

RESEARCH ARTICLE

I (do not) consume; therefore, I am: Investigating materialism and voluntary simplicity through a moderated mediation model

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Abstract

With the burgeoning of consumer culture and materialism on a global scale, a counter-culture movement, namely, voluntary simplicity, is slowly gaining currency. Extant research reveals a degree of disparateness in the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity. Drawing on the value-basis theory and anti-consumption research, the current study attempts at an unorthodox study of the fledgling culture of anti-consumption in urban India. The paper empirically examines the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity in India. This research, through an experimental study followed by a sample survey, conducted among urban Indian consumers, examines how satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, and individualism interact with materialistic values to eventually influence voluntary simplicity attitudes. In Study 1 ($N = 74$ working professionals), we experimentally triggered materialistic aspirations and evaluated their effects on voluntary simplicity in comparison to a control condition. In Study 2 ($N = 315$), individuals self-rated their materialistic values, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, cultural orientation, and voluntary simplicity attitude. Our study, contrary to the suggestions in the existing literature, demonstrates that materialists espouse voluntary simplicity attitudes when environmental degradation around them directly impacts their health, wealth, and well-being. In addition to the positive direct effect, satisfaction with life and self-efficacy serially mediate the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity, providing a welcome divergence from dark-sided conceptualizations of materialism. Our results help global marketers, and public policymakers better understand the interaction between materialistic values and sustainable consumption attitudes, in the developing country perspective.

KEYWORDS

anti-consumption, India, individualism, materialism, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, voluntary simplicity

1 | INTRODUCTION

“vihaya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumānśh charati niḥspṛiḥaḥ
nirmamo nirahankārah sa śhāntim adhigachchhati”

Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 2, Verse 71

“That person, who gives up all material desires and lives free from a sense of greed, proprietorship, and egoism attains perfect peace” (*translation by Mukundananda, 2013, pp. 88–89*).

Simplicity has been a byword of the traditional Indian world view (Patel, 2014). Renunciation of material possession to attain Moksha is the *summum bonum* of such a traditional life, and possession is believed to be at the root of all miseries (Ingalls, 1957). However, the undeniable presence of contemporary consumer culture has changed the social fabric of India (Venkatesh, 1994) and possibly of many other emerging markets. Ipsos, a market research firm, observes that Indian and Chinese consumers lead the global rankings on materialism with 58% and 71% of respondents, espousing materialistic values against a world average of 34% (Panda, 2013). While materialism is persistent and in conflict with traditional values (Eckhardt & Mahi, 2012), anti-consumption is emerging as an alternative discourse to such consumerist values (Khan & Lee, 2014).

Anti-consumption scholars have indicated that developing countries provide the most fertile research base to help in our understanding of anti-consumption (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010). The present research responds to this call and proposes a nuanced understanding of the evolving anti-consumption practices in the developing world, and its holistic implications on the contemporary marketing discourse. More specifically, the paper looks at the emerging anti-consumption movement in India within the bigger narrative of her consumer culture.

Voluntary simplicity (Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009) is one of the most conspicuous forms of anti-consumption practices and involves cultivating self-reliance and taking control over the everyday life by reducing dependence in the market and its various offerings (Huneke, 2005). Voluntary simplicity evolves as a personal construct and aims to refine, reduce, or reject the overall consumption, in search of a simplified and happier life. It is relevant in the context of Eastern civilizations like India, where the social tradition encourages “life through renunciation, in which we covet nothing and therefore achieve real freedom” (Patel, 2014, pp. 327). However, prior research investigating the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity has presented results, which are far from being unanimous (Cherrier, 2010). While Shaw and Moraes (2009) call for exploring how voluntary simplifiers negotiate the tension between voluntary simplicity and market engagement in virtual unison, Tang and Hinsch (2018) draw attention towards exploring how high (vs. low) materialists differ in terms of proenvironmental practices. The current study, responding to these explicit calls,

invokes value-basis theory (Stern & Dietz, 1994) of attitude formation to empirically examine the relationship between materialist values and environmentally oriented anti-consumption practices like voluntary simplicity in India.

The current work propagates the central theme that normative influences in the environment drive anti-consumption values among Indians. Recent studies in the domain of positive psychology suggest that satisfaction with life (Kasser, 2009; Verdugo, 2012), and self-efficacy (Smith-Sebasto & Fortner, 1994) influence sustainable attitudes among individuals, which are vital ingredients for a simpler lifestyle with reduced consumption (Iwata, 2001). Furthermore, anti-consumption is culturally situated (Cherrier, Black, & Lee, 2011), and cultural values like Individualism influence sustainable behaviors (Cho, Thyroff, Rapert, Park, & Lee, 2013). Extending the thesis of Baker, Moschis, Ong, and Pattanapanyasat (2013) to better elucidate materialism and its consequences, the current study proposes a moderated mediation model involving satisfaction with life and self-efficacy as the mediating variables and individualism as the moderating variable, in the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity. We test the central propositions through a multi-stage research design carried across two studies among a section of Indian consumers.

We, in the current study, addresses several gaps in the literature. First, we demonstrate empirical evidence of a positive relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity in the context of an emerging market using the consumer cuing paradigm (Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, & Bodenhausen, 2012). Secondly, through a cross-sectional study, we identify the boundary conditions that affect the positive relationship between materialism and satisfaction with life. These findings, in particular, advance a compelling counter-intuitive argument in consumer research, by proposing and empirically validating an enabling role played by materialism in promoting life satisfaction and sustainable behaviors, such as voluntary simplicity. Marketers need to understand such a process to decipher consumers’ value structure, its underlying motivation and thus, develop promotion strategies leveraging on the anti-consumption belief that lower consumption will pay off and eventually be rewarding in terms of a more sustainable lifestyle.

In the following section, we outline the theory guiding our key hypotheses, following which we report results from studies conducted with middle-class Indian consumers. We then discuss the findings and implications, which are followed by limitations and directions for future research.

2 | THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

The lure of success in the new millennium’s globally competitive market propels multi-national corporations to promote materialism worldwide. This has eventually been catapulted to the centrestage and rendered importance to possessions for individuals in developing countries. At the same time, developing market consumers are becoming increasingly aware of societal and environmental consequences of consumption (Strizhakova & Coulter, 2013), and are in

the process of taking initial steps towards simplifying their lives by realigning or reducing consumption (Walia, 2015). Before this becomes an overwhelmingly inaccessible phenomenon, like in the developed world, marketers need to understand how consumers in emerging markets balance the conflicting practices between a penchant for materialism and a proclivity towards consumption control. Drawing on the value-basis theory, we speculate that in a typical developing country like India, materialistic individuals may espouse the attitude of voluntary simplicity. The following segment introduces the underlying theoretical framework and justifies its adoption in the study.

2.1 | Value-basis theory

Value-basis theory (Stern & Dietz, 1994) is the primary theoretical framework for this research to analyze the correlation between materialistic values and environment-oriented anti-consumption attitudes like voluntary simplicity. Values are the lynchpin to understand and predict the notions of attitudes and behaviors (Rohan, 2000). The 10 general value types (Schwartz, 1992) presented in a circumflex model by arranging the values in competing dimensions of self-transcendence versus self-enhancement; and conservation versus openness to change has been another reference point for this study. After the work of Schwartz (1992), Stern and Dietz (1994) proposed value-basis theory, which provides a framework for environmental attitude formation, based on the values that individuals hold. Value-basis theory propounds a constructive approach towards attitude formation, where attitudes are "constructed in a process in which individuals attempt to take account of their values within a value-expectancy calculus that economizes cognitive effort" (Stern & Dietz, 1994). The theory contends that people form their attitudes based on the expectations about the object of the attitude. Beliefs about the likely outcomes of behavior and how these outcomes are going to affect the particular sets of people or things they value influence attitude formation. Social contexts, such as reference groups, mass media, and social movements, also strongly influence the process of attitude construction.

