

Psychological, Situational, Religious and Behavioral Factors Influencing Happiness in Living: A SEM Approach

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Abstract

Can anyone living based on religious orientation in the tempted environment be happy? The world's renounced "Sufficiency Economy" lifestyle bestowed by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great of Thailand is the important promotive practice. This study investigated direct and indirect effects of traits, situation, religious belief and practice, and behavior based on "sufficiency economy philosophy" on happiness especially hedonic and eudaimonic types. Samples were 323 Booniyom community members, from Santi Asoke, a cult in Buddhist religion. Results from path analysis indicated the model fit that supported the interactionism model with suggestion to add path relationship between group of antecedents. It was found that happiness was directly accounted for 83 percents by the sufficiency economy relating behaviors, as well as, religious belief and practice. Discussion, further analysis, and suggestions were offered.

Keywords: Interactionism, Sufficiency Economy, Buddhism, Booniyom, Thailand.

1. Introduction

Within the past 100 years, most of the world's population have been believing that capitalistic system can improve their well-being and happiness. However, terrified diseases, disasters, and crisis have been continuously unfolding to the world. In Thailand, a tiny group of Buddhist monks named as "Santi Asoke", leading by Samana Bodhirak, had introduced the distinctive concept of simple and austere living, called "Satharana Pokee" in 1970s to counter the mainstream system. They have also accepted and followed His

Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy [1] and set and commune-like living system.

This communal consumption system under "Boonniyom system" [2] is self-reliant community, emphasizing on fair economy, e.g., taking less, giving labor, knowledge and skills for free or sacrifice, most of the earnings of the community go into the central fund which is used to exchange for everyday life necessities. Many followers of Boonniyom system have increased in numbers and locations in Thailand. For laypersons, Boonniyom system requires the austere way of living, e.g., vigilantly observe Buddhist precepts on the regular basis, abstain from base vices (e.g. bad peers, laziness, and idleness), work for community enterprises in work stations for free either full-time or part-time, and being vegetarian. Many of the Boonniyom laypersons join morning sermon before start working, listen to preaching before meals, and join the evening sermon and meditation again before going back to their residence which could be in or outside in the Buddhist center, around the Buddhist center.

Living in the strict and simple way of life like in "Boonniyom" communal community, but surrounded by the tempted environments, raises the question of happiness in living of the clan members. Thus, this study investigates the influences of psychological, situational, religious, and behavioral factors in terms of direct and indirect relationships to happiness in living of these members.

2. Literature Review

The conceptual framework of this study was based on the interactionism model [3] which guided the relationships among several types of independent and dependent variables.

2.1 Concept of Happiness

Happiness in individual level has been studied and defined in various ways [4]. Many constructs and traits have been associated with happiness, e.g., pleasant emotions [5], subjective well-being [6] life satisfaction [7]. In this study, happiness was measured in two dimensions, namely, 1) individualistic happiness referred to hedonic happiness and 2) ethical-living happiness referred to eudaimonic happiness.

2.2 Religion Relates to Behavior and Happiness

In many ways, individual has to uphold oneself to some philosophy, principles, or religion. Scholars have been studying the relationships between religion in many aspects, including beliefs (attitude) and practices (behavior), and happiness or subjective well-being, as well as behaviors, but still in controversial results [8]. However, many studies found the direct positive relationship between these constructs [9]. In addition, based on "Sufficiency Economy Philosophy" of The King Rama 9 which was adapted into psycho-behavioral science [10], it was suggested that ethics and morality could indirectly affect subjective well-being via appropriate behaviors. This empirical evidence was found [11].

2.3 Situation Relates to Religion and Behavior

Social situations in this study consist of 3 factors, i.e., amount of involvement of communal consumption system, role model and social support which could associate with religious belief and practice, as well as,

appropriate behavior. In the past, some studies revealed the possible partial mediating role of religious-related constructs (e.g., mercy, and kindness) on the relationships between social situations (e.g., social support, and role model) and appropriate behaviors [12][13].

