

MATERIALISM AMONG TEENAGERS, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TERMINAL VALUES AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of present study was to investigate the relationship between terminal values, the materialism, and usage of social media among high school teenagers in Budapest, Hungary. Research findings contribute to consumer studies regarding the teenagers terminal value preferences and the relationship between values and materialism. Furthermore the study investigates social media use effect on materialistic attitude. For data collection a paper an pencil questionnaire was applied in June 2017. The sampling was a nonrepresentative, convenience and purposive sampling.

The survey included three major scales. Respondents rated the importance of terminal values provided by the List of Values scale (Kahle et al 1986). The materialism scale conducted was the adaption of Youth Materialism Scale (Goldberg et al 2003) measuring teenagers' attachment to material goods. The social media usage was measured by a Uses and Gratification Scale (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016) reporting the frequency of use for different purposes.

The major findings are the significant correlations between the sense of security and being well-respected values and materialism factors. Using the adopted Uses and Gratification Scale the recent study provides similar component structure than the authors of U&G scale. The influence of social media observation on the strength of materialism was also proved.

KEY WORDS: teenagers, materialism, social media, values, consumerism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays consumerism is inevitably ruling our societies in the developed countries. Consuming tangible goods and services, gaining experiences play central role in human life and contribute to individuals' well-being, satisfaction and happiness. Consumption is more than mere a way of need satisfaction it is a bundle in the social network we belong to and a special tool for identification. The things possessed and acquired are representing our possibilities, reflecting aims, values and self-concept. Things help to define the self, confirming identity and protect the temporary stability of an unstable and vulnerable construction like self. Consumption and „consuming life” is a perfect freedom-concept providing infinite possibilities and the freedom of choice (Bauman, 2005). Consumers' expectations about their future consumption possibilities determine many other fields of life in the present. Personal relationships, starting a family, career, free time and most of the individuals' decisions are strongly attached to possessions, material uncertainty and consumerism.

Several decades ago, in the modern era work had been terminal value for the members of societies. Supporting the material world through work had a central position

in human life. Since the '80s work has been rather an instrumental value aiming to support consumers' choices and decisions. Bauman (2005) differentiates modern and postmodern societies according to the consumption – work relationship, arguing in modern societies work was a primary concept, everything else was secondary. People had to identify themselves as a loyal employee, worker improving professional skills in a certain field. In contrast postmodernity reinforces people to identify themselves as consumers first, then realizing their imagined status by work. In this context consumerist identification means the mixture of present and future expectations and perceptions related to consumption and material possessions. Thus work has lost its importance and become a less meaningful constraint resulting dissatisfaction at an individual level. Consciously discovering new and better opportunities fosters rapid changes in work relationships and weakens loyalty and engagement.

The recent study aimed to research the young generation's materialism, the value concept and the impact of social media use on materialism. Answering the question „Are teenagers materialist?” helps to understand their motivations and future expectations as consumers and employees as well.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Materialism is the attachment to material possessions and acquisitions, an engagement to things and consumer experiences. Perhaps concerns of young generation's materialism are confirmed by the fact they are growing up in a possession centred world seeking more experiences. The human –object relationship is one of the oldest psychological dyads in the history of mankind. Since people satisfy their needs not by producing the things needed but by buying them, infinite choice-sets foster desires and symbols those have become more powerful than before. Although materialism plays a central role in everyday life (Burrough & Rindfleisch; 2011) beside negative effects it provides several positive ones. Materialism positively affects happiness (Wang *et al.* 2017, Chaplin & John, 2010; 2007, Goldberg *et al.* 2003, John, 1999, Ward & Wackman, 1971) personal well-being (Wang *et al.* 2017, Flouri, 2004) satisfaction with life (Wang *et al.* 2017, Pikó, 2006, Richins & Dawson, 1992) and plays an important role in socialization and identity formation (Shrum *et al.* 2013, John, 1999).

