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Does Religion Affect the Materialism of Consumers? An Empirical Investigation of Buddhist Ethics and the Resistance of the Self

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Abstract This paper investigates the effects of Buddhist ethics on consumers' materialism, that is, the propensity to attach a fundamental role to possessions. The literature shows that religion and religiosity influence various attitudes and behaviors of consumers, including their ethical beliefs and ethical decisions. However, most studies focus on general religiosity rather than on the specific doctrinal ethical tenets of religions. The current research focuses on Buddhism and argues that it can tame materialism directly, similar to other religions, and through the specific Buddhist ethical doctrines of the Four Immeasurables: compassion, loving kindness, empathetic joy, and equanimity. The empirical results show the following: (1) Buddhism reduces materialism directly and through some of the Four Immeasurables, and (2) despite the doctrine of non-existence of the self, positive emotions toward the self are still present, and the self absorbs the effects of Buddhist ethics on materialism. The latter finding suggests a "resistance of the self" that is coherent with the idea of a consumer who leverages the self to go beyond it.

Keywords Consumer behavior · Materialism · Consumer ethics · Religion · Buddhism

Introduction

The aim of this work is to extend our understanding of the antecedents of consumer materialism by exploring the ways in which the practice of a given religious ethical doctrine affects materialism via features that are linked to the specific tenets of that religion. Specifically, this research investigates the ways in which Buddhism affects materialism both directly and through the Four Immeasurables (or Four Abodes), which are the four main ethical virtues that Buddhists should pursue. Religion and religiosity are distinct concepts with overlapping boundaries (Bjarnason 2007). Both concepts have been studied in research on consumer behavior. Religion is an institutionalized and organized form of spirituality. Religion, both as a personal characteristic and a cultural factor, influences ethical judgments and decision making (Hunt and Vitell 2006), including the ethical judgments and behavior of consumers. Religiosity is conceived as the general attitude of a subject toward religious issues and themes, regardless of his or her affiliation with a given religion. However, some religiosity scales include the affiliations of respondents and specific denominations or religions (Bjarnason 2007). The extant literature has mainly focused on the effects of general religiosity on different variables related to consumer behavior (for an extensive review, see Vitell 2010). For instance, religiosity is one of the antecedents of the ethical beliefs of consumers (Vitell et al. 2007). In particular, intrinsic religiosity affects ethical judgment, whereas extrinsic religiosity has little effect on such judgment (Vitell et al. 2005). Less attention has been devoted to the ways in which the doctrinal beliefs—in particular, the ethical tenets—of specific religions affect consumers. Recently, Moschis and Ong (2011) suggested that most of the extant literature on religiosity and consumer behavior does not account for confounding factors and mediating variables that intervene between religiosity and consumer behavior. They mention age and cultural factors among these mediating variables. Among other factors, the authors argue that general religiosity does not

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account for the type of religion that one follows and thus that religiosity fails to fully explain consumer behaviors. They suggest that additional research should explore the mechanisms through which religiosity affects consumers. Beyond general religiosity, specific religious doctrines and ethical tenets can be considered part of this mechanism. Moschis and Ong argue that "religiosity may have beneficial effects depending on the religion one follows. The reasons for this may be found in the doctrines and teachings of the different religions" (2011, p. 15). An example of how religious denomination may affect consumer behavior is provided by La Barbera and Gürhan (1995). They demonstrate that materialism negatively affects well-being for born-again Christians, whereas materialism and well-being are not related for non-born-again Christians. These findings "are particularly intriguing, as they suggest that other beliefs and values may influence the phenomenology of materialistic desires" (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002, p. 350). The current research aims to contribute to filling this gap by focusing on the ways in which some specific religious ethical tenets affect materialism.

As noted by Vitell (2010), a major gap in the extant literature exists because few studies have addressed "religiosity's impact on ethical judgments intentions, and/or behaviour" (p. 163). The current work aims to provide some contributions in this direction by examining the ways in which religious ethical tenets—specifically, Buddhism—can affect the materialism of consumers. Approaches inspired by Buddhism have been introduced in the field of management and organizational studies as strategies designed to improve the ethical reasoning of organizations and managers. Gould (1995a) considers Buddhism as a system that can enrich the ethical environment of an organization. To nurture and encourage concerns regarding the ethical implications of personal behavior, he suggests a set of experiential meditative exercises aimed to foster an understanding of oneself and recognition of the subtle connections between individual actions and external consequences. Marques (2010) illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of Buddhist practices in today's workplaces.

Few studies have addressed the consequences of Buddhist practices for consumers. Approaches inspired by Buddhism have suggested new methods of research in consumer behavior, namely the use of introspection as a method to study consumer behavior (Gould 1991; 1995b). However, few studies have explored the ways in which Buddhism affects relevant consumer variables. This lack of attention may result from the preference for research that addresses the general religiosity of consumers rather than their specific religious affiliations. This preference presents advantages in terms of the generalizability of the results. In addition, most religions have the same effects on consumption-related variables such as consumer ethics. However, the preference for religiosity does not account for the effects that the specific doctrinal features of a religion may have on consumers. Although the final outcome of a "better" consumer can be attained through different religious (and non-religious) paths, it is noteworthy to assess the differences among these paths.

The paper is organized as follows. First, the paper offers an overview of materialism. The excesses of consumerism are currently an issue of lively debate. Excessive consumption is accused of destroying natural resources, encouraging superficial lifestyles, and perpetuating social inequalities. Materialism is a source of unrestrained consumption and is thus critical to our understanding of consumer behavior. Second, the ethical doctrines of Buddhism are explored with the aim of understanding their possible effects on materialism. Buddhism represents a method with which to curb materialism through both its core tenets and its Four Immeasurables, which are its four ethical virtues. However, given the complexity of the concepts involved, the hypothesis that ethical doctrines may reduce materialism cannot be taken for granted, and such a hypothesis deserves empirical verification. In particular, the concept of the self, which is central to consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005), and spirituality as a form of consumption of the self (Rindfleisch 2005), seems at odds with the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*, which is the illusory nature of the self. The empirical section aims to understand whether and how much the Four Immeasurables affect materialism. Finally, the results are shown and discussed.

Materialism and Its Relationship with Spirituality

Materialism and Its Effects

Materialism is the personal tendency to attach a central role to possessions and to consider them the main source of happiness or, in situations in which the desired possessions are lacking, unhappiness (Belk 1985; Richins and Dawson 1992). Belk defines materialism as the "importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction" (1984, p. 291). Materialism consists of three components (Richins and Dawson 1992): the centrality of possessions, happiness through possessions, and success signaled by possessions. First, materialists consider possessions and their acquisition as critical aspects of their lives. A considerable part of their lives revolves around things they own or wish to own. This first dimension is the centrality of possessions. Second, materialists think that happiness is derived from

possessions. Other means can be employed to reach happiness, but material things are the main portal by which one can attain happiness. Happiness through possessions is the second dimension of materialism. Third, materialists tend to measure their success in terms of their possessions as compared with the possessions of others.

Materialism is commonly viewed as a negative personality trait that has detrimental consequences for both individuals and society. According to Belk (1985), materialism is composed of three subtraits: possessiveness, nongenerosity, and envy. Each trait is not pro-social and is thus negative. At the individual level, there is a correlation between materialism and personal unhappiness in life because of the negative implications of materialism (Belk 1984, 1985). In fact, the antisocial aspect of materialism threatens the well-being of individuals: materialism "conflicts with collective-oriented values, such as family values and religious values. This state of values conflict creates psychological tension, and this tension is associated with a reduced sense of well-being" (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002, p. 348).

Although a clear causal relation cannot be established, materialism is negatively correlated with a consumer's higher standard of ethics (Muncy and Eastman 1998). Materialism can lead a consumer toward questionable practices. For instance, the level of materialism exhibited by a consumer is positively related to his/her willingness to buy counterfeit products (Furnham and Valgeirsson 2007; Yoo and Lee 2009).

Although the negative effects of materialism have been ascertained, its positive effects are still unclear. The positive effects of possessions on happiness (which is one dimension of materialism) are far from being established with certitude. Contrarily, "[t]wenty years of studies consistently show that once basic needs are met, increases in income produce short-term pleasure, but have almost no lasting impact on happiness" (Ahuvia 2008, p. 485). Marketing has not fully kept its promise of happiness for everyone (Shankar et al. 2006). Consumption can placate needs and wishes; however, some of our urges as consumers are derived from desires (Belk et al. 2003) that are by definition insatiable. Once a desire is satisfied, a new cycle of craving for further satisfaction begins. There is no final end in terms of fulfillment (Shankar et al. 2006). Some recent studies suggest that consumption is far from being a source of happiness and is rather a symptom of unhappiness. Beloved possessions that are nurtured with attention and care by their owners can be linked to loneliness and to deficits in social affiliation (Lastovicka and Sirianni 2011).

Despite the generally negative evaluation of materialism, one cannot disregard its possible positive outcomes. The essential root of materialism can be viewed as a neutral trait. The desire to acquire and retain objects may be deemed as a behavior learned by children to reduce uncertainty and their dependence on others rather than a trait of innate greed (Furby 1978, cited in Belk 1985). Materialism can even be viewed, at least partially, in positive terms: the desire to own something can lead an individual toward industriousness and good work to achieve the desired objects; eventually, personal wealth can be shared with others (family or community) or used to help others; and some degree of materialism is conducive for competition and thus innovation. The opposite of materialism, which is the detachment from worldly things, can also lead to negative consequences. If excessive, the struggle to attain detachment can lead to self-destructive behavior for some people (Belk 1985).

In summary, materialism can generate positive outcomes; however, most of the evidence and common thinking (Fournier and Richins 1991) agree that materialism is a negative trait and that a reduction of materialism in both individuals and society at large is desirable. In addition, if consumption does not grant happiness, as indicated above, materialism would represent a misguided attempt to achieve happiness through possessions.

Contribution of Religions and Buddhist Thought to the Debate on Materialism

The relationship between spirituality and materialism is complex. According to some views, spirituality is the opposite of materialism. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) draw on Schwartz's theory of basic human values to determine the position of materialism as value. In Schwartz's model, values are arranged along two dimensions, namely self-enhancement versus self-transcendence and openness to change versus conservation. The first dimension divides values into those that are self-centered (e.g., hedonism, achievement) and those that are other-centered (e.g., universalism, benevolence). Materialism is self-centered; thus, it is located in the self-enhancement side of Schwartz's model. In contrast, spirituality reflects the values of self-transcendence; thus, it is an opposite of materialism. The authors show that materialism and religiosity are negatively associated (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002).

