Exploring the Psychological Characteristics of Style and Fashion Clothing Orientations

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Exploring the psychological characteristics of style and fashion clothing orientations

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Abstract

Purpose – This research examines the conceptual distinction of two clothing orientations – style orientation and fashion orientation. Style and fashion orientations both express identity and individuality, but the fashion orientation may more strongly reflect materialistic values, which extensive evidence shows are detrimental to well-being. This study investigates how the clothing orientations are associated with materialism and subjective well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – The conceptual distinction between style and fashion orientations and their associations with materialism and subjective well-being were investigated via an online survey (N = 4,591) conducted in Germany, Poland, Sweden, and the United States. Participants aged 18-65 were recruited based on national representative quotas for age, gender, education, and region.

Findings – The regression results support a conceptual distinction between the style and fashion orientation. Style orientation was positively associated with subjective well-being compared to fashion orientation. Both the style and fashion orientations were positively correlated with materialism, but the association was much stronger for fashion orientation, and materialism exhibited a strong negative association with subjective well-being. Interestingly, materialism moderated the association between fashion orientation and well-being but not between style orientation and well-being.

Research limitations – The four examined countries were Western, and thus the findings cannot be generalized to other populations. In addition, this study specifically examined relationships in a clothing context. To enable wider generalization, the relationships tested must be explored in other countries, especially non-Western, and also across other product categories.

Practical implications – The findings of this study can help retailers develop their marketing programs, product and service offerings, and specifically their communications more closely targeted to consumers' clothing orientations.

Originality/value – This study contributes by conceptually distinguishing between clothing style and fashion orientations and investigating their divergent associations to materialism and subjective well-being. This research also raises the question of whether fashion orientation is independent or rather, an aspect of materialism, which has implications for other consumption domains as well.

Keywords: clothing consumption, clothing, fashion, materialism, subjective well-being

Introduction

The need to wear clothing is an integral aspect of life for most people. The most obvious function of clothing is physical by helping to protect the human body against variations in weather. However, clothing can also fulfill a psychological function by serving as a form of non-verbal social communication. For example, the clothes a person wears and how they are worn can provide a signal to others about the person's identity, tastes, and individuality (Banister and Hogg, 2004; Kodžoman, 2019; Schaefer and Crane, 2005). While some people disregard this psychological dimension of clothing, many others attach a high degree of importance to decisions about what clothes to purchase and wear.

To better understand this psychological dimension, we propose a trait-like distinction between clothing orientations, which captures divergent approaches to acquiring and wearing clothing. Specifically, we distinguish between consumers who exhibit a preference for style over fashion in clothing consumption (Gupta *et al.*, 2019). A style orientation is generally linked to viewing clothing as a means to express individuality, whereas a fashion orientation emphasizes novelty, variety, and keeping up to date with current trends in clothing acquisition (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Sprotles and Kendall, 1986). Both clothing orientations can serve to express identity and individuality but through different means (Joyner Armstrong *et al.*, 2018). For example, consumers who strongly endorse a fashion orientation, on average, acquire clothes more frequently to keep up with the latest trends (Joyner Armstrong *et al.*, 2018), whereas consumers who strongly endorse a style orientation often acquire long-lasting, unique clothes (Bly *et al.*, 2015). Such differences may imply that the fashion orientation reflects a stronger endorsement of materialistic values than the style orientation (Talaat, 2020). Extensive evidence has documented a negative correlation between materialism and subjective well-being (Dittmar *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, if materialism plays a significant role in fashion orientation but not in style orientation, differing associations should be

observed between style and fashion orientation and subjective well-being. In this study, we therefore investigate the relationships of style and fashion clothing orientations with materialism and subjective well-being.

Theoretical background

Fashion and style orientation

Research has identified two trait-like orientations that reflect different approaches to clothing acquisition: a *style orientation* and a *fashion orientation* (Cho *et al.*, 2015; Gupta *et al.*, 2019). Although style and fashion are often used synonymously, they have divergent meanings (Bly *et al.*, 2015). In relation to clothing, style represents any distinctive mode of tailoring, whereas fashion represents the style prevailing at any given time (Gupta *et al.*, 2019). A style evolves slowly and is reflective of a person's identity and way of life. By contrast, fashion is temporary, ever-changing and resonates newness. For example, Solomon and Rabolt (2004) suggested that fashion represents "a style of dress that is accepted by a large group of people at any given time." Fashion can thus be regarded as symbolic resources that share some level of mutual social understanding but exist in a state of transience. We refer to fashion orientation following the conceptualization by Gupta *et al.*, (2019), but note that this term is used synonymously with the concept of fashion consciousness as adopted in other related literatures.

Differences are also apparent in the characteristics of clothing acquisitions. Consumers with a strong style orientation often acquire clothing that reflects their individualized style and whose design is perceived as classic (Cho *et al.*, 2015). Style orientation thus expresses individuality in a way that mirrors the relatively stable and consistent aspects of personal tastes, interests, and characteristics (Tai, 2005).

Style-oriented consumers are more likely than fashion-oriented consumers to focus their acquisition decisions on characteristics like longevity, authenticity, and uniqueness (Bly *et al.*, 2015). Longevity suggests a preference for clothing items that are more timeless and therefore can be used over a longer timeframe. Authenticity is about ensuring that the acquired clothing items reflect one's identity, and uniqueness expresses the distinctiveness and personalized style of the clothing. Style-oriented consumers consequently tend to prefer clothing items that can be kept for years, even in the face of changing fashion trends. They may be aware of the clothes that suit them, and use creativity to combine items from their existing wardrobe to create new and different looks (Joyner Armstrong *et al.*, 2018). This also means that the style orientation is associated with lower shopping frequency and with preferring secondhand over new clothes compared to the fashion orientation (Gupta *et al.*, 2019).