2.4 Psychological Trait Relates to Religion and Behavior

Based on the psychological theory of moral and work behavior [14], three psychological traits are mental health, locus of control, as well as future orientation and self-control. In more recent studies, there were empirical evident confirmed by path analysis indicated that these psychological constructs directly related to appropriate behaviors and indirectly related to various important behavior via religious relating constructs [15] [16].

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Samples

Data were collected from 477 Boonniyom members in Bangkok and outer provinces. Only 323 completed data were used for path analysis. The samples consisted of 82 males (25.34%) and 241 females (74.60%) with the age range from 15 to 86 years (\bar{x} = 54.30 years, SD = 12 years). The average years of education was 13 years with median of 16 years (or Bachelor’s degree) (SD = 0.50).

3.2 Measures

The five groups of variables. Table 1 indicated item discrimination (t-ratio) which reflected item quality, and test’s confirmatory factor analysis reflecting construct validity, as well as, reliability for each measure were presented. Most of the summated rating measures each consisted of 10-15 items. Each item was in the form of a single sentence accompanied by 6-point rating scale ranging from “absolutely true” to “absolutely not true”.

Table 1. Item and measurement quality

Measure	No. of items	Range of t-ratio	Reliability (α)	Confirmatory Factory Analysis						
				χ^2	df	p-value (p>0.05)	RMSEA (≤ 0.06)	CFI (≥ 0.95)	TLI (≥ 0.95)	SRMR (≤ 0.08)
1. Individualistic happiness (IN)	15	3.73-6.26	0.77	95.47	78	0.08	0.04	0.96	0.95	0.07
2. Ethical-life satisfaction* (ES)	10	4.53-10.79	0.78	36.35	31	0.23	0.03	0.98	0.97	0.05
3. Moderate-living behavior* (MB)	10	2.19-8.26	0.62	32.20	28	0.26	0.03	0.97	0.96	0.05
4. Wisely-living behavior* (WB)	12	2.60-6.69	0.72	53.38	45	0.18	0.03	0.97	0.95	0.06
5. Safely-living behavior (SB)	11	2.75-7.17	0.68	44.47	40	0.28	0.03	0.98	0.97	0.08
6. Booniyom belief *(BL)	12	2.58-9.99	0.80	60.95	49	0.11	0.04	0.97	0.96	0.06
7. Booniyom practice* (PR)	12	4.93-10.13	0.81	55.92	49	0.23	0.03	0.98	0.97	0.05
8. Mental health (MH)	12	2.89 -10.04	0.88	61.90	47	0.07	0.05	0.97	0.96	0.04
9. Locus of control (IC)	12	4.00-7.50	0.75	53.59	45	0.17	0.04	0.97	0.95	0.06

Measure	No. of items	Range of t-raito	Reliability (α)	Confirmatory Factory Analysis						
				χ ²	df	p-value	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
						(p>0.05)	(≤0.06)	(≥0.95)	(≥0.95)	(≤0.08)
10 Future orientation and self-control (FO)	11	2.19-8.20	0.68	36.26	31	0.23	0.03	0.97	0.95	0.08
11 Good role model* (MO)	12	3.83-7.62	0.69	48.99	40	0.15	0.04	0.97	0.95	0.06
12 Social support* (SS)	12	4.65-11.26	0.86	51.76	38	0.06	0.05	0.97	0.95	0.05

Note: * Constructed by the researcher.

The first group of variables was happiness in living. It consisted of two variables, namely, 1) Individualistic happiness (IH) referred to overall satisfaction towards family and society, assessed by happiness measure [17] and 2) Ethical life satisfaction (ES) referred to self-pride and satisfaction from helping others, observing precepts, and self-development.

The second group of variables was sufficiency economy lifestyle based on Sufficiency Economy Philosophy of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great which UNESCO presented “Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award” in 2006 [18]. It consisted of three variables, namely, 1) Moderate living behavior (MB) referred to economical carefully managing and acquiring the resources from communal center at a minimum level. 2) Wisely living behavior (WB) referred to exploring information and doing everyday life activities based on critical thinking and rationality. and 3) Safely living behavior (SB) involved risk management and readiness for changes and impacts.

