

Modernization, Mass Production and Materialism: Psychological, Social, and Spiritual Challenges in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This paper studies the interrelationship between industrialization, modernization, materialism, and the decline of spirituality in contemporary society. It explores how mass production, technological advancement, globalization, and the Information Technology revolution have transformed human lifestyles, economic systems, and social structures. While these developments have contributed to improved standard of living, modernization, urbanization, and economic growth, they have intensified consumer culture, material aspirations, and individualistic values. This study sheds light on how rising consumerism and media influence have encouraged materialism, often affecting personal well-being, social relationships, and ethical values. In contrast, the paper emphasizes the role of spirituality in promoting emotional balance, self-awareness, and psychological well-being. This research is based on secondary sources, including scholarly articles, review papers, online database, text books, and reports. This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach to synthesize existing literature. The findings suggest that excessive materialism is associated with social disconnection, emotional imbalance, psychological stress, and moral decline, whereas spirituality and traditional values contribute to inner peace and sustainable well-being. The paper concludes that a balanced integration of material progress, healthy lifestyle and spiritual development is essential for achieving holistic human development and maintaining social harmony in modern societies.

Keywords

Consumerism, Globalization, Industrialization, Materialism, Modernization, Spirituality, Sustainability, Urbanization

Introduction: A Conceptual Overview of Industrialization, Modernization, and Their Socio-Spiritual Implications

Industrialization and modernization have significantly transformed human societies across the Globe. Mass production started in the early 18th and 19th centuries with the idea of interchangeable parts and later with the moving assembly line production, but with industrial production in the 1920s, mass production transformed rural agrarian economies to more urban-centric and product-orientated (Hobsbawm, 1999; Weber, 2002). This led to urbanization and expansion of global trade. Modernization further enhanced social and economic changes through scientific progress, industrial growth, and the development of technological advancement and global trade. Industrialization and modernization created employment opportunities for the people, consequentially leading to migration from rural to urban areas. The growth and development of cities and industries paved way for improved production with efficiency and raised standard of living for many sections of society across the globe. At the same time, modernization encouraged consumerism and material aspirations among individuals. Digital communication and technological advancement changed the way people work, interact, and consume goods and services (Castells, 2010; Schwab, 2016). However, these latest developments across world changed traditional social structures and weakened community-based living systems. Joint family systems gradually declined and individualistic lifestyles became more common in modern societies (Durkheim, 1984; Giddens, 1991). Individuals started to focus on status, wealth, materialistic things and it created psychological and emotional challenges. In societies, economic achievements and consumer culture have reduced the importance of moral values, ethical living, spirituality, inner peace, reduced importance in social relationships, and self-awareness in human life. The imbalance between material progress and spiritual well-being has contributed to stress, loneliness, and social disconnection in contemporary society (Polanyi, 2001; Weber, 2002). Therefore, it is important to understand the relationship between industrialization, modernization, and spirituality it is essential for examining the social and psychological condition of modern human life.

Research Methodology

This study is based on secondary data and it has been collected from textbooks, review papers, newspapers, research papers, reports, published literature, online databases and reliable online sources. The paper mainly focuses on Mass production, Materialism, Modern societies and lack of spirituality. The study has adopted a qualitative study and a descriptive research approach.

Literature Review

Richins (2010) explained that materialism encourages individuals to place greater importance on the acquisition and possession of material goods as a way to achieve happiness, social status, and self-worth. Christopher et al. (2009) observed that materialism has a negative association with personal well-being, social relationships, and altruistic behavior. Shrum, Burroughs, and Rindfleisch (2005) stated that media exposure and consumer culture significantly influence the growth of materialistic values among individuals. Rosmarin et al. (2022) highlighted that spirituality contributes to emotional balance, self-awareness, mental well-being, and a sense of purpose beyond material achievements.