Other scholars argue that spirituality and some forms of materialism can be deeply tied and are not necessarily in opposition. Secular commodities can attain a sacred status (O'Guinn and Belk 1989), as shown by the literature on consumer behavior, beginning with seminal works such as that by Belk et al. (1989). This sense of the sacred can have three sources: the producer of the good, the individual consumer, and the consumer community. A company or organization can convey the sacred by carefully managing

its environment, as is done at Heritage Village, a religious theme park with commercial spaces (O'Guinn and Belk 1989), where a heavenly sense of sacred exaltation, awe, and detachment from ordinary and "profane" life was explicitly evoked. In addition to controlling commercial spaces, a company can imbue its products with a sort of "magical" touch, as occurs with Apple products (Belk and Tumbat 2005), which are revered as having somewhat magical powers. As a second source of sacralization, the sense of the sacred can also be imparted autonomously by individual consumers through ordinary acts of consumption, by imbuing certain products that are particularly dear and meaningful to them with a sacred quality. Consumers can assign to common objects a sacred power and consider them magical fetishes (Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011). These magical and supernatural attributions of products are a part of consumer society (St. James et al. 2011). A third source of the sacralization of consumption is a brand community, such as the community surrounding the early personal digital assistant Apple Newton (Muñiz and Schau 2005). The community employs religious rhetoric and arguments to discuss ways to revitalize a dead product that was discontinued by its own manufacturing company. A brand community aggregates in brandfests, which are ritual celebrations of a particular brand that can even produce a feeling of transcendence among the faithful (Schouten et al. 2007).

A further evolution of the connection between spirituality and materialism is currently being debated. In this debate, spirituality and materialism are seen as two connected concepts and not as autonomous entities. The two realms are considered as an interlocked phenomenon consisting of both spirituality and materiality, converging in one concept: spiritual materialism. The meeting of Eastern spiritual practices and Western consumerist culture has given birth to the notion of spiritual materialism. According to the interpretation of spiritual materialism provided by Trungpa (1973), people can consume material things in spiritual ways. This leads to the risk that the individual superficial ego would treat spiritual matters the same way that it deals with consumption choices (Rindfleisch 2005). Spiritual consumers would select spiritual doctrines through the same approach they would use to choose a commercial good. In this sense, spirituality is used in the service of the self, and thus, it becomes one of many forms of self-caring (Rindfleisch 2005). In this "turn to the self" movement in postmodern spirituality, spirituality would be a curtain behind which is the typical self-centered consumer. In such a case, spirituality becomes one of the many tools used by the individual to affirm the self. Spiritual materialism allows the convergence of Western techniques of the self (Foucault 1990) with Eastern spiritual traditions. The self is the nodal point of this convergence. In this phenomenon, the self-help literature stemming from self-development psychotherapies combines with New Age spirituality. This hybridization leads toward a self that is a consumable commodity that is consumed and should be constantly reinvented by the individual with the help of spiritual products. The promises of marketing are the same as the promises of spirituality, in this postmodern form of spiritual materialism: to unleash the infinite powers of a hidden self that can only be revealed by adopting the latest techniques and spiritual practices (Rindfleisch 2005).

The argument provided by Rindfleisch (2005) is applied to New Age movements of spirituality. However, this theory is at odds with some forms of spirituality, namely, Buddhism, because of its different conceptualization of the self. The idea of spiritual materialism as affirmation of the self it "is quite decidedly not the spiritual path that Tibetan Buddhists, other Asians, and their Western counterparts are presenting to us in the West" (Gould 2006, pp. 65–66). Gould (2006) counters the argument that spirituality is a form of self-caring. The self-caring paradigm can be "misleading, counterproductive, and constitutes a serious limitation for the advancement of human understanding and spirituality" (Gould 2006, p. 75). The concept of the self is thus the key point of convergence between spirituality and materiality (Rindfleisch 2005) and, at the same time, a possible point of divergence between Buddhism and other forms of spirituality (Gould 2006). Buddhism holds a unique position with respect to the concept of the self, challenging the very idea that the self exists. What we call the self is actually an illusory conventional ego that perpetuates itself through a continuous cycle of reactions in the form of acts of attachment and avoidance. From this perspective, one can wonder what the position and practical effects of the Buddhist doctrine of self are within the debate about spiritual materialism.

Moving from spirituality and self to other specific religious doctrines, we observe that most religions condemn excessive consumption and materialistic tendencies. The goal of curbing excesses in life, including consumption excesses, is a common tenet in most religious traditions, as reported by Cowar (1998, pp. 159–160). For example, Islamic thought suggests that people should limit their consumption of resources to allow other people to access those resources; in the Jewish tradition, human beings should limit themselves to allow coexistence with our environment (similar to the way in which God, according to the Kabbalist thought, voluntarily exercised self-restraint to enable the act of creation), and Christian thinking is increasingly concerned about the over-consumption of the rich Northern countries (most of them of the Christian tradition) to the detriment of poorer countries. Some notions in other Eastern spiritual disciplines advocate self-restraint in life and in consumption. In the yoga discipline,

for instance, the notions of *aparigraha* and *bramacharya* express non-possessiveness and continence, respectively (Corner 2009).

The reasons that religions criticize excessive consumption are varied, but they can be synthesized in some basic motivations (Belk 1983). First, the attention toward worldly possessions diverts an individual from his/her spiritual duties. Second, materialism can lead individuals to engage in immoral behavior, such as theft or fraud, to satisfy their greedy desires. Third, materialism can encourage conspicuous consumption that promotes envy and social inequality and thus disturbs social harmony. Furthermore, some religions posit that what we find in the world does not belong to us; rather, it belongs to God. Thus, the idea of owning something is inherently mistaken.

Religious criticism of materialism does not entail a condemnation of property per se. On the contrary, private property is usually accepted by religions as a source of social order (Belk 1983). Some religions also have a positive view of some degree of materialism and encourage possessions. After the Protestant Reformation, the approach of some religions with regard to possessions changed. As suggested by the notable Weberian interpretation, the Protestant spirit considers possessions as positive if they are obtained through honest and hard work. Wealth that is obtained honestly can also be considered a blessing and perhaps even a duty (Belk 1983). However, even in cases in which some forms of material possessions are appreciated, an attachment to goods that diverges from sound ethical reasoning would be criticized.

Personal possessions have a core role in the definition of our identities. Our bodies, inner processes, and personality traits form our concepts of self, but the self also consists of external objects (Belk 1985). The things and objects that we own form our extended self (Belk 1988). Religious doctrines can influence the role of possessions in defining our identity by shifting the core self from our self-identity to other deeper parts of our being. In these religious doctrines, we are not our thoughts, our desires, or the things we own; our true identity is based on our souls, our link with the larger community of fellow humans, or other spiritual-based essences. Alternatively, in the case of Buddhism, there is truly no self on which to rely. Through this shift of focus, the role of self-identity changes, and possessions are likely to be discarded as peripheral to the definition of what we are.

Buddhism, like other religions, is involved in the debate regarding materialism and consumerism. Attachment to worldly phenomena is a key issue for the Buddhist doctrine because "the key to salvation in Buddhism lies in rejecting the material world and turning to an inward contemplative focus" (Belk 1983, p. 514). In addition, due to its practical nature, Buddhism represents an interesting religion through which to explore such themes. According to some views, Buddhism should not be classified as a religion; rather, it should be viewed as a philosophy, science, psychology, or practice. The horizons of Buddhism are spiritual, and some devotional practices are present in some streams of Buddhism; however, Buddha himself is revered more as an enlightened human being than as a God-like entity. Buddhism promotes a practical attitude toward the issues of life: "Buddha emphasized the practical goal-directed orientation of his way and urged his disciples not to engage in idle speculations or mere intellectualism" (Esposito et al. 2006, p. 353). Buddhism attempts to enable and encourage a happy and moral life based on observation of the essential mechanisms of human beings in their daily routines. The practical and ethical posture held by Buddhism allows it to adequately address frequent and daily acts, such as consumption. Thus, Buddhism can contribute to the debate regarding the consumerism and materialism of society.

Buddhism is not intrinsically opposed to consumption and possessions. Recent scholarly contributions in the field of Buddhist studies show that Buddhism has been partly distorted by initial Western interpretations. The Western view of Buddhism has over-emphasized the idealist side of Buddhism, and the sacred value of material objects advocated by some Buddhist doctrines has been omitted (Rambelli 2007). In medieval Japan, the growing school of Zen Buddhism considered inanimate objects as sacred. This inclusion was not limited to ritual objects such as altars or shrines. Plants, trees, stones, and human-built tools for labor were considered worthy of reaching Buddhahood (that is, the state of enlightenment). Among the rituals that acknowledge this sacred nature of objects is the disposal ritual, in which broken or used things (clothes and other common goods) were ceremoniously discarded in temple rituals. This practice has continued in modern times (Rambelli 2007). Although these religious practices and tenets are not extended to all Buddhist schools and streams, these aspects of the religion show that objects and anonymous commodities are not condemned by Buddhism per se. Objects can even be sacralized to represent the all-inclusive realm of Dharma.

In summary, spiritual materialism on a higher level and specific religious doctrines form a relevant background for consumers' materialism. Buddhism participates in this debate with its own unique position with respect to the concept of self and its doctrines, as the following sections will illustrate in more detail.

Buddhist Doctrine and Moral Tenets and Their Effects on Materialism

Buddhism is divided into different streams and schools. The two main branches are Hinayana and Mahayana.

Hinayana Buddhism is closer to the roots of the form of Buddhism that is traceable to the life of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. Today, Hinayana Buddhism is practiced primarily in Thailand and in other regions of Southeast Asia. The Mahayana branch developed later than the Hinayana branch in the broad region extending from Tibet to Japan. The Mahayana branch spread the Buddhist principles and practices to a wider audience, as it attempted to devise systems that would be viable for any segment of the population and would not be limited to the Buddhist monks (Watts 1975). Many other schools and streams subsequently stemmed from these two key branches, notably Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, and Theravada. Despite the differences in approaches and practices, the different streams of Buddhism share common tenets, as is shown in this and the following sections. These essential doctrines are differently emphasized and practiced, although they are shared by the majority of Buddhist streams.

