

Martyna Płudowska\*  
Andrzej E. Sękowski  
Barbara Cichy-Jasiocha

*Relationship Between Materialism  
and Inconspicuous Consumption:  
The Moderating Effect of Values\*\**

ABSTRACT

The last few decades have abounded in analyses devoted to materialism, its causes, consequences, and manifestations. Despite much evidence suggesting that materialism manifests itself as a propensity for conspicuous consumption, contemporary market trends show that it is necessary to re-examine the forms of consumption in which materialistic goals and values may transpire. In the present study, we investigated the relationship between materialism and inconspicuous consumption (IC), taking into account the moderating role of values. The study demonstrated that values played a moderating function in the relationship between materialism and IC: materialism turned out to be a positive predictor of IC among the participants who displayed a greater preference for security, conformity and tradition values. We also showed that the effect of materialism on IC was negative for individuals with a low preference

---

\* Correspondence regarding this paper should be sent to: Martyna Płudowska (ORCID: 0000-0001-6246-9152), mpludowska@kul.pl; or Andrzej E. Sękowski (ORCID: 0000-0003-1042-0941), andrzej.sekowski@kul.pl; or Barbara Cichy-Jasiocha (ORCID: 0000-0001-5363-4240), barbara.cichy-jasiocha@kul.pl; Institute of Psychology, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Al. Raławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland.

\*\* This research was funded by the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin under the grant "Nieostentacyjna konsumpcja – przeciwieństwo materializmu, czy jego nowe oblicze?", no. 1/6-20-20-05-0511-0002-0074.

for conservation values, but positive for those showing a high preference for this value category.

*KEYWORDS: materialism; inconspicuous consumption; values; status; consumer culture.*

## INTRODUCTION

In psychology, materialism is viewed as a manifestation of consumer culture (Zawadzka, 2014), expressed through the worth that people attach to the acquisition and possession of material goods, which they find to be central to their lives and which they perceive as a measure of their success and happiness (Richins, 2004).

In many studies, materialism is treated as an individual difference variable, however, when viewed as a “product” of consumer culture, it is associated with such phenomena as accumulation of cultural capital, social comparison, and status seeking through consumption (Atanasova & Eckhardt, 2021). Despite evidence suggesting that materialism manifests itself as a propensity for conspicuous consumption (CC) (Roy Chaudhuri et al., 2011; Sahin & Nasir, 2021), it is not the only form in which the desire for “more”, specific to materialism, is expressed (Atanasova & Eckhardt, 2021; Richins, 2017). Contemporary market trends, such as a departure from the strictly materialistic perspective, expressed in prioritizing access over acquisition (cf. Akbar et al., 2016; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017), on the one hand, and the materialistic approach to experiences (Shrum et al., 2013), on the other, suggest that it is necessary to re-examine the forms of consumption in which materialistic goals and values may become apparent (Atanasova & Eckhardt, 2021).

**Materialism and conspicuous/inconspicuous consumption**

Materialistically oriented individuals show a propensity for CC (Fournier & Richins, 1991; Kolańska-Stronka & Gorbaniuk, 2022; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Podoshen et al. 2010; Roy Chaudhuri et al., 2011; Sahin & Nasir, 2021). They attach more weight to items that can be worn/displayed in public, and take more pleasure in showing off these goods to other people than in actually using them (Richins, 1994a; Richins, 1994b). Materialism, however, like many other psychological constructs, is a complex and multifaceted concept (Poraj-Weder, 2017). Researchers draw attention to the fact that materialism viewed as a “motivational complex” has many different patterns, depending on why an individual focuses on material goods and money (Górnik-Durose, 2007; Kasser, 2002). An interesting view of the genesis and functions of materialism has been proposed by Polish researchers who distinguish two types of materialism depending on the configuration of the personality traits of neuroticism and extraversion (Górnik-Durose & Pilch, 2016). The first type is peacock-type materialism, which is narcissistic, with a relatively high level of extraversion and a low level of neuroticism. As consumers, peacocks want to highlight and strengthen their own worth – they appreciate branded products, expensive gadgets, and show a propensity for CC. The second type is mouse-type materialism, which is characterized by high neuroticism and low extraversion. Mouse-type materialists are cautious and wary of their consumption behaviors and show greater concern for their financial future. Expensive and branded products are not particularly attractive to them – their consumption preferences seem to focus on ensuring safety and security. While in the case of peacocks, the function of materialism is to express the narcissistic “self”, mouse-type materialists focus on acquiring material goods in order to ensure a comfortable and secure life in the threatening and uncertain world (Górnik-Durose & Pilch, 2016).

