I Do Not Consume: Examining Determinants of Voluntary Simplicity

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Abstract

In today's society, where consumption is a significant concern, the pursuit of satisfaction with life has become increasingly important. The development of technology has made everything easily accessible, which has had a negative impact on people's efforts to achieve their goals and their sense of satisfaction. The theoretical framework is based on the idea that voluntary simplicity is a lifestyle choice that involves reducing one's consumption and focusing on non-materialistic values. This study aims to explore the determinants of voluntary simplicity as religiosity, materialism and life satisfaction. Data were collected from 699 purposively sampled respondents from different countries via an online survey tool. Confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were conducted to test the theoretical structural equation model. The findings indicate that satisfaction with life and religiosity have a positive effect on voluntary simplicity, whereas the effect of materialism is negative. Moreover, religiosity was found to be an important factor explaining satisfaction with life.
Keywords: *Voluntary simplicity, Religiosity, Materialism, Satisfaction with life*

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of satisfaction with life has become a significant concern in today's consumption-focused society (Diener et al., 1999). With technology providing instant access to information and resources, the level of effort required to accomplish tasks has decreased (Twenge et al., 2012). As a result, the feeling of satisfaction that comes from working hard and achieving something meaningful has diminished. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing need for measuring people's satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985). However, new perspectives have emerged on the transition to a simpler life.

Satisfaction with life has been examined in relation to various factors, such as materialism (Richins & Dawson, 1992), voluntary simplicity (Elgin, 1981), religiosity (Hill & Hood, 1999), happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001), personality characteristics (Costa & McCrae, 1980), and occupation (Judge et al., 2001).

Taking all these factors into consideration, the study aims to explore the relationships between voluntary simplicity, satisfaction with life, materialism, religiosity. Examining these concepts, the study seeks to provide insights into the impact of religiosity and social trends on individuals' efforts to achieve satisfaction and the potential benefits of embracing a simpler way of life.

Voluntary simplicity is a lifestyle choice that promotes living with less to attain greater freedom, contentment, and purpose (Elgin, 1981; Schaefer & Crane, 2005). This study explores the origins and definition of voluntary simplicity, as well as its associations with materialism (Belk, 1985), intrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967), extrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967), and satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985). It investigates the impact of the ease of access to everything due to technological advancements on individuals' efforts to achieve goals and the resulting sense of satisfaction.

Additionally, the article discusses the value of simplicity found in various religious philosophies and their relevance to contentment and personal growth (Argan et al., 2012). Researchers and scholars from diverse fields, including sociology, psychology, and environmental studies, have examined voluntary simplicity as an alternative approach to living that prioritizes well-being and sustainability (Dittmer, 2012; Schaefer & Crane, 2005).

We demonstrate empirical evidence of a relationship between voluntary simplicity and its associated

factors. This article contributes to the understanding of alternative ways of living that prioritize a meaningful and fulfilling life.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Voluntary Simplicity

Voluntary simplicity is a lifestyle choice that emphasizes living with less to achieve greater freedom, contentment, and purpose. According to Elgin (1981), voluntary simplicity involves "a deliberate choice to live with less in order to create a life that is more meaningful, purposeful, and satisfying." It is a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of living a life that is based on one's values and priorities, rather than being driven by consumerism and the pursuit of material possessions (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). Hoge defined voluntary simplicity as a "chosen lifestyle characterized by reduced consumption, increased personal self-reliance, and a greater emphasis on nonmaterial values" (Hoge, 1994, p. 280) and noted that voluntary simplicity is a conscious choice made by individuals to live with less material possessions and to prioritize nonmaterial values such as relationships, spirituality, and personal growth. Hoge's definition emphasizes the intentional nature of the lifestyle choice and its focus on reducing consumption as a means of achieving personal and societal benefits.

The concept of voluntary simplicity first emerged in the 1960s as a response to the increasing consumerism and materialism of Western societies (Alexander, 2009). It was popularized by writers such as Duane Elgin, who published a book in 1981 called "Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich". Since then, the concept has been widely discussed in academic literature and has been studied by scholars in various fields, including sociology, psychology, and environmental studies (Dittmer, 2012; Schaefer & Crane, 2005).