Rise of Mass Production and Industrial Revolution

The increase in mass production started during the Industrial Revolution with the development of interchangeable parts in manufacturing. Later, assembly line production increased the speed and efficiency of industrial output. Many factories across the globe were able to produce huge quantities of goods at lesser cost and within short span of time. Many people moved from rural areas to urban areas in search of job in factories and industries. As industries expanded, urbanization also increased rapidly across many countries. The Industrial Revolution, sometimes called the First Industrial Revolution in contrast to the subsequent Second Industrial Revolution, was a transitional period of the global economy toward more widespread, efficient and stable manufacturing processes, succeeding the Second Agricultural Revolution (Wikipedia contributors, 2026). One of the offshoots of the industrial revolution is the growth of urban landscapes. The Industrial Revolution therefore changed not only economic and social structure but also the lifestyle of human societies.

Impact of Industrialization on Society and Family Structure

Industrialization brought drastic changes to society and family structure. Due to industrialization people migrated from rural to urban areas in search of employment opportunities for a better living condition. Industrial production created jobs and gave rise to migration, and in effect, the joint family system and community living started to disintegrate (Durkheim, 1984; Giddens, 1991). In cities, people began to adopt more individualistic ways of living and social relationships became less closely connected. The increasing cost of living and changing work patterns contributed to the rise of nuclear families consisting only of parents and children. While industrialization improved economic opportunities, contributed to the economic development of the economy, and contributed to GDP but simultaneously it reduced the emotional and social support in joint family systems. All these social changes significantly transformed human relationships, family values, morals, ethics, cultural traditions, and patterns of community interaction in modern society.

Consumerism and Materialistic Lifestyles

Consumerism and materialism encourage individuals to place greater importance on the acquisition and possession of material goods as a means of achieving happiness, social status, and self-worth (Richins, 2010). Industrialization, modernization, mass production and technological development made products available for people at cheaper prices and in larger quantities. As a result, people gained easier access to a wide variety of goods and services, which gradually increased consumption levels in society. The mass production and availability of products at cheaper price encouraged the growth of consumer culture, where buying and owning goods became closely connected with lifestyle and social status for the people. With everything available at cheaper prices, people became more aspirational for better lifestyles, even in the knowledge that the kind of lifestyles they are choosing is not affordable or sustainable in the long run.

Advertising, social media, promotions, and globalization influenced people's preferences and spending habits across the globe (Ritzer, 2010; Castells, 2010). Many individuals began to compare their lifestyles with others and developed aspirations for luxury, comfort, social status, and modern living. This has created and imposed a pressure among people to achieve higher economic status and expensive products. In many cases, material success started to receive greater importance than social relationships and personal well-being.

This increasing consumerism contributed to unnecessary spending, wastage, and dissatisfaction among individuals despite improvements in living standards. It is vital to start moral attuning of children to the ancient wisdom and traditional values, which will develop a sense of right and wrong. The world has come a long way, and it is not possible

to turn the wheels of change backward, but we could still make a change by prioritizing our moral values over materialism.

