrumental materialism), and thought that in the rapidly changing Romanian economy virtually everyone was becoming a materialist. Romanians, and to a lesser degree Western Europeans and Turks, were more likely than the North Americans to see materialism as an empowering and self-enhancing expression of control and freedom.

This qualitative work was conducted simultaneously with our work in modifying the quantitative measures of materialism. It is instructive to compare the more broadly perceived elements of materialism just discussed to those that are captured in the scales of Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992). The competitive nature of materialism (finding number 1 above) is imperfectly captured by the existing scales, but seems related to Belk's envy scale and Richins and Dawson's success scale. The finding that materialistic people are seen as believing that possessions lead to happiness (number 2) is consistent with the core definition underlying both of these scales and with the role of acquisition in happiness scale of Richins and Dawson specifically. The third theme of materialists valuing things over people appears related to Belk's nongenerosity scale. The fourth theme, that materialists are thought to excessively or obsessively value acquiring and keeping possessions is consistent with Belk's possessiveness scale and Richins and Dawson's possession centrality. The fifth theme of materialism as weakness is not directly captured by either the Belk or Richins and Dawson scales, although both of them seem underwritten by a belief that materialism is more of a weakness than a strength. The Turkish/European communal view of materialism, the Romanian instrumental view of materialism, and the Romanian/Turkish/European empowerment view of materialism are not well captured by either set of scales. Despite a common core meaning, these are culture-specific variations that add to local meanings of materialism. And these qualitative data revealed concern with materially capturing memories and experiences – a concern that is only partly addressed in Belk's (1985) possessiveness scale. However, Belk's (1985) three dimensions of

materialism (possessiveness, nongenerosity, and envy) were all tapped by the focus group discussions, journals, and depth interviews. With these results in mind we turn to the quantitative findings for the revised scales used here. In presenting evidence concerning the reliability and validity of these scales we will present other qualitative findings from the wishes elicited and the luxury/necessity judgments.

4.2. Dimensions of materialism in new scales

Country-specific factor analyses (when the sample size allowed it), indicated some differences, but in most cases there were four similar factors corresponding to the overall solution shown in Table 1: Nongenerosity, Possessiveness, Envy, and Preservation. The combined factor analytic solution, with varimax rotation was chosen for cross-cultural comparisons because it proved the most robust. Some of the items that had low item-total correlations with the overall scale were omitted from the subscales despite satisfactory overall loadings. The items included had loadings greater than 0.40 in all of the culture-specific solutions (usually on the same factor), as well as in the overall solution.

The first three dimensions differ somewhat in composition, but are conceptually the same three factors in Belk's (1985) original scale. The fourth dimension, labeled tangibilization in a preliminary analysis from a smaller sample (Ger and Belk, 1990), is now labeled Preservation. Preservation involves the conservation of events, experiences, and memories in material form. This tendency toward conserving, and retaining memory-laden objects also emerged in the qualitative data presented above.

4.3. Reliability

The four factors account for 28% of the variance in the data for the overall sample. In country-specific factor analyses, the variance explained ranged between 26 and 39 percent. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability. In the total sample, as well as within each of the cultures studied, moderately satisfactory alpha levels were found for the scale and the subscales, especially Nongenerosity (see Table 2). The original materialism scale (Belk, 1985) in these cultures consistently produced lower alphas. While scales corresponding to the culture-specific factor analyses were able to improve on the alphas in Table 2 in some cases, the overall solution is the most robust for the entire sample. This tradeoff in lower alphas for a single cross-cultural scale of materialism seems inescapable. Furthermore, cross-cultural Cronbach's alphas in 0.50's and

Table 1

Materialism scale items by subscale where the factor loadings are indicated in parentheses

New nongenerosity subscale

1. I enjoy donating things for charity. ^{a,b} (0.60)
2. I enjoy sharing what I have. ^a (0.57)
3. I do not enjoy donating things to the needy. ^c (0.49)
4. I don't like to lend things, even to good friends. (0.46)
5. When friends do better than me in competition it usually makes me feel happy for them. ^a (0.46)
6. I enjoy having people I like stay in my home. ^{a,b} (0.45)
7. When friends have things I cannot afford it bothers me. (0.42)
8. I worry about people taking my possessions. (0.42)
9. I don't mind giving rides to those who don't have a car. ^a (0.40)

New possessiveness subscale

1. I get very upset if something is stolen from me, even if it has little monetary value. (0.59)
2. I don't like to have anyone in my home when I'm not there. (0.50)
3. I don't get particularly upset when I lose things. ^a (0.46)
4. I am less likely than most people to lock things up. ^a (0.45)