Given these observations about the various functions and manifestations of materialism, it can be assumed that CC is only one of the forms of manifesting materialistic values. Peacock-type materialism allows individuals to sustain and nurture their narcissistic self. On the other hand, mouse-type materialists, who show the neurotic tendency to feel anxious and insecure and have a low level of emotional stability, use material goods as a “security blanket”. Tangible resources, such as money and material goods, give them a sense of having a relatively sheltered life (Górnik-Durose, 2020).

It seems, however, that it is not only personality traits that can determine what specific type of consumption materialism is expressed through. The consumption preferences of materialistically oriented individuals are also shaped by macro-social, cultural, and socio-economic factors (cf. Atanasova & Eckhardt, 2021). Eckhardt et al. (2015) pay attention to the changing relationship between conspicuousness and status. The decline in the signaling capacity of traditional luxury goods has been caused, among others, by the widespread availability of counterfeit goods, the democratization of luxury for the masses, and the expanding luxury goods rental market. In an anonymous urban society, it is difficult to distinguish wealthy owners from those who have rented a luxury product, bought it on credit, or managed to come by a counterfeit that is difficult to distinguish from the original (cf. Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2020).

An interesting construct that reflects changes in consumption caused, among others, by the trends described above is inconspicuous consumption (IC). Berger and Ward (2010, p. 556) define IC as “the use of subtle signals that are only observable to people with the requisite knowledge to decode their meaning”. We propose a slightly broader definition of this construct, according to which IC is a relatively constant disposition to purchase subtly labeled products and services that are little known to the average consumer. It manifests itself as a conscious decision not to buy

conventional status-goods and instead to purchase unostentatious brands and products that use subtle design signals and to invest in one's own and one's family's health, leisure, education and personal development. Inconspicuous consumer choices are viewed as expressing consumers' knowledge about what is good for an individual, and their awareness of and concern for the welfare of the environment and society (Płodowska et al., 2021).

Currid-Halkett (2017) claims that IC understood in this way communicates status, allowing one to set oneself apart from the mainstream in a way that is difficult to observe at first glance. It is consumption that, on principle, takes less materialistic forms. Recent findings suggest, however, that the traditional way of thinking about relationships between materialism and consumption (the belief that there is a directly proportional relationship between materialism and CC and an inversely proportional relationship between materialism and IC) may be too simplistic. Atanasova and Eckhardt (2021) suggest that it is necessary to cast a broader look at materialism in the context of social, economic and lifestyle changes characteristic of contemporary consumer culture. Those authors propose a new definition of materialism, according to which it is "a logic of consumption, which manifests as a preoccupation with the consumption of objects, access or experiences as a way to signal status, build image, pursue happiness, and attain a sense of self-worth" (ibid., p. 3). Viewed in this way, materialism can go beyond the boundaries of possession and acquisition, manifesting in consumption that is based on experiences, reduction of material goods, and a minimalist esthetic. Thus, deliberate avoidance of the consumption of certain goods and the shift from possession to access and experiences, can be just as materialistic as focusing on possession (Richins, 2017). This seems particularly interesting in the context of contemporary changes in patterns of consumption understood as a way of achieving social distinction and signaling status, which rely on inconspicuousness (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2020).

In line with the observations above, it can be concluded that materialistic values manifest in specific consumption patterns depending, on the one hand, on personal factors, such as the configuration of personality traits, and on the other hand, on social change. While the relationship between materialism and CC has been confirmed empirically numerous times (cf. Roy Chaudhuri et al., 2011), only a few studies have addressed the question of the relationship between materialism and IC. This study aims to fill this gap in research.

### **Materialism, IC and values**

Previous studies on the relationship between materialism and other values showed that people with a high level of materialist values were more likely to value financial security and less likely to value warm relations with others and a sense of accomplishment (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) demonstrated that materialism was negatively correlated with benevolence, conformity and universalism, but ranked close to power and achievement values. In a cross-cultural study, Grouzet et al. (2005) confirmed that materialism had a similar position to other values focused on self-interest. Materialism was also positively associated with the preference for such values as an affluent life, material comfort and hedonism (Keng et al., 2000; Zawadzka, 2013). Thus, materialism, which is a manifestation of consumption culture, is associated with an increase in the importance of self-enhancement values (Zawadzka, 2014). Taking the above into account, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H1 Materialism is positively related to the self-enhancement values of power and achievement and to hedonism.

