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Determinants of compulsive buying behavior among young adults: The mediating role of materialism



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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to determine what makes young adults materialistic. The study examines the mediating role of materialism between the contextual factors and compulsive buying. Data was gathered from 219 Pakistani undergraduate university students. Partial Least Square (PLS) technique was used to analyze the data. The study confirms the intuition that more materialistic young adults are more likely to be involved in compulsive buying than are less materialistic young adults. The results were similar with the previous literature conducted in the western culture, indicating that also applies in a modern Islamic society. The findings of the study reveal that materialism mediated the relationship between certain sociological factors (i.e., group, media Celebrity endorsement, and TV advertisement) and compulsive buying. The study highlights the importance of understanding young adults' materialistic attitudes and consumption decisions and provides key knowledge for researchers, policymakers, and managers of leading brands.

1. Introduction

The increasing level of materialism has become a hot issue among parents, young adults, policymakers, and marketers around the world (Duh, 2016; Pilch & Górnik-Durose, 2016; Wang & Liao, 2007). This study addresses the antecedents and consequences of materialism, particularly as related to compulsive buying. The motives for materialistic attitudes can be traced back to rapid urbanization, parents' high purchasing power, and the role of young adults in family purchase decisions (Chan, 2008; Hultman, Kazemina, & Ghasemi, 2015; McNeal & Yeh, 1997; Pugliese & Okun, 2014; Tsang, Carpenter, Roberts, Frisch, & Carlisle, 2014). Scholars have extensively studied materialism's nature (Belk, 1988; Cole et al., 2015; Richins & Dawson, 1992), antecedents (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Parr, Zeman, Braunstein, & Price, 2016), and consequences (Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, & Kasser, 2014; Pieters, 2013; Unanue, Dittmar, Vignoles, & Vansteenkiste, 2014). In the marketing literature, materialism is addressed as a negative value that tends to have a negative impact on the subjective well-being and life satisfaction of youth (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Christopher, Saliba, & Deadmarsh, 2009; Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011) and is positively related to compulsive buying (Manolis & Roberts, 2012). A survey conducted at the Singapore Business School found that students who are more materialistic are unhappy, less satisfied, and have lower levels of self-actualization than students who are less materialistic (Mueller et al., 2011). In recent years, a dramatic increase in materialism has emerged as a social issue among youth (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Kasser et al., 2014).

Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, and Kasser (2004) found that individuals gain materialistic principles in the course of social learning from

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relatives, peers, television, and social media, all of which are often supportive of a materialistic way of life. Adolescents who are exposed to this kind of social learning tend to be fascinated with innovative products and are particularly receptive to advertisements and promotional offers (Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell, 2002). Schor (2004) concluded that modern youth are “the most brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and materialistic generation in history.” For highly materialistic persons, such expensive item ownership is believed to provide the greatest life satisfaction. With every passing day, materialism affects young adult behavior with more power. For example, compared to Baby Boomers graduating from high school in the 1970s, recent high school students are more materialistic; 62 percent of students surveyed in 2005–07 think it is important to “have a lot of money” while just 48 percent had the same belief in 1976–78 (Twenge, 2013). Similarly, a survey conducted in the UK revealed that children have become more materialistic these days compared to previous generations (Lenka, 2014).

Compulsive buying behavior has captured much attention from scholars researching marketing psychology (Chan, Zhang, & Wang, 2006; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). This is because compulsive buying behavior affects more than fifty million US citizens (Dittmar & Drury, 2000) and has serious psychological consequences. Ninan et al. (2000) defined compulsive buying behavior as “impulsive and/or compulsive buying of unneeded objects.” Scholars identified significant constructs such as TV advertisements, peer group, and media celebrity endorsement which is responsible for materialistic values and compulsive buying behavior among young adults (Richins, 1995; Sirgy et al., 2016). However, Yurchisin and Johnson (2004) found materialism is the key factor of compulsive buying, and thus affects all buying decisions of consumers. Compulsive buyers believe that material possession is an important way to happiness, success, and self-identity, and 5.8% of American customers were assessed to be compulsive buyers (Koran, Faber, Aboujaoude, Large, & Serpe, 2006).

Pakistan was chosen as the research context of this study. As an emerging market, there has been a noticeable demographic shift in Pakistan so that half of the population is under the age of 30 and middle-class group income is increasing. Pakistan is experiencing fast changes in its social structure (Qadeer, 2006). The youth of today believe in independence and individuality (Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). As a result, a rise has been seen in the psychological disorders and unique consumption behaviors of young adults (Wang, Liu, Jiang, & Song, 2017). The growing number of excessive buying behaviors among young adults may be the cause of materialism and compulsive buying. Despite the extensive research on materialism among children in developed nations, no study can be found on the topic of materialism in Pakistan. To fill this research gap, the present study makes several important contributions to the existing literature. First, we propose a conceptual model based on existing literature to explore the reasons for materialistic attitudes among youth in Pakistan. Second, we extend the scope of the literature by testing and validating the conceptual model by involving various antecedents and outcomes of materialism among youth. Third, we focus on materialism as a possible mediator between social contextual factors and compulsive buying behavior among young adults.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Materialism

From last four decades, scholars have found that increasing role of materialism has become a central construct of the consumer behavior (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004; Graham, 1999). Belk (Belk, 1983; Belk, Bahn, & Mayer, 1982; Belk & Pollay, 1985; Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Ger & Belk, 1996) and Richins (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Richins & Rudmin, 1994; Richins, 1995, 2004) have discussed materialism conceptually as a latent construct. According to Belk (1988), materialism is a significant utilization pattern, as young people frequently use material possessions to convey their extended selves. Belk (1984) explains materialism as a stage in which a person thinks certain material goods are mandatory for enjoyment in life. Richins and Dawson (1992) conceptualize materialism as personal values and a choice between tangible and intangible life goals. Materialism can be defined as “the extent to which individuals attempt to engage in the construction and maintenance of the self through the acquisition and use of products, services, and experience” (Shrum et al., 2013).

The present study measures the materialism by using the materialism value scale approach in (Richins & Dawson, 1992). The scale is composed of three domains (centrality, happiness, and success) where; (1) centrality refers to possession, which plays an important role in materialists' lives, (2) happiness is the belief that an individual is happier if the individual has many expensive things, and (3) success is measured through what one owns. Materialistic young adults are always motivated towards excessive purchases because getting wealth and material possession is their vital life goals. They use expensive products as a medium to represent the social position, reputation, and success. Scholars found materialistic behavior is aroused among young adults due to external and internal stimuli. According to Kasser and Kanner (2004), materialistic values focus on two major factors: the socialization stimuli and the psychological stimuli. The socialization factor consists of social agents that are, peer pressure, media celebrity, family roles, media exposure, and television advertisements. On the other hand, the psychological factor is internal and consists of stress and subjective well-being (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001).

2.2. Compulsive buying

The topic of compulsive buying behavior has received considerable attention from researchers (Kwak, Zinkhan, & Dominick, 2002; Roberts, Manolis, & Tanner, 2003). Edwards and Potter (1992) defined compulsive buying as “a chronic abnormal form of shopping and spending characterized by the extreme, uncontrollable, and repetitive urge to buy, disregarding the consequences.” Research has described compulsive buying behavior as a mental state in which an isolated individual who lacks impulse control and has low self-esteem combined with anxiety and materialism seeks excitement (Desarbo & Edwards, 1996; Faber & O'guinn, 1992;

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