Valued objects can be oriented around three sources of concern: The self, other human beings, and all other living creatures. Thus, they are classified as attitudes towards egoistic concerns, altruistic concerns, and biospheric concerns. Individuals who value egoistic environmental concerns are apprehensive about the environment and how it impacts their own lives. While people with an altruistic outlook are concerned about the impact of the environment on human beings as a whole, those with biospheric concerns, care about every living organism. This may be combined with Schwartz's (1992) value orientation to argue that self-enhancement values positively correlate with egoistic concerns, and whereas self-transcendent values tend to positively correlate with altruistic and biospheric concerns (Hansla, Gamble, Juliusson, & Gärling, 2008; Schultz, & Zelezny, 1999). For this study, we have considered the positive

impact of materialism, which has a self-enhancement value within the egoistic environmental concern.

3 | RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS

3.1 | Voluntary simplicity

Voluntary simplicity, initially propagated by religious traditions across the world (Gregg, 1936), has been adopted as a variation of anti-consumption movement (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Iyer & Muncy, 2009). A lifestyle that embraces voluntary simplicity focuses on the condition of external simplicity and inner richness (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977). In essence, voluntary simplifiers are individuals who choose to lead a materially simple lifestyle out of a free will, rather than being subjected to any external coercion (Etzioni, 1998). Researchers have looked at Voluntary simplicity from a perspective of emancipation from the dominating consumer culture. Past studies (Leonard-Barton & Rogers, 1980, pp. 28) have defined voluntary simplicity as "the degree to which an individual consciously chooses a way of life intended to maximize the individual's control over his own life." Elsewhere, voluntary simplifiers are described as genuinely creative consumers (Cherrier, 2009), who tailor their consumption practices to enhance self-expression. This varied conceptualization points to the rich yet, dispartateness in the understanding of voluntary simplicity, which consists of the adoption of a less materialistic, more sustainable, and self-sufficient lifestyle (Shama, 1985).

Promulgators of voluntary simplicity do not advocate for complete relinquishment of materiality like a monk (Elgin, 1981). Also, voluntary simplicity never asserts austerity; rather, it advocates frugality. Frugality, as theorists assert, is defined by restraint and moderation of consumption to reduce waste (Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner, & Kuntze, 1999). The outcome of minimizing clutter and reducing waste might be the same as that of voluntary consumption; however, the latter differs concerning the key motivations. Voluntary simplifiers look towards providing meaning to their lives and achieving personal growth, which may not be the primary explanation for customers aspiring for frugality (Elgin, 1981). The key motivators for voluntary simplicity are self-interest (Iyer & Muncy, 2009), environmental considerations (Shaw & Newholm, 2002), social (Alexander & Ussher, 2012), and religious determinants (Chowdhury, 2016). However, voluntary simplicity differs from concepts like environmentally responsible consumption and ethical consumption in the sense that it emanates from an anti-consumption rationale (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013).

Voluntary simplicity practice has not been free from criticisms. The major criticisms of voluntary simplicity center around the notion that it is being practiced only by the affluent (Baudrillard, 1998; Rudmin & Kilbourne, 1993), its fundamental opposition to the symbolic function of consumption (Douglas, 1976), and its apolitical nature (Grigsby, 2012). Voluntary simplicity is occasionally considered as luxury consumption (Baudrillard, 1998) or a "leisure

expansion movement" (Alexander, 2011). Voluntary simplicity has even been described as an ethic professed and practiced by well to do individuals, who are free to choose their standard of living (Alexander, 2011). Considering broad-based affluence in developed countries and rising affluence in developing countries (Myers & Kent, 2003), for the vast majority of the population, voluntary simplicity is available to some extent (Alexander, 2011). Furthermore, voluntary simplicity is more than "leisure expansion," considering its diverse motivations, such as environmentalism and social justice. Second, the challenge to voluntary simplicity comes from the symbolic function of consumption. Researchers contend that, if one of the main functions of consumption is meaning creation, then what precisely, proponents of voluntary simplicity are asking people to relinquish (Douglas, 1976). Voluntary simplicity researchers (Cherrier & Murray, 2002) contend that through anti-consumption practices, people do not renounce meaning. Instead, they create and enhance meaning by challenging predominant consumption practices. Finally, voluntary simplicity has been criticized as being "escapist" and "apolitical," as voluntary simplicity practitioners, do not aim for a broad-based policy change, instead focus on individuals as primary change agents (Grigsby, 2012). Looking at the history of the movement, this is a valid criticism. However, there are emerging signs of the movement getting politicized and aiming for a broader change (Alexander, 2011). Despite these conceptual criticisms, the voluntary simplicity movement continues to be adopted across the globe (Jebrowski, 2000).

Voluntary simplicity practices vary across a continuum ranging from non-simplifiers to strong simplifiers (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977), which has been portrayed later as a market-mediated practice while contending that simplifiers can either maintain or reduce their levels of consumption (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). McDonald, Oates, Young, and Hwang (2006) synthesize the various classifications and suggest that there should be more focus on a segment on consumers defined as "Beginner simplifiers," who are at the beginning of their voluntary simplicity journey. Understanding these consumers will throw more light on the critical drivers for the adoption of sustainable lifestyles (Shaw & Moraes, 2009). Considering the scope of the study in developing countries like India, whose response to globalization and environmentalism is very recent, consumers are likely to be in the formative stages of developing voluntary simplicity attitudes.

3.2 | Materialism and voluntary simplicity

Materialism has been described as the "set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life" (Richins, & Dawson, 1992, pp. 308). Other scholars like Belk (1985) describe materialism as the importance people attach to worldly possessions. With the rapidly growing consumerism in developing markets, there is an increased focus on the practices of material consumption (Chan & Prendergast, 2007). Chan and Prendergast (2007) show that normative social influences in countries like USA and China can promote materialism, where it is acknowledged as an important life value (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). As materialists are self-centered individuals (Richins & Fournier, 1991),

materialism is strongly aligned with self-enhancement values and negatively aligned with self-transcendent values (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Self-enhancement values reflect a narrow self-construal, which is less inclusive of other human beings and living organisms (Schwartz, 1977). A self-enhancement value orientation makes individuals focus on threats and information that are self-congruent (Stern, Kalof, Dietz, & Guagnano, 1995). Thus, a person with a self-enhancement value orientation would be aware of and focus on those situations or objects that pose threats to his or her valued objects like wealth, power, and authority. According to the value-basis theory (Stern & Dietz, 1994; Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999; Stern, Dietz, & Kalof, 1993), the environmental concern develops from the knowledge of harmful consequences of the material consumption. Hence, individuals with high self-enhancement values will unfailingly develop environmental concern, if the environmental degradation around them is found to have directly impacted their daily life. A recent study (Schultz et al., 2005) suggests that values and environmental concerns explicate only a small portion of the variance in environment-related behaviors. However, high self-enhancement does predict consumers' general concern for the environment.