H2 Materialism is negatively related to the self-transcendence values of benevolence and universalism.

IC involves purchasing “better”, more health-conscious versions of ordinary products, and inconspicuous consumer behaviors express the consumer’s knowledge of what is good for the environment and the local economy and what is more humane (Currid-Halkett, 2017). The values belonging to the motivational domains of universalism and benevolence reflect collectivist interests and are concerned with the enhancement of others (Grunert & Juhl, 1995). The concern for the welfare of society and the environment expressed through IC should therefore be associated with the preference for universalism values, which “combine two subtypes of concern—for the welfare of those in the larger society and the world and for nature”, and benevolence values, which “emphasize voluntary concern for others’ welfare” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 7). Previous studies also demonstrated that universalism correlated positively with environment-friendly behaviors (Thøgersen & Ölander, 2002) and that universalism and benevolence were positively associated with environmentally conscious consumer attitudes (Grunert & Juhl, 1995). Given these findings we assumed that

H3 IC is positively related to the self-transcendence values of benevolence and universalism.

IC also manifests itself as a preference for experience shopping, as opposed to the tendency to collect items, which is characteristic of CC. Attaching great importance to experiences, both those focused on intellectual stimulation, as well as those related to emotional satisfaction or sensual pleasure should be associated with the preference for stimulation values (a varied life, an exciting life, novelty) and hedonism values (pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself) (Schwartz, 2012). IC also aims to bring consumers closer to being “their version of better humans in all aspects of their lives” (Currid-Halkett, 2017, p. 20). IC is an attempt to distinguish oneself from “mainstream” society through

one's own consumer choices driven by knowledge, awareness and values. Thus understood, IC should correlate positively with self-direction values (independent thought and action – choosing, creating, and exploring) (Schwartz, 2012). In view of the above we hypothesized that

H4 IC is positively related to the openness to change values of self-direction, and stimulation, and to hedonism.

Leading researchers of values such as Rokeach (1973) and Schwartz (1992) believe that individual values can be properly understood when viewed as part of a larger value system. Accepting this assumption, we proposed that the effect of materialism as a value (cf. Richins, 2004) on IC should be studied taking into account the moderating influence of other values. This assumption was used, among others, in research on the interactive effects of materialism and other values on well-being (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002).

Considering the above we assumed that

H5 The relationship between materialism and IC is moderated by values.

## METHOD

### **Participants**

A total of 497 participants (278 women and 219 men) took part in the study. All respondents were residents of large cities, had higher education and incomes exceeding the national net average, which at the time of the study was PLN 3,775. Since manifestations of IC had previously been observed among educated, well-to-do inhabitants of large cities (Currid-Halkett, 2017), the sample only included individuals with higher education and a net income



above the national average who lived in one of the following five Polish cities with a population exceeding 500,000 inhabitants.

The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 45 years ( $M = 35.28$ ,  $SD = 5.61$ ). The vast majority of the respondents declared that they worked professionally (91%), 3.6% worked and studied, and 5.4% were economically inactive. Most of the individuals in the study sample were in relationships: 44.3% were married and 35.4% lived in a partnership/informal relationship. Almost every fifth respondent lived alone: 16.3% were single – “I do not have a partner”, 3.6% were divorced/separated, and 0.4% were widowed.

### **Instruments**

In this study we used Płudowska’s Inconspicuous Consumption Scale (ICS) (2021), Richins and Dawson’s Material Values Scale (MVS) (1992) adapted into Polish by Górnik-Durose, and Schwartz et al.’s Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ) (2001) adapted into Polish by Ciecuch and Zaleski (2011).

The ICS consists of 18 items describing beliefs and behaviors. The participants rate how much they agree with those statements on a 7-point scale from 1 = *definitely not* to 7 = *definitely*. The scale includes four factors: Knowledge (“My eating habits are rooted in my knowledge”), Services (“I am inclined to spend a lot of money on private health care”), Experiences (“I prefer to spend money on something pleasurable (e.g. a weekend at a SPA) than to buy material goods”), and Subtle Brand Signals (“I choose brands that are little known to the average consumer”). The scores for each factor are added up to determine a global IC score. The reliability coefficient for the ICS was  $\alpha = .0.89$ .

In the present study, we used the 9-item version of the MVS, which provides a global score which is a general measure of materialism, and scores on three subscales: Centrality, Success, and Happiness. The respondents rated to what extent they agreed with the statements of the questionnaire on a five-point scale

from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The reliability coefficient for the global MVS obtained in the present study was high ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ).

