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Original article

Leisure, materialism, well-being and the environment[☆]

Loisirs, matérialisme, bien-être et environnement

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. – There are increasing concerns that people in modern societies spend too much of their leisure time on activities such as shopping and watching television and that this undermines human well-being and damages the environment.

Objectives. – This paper explores the relationships between materialism, environmental values and life satisfaction on the one hand, and different forms of leisure activities on the other. In particular, it addresses the differences between serious or intrinsically motivating leisure activities and casual or extrinsically motivating activities.

Method. – Three survey studies were conducted among 16 to 25-year olds in the UK ($n = 338$), Spain ($n = 417$) and China ($n = 961$).

Results. – Reading books was negatively related to materialism and positively to environmental values and behaviours. Playing sports was associated with higher well-being. Moreover, materialism was negatively associated with environmental values and behaviour. Life satisfaction was higher among those with stronger environmental values and weaker materialism.

Conclusion. – The findings suggest that sustainable lifestyles, characterised by higher well-being, higher environmental concern and behaviour and lower materialism can be found in each nation. Moreover, such lifestyles are associated with different kinds of leisure engagement. Examining the potentially positive role of reading books rather than being immersed in screen time deserves further attention.

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R É S U M É

Introduction. – On s'inquiète de plus en plus que les gens des sociétés modernes passent trop de temps libre à des activités telles que faire du shopping et regarder la télévision et que cela porte atteinte au bien-être humain et nuit à l'environnement.

Objectifs. – Cet article explore les relations entre le matérialisme, les valeurs environnementales et la satisfaction à l'égard de la vie, d'une part, et les formes de loisirs, d'autre part. En particulier, il aborde les différences entre les activités de loisir sérieux ou intrinsèquement motivés et les activités occasionnelles ou extrinsèquement motivés.

Méthode. – Trois études ont été menées auprès des jeunes de 16 à 25 ans au Royaume-Uni ($n = 338$), en Espagne ($n = 417$) et en Chine ($n = 961$).

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Résultats. – La lecture de livres était constamment liée négativement au matérialisme et positivement aux valeurs et aux comportements environnementaux. Faire du sport était associé à un bien-être supérieur. De plus, le matérialisme était négativement associé aux valeurs et aux comportements environnementaux. La satisfaction de vie était plus élevée parmi ceux avec des valeurs environnementales plus fortes et un matérialisme plus faible.

Conclusion. – Les résultats suggèrent que des modes de vie durables, caractérisés par un bien-être, une préoccupation et un comportement environnementaux plus élevés, et un matérialisme inférieur peuvent être trouvés dans chaque nation. De plus, de tels modes de vie sont associés à différents types de loisirs. Examiner le rôle potentiellement positif de la lecture de livres plutôt que d'être immergé dans le temps passé à l'écran mérite une plus grande attention.

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1. Introduction

People in modern day societies are inundated with affordable consumer goods, consumer opportunities and advertisement (Kasser, 2005). Modern lifestyles are often characterised by indoor activities and technologies and a disconnection from nature and outdoors activities (Kellert, 2002; Louv, 2005). According to UK statistics 98% of 5–18 year-olds in 2002 used computers for work, games and the internet and in 2003 90% of 15–34-year olds owned/used a mobile phone (ONS, 2003). In 2015, the average person in the UK aged 4 or older spent more than 3.5 hours a day watching television. This number is slightly lower than the previous two years due to an increase in the use of mobile devices (Ofcom, 2016). The intense use of modern technologies for work and leisure has negative impact on the environment as well as human well-being as such there are increasing calls for the encouragement of more sustainable lifestyles (Jackson, 2017; Kasser, 2009). This paper presents findings from three correlational studies conducted in the UK, Spain and China among 16–25-year olds, which examine the link between materialism, environmental values and life satisfaction and explore whether there are any leisure activities that are associated with low materialism, strong environmental values and high life satisfaction. Identification of such activities may provide new ways to engage with consumers to promote more sustainable lifestyles.

Sustainable lifestyles are characterised by less materialism, higher environmental values and higher well-being. The literature from environmental sciences tends to refer to sustainable lifestyles in terms of patterns of consumption, which meet people's needs, and provides a good quality of life without jeopardising the needs of future generations (Jackson & Smith, 2018; Mont & Bleischwitz, 2007). In sociology lifestyles are understood as a collection of social practices, which represent a particular way of life and give substance to self-identity (Evans & Jackson, 2007; Giddens, 1991). The use of the concept in psychology is rare but Heijns and colleagues referred to it in terms of manifest behaviours and latent components, such as values, attitudes, and opinions (Heijns, Smeets, Carton, & van Gemert, 2005). What these different conceptualisations have in common is that they suggest it is meaningful to group lifestyles on the basis of overt behaviours and underlying social-psychological and contextual variables. A sustainable lifestyle would manifest itself in a pattern of behaviours associated with high well-being, low materialism and strong environmental values. This might, for instance, involve adopting pro-environmental behaviours such as recycling or buying eco-products. But what does it mean for leisure engagement? Are people who are less materi-

alistic and more environmentally aware also more likely to engage with some leisure activities than others? Are they less likely to spend time watching television or playing computer games and more likely to spend time outdoors, reading books, or volunteering?

Goal, value and flow theories (Csikszentmihályi, 2004; Richins, 2004) would suggest that people with stronger materialistic and weaker environmental values, spend more time watching television or sitting behind computer screens and experience lower well-being whereas others who hold stronger environmental values, weaker materialistic values, spend more time outdoors, playing sports or volunteering and experience higher well-being.

2. Materialism and environmental values

Schwartz (2006) and Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) suggest that human values can be grouped into ten motivation domains, which fall onto two dimensions: self-enhancement versus self-transcendence values and conservatism versus openness-to-change values. These dimensions reflect individual differences in the relative importance people place on values along those dimensions. The first dimension, is of particular importance here, and suggest that people can be distinguished on the basis of the relative importance they place on values such as influence, success, wealth, pleasure and money (self-enhancement) versus those who place more importance on values such as equality, protecting the environment, a world of beauty and social justice (self-transcendence). Along similar lines the aspiration index (based on self-determination theory; Deci & Ryan, 2000) distinguishes two types of goals that drive people's behaviour: intrinsic goals such as community, affiliation, self-acceptance growth and extrinsic goals such as conformity, popularity and financial success (Grouzet et al., 2005). Intrinsic goals tend to be more important to people than extrinsic goals. However, some people are more likely to be driven by extrinsic goals such as materialism than others.

Materialism is defined as "the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods in achieving major life goals or desired states" (Richins, 2004, p. 210). Materialism is a clear example of an extrinsic goal or self-enhancement value as it is characterized by a striving for extrinsic financial and material rewards. Environmental values, on the other hand, are good examples of self-transcendent values as they are characterised by a concern for others—other people, other species and the natural environment. Environmental values have been conceptualised in many different ways (Dietz, Fitzgerald, & Shwom, 2005) including the cognitive beliefs people hold about the causes, solutions and severity of environmental problems (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000) as well as affective attitudes towards nature (Kals & Maes, 2002). In this paper, we understand them in a broad sense including both of these concepts.

There is significant evidence that materialism is associated with weaker environmental values and behaviours, operationalized

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