New envy subscale

1. I don't seem to get what is coming to me. (0.67)
2. People who are very wealthy often feel they are too good to talk to average people. (0.50)
3. If I have to choose between buying something for myself versus for someone I love, I would prefer buying for myself. ^c (0.49)
4. I am bothered when I see people who buy anything they want. (0.46)
5. There are certain people I would like to trade places with. (0.40)

Preservation subscale

1. I like to collect things. ^c (0.67)
2. I have a lot of souvenirs. ^c (0.60)
3. I tend to hang on to things I should probably throw out. (0.58)

^a Reverse scored.^b Modified item.^c New item.

0.60's are viewed as satisfactory considering the complexity and multifacetedness of the construct (see Hui, 1988, pp. 22-23), especially in early stages of research (Nunnally, 1967, p. 226). Use of a homogeneous sample, which implies smaller variance, may also have lowered the alphas here.

As the last two rows of Table 2 show, alphas are larger on average in the West than they are elsewhere. If there is a Western bias in the new materialism scale, this is consistent with the historical analyses noted earlier which suggest that the materialism inherent in consumer culture arose in the West, and with recent analyses of globalism that see consumer culture as diffusing from the West to other parts of the world. It is also consistent with such a spread of

Table 2

Reliability of subscales of the materialism scale, and the total scale, in national and cross-national samples of business students. Entries are values of Cronbach's α coefficients

Sample	<i>n</i>	Nongenerosity	Possessiveness	Envy	Preservation	Materialism
U.S.A.	228	0.66	0.61	0.46	0.55	0.62
New Zealand	114	0.70	0.44	0.39	0.58	0.62
Europe	453	0.63	0.49	0.40	0.62	0.66
Germany	103	0.49	0.52	0.29	0.44	0.57
Sweden	70	0.61	0.49	0.30	0.56	0.68
U.K.	91	0.63	0.38	0.19	0.65	0.52
France	47	0.77	0.65	0.64	0.53	0.79
Other ^a	142	0.62	0.47	0.42	0.71	0.71
Thailand	107	0.41	0.33	0.34	0.41	0.46
India	31	0.71	0.57	0.60	0.35	0.50
Turkey ^b	357	0.61	0.39	0.33	0.51	0.59
Israel	56	0.73	0.67	0.37	0.60	0.72
Ukraine	81	0.51	0.50	0.42	0.43	0.65
Romania	69	0.43	0.35	0.52	0.44	0.58
ALL	1496	0.65	0.49	0.48	0.53	0.61
Western ^c	795	0.66	0.53	0.45	0.59	0.67
Non-Western ^d	701	0.62	0.44	0.44	0.47	0.56

^a Other Europeans.

^b Turkish business and MBA students. The data from nonbusiness students were not used in cross-cultural comparisons; they were only used for the validity analysis.

^c U.S.A., New Zealand, Europe.

^d Thailand, India, Turkey, Israel, Ukraine, Romania.

materialism from the West that within Turkey materialism reliabilities were higher in the more cosmopolitan and Westernized environments of the big cities (Istanbul and Ankara, $n = 239$: 0.64) and lower in the small cities ($n = 118$: 0.47). Gulerce (1992) indicates that while the majority of children in Western cultures have cuddly transitional objects, among lower social class families in Turkey as few as 4% of children cling to such favorite material possessions. Those Turkish children who do have transitional objects tend to be those in more 'Westernized' families, and the objects tend to be Western stuffed animals like Snoopy, Garfield, and Donald Duck. Given its association with the West, materialism may be appropriately measured in a Western-biased way.

In an effort to examine the similarity across countries in each of the four dimensions to this overall Western-biased compromise structure we did a Procrustes rotation of each non-Western factor solution to the factor solution for the target group defined as the U.S.A., Western Europe, and New Zealand. This method rotates each of the other factor solutions to be as similar as possible to the target and then computes coefficients of congruence based on the correla-

tions of the rotated factor loadings between source and target. Using the 0.70 cutoff suggested by Hupka and Zaleski (1990), we found that none of the factors is completely comparable to the Western structure across all non-Western nations, nor was any non-Western country structure consistently similar to the Western structure across all factors. However, Nongenerosity in Ukraine and Thailand, Preservation in Turkey and India, and Possessiveness in Turkey and Romania were adequately similar to the corresponding factors in the Western samples. Hence factor structures and underlying views of materialism are not identical between Western and non-Western countries, even though the interpretation of underlying factors is relatively similar. The overall materialism scores combining all items accordingly remain a better basis for cross-cultural comparisons than the subscale scores. The coefficient alphas shown in Table 2 also support this conclusion.

