

Impact of Social Pressures on Materialism among Students

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Abstract

Increased level of materialism among Asian young people lead the current study to investigate underlying factors behind the emergence of this social problem. For this purpose, social pressures were taken as influencing factors, and their impact on materialistic values was highlighted by doing a cross-sectional survey. The survey was gone through on randomly selected 750 university students in Punjab by using questionnaire of social pressures (negative experiences) materialism scale. Both of the scales showed good reliability and validity. After data collection, Smart PLS was considered for impact analysis and measurement model was developed as well as fitted and validated by performing Partial Least Square Algorithm and Path-coefficient boot-strapping. Path coefficients posed that 'living without parents', 'difficulty coping in school', 'sudden drop in family finance', and 'problems in new circle of friends' triggered materialism by up to 80%, whereas 'being head of the family' and 'diminishing love and emotional support from parents' decreased materialistic values up to 20%. Social pressures, informed by this study, should be addressed by sociologists and educationists to help students overcome negatively emerged values i.e. materialism among them.

Keywords: Materialism, social pressures, negative experiences, students

Introduction

Over the past few years, the value of money, lust for status and possessions have increased among Asian people (Awanis, Schlegelmilch, & Cui, 2017; Zhang, 2018) especially among Pakistani adolescents (Zaman, Shah, & Hasnu, 2016). Most of the people became materialistic and have set making a lot of money as one of their future goals (Schor, 2014). Despite the fact that materialism is often seen as a social problem, it is being increased among people day by day. Materialism is argued alarmingly in terms of low subjective well-being, low life satisfaction and poor interpersonal relationships (Sheldon & Kasser, 2008; Shrum, Lee, Burroughs, &

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Rindfleisch, 2011; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; Vega & Roberts, 2011). The dramatic change in favor of material-values poses the question that what factors trigger it to be? In respect of the development of materialism, scholars argued that it emerges in individuals as early as pre-school age and develops over time with social comparisons, becoming more complex with age, gender, education, and comparison of playing stuff like toys (Verma, 2009). As they get exposed to adult attitudes about material objects, children conform to consumerism norms that promote materialism (Chaplin & John, 2007). Once children reach adolescence, materialism would have become a stable value. In consequence to the development of materialism from childhood through adolescence, a vigorous debate is made regarding the factors stimulating materialism among children (Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, & Bamossy, 2003; Kasser, 2005; Schick, 2002; Seidel, 2011). However, the development factor behind materialism among adolescents aged 18-20 years is somehow ignored, especially in the context of Asian countries. It is crucial for it to be highlighted, so that if materialism brings negative influence in life then its' causing factors should be captured.

Related Studies

The family is considered a primary source to impart the values, concepts, and attitudes, with parents assuming the role of a model (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008; Roberts, Tanner & Manolis, 2005). They show adolescents what a reasonable consumption looks like (Chaplin & John, 2007). Parents' emotional attachment with their children may also influence the mindset of children. As mothers, who were low on warmth and relied on negative emotional communications were likely to have adolescents, who emphasized financial success as a goal of life (Kashdan & Breen, 2007). Additionally, disruption in families can also be a promoting factor of materialistic values. Contrarily, another study of Chan and Prendergast (2007) in Hong Kong families, informed that Hong Kong teenagers hardly consult family members when in need to get support from them either emotionally or in product purchase decisions. Alongside living in disrupted families, the economic condition of the individuals plays an important role in setting future goals. Chaplin, Hill, and John (2014) conducted a study on impoverished and affluent children and found that the low economic status of families causes the development of materialism among adolescents.

Apart from family influence, pressures other than from family can also have an impact on individuals, such as from peers and school. With regards to problems in peer relationships, Banerjee and Dittmar (2008) concluded from the literature review that when school going students face peer rejection and peer pressure, it becomes a motive to develop materialism in them. Furthermore, Goldberg et al. (2003) studied 9-14 year old youth and concluded that most materialistic individuals had problems in their schooling.

In conclusion, all the major social groups or factors, such as parents, family, financial status, peers and schooling are reported to have correlation or impact on the development of materialistic value. However, the reports are majorly concerned with either children or western nations, rather than exploring factor of promoting materialism among Asian adolescents. To fill this gap, the current study aims to measure the impact of social pressures on materialism among Pakistani university students. Following are the main objectives of this study:

Objectives of the Study

- To highlight the level of materialism among university students
- To explore the relationship between social pressures and materialism
- To measure the impact of social pressures on materialistic values among university students

Research Question

- What is the level of materialism among university students?

Hypotheses of the Study

1. Social pressures have a significant relationship with materialism among university students.
2. Social pressures have a significant impact on materialism among university students

Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to the province of Punjab and students, studying in 2nd year, 3rd year, and 4th year of their university.