Schultz (2001) argues that individuals differ in their abilities to include nature in their cognitive schema. For the people with a high tendency of inclusion, nature, and self are highly connected. For people with a tendency of low-inclusion, nature, and self are distal, and nature is valued to the extent that it impacts the self (Schultz et al., 2005). Therefore, self-enhancement values lead to more egoistic concerns and render people more inclined towards protecting aspects of the environment, their wealth, and wellbeing that affects them on a personal level. Individuals with self-enhancement values, like materialism, follow an economical approach for valuing the environment, based on the material costs of environmental degradation to self (Hammond & Coppock, 1990). Recent research studies in emerging markets have revealed that materialists are concerned about local environmental issues and are likely to act if the local concerns are grave in magnitude (Gökşen, Adaman, & Zenginobuz, 2002). For example, materialistic individuals will reduce the usage of environmentally harmful products if such use directly impacts their health and well-being, leading possibly to a simpler lifestyle. Additionally, as global brands are increasingly taking environmentally responsible positions, materialists across the world are becoming more conscious of the implications of environmental degradation (Osterhus, 1997; Strizhakova & Coulter, 2013). Recent studies (Jain & Kaur, 2004; Singh, 2009) have pointed out that young Indian consumers have shown more promise in their concern for the environment and sustainable growth. Considering environmental concern as a belief that has been reported in the past studies (Poortinga, Steg, & Vlek, 2004) to influence attitude and behavior, it is cogent to argue that environmental concern is likely to lead to consumption reduction to maintain cognitive consistency. One of the most potent ways of reducing consumption is using voluntary simplicity (Egea & de Frutos, 2013). Thus, we argue that high-materialists in developing countries would espouse voluntary simplicity attitudes due to personal environmental concern. The

above argument is in line with recent findings in developed countries that egoistic motivations can as well lead to consumption reduction (Egea & de Frutos, 2013). Nevertheless, low-materialists are less exposed to environmentally responsible promotions by global brands, and thus, are less likely to be aware of the environmental consequences of consumption (Strizhakova & Coulter, 2013). According to Schultz et al. (2005), however, people staying in urban areas would feel less connected with nature, and they are less likely to develop biospheric environmental concern and more likely to develop egoistic environmental concern. Hence, we argue that even low-materialists residing in Indian cities are likely to develop egoistic environmental concern. Thus, high-materialists would have stronger egoistic environmental concerns than low-materialists due to varying value alignment and environmental knowledge. Thus, high-materialists are more likely than low-materialists to espouse voluntary simplicity attitudes. Based on the above arguments, we advance the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: *Higher (lower) levels of materialism are more (less) likely to espouse voluntary simplicity attitudes*

Baker et al. (2013) suggest the inclusion of moderating, mediating, and conditional variables to unravel the complexity of materialism. Also, there is considerable disagreement in the literature on the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity (Cherrier, 2010). Thus, to better understand the association between materialism and voluntary simplicity, this paper has developed a moderated serial mediation model involving satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, and individualism.

3.3 | Influence through satisfaction with life

According to the philosophical view of Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz (1976), happiness is a feeling of satisfaction with life in its entirety. Satisfaction with life is an evaluative dimension (Eid & Larsen, 2008) of subjective well-being, which is achieved when a person holistically accomplishes psychosomatic well-being (Veenhoven, 2000), and it indicates a consistent state of happiness (Myers & Diener, 1997). It involves constant feelings of happiness and actions that enable personal growth (Sirgy, 2012). In other words, leading a good life involves a realization of a state of personal fulfillment in subjective choices of life. McGill (1967) have defined this as a favorable ratio of desires fulfilled versus not fulfilled. It involves the evaluations of the fulfillment of one's wishes, goals, and needs. Thus, the affective correlates of subjective well-being, like positive emotions, are determined by satisfaction with life judgments (Şimşek, 2011).

According to (Schwartz, 1992), values are the guiding light for living one's life. Understanding and aligning effectively with one's values would improve an individual's sense of satisfaction with life and well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Based on the value congruence hypothesis (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000), if an individual has ingrained self-enhancement values, then mastery over consumeristic cultural capital,

will make them successful and improve their level of satisfaction (Thyroff & Kilbourne, 2018). Recent empirical evidence suggests that self-enhancement value orientation is positively associated with satisfaction with life both directly (Burr, Santo, & Pushkar, 2011; Thyroff & Kilbourne, 2018) as well as indirectly (Karabati & Cemalcilar, 2010; Thyroff & Kilbourne, 2018). Thus, materialists with self-enhancement value orientation are likely to have a positive relationship with satisfaction with life. Furthermore, materialism is not always bad. In instrumental forms of materialism, possessions help individuals make life more meaningful and manageable (Richins & Fournier, 1991). Recent research by Ger and Belk (1999) suggests that materialism loses its negative effect and improves satisfaction when a person's consumption helps achieve growth-oriented goals, such as personal control, self-improvement, and worldly progress. Based on the above arguments, we posit the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: *Materialism will have a positive influence on satisfaction with life*

Amidst the multiple motives driving voluntary simplicity, one of the key motives is the concern for the environment. Extant research on the quality of life suggests that positive emotions are generated due to a positive evaluation of one's quality of life (Şimşek, 2011). According to the "broaden-and-build" Please provide the further publication details in reference to the theory, our thought-action repertoire is enhanced to give rise to more flexible processing (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions enable a higher preference for exploration among individuals in enjoyable contexts as positive emotions make positive material accessible to memory, which is diverse in its ramifications (Kahn & Isen, 1993). As the accessed material is positive, it improves expectations about the neutral to positive experiences available. The satisfied people, as a consequence, will be more likely to be open to experiences while in search of challenging and fulfilling opportunities. Past research reveals that personality variables like openness to experience, which means an engendering of curiosity for new things, creativity, variety seeking, and novelty is a strong predictor of proenvironmental actions (Fraj & Martinez, 2006) including voluntary simplicity (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977; Kaynak & Ekşi, 2014). Dimensions of openness to experiences, such as appreciation of the esthetic elements and intellectual curiosity might positively influence an individual's interest in nature (Hirsh & Dolderman, 2007). Their inquisitiveness also leads them to support novel ways to reduce environmental damage and find alternatives for environmental sustainability (Kaynak & Ekşi, 2014). It has been empirically demonstrated in past studies (Fraj & Martinez, 2006) that individuals, who are open to new experiences, are more likely to be environmentally conscious and take up self-fulfilling activities, such as recycling. Considering the concern for nature as one of the motivations for voluntary simplicity to and taking up a self-fulfilling lifestyle, we plausibly argue that life satisfaction positively influences voluntary simplicity. Based on the above arguments, we reason that satisfaction with life is likely to have a positive influence on voluntary simplicity. Additionally, drawing from Hypothesis 2 that theorizes the

positive influence of materialism on satisfaction with life, we advance the following hypothesis on the mediating role of satisfaction with life:

Hypothesis 3: *Satisfaction with life positively mediates the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity.*

3.4 | Influence through self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as the belief that people vest on their abilities to produce a desired level of performance that can exercise a positive influence of events impacting their lives (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs govern how people think, feel, get motivated, and behave (Bandura, 1994). According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs vary based on the magnitude of task difficulty, level of certainty for doing a task successfully, and generalizability of tasks across situations (Bandura, 1997; Chen, Casper, & Cortina, 2001). Self-efficacy is interpreted either as domain-specific or task-specific. However, contemporary scholars have theorized generalized self-efficacy as an extensive and stable sense of personal capability that can be leveraged across a broad range of stressful situations (Scholz, Doña, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002). Bandura (1977) suggests four prime bases of self-efficacy: Performance accomplishments, emotional arousal, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion.