4.4. *Validity*

Validity was evaluated using the scale and subscale correlations with the proportions of items seen as necessities and the proportions of wish list mentions involving materialistic products. Most of the relevant correlations are significant (Table 3). The reliabilities of the scales are a constraint on their validity, since theoretically a scale cannot correlate more highly with an external measure than it does with itself. Nevertheless, the pattern of correlations supports the overall scale's validity: the materialism scale is related to the proportion of items seen as necessities and the proportions of materialistic items wanted and missed, but it is not associated with the proportion of materialistic important products already owned. In retrospect, it is not surprising that materialism is related to desires (Want and Miss) and not to what people already have and value (Own). As focus groups suggested, whether people own a lot or a little, they can still be materialistic. Furthermore, materialism is more highly related to strong desires – what people feel bad about not owning (Miss) – than to simpler wants (Want). As a conceptual replication, we would expect materialism to be negatively correlated with the proportion of nonmaterialistic items wanted and missed and positively correlated with the difference between proportions of materialistic and nonmaterialistic items named (both logically independent of the proportion of materialistic items desired because some items fell in neither category). This expectation is borne out for items respondents feel bad about not owning (Miss). Thus, people with higher materialism scores miss not owning materialistic things more and miss not owning nonmaterialistic things less.

Correlations of the materialism surrogates with the subscale scores suggest

Table 3

Correlations of scales with number of necessities, and with percent of materialistic (M) and nonmaterialistic (NM) items mentioned as owned, wanted, and missed (badly desired) (total sample, $n = 1496$)

	Nongenerosity	Possessiveness	Envy	Preservation	Materialism
% of necessities	0.04 ^a	0.19 *	0.17 *	0.01	0.17 *
% of M items owned	0.14 *	-0.04	-0.13 *	-0.07	-0.01
% of NM items owned	-0.24 *	0.12 *	0.22 *	0.10 *	0.03
% of M-NM items owned	0.24 *	-0.10 *	-0.22 *	-0.10 *	-0.02
% of M items wanted	-0.03	0.08 *	0.15 *	-0.02	0.08 *
% of NM items wanted	-0.08 *	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	-0.05
% of M-NM items wanted	0.01	0.07	0.13 *	-0.02	0.08 *
% of M items missed	0.08 *	0.09 *	0.18 *	-0.01	0.15 *
% of NM items missed	-0.12 *	-0.02	-0.06	0.05	-0.08 *
% of M-NM items missed	0.12 *	0.06	0.15 *	-0.03	0.14 *

* $p < 0.01$.

^a Although not statistically significant for the total sample, statistically significant correlations of the percent of necessities with nongenerosity were obtained for some countries, namely, Israel (0.41), India (0.30), Thailand (0.25) and Turkey (0.14).

that the subscales reflect conceptually different dimensions of consumption orientation. The most reliable subscale, nongenerosity, is related positively to the proportion of materialistic items owned and considered important (Own) and missed (Miss), and inversely to the proportion of nonmaterialistic items owned, wanted, and missed. The more materialistic products that people own or miss, the less generous they are, and the more nonmaterialistic things they have, want, and miss, the more generous they are. For the other three subscales the relationship with the proportion of materialistic items currently owned and regarded as important (Own) shows an opposite pattern that helps explain why the responses to this question were not significantly correlated with overall materialism scores. The relationship of possessiveness and envy to the other criterion questions, Want and Miss, and the proportion of items classified as necessities, were significant and in the expected directions, but preservation scores were unrelated to the proportion of materialistic or nonmaterialistic responses to these questions. Unlike the other components of materialism, preservationist tendencies seem focused on that subset of objects owned that act as storehouses of memories of the past. Thus, it is reasonable that the desire for acquiring objects in the future and the belief that many products are necessities should be unrelated to this subtrait.

Another indication of validity is the comparison of known groups such as business and nonbusiness students (Belk, 1985). For the Turkish sample, as expected, business students ($n = 357$) were more materialistic and considered

more things to be necessities compared to nonbusiness students ($n = 233$): the means are 59.12 versus 57.22, and 13.26 versus 12.79, respectively ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the scale seems to be valid by this criterion, even within a non-Western and nonaffluent culture.