Overall, voluntary simplicity can be seen as a way of rejecting the dominant culture's emphasis on consumerism and materialism in favour of a simpler, more meaningful way of life. It is a lifestyle choice that has attracted the attention of many researchers and academics who are interested in exploring alternative ways of living that prioritize well-being and sustainability.

Numerous religions' philosophies include statements related to simplicity. For example, the Hinduism concept of "the one who is completely free from desires gains tranquility," the Jewish belief in "neither poverty nor riches, only what is sufficient for me," and the Taoism belief in "the person who knows contentment has real wealth" can be cited as examples (Argan et al., 2012: 205). These statements emphasize the value of leading a simple life and finding contentment in what one has, rather than constantly striving for more.

Materialism

Materialism refers to a set of values that prioritize the acquisition of material possessions and wealth, and view these as the key indicators of success and happiness in life (Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialistic individuals tend to be more focused on consumerism, and less concerned with other aspects of life such as social relationships, personal growth, and spirituality.

Religiosity

Religiosity concept have been studied in business related areas for its effects on social life and interactions. Religiosity can be classified into two categories as intrinsic and extrinsic (Allport, 1967). Intrinsic Religiosity refers to an individual's internalization of their religious beliefs and practices, and the extent to which they find personal meaning and fulfilment in their religion (Allport & Ross, 1967). It is characterized by a deep personal commitment to one's faith, and a belief that religion can offer guidance and support in all aspects of life. Extrinsic Religiosity, in contrast to intrinsic religiosity, refers to an individual's tendency to view religion to an end, such as achieving social status or material gain, rather than as an end (Allport & Ross, 1967). Extrinsic religiosity is characterized by a more superficial

commitment to religious beliefs and practices, and a tendency to use religion for personal gain or social approval. In this study intrinsic religiosity is considered.

Satisfaction with Life

Satisfaction with Life is a concept that refers to an individual's overall sense of happiness and fulfilment with their life, including their relationships, work, health, and other important domains (Diener et al., 1985). It is often used as a key indicator of well-being and quality of life and has been shown to be influenced by a variety of factors, including materialism, simplicity, and religiosity.

In studies examining the relationships between these concepts, researchers have also examined a variety of other factors, such as psychological well-being, environmental attitudes, and social behaviour. Findings have varied, with some studies showing significant positive effects of intrinsic religiosity and voluntary simplicity on well-being and environmental attitudes, while others have found significant negative effects of materialism and extrinsic religiosity on these same outcomes. Overall, the literature suggests that the pursuit of material wealth and possessions is often at odds with the pursuit of well-being and environmental sustainability, while religious beliefs and practices can have both positive and negative effects on these outcomes, depending on the degree of internalization and authenticity of the individual's faith. Based on the literature review following hypotheses and research model is presented in Figure 1.

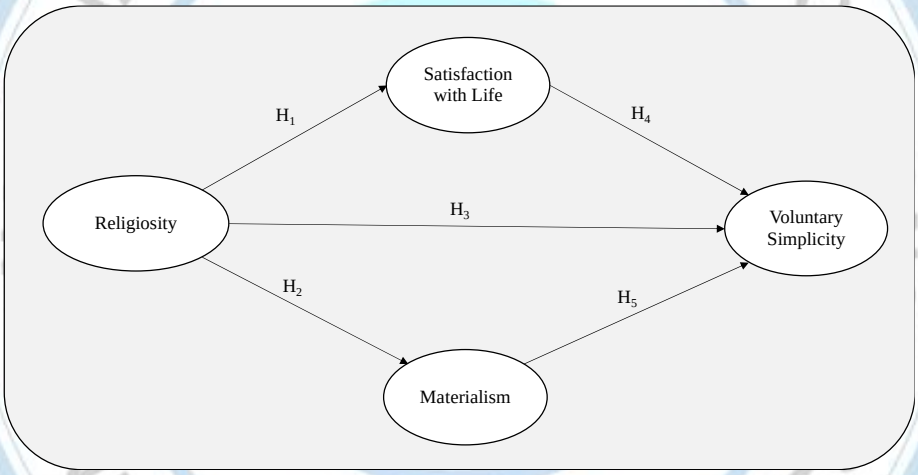


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

H_1: Religiosity has an effect on satisfaction with life.