By contrast, a fashion orientation is linked to a strong interest in and awareness of up-to-date trends and about what is considered fashionable (Cho and Fiore, 2015; Walsh *et al.*, 2001; Workman and Cho, 2012). Highly fashion-oriented consumers are therefore more likely to read about fashion trends, which in turn translates into more frequent purchases of new clothing items (Beaudoin *et al.*, 2000; Joyner Armstrong *et al.*, 2018). The transient nature of fashion and fashionable clothing items means that acquired clothing items quickly become obsolete, thereby operating cyclically, and warranting continued consumption. Interestingly, Gupta et al. (2019) also found that fashion-oriented consumers acquired more of their clothing from 1st markets (e.g., high-street stores) and less from 2nd markets (e.g., secondhand stores). On the other hand, highly style-oriented consumers were more likely to consider the environmental impact of clothing when purchasing clothing (e.g., by purchasing eco-labeled or secondhand clothing).

Though presumed distinct, the style and fashion orientations are not diametrical opposites. For example, both clothing orientations are associated with a greater-than-average interest in clothing

and the importance placed on appearance (Joyner Armstrong *et al.*, 2018). But there is intriguing indicative support for the different characteristics associated with style and fashion-oriented clothing consumers. In other words, existing evidence is mostly preliminary, warranting further investigation into the conceptual distinction between these two clothing orientations and their psychological and consumption characteristics.

The link with materialism

Materialism is defined as the importance a person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Materialism is characterized by three delineating aspects: (i) *acquisition centrality*, the extent to which possessions and acquisitions are a central focus in life; (ii) *happiness through acquisition*, the belief that acquiring additional or different things will result in increased happiness and well-being; and (iii) *success*, the tendency to evaluate the success of oneself and others by their possessions (Fitzmaurice, 2008; Richins, 2017; Richins and Dawson, 1992).

In coupling clothing consumption and materialism, Belk (1988) argued that clothing is acquired as a "second skin" in which to be seen. Similarly, O'Cass (2000, 2004) argued that fashionable clothing signals status and self-identity to others (e.g., professional, sexy, casual). Accordingly, a person's clothes can influence the formation of first impressions and communicate immediate, if not sometimes superficial, insights into a person's identity and personality (Joung, 2013). Although both style and fashion orientations involve using clothing as a means of communicate identity to other people, the underlying messages communicated may differ profoundly. The style orientation mainly involves communicating an individualized style (Cho *et al.*, 2015), whereas the fashion orientation involves communicating newness, social positioning, and status (Lysonski and Durvasula, 2013; Segev *et al.*, 2015; Walsh *et al.*, 2001). The materialistic emphasis of the two

traits thus arguably differs, with a stronger link between fashion orientation and materialism than for style orientation (Gupta *et al.*, 2019; Talaat, 2020).

The stronger link between fashion orientation and materialism is not surprising given the typical characterization of a materialistic person. For example, Dittmar (2005) describes a materialistic person as one who believes that the acquisition of material goods is central to both their self-definition and happiness, as well as a prime indicator of their success. They place a high emphasis on material possessions and have positive attitudes toward acquisitions (Lertwannawit and Mandhachitara, 2012). The endorsement of materialistic values thus reflects a commitment to identity construction through material possessions.

Materialistic consumers often place emphasis on external cues and favor possessions worn or consumed in public places. Clothing can thereby act as an external cue for impression management (Richins and Dawson, 1992). The endorsement of materialistic values has also been identified as an important predictor of time spent shopping (Fitzmaurice and Comegys, 2006) and is related to status consumption (Heaney *et al.*, 2005). As such, considerable overlap exists in the characterization of materialistic and fashion-oriented consumers. Highly fashion-oriented consumers often purchase novel and fashionable items to communicate success or social status, and some evidence suggests that materialism moderates the relationship between fashion orientation and status consumption (Lertwannawit and Mandhachitara, 2012). Despite the conceptual similarities and the expected stronger link between materialism and fashion-oriented consumers, only limited empirical research has investigated this relationship. The first objective of this study is thus to validate the hypothesized stronger relationship between fashion orientation and materialism:

H1. Materialism is more strongly related to fashion orientation than style orientation.

2.3 Clothing orientation, materialism, and subjective well-being

Subjective well-being relates to how people feel and think about their lives (Diener, Larsen, *et al.*, 1985; Jebb *et al.*, 2020), which reflects both cognitive and affective dimensions of well-being. Cognitive well-being refers to domain-specific and global evaluations of life, whereas affective well-being refers to the frequency and intensity of positive and negative emotions and moods (Luhmann *et al.*, 2012). Many life domains contribute to a person's subjective well-being including their health, socioeconomic status, personal relationships, sense of safety and security, connection to community, and consumption activities (Jebb *et al.*, 2020; Sirgy *et al.*, 2012; Weinberg *et al.*, 2018).

One extensively studied relationship is that between materialism and subjective well-being. Although exceptions exist (e.g., Roy *et al.*, 2019), the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that materialism has a detrimental effect on people's subjective well-being (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Górnik-Durose, 2020; Silvera *et al.*, 2008). For example, a meta-analysis found that materialism is negatively related to cognitive and affective well-being, as well as to most other indicators of well-being (Dittmar *et al.*, 2014). One explanation for the negative relationship between materialism and subjective well-being is that materialistic consumers are more likely to believe that acquiring products will induce pleasure, improve the impression made on others, and facilitate social relationships (Richins, 2011, 2017). This involves a recurring desire for obtaining new possessions and a dissatisfaction with current possessions, which may undermine their well-being (Larsen and McKibban, 2008). Another explanation is that materialistic consumers disproportionately focus on money, expensive products, and image. This focus increases the likelihood that they pay attention to advertisement messages and internalize these, which can induce the sense that their current possessions are insufficient and inferior (Dittmar *et al.*, 2014; Kasser and Kanner, 2004). Moreover, exposure to advertisement messages can result in upward social comparison that may induce negative self-evaluations (Collins, 1996; Sirgy *et al.*, 2012) and an

increased perceived discrepancy between current and ideal self (Halliwell and Dittmar, 2006; Higgins, 1987). Similar dynamics may play out for highly fashion-oriented consumers with recurring comparisons between their current clothing possessions and the most recent looks and trends. This is less likely to occur for highly style-oriented consumers who may instead use new clothing purchases to reinforce their individualized and more inwardly focused style and resist fast-changing fashion trends.