Consumer studies influenced by materialism are focusing on the formation of consumer societies (Mukerji, 1983). Human – materials relationship had been more highlighted in the late 19th and early 20th century (Marx, Veblen, Mauss, Durkheim). Later Csíkszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton distinguished instrumental and terminal materialism (Csíkszentmihályi & Rochberg-Halton, 1978). Belk revealed the nature of materialism through the admonitions of different religions and argued there are differences between inherited and acquired materialism as a personality trait (Belk, 1983). Richins and Dawson's work on materialism as a personal value was a new milestone to the development of materialism theories (Richins & Dawson, 1992). In the last fifteen years materialism was related to happiness, satisfaction with life, self-esteem and other psychological processes and states. Besides there are several findings about the differences between genders (Weaver *et al.*, 2011, Goldberg *et al.*, 2003) family background (Chaplin & John, 2010, Flouri, 2004) and the influence of social comparison (Díaz & Arroyo, 2017, Gil *et al.*, 2016).

Researching materialism is usually based on socialization or psychological paradigm (Usha-Lenka, 2014). During the process of socialization materialism is influenced by gender (Chaplin John, 2007), family communication (Flouri, 2004), social and economic state (Kasser *et al.* 1995), peer communication and acceptance (Chaplin – John, 2010), mass media (Weaver *et al.* 2010), school and relationship with school mates (Abeele – Roe, 2013) and the dependence of reference groups (Gil *et al.* 2016). Culture has a great impact on materialism in particular if possessions are the signs of success and well-being (Gupta, 2011). Culture includes values, norms, habits, convictions and the objects those significant in consumers' behavior (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2014). Among all items, values are capable to transfer culture, because these are common beliefs and ideas determining personal and collective goals

and distinguishing good from bad (Rokeach, 1973). Since consumption processes and decisions belong to a larger social network, the most important values of consumers' culture can be reflected in consumption. Past researches in Hungary found the high importance of consumption related personal values (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2009).

The nature of consumer society is not merely the acts to possess, acquire and satisfy needs but the relationship between the objects and human self. According to Lunt and Livingstone consumers' relationships, interpersonal dependency and identities are revealed through the role of consumer. (Lunt & Livingstone, 1992). Whether to be consumer is a role such as child, parent, friend, employee or any other social role? Roadder John investigated socialization process from the view of consumer studies and she found similarities. Becoming consumer is a personal development process improving identity fragmented by different stages (R. John, 1999). Individuals change their evaluations, observe and imitate others, while identify themselves internalizing values and moral consequences. Observation plays an important role in consumer socialization process and social comparison is one of the ways of social observations comparing individual differences and similarities (Festinger, 1954). Consumption studies are focusing on the materials possessed, social-economic state and consumption related possibilities. Due to the dynamic and rapid technological changes in the last decades social network sites (SNS) provide a great opportunity to observe others without the necessity of personal interactions. SNSs are communities within society in which communities social norms and values are restructured according to the nature of SNS, and the online community creates its own (Hum *et al.* 2011). These microcultures transfer values, norms, and depicting users life through selfies, tweets and a well-designed profile consumer experiences and possibilities might be observed as well. Creating online – mainly SNS – personalities equals to creating and maintaining a new source of information about the user's real personality. In this context SNS can be considered as a field of social comparison. Scrolling SNS timelines user faces the life, enjoyment, happiness and satisfaction of others. This can confirm user's concepts, maintain motivation or frustrate him or her. Negative affects of social comparison via SNS have already been proved (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Former research findings and the value concept of consumer society raised the question *Are teenagers materialist?* What antecedents can influence their desire to possess and acquire things? Furthermore investigating the relationship between materialism and individual terminal values can result fruitful consequences.

Adolescence is a crucial life stage regarding identity formation which built up by several interstages. According to individuals' age early (12-15) middle (15-17) and later (17-19) adolescence can be distinguished. Our study

is focusing on the middle and later stages because of consumerist reasons. While during the early stage physical and basic psychological changes happen in middle and later stages there is a new individual nascent regarding her or his decisions, opinions and behaviour. These stages are very important for the early adulthood life stage because early adults still representing later adolescent habits, preferences and consumption patterns. Depending on the strength of this attachment to habits the preferences born in adolescence can accompany individuals during lifetime.

