
REFLECTIONS ON AFRICAN AND WESTERN WORLD
PRACTICES AND RESPONSES TO MATERIALISM

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Abstract

Materialism is a social problem which cuts across age, gender, educational, ethnic, racial, national and continental strata of human existence. The misconception of materialism as a way of life is rapidly gaining ground in Africa. This is promoting bribery and corruption in many sectors and has destroyed many lives, societal moral uprightness, and educational standard. This paper analyzed African and Western world practices of materialism from a social point of view. The paper argues that socio-civic proactive response is capable of tackling materialism and corruption in Africa, if the school, the teachers teaching the subjects, the government and entire society are faithful to the tasks. It is recommended that there is the need to de-emphasize undue recognition of material acquisitions in the society. Also, the curriculum developers and experts in socio-civic education, the teachers of socio-civic education and parents should pay quality attention to acquisitive values.

Keywords: *Materialism, corruption, society, socio-civic response*

Introduction

The contemporary African society is pervaded with corruption and materialism. The greed of humans makes them pursue material things of the world at the expense of moral and spiritual values. Materialism is a concept that explains individuals' love for material acquisitions at the expense of moral and spiritual values. However, choice of material possessions in life is for individuals and this is very important in the physical, spiritual and moral aspects of the societal life. In contemporary times, deceit of material possessions as source of joy and satisfaction in life, lack of contentment, worldliness, peer pressure, laziness, ignorance of the consequences of acts and inordinate desire for material possessions have been promoting the high rate of materialistic consciousness among the people globally and in Africa particularly.

The misconception of materialism as a way of life is rapidly gaining ground in Africa. This is promoting bribery and corruption in many sectors and is destroying many lives and societal moral uprightness. According to Kunhiyop (2008), this act also increases social vices, dishonesty, and selfishness in the society. Material acquisitions that people are desperately longing to acquire in the contemporary African society are big cars, latest clothes, plots of land, attractive castles, mansions, huge amount of money in local and foreign bank accounts and fame but to mention a few. To achieve these material possessions, some people become involved in kidnapping, cultism, money rituals, "419", fake business, armed robbery, prostitution and sex trafficking, "yahoo plus" and many of such. These attitudes are reported on mass media.

Materialism as one of the banes of the society today cut across age, gender, educational, ethnic, racial, national and continental strata of human existence. However, there has been a tendency to localize this ethical issue to a particular group of people like Africans, because of the noticeable negative impacts on the populace. This paper, however, looks beyond the shores of the African continent and preys into materialism in the Western world. The study adopts Marsha L. Richins' response to materialism from the Western world because of its wider influence in the Western literature on materialism.

The thesis of the paper is that socio-civic studies are capable of tackling corruption and materialism in Africa; if all concerned individuals are faithful to the tasks. Explaining from Marsha L. Richins' postulation of materialism is argued that some aspects of African concept of materialism are in congruence with the Western practices of materialism and some responses relevant to the sustenance of societal uprightness for correcting a society that is desperately materialistic at the expense of all moral and spiritual values. The specific objectives are: to discuss western concept of materialism as presented by Richins and African concept of materialism; to compare the rationale, types, approaches, effects and curtailment of materialism in Africa with those in the Western world as presented by Richins. This paper is limited to materialism because it considers corruption as an offshoot of materialism.

This paper takes an analytical position made use of analytical method to make critical contemplation and appraisal of Western and African concepts of materialism. The claims come from the interviews and observations the writer made to gather primary information from the field on African concept of materialism. Richins' materialism value scale was adopted to design the instrument. The instrument centered on the three major components: success, centrality, and happiness. It also found out the number of material objects people own as a sign of success in life. The general information obtained from the interview guide consists of the following: name, tribe, nationality, sex, religion, and profession. Another section requested participants' views on rationale, type, approaches, effects, and curtailment of materialism. Due to the nature of the study, purposive sampling technique was employed to select eighty-one respondents from five countries in West Africa; the respondents came from fifteen tribes. Owing to the heterogeneity of the population, civil servants, artisans, ministers of the gospel, traders and farmers in the selected tribes of West Africa were interviewed. They included Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Abua, Ibibio, Kalabari, Egede, Fulani, Clarro, Sabe, Zuru and a host of others. The writer also made use of the literature in the libraries for current theoretical information on the subject matter.