H_2: Religiosity has an effect on materialism.

H_3: Religiosity has an effect on voluntary simplicity.

H_4: Satisfaction with life has an effect on voluntary simplicity.

H_5: Materialism has an effect on voluntary simplicity.

METHODOLOGY

Instruments

Previously validated and reliable constructs were used to test the hypothesized model. In order to measurethe constructs, Richins' (2004) materialism scale consisting of three dimensions – as success, centrality and happiness-, Diener et. al's (1985) unidimensional satisfaction with life scale, Shama's (1985) unidimensionel voluntary simplicity scale and Hoge's (1972) intrinsic religiosity scale were adapted. All statements were measured on 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Sample and Data Collection

Online survey in English was prepared and distributed through the multinational Master's degree class students. The country of origin of the sample ranged from Asia, to Africa, Europe and America including 26 countries. A total of 699 respondents voluntarily participated to the study. Apart from the construct related items, demographic profile of the respondents were also gathered.

The respondents' age were 18 to 65 years with a mean of 28.8 and standard deviation of 8.4 years. 52.9% of the respondents were female, whereas 43.9% were male and remaning 3.3% preferred not to state their gender. Majority of the sample was single (72.2%), only 27.8% was married. The sample could be defined as highly educated, because 88.1% of all participants hold at least associate degree, in which 59.7% of them had undergraduate and 22% master's degree. 56.8% of the respondants had a full time and 15.6% had a part time employment, whereas 25.8% was unemployed and 1.9% was retired. The sample covered different countries and continents, therefore due to comparison difficulties income level was not asked.

RESULTS

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The measurement model was tested with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) via IBM SPSS AMOS v25. Second order model was created for materialism and the hypothesized model indicated an acceptable fit considering the goodness of fit indicies ($\chi 2(263)$, N=699)=877.214 p<0.01; CMIN/df=3.335; CFI=0.933; TLI=0.923; NFI=0.907; IFI=0.933; RMSEA=0.058).

Table 1. Correlations of Constructs

	Voluntary Simplicity	Satisfaction with Life	Religiosity	Materialism
Voluntary Simplicity	0.75			
Satisfaction with Life	0.47***	0.72		
Religiosity	0.26***	0.38***	0.83	
Materialism	0.05	0.28***	0.29***	0.96

***: p<0.01; Diagonal values are the square root of AVEs

Findings supported the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs. Composite reliability (CR) values were found above 0.70, average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 and factor loadings of the items were above 0.50 (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981), see in Table 2. Also square root of AVEs were greater than inter-construct correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), see in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 2. CFA Results

Constructs		Items	Loading	CR	AVE
Materialism	Happiness	I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	0.79	0.97	0.91
		It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.	0.75		
		My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.	0.72		
	Success	I like to own things that impress people.	0.74		
		I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.	0.71		
		The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	0.60		
	Centrality	I like a lot of luxury in my life.	0.70		
		Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.	0.59		
Voluntary Simplicity		I am interested in personal growth more than economic growth.	0.76	0.76	0.56
		I believe that product function is usually more important than its style.	0.75		
		I am determined to have more control over my life as a consumer.	0.75		
		I believe in material simplicity. i.e, buying and consuming only what I need.	0.60		
		I believe in "small is beautiful". i.e., I prefer smaller cars over larger cars.	0.65		
Satisfaction with Life		I am satisfied with my life.	0.87	0.84	0.52
		In most ways my life is close to my ideal.	0.82		
		The conditions of my life are excellent.	0.73		
		So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	0.63		
		If I could live my life over I would change almost nothing.	0.51		
Religiosity		Nothing is as important to me as serving God as best I know how.	0.92	0.94	0.69
		One should seek God's guidance when making every important decision.	0.89		
		My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.	0.86		
		I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life.	0.83		
		My faith involves all of my life.	0.82		
		My faith sometimes restricts my actions.	0.74		
		In my life I experience the presence of Divine.	0.74		

$\chi 2(263), N=699)=877.214$ $p<0.01$; CMIN/df=3.335; CFI=0.933; TLI=0.923; NFI=0.907; IFI=0.933; RMSEA=0.058

Path Analysis

The hypothesized structural model was tested with path analysis and the results indicated an acceptable fit ($\chi 2(264), N=699)=895.977$ $p<0.01$; CMIN/df=3.394; CFI=0.931; TLI=0.921; NFI=0.905; IFI=0.931; RMSEA=0.059).