Another adverse consequence of materialism is its association with dysfunctional consumer behaviors like compulsive consumption (Dittmar, 2005; Faber and O'Guinn, 1992). Although evidence is scarce, compulsive consumption might be a risk factor for some fashion-oriented consumers by continuously seek to acquire the newest and trendiest clothing to improve their status and image. For example, Park and Burns (2005) found that a strong interest in fashion was positively linked to compulsive consumption. Manolis and Roberts (2012) also observed that materialism and compulsive consumption were negatively related to subjective well-being among a large sample of adolescents in the United States. However, while compulsive consumption and potentially also overconsumption (Alexander and Ussher, 2012) may have detrimental effects on subjective well-being, more moderate levels of clothing consumption may positively relate to well-being. For example, shopping for clothing and other consumer goods may for some people elicit pleasure, hedonic enjoyment, and satisfy self-expressive needs (Ekici *et al.*, 2018; Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006).

The extent to which consumers derive positive affect from clothing consumption has been the subject of little research, but in line with the evidence and theoretical reasoning outlined above, we suspect that this might differ depending on whether consumers endorse a style or fashion orientation. We therefore hypothesize that endorsing a style orientation is more positively associated with subjective well-being than endorsing a fashion orientation.

H2: Style orientation is more positively related to subjective well-being than fashion orientation.

Highly materialistic consumers are more likely to believe that consumption signals success and status than less materialistic consumers (Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012; Richins, 1994; Wong, 1997; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998). As a result, they are more likely to judge their own life satisfaction based on their consumption patterns, which ample evidence suggests is detrimental to subjective well-being. Because a fashion orientation generally symbolizes (materialistic) consumption, we expect that the relationship between fashion orientation and subjective well-being will be moderated by materialism, whereas no moderation effect is expected for style orientation due to its expected weaker connection to materialism. Specifically, we expect that consumers who strongly endorse a fashion orientation and materialistic values will report lower subjective well-being. We thus formulate the following hypothesis:

H3: The relationship between fashion orientation and subjective well-being is moderated by materialism.

Method

Participants

To investigate the distinction between style and fashion orientations and their relationships with materialism and subjective well-being, we relied on data from an online survey carried out in four countries (Germany, Poland, Sweden, and the United States) with large and socio-demographically diverse samples. The countries were selected to capture a broad spectrum of clothing markets within the Global North. Sweden has a modern clothing fashion market (e.g., home to H&M), whereas Germany is the largest economy in Europe with a major clothing market. The United

States has the world's largest clothing market and was also included due to its cultural and political distinction from continental Europe. Finally, Poland was included to represent Eastern Europe and a post-communist regime, which similar to the United States largely accepts materialistic values. Comparing more than two countries has its advantages as differences can be better contextualized when compared to at least one additional country or to a group of similar countries (Boer *et al.*, 2018).

The survey was administered by the marketing research company Qualtrics. Qualtrics recruited adult participants (aged 18-65) from each of the four countries based on national representative quotas for age, sex, education, and region with the aim of achieving representativeness, and participants were incentivized for their participation (e.g., gift cards). Several quality measures were implemented in both survey parts to maximize data quality and to screen out careless responses. These measures included attention filters (e.g., "Please select strongly agree"), bogus items (e.g., "I always sleep less than one hour per night"), detecting answering in patterns (i.e., straight-lining), and self-reported data on answer quality (e.g., "In your honest opinion, should we use your data in our analysis of this study"). Participants failing multiple quality checks were replaced. Due to its length, the survey was divided into two parts answered with two to four-week intervals between October 2016 and January 2017. All key measures included in the present study were included in the second survey part. Only participants completing both survey parts were included in the analyses, resulting in a sample of $N = 4{,}591$. We subsequently removed participants who reported never purchasing clothing for themselves ($n = 186$). The final sample ($N = 4{,}405$) was not fully representative, in part due to a self-selection in the participants who completed both survey parts ($M_{age} = 42.23$, $SD_{age} = 13.53$; 57% female), with the following country breakdown: Germany ($n = 1{,}140$), Poland ($n = 1{,}090$), Sweden ($n = 1{,}125$), and the United States ($n = 1{,}050$). The survey was originally developed in English and subsequently translated by ISO17100 certified translators into

the three other languages and then proofread by native speakers. Because the survey included a wide range of measures, only a subset of them is reported here. We note that other manuscripts have been published on the same data set (e.g., Gwozdz *et al.*, 2017; Joanes, 2019; Nielsen *et al.*, 2020; Nielsen and Bauer, 2019), and that the present hypotheses were not preregistered prior to data collection.

Measures

We relied on existing validated scales to measure our key constructs (all measurement items and reliability coefficients are shown in Appendix 1). To measure *fashion orientation*, we used the six-item fashion consciousness scale by Sprotles and Kendall (1986) rated on a likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Style orientation was measured on a 22-item scale developed by Joyner Armstrong et al. (2018), which was rated on a seven-point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). The style orientation scale comprises five distinct dimensions: style longevity, aesthetic perceptual ability, creativity, appearance importance, and authenticity.