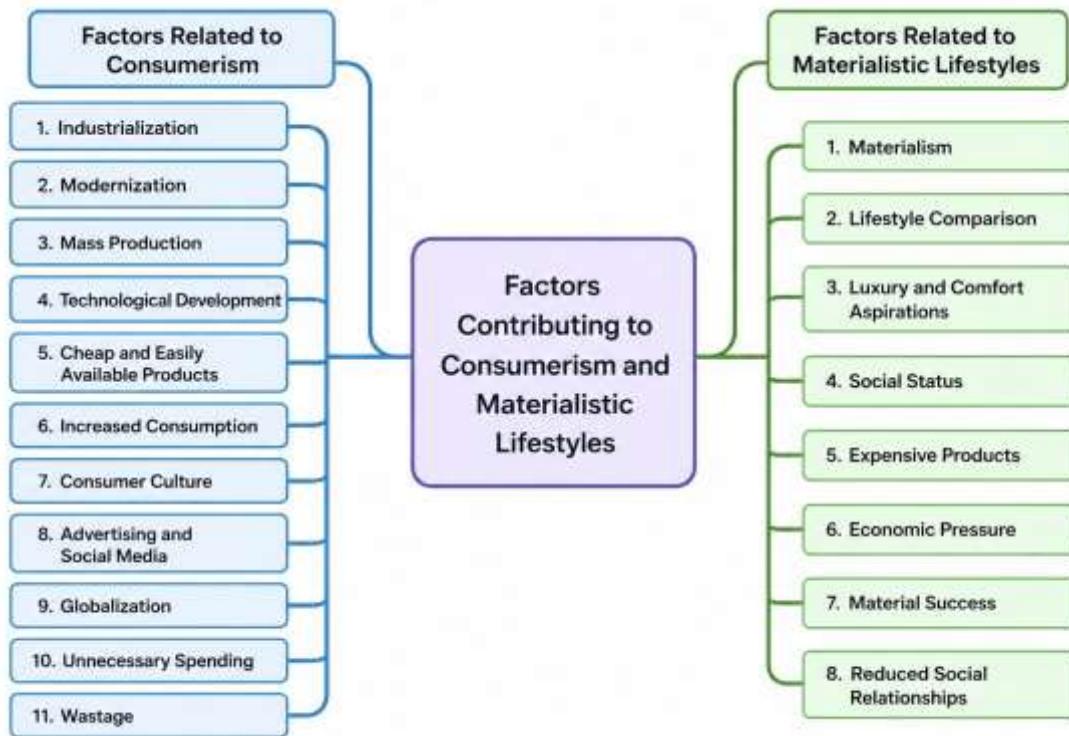


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Illustrating Factors Contributing to Consumerism and Materialistic Lifestyles

Globalization and Expansion of Markets

According to Beck (2000), the notion of “globalization” refers to an open, multidimensional, and multicultural process. It corresponds to the growing interdependence of national economies, involving consumers, producers, suppliers, and governments of different countries (Knight, 2000). Globalization has increased the connection between countries through trade, business, and communication. The information technology revolution saw a phenomenal rise in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which made communication faster and easier (Castells, 2010; Schwab, 2016). ICTs played a vital role in globalization by connecting businesses, consumers, and markets through digital platforms and the internet. technology aided companies to manage production, marketing, promotion, and distribution activities more efficiently at the global level. As global competition increased, many organizations focused on profit maximization and market expansion to sustain growth. While globalization created economic prospects and wider consumer choices, it increased competition, consumerism, and dependence on global markets.

Economic Inequality and Social Class Division

Social stratification refers to the hierarchical arrangement of individuals into groups based on varying access to resources and opportunities, impacting everything from education and job prospects to health outcomes and societal participation (Christian, 2021). Industrialization and economic growth contributed to the increase of inequality in society. As factories and industries expanded, wealth became concentrated in the hands of a small group of industrial owners and business elites. This created a division between who owned industries and resources, and the working class, who depended on wages for survival. Factory workers often worked under tough conditions for low wages while industrial capitalists earned large profits from production and trade. The growing gap between the rich and poor increased social and economic differences among people. In many industrial societies, workers became highly dependent on factory owners for employment and financial security. The working class depended on the wealthy factory owners for their wages and divided the societies into different classes of people (Weber, 2002; Durkheim, 1984). This kind of over dependence on owners reduced economic freedom from laborers and strengthened the power of industrial capitalists in society. As a

result, industrialization not only changed economic systems but also created clear social class divisions and unequal distribution of wealth.