Table 3. Path Analysis Results

Hypotheses	β	Std. Error	Std. β	t-value
H_1: Religiosity→Satisfaction with Life	0.299	0.033	0.380	9.189***
H_2: Religiosity →Materialism	0.207	0.032	0.287	6.526***
H_3: Religiosity → Voluntary Simplicity	0.062	0.025	0.119	2.527*
H_4: Satisfaction with Life → Voluntary	0.297	0.033	0.447	8.382***
H_5: Materialism → Voluntary Simplicity	-	0.035	-0.099	-2.156*

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

According to path analysis (see Table 3), all the proposed hypotheses were supported. Religiosity had significant positive effects on both satisfaction with life (β=0.380), materialism (β=0.287) and voluntary simplicity (β=0.119). Satisfaction with life had a significant and positive effect on voluntary simplicity (β=0.447), whereas materialism had a negative effect on voluntary simplicity (β=-0.099).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the growing significance of pursuing satisfaction with life in today's consumption-driven society. The easy accessibility of technology has had adverse effects on individuals' ability to achieve their goals and experience a sense of fulfilment. To address this issue, the study adopted a theoretical framework centred around voluntary simplicity, which involves reducing consumption and prioritizing non-materialistic values.

Through the examination of determinants such as religiosity, materialism, and life satisfaction, the study aimed to explore the factors influencing voluntary simplicity. A total of 699 respondents from various countries participated in an online survey, providing valuable data for analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were employed to assess the validity of the theoretical structural equation model.

Based on the results obtained from path analysis, all the proposed hypotheses in this study were supported. The analysis revealed significant positive effects of religiosity on satisfaction with life, materialism, and voluntary simplicity. Additionally, satisfaction with life was found to have a significant and positive effect on voluntary simplicity, while materialism had a negative impact on voluntary simplicity.

This study reveals that religiosity has a significant impact on people's satisfaction with life, materialistic attitudes, and adoption of a simpler lifestyle. Specifically, individuals with higher levels of religiosity tend to experience greater satisfaction with life, exhibit higher materialistic tendencies.

First, they indicate that both satisfaction with life and religiosity have a positive influence on voluntary simplicity, suggesting that individuals who are more satisfied with their lives and have stronger religious beliefs are more likely to adopt a simpler lifestyle. Conversely, materialism was found to have a negative influence on voluntary simplicity, indicating the importance of reducing attachment to material possessions and desires.

Furthermore, the study found that religiosity plays a crucial role in explaining satisfaction with life. This finding suggests that religious beliefs and practises contribute to overall life satisfaction and may serve as a source of comfort, meaning and fulfilment.

Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of the determinants of voluntary simplicity and highlights the need to re-evaluate our priorities in an era of over-consumption. By recognising the positive effects of life satisfaction and religiosity, while acknowledging the harmful effects of materialism, individuals and society can strive for a more fulfilling and sustainable way of life.

A possible limitation of this study is the possibility that respondents may not give clear and accurate answers in the questionnaires, especially when it comes to sensitive issues such as religion. Future research should consider using alternative methods, such as qualitative interviews or more sophisticated survey techniques, to overcome possible challenges in collecting accurate and comprehensive data on sacred topics such as religion. We also recommend that academia can contribute by conducting further research on the determinants and effects of voluntary simplicity, conducting longitudinal studies, developing educational programmes and awareness campaigns, and conducting comparative studies across different cultures.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest".

Author Contributions

H.E. and Ş.K. conceived the study. A.B. developed the theoretical framework and performed the statistical analyses. Ş.K. conducted literature review. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.