Some positions in the Buddhist debate (mainly in the "engaged Buddhism" stream of thought) consider consumer culture and consumerism as outcomes of the three "poisons" defined by Buddhism, namely greed, hatred, and delusion. In this view, consumerism causes "vast amounts of suffering and loss" (Barnhill 2004, p. 59). This uncompromising approach indicates the "discontent and suffering that is both the root of consumerism and also its result" (Barnhill 2004, p. 59). However, Buddhist thinking does not generally condemn consumption as such. Rather, it indicates the dangers and meaningless nature of excessive consumption. In this section and the next, we provide a synthesis of some of the Buddhist doctrines that may have a specific effect on the materialism of consumers. Although it is reasonable to expect that religious doctrines would curb materialism, this relationship should not be taken for granted. One aim in describing the Buddhist tenets in this section is to show that Buddhism does not condemn consumption in itself; thus, its effects on materialism should not be overemphasized and should be empirically verified, and such verification is the aim of this work.

First, three core tenets of Buddhism are presented: desire as a source of suffering, interdependence and impermanence, and the non-self. In addition to these general Buddhist tenets, moral doctrines may play a major role in the relationship that a Buddhist has with materialism. The essential platform of the Buddhist doctrine is morality. According to Buddhaghosa (an ancient Buddhist monk and commentator), morality is one of the two legs of Buddhism (with meditation as a second leg and wisdom as an emergent third element; Esposito et al. 2006; Neumaier 1998). Therefore, the moral doctrine of Buddhism, as synthesized in the Four Immeasurables, may have a direct effect on materialism.

Desires as Sources of Suffering (*Dukkha*)

The ideal, final aim of any Buddhist path is *nirvana*. Nirvana is the final liberation from the "poisons" of greed, delusion, and hatred. Nirvana is the ultimate detachment from the worldly chain of delusional acts that lead to worldly attachments and suffering. The first of the four Noble Truths of Buddhism (the basic set of Buddhist tenets) involves suffering (*dukkha*). This Noble Truth dictates that life entails suffering. The second Noble Truth indicates that the roots of suffering are desires. The removal of desire from one's life causes the elimination of suffering (third Noble Truth). Finally, as the fourth Truth dictates, one can remove desire and thus overcome suffering by following the Buddhist Eightfold Path toward *nirvana*. Marketing (among other activities) promises to eliminate at least some forms of suffering in our lives, such as dissatisfaction, annoyance, or other unpleasant states of needs. However, as discussed previously, this promise is not fulfilled or is merely superficially fulfilled. Like anything that causes mistaken human attachments, goods offered in the market can be a source of suffering rather than a solution to suffering. When consumption is excessive and becomes a form of attachment and craving, it is a source of delusion and eventually causes suffering. Buddhism advocates the freedom from any form of craving (Brazier 2003; Barnhill 2004). We may expect that Buddhism would assist people in controlling their desires (because desires are the source of suffering) and in achieving some detachment from the lures of marketing and consumption (as a result of the recognition that these activities cannot represent final solutions). Thus, contentment is more relevant than the continuous nurturing of the never-ending chain of desires.

Detachment from desires may result in less materialistic attitudes, but one should acknowledge that such detachment should also be applied to the desire to be detached. Indulging in excessive detachment is another form of attachment. This point is illustrated by the figure of the *bodhisattva*—the enlightened being of the Mahayana tradition. The *bodhisattva* refrains from remaining in the state of nirvana with the intention of pursuing the liberation of all sentient beings. The *bodhisattva* does not enter the final state of nirvana until all other beings are free. This myth suggests that detachment from desires must be total and must include the desire to reach nirvana. A possible consequence of this doctrine for materialism is that possessions must be treated with a balanced level of detachment rather than a full renunciation of them.

Interdependence (*Pratitya-Samutpada*) and Impermanence (*Anitya*)

One of the core ideas in Buddhism is that of the dependent origination and the interpenetration of anything with

anything else (*pratitya-samutpada*) (Barnhill 2004). Reality is impermanence (*anitya*). Nothing in the world is permanent; everything is caused by everything else and, in turn, is a cause of everything else. This system is not a mechanistic view of reality because the system also includes volitional elements. A human being can participate in this network of interlocked causes with his/her intention and will, which produces another source of causes; this concept is known as *karma* and is drawn from Hinduism and reinterpreted in Buddhism. Good deeds accumulate good *karma* for current and future cycles of life.

Assuming this view, one would be aware that every action has some consequences in some part, or at some time, in the net of connected causes. Because any change in one part entails a change in other parts, only a careful ethical evaluation of one's behavior can assist an individual in avoiding undesired effects. This view assumes that a person and his/her external social (even physical) structure are so intertwined that there is no real distinction between the individual and the remainder of reality. In fact, in Buddhism, the self is considered a form of delusion or even the highest form of delusion. This reduction of the external structure to the individual and vice versa is not followed by other religious perspectives, such as Christianity (Knitter 2004). Examining Christianity from a liberation theology perspective, Knitter (2004) argues that the separation between individuals and social structures implies the existence of structural greed, which is represented by some social institutions that originate from greedy roots, have lives of their own, and are independent from individuals. A reduction of greed in individuals would not necessarily lead toward less greed in these social entities; thus, the idea of a connection between personal acts and overall consequences is weakened.

The idea of co-arising phenomena and connections is not new to the consumption and globalization discourses. Consumption is linked to the use of human (i.e., labor) and natural resources. Each act of consumption "pulls the strings" that are attached to some resource elsewhere. Some of these strings may result in exploitation of human or natural resources. For instance, drivers of gas-guzzling vehicles are accused by their more hostile detractors of contributing to the exploitation of natural resources and even to wars occurring far from their own countries (Luedicke et al. 2010). Thus, each consumer is responsible for a portion of this complex net of connections. The Buddhist doctrine suggests that followers should be aware of these nets of co-causation links. A lack of awareness associated with excessive consumption contrasts with this systemic view.

The doctrine positing that everything is connected to everything else may also strengthen the positive effects that an individual can have in society through his/her individual, and apparently minimal, acts. Rather than being discouraged by being one single person within the mass, a single Buddhist would assign great influence to her tiny acts. Therefore, a single act of consumption, as small as it may be, may seem relevant to a Buddhist. From the perspective of interdependence, consumption can thus be viewed as a relevant behavior that cannot be executed by superficially following one's own desires and whims. Furthermore, because any act of consumption is intimately linked to other elements, such a view of interdependence encourages environment-friendly and ethical forms of consumption that are designed to avoid inflicting pain upon entities that seem distant but are actually close. Based on this aspect, one can infer that caring about the *karmic* law of interdependence and impermanence would result in careful and sensible consumption acts.

There is also a more direct connection between interdependence and the ways in which one should treat possessions. A method of gaining merit, and thus good *karma*, is to donate part of one's possessions to increase the happiness of others (Esposito et al. 2006). Wealth is a sign of good *karma* accumulated in the past; thus, what we possess is not truly ours but is rather the outcome of some past deeds that were dependent upon the deeds of others. Thus, possessions should be treated with a sense of equality. If possessions are a means to achieve social equality, materialism is dispelled.

With regard to the *karmic* law of interdependence, the effects on materialism can be expected to be negative; however, this relationship should not be taken for granted because it could be reversed. If an individual act is subtly connected to the fate of the world, everything, including objects and possessions, may assume relevance. Thus, possessions may assume centrality and promote some degree of materialism. The use of personal wealth to promote social equality and to improve the world with one's own actions would be associated with the belief that possessions are not inherently wrong. We can conclude that the laws of interdependence and impermanence suggest a reduction in materialism, but that this effect is not absolute.

Non-Self (*Anātman*)

The identity as a source of unhappiness is a concept that is emerging in the consumer behavior discourse. As Saren (2007) argues, the concept of identity prompts various issues that must be addressed. He cites "some problematic issues for this concept [of identity] all of which point to an essential incompleteness at the heart of consumer identity" (Saren 2007, p. 343). Buddhism may assist in filling the gap of consumer identity.

The individual self is not considered a fixed entity in Buddhism. The self is composed of interdependent causes

that ultimately amount to the disappearing of the self as it is commonly considered. According to Buddhism, what we call "I" is a delusional formation that represents the outcome of our continuous chain of cravings and aversions (Brazier 2003). According to Buddhist psychology, the human identity is a defensive structure of illusory perceptions intended to resist the omnipresence of suffering or *dukkha*. Facing the overwhelming awareness of affliction, a human being reacts by pursuing pleasant states and objects and rejecting unpleasant ones. This process becomes so powerful that it builds a perceptual cage of identity in which one is entrapped. Our illusory sense of self is born. No direct contact is allowed in this perceptual cage. We observe the world by applying schemes and structures that are intended to avoid affliction. We erroneously consider that a self exists and that our self is composed of the thoughts that we have and the related actions that we undertake. Actually, these thoughts and actions are merely reactions to *dukkha* as dictated by our defensive structure.

Thus, Buddhism entails the doctrine of non-self: *anātman*. This notion does not advocate the idea of the annihilation of a subject. Rather, it confirms the strong interdependence of causes and effects and seeks to discover the real substance of existence. Viewed from this perspective, marketing advocates an affirmation of consumer identity. Products and consumption are tools by which an individual can affirm his own individuality. The literature commonly considers that consumption extends beyond self-expression to become a form of self-identity. This notion of self-identification through consumption contrasts with Buddhist thought and is challenged by some researchers as a form of artificial substituting of the real self with a consumer-based self (Kaza 2000). Consumerism can be viewed as a negative and constant striving for economic growth that is fuelled by consumption and by delusional self-identity (Sivaraksa 2003). To assure a high level of consumption, an individual is molded to identify herself as a consumer rather than discovering her real essence (Kaza 2000). Consumption becomes the building block of self-identity. In its extreme forms, a weak self may be substituted by a consumer self that gravitates toward impulsive buying as a form of identity seeking (Dittmar 2008).