Information Technology Revolution, Consumerism, and Unsustainable Living

The Information Technology Revolution has pointedly transformed communication, business operations, logistics, supply chains, and economic activities across the world by making information exchange faster, easier, and more accessible. The growth of digital technologies and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) changed the production, distribution, marketing, and consumption of goods and services. Businesses increasingly adopted computers, internet-based services, and digital platforms to improve operational efficiency and expand their market reach. Online communication and digital marketing reduced the role of intermediaries in many business transactions. At the same time, rapid technological growth and mass production encouraged consumerism by making a variety of products available at affordable prices to the consumers (Ritzer, 2010; Shrum et al., 2005). Media influence, advertising, and social comparison further strengthened materialistic attitudes and lifestyle ambitions. This rising culture of consumption led to excessive purchasing, regular replacement of products, and rising environmental concerns due to increased waste generation and overuse of natural resources. Consequently, while technological advancement improved economic development and convenience, it also contributed to unsustainable living patterns and created serious social and environmental challenges.



Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Impact of the Information Technology Revolution on Consumerism and Unsustainable Living

Psychological and Social Consequences of Materialism; Decline of Morality, Ethics, and Spirituality

The growing demand for material aspects and consumer lifestyle raised psychological and social problems in modern society. Many people gave importance to money and personal achievements and have become more isolated. The weakening of close social interactions has contributed to feelings of loneliness, depressed and emotional isolation among individuals. At the same time, values such as compassion, sharing, and altruism have weakened in many societies due to growing individualism and competition. People are often influenced by social comparison and the pressure to maintain higher social status, which increases stress and dissatisfaction. The continuous desire for wealth, recognition, materialistic things, and has also created anxiety and emotional imbalance among individuals. Despite technological connectivity, many people experience emotional disconnection and lack meaningful personal relationships. These psychological and social consequences show that excessive materialism can negatively affect both individual well-being and social harmony.

Modern society has witnessed a steady decline in morals, ethics, and spirituality due to the increasing focus on material success and personal achievement. Earlier, people were guided by philosophical thinking, moral values, and spiritual practices that emphasized honesty, compassion, discipline, integrity and balanced living. However, modernization and consumer culture shifted people's focus toward wealth, fame, status, and material comforts. Many individuals now seek external validation through social recognition, luxury lifestyles, and online approval rather than inner satisfaction and self-awareness. The desire for instant gratification has also increased, with people expecting quick success,

entertainment, and personal rewards. This growing material orientation has weakened moral responsibility and reduced the importance of ethical behavior in daily life. Spiritual values such as simplicity, forgiveness, kindness, patience, inner peace, and self-discipline have gradually lost significance in many modern societies. As a result, individuals often experience emotional emptiness and lack a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in life. People long for peace and equilibrium in life but lacks the wisdom to know that the cost of peace is to let go of the materiel comforts and to embrace spirituality. They look for companionship in the same machines which snatched them away from everyone and everything. Machines are their god. Content is their contentment. Their happiness lies in assets which outlive them.