Resilient nonequivocation towards performance accomplishment by reliance on the personal agency is the most significant source of self-efficacy since it is based on the mastery of expectations (Bandura, 1997). Success with a particular task raises the mastery of expectation (Sherer et al., 1982). Materialists define success in terms of the acquiring of possessions (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Thus, success with acquisition raises mastery, which in turn increases self-efficacy. Early research shows that materialists are mostly able to match their capabilities or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) with extant possibilities, set appropriate goals that are realizable through hard work, and find subjective justifications for their consumption behavior, the latter displayed as signals of material enhancement. Ger and Belk (1996) demonstrated that in an emerging economy like Turkey, individuals saw materialism as self-enhancing, providing a sense of control. Similarly, in a study where materialism was compared with other values, it was observed that materialism was close to the value of power (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Such a materialist aspect of consumption, according to Zavestoski (2002), leads to self-efficacy. Hence, we postulate the hypothesis below.

Hypothesis 4: *Materialism will have a positive influence on self-efficacy*

In societies where consumption is the dominant social paradigm, it is often challenging to exercise anti-consumption activities (Peattie & Peattie, 2009) as it may involve considerable privation and austerity. Thus, anti-consumption practices like voluntary simplicity are challenging and will necessitate a high level of commitment and persistence to succeed (Alexander, 2013). For example, most waste can be recycled using contemporary technology; however, it takes

much daunting effort in the collecting and processing of them regularly. However, strong self-efficacy improves personal accomplishments (Bandura, 2001). Individuals with high confidence in their abilities view potentially challenging tasks as obstacles to be overcome instead of risks to be avoided. Such an outlook increases intrinsic motivation and deep engagement with the activity. Intrinsic motivation is correlated with favorable psychological outcomes, such as positive goal progress, feeling good about an activity, and mental well-being (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Additionally, individuals with high self-efficacy maintain strong goal commitment and sustain their effort in the case of failure (Locke, Zubritzky, Lee & Bobko, 1982). They attribute failure to the subjective lack of effort or skills rather than to any fatalistic measures (Bandura, 1989). They approach difficult situations with an amount of self-assurance that they can control them. This positive outlook contributes to success, reduces stress, lowers susceptibility to anxiety and eventually increases satisfaction with life. High self-efficacy has been associated with volunteerism (Lindenmeier, 2008), environmentalism (Allen, Schewe, & Liander, 1980), ethical consumption (Walumbwa et al., 2011), smoking cessation (Gwaltney, Metrik, Kahler & Shiffman, 2009), and diet control (Armitage & Conner, 1999). Thus, arguably, self-efficacy will positively influence voluntary simplicity. Furthermore, we have argued in Hypothesis for a positive effect of materialism on self-efficacy. We posit the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: *Self-efficacy positively mediates the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity.*

Emotional arousal is one of the main drivers of self-efficacy which interferes with and impairs performance (Bandura, 1977). Individuals learn over time that desired outcomes will be achieved only when they experience positive emotions and are not troubled with negative emotions. Thus, people use positive emotions to provide a fillip to their inner capabilities. "Conservation resource theory" by Hobfoll (1989) posits that people participate actively in preserving resources and preventing their loss. They do not wait passively for the stressful event to occur and enhance these resources in anticipation of any possible future loss. Positive emotions act as personal resources and are available to individuals when needed. Individuals use positive effects to boost self-efficacy in the apprehension of stressful events which can potentially deplete and damage the self-efficacy. Existing research supports constructive links between positive emotions and self-efficacy (e.g., Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In laboratory settings, participants in a naturally positive mood set themselves elevated goals and possessed higher self-efficacy (Jundt & Hinsz, 2001). Building on the discussion in the preceding lines, it is argued that higher satisfaction with life is likely to be associated with higher self-efficacy. Again, based on Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5 (i.e., the positive influence of materialism on satisfaction with life and self-efficacy), the following hypothesis is advanced.

Hypothesis 6: *Self-efficacy positively mediates the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity.*

3.5 | Moderation by individualism

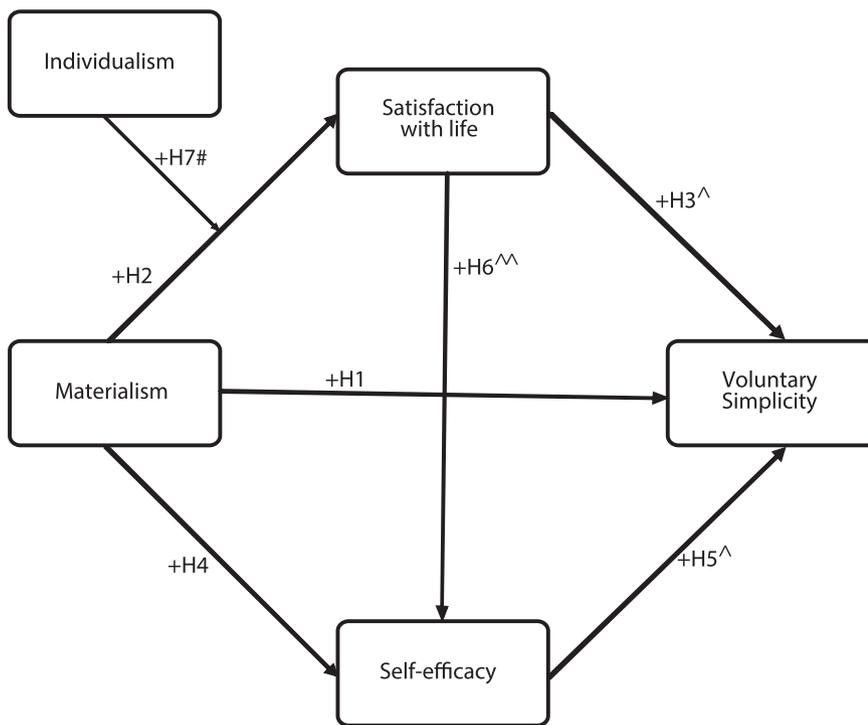
"Individualism is one of the most widely used cultural dimensions in the marketing literature" for understanding and predicting consumption attitudes and behavior (Sivadas, Bruvold, & Nelson, 2008, pp. 201). Individualism and collectivism are cultural orientations that can be viewed with respect to an individual's or group's relationships with others (McCarty & Shrum, 2001). Individualistic consumers tend to accord precedence to individual goals and commitments over group goals and commitments, whereas collectivist individuals give primacy to group goals and commitments. In other words, one can depict individualism and collectivism with values of independence and interdependence, respectively. Individualists display characteristics, such as individual initiative, freedom of choice (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1993), emotional independence (Hofstede, 1980), rights over duties, self-reliance, a high level of competition, and above all, the role of cost/benefit analysis in assessing the behavior (Triandis, 1994).

India, though traditionally a collectivist society, has seen an unprecedented shift in consumer culture in the last two decades. Modernization has inevitably transformed the contemporaneous cultural fabric of the country (Mathur, 2010). For example, in urban India, there is a steady growth in the number of people who are embracing individualist values in comparison to the traditional collectivist values (Mishra, 1994). According to Csikszentmihalyi (1999), happiness emanates from "flow" experiences, which are generally intrinsically motivated. Indeed, with economic

development, modernization, and a consequent transformation in the direction of an individualistic orientation, people are free to do what is intensely and intimately cherished by them and is consistent with their inner self (Ahuvia, 2002), rather than being stalled by atavistic social pressures.

