



## ANOINTING WITHOUT MONEY: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MATERIALISM, HAPPINESS AND DAILY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IN A NIGERIAN SAMPLE

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### ABSTRACT

*Materialism, happiness and spiritualism seem inseparable and represent areas that have continued to dominate human life and yet have attracted limited research interests, especially in Nigeria. The present study employed the multi-stage sampling technique to investigate the relationship between materialism, happiness and daily spiritual experience among 142 participants drawn from across 3 religious groups in Makurdi, Benue state Nigeria. Consistent with our first hypothesis, and as opposed to most Western-based studies, we found that materialism is positively related with happiness. Also, the second hypothesis that proposed a significant negative relationship between materialism and daily spiritual experience was refuted. The third hypothesis which proposed a positive relationship between happiness and daily spiritual experience was confirmed. The study suggests that there is more to materialism and happiness than previous authors could see, and that is the context within which the study is carried out. The results imply that caution should be taken when interpreting some results especially those that have socio-cultural implications.*

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**Keywords:** Materialism, Happiness, Daily spiritual experience

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has been adjudged in many quarters as harboring some of the most religious people, and arguably having the highest number of religious houses on earth. In fact, it has been estimated that the number of churches resident in one of Nigeria's major cities outnumbers all the churches in other West African countries put together. The attitudes of most Nigerians consistently show that religious beliefs and practices are part of their daily life. Such beliefs seem to give succor to the afflicted and relief to the oppressed (Thoresen, 1998). Thoreson explains that religious beliefs can enable people to cope with many of life's challenges such as career insecurity, health

complications, and psychosocial concerns that almost everyone faces, regardless of age, gender or life situation. As [Pargament \(1997\)](#) observed, evidence also indicates that religion and spirituality are vital resources for many individuals in times of psychosocial distress. Similarly, [Revheim et al. \(2010\)](#) stated that spiritual matters could be an important part in the recovery process of patients. Studies (e.g., [Koenig et al., 2001](#)) reported lower rates of anxiety and depression among more religious individuals. Religious practices and beliefs are used by many people as a coping mechanism when exposed to traumatic and/or stressful life events ([Peres et al., 2007](#)). For example, Ai, Tice, [Peterson et al. \(2005\)](#), reported that following the September 11 (9/11) terrorist attack in the US, the number of congregations grew in many churches as people from different social strata chose prayer as a coping formula. It might be for this reason that [Davie \(2007\)](#) and [Ridge et al. \(2007\)](#) noted that religion is crucial in many people's lives, particularly in cases of serious illness or other forms of misfortune. Similarly, despite the fact that worship centers have become principal targets of terror attacks in some parts of Nigeria, many Nigerian Christians still seem to prefer to die attending religious services rather than 'distance' themselves from the subject of their belief.

Different fields of specialization have advanced their own explanations for such behaviors. For instance, some sociologists explain it to mean that sudden and unexpected death threatens people's sense of ontological security ([Howarth, 2007](#)). A parallel may be found between this and the Marxian view that religion is the opium that soothes pains of oppression and discomfort ([Haralambos and Holborn, 2008](#)). The point has also been made that religion might help people to rationalize loss, and possibly soothing interpretations of threatening and unpleasant events ([Park, 2005](#)). Psychology has also tried to explain why religious belief survives. Some authors (e.g., [Festinger et al., 2008](#)) have applied theories such as cognitive dissonance to explain why people hold onto their belief even when 'prophecy fails' or prayers seem to be unanswered. Others (e.g., [Paley, 2008](#)) described adherence to religious faith as irrational 'positive illusions'. Such authors as Paley, in any case, acknowledged that a spiritual experience might help to comfort those in distress. It is not surprising, therefore, that majority of Nigerians seem to seek spiritual or supernatural meanings in a world they perceive to be ever increasingly politically unstable and economically difficult. There are several definitions of spirituality and none of them has been universally accepted. According to [Hafer and Gresham \(2009\)](#), there are various options for defining the term from the purely religious to the all-encompassing. Spirituality has been used in reference to levels within the human consciousness that are deeper than, and prior to, human emotions, feelings and attitudes ([George, 2006](#)). In spite of this widely-held belief, how it affects the everyday lives of Nigerians has not been empirically examined. Despite the importance of religious beliefs in personal and social lives, psychologists have not channeled corresponding attention to investigating spirituality ([Maheshwari and Singh, 2009](#)). [Miller and Thoresen \(2003\)](#) identified two fundamental reasons for this lack of attention: an assumption that spirituality cannot be studied scientifically and also that it should not be studied scientifically. It is only recently that researches on spirituality/religiosity have begun to emerge. It is in an effort to add to this scanty empirical literature that the present study attempted to examine whether materialism, happiness and