Theoretical Standpoints

Materialism is a philosophy of the Western culture which holds that only the material world exists. The concept of materialism states that it is money, not God that makes the world go round. This implies that money is the basic strength of human action and the end of life is to acquire material goods (Storkey, 1995). On this view, money is supposed to supply human values, when actually it represents them. Money cannot buy joy, life and other things that are paramount to life. Similar to this position is that of Srikant (2013) who observed that materialism has been considered by scholars from various fields of study such as economics, anthropology, consumer behaviour and marketing, psychology, political science and social sciences. It is associated with a tendency that considers material acquisitions and physical comfort as more important over and above spiritual values. He explained the concept of materialism from two different perspectives, namely socio-cultural and individual perspectives. As a socio-cultural concept, materialism is a socio-cultural phenomenon and refers to cultures in which the majority of the people in the society appreciate material acquisitions. Materialism, as an individual perspective, refers to identifying a person who values material acquisitions very highly.

Furthermore, in the view of Uebersax (2016), materialism is more than the sense of greed and desperate desire for material acquisitions, but committed materialistic view of life. Materialism entails “sensory pleasure as the supreme good (*summum bonum*), health, prosperity, material possessions” that have worth of promoting physical enjoyment of life. The ultimate basis of right and wrong is physical pleasure. Hence, this view considers materialism as the highest good in life that people desire to achieve. This is evident in African context as well.

Similarly, materialism is related to capitalism from the economic point of view. Dex (1995), observed that materialism from this point of view refers to an exploitative form of capitalism. It also involved the infusion of economic, political and social life that is related to the owners of the means of production and wage labourers. Capitalism in Marx’s theory “was an intermediate stage of the economic organization before socialism and communism” (213). According to

Marxists, capitalism is a bad way of organizing economic life and makes the rich to suppress the masses. It increases poverty and plight of the poor and makes some people rich at the expense of others because it encourages exploitation, greed, and selfishness. This is noticeable in Africa. Thus, there is the need for justice in the nation. The state should ensure equal distribution of incomes among the citizenry. Capitalism allows accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few who are influential in the society while the masses own little or nothing.

Storkey (1995), Srikant (2013), and Uebersax (2016) are similar in their dispositions to materialism. These scholars affirmed that materialism has to do with individuals and societal values for material acquisitions for satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness in life. Materialism can be considered from social, cultural and religious perspectives, depending on the nature of the study. This study considers materialism from the social point of view. Thus, materialism is the importance that the young and the old, the rich and the poor people attach to the material acquisitions at the expense of love for God and fellow human beings.

Western Concept of Materialism

Materialism in the Western world has been examined by different scholars but as noted earlier the writer adopts the response of materialism in the Western world as presented by Marshal L. Richins. She is a distinguished scholar and lecturer at the University of Missouri Western Concept of Materialism is a long topic of social and philosophical concern. Materialism more than other variables describes individuals' real and desired relationship with economic materials. It relates to the satisfaction people gain from the acquisition and possession of materials. Richins approaches materialism from three major components which are acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success (Richins & Rudmin, 1994). The term, 'materialism,' has been used to refer to a variety of behaviours or orientations. This means, materialism is viewed as a pattern of behaviours involving greed and conspicuous consumption. These three components are summarized below:

Acquisition Centrality: This means materialists centre their lives on the acquisition of possessions. Materialism is a way of life in which material acquisition serves as a goal and plans to achieve in life. It gives meaning to life and provides bearing for daily life. Materialists worship material possessions and the pursuit of possessions takes the place of religious value in their lives and also influences their ways of life (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Acquisition as the Pursuit of Happiness: Possession and its acquisition are central to materialists because they consider them as essential factors to their satisfaction and well-being in life. Materialism is “an orientation emphasizing possessions and money for personal happiness and social progress” (304). Other people apart from the materialists also get involved to some extent in the pursuit of happiness, but the pursuit of happiness through the acquisition of material things differentiates them (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Possession-Defined Success: Materialists judge their success and others' success by the quantity and quality of what they acquired. Materialists consider themselves as successful to the extent that they can possess materials that express these desired statuses (Richins & Dawson, 1992). According to Richins (2004), values are prescriptive beliefs about desirable goals in life and ways of life and may be the most important belief that a person holds in life. Thus, material values relate to the importance ascribed to material possessions and wealth in achieving major life goals. The pursuit of one goal in life requires the neglect of some other goals. Material values are contrary to spiritual and interpersonal values. Material values are represented by the importance one places on economic and physical security. The values of individuals in life determine their responses to materialism.

The rationale for Materialism: From the perceptions of Richins, some factors are identified as rationale for materialism in the western world. They include, (i) Financial security and worth, the status it affords, appearance-related reasons, or utilitarian reason foster materialism. (ii) Greed: The conspicuous desire of man to

express self-identity to others and impress the society makes some people to be guilty of the undue desire of material acquisitions. (iii) Fame: This deals with status seeking. This is what economists called non-utilitarian value. (iv) Family structure: This is a factor that influences material values in the society. (v). Family's economic status and, (vi) influences of media (Richins, 1991; Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Types of Material Possessions: Materialism is value that represents the individuals' view on the place of material possessions in their lives. Possessions were categorized by material/object type. These include: (i) Sentimental objects: This shows associations with important others. Examples of such are gift and photo albums. (ii) Assets: house, money and investment property (iii) Transportation: cars (iv) Practical objects – Electronic equipment such as personal computers, television sets, and furniture. (v) Material related to personal appearance – Clothing, jewelry, and shoes. (vi) Extension of self – trophies and souvenirs. (vii) Hedonism: Going to recreational centres (Richins, 1994).

Approaches to Acquiring Material Possessions: Richins stated approaches to acquiring material possessions and these means were discovered from interaction with her works. (i) Hard work: Some people engage in hard work to acquire material possessions in life. (ii) Magic: People acquire material possessions through magical power. (iii) Crime, gambling, and fraudulent acts: These means are also used to acquire material possessions (Richins, 1999; Richins & Chaplin, 2015).

Effects of Materialism: Materialism has both positive and negative effects. Positive Effects of materialism in the Western context include (i) Improvement on quality of product and living (ii) Hardworking: Materialists might work harder to earn more so that they can acquire more materials that they desire to acquire. (iii) Provision of financial security for their family members (iv) Higher standard of living (v) High levels of consumption by materialists can increase the wealth of business institutions, increasing their ability to make capital improvements and invest in research and development, which in turn leads to greater

productivity, technological breakthroughs, and higher living standard. (vi) Momentary happiness, excitement, and pleasure to the materialists which make them have a sense of superiority over and above other people. Negative Effects: Materialism has negative effects on materialists and society. When people place high value on material goods, many unhealthy things are bound to happen and these are fear, guilt, and anxiety, feelings of envy among materialists as they shop and see the possessions of other; materialists are wasteful, materialism disrupts earth resources; less happy than other people, poor interpersonal relationship and lack of satisfaction (Richins & Rudmin, 1994, Richins, 1999; Richins & Chaplin, 2015).

Curtailement of Materialism: Consequent to Richins' concept of materialism, three major ways of curtailing materialism are teaching, contented life and parental roles (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Richins & Chaplin, 2015).