Extant research on "cognitive consistency theory" suggests that the individuals who nurture conflicting values, emanating out of a contradiction between the individual orientation of material values and collective-oriented values experience psychological tension and, as a result, satisfaction with life remains far from being realized (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). On the contrary, satisfaction with life is optimized when the different facets of an individual's personality are integrated into a harmonious whole (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). Prior research suggests that materialism is more congruent with individualistic values than with collectivist values. Thus, value realignment is likely to produce a higher level of satisfaction with life. This has received empirical support in past studies (Joshani & Jarden, 2016) that have demonstrated that individualism positively moderates the relationship between hedonism and happiness. Similarly, La Barbera and Gürhan (1997) indicated that materialism would improve satisfaction with life when it did not contradict the value system and life perspective. Based on the preceding discussion, we posit the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 7: *Individualism positively moderates the relationship between materialism and satisfaction with life.*



^Direct mediation
^^Serial mediation
#Direct moderation

FIGURE 1 Conceptual model. The figure depicts hypothesized direct and indirect connection between materialism and voluntary simplicity. H1, H2, and H4 represent hypothesized direct effect between materialism and voluntary simplicity, satisfaction with life, and self-efficacy respectively. H3[^] and H5[^] represent direct mediation effect involving materialism→satisfaction with life→voluntary simplicity and materialism→self-efficacy→voluntary simplicity. H6^{^^} represents hypothesized serial mediation effect involving materialism→satisfaction with life→self-efficacy→voluntary simplicity. H7[#] represents hypothesized moderation effect involving individualism, between materialism and voluntary simplicity

4 | EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

A number of studies have been carried out to test the suggested theoretical framework. In Study 1, we cue materialism experimentally and examine its impact on voluntary simplicity. The pretest offers preliminary support for the consumer cuing paradigm by showing that the experimental manipulation can indeed stimulate situational materialism among participants. Study 2, offers a cross-sectional test of the materialistic values→satisfaction with life→self-efficacy→voluntary simplicity, in a serial mediation model while examining the moderating role of individualistic values.

4.1 | Study 1

The goal of the experimental study was to examine whether voluntary simplicity is influenced by situationally induced materialism. We used the “consumer cuing paradigm” in this study (Bauer et al., 2012) as a means to induce situational materialism. In this model, subjects in the “consumer cue” condition were assigned experimental manipulations, in the form of pictures of desirable luxury brands, viewed as symbols of wealth, status, and image. It is presumed that the luxury goods pictures used as consumer cues are equivalent to the incidence of such activating conditions in the day-to-day life.

4.1.1 | Pretest

A pilot study was conducted to test if the depiction of luxury goods used as visual stimuli can elicit materialistic strivings. Though pictures used for the stimulus were similar to those used in past studies (Bauer et al., 2012; Nagpaul & Pang, 2017), pilot testing of the pictures was done again to ascertain applicability to the developing country sample. Fifteen MBA students were allocated randomly to view and rate the pleasantness of either luxury goods pictures or neutral pictures of everyday items. Then, as a part of an ostensibly distinct study, participants were presented a lexical decision task (LDT; Meyer & Schvaneveldt, 1971) using Psytoolkit (Stoet, 2017). LDT introduced to participants as a word recognition task, was used as an implicit indicator of the significance of materialistic aspirations. We randomly exposed the participants to a chain of English letters on the computer monitor and then asked them to specify if the words were correct English words or not. We used five target words (branded, expensive, impressive, status, and luxury), five nontarget words (banana, horse, shoulder, table, and shirt) and five wrong words, that were previously used by Nagpaul and Pang (2017). Participants had to either press the key “A” if the word was correct in the English language or press the key “L” if they felt it is a non-word. The reaction time for the key-press was recorded with the Psytoolkit’s inbuilt algorithm. Researchers expected that the participants’ reaction time for the target words in the luxury goods condition would be faster than those of neutral goods condition. Results of the pilot study indicated that participants

who were shown the luxury goods stimulus had faster reaction times ($M = 645.4$ ms, standard deviation $[SD] = 112.01$) for the target words than those participants who were shown neutral stimulus ($M = 898.8$ ms, $SD = 106.4$), $t(15) = -4.49$, $p < .001$. Thus, this authenticated that our consumer cue manipulation triggered a materialistic mindset among participants.

4.1.2 | Main experiment

Participants

Seventy-four working professionals (males = 48, females = 26) who were part of the Alumni network of a reputed business school were invited to participate in this study. We informed the respondents that their participation in this study was purely voluntary and assured them of the anonymity of their responses. The sample had a mean age of 39.5 years ($SD = 2.33$), and more than 60% of the participants were in the age range of 35–44 years. Participants rated the pleasantness of pictures as part of a visual perception study, which was being used for consumer research. Participants were either assigned 17 images of luxury goods like accessories, clothing, car, electronics (consumer cue condition), or that of mundane things like tools, furniture, utensils (control condition) randomly. The pictorial stimuli were adapted from Nagpaul and Pang (2017) with some updates to represent the latest trends, especially in consumer cue conditions. Different sets of visual stimuli were used for men and women, respectively. Following this, participants completed a few survey questions, apparently for a study on sustainability.

Measures

Furthermore, participants responded to survey questions as part of the sustainability section, which included the measures for voluntary simplicity. Voluntary simplicity attitude has been measured using four items (7-point Likert items ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”) borrowed from a scale designed by Iyer and Muncy (2009). After completing the voluntary simplicity measures, we asked the participants to rate on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to indicate the degree to which the images seen by them emphasized fundamental tenets of materialism, such as fame, image, status and wealth respectively. We did this to verify if the manipulations used as part of the consumer cue condition situationally activated materialism.

Analysis and results

Results authenticated that the triggering of situationally activated materialism functioned as desired, as the consumer-cue condition visuals were rated higher on fundamental tenets of materialism ($M = 23.4$, $SD = 4.24$) than the neutral control condition visuals ($M = 16.28$, $SD = 6.07$), $t = 2.85$, $p < .01$. We conducted independent sample t tests (for means, SD , and t tests, see Table 1) to determine differences in voluntary simplicity between the consumer cue and neutral control conditions.

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and t test results

	Consumer cue		Neutral control		Comparison	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	T	p
Pilot test	645.42	112.01	898.82	106.45	4.49 (15)	.001
Manipulation	23.40	4.24	16.28	6.07	2.85 (74)	.01
Voluntary simplicity	22.10	3.27	20.70	2.73	2.04 (74)	.04

Results confirmed that the participants in the consumer-cue condition reported higher levels of voluntary simplicity ($M = 22.1$, $SD = 3.27$) than the participants in neutral control condition ($M = 20.7$, $SD = 2.73$), $t = 2.04$, $p < .05$. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

4.2 | Study 2

Study 2 lent itself to an examination of mediating and moderating paths between materialism and voluntary simplicity with a cross-sectional design. Thus, we examined differences in the voluntary simplicity attitude, satisfaction with life, and self-efficacy of participants as a correlate of their self-rated materialism.

4.2.1 | Participants

We collected data from a sample of 315 respondents enrolled in an executive postgraduate course. Participants used a popular online survey platform (SurveyMonkey.com) to complete a set of scales. Most of the respondents were male (69%), with a majority (63%) falling in the age category of 25–44 years. We informed the respondents that their participation in this study was purely voluntary and assured them of the anonymity of their responses. The overall response rate was 65%.