Some theoretical arguments suggest that non-self and materialism are not necessarily strongly opposed. First, Buddhism can admit the existence a conventional self—that is, the self that we "use" in our daily activities and feel as a continuous and real entity. Buddhism does not deny the existence of this conventional self; rather, it denies its autonomous reality with respect to the chain of causes that produces it. Given the existence of a conventional self, this self may have typical personal traits, including materialism. Second, it is debated whether the non-self doctrine entails altruism and other positive attitudes (which, in our case, would oppose a materialistic attitude). The non-existence of the self may entail apathy rather than altruism because there is no self that would benefit from altruism. As the ancient Buddhist scholar Śāntideva argues, "since there are no enduring selves, it would be irrational, and therefore unjustifiable, to prioritize the welfare of my own enduring self above the welfare of other persons" (Harris 2011). Based on this debate, one can draw the conclusion that the non-self doctrine does not necessarily and logically lead toward altruism and other attitudes that are opposed to materialism.

Table 1 synthesizes the core doctrines of Buddhism and their expected effects on materialism.

In summary, the key doctrinal elements of Buddhist (desire as a source of suffering, interdependence and impermanence, and non-self) represent means by which materialism may be reduced. Materialism represents a continuous series of cravings that nurture a delusional self that is unaware of the impermanence of any elements of existence, including pleasures and worldly happiness. Nevertheless, we cannot consider the three core tenets of Buddhism as fully opposed to consumption and possessions nor can we assume that their effects on materialism are obvious. Thus, we should address the ethical aspect of Buddhism and search for relationships that may explain how Buddhist ethics affect materialism.

The Four Immeasurables

The elements of the Buddhist doctrine illustrated above allow us to understand the ways in which materialism can be evaluated from a Buddhist perspective. We can expect that people who practice Buddhism would reduce their materialism to the extent allowed by the limitations illustrated above. Buddhism can also reduce materialism on another level based on the practicality and morality associated with this religion. Buddhist ethics share some common roots with other religions, as the Dalai Lama himself often declares, highlighting that the tenets of Buddhism are not the opposite of what other religions advocate. Buddhism, similar to other religions, strives to allow essential and good human traits to emerge. Essential ethical tenets are shared by Christians, Jews, and Muslims (Ali and Gibbs 1998), and they are also a point of reference for other religious traditions. For instance, the ethical tenet of not lying is established by the New Testament of the Holy Bible, the Book of Exodus, and the Holy Quran. Buddhism, with its right speech tenet in the Eightfold Path, shares this ethical principle. In addition to these common points, Buddhism has some specific ethical tenets that refer to its doctrine, namely, the Four Immeasurables.

Table 1 The Buddhist doctrinal tenets and their effects on materialism

Buddhist tenets	Effects on materialism	Doctrinal aspects that may temper the effects of Buddhism on materialism
Desire as a source of suffering (*dukkha*)	A consumer should control desires and escape the never-ending chain of cravings and aversion entailed by consumption and materialism	The desire to be detached from possessions should be avoided as a desire in itself
		Detachment from possessions should not be achieved at the expenses of others
Interdependence and impermanence (*anitya*)	Interdependence suggests that any act of consumption is subtly linked to other elements, such as natural resources and social equality. Consumers should refrain from materialism as an attitude that is inattentive to these subtle connections	Positive acts of consumption and some possessions can provide benefits to others via the same connection; thus, a consumer can engage in possessing and consuming wisely
	Impermanence suggests that one must not expect a final state of satisfaction or happiness resulting from consumption	The act of donating and sharing one's wealth is morally right; possessions are thus useful for this action of sharing
Non-self (*anātman*)	The identity is an illusion; thus, the consumer identity is also illusory	The conventional self is admitted; thus, typical conventional traits, such as materialism, are also admitted
		The non-self doctrine does not necessarily imply altruistic attitudes

Buddhism acknowledges the Four Immeasurables (also known as Pure Abodes or Stations of Bhrama). The Four Immeasurables are the cardinal moral virtues with which a Buddhist should comply. They are also the focus of four meditative practices aimed at evocating the mental and emotional states encompassed by the Four Immeasurables. The Four Immeasurables are compassion (*karuna*), loving kindness (*metta*), empathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*). We can expect that the Four Immeasurables would affect the materialism of individuals by curbing each of the three components of possessions: centrality, happiness through possessions, and success through possessions (Richins and Dawson 1992).

Compassion and Loving Kindness

Compassion (*karuna*) refers to feeling the negative feelings and suffering of another person and treating such sorrowful states as if they were one's own personal suffering. Loving kindness (*metta*) refers to actively taking care of others, feeling a sense of altruistic connection with them, and wishing for their happiness. Compassion and loving kindness are complementary (Wallace 1999). One cannot wish for the happiness of another person (loving kindness) without feeling her suffering (compassion); alleviating the suffering of another person (compassion) leads to feelings of hope and enjoyment of their happiness (loving kindness). In simple terms, "loving-kindness focuses on the positive side. Compassion addresses the negative side" (Wallace 1999, p. 128). To be compassionate and loving is to transcend one's own individuality (Kristeller and Johnson 2005). Thus, compassion is strictly linked to the Buddhist concept of impermanence, in which everyone is connected to everyone else and individual egos are transcended. A basic notion of Buddhism is that we should treat anyone as if she/he were once our mother or father (Gould 1995b). Our habitual way of thinking perpetuates the individuation mechanism through which we frame ourselves as one individual who takes care of himself. By disengaging from the ordinary patterns of individuation, a subject unleashes this self-directed love and extends it to others (Kristeller and Johnson 2005). Buddhism has a long tradition of practice aimed at inspiring compassion and loving kindness in individuals.

One expression of compassion is *dana* (liberality), which is the act of giving. This act can take the form of donations, devotional practices, or basic deeds, such as returning lost objects (Esposito et al. 2006, p. 384). All of these simple acts of donating and sharing express the careful participation of an individual in the existence of others and thus reflect compassion. Compassion and loving kindness encourage a decrease in materialism because the predominance of one's ego is tempered by empathetic attention toward the feelings and circumstances of others. Typical traits that accompany materialism, such as envy and non-generosity, are incompatible with compassion and loving kindness.

The three components of materialism (Richins and Dawson 1992) are curbed by compassion and loving kindness. In particular, the idea of measuring one's personal success in terms of one's possessions compared with the possessions of others would be dispelled by kind-hearted participation in the lives of others. Social comparison can be directed either upward or downward. In

upward comparison, one can feel a sense of envy for what he does not possess in comparison with more materially prosperous tiers of society. In downward comparison, one's own happiness is elevated due to the realization that one is not in the situation of those in the less prosperous tiers. This mechanism is well known in the fields of psychology and consumer behavior. Consumers automatically compare themselves to others, even in the minute details of life. In customer loyalty programs, for instance, an increase in the number of consumers in an elite program tier decreases the perception of status held by consumers in this tier; however, the addition of a lower tier to the program increases the status perception (Drèze and Nunes 2010). Thus, the act of comparison with other consumers is a powerful mechanism that affects one's perceived status. Compassion and loving kindness represent antitheses to such social comparison. Other individuals are not viewed as sources for comparison; rather, they are viewed as targets for kind caring. People whom we perceive as lower than us in terms of some features, such as possessions, are not treated as a basis for comparison; rather, they are seen as people. Moreover, individuals whom we perceive as higher than us in consumer status are not objects of envy.

With regard to the happiness component of materialism, the idea that happiness is achieved through possessions would be tempered by the action of causing happiness to others through acts of loving kindness or by embracing the unhappiness of others. Finally, in a system in which the feelings of others are relevant, the centrality of one's possessions is clearly diminished.

Sympathetic Joy (*Mudita*)

Sympathetic joy (*mudita*) can be seen as: 1) the ability to find happiness in anything, even in tough situations and in the happiness of others; 2) the expression of this joy for the purposes of enlightening others and increasing the happiness of others (including people who may cause suffering for an individual); and 3) the appreciation of the joy of others without self-interest and jealousy. *Mudita* is linked to loving kindness but is different. *Mudita* involves the encouragement of the joy of others or the unselfish participation in such joy. The opposite state of *mudita*, an "enemy", is jealousy. Jealousy involves some envy and possessiveness related to something one owns and does not wish to share with others. In contrast, *mudita* refers to the altruistic joy that stems from the happiness of others and the act of sharing one's own happiness with others without keeping such joy to oneself.

Similar to compassion and loving kindness, sympathetic joy tempers social comparisons with other consumers and thus reduces the success component of materialism. In particular, the success of others is not viewed as a target to reach but is viewed as a source of rejoicing and sympathetic participation. With regard to other components of materialism, happiness is found in many (virtually any) circumstances of life; thus, possessions do not have a central role nor are they the only means of attaining happiness.

Equanimity (*Upekkha*)

The story of the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha, reflects his personal discovery of moderation and avoidance of the extremes in life. Siddhartha was raised in a wealthy and powerful family. His father was a king, and Siddhartha was his natural successor. One day, wishing to know the real world, Siddhartha ventured outside of the iron cage of his dwelling and saw an old man, a sick man, and a corpse, representing three stages of the fate of every human being. Then, he met a *sadhu*, an Indian holy man, who was poorly dressed and who possessed nothing. However, the demeanor of the *sadhu* expressed his serenity. Thus, Siddhartha decided to become a hermit and began to deprive his body of any comfort and to restrict himself to the deprivation and difficult conditions of an ascetic life. After experiencing such a way of life for several years, he reached the conclusion that extreme poverty and deprivation, like extreme wealth, do not lead to happiness and enlightenment. Thus, he began the meditation practice that would lead him to final enlightenment and to becoming Buddha (Marques 2010). This spiritual journey symbolizes (among other meanings) the serene detachment from any form of extremes in this world. This detachment is equally applicable to the very idea of being detached: living as a *sadhu* in absolute poverty would be a misguided choice, but also the choice of living in the world with all of its privileges and unlimited resources would be misguided. The Middle Way professed by Buddha is the revolution introduced by Buddhism in relation to the religious thinking of the Buddha's time.