Value preferences were tested using the PVQ-40. The questionnaire contains forty short descriptions of people, and the person surveyed has to assess how similar he or she is to the person described. The items are rated on a six-point scale from *completely unlike me* to *very similar to me*. The questionnaire allows one to determine people's preferences regarding each of the ten types of values distinguished by Schwartz. In this study, the following Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficients were obtained for the ten value types: Conformity (0.71), Tradition (0.67), Benevolence (0.71), Universalism (0.83), Self-direction (0.73), Stimulation (0.70), Hedonism (0.78), Achievement (0.80), Power (0.70), Security (0.70), as well as for the four value categories: Openness to Change (0.83), Self-enhancement (0.84), Conservation (0.84), and Self-transcendence (0.87).

## **Procedure**

A computer-assisted web interview survey was conducted among registered users of the Polish nationwide research panel Ariadna. The panel is operating in Poland based on voluntary paid cooperation. The respondents were rewarded for taking part in the study.

## **RESULTS**

As a first step, we calculated descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients between the investigated variables (Table 1). The analysis showed a weak, positive correlation between IC and materialism. IC most strongly correlated with the following values: stimulation, universalism, self-direction, and benevolence, and the value categories of openness to change and self-transcendence

(a moderate correlation), while materialism showed the strongest relationship with power, achievement, and hedonism (a moderate correlation).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and a matrix of correlations of materialism (MVS) and inconspicuous consumption (ICS) with values (PVQ-40).

Variable	1	2	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Inconspicuous Consumption	–		75.24	16.32
2. Materialism	.10*	–	27.65	5.99
3. Benevolence	.35***	.04	17.01	3.13
4. Universalism	.39***	.03	26.13	4.78
5. Self-Direction	.39***	.03	17.81	3.18
6. Stimulation	.48***	.21***	11.29	2.85
7. Hedonism	.33***	.33***	11.10	2.77
8. Achievement	.32***	.44***	15.46	3.64
9. Power	.26***	.54***	9.90	3.06
10. Security	.26***	.22***	20.99	3.90
11. Conformity	.18***	.18***	15.74	3.45
12. Tradition	.25***	.13**	13.90	3.73
13. SELF-TRANSCENDENCE	.40***	.03	43.15	7.33
14. OPENNESS TO CHANGE	.51***	.13**	29.10	5.20
15. SELF-ENHANCEMENT	.33***	.54***	25.36	6.07
16. CONSERVATION	.28***	.22***	50.62	9.24

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

To explain how interactions between materialism and values determined IC, we performed a moderation analysis. Significant interactions were observed between materialism and security, conformity, tradition, and the category of conservation values.

The first moderator we analyzed was security. The model with the interactive term was well fitted to the data  $F(3, 493) = 15.551$ ,  $p < .001$ , and explained 9% of the variance in IC. The analysis showed that materialism was a positive predictor of IC only in those individuals who prioritized security values (approximately one standard deviation above the mean) –  $\Theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=25} = 0.44$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Among people with a lower preference for security values, the effect of materialism on IC was statistically non-significant ( $\Theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=17} = -0.24$ ,  $p = .155$ ;  $\Theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=21} = 0.10$ ,  $p = .401$ ).

Table 2. Security as a moderator of the effect of Materialism on Inconspicuous Consumption.

	Coeff.	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	99.865	16.151	6.183	< .001
Materialism ( <i>X</i> )	-1.685	.580	-2.907	< .01
Security ( <i>W</i> )	-1.327	.753	-1.761	.078
Materialism × Security ( <i>XW</i> )	.085	.027	3.211	< .01
$R^2 = .087$ , $MSE = 244.838$				
$F(3, 493) = 15.551$ , $p < .001$				

As a next step, we tested the moderating role of conformity in the relationship between materialism and IC. The model with the interactive term was well fitted to the data  $F(3, 493) = 12.344$ ,  $p < .001$ , and explained 7% of the variance in IC. All the predictors and the interactive term made a significant contribution to the regression equation.

Table 3. Conformity as a moderator of the effect of Materialism on Inconspicuous Consumption.