To measure *materialism*, we used the materialism scale by Richins and Dawson (1992). Similar to Gwozdz, Gupta and Gentry (2019), we used a shortened scale consisting of only the positively phrased items thereby neglecting the reversed items due to their poor factor loadings in a confirmatory factor analysis. The low factor loadings of the reverse-coded items have also been observed in other studies. For example, Wong, Rindfleisch, and Burrroughs (2003) noted that while the scale has worked well psychometrically in the United States, it often encounters problems in cross-cultural contexts due to the use of mixed (positively worded versus negatively worded) statements. Consequently, we used only ten of the original 18 items, which were rated on a seven-point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

Subjective well-being consists of two components: an affective and a cognitive component. *Affective well-being* was measured through the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) (Diener *et al.*, 2010). The measurement scale consists of 12 short items assessing positive (6 items) and negative (6 items) emotional experiences. The opening text for the scale read: "Please think about what you have been doing and experiencing during the past four weeks. Then report how much you experienced each of the following feelings using the scale below." Each of the feelings was rated on a five-point likert scale (1 = *very rarely or never*; 5 = *very often or always*). The scores for positive and negative experiences were combined to develop an 'affect balance' score by subtracting the negative score from the positive score with resulting scores ranging from -24 to 24. For *cognitive well-being* we used the Satisfaction with Life scale (Diener, Emmons, *et al.*, 1985). The measurement scale consists of five items rated on a seven-point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

We also measured three socio-demographic variables: gender, age, and income. Gender was measured using three response options (male, female, and 'other'). Due to the few participants identifying as non-binary (*n* = 7), we used gender as a dummy variable (1 = female, 0 = male). Age was measured in years and income was measured via an 11-point country-specific ranked scale based on corresponding national statistics from 2014 (Eurostat for Germany, Poland, and Sweden and U.S. Census Bureau for the United States; see Gwozdz *et al.*, 2017 for further details).

Analytical strategy

Ordinary least square (OLS) regression was the main analysis technique used to investigate the relationships between style and fashion orientation and materialism and subjective well-being. We employed a sequential analytical approach whereby a series of regression models were performed to unpack the relationships between style and fashion orientation and the affective and cognitive

components of subjective well-being, as well as the potential role of materialism. To test for moderation, we performed a regression analysis where affective and cognitive well-being were regressed onto style orientation, fashion orientation, materialism, and the interaction terms (style x materialism and fashion x materialism). We report both unstandardized and standardized coefficients to facilitate analytical comparisons across the two types of well-being because they were measured on different scales. Income, age, and gender were included as control variables in all analyses.

Results

As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, the mean of style orientation ($M = 4.93$; $SD = 1.06$) was consistently above the scale mid-point across the four countries. The mean of fashion orientation was considerably lower ($M = 2.76$; $SD = 1.63$), whereas the materialism mean was around the scale mid-point ($M = 3.51$; $SD = 1.27$). But as illustrated by the violin boxplots in Figure 1 (panels a-c), the materialism distributions, in particular, varied between the four countries. The Pearson correlations between the three key constructs were as follows: style and fashion orientation ($r = .51$; $p < .001$), style orientation and materialism ($r = .27$; $p < .001$), and fashion orientation and materialism ($r = .51$; $p < .001$). The three constructs were thus all positively correlated, but with fashion orientation being more strongly correlated with materialism than style orientation (see country-specific correlations in Figure 1, panels d-f). The correlations were statistically significantly different ($z = -16.50$, $p < .001$) and thus provide support for hypothesis H1. Interestingly, style orientation, fashion orientation, and materialism were all negatively correlated with age, suggesting that their endorsement might wane over the life course. Women were more likely than men to endorse the style orientation ($r = .25$; $p < .001$) and the fashion orientation ($r =$

.12; $p < .001$), which might reflect a greater interest in clothing consumption as also observed in other studies (Naderi, 2013).
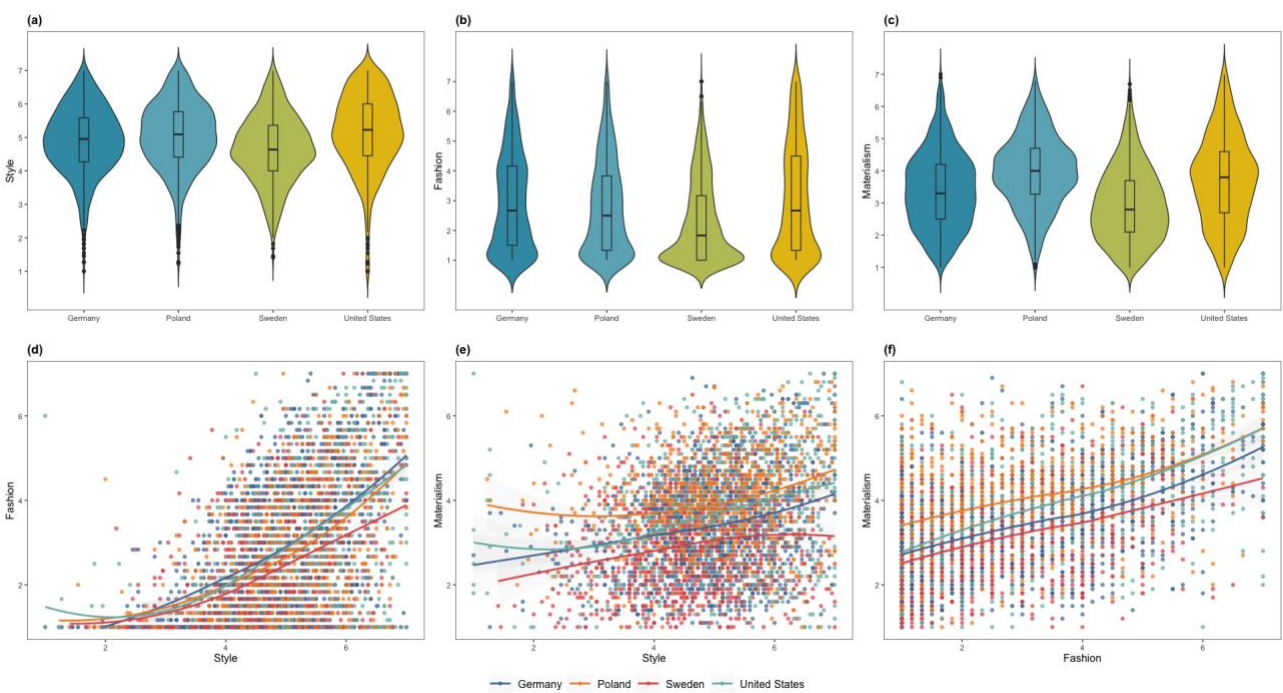
Figure 1. Distribution plots and bivariate correlations. Panel (a-c) show violin-box plots of style orientation, fashion orientation, and materialism across the four countries. Panel (d-f) illustrate bivariate correlations between style orientation, fashion orientation, and materialism across the four countries with dots representing individual cases. Source: The authors.