Methodology

It was a cross-sectional survey-based causal study, where social pressure and materialism was measured by using a questionnaire with university students. Afterward, a statistical analysis was performed to get quantitative results.

Participants

The population of the study was university students from the province of Punjab. For sample selection, 2 large public universities were considered. Equal representation was given to each of the faculty within selected universities. Random sampling technique was used and 75 participants were included from each faculty. The total sample size was 750 students.

Research Tools

Social Pressures: Perceived social pressures scale was based on six items, adopted from Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Denton (1997). Reliability of the scale (.823)

falls in good criterion range ($>.80$). Each item of the scale was considered as a separate factor of social pressures i.e. “Living without parents”, “Being head of the family”, “Difficulty coping in school”, “Lack of emotional support”, “Poor Family Finance”, “Problems with peers”.

Materialism: Materialism among university students was measured by ten-item materialism scale, developed by Richins and Dawson (1992). Internal consistency of materialism scale was .865, it also falls in good criterion range ($>.80$). Convergent and discriminant validity of the short-form materialism scale was reported as good in Richins (2004). This study estimated construct reliability and validity of the scale as: Cronbach’s Alpha = .741, rho_A = .786, Composite Reliability = .814, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = .534.

Data Collection

A survey was conducted by visiting each of the institutions. There were three sections of survey sheets provided to study participants: 1. Demographic part i.e. gender, age, sector, study area, and locality; 2. The scale of social pressures; and 3. The scale of materialism. To avoid distorted perceptions of respondents ipsative measurement was preferred (Hunt, Bowen & Martin, 2002), and the four-point scale was used for each of the questionnaires. Along with survey questionnaires, informed consent was also given to selected students, in which, the purpose of the study, volunteer participation, anonymity, and confidentiality was assured to them.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis of the variables was performed to estimate the materialism level. Correlation between social pressures and materialism was tested by performing Pearson correlation with significance at the 0.01 level. Impact of social pressures on materialism was determined by doing path analysis in SmartPLS 3. PLS Algorithm and Bootstrapping were calculated to check the fitness of the developed model. It was fitted by following the criteria (SRMR range between .05-.08, NFI $>.50$) given by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) and Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010). Hypotheses of the study were rejected/accepted on the base of a criterion range of Path coefficients (β) $\geq .20$, F Square $>.02$, Q-Square < 1.00 , R Square $>.30$, T Statistics >1.96 and P value $< .05$, given by Chin (1998).

Results

Total of 540 students has properly filled the questionnaires with a response rate of 72%. Among them, 50.3% were male respondents and 49.6% were females, aged 18 years with 39.2%, 19 years with 31.9%, and 20 years with 28.9%. Most of the respondents (62.3%) were urban residents, while the rest (37.7%) was from a rural area. Majority of respondents’ (57.2%) study area was science, while only 42.8% of respondents studied in arts.

In a descriptive analysis of the scale of materialism showed that a majority of respondents (77.7%) used to admire people who own expensive things. For 56.9% of students, some of the most important achievement in life included acquiring material possessions. Only 22.4% of them did not place much emphasis in the number of material objects that people own as a sign of success and only 3.5% were agreed to buy only needed things and their happiness would not base on owing nicer things. Likewise, it was observed through percentage value that only 30% of university students tried to make their life simple as far as possessions are concerned and the things they own have no importance for them. A majority of respondents (96.1%) often spend money on unnecessary things and they (82.6%) own things that they considered necessary to enjoy life. For 87.2% of study participants, their life may have a better turn if they have certain things that they did not have in life. The overall mean value of the scale of materialism was 3.26, indicating a very high level of materialistic values emerged among university students (Table 2).

Table 2

Level of materialism among students

Item statement	Strongly disagree (%)	Tend to disagree (%)	Tend to agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
'I admire people who own expensive things'	19 (3.5%)	101 (18.7%)	106 (19.6%)	314 (58.1%)	3.32	.898
'Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possession'	79 (14.6)	154 (28.5%)	203 (37.6%)	104 (19.3%)	2.61	.957
'I don't place much emphasis in the number of material objects that people own as a sign of success'*	210 (38.9%)	209 (38.7%)	102 (18.9%)	19 (3.5%)	1.87	.838
'I usually tend to buy the things I need'*	312 (57.8%)	209 (38.7%)	19 (3.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1.46	.565
'I try to keep my life simple as far as possessions are concerned'*	235 (43.5%)	143 (26.5%)	143 (26.5%)	19 (3.5%)	1.90	.912
'The things I own are not all that important to me'*	261 (48.3%)	117 (21.7%)	71 (13.1%)	91 (16.9%)	1.99	1.136
'I often spending money on things that I do not really need'	20 (3.7%)	1 (0.2%)	275 (50.9%)	244 (45.2%)	3.38	.679
'I have the things I really need to enjoy life'	19 (3.5%)	75 (13.8%)	162 (30.0%)	284 (52.6%)	3.63	.551
'My life would be better if I owned certain thing I do not have'	0 (0.0%)	69 (12.8%)	187 (34.6%)	284 (52.6%)	3.40	.704
'I would not be any happier if I owned nicer things'*	330 (61.1%)	191 (35.4%)	0 (0.0%)	19 (3.5%)	1.46	.678
Total score					3.26	.791