	Coeff.	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	110.779	13.880	7.981	< .001
Materialism ( <i>X</i> )	-1.805	.508	-3.556	< .001
Conformity ( <i>W</i> )	-2.505	.840	-2.983	< .01
Materialism × Conformity ( <i>XW</i> )	.123	.030	4.065	< .001
$R^2 = .070, MSE = 249.238$				
$F(3, 493) = 12.344, p < .001$				

Materialism turned out to be a significant positive predictor of IC only in individuals who prioritized conformity (one standard deviation above the mean) –  $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=19} = 0.52, p < .001$ ). In people whose Conformity scores were close to the group mean, materialism did not predict IC ( $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=16} = 0.16, p = .198$ ), and in participants whose Conformity scores were about one standard deviation below the mean, a statistical trend for materialism to negatively predict IC was observed ( $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=12} = -0.33, p = .061$ ).

Table 4. Tradition as a moderator of the effect of Materialism on Inconspicuous Consumption.

	Coeff.	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	99.457	11.132	8.934	< .001
Materialism ( <i>X</i> )	-1.363	.388	-3.516	< .001
Tradition ( <i>W</i> )	-2.162	.776	-2.784	< .01
Materialism × Tradition ( <i>XW</i> )	.112	.027	4.233	< .001
$R^2 = .098, MSE = 241.709$				
$F(3, 493) = 17.880, p < .001$				

The last value that we hypothesized to moderate the relationship between materialism and IC was tradition (Table 4). The analysis showed that materialism was a positive predictor of IC in individuals whose Tradition scores were approximately one standard deviation above the mean  $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=17.32} = 0.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In participants with a lower preference for Tradition values, the effect of materialism on IC was statistically non-significant ( $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=14} = 0.21$ ,  $p = .074$ ;  $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=10} = -0.23$ ,  $p = .128$ ).

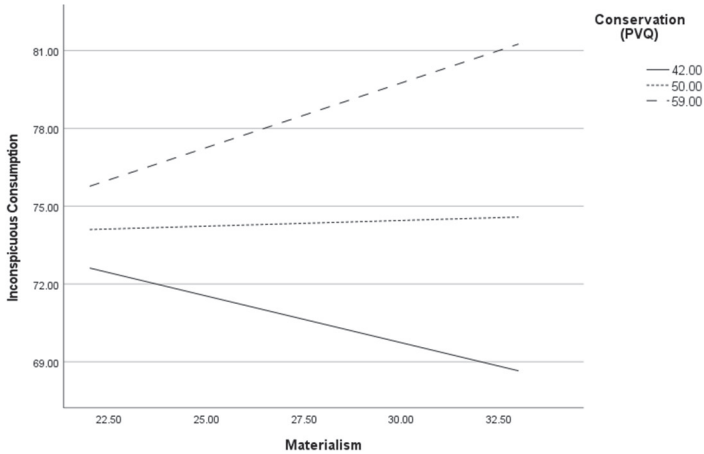
A regression analysis performed for the four groups of values demonstrated that conservation moderated the relationship between materialism and IC (Table 5).

Table 5. Conservation as a moderator of the effect of Materialism on Inconspicuous Consumption.

	Coeff.	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	119.417	15.761	7.577	< .001
Materialism (X)	-2.482	.564	-4.397	< .001
Conservation (W)	-.926	.304	-3.043	< .01
Materialism × Conservation (XW)	.051	.011	4.730	< .001
$R^2 = .117$ , $MSE = 236.438$				
$F(3, 493) = 21.942$ , $p < .001$				

In people with a low preference for conservation values, the effect of materialism on IC was negative and statistically significant ( $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=42} = -0.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and in those who displayed a high preference for this group of values, the relationship between materialism and IC was positive and statistically significant ( $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=59} = 0.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For moderate Conservation scores, the effect of materialism on IC was statistically non-significant ( $\theta_{(XW \rightarrow Y) | Z=50} = 0.04$ ,  $p = .713$ ).

Figure 1. Effect of Materialism on IC with moderating role of Conservation.



## DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between materialism and IC, considering the moderating function of values. In taking up this subject, we were inspired by previous findings regarding the functions and manifestations of materialism (Górník-Durose, 2007; Górník-Durose & Pilch, 2016; Kasser, 2002, 2004) and analyses devoted to the changing trends in manifesting materialistic values in the form of specific consumption patterns (cf. Akbar et al., 2016; Atanasova & Eckhardt, 2021; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Shrum et al., 2013). While the observations made by Veblen in his treatise *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) had for decades accurately described the role of material goods in manifesting social position and status, the advance of liquid modernity (cf. Bauman, 2000) has confronted researchers with new challenges (Atanasova & Eckhardt, 2021). In the present study, we tested hypotheses concerning the rela-