To investigate whether style and fashion orientations relate to subjective well-being, two regression models were analyzed. Here, affective well-being and cognitive well-being served as outcome variables, and style and fashion orientation were included as predictor variables alongside the socio-demographic variables. As detailed in Table 2 (Models 1-2), style orientation positively predicted both cognitive ($\beta = .14$; $p < .001$) and affective well-being ($\beta = .18$; $p < .001$) when controlling for income, age, and gender. By contrast, fashion orientation exhibited a weak positive relationship with cognitive well-being ($\beta = .04$; $p = .039$) but was not significantly related to

affective well-being (β = .02; p = .347). The coefficients for style and fashion were statistically significantly different in the models predicting cognitive (t = 5.06, p < .001) and affective well-being (t = 7.93, p < .001). These results thus support hypothesis H2 that style orientation is more positively related to subjective well-being than fashion orientation. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was below 1.44 in both models, indicating no multicollinearity among the independent variables.

-- INSERT TABLE 2 HERE --

In a subsequent step, we explored how the relationships between style and fashion orientation and subjective well-being might change when adding materialism as a control variable in the regression models. The purpose of this analysis was particularly to explore fashion orientation's relation to subjective well-being 'without' the materialistic dimension (we return to the practical feasibility of this in the discussion). As expected, materialism was strongly and negatively related to cognitive (β = -.31; p < .001) and affective well-being (β = -.29; p < .001) (see Table 2, Models 3-4). Adding materialism to the models had little influence on the coefficients for style orientation, which remained positive and statistically significant for both cognitive (β = .15; p < .001) and affective well-being (β = .20; p < .001). The fashion-orientation coefficients, on the other hand, changed profoundly. Fashion orientation now positively predicted cognitive (β = .18; p < .001) and affective well-being (β = .15; p < .001) with coefficient sizes resembling those for style orientation. The VIF was below 1.74 in both models.

To investigate the stability of the above-mentioned results, we next performed country-specific regression analyses. As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between style orientation and subjective well-being is relatively stable across the four countries. However, the positive relationship between fashion orientation and subjective well-being appears to be primarily driven by the United States

sample with considerably smaller positive coefficient sizes observed in Germany, Poland, and
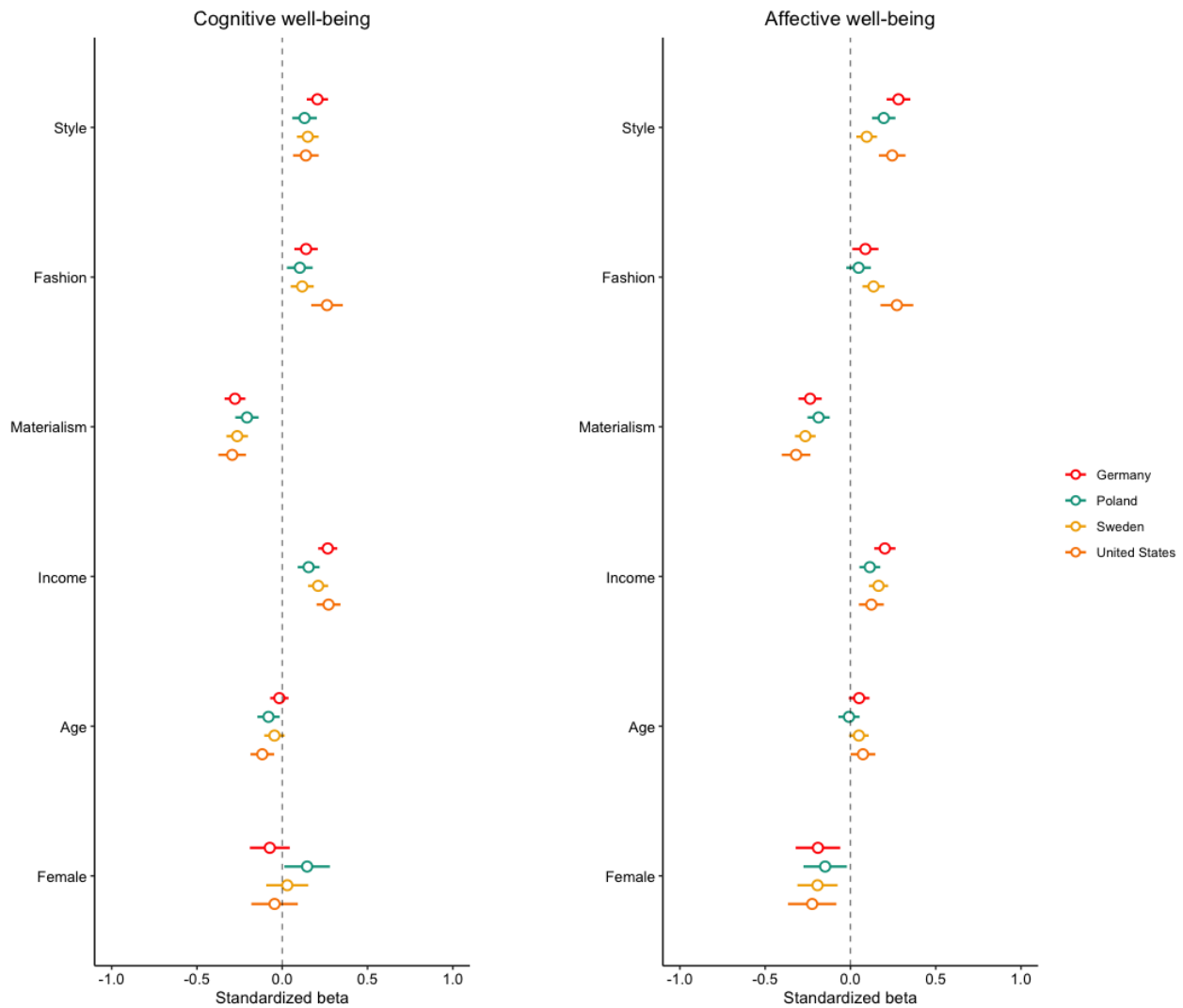
Sweden.