4.2.2 | Measures

All items used in the current analysis are adapted from well-established scales presented in Table 1. Materialism was measured using the parsimonious version of the Richins and Dawson (1992) materialism scale. The scale has low social desirability bias and is being extensively used by materialism and consumer researchers (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). Though the original scale had 18 items, the reduced version contains only six. Participants specified how much they agree or disagree with each of the six items using a 7-point scale that ranged from 7 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree). The original materialism scale loaded onto three independent dimensions: Success, centrality, and happiness, providing a three-factor solution. The constructs used in this study aligned with the original dimensionality of the scale (Kilbourne, Grünhagen, & Foley, 2005) across cross-cultural settings. For measuring satisfaction with

life, we used a 5-item scale designed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), which measured global evaluations of one's satisfaction with life. Participants specify how much they agree or disagree with each of the five items using a 7-point scale that ranges from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Voluntary simplicity attitude has been measured using three items (7-point Likert items ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") borrowed from a scale designed by Iyer and Muncy (2009). For measuring self-efficacy, we used a parsimonious version of the general self-efficacy scale developed initially by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) and adapted by Romppel et al. (2013) in a cross-cultural setting. Out of 10 items prescribed in the original scale, we used six items, which provided a maximum coefficient of variation and good discrimination (Romppel et al., 2013). We asked the participants to respond to the items on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all true to 4 = exactly true. The measure has been used extensively in social sciences and marketing research. Horizontal individualism has been measured using three items from a scale developed by Sivasdas et al. (2008), which is a condensed version of Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand (1995) scale. All items are answered on a 9-point scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 9 = strongly agree. We chose this scale primarily for its parsimony and effectiveness with the Indian sample as a part of a cross-cultural study (Sivasdas et al., 2008). We detected certain items following poor loadings in cross-cultural settings (Roberts, Manolis, & Tanner, 2003). Table 1 listed the items used, factor loadings, Cronbach's α , composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE), results of the constructs.

4.2.3 | Analysis approach

We followed a two-step approach for the analysis. We assessed the overall measurement model in SmartPLS in the first step (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The measurement model indicated the reliability and validity of the variables concerned. In the second step, a conditional process analysis (Moderated Serial mediation) was executed using PROCESS macro in IBM SPSS 20 (Hayes, 2013), with latent variable scores obtained from partial least square (PLS) analysis as input. It produced validity results precisely and allowed us to test the direct, moderation, and mediation paths simultaneously (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins & G. Kuppelwieser, 2014). As such, we tested the direct effect, and the serial mediation effect among materialism, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, and voluntary simplicity first. Then, we examined the direct moderation and moderated mediation effect

of individualism on the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity.

4.2.4 | Measurement model assessment

The association between manifest variables and latent variables was assessed using the measurement model. In alignment with the previous studies, the strength of materialism was measured by reflectively specified factors, such as success, centrality, and happiness. Based on the recommendations by Jarvis, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2003), this study specified that the universal drivers are formatively linked to the latent variable, materialism. Consequently, it was proposed that the first-order drivers, such as success, centrality, and happiness determine the strength of materialism. Furthermore, the measurement of every single driver was done using multiple reflectively specified indicators to improve reliability. In other words, the second-order factor (here, materialism), had first-order factors as formative indicators (drivers of materialism), and in-turn, the first-order factors had indicators that were reflectively specified. Hence, this study suggested a Type 2 second-order factor specification for materialism, which included a reflective first-order and formative second-order construct, based on the classification by Jarvis et al. (2003).

For the first-order reflective constructs, item loadings, Cronbach's α , CR, and AVE were assessed for the following constructs: "materialism success," "materialism centrality," "materialism happiness," "self-efficacy," "satisfaction with life," "voluntary simplicity" and "individualism." All the factor loadings reported were much above the recommended level of 0.70 except for one item that fell below 0.70 (i.e., one item from self-efficacy scale with the loading of 0.62); however, it did not cause any issue as the AVE for all reflective constructs are above the recommended threshold of 0.5. Additionally, CR of all the latent variables was close to 0.9, a value higher than the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2009), indicating acceptable reliability. In addition, the "heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations" (HTMT) was used to evaluate the discriminant validity of reflectively measured constructs (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). For all the of the reflectively measured constructs, HTMT values were lower than the prescribed cut-off value of 0.85 (Kline, 2011), confirming the discriminant validity.

On the basis of Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer's (2001) suggestions, the measurement quality of the second-order construct of materialism was tested. First, the correlations amongst the constructs were studied. As depicted in Table 2, first-order materialism-related dimensions have a relatively small absolute

TABLE 2 Measurement of constructs used in study

Construct and items	Loadings	A	CR	AVE
Materialism—Success		0.754	0.890	0.802
<i>I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes</i>	0.888			
<i>Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring possessions</i>	0.903			
Materialism—Centrality		0.813	0.915	0.843
<i>I usually buy only the things I need</i>	0.921			
<i>I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned (R)</i>	0.915			
Materialism—Happiness		0.763	0.894	0.808
<i>My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.</i>	0.899			
<i>I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things</i>	0.899			
Voluntary simplicity		0.772	0.867	0.685
<i>I make specific efforts to buy products made out of recycled material.</i>	0.816			
<i>"Waste not, want not" is a philosophy I follow.</i>	0.845			
<i>I try to recycle as much as I can</i>	0.823			
Satisfaction with life		0.842	0.894	0.678
<i>In most ways my life is close to my ideal.</i>	0.794			
<i>The conditions of my life are excellent.</i>	0.825			
<i>I am satisfied with my life.</i>	0.877			
<i>So far I have got the important things I wanted in life.</i>	0.795			
Self-efficacy		0.779	0.848	0.529
<i>It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals</i>	0.734			
<i>I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events</i>	0.763			
<i>Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations</i>	0.790			
<i>I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities</i>	0.621			
<i>I can usually handle whatever comes my way</i>	0.718			
Individualism		0.716	0.840	0.637
<i>I enjoy being unique and different from others in many ways.</i>	0.771			
<i>I often "do my own thing."</i>	0.790			
<i>I am a unique individual.</i>	0.833			

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability.

TABLE 3 Means, SD, and correlations among variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Individualism	22.17	3.695	0.798						
2. Materialism–Centrality	5.91	2.43	0.283	0.918					
3. Materialism–Happiness	9.14	2.77	0.172	0.093	0.899				
4. Materialism–Success	8.38	2.74	0.113	0.129	0.385	0.896			
5. Self-efficacy	15.57	2.52	0.397	0.301	0.07	0.126	0.728		
6. Satisfaction with Life	19.95	4.43	0.258	0.336	0.091	0.159	0.274	0.824	
7. Voluntary simplicity	14.43	3.56	0.268	0.356	0.072	0.112	0.389	0.313	0.828
HTMT ratio									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
1. Individualism									
2. Materialism–Centrality	0.371								
3. Materialism–Happiness	0.228	0.119							
4. Materialism–Success	0.15	0.164	0.505						
5. Self-efficacy	0.541	0.37	0.093	0.163					
6. Satisfaction with life	0.329	0.404	0.12	0.198	0.321				
7. Voluntary simplicity	0.362	0.444	0.1	0.143	0.48	0.383			

Note: AVE appear diagonal.

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; HTMT, heterotrait–monotrait; SD, standard deviation.

correlation among themselves (i.e., 0.129, 0.385, 0.093). Finally, for evaluating the common method bias (CMB), the full collinearity assessment approach was used (Kock, 2015). For the first-order materialism dimensions, the variance inflation factors (VIF) were calculated. The VIF values for all formative construct indicators ranged from 1.578 to 1.926, which was below the threshold of 3.3 (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2017; Kock, 2015), ruling out the threat of multicollinearity and CMB.