Note: An asterisk indicates reverse coded items

In the result of Pearson correlation between social pressures and materialism, it was found that there is a low positive correlation of ‘living at home without parents’ ($r = 0.137$), ‘major sudden drop in family’s financial statuses’ ($r = 0.164$), and ‘being the house head’ to generate family income’ ($r = 0.209$) with materialistic attitude. On the other hand, ‘serious difficulties coping in school’ ($r = -0.198$) and ‘diminishing love and emotional support from parents’ ($r = -0.166$) have a low negative correlation with materialism among university students. Correlations were significant at the 0.01 level. Experiencing problems in a new circle of friends have no significant relationship with material values ($r = .021$) (Table 3).

Table 3
Correlation between social pressures and materialism

	Materialism	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6
Materialism	1						
2.1 ‘Living in the home without parents’	.137**	1					
2.2 ‘Serious difficulties coping in school’	-.198**	.504**	1				
2.3 ‘A major, sudden drop in family’s financial status’	.164**	.263**	.498**	1			
2.4 ‘Diminishing love and emotional support from parents’	-.166**	.267**	.281**	.196**	1		
2.5 ‘Being the house head, it was the need for me to generate family income’	.209**	.190**	-	.171**	.157**	1	
2.6 ‘Experience problems in a new circle of friends’	.021	.586**	.202**	.292**	.147**	.231**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To measure the impact of social pressures on materialism, the model was developed and fitted in SmartPLS 3 by performing PLS Algorithm. Model fit indices values were: SRMR = 0.06, Chi-Square = 1,493.39, and NFI = 0.519, falling in criterion range of goodness of fit. It was found in performing bootstrapping of path coefficients that difficulty coping in school has a high impact on materialism, as it increased materialistic attitude among respondents up to 82% ($\beta = 0.821$, $P = .000$). Besides, living without parents followed by poor family finance and problems in the circle of friends also increased materialism among university students as the there beta value was 0.582 ($P = .000$), 0.270 ($P = .004$) and 0.140 ($P = .022$) respectively. On the other side, lack of emotional support from parents and being family head in terms of generating family income decreased material value up to 23% ($\beta = -0.228$, $P = .000$) and 20% ($\beta = -0.195$, $P = .000$) consecutively. R-Square value for the impact of social

pressures on materialism was 0.459, which falls in the average category. T Statistics, F-Square and Q-Square values also passed the criteria of validating the model ($T > 1.96$, $F^2 \geq .02$, $Q^2 < 1.00$) (Table 4).

Table 4
Impact of social pressures on materialism among students

Boot-strapping Path Coefficients Path	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Std. Dev.	T Statistics	Sig.	F ²	R ²	Q ²
Living without parents -> Materialism	0.582	-0.579	0.053	10.936	0.000	0.293		
Being head of family -> Materialism	-0.195	0.185	0.049	4.028	0.000	0.059		
Difficulty coping in school -> Materialism	0.821	0.835	0.060	13.742	0.000	0.628	.459	.174
Lack of emotional support -> Materialism	-0.228	0.224	0.035	6.573	0.000	0.085		
Poor family finance -> Materialism	0.270	-0.286	0.094	2.864	0.004	0.089		
Problems in new friends -> Materialism	0.140	0.137	0.046	3.056	0.002	0.022		

The model figure shows the diagram illustrating path coefficients from social pressures to materialism. Loading value of materialism items was greater than .45 (Figure 1).