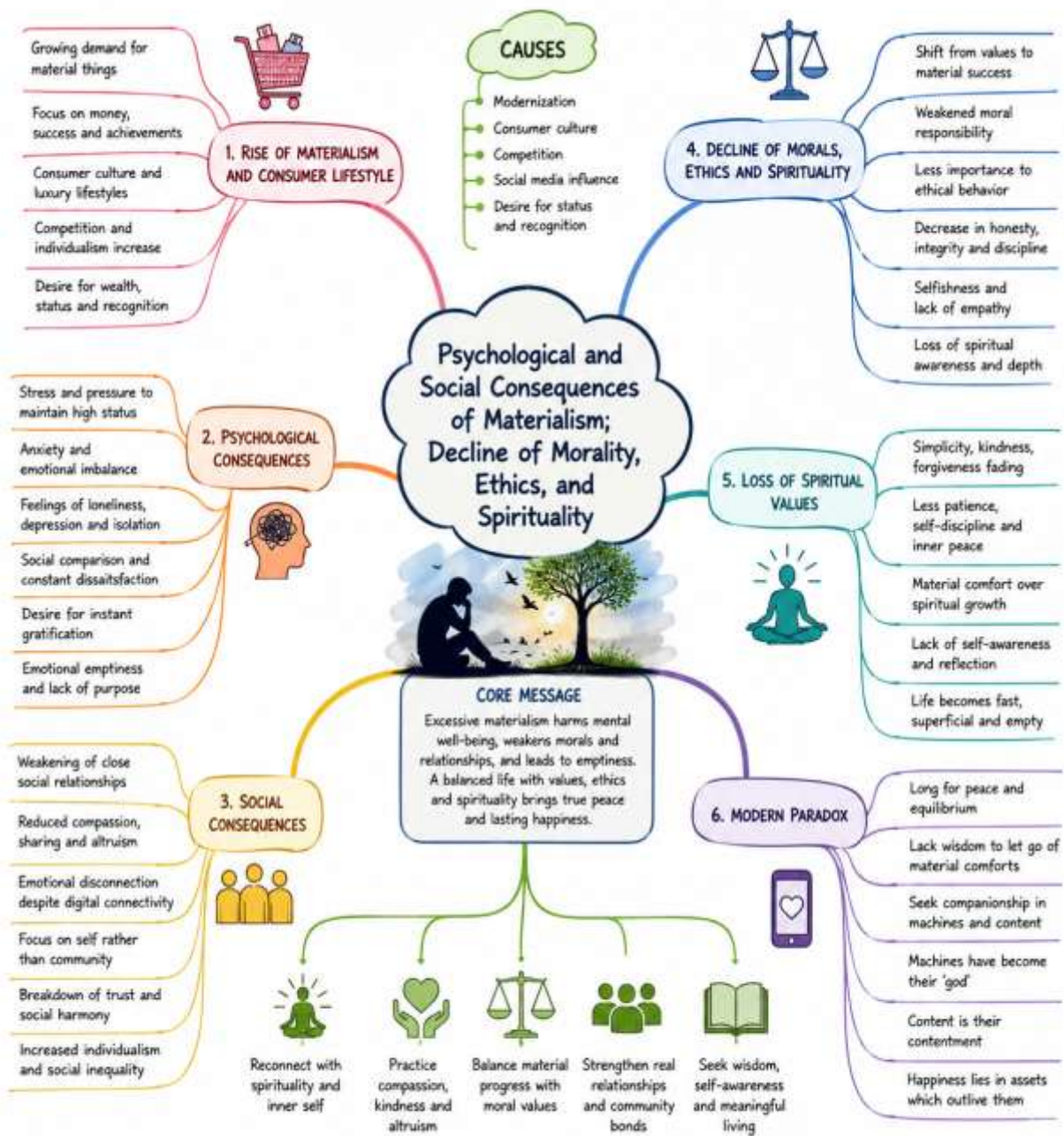


Figure 3: Psychological and Social Consequences of Materialism; Decline of Morality, Ethics, and Spirituality

Social Media, Digital Addiction, and Need for Spirituality and Traditional Values

In this age of social media and instant connections, man connects but is disconnected; people are anxiety-ridden and lonely. People long for external validation. They are always busy, and in their busyness, they have forgotten their spiritual self. They are directionless, goalless and objectiveless, a thoroughly confused human being bereft of a

meaningful life. They are a broken soul struggling to know himself. They can neither connect to themselves nor to another human being, including their own family into which they were born. They are zombies to the outside world and unfamiliar people to themselves. Selfishness is a virtue. Altruism is alien to them. Instant gratification drives them.

Social media and digital technologies have changed the way people connect and communicate in modern society. Although these platforms help in fast communication, many relationships have become superficial and lack emotional depth. People often depend heavily on mobile phones, computers, and virtual content for entertainment, games, information, and social interaction. This increasing dependence has reduced real-life communication and created emotional distance between individuals. Regular use of digital media leads to confusion and reduced self-awareness and as an individual when they are compared to others online, they seek approval from virtual audiences.