The Middle Way takes the form of equanimity and suggests that moderate consumption fulfills needs and prevents delusional attempts to satisfy endless desires. The principle of moderation "applies to all forms of consumption; the constant principle that runs through the Buddha's teaching is that everything we consume is a means, not an end, and to follow the Middle Path of moderation with contentment" (King 2009, p. 98). Equanimity (*upekkha*) is the detachment from both cravings and aversions. Detachment from any ego-based desires is a goal in Buddhist practice. *Nirvana* is a final state of total detachment from one's ego and its cravings. The goal of distancing oneself from any desire and craving is so central in Buddhism that even the desire to reach *nirvana* should be avoided. Consumption and possession should not be

avoided; rather, an excess of consumption should be avoided. This excess must be considered for both the directions of over-consumption and lack of consumption. Equanimity dictates that detachment from things should not amount to hating or avoiding things. Equanimity reduces the centrality of possessions by assigning them a proper weight in life. One can consume and possess, but one should not place things at the center of life and assign to them an importance that they do not have. Equanimity displaces the idea of reaching happiness through consumption and encourages the pursuit of balanced contentment. Finally, success through consumption entails a disproportionate quantity or quality of possessions compared with the possessions of others. Equanimity would discourage such bias.

Table 2 synthesizes the Four Immeasurables and their expected effects on materialism.

Based on the above discussion, we can expect that Buddhism would cause a reduction in materialism. This effect may be direct and mediated by the Four Immeasurables. The direct effect is derived from the doctrinal tenets of Buddhism and from its overall philosophy. The Four Immeasurables may add a further ethical dimension to the effects of Buddhism on materialism. The next section illustrates the empirical research undertaken to verify the following research questions:

- Does Buddhism affect materialism?
- Do the Four Immeasurables mediate the effects of Buddhism on materialism?
- Which of the Four Immeasurables have a major role in the effects on materialism?
- What is the role of the self?

Method and Measures

Sample and Variables

Vitell (2010) identified a gap in the literature on religiosity and consumer ethics with regard to the use of student samples in most studies. The current work adopted an international sample of the general population in an attempt to overcome this gap. Participants in the research were recruited through a banner published in social networks and through an international online survey service. The campaign was conducted in many stages during a period of 6 months to obtain a valid sample. Subjects who were willing to participate were directed to the anonymous survey administered through an online survey platform (SurveyMonkey). The total number of respondents was 348. Forty-four questionnaires had significant amounts of missing data and were eliminated. The remaining 304 questionnaires were deemed employable for the analyses. The average age of the respondent was 40.6 years (SD = 11.98), and the ages of respondents ranged from 18 to 72 years. The number of women in the sample was slightly higher than the number of men; women represented 57% of the sample. The various occupations of the participants included employees, professionals, administrative workers, and artists. The countries of origin also varied. The most represented countries were the USA (49%), Canada (13%), Australia (8%), the UK (6%), and India (5%). Various religious affiliations were included in the sample.

The questionnaire included three scales: an 18-item scale concerning Buddhism aimed at measuring the degree

Table 2 The Four Immeasurables and their effects on materialism

Four Immeasurables	Materialism components			"Enemies" of the quality
	Centrality of possessions	Success through possessions	Happiness through possessions	
Compassion (*karuna*)	Possessions are displaced from any central role because other human beings and their feelings and lives are a focus of empathic care and attention rather than things	Downward social comparisons are reduced	Compassion refers to feeling and taking care of the happiness of others	Cruelty, meanness, pity
Loving kindness (*metta*)		Upward social comparisons are reduced	The happiness of others is sought and fostered	Hate, anger, judgmental
Sympathetic joy (*mudita*)		Upward social comparisons are reduced	Rejoicing in the happiness of others rather than one's own	Jealousy
Equanimity (*upekkha*)	Detachment from possessions	Equanimity dictates a fair equidistance from extremes; thus, one should not strive to gain a status that is superior to the status of others	Contentment and balance rather than temporary happiness	Preoccupation, indifference, apathy

of commitment and involvement in Buddhism, regardless of formal affiliation; a 16-item scale to measure the application of the Four Immeasurables (Kraus and Sears 2009); and an 18-item scale to measure materialism (Richins and Dawson 1992). The three scales are described below. General demographic data were also included in the questionnaire. To reinforce the theoretical direction of the effects, we included two further items that asked respondents whether, in their view, Buddhism affects materialism or, in contrast, less materialism leads to Buddhism.

The Buddhism Measure

Current scales of religious affiliation or religiosity can be inapplicable when the measure refers to Buddhism. Buddhism is a non-theistic religion or even a non-religion for some observers. As Moschis and Ong indicate, "Buddhism is not a religion per se but a way of life" (2011, p. 13). Therefore, common scales referring to supernatural entities or God would not be useful. However, a general non-denominational scale of religiosity would fail to address the specific aim of this research, which is designed to explore the links between Buddhist doctrine and the materialism of consumers. In addition, the number of people practicing Buddhist meditation or other practices inspired by Buddhism is likely larger than the actual number of people formally affiliated with Buddhism. Therefore, a scale that measures respondents' formal affiliation to Buddhism would not gauge the phenomenon. Finally, the higher spiritual guide of Buddhism—the Dalai Lama—does not advocate conversions to Buddhism; rather, he encourages the adoption of the main Buddhist tenets. Thus, it is likely that some individuals may commit to Buddhism, or to some part of Buddhism, without being full-fledged Buddhists.

For these reasons, a new scale was developed and tested with the aim of measuring the intensity of Buddhist religiosity and the commitment of the respondents. This new scale includes 18 items designed to cover six main dimensions related to Buddhism. Three items are included in each dimension, and approximately one-third of the items employ reverse wording to increase the reliability of the scale. The six dimensions and their respective items are as follows:

1. Ethics: *My personal ethics are close to Buddhism; My moral behavior is informed by Buddhism; In my moral decisions, I am not inspired by Buddhism* (reverse wording)
2. Doctrinal knowledge: *I read books about Buddhism; I know the main Buddhist teachings; I do not know Dharma* (reverse wording)
3. Affiliation: *Other people would consider me a Buddhist; I would define myself as a Buddhist*; *I am not a Buddhist* (reverse wording)
4. Community of followers: *I belong to a community of Buddhism followers*; *I know other people practicing Buddhism*; *I am alone in my Buddhist practice* (reverse wording)
5. Practice: *I practice Buddhism; I devote part of my time to Buddhism practices; I practice Buddhist meditation*
6. General personal consequences of Buddhism: *Buddhism gives me a sense of well-being; When I practice Buddhism, I feel better*; *The Buddhist doctrine is not useful for attaining happiness* (reverse wording)

The six dimensions cover the three attributes that Bjarnason (2007) suggests for religiosity: religious beliefs (the first two dimension of ethics and doctrinal knowledge), religious affiliation (affiliation and community), and religious activities (practices and expected consequences).

The Four Immeasurables Scale

Kraus and Sears (2009) have developed and validated the SOFI (Self-Other Four Immeasurables) scale. This scale measures an individual's application of the Four Immeasurables. The authors suggest four dimensions for the scale: positive qualities toward the self, positive qualities toward others, negative qualities toward the self, and negative qualities toward others. Table 3 details the SOFI scale and the questionnaire administered to respondents.

The Materialism Measure

The 18-item scale developed by Richins and Dawson (1992) is one of the most widely used methods of measuring materialism in the literature. This scale distinguishes three dimensions of materialism: centrality of possessions, happiness through possessions, and success symbolized by possessions. Richins (2004) has successively proposed a shorter 15-item scale to measure materialism. However, the only advantage of the shorter scale compared to the complete form resides in its more robust dimensionality. The analysis conducted in this paper refers to the overall materialism scale and does not investigate its three dimensions; therefore, the original 18-item scale is a valid and more inclusive measurement.

Analysis and Results

Measurement Evaluation

The first step of the analysis is to evaluate the measures employed, particularly the measures of the new Buddhism

Table 3 The SOFI scale (Kraus and Sears 2009)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Read each item and then circle the appropriate answer next to that word. Indicate to what extent you have thought, felt, or acted this way toward yourself and others during the past week

	Very slightly or not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
Friendly—self	1	2	3	4	5
Friendly—others	1	2	3	4	5
Joyful—self	1	2	3	4	5
Joyful—others	1	2	3	4	5
Accepting—self	1	2	3	4	5
Accepting—others	1	2	3	4	5
Compassionate—self	1	2	3	4	5
Compassionate—others	1	2	3	4	5
Mean—self	1	2	3	4	5
Mean—others	1	2	3	4	5
Hateful—self	1	2	3	4	5
Hateful—others	1	2	3	4	5
Angry—self	1	2	3	4	5
Angry—others	1	2	3	4	5
Cruel—self	1	2	3	4	5
Cruel—others	1	2	3	4	5

scale and the recently developed SOFI. A factor analysis with varimax rotation of the 18 items for the Buddhism scale reveals that the first component explains 46% of the variance, whereas any other component explains less than 10% of the variance. An examination of a scree plot of the eigenvalues shows a remarkable decline after the first component and thus confirms that the Buddhism scale has a satisfactory one-factor structure. Table 4 shows the results of the factor analysis. Each item in the first factor has a loading of more than 0.50, as suggested in the praxis of the literature. The internal reliability of this final 11-item scale is measured through Cronbach's alpha: the value of 0.92 is well beyond the threshold of 0.70 suggested in the literature (Nunnally 1978). The value of AVE (average variance extracted) is 0.81, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

To further confirm the validity of the Buddhism scale (i.e., whether it measures the extent of Buddhist practice by the respondents, regardless of their formal religious affiliation), an additional and distinct sample of 102 respondents was used to check for the external validity of the scale. Respondents were recruited through an international online survey service. The respondents were varied in their religious affiliations, also including different denominations of Buddhism, such as Tibetan, Theravada, and Zen. The respondents to this separate survey were specifically required to complete the Buddhism scale along with the following variables and information: the religiosity scale (Vitell et al. 2007), the formal affiliation with Buddhism, the number of hours of Buddhist practice, the percentage of family members who are Buddhists, and the number of years of Buddhist affiliation. All those variables characterize typical Buddhist practitioners, and they were selected to verify the external validity of the Buddhism scale. The Buddhism scale significantly and positively correlates with extrinsic religiosity and all of the other variables mentioned. This result shows that the Buddhism scale satisfactorily captures the commitment to the Buddhist practice by an individual, regardless of her/his formal affiliation. In summary, to validate the Buddhism scale, two distinct samples were employed. The Buddhism scale appears to have good external validity and to synthesize well the attitudes that are of interest in this study.