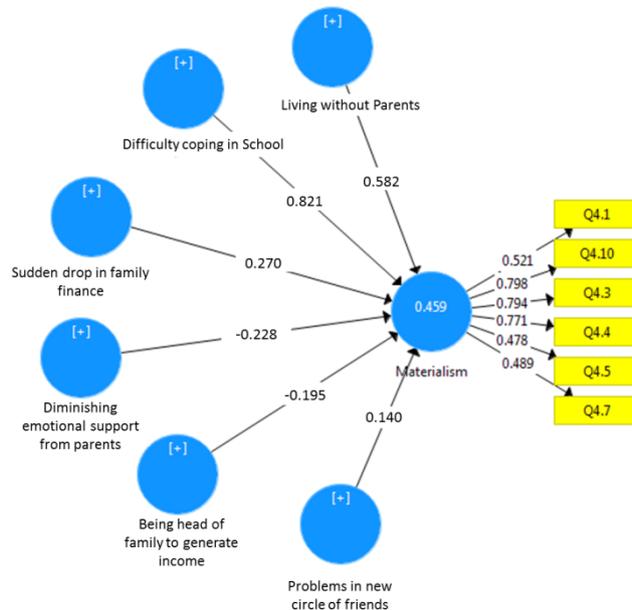


Figure 1. Model: Impact of Social Pressures on Materialism

Discussion

As far as materialism among university students was concerned in the current study, the first objective was to determine the level of materialistic attitude among university students. Results of the study revealed that a majority of study respondents admired people who own things and some of the most important achievement for them was to acquire material possessions. Findings are aligned with the report of Zaman et al. (2016). Results of the study also showed that university students used to spend money on unnecessary things just to enjoy life and thought of owning more things as a source of a better life. This study found very few of the respondents, who don't consider the number of material objects as a symbol of success and buy only needed things. There were a small number of students who tried to keep their life simple or who did not give importance to their possessions. On the whole, materialism level was high among university students, which supports the previous reports of increasing materialism among Asian people (Zaman et al., 2016; Zhang, 2018).

The second objective of the study was to explore the relationship between social pressures and materialism. The results posed a positive correlation between the social pressure named: 'major sudden drop in the family's financial statuses' and materialistic attitude. The result is aligned with the findings of Dean, Carroll, and Yang (2007) who found a positive significant correlation of financial problems with the materialistic attitude among married couples. On the other hand, the social pressure, i.e. 'serious difficulties coping in school' have a negative correlation with materialism. Contrarily, Goldberg et al. (2003) posed that materialism has a negative relationship with schooling problems. This difference in finding may be because of different age groups of the study sample. Current study surveyed university students, who were aged between 18 and 20, whereas Goldberg et al. (2003)'s subjects of the study were 9 to 14 year old individuals. Diminishing love and emotional support from parents was also found to have a negative correlation with materialism, which leads to the acceptance of the first research hypothesis (Social pressures have a significant relationship with materialism among university students).

Third and a major concern of the current study was to measure the impact of social pressures on materialistic values among university students. Similar to the direction of the correlation coefficient, path coefficients revealed the high impact of living in home without parents Chan and Prendergast (2007); Roberts, Tanner, and Manolis (2005) convinced that the individuals, who belong to disrupted families, showed a high level of materialistic values. Furthermore, current study revealed that a sudden drop in family finances triggered the development of materialism among university students. It supported the finding of Chaplin et al. (2014) that poor financial condition can promote materialistic values among individuals. Apart from family factors, peer pressures are also found to be significant as 'experiencing problems in a

new circle of friends' and 'difficulty coping in school', play their role to level up the materialistic attitude among individuals. This result is in line with the conclusion made by Banerjee and Dittmar (2008) that problems in peers trigger materialism among individuals.

This study also revealed some social pressures that resulted in decreasing the material values, such as, 'lack of emotional support from parents'. It is contrasting to the study of Kashdan and Breen (2007) that adolescents, receiving low warmth from mothers, set financial success as their goal. There may be the difference in culture and priorities among western and Asian students in respect of getting emotional support from their parents. Moreover, 'being the head of a family to generate family income' also decreases materialism among university students. Likewise, a previous study also found the least impact of generating income on materialism development (Parashar & Jain, 2017). Having responsibility of a household may not allow individuals to think about collecting possessions and diminishing relationships. In-light of all these findings, second research hypothesis (Social pressures have a significant impact on materialism among university students) was also accepted.

Conclusion

The current study was an attempt to explore the level of materialism and to measure the impact of social pressures on materialistic values. Materialism was found to be highly developed among university students, and significant correlation existed between social pressures and materialism. Few of the social pressures, named, 'living in home without parents', 'difficulty coping in school', 'sudden drop in family finance', and 'problems in new circle of friends' triggered materialism by up to 80%, whereas 'being head of family' and 'diminishing love and emotional support from parents' decreased materialistic values among university students up to 20%.

Implications and Recommendations

The study showed the high potential of social pressures to modify materialism attitude among university students, aged 18-20 years, which was unknown in respect to Asian developing nation, particularly to Pakistan. Social pressures, informed by this study, should be addressed by sociologists and educationists to help students overcome negative emerging values (i.e. materialism) among them. Impact direction of all pressures was not the same. Some caused increase while certain caused a decrease in materialistic values. Future studies can be carried out to confirm and deeply explore the findings. Moreover, the current study did not include demographic differences regarding the impact of social pressures on materialistic values. Further studies in this area should also be encouraged.

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