4.2.5 | Hypothesis testing

The hypothesized direct effects were tested using the serial mediation model, Model 6 in PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) with the latent variable data from PLS as the input. Constructs were represented by the average value of total item scores. Materialism was reported to have a direct, positive, and significant influence on voluntary simplicity (Hypothesis 1: $b = 0.124$, $p < .05$), satisfaction with life (Hypothesis 2: $b = 0.275$, $p < .001$), and self-efficacy

(Hypothesis 4: $b = 0.169$, $p < .001$). Satisfaction with life was found to have a direct influence on self-efficacy ($b = 0.227$, $p < .001$) and voluntary simplicity ($b = 0.195$, $p < .05$). Self-efficacy was found to have a direct influence on voluntary simplicity ($b = 0.307$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, and Hypothesis 4 were supported (see Table 3).

The mediation hypothesis was tested using the procedure proposed by Hayes (2013), which uses the PROCESS 3.0 macro in SPSS 20, with input the latent variables derived from PLS testing. The technique used bootstrapping to check the statistical significance of the sequential mediation effect (with 5,000 resamples). The total indirect effect of materialism on voluntary simplicity, as shown in Table 3, was significant. It was split into three partial indirect effects, which are all significant at 5% levels as no 95% interval contains zero. Materialism, satisfaction with life, and self-efficacy accounted for 21% of the variance in voluntary simplicity. Hence, Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 5, and Hypothesis 6 are supported (Table 4).

The study demonstrates an association between materialism and satisfaction with life ($b = 0.245$, $p < .001$). However, the moderating

TABLE 4 Model coefficients and test of significance for hypothesized direct effects

	Satisfaction with life			Self-efficacy			Voluntary simplicity		
	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>p</i>	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>p</i>	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>P</i>
Materialism	0.275	0.054	.000	0.169	0.055	.002	0.124	0.053	.019
Satisfaction with life				0.227	0.055	.000	0.195	0.053	.003
Self-efficacy							0.307	0.053	.000
	$R^2 = 0.075$			$R^2 = 0.101$			$R^2 = 0.211$		
	$F = 25.62$, $p < .001$			$F = 17.6$, $p < .001$			$F = 27.8$, $p < .001$		

TABLE 5 Model coefficients and test of significance for hypothesized indirect effects

	Satisfaction with life			Self-efficacy			Voluntary simplicity		
	Coefficient	Standard error	p	Coefficient	Standard error	p	Coefficient	Standard error	p
Materialism	0.275	0.054	.000	0.169	0.055	.002	0.124	0.053	.019
Satisfaction with life				0.227	0.055	.000	0.195	0.053	.003
Self-efficacy							0.307	0.053	.000
	$R^2 = 0.075$			$R^2 = 0.101$			$R^2 = 0.211$		
	$F = 25.62, p < .001$			$F = 17.6, p < .001$			$F = 27.8, p < .001$		
Indirect effects of materialism on voluntary simplicity									
							Effect	Standard error	LLCI-ULCI
Total indirect—Materialism—Voluntary simplicity							0.124	0.031	(0.065, 0.189)
1. Materialism→Satisfaction with life→Voluntary simplicity							0.053	0.022	(0.015, 0.102)
2. Materialism→Self-efficacy→Voluntary simplicity							0.051	0.021	(0.010, 0.095)
3. Materialism→Satisfaction with life→Self-efficacy→Voluntary simplicity							0.019	0.009	(0.005, 0.041)

Abbreviation: LLCI (lower level confidence interval)-ULCI (upper level confidence interval).

effect of individualism on the relationship between materialism and satisfaction with life (Table 5) was significant, but negative interaction effects ($b = -0.111, p < .05$) were found (Figure 1).

The graphs in Figure 2 (high [+1 SD] vs. low [-1 SD] levels of Individualism), in the case of high Individualism, follow a negative slope, indicating a significant negative relationship between individualism and satisfaction with life. Similarly, graphs display an amplified effect of materialism on satisfaction with life for low individualism. Considering the moderation analysis revealed a negative but significant interaction effect, Hypothesis 7 was not supported (Table 6).

5 | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Considering the change brought by globalization and the concept of simplicity that is ingrained in the traditional Indian culture, this

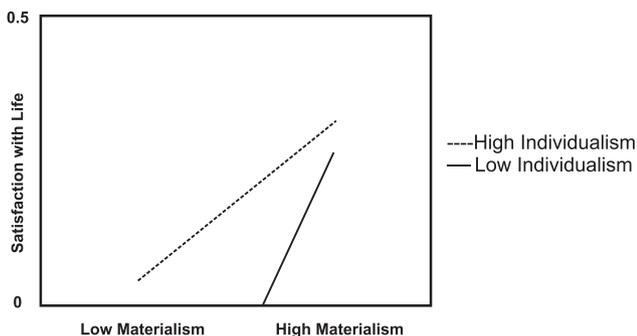


FIGURE 2 Moderation of the effect of materialism on satisfaction with life. Figure 2 graphically depicts moderation of the effect of materialism on satisfaction with life at high (+1 SD) versus low (-1 SD) levels of Individualism as part of Study 2. In the case of high Individualism, lines follow a negative slope, indicating a significant negative relationship between individualism and satisfaction with life. Similarly, graphs display an amplified effect of materialism on satisfaction with life for low individualism. SD, standard deviation

study takes a fresh look at the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity. This assumes significance in the wake of mixed and equivocal findings of past research in consumer psychology, and the recent interpretivist research in the domain of anti-consumption. For instance, a negative relationship between materialism and anti-consumption manifestations (Lee & Ahn, 2016; Richins & Dawson, 1992) was reported. Responding to calls for a better understanding of the consequences of materialism, we adopted an expansive approach by including additional explanatory variables to investigate the complex relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity. India has a long tradition of accommodating and balancing multiple discourses. While the mainstream Vedas advocated abjuring materialism, the Charvaka School practices skepticism and promulgated materialistic hedonism (Chattopadhyaya, 1964). Thus, a layered and contesting world view contributes to an equally diverse consumption or anti-consumption behavior, as we may comprehend in a market-based economy today. Although small, the anti-consumption practitioners in India are likely to emerge as an important opinion leader group in the recent future.

Thus, keeping the possibilities in mind, this paper has empirically demonstrated direct and indirect effects between materialism and voluntary simplicity. Study 1 exhibited that participants exposed to the situational cues of materialism (visuals of luxury goods) espoused voluntary simplicity more than those who were exposed to neutral visuals. The current study is one of the few to demonstrate that situationally activated materialism produces visible variations in an individual's attitude towards voluntary simplicity. Study 2 lent evidence for the role of satisfaction with life and self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism between materialism and voluntary simplicity. It evinced positive relationships between pairs of constructs, such as materialism and satisfaction with life, materialism and self-efficacy, satisfaction with life and self-efficacy, satisfaction with life and voluntary simplicity, and self-efficacy and voluntary simplicity. In addition, the mediating effects of satisfaction with life, self-efficacy,

TABLE 6 Model coefficients for hypothesized direct moderation

Direct mediation—Materialism→Satisfaction with life				
Path	Effect	Standard error	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence interval
Materialism	0.245	0.055	.000	(0.135, 0.355)
Individualism	0.148	0.058	.012	(0.033, 0.264)
Materialism × individualism	-0.111	0.047	.019	(-0.205, -0.018)
Constant	0.297	0.054	.585	(-0.077, 0.1369)

$R^2 = 0.128$, $F = 15.2$, $p < .000$

and their interaction were found to be significant, thus confirming a complementary mediation (Zhao, Lynch & Chen, 2010) or a partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

A direct and positive relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity attitudes suggested that materialists were not averse to developing anti-consumption attitudes, as suggested in the extant literature. They instead balanced the anti-consumption attitudes with consumption-centric attitudes to attain optimal well-being. This resonates with the proposition that materialism is not inherently good or bad (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1978), and altruistic actions are egoistically motivated (Waterman, 1981). In other words, materialists in India espouse voluntary simplicity attitudes due to self-interest concerns, such as the visible impact of environmental degradation on their health, wealth, and well-being. Extant research suggests that human–environment interaction and technological findings like global warming and greenhouse gas emissions have always enabled the formation of a new and evolving set of environmental attitudes (Stern & Dietz, 1994). Considering environmental attitude formation with “fluid attitude objects” has always remained an important area of theoretical inquiry (Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999), this study adds to the existing knowledge by delineating how materialists, form an emergent environment-oriented anti-consumption attitude.