Reliability and validity analyses indicate that the new scale does tap a specific common aspect of consumption orientation across cultures. Given the results of the Procrustes rotations there is a stronger case for relying on the overall materialism scale cross-culturally than on its subscales. The coefficient alphas are also adequate for the nongenerosity subscale. The situation that arises here, in which the materialism scale and the subscales are not identical with those originally developed by Belk, is common in cross-cultural extension of monocultural scales, and validity evidence is the ultimate test of the appropriateness of the new scale structures (Kline, 1988). The validity findings reported here provide further support for the overall revised scale. Materialism is related to the proportion of goods and services perceived as necessities and the materialism of wants and wishes. Materialism also is stronger among business students than other students in Turkey, as was true of the original scales in the U.S. And the focus groups, journals, and interviews provide further support for the cross-cultural validity of the scales. Based on these results we now compare the different cultures' levels of materialism, although the results are clearly preliminary.

4.5. Cross-cultural levels of materialism

As may be seen in Table 4, the Romanian sample is the most materialistic of all, followed by the United States, New Zealand and Ukraine. Germany, Turkey, Israel, and Thailand are moderately materialistic. India and all European countries except Germany are relatively nonmaterialistic, with Sweden having the lowest overall materialism scores. The attitude expressed in Romanian focus groups and journals that 'everybody' in Romania was becoming materialistic, is borne out by these results. Both the materialistic and nonmaterialistic groups include a mix of Western and non-Western and affluent and nonaffluent nations. Hence neither national affluence nor Westernness can explain the findings.

4.6. Understanding differences in materialism: Qualitative data and interpretations

At first it may seem startling that many of the most materialistic countries are so-called Second or Third World countries. In order to help understand this apparent anomaly it is useful to return to the qualitative data from open-ended

Table 4
Mean scores on materialism scales by country

Country	Nongenerosity	Possessiveness	Envy	Preservation	Materialism
Romania ($n = 69$)	24.58 ^a	15.38 ^a	13.36 ^{b,c}	10.06 ^{a,b}	63.13 ^a
U.S.A. ($n = 228$)	22.67 ^{a,b}	14.02 ^{a,b}	14.23 ^{a,b,c}	10.10 ^{a,b}	61.12 ^{a,b}
New Zealand ($n = 114$)	22.10 ^{a,b}	14.32 ^{a,b}	14.31 ^{a,b,c}	9.93 ^{a,b}	60.54 ^{a,b}
Ukraine ($n = 81$)	21.71 ^{a,b}	13.78 ^{a,b}	15.84 ^{a,b}	8.51 ^{a,b}	59.86 ^{a,b}
Germany ($n = 103$)	22.26 ^{a,b}	13.80 ^{a,b}	13.92 ^{a,b,c}	9.19 ^{a,b}	59.16 ^{a,b,c}
Turkey * ($n = 357$)	17.79 ^c	15.18 ^a	16.29 ^a	9.81 ^{a,b}	59.12 ^{a,b,c}
Israel ($n = 56$)	22.33 ^{a,b}	13.31 ^{a,b}	13.17 ^c	9.93 ^{a,b}	58.88 ^{a,b,c}
Thailand ($n = 107$)	20.80 ^{b,c}	13.63 ^{a,b}	13.84 ^{a,b,c}	10.24 ^a	58.25 ^{a,b,c}
India ($n = 31$)	20.90 ^{b,c}	12.90 ^b	13.35 ^{b,c}	10.14 ^{a,b}	57.74 ^{b,c}
U.K. ($n = 91$)	20.33 ^{b,c}	13.77 ^{a,b}	12.33 ^c	10.29 ^a	56.54 ^{b,c}
France ($n = 47$)	20.73 ^{b,c}	13.18 ^{a,b}	12.93 ^c	9.87 ^{a,b}	56.47 ^{b,c}
Other ** ($n = 142$)	20.65 ^{b,c}	13.30 ^{a,b}	12.17 ^c	9.11 ^{a,b}	55.33 ^{b,c}
Sweden ($n = 70$)	20.06 ^{b,c}	13.55 ^{a,b}	11.89 ^c	8.12 ^b	53.21 ^c

Note: Countries are listed based on their materialism scores: from the highest to the lowest. The superscript letters indicate Scheffé multiple comparison results using harmonic means. The same superscript letter indicates countries which do not differ ($p < 0.05$) from one another.

* Business and MBA students.