religious adherents' daily spiritual experience are significantly related. Materialism was of interest in the current study because the Nigerian society seems to have turned into a more materialistic one; on happiness because Nigerians have been rated as some of the happiest groups on earth; on spirituality because Nigeria seems to have the largest number of church goers by virtue of the number of churches that arguably outnumber all the churches in the entire Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is worthwhile to determine how materialism and daily spiritual experience are related to the happiness of these religious adherents. .

### **Materialism and Happiness**

According to [Pelletier \(2009\)](#), materialism plays a major role in society. People have the innate need to desire life's necessary appurtenance; these today will include items such as the Laptop, Tablet, Ipad, Iphone or Blackberry. To earn money to acquire those items, people endure both physical and emotional stress working. . But no matter the value people place in money, it does not buy happiness, as researches have indicated (e.g., [\(Roberts and Clement, 2007\)](#)). Rather, many people who place much value in money always agonize ([Oropesa, 1995](#)). Oropesa explains that acquisition and possession are ridiculed as thin cultural values that impoverish the human spirit while fuelling narcissistic self-absorption. Even among samples of adult populations with greater financial resources, strong materialistic values continued to relate negatively to happiness, which is an index of well-being ([Kasser and Ryan, 1996](#)). Abundant research evidence has demonstrated that the pursuit of economic well-being does not guarantee happiness or life satisfaction at the microeconomic-psychological level. It has been suggested that attaining one's materialistic aspirations does not increase well-being ([Kasser and Ryan, 2001](#); [Kasser and Ahuvia, 2002](#)). It appears very difficult for materialistic people to attain their aspirations because as [Sirgy \(1998\)](#) argued, such people live in an unrealistic world and often set standard-of-living goals that are difficult to be met through accumulation of possessions. Such people will more likely be unhappier than less materialistic people, since according to [Wilson \(1960\)](#), persistence of unfulfilled needs leads to unhappiness.

However, the relationship between materialism and happiness has been examined in many countries such as the United States ([Richins and Dawson, 1992](#); [Swinyard et al., 2001](#)), in Singapore ([Kasser and Ahuvia, 2002](#)) and Germany ([Schmuck et al., 2000](#)), with all the results supporting the negative relationships. In fact, there is overwhelming research evidence that the more people endorse materialistic goals, the less happy and unsatisfied they will be with life, especially in more industrialized societies ([Belk, 1985](#); [Richins and Dawson, 1992](#); [Richins, 1994](#); [Kasser and Ryan, 1996](#)). The present researchers think that the universal understanding of this model will be incomplete if data from continents and societies other than America, Asia and Europe are neglected. Besides, it will be narrow of researchers to assume that studies everywhere will reveal a negative relationship between materialism and happiness only because such was found to be the case across more industrialized societies of the global North. Naturally, diversity of socio-cultural contexts will mean diversity in psychosocial forms and relationships. In most Western

societies where studies on materialism and happiness have been conducted, economic security was more or less guaranteed for many. For example, until quite recently, they enjoyed the luxury of switching jobs, earning more pay. In contrast, many non-western, technologically simpler societies have a long history of a situation in which access to life's necessities is a rarity for most people. We think that the suggestions about material possession not being intrinsically and ultimately satisfactory only expectedly emanate from societies in which meeting one's daily needs is not a big question. People in such contexts would have a tendency to locate satisfaction in something less common than material possession (Swinyard *et al.*, 2001). It is our belief that the result would be different where a materially less successful society is to be investigated; Nigeria, for instance, has been adjudged as harboring the largest number of hungry people (see (Oteh, 2009). In such a country, the materially well off may tend to be happier than the rest of the poor majority.