Figure 2. Results from country-specific regression models with standardized coefficients. Source: The authors.

In testing our third hypothesis, two regression models with interaction terms were tested to

explore whether materialism moderated the relationships between style and fashion orientation and

subjective well-being (Table 2, Models 5-6). We did not observe statistically significant interactions

between materialism and style orientation for cognitive ($\beta = -.10$; $p = .309$) nor affective well-being

($\beta = .12$; $p = .258$). However, the interactions between materialism and fashion orientation were

positive and statistically significant for both cognitive ($\beta = .30$; $p < .001$) and affective well-being ($\beta = .19$; $p = .012$), thus supporting H3.

The interaction effects, depicted in Figure 3, visualize the moderation of materialism between style and fashion orientation and cognitive and affective well-being. For example, the non-significant moderation between style orientation and cognitive and affective well-being can be identified by the slopes for low, medium, and high materialism. The parallel running slopes for materialism show that the relationships between style orientation and subjective well-being are not significantly affected by materialism. However, this is not true for fashion orientation and subjective well-being where the slopes increase with higher levels of materialism (Figure 3, panels c-d). This suggests that the relationships between fashion orientation and cognitive and affective well-being become stronger with higher levels of materialism. However, the lower intercepts for higher levels of materialism indicate that participants who more strongly endorse materialistic values and have low fashion orientation report lower levels of cognitive and affective well-being.

Taken together, the moderation analyses show that style orientation has a moderately strong and positive relationship with cognitive and affective well-being independent of materialism, whereas materialism plays a significant role in the relationships between fashion orientation and cognitive and affective well-being.
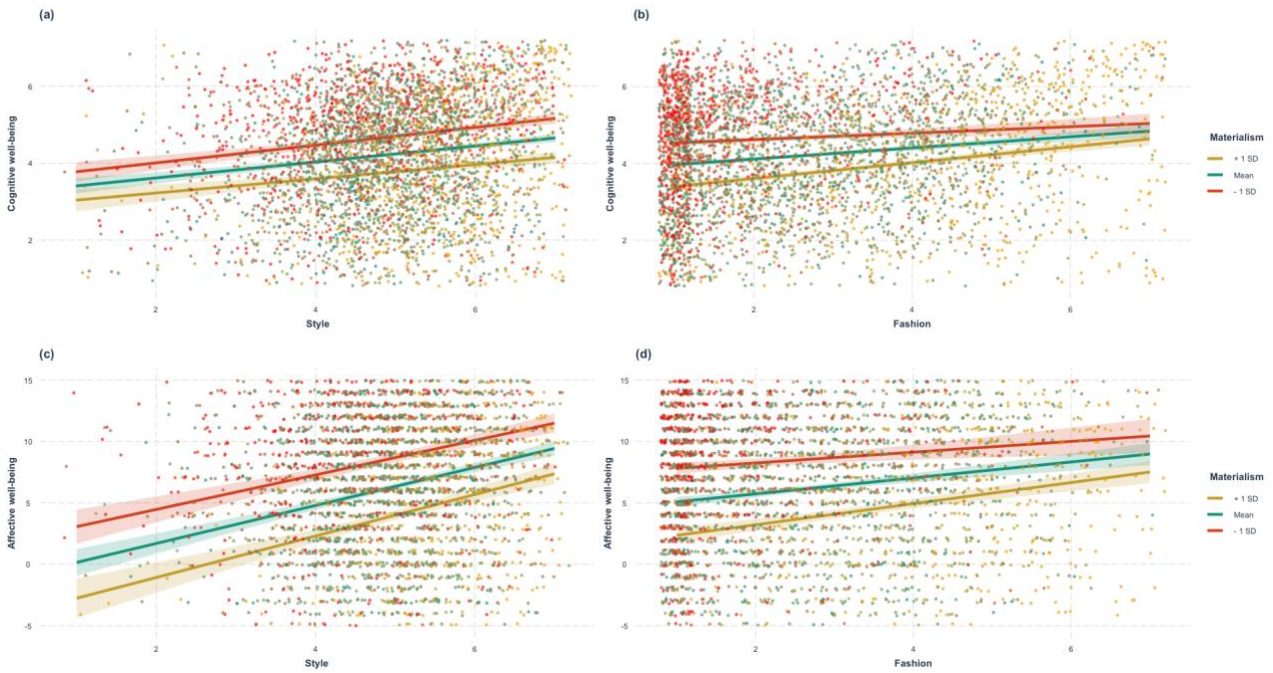
Figure 3. Moderation effects of materialism. Note that in panels (c) and (d) only cases within the boundaries of the y-axis are shown. The analyses include income, age, and gender as control variables. Source: The authors.