** Other Europeans.

questionnaire items. One possibility is that there is now a world standard package of goods (Keyfitz, 1992), so that consumers who do not have the items on this list feel deprived. From the open-ended 'wish list' questions, we find that the items that were universally desired included a dwelling, car, clothes/shoes, books, and various electronic goods (TV, stereo, VCR, CD player, PC). These products may thus be seen as the world standard package, at least for these students near the close of the 20th century. From the designations of products as being necessities or luxuries, those most universally regarded as necessities were electricity (98%), a job (97%), hot running water (93%), a car (88%), a radio (88%), college education (76%), 3⁺ weeks vacation (71%), color TV (69%), and audio cassette player (68%). Because each of these items is less prevalent in the nonaffluent countries, it is plausible that consumer desire and materialism are higher in these countries as a result. However, this does not explain the presence of the USA, Germany and New Zealand among the materialistic set, and India among the nonmaterialistic set. Hence, more than this explanation is needed to understand these patterns of materialism.

The wish lists provide further insight. The cultures that had high materialism scores all wanted products judged to be more materialistic, although there was some local variation in *which* materialistic products were desired, including jewelry (Romania, U.S.A., Thailand), plane/boat (U.S.A., Turkey), second

house/real estate (Turkey), money (Ukraine), and stocks/bonds (U.S.A.). The less materialistic Europeans (excluding Germans) want things such as furniture/decorative items, travel/entertainment, antiques/art/rugs, and tableware, which were judged to be characteristic of neither low nor high materialism. What they want appears, as Ingelhart (1970) forecast, to appeal to higher order needs—experiences, art, and aesthetics. But more than this is needed to understand why certain groups have turned to such needs more than others. Here consumption histories help.

The materialistic Romanians and Ukrainians were the only groups in which no one said 'nothing' when asked what they feel bad about not owning. Although all nationalities have wish lists that include a car, fashionable clothing, electronics, a dwelling, home computer, and books, Romanians and Ukrainians were distinctive and differed in also desiring such basics as food, water, cigarettes, furniture, appliances, and grooming products. Before the 1989 Romanian revolution, in order to erase the international debt Nicolae Ceaușescu had imposed 15 years of severe shortages and rationing of food, heat, water, electricity, gas, and other basics (Belk and Ger, 1994). Queues were ubiquitous for bread, milk, flour, sugar, meat, and many other consumer goods. But now, suddenly, there is an explosion of consumer goods available. After such severe deprivation, the leap to materialism under the temptation of newly available and advertised goods (especially the formerly forbidden fruits of Western culture) is highly seductive. Romanians agree that materialism is exploding because of the lure of a rapidly expanded array of consumer goods (even if it is still quite modest by Western standards). Social comparison (Festinger, 1954) also plays a part, with Romanians inevitably comparing themselves materially to those who are now a bit better off. Similar developments have occurred in Ukraine, and to some degree in Turkey (Ger, 1992; Belk and Ger, 1994), both of which also experienced dramatic and sudden changes in their economic and political environments. It has been suggested that consumer desires are stimulated not only by relative deprivation, but also by a sudden realization of abrupt changes that make consumption a novel new possibility (Ger et al., 1993). Interestingly, in our prior scale development work shortly before German reunification (Ger and Belk, 1990), Germany had the lowest materialism scores. The post-unification measurements within the German data show significant differences from the earlier sample in mean materialism scores (60.4 versus 54.0), as well as in nongenerosity (22.9 versus 20.1), envy (14.4 versus 12.0), and number of things perceived to be necessities (10.4 versus 8.9). This too supports the interpretation that cultural change and unsettled social conditions are associated with greater levels of materialism. The only commonality between the less materialistic

non-Germanic Europe and nonmaterialistic India, appears to be their socio-cultural stability and the prevalence of tradition.

5. Cautions

Several cautions need to be considered in reflecting upon the present results. The new item pool constructed for scale development still included many of the items in the original Belk (1985) scales. Even though the culture-specific factor analyses showed some differences, a single solution was imposed that fit the overall world sample best. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients obtained were just moderately satisfactory. And the business student samples from each country may not reflect the broader patterns of materialism in these countries. Moreover, they may not be atypical of their cultures in the same ways. But although it might seem plausible that the relative social class status of business students in the U.S.A. versus Romania, Ukraine, and Turkey, or in Sweden and the U.K. versus India may be different, and that this may account for the findings, the pattern of results rules this out: the U.S.A., Romania, Ukraine, and Turkey are all high in materialism, and Sweden, the U.K., and India are all low in materialism. The scales suggest provocative national differences in materialism that seem positively related to pace of socioeconomic change and this bears further investigation.