African Concept of Materialism

African concept of materialism was examined in the field work from three major components namely, acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness and possession-defined success, as identified by Richins. Africans from different perspectives describe materialism in their dialect with different expressions. Materialism has been in Africa since many years ago but the degree was not high compared to contemporary times. People have been acquiring material possessions over and above societal interests. All the expressions collected from the field work emphasize that materialism is an undue crave for material possessions over and above moral and spiritual values. The existing literature corroborates the above position that materialism is undue love to acquire material possessions over and above moral and spiritual values. This agreed with Uebersax (2016), in the conceptualization of materialism who considered materialism as the sense of greed and desperate desire for material acquisitions.

Acquisition Centrality: Africans also attach materialism to acquisition centrality. The Yorubas express this by saying *ohun ti ndun ni nipó lórọ̀nì, ológún ẹ̀rú ku, aso rẹ̀ jẹ̀ eyọ̀ kan*. Meaning what

concerns a person is the centrality of his or her heart. One with twenty slaves died and his cloth is just one. This means materialists value material acquisitions over above other goals in life. Acquisition of material possessions is the concern of materialists over moral and spiritual values.

Acquisition as the Pursuit of Happiness: Happiness is indispensable in life and people pursue happiness in Africa. But the materialists consider the pursuit of material acquisitions as a thing of joy and satisfaction. In an interview with Tutu (2017), he said that a Fulani man who wakes up in the morning and observes increase in number in his flock will be happy and feels satisfied. Milking of the cattle will make him satisfied and fulfilled in life. It is believed that acquisitions of material possessions give happiness to the people.

Possession-Defined Success: The Africans attach success in life to the number of children, quality, and quantity of material acquisitions of man (Awogbade, 2017). For instance, it is usually expressed in Yoruba that: *Olówó ni Aláséyọrí, ohun ti ówó báse tì ilẹ̀ ni yo gbé.* It means the rich man succeeds in life, whatever problems money cannot solve would remain unsolved.

Types of Material Possessions: African material possession was categorized by adopting Richins' categorization style as follows: (i) Sentimental objects. African people appreciate and value gifts in their relationship with one another. (ii) House is indispensable in life and every responsible citizen desires to live in a good house. However, the materialists are fond of having many houses at the expense of other peoples' success and destiny. But it becomes materialism when the one builds is not conscious of other peoples' life and welfare, and spiritual and moral values are not given ultimate attention. (iii) Money: Money is the first and foremost material that materialists long to acquire (Okunlola, 2017). Thus, the materialists do everything possible to get money and preserve it. Some youths, attach inestimable value to money. This reflects in their slogan "Na money matter." (iv) Investment Property (v) Material related to personal appearance includes clothes, jewelry, and extension of self. Extension of self: This includes (a) souvenirs

(b) Celebrations which involves dining and wining and inviting entertainers to display. These celebrations include burial, naming, house-warming, marriage, festivals and several anniversary celebrations. (c) Chieftaincy Title. (vi) Hedonism: This involves going to bars, hotels to drink and have fun with the opposite sex at the working hours of the day. (vii) Charm (*ògùn*) is another material possession that Africans long to acquire (Awogbade, 2017 & Oguah, 2017).

The rationale for Materialism in Africa: Materialism is evident in the African context and the paper identified six major factors as rationale for materialism in Africa. They include (i) Financial Security: In the African context, this goes beyond the owners; it extends to the children and relatives. The undue desire to leave quality substance as an inheritance for the children makes some people be materialistic. (ii) Greed is a major factor that promotes materialism in Africa. It is expressed as ungodliness, selfishness, the natural tendency in every human being and an inordinate desire. (iii) Fame as a factor that promotes materialism in Africa involves status seeking. It is expressed by respondents as seeking for high social status, to show superiority complex over and above other people in the society. (iv) Poverty: In any family where abject poverty is prominent; some people will make efforts to escape by all available means which can make to be guilty of materialism. (v) Influence of the media is a factor that is fostering materialism in Africa: The information one sees and hears has effects on his or her behaviour. The inability of individuals to adequately process and internalize the information received can make someone become materialistic (Oguah, 2017 & Okunlola, 2017).