tionships of materialism and IC with values. We found that the more worth people attached to the acquisition and possession of material goods, which occupied a central place in their lives and were viewed as a measure of their success and happiness (cf. Richins, 2004), the more likely they were to prioritize values associated with the pursuit of status and social prestige, domination and control over other people and resources (power), personal success (achievement), and pleasure (hedonism). Power and achievement fall under the category of Self-enhancement values, which are related to meeting one's own needs and pursuing one's own interests (Schwartz, 1992, 2012). Our results support the assumptions of Hypothesis 1 and are in line with previous findings on the relationship between materialism and other values (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Grouzet et al., 2005; Keng et al., 2000; Zawadzka, 2013, 2014). In Hypothesis 2, we postulated that there was a negative relationship between materialism and the self-transcendence values of benevolence and universalism, but our results did not confirm these assumptions. They showed that the focus on material values was unrelated to caring for the welfare of either one's family and friends (benevolence) or all people and nature (universalism). Perhaps, this observation was a consequence of the specific character of the group surveyed – all respondents who took part in the study were residents of large cities and had a higher education degree. They were probably more aware of the consequences of climate change, and, as shown in previous research, people with a higher preference for self-transcendence values are more likely to express concern for climate change compared to people with a low preference for this group of values. Interestingly, this trend was independent of the participants' preference for self-enhancement values, which are associated with materialism (Prati et al., 2018). Gatersleben et al. (2009) also demonstrated that people who expressed a lot of concern for the environment were not necessarily characterized by a low level of materialism – nearly a quarter of the participants



showed a relatively high level of concern for the environment and a high level of materialism at the same time. The defining goal of benevolence is “preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the ‘in-group’)” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 7). Materialistically oriented people may tend to treat as property not only goods and money, but also other people, especially those who they identify themselves with or over whom they have control (my child/my employee) (cf. Belk, 1985; Fromm, 2008). Perhaps then, in some of the respondents, benevolence was expressed as concern for “what belongs to me” or “is part of me”. In this context, materialism does not exclude benevolence, although the reasons for benevolent behaviors may be completely different in less and more materialistic people.

Another goal of the present study was to test the hypotheses regarding the relationships between IC and values. The results we obtained confirmed our assumptions that IC was directly related to the preference for the self-transcendence values of benevolence and universalism (H3), the openness to change values of self-direction and stimulation, and hedonism (H4). Consumer behaviors characteristic of IC are associated with obtaining and using knowledge about products and services regarding the methods of their production, social responsibility and humanitarianism. Inconspicuous consumers prefer goods produced in small, artisanal factories, buy food from local entrepreneurs, and choose clothes and cosmetics produced with respect for the principles of environmental protection, in this way expressing their care for the welfare of the local community and nature (cf. Currid-Halkett, 2017; Płudowska et al., 2021). Beliefs and behaviors of this type, in turn, reflect their preference for universalism and benevolence values (cf. Grunert & Juhl, 1995; Thøgersen & Ölander, 2002; Schwartz, 2012). IC also manifests itself in spending money on services and experiences, as opposed to the tendency to purchase and hoard items, which is characteristic of CC. According to our results, the preference for spending money on interesting

and pleasant experiences (such as a vacation, a weekend at a SPA) serves to satisfy the need for stimulation and pleasure. IC also involves consumer choices driven by knowledge and environmental and social awareness. They allow inconspicuous consumers to set themselves apart from the mainstream mired in the ostentatious consumption of typical status goods and following fashion and advertising (cf. Currid-Halkett, 2017), which, as our results show, may be related to the realization of self-direction values (cf. Schwartz, 2001, 2012).

An important goal of the present study was to determine the relationship between materialism and IC, taking into account the moderating role of values (H5). The results we obtained indicate that the effect of materialism on IC is different for individuals with different levels of preference for the three values included in the study. The analysis showed that materialism was a positive predictor of IC in respondents with a higher preference for security, conformity, and tradition values. Conservation also moderated the relationship in question – the effect of materialism on IC was negative for individuals with a low preference for conservation values and positive for those who assigned a high priority to this value category.