More so, although materialism has generally been reported as a trait peculiar to Euro-America (Swinyard *et al.*, 2001), recent global events might have caused this trait to spread to other parts of the world (Mattelart, 1991; Belk, 1995). Thus, studies from other parts of the world to which materialism has spread are justified in that they will no doubt add to the fuller understanding of the discourse. Consequent upon this, it makes empirical sense to hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: Materialism will be positively related to the Faithfull's happiness.

### **Materialism and Daily Spiritual Experience**

Materialism is widely viewed as an important life value (Mick, 1996). Rokeach (1968) defined materialism as a centrally held, enduring belief which guides actions and judgments across specific situations and beyond immediate goals to more ultimate end-states of existence. Materialism, in economic psychology and consumer, research has been defined as the importance a consumer places on worldly possessions (Belk, 1985). And it has been suggested that values affect various aspects of consumption attitudes and behavior (Anuar *et al.*, 2012). Also materialism has been associated with various negative remarks, some of which include envy, disregard of others and of social issues, self-centeredness, lack of principles, and possessiveness (Fournier and Richins, 1991). Also materialism appears to be positively related with physical and psychological difficulties (Kasser and Ryan, 2001; Kasser and Ahuvia, 2002).

However, materialism and spiritual experience are placed side-by-side in this study due to the fact that abundant evidence suggests that they may be negatively related (Swinyard *et al.*, 2001). According to Swinyard and colleagues, excessive materialistic value has long been criticized as being incompatible with religious fulfillment. Also a number of studies (e.g., (Belk, 1985) have reported that materialism and religiosity are negatively related. Considering various definitions of materialism as devotion to material needs and desires to the neglect of spiritual matters, and a way of life, opinion, or tendency based entirely upon material interests, then people who are materialistic will be more likely to pay less attention to spiritual matters than to closing the gap between what they can afford and what they want. Because materially focused people place

possession and acquisition at the centre of their lives, it is likely that other things will not matter to them, and that other domains in their lives including their spiritual life will be neglected. It is therefore hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: Materialism will be negatively related to the Faithfull's daily spiritual experience.

### **Happiness and Daily Spiritual Experience**

Happiness is an integral part of many individuals' lives and has attracted fairly large amounts of research, especially in America, Europe and Asia (Joshnloo and Afshari, 2011). To maintain a happy life is most people's desire because it guarantees meaningful life. This drive for happiness and meaningful life does not exclude Nigerians. Despite the fact that Nigerians have been adjudged the happiest people on earth (Oteh, 2009), literature search on happiness, or its relationship with daily spiritual experience, on the country, revealed very few studies with inconsistent results. While some researchers (e.g., (Mookerjee and Beron, 2005; Abdel-Khalek, 2006) reported a positive association between them, others (e.g., (Lewis *et al.*, 2005; Abdel-Khalek and Nacuer, 2006) found no association, while Argyle and Hills (2000) reported negative relationships. The inconsistencies might, among other things, be consequent upon the different ways the researchers operationalised happiness -- as life satisfaction and well-being-- in such a way that led to the adoption of different scales for its measurement. We operationalise happiness differently, as positive experiences in daily life. More so, our interest is not on religiosity per se but on daily spiritual experience as measured by the daily spiritual experience scale. It would be worthwhile to establish the relationship between these two variables when they are operationalised in these ways. Hence, the proposition that:

Hypothesis 2: Happiness will be positively related to the Faithfull's daily spiritual experience.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants and Procedure**

The multi stage sampling technique was employed to select 142 participants that participated in the study. They consisted of 83 males and 59 females drawn across three Christian groups: Catholics, Pentecostals and Anglicans, in Makurdi, Benue state, Nigeria. Their ages ranged from 19 to 57 years, with a mean age of 29.7 years. The participants were predominantly of Tiv and Idoma ethnic groups of the north-central region of Nigeria. Their lowest and highest educational attainments were Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE) and first university degree respectively. A total of 211 questionnaires were administered to respondents across the three religious groups. Out of this number only 159 copies were completed and returned, representing 75.4% response rate. Out of this number returned, 17 copies (10.7%) were lost to improper completion, and 142 copies only were, then, used for data analyses. All the participants for the study were volunteers and no incentive was applied to encourage participation.