The third group of variables was religious belief and practice. It consisted of two variables, namely, 1) Boonniyom belief (BL) based on Buddhist religion belief with the emphasis on special important beliefs, e.g., believing in an austere way of living, and serving common interests. and 2) Boonniyom practice (BP) referred to practicing Dharma, e.g., austerity practicing awareness of the precepts, keeping oneself under restraint, taking less and offering more.

The fourth group of variables was situational factor. It consisted of three variables, namely, 1) Amount of involvement with communal consumption system (Satharana Pokee) (SA) which consisted of three conditions: frequency of giving general services, length of working for common good, and using the central accommodation. 2) Good role model (MO) defined as the report of perceiving significant others practicing the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Boonniyom principles. and 3) social support (SS) defined as receiving emotional, informational, and material supports from family members and co-workers for following the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Boonniyom principles.

The fifth group of variables was trait characteristics. This psychological group consisted of three variables, namely, 1) Mental health (MH) defined as having appropriate amount of anxiety, and emotional stability. 2) Locus of control (IC), based on Rotter [19] referred to the belief in internal control of reward rather than external control. and 3) Future orientation and self-control (FO), based on Mahoney and Thorenson [20] referred to ability to expect and prefer important future consequences of one’s action, and regulating one’s behavior to achieve that expected result. Measurement of variables in this group were from Bhanthumnavin, Vanindananda, and others [21].

3.3 Data Collection and Criteria for Path Analysis

Questionnaires were distributed to Booniyom members in Bangkok and outer provinces, e.g., Nakornprathom, Ubonrajthani, Srisakate and Kanchanburi during June to August 2019. Before that in May 2019, questionnaires were tried out on another group of 120 members. Item discrimination, confirmatory factor analysis, and reliability were computed for each measure to reduce items and test of measurement quality (See Table 1).

Path analysis were performed to investigate the direct and indirect influences of the possible antecedent factors on happiness in living. The fitted model should meet at least three out of five of the following criteria, i.e, 1) The chi-square test of model fit (χ^2) should not be significant [22]. 2) The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) [23] should be less than 0.50. 3) The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) [24] should more than 0.95. 4) The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) [25] should be moving toward 1.00. and 5) the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) [26] should be less than 0.50.

4. Results

According to Table 2, correlational matrix of each pair of variables were performed and revealed the range of -0.22 (ns) to 0.604 (p<.01).

Table 2. Correlational matrix and basic statistics of variables in the study

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1.IN	75.16	7.62	1												
2.ES	47.71	6.08	.523**	1											
3.MB	42.72	5.86	.368**	.432**	1										
4.WB	52.46	6.53	.428**	.421**	.415**	1									
5.SB	48.27	5.90	.469**	.381**	.462**	.581**	1								
6.BL	61.66	6.95	.189**	.472**	.308**	.263**	.279**	1							
7.PR	55.86	6.40	.491**	.604**	.440**	.494**	.478**	.458**	1						
8.MH	52.92	9.14	.507**	.540**	.462**	.403**	.470**	.343**	.526**	1					
9.IC	54.66	7.18	.331**	.420**	.380**	.471**	.389**	.516**	.442**	.482**	1				
10.FO	48.77	5.82	.366**	.340**	.565**	.460**	.509**	.265**	.471**	.479**	.476**	1			
11.SA	1.50	.50	.223**	.240**	.130*	.062	.041	.196**	.134*	.087	.065	-.022	1		
12.MO	47.96	6.40	.374**	.293**	.239**	.285**	.358**	.215**	.325**	.290**	.334**	.250**	.094	1	
13.SS	54.11	7.65	.487**	.268**	.189**	.341**	.283**	.147**	.366**	.223**	.335**	.267**	.147**	.568**	1

Note: * p<.05; ** p<.01

Path analysis (as Figure 1.) was performed to investigate the influences of trait, situational, belief and practice, and behavioral factors on life satisfaction. The results revealed the good fit findings of the hypothetical model based on interactionism model ($\chi^2=47.86$, df = 35, p-value = 0.072; RMSEA = 0.03; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; SRMR = 0.06) with one additional path from trait factor to situational factor.