Approaches of Acquiring Material Possessions: Africans use different approaches to achieve material possessions; some ways are ethical while some are not as found below: Hard work, inheritance, gifts and number of Children are ideal ways of material acquisition. However, fraudulent acts and mystical power or magic are unethical ways of acquiring material possessions and they are fairly common in the African context. Magic and medicine are the reality of life in Africa and can be used by man to conquer his

environment (Awogbade, 2017). Denial of findings above is a denial of the African reality of mystical power.

Effects of Materialism: Materialism has positive and negative aspects of the materialists and the society. Positive Effects include Improvement in Quality of Life, Hard work, provision of financial security for the children and family members, the standard of living, Job Opportunities. Negative Effects of Materialism on the materialists and society are, wastefulness, disturbances in social order due to social vices attached to materialism, lack of marital satisfaction, promotion of cultism, materialism brings damage and loss of lives, (Yaw, 2017 & Awogbade, 2017).

Curtailement of Materialism: The curtailement of materialism is categorized into three major parts based on the empirical findings and are also supported by theoretical findings and they are: Educational approach: This involves socio-civic and the teaching of good character through stories, songs, customs, and taboos. Religious Approach: This centres on the roles of the church, mosque and ATR adherents as religious bodies to teach moral and spiritual value in the society among their adherents. Legal Approach: This involves the legal function of the government at all levels to curtail fraudulent means of material acquisitions in the society. Community Punitive Approach: This involves the roles of every community in the African context to curtail unethical ways of material acquisitions in the society. Africans are community oriented and the community power is employed to address the problem of immoral acts that is ravaging the society (Okunlola, 2017 & Dopamu, 2009: 16-17).

Comparative Analysis of Western and African Practices of Materialism

Materialism is evident in the contemporary African society as in Western context, which Richins' study revealed. The greedy nature of humans makes them pursue material possessions of the world at the expense of moral and spiritual values. Materialism promotes social vices in the society with implications on morality, as drawn from Western and African concepts of materialism. The positions

of Western and Africa on materialism are similar in some areas and differ in certain aspects, as discussed in the study.

In the analysis and comparison of African and Western concepts of materialism, it was revealed that there are large similarities in types such as cloth, house, investment property, money, hedonism, and jewelry, except in sentimental objects such as gift and photo albums. On rationale, only family structure and poverty separate Western world's rationale of materialism from that of Africa. On approaches, the mystical power is more prominent in Africa than in the Western world. On effects, association with cultism, loss, and damage of lives and difficulty to meet the family needs, separate the effects of materialism in Western context to that of Africa. On curtailment, African community's punitive approach is quite different from that of Western context. The material value that an individual desires to acquire shapes his or her life, be it white or black. Consequent on this, the material possessions that individuals' value shape their lives and vision in life. Materialism promises satisfaction and happiness but it can only give momentary excitement in both contexts. Both contexts consider materialism as an unhealthy practice and as destructive to the materialists and societal uprightness. The materialists are desperate in the attempt toward material acquisitions and do not consider the interest of others generally.

In sum, the following facts are deductible from the findings. Materialism is not a problem of owning or not owning material possessions or wealth; it is the problem of priorities for material acquisitions over and above moral and spiritual values. Materialism brings momentary happiness to the materialists, generally. Happiness and satisfaction in life do not depend on material acquisitions. Materialism promises happiness but it can only provide emotional excitement and not happiness. Money and material possessions cannot buy happiness in life. To a large extent, Western world's postulation of materialism is in congruence with some aspects of African concept of materialism.

Corrective Roles of Socio-Civic Studies in Tackling Materialism and Corruption in Africa

The curtailment approaches from both the Western world and Africa have pervading implications for corrective roles of socio-civic studies in tackling materialism and corruption.