## Measures

Richins and Dawson (1992) Materialism Value Scale (MVS) that consists of 18 items was used to measure individual materialistic value. Responses were on 5-point Likert-type response scale (anchored with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). It consists of three factors: possessions as defining success, acquisition centrality, and acquisition as the pursuit of happiness. In Richins and Dawson's study, the 7 centrality items produced alpha coefficients between .71 and .75 in the latter three surveys. The 6-item success subscale alpha ranged from .74 to .78, and the 5 happiness items alpha was between .73 and .83. The alpha for the 18 items varied between .80 to .88. Test-retest (three-week interval) reliability coefficients were .82, .86, and .82 for the centrality, happiness, and success subscales respectively, and .87 for the full scale. Sample items include: "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes", "It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I like". The scale's psychometric value has been established in the literature through numerous reliability and validity checks (e.g., (Roberts and Clement, 2007), and is widely used in measuring materialism. The Scale's Cronbach's alpha was .81 in this study.

The Orientations to Happiness Scale (OTH) developed by Peterson *et al.* (2005) was used for the subjective assessment of happiness. The OTH scale has three orientations to happiness (life of pleasure, life of engagement, and life of meaning). The Scale consists of 18 items with 6 items for each subscale. Sample item is: "my life serves a higher purpose" (life of meaning). Responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "very much unlike me" through 5 = "very much like me". The OTH Scale has demonstrated good psychometric properties in various studies (e.g., (Peterson *et al.*, 2005; Peterson *et al.*, 2007). Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .83 in the present study.

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) developed by Underwood and Teresi (2002) that consists of 16 items was used to measure participants' spiritual experience. The scale is scored using a 6-point Likert scale, in which response categories ranges from 1 = many times a day to 6 = never or almost never. Lower scores reflect more frequent daily spirituality experience. Sample items include: "I feel God's presence" and "During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy, which lifts me out of my daily concerns." Cronbach's alpha of the Scale was .88 in the present study.

## RESULTS

The first hypothesis suggested a positive relationship between materialism and the Faithfull's happiness. This was tested by means of regression analysis whereupon monthly income, education, age, gender and marital status were controlled for. Consistent with prediction, our data showed a significant positive relationship between materialism and happiness ( $t = 1.95, p < 0.05$ ).

**Table-1.** Materialism and happiness

| Variable    | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients |       |       |
|-------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
|             | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      | t     | Sig   |
| (Constant)  | 17.054                      | 1.910      |                           | 8.927 | 0.000 |
| Materialism | .058                        | .030       | .163                      | 1.949 | .053  |

This result confirms the first hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between materialism and happiness (see Table 1). The results of the study also showed that the second hypothesis which suggested a significant negative relationship between materialism and the Faithfull's daily spiritual experience was not confirmed (see Table 2).

**Table-2.** Materialism and daily spiritual experience

| Variable    | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients |        |       |
|-------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
|             | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      | t      | Sig   |
| (Constant)  | 68.157                      | 4.330      |                           | 15.741 | 0.000 |
| Materialism | .084                        | .067       | .105                      | 1.250  | .053  |

Thus, our data failed to support a hypothesised negative relationship. Instead, materialism was positively related with our participants' daily spiritual experience, ( $t = 1.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ). We controlled for monthly income, gender, age, and education as were expected and found that respondents' gender, age, and education were significantly related to daily spiritual experience.

As predicted, the third hypothesis which suggested a significant positive relationship between happiness and daily spiritual experience was confirmed ( $t = 2.29$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (see Table 3).

**Table-3.** Happiness and daily spiritual experience

| Variable   | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients |        |       |
|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
|            | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      | t      | Sig   |
| (Constant) | 64.572                      | 3.972      |                           | 16.259 | 0.000 |
| Happiness  | .429                        | .187       | .191                      | 2.292  | .023  |

The Faithfull's happiness was significantly and positively related to their daily spiritual experience.