In interpreting these results, one can refer to the dynamic principles that organize the structure of values (Schwartz, 2012). According to the third of Schwartz's principles (*ibid.*), people pursue security, conformity and tradition values to cope with the anxiety induced by the uncertainty of the social and physical world (these are self-protective values). This is achieved by avoiding conflicts (conformity) and striving to maintain the current order of things (security and tradition). Fromm (1955), who analyzed the interpersonal relations of individuals with the having orientation (which can be identified with materialism), claimed that they tended to show two basic attitudes: a controlling attitude and a conformist attitude. The former is the desire to subjugate, dominate, control, and rule over other people. The latter takes

the form of conformism, seeking strength and confirming one's importance in a group. It involves giving up some freedom and affirming one's own worth by identifying oneself with an authority (ibid.). The directly proportional relationship between materialism and IC in individuals who prioritize security, conformity and tradition values may mean that materialist-oriented individuals engage in this type of consumption to ensure a sense of safety and security, or even to adjust to the consumption trends prevailing in their social group (cf. Currid-Halkett, 2017; Eckhardt et al., 2015).

Our results are consistent with previous findings on the various functions and manifestations of materialism. As in the case of mouse-type materialists, for whom conspicuous consumption of expensive, branded items is not a priority, since they treat money and goods as a way of securing their future and ensuring a comfortable life, materialists who show preference for the conservation values of security, conformity and tradition can use IC as a "security blanket" (Górnik-Durose, 2020; Górnik-Durose & Pilch, 2016). It is possible, then, that people who follow their materialistic inclinations by engaging in IC, do so as a kind of compensation strategy to meet their unfulfilled need for security (cf. Górnik-Durose, 2007; Kasser, 2002; Kasser et al., 2004). The care that inconspicuous consumers characteristically take in choosing high quality food products and cosmetics and the way they invest in their health and development (cf. Płudowska et al.) may, on the one hand, serve to increase their sense of security, and on the other hand, provide a sense of belonging to their in-group and a sense of integration with the other members of this group.

Our results also show that materialists who have a low preference for conservation values are less involved in IC. Perhaps, individuals who attach little importance to security, conformity to social norms, and humility are more likely to engage in traditional, conspicuous consumption. Our results are in line with previous findings on the expressions of materialism. We have demonstrated that materialism can manifest as involvement in

IC if an individual sees it as an opportunity to cope with anxiety and ensure their safety and security.

## LIMITATIONS

The first significant limitation of this study is the specific character of the sample. The study was conducted in Poland among well-to-do inhabitants of large cities, which limits the possibility of generalizing the results to a broader population. It would be interesting to test the effects we identified in this study, in other populations and/or cultures. Another limitation is that we did not take into account the variable of CC. A study would be warranted to test a model that includes the mediating role of values in relationships of materialism with conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption. It would also be interesting to take into consideration personality variables and the division into peacock- and mouse-type materialism in future research.

## REFERENCES

- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Polity.
- Burroughs, J. E., & Rindfleisch, A. (2002). Materialism and well-being: A conflicting values perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(3), 348–370.
- Eckhardt, G. M., & Bardhi, F. (2020). New dynamics of social status and distinction. *Marketing Theory*, 20(1), 85–102.
- Chaudhuri, R. H., Mazumdar, S., & Ghoshal, A. (2011). Conspicuous consumption orientation: Conceptualisation, scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 10(4), 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.364>
- Cieciuch, J., & Zaleski, Z. (2011). Polska adaptacja Portretowego Kwestionariusza Wartości Shaloma Schwartza [Polish adaptation of Shalom Schwartz' Portrait Value Questionnaire]. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne*, 17(2), 251–262.
- Fournier, S., & Richins, M. L. (1991). Some theoretical and popular notions concerning materialism. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6(6), 403–414.
- Fromm, E. (2008). *To have or to be?* Continuum.

