

AS	AWAY	BELIEFS	DESPITE
DURING	EMBRACE	EVENTUALLY	FOR
FUELLED	GRADUALLY	LONELINESS	LONESOME
LOWER	MUST-HAVE	OPPOSITE	OVERALL
PROMOTED	QUICKLY	SPITE	STILL
THOUGH	TOWARDS	WITH	YET

COVID may have made us less materialistic –new research

The early days of COVID brought a new sense of urgency to shopping for certain items. Toilet paper, pasta and bread flew off the shelves as people stocked up on vital supplies. Then came the _____¹ purchases to help with the tedium of lockdowns, with hot tubs, kitchen gadgets and new pets becoming extremely popular purchases. So did the pandemic make us generally more materialistic?

Certainly, research suggests that a tendency towards materialistic behaviour – a focus on acquiring money and possessions that signal economic and social status – is caused by high levels of stress, anxiety and _____² For many, the pandemic has been a stressful, anxious and lonely period.

Materialism is also _____³ by media consumption. And early reports found that during periods of lockdown and social restrictions, people became even more glued to their screens than before.

But _____⁴ these conditions which might have been expected to make people more materialistic, our research suggests that the _____⁵ was true. We asked people in the UK about their _____⁶ and values before and after the arrival of COVID and found that, _____⁷ most people have moved to caring less about money and material gains. They rated goals like “being financially successful” and “having a job that pays well” _____⁸ than before.

We believe that these changes might be explained by other factors related to the pandemic. For example, COVID focused attention on the importance of health. Also, advertising and social media _____⁹ social values like solidarity and dealing _____¹⁰ the challenges of a shared experience.

There may be benefits to such a change in attitude. Research has found that materialism leads to lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction, as well as causing negative moods and anxiety. _____¹¹ popular culture and social media make materialism hard to avoid. From a very early age, many children _____¹² learn to associate material gain with rewards for good behaviour. As they get older, they discover that things can help us to present ourselves in a more appealing way, and gain other people's attention. Material items _____¹³ become highly desired prizes that also help us to overcome some of our perceived shortfalls.

Of course, big advertisers and marketing departments didn't completely avoid their traditional methods _____¹⁴ COVID. Our research also revealed a higher number of social media posts from brands promoting consumption _____¹⁵ a way to cope with negative emotions and improve wellbeing. This, combined with a widespread reduction in value placed on financial and material gain, could _____¹⁶ lead to the development of polarised mindsets.

On the one side, it is possible that many people will continue the trend initiated by COVID and slowly drift _____¹⁷ from consumerism, potentially bringing deep social consequences.

On the other side, _____¹⁸ the higher number of adverts and online messages which present spending as a route to happiness could have the opposite result. Those more exposed to social media, like teenagers and young adults, may be more likely to _____¹⁹ materialism, and encounter some of the negative effects it brings.

This kind of polarised thinking could develop into part of the long-term social impact of the global health crisis, with serious ramifications for younger generations. A pandemic which pushed many away from the damaging effects of materialism may have pulled others much closer _____²⁰ them.