Discussion

People vary in the importance and effort they dedicate to their clothing decisions. In the present

study, we focused on consumers with a considerable interest in clothing by investigating the

conceptual distinction between two trait-like clothing orientations – style and fashion – and their

relationships with materialism and subjective well-being across four countries. The main insights

from this study can be summarized as follows:

First, style and fashion orientation were, as expected, positively correlated, but our results

nevertheless support their conceptual distinction. Interestingly, fashion orientation exhibited a

stronger positive relationship with materialism than style orientation. This supports our theorizing

that fashion orientation shares conceptual overlap with materialism and to a greater extent than style

orientation. Although style orientation was correlated with materialism, other non-materialistic

motivations may similarly be shared among style-oriented consumers such as authenticity, uniqueness, and longevity (Joyner Armstrong *et al.*, 2018).

Second, we replicated the strong negative relationship between materialism and subjective well-being as widely identified in previous research (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Dittmar *et al.*, 2014; Kasser, 2016; Sirgy *et al.*, 2012). This strong and negative relationship holds for both cognitive and affective well-being. Numerous explanations have been proposed for the negative relationship between materialism and subjective well-being. One such explanation is that people who strongly endorse materialistic values believe that acquiring products induces pleasure and signals success to others (Richins, 2011). However, the recurring desire for new possessions and emphasis on money, conspicuous consumption, and image may induce negative self-evaluations and a discrepancy between current and ideal self (Halliwell and Dittmar, 2006; Higgins, 1987; Larsen and McKibban, 2008).

Third, upon exploring the interplay of style and fashion orientation, materialism, and subjective well-being, a more nuanced picture of the style and fashion orientations emerged. While style orientation was positively related to both cognitive and affective well-being, fashion orientation was only weakly related or unrelated to subjective well-being. However, when introducing materialism to the regression models, and thus controlling for the shared variance of fashion orientation and materialism, fashion orientation became positively related to both dimensions of subjective well-being. This points towards two propositions: first, there are aspects of fashion orientation unrelated to materialism and positively linked to well-being. Thus, if clothing consumption was not about acquiring possessions, conveying status through possessions, or achieving happiness through possessions, it could, in principle, be positively related to subjective well-being. Second, a style orientation or a fashion orientation without materialistic dimensions can positively relate to subjective well-being, although the conceptualization and indeed practical feasibility of a fashion

orientation without materialism can be seriously questioned. Setting these concerns aside, clothing consumption has been associated with hedonic enjoyment, pleasure, and the satisfaction of self-expressive needs (Ekici *et al.*, 2018; Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006). Clothing consumption may also be considered by some as a form of entertainment and recreation (Bäckström, 2006; Guiry *et al.*, 2006). Hence, it is possible that such experiences can contribute positively to a person's subjective well-being, although causal evidence is currently lacking. Future research could explore which aspects of clothing consumption might induce positive emotional experiences (e.g., spending time with family or friends). Moreover, no evidence currently exists to indicate whether the emotional implications of clothing consumption vary as a function of the type of clothes acquired or the acquisition mode (e.g., secondhand or leasing versus high-street or luxury clothing). Answering such questions becomes particularly important as the world ramps up efforts to address the environmental degradation caused by clothing production and consumption (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020; Sohn *et al.*, 2021).

Fourth, the present results suggest that materialism is not equally detrimental to all people (Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012). Materialism generally has a negative effect on subjective well-being with highly materialistic participants reporting lower levels of subjective well-being compared to less materialistic participants. But both groups benefit from some form of clothing involvement, either through a fashion or style orientation. For fashion orientation, we find that materialism moderates the relationships between fashion orientation and cognitive and affective well-being. While materialism did not significantly moderate the relationship between style orientation and subjective well-being, for fashion orientation its relationship with subjective well-being increases with higher levels of materialism. One possible explanation is that highly materialistic consumers live out their values through fashion and fashionable consumption, thereby

realizing their appreciation of material possessions. However, this explanation warrants empirical investigation and is currently mere speculation.

Fifth, the distinction between style and fashion orientation is reflected in the stronger relationship between fashion orientation and materialism compared to style orientation. The strong correlation between fashion orientation and materialism suggests the greater importance of external cues for fashion orientation. This raises the important question of whether fashion orientation is an independent concept or merely another description of materialism. If fashion orientation is about acquiring new clothing items (Beaudoin *et al.*, 2000) to satisfy the need of keeping up to date with the latest fashion trends (Walsh *et al.*, 2001), then there is more than one way to achieve these aims. One way is to repeatedly purchase new clothing items when current items become symbolically obsolete (e.g., because a new trend emerges), which results in the continued accumulation of material possessions. Another way without the notion of materialism could be via providing access to new, trendy clothing items without ownership such as through renting, lending, leasing, or swapping clothing. Indeed, examples of companies offering rental services include Rent the Runway, Nuuly, Tulerie, and Gwynnie Bee. Such acquisition methods may permit fashion-oriented consumers to fulfill their potential needs for communicating extrinsic and appearance features to other people while at the same time mitigating the negative environmental impacts associated with fast fashion. This suggests that even if materialism is removed from fashion orientation, both style and fashion orientations remain conceptually distinct.