- Fromm, E. (1955). *The sane society*. Rinehart & Company.
- Gatersleben, B., White, E., Abrahamse, W., Jackson, T., & Uzzell, D. (2009). Materialism and environmental concern examining values and lifestyle choices among participants of the 21st Century Living Project. RESOLVE Working Paper 01-09.
- Górnik-Durose, M. (2007). Nowe oblicze materializmu, czyli z deszczu pod rynnę [The new face of materialism, or out of the frying pan into the fire]. *Psychologia. Edukacja i Społeczeństwo*, 4, 211–226.
- Górnik-Durose, M. (2016). Polska adaptacja skali wartości materialnych (MVS) – właściwości psychometryczne wersji pełnej i wersji skróconych [Polish adaptation of the Material Values Scale: The psychometric properties of the full and abbreviated versions]. *Psychologia Ekonomiczna*, 9, 5–21.
- Górnik-Durose, M. E., & Pilch, I. (2016). The dual nature of materialism. How personality shapes materialistic value orientation. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 57, 102–116.
- Górnik-Durose, M. E. (2020). Materialism and Well-Being Revisited: The Impact of Personality. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 21, 305–326.
- Grouzet, F. M. E., Kasser, T., Ahuvia, A., Fernandez-Dols, J. M., Kim, Y., Lau, S., et al. (2005). The structure of goal contents across 15 cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89(5), 800–816.
- Grunert, C. & Juhl, J. (1995). Values, environmental attitudes and buying of organic foods. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 16, 39–62.
- Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. MIT Press.
- Kasser, T., Ryan, R., Couchman, C., & Sheldon, K. (2004). Materialistic values: Their cause and consequences. In T. Kasser & A. Kanner (Eds.), *Psychology and consumer culture. The struggle for a good life in a materialistic world* (pp. 11–28). American Psychological Association.
- Keng, K. A., Jung, K., Jivan, T. S., & Wirtz, J. (2000). The influence of materialistic inclination on values, life satisfaction, and aspirations: An empirical analysis. *Social Indicators Research*, 49, 317–333. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006956602509>
- Kolańska-Stronka, M., & Gorbaniuk, O. (2022). Materialism, conspicuous consumption, and brand engagement in self-concept: A study of teenagers. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, 10(1), 39–48.
- Newholm, T., & Shaw, D. (2007). Studying the ethical consumer: A review of research. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 6(5), 253–270.
- Pludowska, M., Bartczuk, R., Sękowski, A. & Cichy-Jasiocha, B. (2021). Inconspicuous Consumption Scale – development and validation. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/wj54c>

- Podoshen, J. S., Li, L., & Zhang, J. (2010). Materialism and conspicuous consumption in China: A cross-cultural examination. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 35(1), 17–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2010.00930.x>
- Podoshen, J. S. & Andrzejewski, S. A. (2012). An examination of the relationships between materialism, conspicuous consumption, impulse buying, and brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 20(3), 319–334. <https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679200306>
- Poraj-Weder, M. (2017). Niedaleko pada jabłko od jabłoni? O transmisji materialistycznych wzorców w diadzie matka-córka [Like mother, like daughter? On the transmission of materialistic models in a mother–daughter dyad]. *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne*, 22(4), 656–671.
- Prati, G., Pietrantonio, L., & Albanesi, C. (2017). Human values and beliefs and concern about climate change: A Bayesian longitudinal analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 52(4), 1613–1625. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0538-z>
- Richins, M. (1994a). Special possessions and the expression of material values. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(3), 522–533.
- Richins, M. (1994b). Valuing things: The public and private meanings of possessions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(3), 504–521.
- Richins, M. (2004). The material values scale: Measurement properties and development of a short form. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 209–219.
- Richins, M., & Dawson, S. (1992). A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(3), 303–316.
- Richins, M. L. (2017). Materialism pathways: The processes that create and perpetuate materialism. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27(4), 480–499.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. Free Press.
- Sahin, O., & Nasir, S. (2021). The effects of status consumption and conspicuous consumption on perceived symbolic status. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2021.1888649>
- Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1116>
- Schwartz, S. H., Melech, G., Lehmann, A., Burgess, S., & Harris, M. (2001). Extending the cross-cultural validity of the theory of basic human values with a different method of measurement. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32, 519–542.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (pp. 1–65). Academic Press.

- Shrum, L. J., Wong, N., Arif, F., Chugani, S. K., Gunz, A., Lowrey, T. M., Nairn, A., Pandelaere, M., Ross, S. M., Ruvio, A., Scott, K., & Sundie, J. (2013). Re-conceptualizing materialism as identity goal pursuits: Functions, processes, and consequences. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(8), 1179–1185.
- Thøgersen, J., & Ölander, F. (2002). Human values and the emergence of a sustainable consumption pattern: A panel study. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 23, 605–630.
- Zawadzka, A. M. (2013). Aspiracje materialistyczne dzieci i młodzieży w kontekście preferowanych wartości i dobrostanu [Materialistic aspirations of the adolescent in the context of preferred values and well-being]. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne*, 19(1), 7–16.
- Zawadzka, A. M. (2014). Wartości, cele i dobrostan kulturze konsumpcji [Values, goals and well-being in the culture of consumption]. In A. Zawadzka, M. Niesiobędzka, & D. Godlewska-Werner (Eds.), *Kultura konsumpcji – wartości, cele, dobrostan. Psychologiczne aspekty zjawiska* [Culture of consumption – values, goals, well-being. Psychological aspects of the phenomenon] (pp. 15–37). Wydawnictwo Stowarzyszenia Filomatów.