Second, the study reveals that there is a positive relationship between materialism and satisfaction with life. The current study has argued that, when individuals emphasize the same values, which are prevalent in their environment, their sense of satisfaction improves. In other words, when in developing countries like India, urban consumers emphasize self-enhancement values like personal growth, achievement, and power through materialism, the satisfaction increases due to value alignment with growth orientation in new India. This contradicts the frequently found negative relationship between materialism and satisfaction with life in US samples (Norris & Larsen, 2011; Thyroff & Kilbourne, 2018) but aligns with the findings subscribed by neoclassical economics, which suggests that self-interest generates economic incentive, which in turn has a positive impact on satisfaction (Thyroff & Kilbourne, 2018).

This paper is amongst a very few to have used positive marketing theories and constructs in the domain of anti-consumption. This evolves as an alternative discourse, as most of the work in the field of anti-consumption has used a cynical view with undesirable self, animosity, ethical concern, and dissatisfaction as critical antecedents of anti-consumption. We address these concerns by including positive

constructs like satisfaction with life and self-efficacy as mediators in the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity. Frederickson’s (2013) broaden-and-build theory helps to explain how positive emotions emanating from a satisfied person, make him open to experiences and new possibilities in trying out sustainable consumption practices and enables creativity to pursue a meaningful life in harmony with the consumer culture. Additionally, positive emotions enable self-control (Andrews & Holst, 1998), thereby helping individuals to reduce consumption for a better future. The findings in the current study add to the positive psychology literature by empirically showing that satisfaction with life enables not only sustainable consumption (reason for) but also sustainable anti-consumption (reason against). Furthermore, the focus on self-efficacy as a proximal predictor of voluntary simplicity also supports using a positive cognitive perspective in anti-consumption research, which has been ignored in past research despite its importance. Since anti-consumption in any form involves hardships, self-efficacy provides it with the required resources to overcome them. As evident from the empirical analysis, self-efficacy is a highly significant predictor of voluntary simplicity. Additionally, self-efficacy provides the necessary persistence to sustain voluntary simplicity beyond the initial trial.

The study demonstrates individualism as having a significant yet negative moderating effect on the relationship between materialism and satisfaction with life—a counter-intuitive finding. Individualism may not always have a positive influence on the relationship between materialism and satisfaction with life, especially in eastern cultures (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014) due to the lack of “buffers” against the negative impacts of individualism. Consumers in emerging economies are increasingly becoming more individualistic; however, they may not always respond well to this new perspective, considering the current divide between the environment and the individual’s values. These irreconcilable gaps are due to the unsuccessful attempts to align with a novel system. Moreover, non-application behavioral strategies like active interpersonal strategies, self-efficacy to cushion the adverse effects like conflicts with traditional values, and lesser interaction with family and friends fail to straddle the chasm between subjective values and environmental concerns. In western societies, individualistic values are highly ingrained in the subject’s being (Nisbett & Masuda, 2003), and have been only inately blueprinted in parts by the eastern societies, sans the robust coping strategies of the west. Thus, contrary to the expectations, individualism has a negative instead of a positive impact on the relationship between materialism and satisfaction with life, in the context of eastern civilizations.

An essential finding of the current research is that anti-consumption attitudes are not only limited to Western cultures, but find relevance in emerging economies, such as India, where over-consumption is already having telling impacts on traditional values, culture, and, most importantly, the way of life. The anti-consumption attitude is slowly but pervasively capturing the imagination of the people in India, an emerging economy as it has done in the developed world. Though not manifested in alarming proportions and unlikely to cause significant trouble for companies in the short run, this provides early warning signs and valuable insights into the unique anti-consumption behavior and helps to identify strategic antidotes to tackle the same. À la standardization/adaptation theory (Morgeson, Sharma, & Hult, 2015), the current study suggests that mitigating strategies for anti-consumption do not work with the same efficacy in all markets. Moreover, firms operating across the globe need to tailor their anti-consumption mitigation strategy based on the cultural composition of the country concerned. A critical contribution of this paper is the insight provided that will help social marketers manage the anti-consumption attitudes of target consumers.

The current article is amongst the first few to demonstrate that a situational triggering of materialism causes discernable shifts in a person's attitude towards market-based environmentally friendly tendencies, such as voluntary simplicity. These consumers effortlessly balance and integrate sustainability and economic appeals, and global companies would do well to convey messages to this segment that assimilate sustainability with consumption and status themes. This has important implications for global brands pursuing dual goals of economic growth and environmental sustainability around the world. The urban segments in the emerging economies like India have attained higher education, enjoy traveling, and are internet savvy (Strizhakova & Coulter, 2013). Based on our findings, global corporations can gain a competitive advantage by promoting an environmentally conscious image, promoting sustainable consumption practices, and considering de-marketing campaigns that encourage people to consume less, thus providing a stronger message for sustainability (Reich & Soule, 2016). For example, corporates like Patagonia's "buy less" and "do not buy this jacket" campaigns have significantly improved its revenue and brand equity (Stock, 2013).

6 | LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The respondents of the study were professionals who reside in the urban areas of India. Thus, the findings of this study can be applied to the consumers residing in urban centers of emerging markets. It only provides a snapshot of the cultural values from a typical emerging economy. Future research needs to include respondents from rural areas for comparing their attitudes toward voluntary simplicity.

This study has used Iyer and Muncy's (2009) voluntary simplicity scale items, which are primarily focused on environmental and conservation behaviors. Although the ecological aspect of the lifestyle is of interest in the current study, we acknowledge that there are facets

to voluntary simplicity other than those represented in the current measure, which could be taken up in research endeavors in the future. Elgin and Mitchell (1977) suggested that simplifiers shared five characteristic values in varying degrees, giving meaning to an inwardly simple lifestyle. These characteristics included material simplicity, self-determination, personal growth, ecological awareness, and human scale. Future studies can employ a broader scale, as indicated above, to capture dimensions other than the ones captured here in this study for a holistic understanding of voluntary simplicity.

Anti-consumption is a broad phenomenon. It encompasses manifestations, such as brand avoidance and consumer boycott (Iyer & Muncy, 2009) in addition to voluntary simplicity. Future research should evaluate the relationship between materialism and brand avoidance or consumer boycotts, respectively. We recognize that anti-consumption is a broader phenomenon, and therefore, urge future researchers to include societal (macro-level) and institutional (meso-level) perspectives to address the sustainability challenge (García-de-Frutos, Ortega-Egea, & Martínez-del-Río, 2018) in its entirety. For example, future researchers should study how media message framing and corporate social responsibility initiatives by companies amplify voluntary simplicity attitudes among individuals. Similarly, future research may examine how various social movements can potentially breed new age voluntary simplifiers in emerging economies.

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