The roles of socio-civic studies cannot be overemphasized in the development of any nation. The imperative of the studies in the development of moral and spiritual values in Africa as a society that is societal oriented will go a long way to tackle the materialism and corruption that is affecting all facets of the life. Falade (2008) affirms that “civic education aims at developing in the citizens the spirit of effective citizenship and loyalty to the nation” (19). Also, social studies is a core subject taught in schools from primary to Junior secondary levels, and it has the potential of ‘catching them young’. It teaches the young people how to relate to other people in a good manner and promote peaceful co-existence. These subjects are indispensable in the school curriculum because they state how man will relate to social problems (Ogoh, 2008). Therefore, in spite of social vices attached to materialism and man’s involvement in the menace, socio-civic studies can be of great assistance to curtail undue desire for material acquisition in the society.

There are many approaches for tackling materialism, but for this conference and audience, educational approach is more pertinent. On tackling the rationale of materialism, fame, greed, influence of media are fostering materialism in Africa and there is the need to de-emphasis undue recognition of material acquisitions in the society. Those who bless the lives of others should be celebrated. Also, God-fearing upbringing is most important in life than leaving material possessions behind for children. Tackling the type of materialism, the society should disorientate levels of one’s material possessions as a way of life. The society should expose those who are found of stealing government’s treasury.

Exposing consequence, there is the need to expose consequences of materialism such as madness, premature death, loss of children and many others through mass media and social media.

Presenting the alternative for tackling materialism and corruption: The followings are expected of socio-civic education: The experts in socio-civic education should produce books and articles that will inculcate good moral character into the students with particular reference to the acquisitive value. Akintola (1999:209) corroborated the position that good character is the most significant and distinguished virtue of man. It contains all other moral and ethical virtues. Therefore, there is the need to teach the virtue of good character in all primary and secondary schools. This is believed to curtail the menace of materialism that cuts across many cultures, ethnic groups, and societies in the African society. Therefore, there is the need for contextualization of African norms, values, and practices in the formal educational system of the African society. This can be achieved in socio-civic classes.

The curriculum developers and experts should review and structure socio-civic educations with quality attention to acquisitive values. This will enhance the generalizability of the knowledge to nooks and crannies of the African society. The personality of the teachers teaching socio-civic studies should be pleasant and worthy of emulation for the students. Their moral status and demonstration of good acquisitive values should serve as motivation for students' disposition to material acquisition.

The teachers of socio-civic education should select good methods to teach the students. Effective methods of teaching are indispensable for productive teaching-learning experience. If the teachers are highly intelligent and the teaching facilities are available but the choice of teaching methods is ineffective, the students will not understand the contents of the studies. Expected transformation of the character of the students will not be achieved. The teachers of socio-civic education should motivate the schools, parents, and society to use media and social media to promote a change of character toward material acquisition in the society. The impacts of mass and social media are enormous in shaping people's attitudes on material acquisition. News bulletins, reportage, documentaries, films, videos, and music are vital elements in moral formation which must be thoroughly censored to avoid importation of dangerous and destructive ideology to African morality and spiritual values.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this opening paper, the writer hopes that the paper has sensitized other scholars and conferees into examining materialism from African and Western contexts as presented by Marsha L. Richins. The paper submits that, generally, people interact with material possessions differently in life. The material possessions that individuals' value shapes their lives and visions. The values of people inform their reaction to materialism. Materialism promises satisfaction and happiness but it can only give momentary excitement. Socio-civic studies are capable of tackling materialism and corruption in the contemporary African society, if and when all hands are the deck to faithfully implement and practice this profession. It is recommended that there is the need to de-emphasis undue recognition of material acquisitions in the society. Also, the curriculum developers and experts in socio-civic education, the teachers of socio-civic education and parents should pay quality attention to acquisitive values in the contemporary society.

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