6. Conclusion and discussion

It is surprising that neither consumers from the affluent Western countries nor the less affluent countries were uniformly more or less materialistic, given the two expectations based on the literature. This finding warrants further discussion in light of the history of consumer culture and current arguments about globalism. While there is some evidence in the present results of the emergence of a world standard package (Keyfitz, 1992) among the business students studied, numerous culture-specific differences remain in the consumption desires of consumers of different nations. Differences in levels of economic development cannot explain these preferences, since consumers in more impoverished nations did not express the same more basic desires as the Romanians and the Ukrainians. Rather, their histories of systematic consumer deprivation under Communism and the sudden release from Communist attempts at leveling seem to account for the specific wish lists of these two countries.

Besides the dissimilarities of the top items in the wish lists elicited, a second evidence against uniform globalism in materialism and consumer culture is that rather than Second and Third World consumers simply copying similar degrees of materialistic desire from First World consumers, some seem to have surpassed the materialism levels of much of the West. Furthermore, the presence of both affluent and nonaffluent nations in the most materialistic set of countries contradicts the literature hypothesizing a simple demonstration effect in which consumers in less economically developed nations gradually try to emulate the more extravagant consumption of consumers from more economically developed nations (e.g., Pearce, 1989, pp. 216–228).

The present results hint instead that the most socially and economically dynamic countries show the highest levels of materialism. By social change we mean not merely modernization or Westernization, but changes in institutions, the economy, political conditions, structural changes such as privatization, marketization, and urbanization, and changes in the people themselves, as with large scale emigration and immigration (see Berry, 1980). Romania, Ukraine, Germany, and Turkey are undergoing drastic changes. While the disruptions are less dramatic at the present time, the U.S.A., New Zealand, Thailand and Israel have been undergoing dynamic change for some time. India is a very traditional society and Europe (except reunified Germany) is relatively stable and traditional. These are countries with incremental change or dynamic stability. Sweden, the nation lowest on materialism in this study, has an aristocratic tradition along with social democracy and fairly equally distributed income. Dynamic changes, in both developed and underdeveloped societies, open avenues for social mobility, accompanied by a confusion in norms, and, in contemporary large scale anonymous societies, open expectations of enhancing prestige through consumption (Belk, 1984). These changes also increase envy, social comparison (see Cook and Curtin, 1987), and insecurity. There is a compensatory relationship between an individual's insecurity vis-à-vis a striven-for identity and the tendency to want material prestige symbols or "marker goods" (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979) associated with that identity (Braun and Wicklund, 1989). Dynamic change may also increase perceived relative deprivation compared to prior experience (Arndt, 1978). Change may aggravate social comparisons of several kinds: relative to the past, relative to expectations, relative to those better off in the society, and relative to consumers in better-off nations (Ger, 1992). We did not start out with the expectation that social change was related to materialism, and hence we do not have measures or a planned sampling of such change. And, there are no social change indicators that can be related, post hoc, to materialism scores. However, this interpretation suggests

itself when we look closely at recent histories of the countries studied in light of the pattern of materialism score means, and we believe it deserves further study.

Based on these tentative results, the spread of consumer culture, while generally flowing from West to East, presently appears neither uniform nor homogeneous. Contemporary world materialism is neither unique to the West nor dependent upon affluence. Have and have-not nations can both be materialistic, just as there are widely different levels of materialism between such have nations as the U.S. and Sweden, and between such have-not nations as Romania and India. Collectivist and individualist nations can both be materialistic, and so can both countries with prior scarcity and prior abundance. Some of the most materialistic nations presently have the least materially and were those ostensibly striving for egalitarian communist principles only a short time ago. Social change and accompanying mobility and confusion in norms coupled with the spread of Western influence and globalization seem to impel materialism. This interpretation of the present findings should be tested with more broadly representative national samples, both within countries over time as well as across countries. If our interpretation receives further support, it suggests that when there is social, economic, and political upheaval, rather than clinging to the security of traditional ways of consumption, we instead turn to new and more expansive consumption desires. At least this is the internal psychological response. The reality of external conditions may differentially affect the exercise of such heightened materialism. We hope that these findings stimulate additional research into material aspects of globalism and localism. And we hope that in this increasingly global world, the nature of consumer desire will be recognized to be increasingly interdependent across cultures as well. This study offers a starting point for addressing these fundamental international concerns.

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