With regard to the SOFI, the factor analysis shows four distinct factors (see Table 5).

The first and third factors (positive qualities toward the self and positive qualities toward others) aggregate all of the positive emotions and qualities for the self and others, respectively. The second factor represents the sentiments of being cruel toward the self or others. The acts of being cruel and mean correspond to the "far enemies" of compassion (Kraus and Sears 2009, p. 180). Thus, this factor expresses the opposite of compassion and can be labeled "Uncompassionate". Similarly, the fourth factor contains the far enemies of loving kindness, which are anger and hate. Both of these emotions are expressed toward the self and others in the factor. This factor can be referred to as "Unloving". Interestingly, these results show that the SOFI scale in our sample is structured with two positive and two negative factors that do not overlap with the structure devised by Kraus and Sears (2009). This difference can be attributed to the larger and more varied sample employed in the current research as compared with the sample employed by Kraus and Sears (2009), which was primarily composed of students within a single college. In our scale, the salient feature with regard to the positive qualities is the

Table 4 Factor analysis of the Buddhism scale

	Component		
	1	2	3
Cronbach's alpha	0.923		
AVE	0.813		
I practice Buddhism	**0.809**	0.348	0.187
I devote part of my time to Buddhism practices	**0.763**	0.274	0.201
Other people would consider me a Buddhist	**0.753**	0.043	0.202
I would define myself as a Buddhist	**0.743**	0.322	−0.014
I practice Buddhist meditation	**0.733**	0.168	0.164
The Buddhist doctrine is not useful for attaining happiness[a]	**0.661**	0.597	−0.035
Buddhism gives me a sense of well-being	**0.661**	0.597	−0.035
I read books about Buddhism	**0.626**	0.241	0.186
I know the main Buddhist teachings	**0.624**	0.167	0.313
My personal ethics are close to Buddhism	**0.587**	0.283	−0.024
I belong to a community of Buddhism followers	**0.553**	0.145	0.547
I do not know Dharma[a]	0.053	0.771	0.108
When I practice Buddhism, I feel better	0.486	0.662	0.019
In my moral decisions, I am not inspired by Buddhism[a]	0.160	0.661	0.024
My moral behavior is informed by Buddhism	0.481	0.572	0.143
I am alone in my Buddhist practice[a]	−0.123	0.000	0.849
I know other people practicing Buddhism	0.355	−0.004	0.665
I am not a Buddhist[a]	0.369	0.309	0.399

Rotation method: varimax. The first factor that has been subsequently used for the analyses is highlighted in bold

[a] Reverse worded item

Table 5 Factor analysis of SOFI (Self-Other Four Immeasurables) scale

	Component			
	Positive toward self	Uncompassionate	Positive toward others	Unloving
Cronbach's alpha	0.839	0.750	0.765	0.769
AVE	0.674	0.638	0.580	0.575
Friendly—toward myself	**0.818**	−0.127	0.139	−0.080
Joyful—toward myself	**0.802**	0.053	0.339	−0.034
Accepting—toward myself	**0.779**	−0.056	0.260	−0.112
Compassionate—toward myself	**0.560**	−0.333	0.333	−0.220
Cruel—toward myself	−0.214	**0.819**	0.038	0.012
Cruel—toward others	0.095	**0.745**	−0.167	0.040
Mean—toward myself	−0.289	**0.719**	0.153	0.217
Mean—toward others	0.039	**0.688**	−0.211	0.256
Compassionate—toward others	−0.018	−0.223	**0.758**	−0.250
Accepting—toward others	0.244	0.033	**0.698**	−0.223
Friendly—toward others	0.261	−0.030	**0.697**	−0.021
Joyful—toward others	0.404	−0.001	**0.679**	0.008
Angry—toward others	−0.040	0.034	−0.223	**0.823**
Hateful—toward others	−0.014	0.209	−0.333	**0.726**
Angry—toward myself	−0.505	0.206	0.142	**0.624**
Hateful—toward myself	−0.421	0.428	0.033	**0.555**

Rotation method: varimax

Numbers in bold identify the factors used for the analysis

subject who is targeted with the positive posture, whether toward the self or others. The negative qualities are instead organized according the two concepts of the lack of compassion and the lack of loving kindness. This result may have occurred because the subjects consider negative attitudes as more inclusive than positive attitudes: if one behaves without compassion and without loving kindness, this behavior involves both oneself and others. This result is consistent with the idea of *karma* and the interdependence of beings. On the contrary, a positive attitude should be reserved primarily for others; such a tendency would explain why positive emotions are divided according to the subject who benefits from the emotions. For each of the four factors, the internal reliability is good: Cronbach's alpha is higher than the threshold of 0.70 and ranges from 0.75 to 0.84. In addition, the values of the AVE are higher than the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker 1981) and range from 0.58 to 0.67.

A further step in the process of validating the measures is the assessment of the discriminant validity of the constructs with the purpose of assessing whether each construct is more correlated with its own indicators than with any other construct. As Table 6 shows, each pair of constructs is significantly correlated, but the maximum correlation is 0.55.

As shown by Castaldo et al. (2009), in such cases, it is advisable to assess whether the confidence interval of each correlation between any two constructs includes a value of 1. We perform this test for each of the 15 correlations, and none of these intervals include a value of 1. As a further assessment of the discriminant validity of the constructs, we conducted the test suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). To obtain a satisfactory level of discriminant validity, we note that the square root of the AVE of each construct should be higher than the correlation of that construct with any other construct. For each of our constructs, the AVE exceeds any correlation.

As a further method of assessing discriminant validity, one may notice that the Buddhism scale and the four dimensions of SOFI (positive toward self, positive toward others, uncompassionate, and unloving) could be considered sufficiently similar to be combined into a common structure or variable. To assess the discriminant validity of these constructs and the existence of distinct variables, we conducted a factor analysis that included all of the 18 items of the Buddhism scale and all of the 16 items of the SOFI scale. As shown in Table 7, the final result confirms that the constructs are distinct. The four factors of SOFI are also replicated in this overall factor analysis. Among the 18 items of the original Buddhism scale, 14 items load on a common factor. In contrast to the SOFI scale, the remaining four items load on two distinct factors. By introducing materialism as a further variable in the factor analysis, we achieve similar results.

The results of the discriminant validity tests confirm that the Buddhism scale, the four dimensions of SOFI, and materialism are distinct measures that can be treated as separate variables.

Mediation Analysis

To verify the direct and mediated effects of Buddhism on materialism, we conducted four mediation analyses, employing the Buddhism scale as independent variable, materialism as dependent variable, and each of the Four Immeasurables as mediator. This type of analysis can clarify the details of how Buddhism and each of the Four Immeasurables affect materialism. Given that the discriminant validity tests of the constructs were satisfactory, we can conduct separate analyses and expect that the results will not be affected by correlations. In addition, separate regressions have been already employed in the literature to explore the linkages between ethics and consumer behavior (Vitell et al. 2007).

Figure 1 represents the typical mediation model with the common notations. The independent variable X has a direct effect on the dependent variable Y and an indirect effect through the mediator M. In their classical work on mediation, Baron and Kenny (1986) suggest rules that should be

Table 6 Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the constructs

	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Buddhism scale (first factor)	3.737	0.797	(0.923)					
2.	Positive toward self	3.488	0.853	0.210**	(0.839)				
3.	Positive toward others	3.866	0.701	0.165**	0.550**	(0.765)			
4.	Uncompassionate	1.384	0.601	−0.170**	−0.254**	−0.174**	(0.750)		
5.	Unloving	1.703	0.706	−0.217**	−0.430**	−0.336**	0.445**	(0.769)	
6.	Materialism	2.336	0.568	−0.301**	−0.184**	−0.281**	0.328**	0.342**	(0.845)

$n = 304$; The diagonal shows the Cronbach's alpha coefficients in parentheses

** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table 7 Factor analysis combining the Buddhism scale and the SOFI scale to assess discriminant validity

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I practice Buddhism	0.879	0.031	−0.051	0.021	−0.105	0.125	0.037
Buddhism gives me a sense of well-being	0.831	0.109	0.050	0.031	−0.088	−0.108	0.281
The Buddhist doctrine is not useful for attaining happiness[a]	0.831	0.109	0.050	0.031	−0.088	−0.108	0.281
I would define myself as a Buddhist	0.801	−0.067	−0.124	0.085	−0.035	−0.075	0.009
I devote part of my time to Buddhism practices	0.782	0.175	0.022	0.009	−0.212	0.175	0.052
When I practice Buddhism, I feel better	0.723	0.046	0.031	−0.004	0.002	−0.091	0.336
Other people would consider me a Buddhist	0.718	0.031	−0.048	0.154	0.081	0.134	−0.352
My moral behavior is informed by Buddhism	0.705	0.001	−0.075	0.024	0.036	0.042	0.339
I practice Buddhist meditation	0.698	0.207	0.035	0.041	−0.272	0.156	−0.004
My personal ethics are close to Buddhism	0.672	−0.048	−0.167	0.202	0.182	−0.080	−0.090
I read books about Buddhism	0.658	0.050	−0.026	0.034	−0.083	0.155	0.038
I know the main Buddhist teachings	0.646	−0.062	−0.233	−0.045	0.018	0.273	−0.058
I belong to a community of Buddhism followers	0.583	0.083	0.067	−0.089	−0.145	0.536	0.003
I am not a Buddhist[a]	0.467	0.133	−0.090	0.053	0.072	0.362	0.107
Joyful—toward myself	0.028	0.829	0.068	0.238	−0.071	0.096	0.093
Friendly—toward myself	0.057	0.811	−0.168	0.113	−0.026	−0.061	−0.025
Accepting—toward myself	0.131	0.800	−0.058	0.170	−0.097	−0.010	−0.036
Compassionate—toward myself	0.133	0.556	−0.342	0.329	−0.160	0.138	0.009
Cruel—toward myself	−0.060	−0.148	0.831	−0.016	0.007	0.057	0.145
Cruel—toward others	−0.041	0.081	0.731	−0.184	0.046	−0.168	−0.025
Mean—toward myself	−0.070	−0.241	0.710	0.185	0.251	0.117	−0.142
Mean—toward others	−0.151	0.004	0.627	−0.123	0.321	0.036	−0.394
Compassionate—toward others	0.080	0.052	−0.186	0.771	−0.234	0.097	0.071
Friendly—toward others	0.077	0.351	−0.024	0.662	−0.017	−0.076	−0.020
Accepting—toward others	0.066	0.329	0.056	0.648	−0.247	−0.061	−0.013
Joyful—toward others	0.012	0.484	0.043	0.570	−0.071	0.046	0.208
Angry—toward others	−0.164	−0.049	0.067	−0.228	0.759	−0.003	0.040
Hateful—toward others	−0.043	−0.062	0.207	−0.306	0.733	−0.072	−0.039
Angry—toward myself	−0.104	−0.436	0.284	0.088	0.551	0.010	0.257
Hateful—toward myself	0.030	−0.371	0.486	−0.029	0.520	−0.036	0.047
I am alone in my Buddhist practice[a]	−0.050	0.055	0.014	−0.068	−0.092	0.819	0.067
I know other people practicing Buddhism	0.359	−0.091	−0.040	0.161	0.092	0.640	−0.191
In my moral decisions, I am not inspired by Buddhism[a]	0.358	−0.009	−0.070	0.260	0.028	0.024	0.607
I do not know Dharma[a]	0.417	0.042	−0.056	−0.081	0.215	−0.011	0.511

Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization

[a] Reverse worded item

followed to verify the mediation among variables. They suggest the computation of the following three regressions:

$$M = i_1 + aX + e_1$$

$$Y = i_2 + c'X + e_2$$

$$Y = i_3 + cX + bM + e_3$$

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a full mediation effect is present if the following conditions are met:

(1) in the first regression, the coefficient a is significant (i.e., the independent variable X affects the mediator M);
(2) in the second regression, the coefficient c' is significant (i.e., the independent variable X affects the dependent variable Y, without adjustments for the presence of M); and
(3) in the third regression, the coefficient c is *not* significant, and the coefficient b is significant (i.e.,

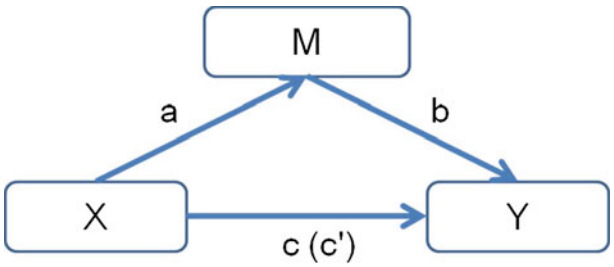

Fig. 1 Mediation model

the independent variable *X* does not affect the dependent variable *Y* when the mediator *M* is introduced).

Baron and Kenny (1986) further suggest the use of the Sobel test to verify whether the mediating path *ab* is significant.

Following the recent suggestions by Zhao et al. (2010) regarding mediation analysis, we conducted a bootstrapping test of mediation (Preacher and Hayes 2004) using the statistical software AMOS 18. In the bootstrapping approach, the significance of the mediation effect is assessed by considering the confidence interval at the chosen significance level of the standardized indirect effect. If this interval does not include zero, the indirect effect is significantly present. To further prove the mediation effect, in addition to conducting the bootstrapping test, we executed the Sobel test on the coefficients *ab* of the mediating paths. Table 8 shows the results of the mediation analysis.

Figure 2 synthesizes the effects shown in Table 8.

To further explore the mediation of the Four Immeasurables and, specifically, the weak effect of the positive self on materialism, we conducted an overall mediation analysis that included all of the variables. The analysis was conducted using AMOS 18.

Although the discriminant validity test grants the possibility of conducting separate mediation analyses for each variable (as illustrated above), the weak effect of the positive qualities toward the self may be modified by the presence of other variables. Figure 3 shows the results. Positive qualities toward oneself are not significant at the 99% confidence level and are marginally significant for the 95% level. Interestingly, the sign of the relation is positive, that is, a higher level of positive qualities toward the self slightly increases the level of materialism.

The overall results show that Buddhism reduces the level of materialism. Buddhism also augments the positive qualities of the subjects (toward themselves and others) and reduces the "enemies" of compassion and loving kindness, namely anger, hate, cruelty, and meanness. With regard to the meditating effects of the ethical qualities of Buddhism, the results show that the mediation is significant in particular for the negative side of the Four Immeasurables (uncompassionate and unloving); Buddhism restrains the enemies of compassion and loving kindness and thus restrains materialism. For the two positive ethical virtues, which we labeled "positive toward self and others", the results are less robust. For "positive toward self" and "positive toward others," the Sobel test rejects the mediation at the 99% confidence level and accepts it at the 95% level. The rejection at the 99% level also occurs for "positive toward self" with the bootstrapping analysis. In the overall mediation analysis, the effect of the positive qualities toward the self further reduces and even changes its direction. Furthermore, the two positive qualities have the smallest mediation effects among the Four Immeasurables. These weak mediation effects may be attributed to the small *b* coefficients (−0.08 for self and −0.19 for others), which measure the effects on materialism, and which may indicate that positive qualities do not strongly affect materialism.

Discussion

The findings suggest that one's commitment to Buddhism curbs materialism both directly and by nurturing the ethical qualities of the Four Immeasurables. The Buddhist detachment from the cycle of desires, its frame of personal identity as an illusory construction, and its consideration of the interdependence of all elements help to explain why Buddhism reduces materialism. The specific effects of the Four Immeasurables occur as a result of the reduction of qualities that are opposites of compassion and loving kindness. An emerging and noteworthy result is that the positive qualities of the Four Immeasurables expressed toward oneself or others affect materialism with less intensity than do the negative qualities. Consumers can reduce their materialism by avoiding the barriers to compassion and loving kindness rather than by cultivating the positive side of the Four Immeasurables. The effects are thus asymmetric. Buddhists may consider materialism as resulting from a lack of compassion and loving kindness; thus, an improvement in these negative traits would reduce materialism. However, the nurturing of positive qualities for oneself and others seems to extend beyond the limited domain of consumption. The final aim of these positive qualities bypasses consumption to pursue different aims. For instance, one may cultivate positive qualities with the purpose of being a good member of the community rather than being a good consumer.

We can offer two types of explanation for the findings. First, the results can be explained by referring to the modern evolution of Buddhism. Second, the findings are

Table 8 Coefficients of the mediation analyses and mediation test significance

Mediator	Mediation coefficients				Indirect effects		Sobel test
	a (Buddhism on mediator)	*b* (mediator on materialism)	*c* (Buddhism on materialism, adjusted with mediator)	*c′* (total effect: Buddhism on materialism)	Standardized indirect effect	Lower–upper bound of the standardized indirect effect (95 and 99% confidence)	Sobel statistic (SE)
Positive toward self	0.224** (0.060)	***−0.084**** (0.037)	−0.196** (0.040)	−0.215**	***−0.026****	−0.060 to −0.005 ***−0.051 to 0.002***	***−1.939**** (0.010)
Positive toward others	0.145** (0.050)	−0.192** (0.044)	−0.187** (0.038)	−0.215**	−0.039**	−0.078 to −0.013 −0.061 to −0.003	***−2.415**** (0.012)
Uncompassionate	−0.128** (0.043)	0.269** (0.038)	−0.180** (0.050)	−0.215**	−0.048**	−0.093 to −0.019 −0.082 to −0.008	−2.744* (0.013)
Unloving	−0.192** (0.050)	0.234** (0.043)	−0.170** (0.038)	−0.215**	−0.063**	−0.080 to −0.022 −0.131 to −0.023	−3.138* (0.014)

a, *b*, and *c* are the unstandardized coefficients referred to in Fig. 1. The numbers in parentheses are the SE. The numbers in italics and bold denote coefficients that are not significant at the 99% confidence level and that are significant at the 95% level

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

coherent with the relationship between spirituality and materiality in consumption.

These results may be caused by the evolution of Buddhism in Western societies. This evolution is relevant to the interpretation of the results for two reasons. First, most participants in this research were Westerners. Second, this interpretation of Buddhism is not exclusive to the Western world; other groups in the East are re-importing the Western interpretation of Buddhism in a global crossing of views and paths (Possamai 2009).

Religions do not simply transfer from one culture to another. The receiving culture translates the incoming religion and hybridizes it with its previous religious discourse; it thereby creates something new in a coevolutionary process. This process can even be a reinterpretation of the original religion. Buddhism has undergone a process of acculturation in its meeting with the Western consumerist world, which has caused the hybridization of Buddhism (Possamai 2009). In the earlier dissemination of Buddhism in the Western countries during the 1960s, Buddhists in the West were mainly focused on maintaining the Tibetan traditions that were endangered by the occupation of Tibet. Since the 1980s, Buddhism interpretation and practice in the West has changed: the interpretation and practice of Buddhism has begun to place increased emphasis on individual well-being and personal improvement. Buddhism has combined with the growing trend of the human potential movement and the focus on the self. A renewed emphasis on meditative techniques was part of this attention directed toward the positive effects of Buddhism on the lives of individuals. Some Westerners became interested in their self-development rather than in escaping the cycle of suffering (Possamai 2009). Part of this self-enhancement can be expressed through consumption, which is a strong form of the construction of one's identity in Western cultures (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Fournier 1998). The pairing of the self-based psychological interpretation of Buddhism with the relevance of consumption for the self has led to the belief that positive emotions toward the self do not affect materialism because possessions are one of the core elements of the identity of Western consumers. Thus, a certain degree of propensity toward possessions can be a form of self-expression and self-enhancement. In terms of the positive emotions directed toward oneself, a consumer can express and reinforce these emotions with some form of consumption rather than refraining from such consumption. This tendency is particularly evident in instances in which consumption is a form of self-rewarding, including instances of self-gift giving (Mick and Demoss 1990). Self-gift giving is a special indulgence that one concedes to him/herself. In these cases, consumption expresses some degree of materialism as a temporary suspension of an attitude that would otherwise avoid excesses.