The present results suggest that retailers may significantly benefit from understanding the differences between style- and fashion-oriented consumers and the needs they seek to satisfy through consumption and how they relate to subjective well-being. Indeed, our results have implications for the development and offering of clothing products and services and communications about them. With increasing recognition of the negative environmental impacts of

clothing consumption (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020; Sohn *et al.*, 2021), promoting the acquisition of clothing to satisfy the materialistic needs of fashion-oriented consumers may seem counter-productive. However, as indicated above, there are other ways for retailers to provide their consumers with access to clothing items that meet their differentiated needs, while at the same time minimizing associated environmental impacts. Indeed, a better understanding of consumers' underlying motivations for both style and fashion orientation might allow brands to strengthen their targeted communications with messages that emphasize the pro-environmental effects of consumption choices made in favor of the brand. Patagonia serves as an excellent example of a brand whose sustainability strategy targets consumers with a distinct style orientation. To maintain consistency between consumers' level of pro-environmental consciousness and those of the organization, clear communication strategies are necessary. It is also important to design pro-environmental messages that appeal to consumers with a high fashion orientation. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, consumers with a distinct fashion orientation may recognize the importance of addressing the environmental impacts of clothing once their more materialistic needs are met. While environmental protection may not be their primary motivation for consumption choices, assuming that all consumers with a high fashion orientation lack any interest in the environment may be a mistake. Acknowledging this fact presents an opportunity for more inclusive messaging about the environment that includes consumers with a high fashion orientation (e.g., by promoting alternative clothing business models like clothing rental; Nielsen and Gwozdz, 2018). Further research is necessary to understand the circumstances under which consumer with a high fashion orientation are interested in reducing harmful effects of their clothing consumption choices on the environment. Taken together, designing product and service offerings and communications tailored to the distinct needs of both consumers with a high style and a high fashion orientation can lead to more environmentally sustainable options.

Limitations and future research

The present research has several noteworthy limitations. Most importantly, all results are strictly correlational, and thus causality cannot be inferred. While our results are based on large and demographically diverse samples from four countries, they are only from Western countries. Future research is consequently encouraged to investigate whether the present results generalize to other non-Western countries, which may also have fundamentally different clothing practices and markets and therefore different clothing consumption traits.

Although we advance the conceptualization of fashion orientation and identify its strong link to materialism, further conceptualization and exploration of fashion orientation is warranted. We sketch how fashion orientation could still be distinct from style orientation when removing materialism, but further work is required to support this suggestion and not least to investigate the practical feasibility of a fashion orientation without materialism. The conceptualization of style orientation would also benefit from further development both theoretically and empirically.

The measurements of style and fashion orientation need further psychometric validation, which is particularly true for style orientation. The fashion orientation scale might also need additional scrutiny pending the continued development of the concept. Furthermore, the present study exclusively focused on the clothing domain, which has distinct characteristics that separate it from other key consumption domains. Future research could investigate whether the style and fashion orientations are similarly mirrored in other consumption domains such as interior design, jewelry, or technology products. Clearly, the measurement scales used here will require adaptation to fit other domains.

Finally, further research is needed to explore the circumstances that influence the willingness of individuals with either a distinct fashion or a style orientation to engage in more pro-

environmental and other pro-social consumption behaviors. For example, although research suggests a stronger link between style orientation and pro-environmental clothing consumption (Gupta *et al.*, 2019), identifying ways to guide behaviors of consumers with a distinct style orientation towards desired outcomes, while simultaneously motivating for consumers with a high fashion orientation to adopt more pro-environmental consumption behaviors is an important area for exploration (Hassan *et al.*, 2022).

Conclusion

The present study contributes with a clearer conceptual distinction between style and fashion orientation and with documenting the two orientations' relationships with materialism and subjective well-being across four countries and using large samples. We hope future research will shed further light on the social, psychological, socio-demographic, and consumption characteristics of consumers with distinct style and fashion orientations.

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Declaration of conflicts of interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

Ethics approval statement

No ethics approval was obtained for the present study as this was not common practice nor institutionally available at Copenhagen Business School at the time of data collection. However, the study posed no risks to the participants nor include deceit, and an informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data availability

The dataset analyzed in the present study is not publicly available due to data protection policies specified by the funding projects. The dataset is available from the corresponding author upon request.

Appendix

Table A1. Measurement overview

Construct

Fashion orientation (α = .95)
Fashionable, attractive clothing is very important to me.
Keeping up with the latest fashion is important to me.
I spend considerable time and effort to learn about the latest fashion.
I keep my wardrobe up to date with the changing fashions.
I usually have one or more outfits of the very new fashion.
I consciously choose something that reflects the current fashion.

Style orientation (α = .94)
I prefer to purchase clothing I know I can utilize for a long time
I typically purchase clothing I know will fit my personal style for a long time
When purchasing clothing, I like to know it will work with my personal style
I prefer to purchase clothing that is more timeless
I know what looks good on me
I know what color(s) look best on me
I know how to select clothing that flatters my body
When I am purchasing clothing, I can easily eliminate items I know will not look good on me
I mix and match different clothing pieces together to create new looks
I like to create my own style by mixing and matching things I already own
I find ways to give a different look to clothing I already own
I am adventurous when it comes to creating my personal style with clothing
I experiment to put different clothing items together to create my personal style
I pay much attention to how I look
How I look when I'm dressed is important to me
What I look like is an important part of who I am
How I dress is important to me
The way I look is important to me
My clothing style matches the real me
What I wear reflects my inner self
Who I am is clear in my clothing style
My inner self shows in what I wear

Cognitive well-being (α = .90)
In most ways my life is close to my ideal
The conditions of my life are excellent
I am satisfied with my life
So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life
If I could live my life over. I would change almost nothing

Positive affect (α = .90)
Positive
Good
Pleasant
Happy
Joyful
Contented

Negative affect (α = .87)
Negative
Bad
Unpleasant
Sad
Afraid
Angry

Materialism (α = .87)
I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.
Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.
I like a lot of luxury in my life.
I admire people who own expensive possessions (such as homes, cars and clothes).
Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.
The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.
I like to own things that impress people.
My life would be better if I owned certain things that I don't currently have.
I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things (possessions).
It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.