At the same time, there is a growing need to return to spiritual and traditional values in order to bring balance to modern life. Values such as compassion, humanity, integrity, kindness, and community living are important for building strong human relationships and a healthy society. Moral education for children can help them develop good character, morals and ethical behavior from an early age. Reconnecting with traditional wisdom and cultural practices can guide individuals toward more meaningful and balanced living. Spirituality aids individuals to develop inner peace, emotional balance, purpose in life, and stronger mental well-being through values such as compassion, self-awareness, and connectedness (Rosmarin et al., 2022). Spirituality encourages self-reflection, inner peace, and a sense of purpose beyond material achievements. By combining modern development with moral and spiritual values, society can achieve both progress and human well-being.

The only panacea to all the ills of this modern-day digital addict society is the return to spirituality. The old ways of living, where people were the center of living. Compassion, kindness and a sense of giving should be the guiding principles on which societies should be living.

Human Values, Nature, and Sustainable Well-Being

The relationship between human beings and nature has always been important for maintaining physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. In earlier times, people lived and connected to nature for their day-to-day needs. However, rapid industrialization, urbanization, and technological growth and development have gradually reduced this connection, leading to more stress, depression, anxiety, restlessness, and emotional imbalance in modern life (Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1990). Man is part of the evolution; he is part of the nature in fact he complements nature. The day he starts to reconnect with nature, he will find peace. Spending time in natural environments such as parks, forests, villages, practicing yoga or meditation in open spaces, watching sunrise or sunset in natural surroundings and rural areas helps individuals experience peace, relaxation, and mental clarity. Nature encourages self-reflection and spiritual harmony, enabling people to lead a simpler and more meaningful life. Reconnecting with nature can therefore support inner peace, emotional stability, and improve overall quality of life.

Modern advancement has improved materialistic living standards but it has created issues related to morality, ethics, and social responsibility. Excessive focus on material success often results in emotional dissatisfaction, stress, social inequality, and weakened human relationships. A balanced and value-based society is essential for ensuring sustainable and peaceful development. Moral values such as compassion, truthfulness, honesty, kindness, patience, integrity, discipline, and respect for others help individuals build responsible and harmonious communities. Education and social awareness play a significant role in promoting ethical behavior and cultural understanding among people. By combining traditional wisdom with modern knowledge, society can achieve progress that supports both human well-being and long-term social harmony.

Discussions and Conclusion

The study indicates that industrialization and modernization have fundamentally reshaped human society by improving economic development, urbanization, and technological advancement. However, these transformations have also contributed to the expansion of consumer culture, materialistic values, and individualistic lifestyles. The literature reviewed suggests that materialism is closely related with reduced psychological well-being, weakened social relationships, caused depression and anxiety, and increased emotional dissatisfaction. At the same time, globalization and the IT revolution have intensified exposure to media and advertising, further reinforcing consumption-oriented behavior.

This study also highlights that rapid urbanization and industrial growth and development have weakened traditional family structures and community-based living systems. As a result, many individuals experience social isolation, stress, depression, fear, and a decline in moral and ethical values.

In contrast, spirituality is found to play a crucial role in promoting emotional stability, inner peace, and self-awareness among individuals. The evidence suggests that spiritual practices and value-based living can help counterbalance the negative effects of excessive materialism. Furthermore, the integration of traditional wisdom with modern development is essential for maintaining social harmony and psychological well-being.

The research concludes that a materialistic approach to development is unsustainable without corresponding attention to human values and spirituality. Policymakers must consider integrating ethical and spiritual education into curricula to counterbalance excessive consumerism. The role of digital literacy in promoting mindful consumption and reducing digital addiction deserves more scholarly attention. Ultimately, the findings emphasize that sustainable societies must prioritize both external prosperity and internal well-being to achieve long-term social stability and human fulfillment.

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