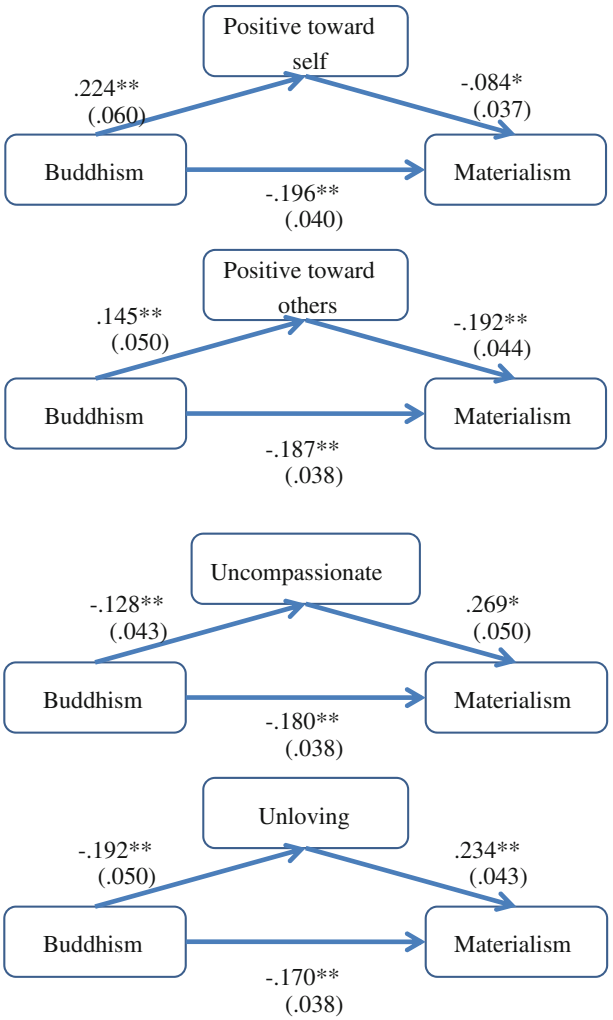

Fig. 2 The effects of Buddhism on materialism mediated by the Four Immeasurables (SE in parenthesis)

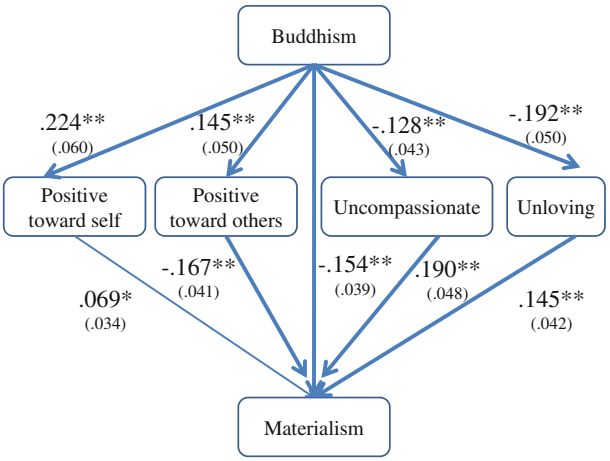

Fig. 3 Mediation analyses including all the variables (SE in parentheses)

More recently, Buddhism is experiencing a new wave of change. In addition to the psychological dimension of Buddhism, contemporary Buddhism entails a higher level of attention toward society (Queen 2000). Buddhist thinking is increasingly interested in new fields, such as ecology and social issues. In this view, materialism primarily represents a threat to society rather than to a single individual because materialism destroys natural resources and widens social inequalities, which causes social tensions. This social dimension is captured by the effects that negative ethical traits (lack of compassion and lack of loving kindness) and positive qualities toward others have on materialism. Compassion and loving kindness can refer to both oneself and others (as the scale employed in this research illustrates), but they synthesize the Buddhist posture toward society and fellows citizens, thus they are social qualities. Compassion and loving kindness are the roots of the attitude that a Buddhist has toward materialism as a social, rather than individual, phenomenon. Compassion, loving kindness, and positive qualities toward others affect the social side of materialism. The overall results suggest that the psychological and sociological dimensions of Buddhism affect materialism in different ways. The psychological dimension of Buddhism (that is, the positive emotions toward the self) does not reduce materialism and may even increase it to a certain extent, whereas the social dimension (captured by compassion, loving kindness, and positive emotions toward others) does reduce materialism.

The findings can also be interpreted through the classification of spiritual materialism provided by Gould (2006). He articulates the relationship between spirituality and materiality by devising four types of materialism: "(1) completely materialistically oriented without a spiritual connection, (2) asceticism, (3) spiritualized self-transformation, and (4) spiritualized self-liberation" (Gould 2006, p. 66). The first type is pure materialism, and the other three types are forms of spirituality. The second type, asceticism, completely refuses materiality. Consumption is negated and is reduced to a minimum. The third type, spiritualized self-transformation, is the use of materiality and consumption as a part of self-improvement. Adopting a Buddhist view, this path leverages the self to go beyond itself. The self is nurtured with materiality to transcend itself. Finally, spiritualized self-liberation refers to the path toward an awareness that the self is not real. Sensations, thoughts, and material stimuli do not witness any reality but rather recognize their impermanence and the non-existence of the self. By attending to these internal or external stimuli, the mind becomes aware of the non-existence of the self.

The findings of the present study suggest a type of "resistance of the self." According to the results, in Buddhism-based forms of consumption, the self does not disappear, as one would expect. By distinguishing between

positive feelings toward themselves and others, consumers affirm the existence of the self. Some consumers continue to consider the self to be something so real that it is a target of positive feelings. This "resistant self" absorbs a portion of the positive effects that Buddhist ethics has on materialism. Buddhism tames materialism, but the self reduces the effect of Buddhism on materialism.

These consumers seem close to the third path (spiritualized self-transformation). In this case, the self is present, although it is not necessarily treated as a reality but as a tool to achieve goals. Among those goals can be included an ethical posture toward consumption—as the other ethics dimensions suggest—that would go beyond the self. As Gould argues, in the path of spiritualized self-transformation, consumers engage "the material world not by shunning it as in the ascetic path, but by making it useful as part of the path. […] In this particular spiritual view the material plane is not rejected or viewed in ascetic terms as something to be shunned as it is in some spiritual perspectives but instead it is utilized by unleashing the power inherent in it" (2006, p. 67). This produces a fine balance between materiality and spirituality, between the self and what transcends the self. This balance is coherent with the findings that the self does not affect materialism and that the non-self ethical dimensions reduce materialism.

At a deeper level, the interpretation of the findings is in line with another doctrinal tenet of many streams of Buddhism, which is the notion of the *bodhisattva*: the enlightened being who does not escape the world but remains to help other beings reach enlightenment as well. Analogously, consumers who are committed to Buddhism do not fully renounce materiality and the self. On the contrary, materiality and the self remain part of their approach to consumption.

The implications of these results can be extended to other religions as a possible reflection of their effects on the attitudes of consumers. Religions commonly pursue positive human traits and discourage negative tendencies. When consumption attitudes are examined, the empirical results suggest that the two paths are not symmetrical and that they may not lead toward the same outcome. Fostering positive qualities does not erase negative traits but merely enhances positive sides. Analogously, to reduce negative tendencies, one should focus on those specific tendencies rather than balancing them with positive traits. In addition, the role of the self is confirmed as a key issue for understanding consumers. However, the self does not necessarily serve ego-related desires, but it can play a role within a more complex ethical system that also includes non-self ethical dimensions.

We can enlarge the conclusions to include some reflections about the so-called "Buddhist economics" (Schumacher 1973; Daniels 2005). Buddhist economics emphasizes the "virtue attached to pursuing a 'Middle Way' and the fundamental concern expressed for the welfare of all beings as a result of the importance attributed to reciprocal action" (Daniels 2005, p. 249). Buddhist economics advocates a richer understanding of consumers. Consumers are not framed as purely economic agents, but as human beings embedded in their socioeconomic environment and striving to satisfy needs that go beyond the mere material wants. Past neo-classical economic theories assumed instead a purely rational consumers whose aim was to selfishly maximize their utility function through an endless accumulation of goods. Today, moving from those basic neo-classical assumptions, economic theories acknowledge a broader spectrum of consumers' aims, including altruism, interpersonal relations, and collective goals (Daniels 2005). However, economic theories still consider the self as the key subject of any economic decision and action. Both recent economic theories and Buddhist economics share a view of consumer as human being, but the concept of self distinguishes the two perspectives. The present work helps the two approaches to meet by suggesting that economic theories—based on the idea of self—and Buddhist economics (and any humanistic approach to economics, as in the original intentions of Schumacher 1973) can coexist in the actual behavior of consumers. Consumers can approach materiality by using both self and non-self, thus behaving as individual agents pursuing non-individual goals.

Limitations and Future Research

The current work can be seen as a preliminary step in the process of understanding the ways in which specific doctrinal tenets of the world's religions and forms of spirituality affect some aspects of consumption. Buddhism is not considered in this paper as superior to other religions or moral codes. Buddhism is simply one of the many paths—religious and non-religious—that may lead toward an improvement of the traits and behavior of consumers. This variety of paths indicates the need for future research pertaining to other religions and spiritual paths.

A limitation associated with studying religion as a root of consumer behavior is the framing of religions into categorical denominations and the consideration of religious affiliations as the causes of some effects; instead, these effects may be rooted in a wider set of personal traits. In the current study, this limitation has been controlled by considering a scale of Buddhism rather than the mere affiliation with Buddhism. Further refinements of scales to measure commitment in specific religions are necessary.

A further possible limitation is related to the hybridization of Buddhism discussed above. Buddhism, as practiced and believed in the Western countries, is one of the

many forms of Buddhism, and it has been adapted to the Western spiritual needs. In addition, one individual can practice Buddhism in a way that significantly differs from the practice of another individual. This observation prompts the question of "why this spirituality still claims to represent Buddhism when it is perhaps instead a relatively moderate form of New Age spirituality" (Faure 2009, p. 142). For some individuals, the boundaries between spiritual paths can cross and hybridize with one another. This feature is true for religions in the postmodern era, and it may also be the fate of Buddhism; that is, in the postmodern manner of selecting religious ideas as one would select items on a grocery shelf, Buddhism may be freely reinterpreted by practitioners in their own subjective ways (Possamai 2009). From this perspective, is materialism actually reduced by the Buddhist doctrine or by some other religious attitude of which Buddhism is simply one element? Surveys cannot fully gauge this effect. Qualitative methods, such as existential interviews, can assist future research pertaining to this topic.

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