## DISCUSSION

The main objective of the present study was to examine the relationship between materialism, happiness and daily spiritual experience, with a focus on religious adherents in Makurdi, a metropolis in Benue state, north-central Nigeria. The religious groups were Catholics, Pentecostals and Anglicans. We found, as expected in our study area, that materialism, is positively related with happiness. This is contrary to previous reports suggesting that the more people endorsed materialistic goals, the less happy and satisfied they will be with life; that materialistic values were negatively related with happiness; that the pursuit of economic well-being does not guarantee

happiness or life satisfaction at the microeconomic-psychological level; that attaining one's materialistic aspirations does not increase well-being are not all true of the Nigerian environment. The context within which the present study was conducted might have culminated in this radically different result. The Nigerian society is poverty-ridden, with majority of the people living below poverty line of less than one US dollar a day. In such a circumstance, the few who afford more than the necessities of life stand out as privileged, and are often happier than the less fortunate majority. However, the pursuit of material acquisition by Nigerians is understood not to be evidently a painful cycle but a worthwhile venture. Because success is judged in terms of the quantity and quality of accumulated property in Nigeria, people could dare the devil to acquire them. They do this not for the sake of acquiring property, but because it gives them some sort of sensation and places them in an enviable status in society. It may be true that the more individuals acquire material possessions, the more they crave for more, and that if they fail to get more they might feel disappointed and unhappy (Swinyard *et al.*, 2001). But it may also be true that what drives them to yearn for more material possession is the happiness they derive there from. It might be incorrect, however, to assume that happiness can only be guaranteed by materialism; there are other factors that people seek to achieve happiness; whether such happiness is short-lived, as Swinyard and colleagues, suggested may need further investigation. However, what is noteworthy here is that as it applies to the Nigerian sample studied, happiness is positively related with material possession. The relationship between materialism and spiritual experience was also examined. Contrary to prediction, our data did not support a negative relationship. It was rather clear that materialism was significantly related with the Faithfull's daily spiritual experience. Although it has been asserted that spirituality and/or spiritual experience is such that transcends the corporeal to involve a belief in supernatural purposes, which material possession cannot guarantee, the reverse was, nonetheless, the case in our study area. The reason for this might be that most Nigerians' commitment to the object of their worship is driven by a grim social reality and by the need to attract supernaturally bestowed material possession (as seen by the exponential rate with which membership of the prosperity-preaching religious groups is growing).

Our result brings up something different in that numerous prior studies have suggested that materialism and spiritual experience cannot be positively related (cf. (Swinyard *et al.*, 2001). Also, materialism has long been reported as being negatively related with religiosity (Belk, 1985), which shares close affinity with spirituality. We also investigated the relationship between happiness and the Faithfull's daily spiritual experience. Consistent with prediction, happiness is significantly related with daily spiritual experience in our sample. This result is not surprising in that it shows that joy and inner peace embodied in happiness are related to spiritual state of individuals. This result suggests that for one to be able to undertake daily acts, one must prepare oneself for it. One of the ways to achieve that, is for one to ensure that one is happy always. Thus, happiness presupposes religious fulfillment.



### **Limitations of the study**

Despite the gap that the present study will fill in literature, it still has its shortcomings. First among them is the problem often associated with survey research, that is, its inability to establish causal relationships. Longitudinal or experimental studies have always been suggested to solve this problem. Second is the social desirability bias, where research participants deliberately present more desirable selves than they are (Bowling, 2005). Such incidence inflates scores which may sometimes be spurious and statistically irrelevant to the research/scientific community. The promise and maintenance of anonymity (which the present researchers did) is a good way to get around such biases. Common method bias is yet another limitation, to which collecting data from multiple sources has been advanced as a solution. This is vital because it adjusts any spurious, bogus or misleading information that might be produced from single sources.

### **CONCLUSION**

The result that materialism is positively related with individual happiness, which disagrees with most previous studies, bespeak the importance of context in social research. People differ in many respects, and so are societies. No two societies are exactly the same and what is abhorred in a particular society may be acceptable in another. So when issues like materialism and happiness are discussed, certain factors, such as the background of the people involved in terms of social security and opportunities for growth, ought to be considered. For those who come from a background of abundance, material acquisition may not necessarily mean much, but for those whose societies have fewer opportunities, material acquisition may be an important variable to guarantee happiness. More so, materialism, which has been heretofore held to be negatively related with spirituality, was found to be positively related with our participants' daily spiritual experience. There is more to materialism and happiness than previous investigators could see, and that is the socio-cultural context within which the study is carried out. No two societies are the same, and responses to certain stimuli by different persons in social circumstances will not be similar.

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