5. Discussion

According to the results presented, there were numerous findings that can be discussed. However, only important and worthwhile findings will be presented. First, most of the path directions from each latent factors supported the interactionism model [3], except the additional path from psychological trait to situation factors. This kind of path direction was also found in many recent Thai studies [27][28][29]. These findings suggested a possible addition of the important relationship between trait and situation. However, it should be pointed out that most of situation variables measured in these studies were self-report of one’s perception of the situation which could be influenced by psychological characteristics of the respondents.

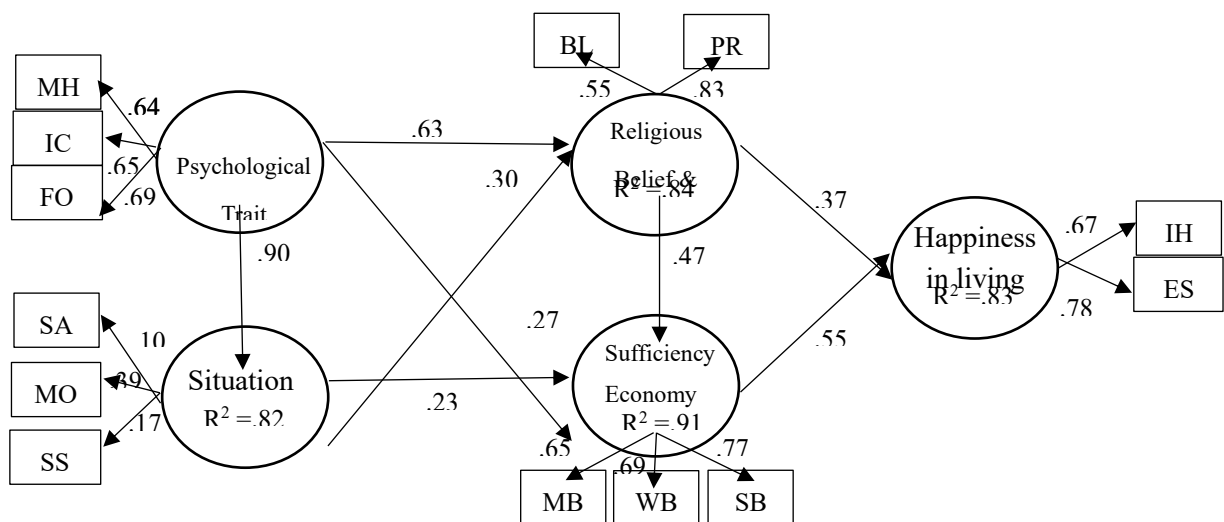


Figure 1. Latent path model of happiness in living

Note: all coefficients are significant.

Second, it could be said that this study was a few studies to empirically revealed that sufficiency economy lifestyle directed affect happiness in terms of hedonic and eudaimonic. It was also found that religious belief and practice were also directly affected happiness, and indirectly affected happiness via behavior. Third, psychological trait group seems to be the earliest antecedents in this model. The highest factor loading for this latent was FO. According to the correlation matrix, the findings also revealed that FO was positively and significantly related to happiness, behaviors, and religious believe and practice. Studies in the past also point out the positive consequences of future orientation and self-control [30]. Limitation of the study were 1) common source of the important variables. Thus, objective measures of independent variables should be included. 2) correlational study is not sufficient to pinpoint causal relationship. The experimental study should be done to confirm the findings. 3) Samples in this study were only the Booniyom members. Comparisons of members with non-members should be carried out.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, it can be concluded that this research model supported and added to the interactionism model. Furthermore, this study also strongly supported the King Rama 9th's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. It can be concluded that moderate living, taking less, giving more, and practice

religion can lead to happiness. In addition, this study also revealed the antecedents of sufficiency economy lifestyle in terms of religion, situation, and psychological characteristics which could shade light for policy planning and social interventions.

In order to increase happiness in living, sufficiency economy lifestyle should be promoted. One of many important world policies to be followed to make it gradually happens, such as, the United Nation's SDG goals [31]. Furthermore, religion, especially Buddhism, is also a part to facilitate the path to happy society. However, research in this topic should be done to confirm the findings in other types of individuals as well. Psychological trait had stronger influence on behavior rather than religious belief and practice. It is suggested to increase future orientation and self-control to promote the appropriate behaviors which lead to happiness.

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