Since social media sites are new forms of social interactions but those seem to be everlasting from now, it is important to measure their impact. The question is *Do social media use influence materialism? Is there any difference between active SNS – content formation or simple passive observation?*

4. MEASUREMENT AND SAMPLING

To be able to answer our research question we used three validated scales of past researches. This paper interprets the findings of three different scales. The Youth Materialism Scale (Goldberg *et al.* 2003; YMS) was developed to examine children’s materialism. Owing to its briefness it is still adequate to measure the attitude of older children or teenagers. Respondents rated do they agree a lot (7) or not at all (1) with 10 statements. The List of Values (Kahle *et al.* 1986; LOV) focuses on several values measured by Rokeach as well and can be linked to consumer behaviour. Respondents could rate the importance (7 = very important; 1 = not important) of nine values listed. Exploring the motivation for social media use the social media Uses & Gratifications scale (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; UG) was applied. Participants could rate how frequently use SNS to gratify their SNS interaction focused motivations (1 = never; 7 = very often).

Sampling was a non-representative convenience sampling applying paper and pencil survey method. Respondents were the students of 4 different high schools (2) and secondary school (2) both located in Budapest. The sampling was conducted in June 2017. Sample analysed include 189 valid answers with the proportion of female 63% and 66% of student had a residence located in Budapest. The mean age was 17, thus the sample is valid for the purposes of recent study.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. List of Values

The means and standard deviations to males and females are represented by Table 1. The List of Values rating provides a reliable internal consistency with Cronbach alpha 0,714 (Nunnally, 1978). *Security* and the *fun and enjoyment* are the most important values for both female and male respondents. The least important values are *being well respected* and the *sense of accomplishment*. As Table 1 is illustrating respondents prefer more individualistic values against social ones. According to the result of further comparisons most of these value preferences are connected to materials and tangible possessions.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of List of Values

	Mean	Std. dev.	Male	Female
Security	5,45	0,94	5,24	5,57
Fun and enjoyment	5,43	0,94	5,24	5,54
Warm relationship with others	5,40	1,07	5,36	5,43
Self-fulfillment	5,20	1,12	4,93	5,36
Self-respect	5,13	1,18	4,79	5,34
Material success	4,85	1,31	5,03	4,74
Sense of belonging	4,85	1,34	4,71	4,92
Being well respected	4,39	1,45	4,44	4,35
Sense of accomplishment	4,20	1,65	3,60	4,55

Source: Authors

5.2. Materialism

Based on the YMS summary (Table 2.) we can derive the conclusion money plays a central role in respondents’ life and future perspectives. The students are expecting job opportunities guaranteeing higher salary and they would prefer more money to spend in the present too. Materialistic attitude of males and females is not the same regarding the importance of material possessions. Females are looking for the opportunity to acquire things while males place a higher emphasis on possessions and the value of the things possessed. Cronbach alpha indicates good internal consistency again (0,824).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of Youth Materialism Scale

	Mean	Std. dev.	Male	Female
The only kind of job I want when I grow up is one that gets me a lot of money.	5,52	1,73	5,77	5,37
I would be happier if I had more money to buy more things for myself.	4,22	2,05	4,00	4,34
I really enjoy going shopping.	3,95	2,12	3,19	4,39
I have fun just thinking of all the things I own.	3,94	1,95	3,76	4,05
When you grow up, the more money you have, the happier you are.	3,36	2,00	3,56	3,24
I really like the others that have very special clothes.	3,30	1,97	3,01	3,46
I would love to be able to buy things that cost lots of money.	3,19	2,00	3,53	2,98
I'd rather not share my snacks with others if it means I'll have less for myself.	2,90	2,04	2,97	2,87
I'd rather spend time buying things, than doing almost anything else.	2,77	1,79	2,41	2,98
I like to buy things my friends have.	2,69	1,68	2,80	2,62
Youth Materialism Scale (YMS)	3,58	1,18	3,50	3,63

Source: Authors

For further analysis an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the YMS ratings. Items resulted the classification of a three component structure. According to the narrative meaning of the statements included by components the first and the second factor were adequate for further examination. First factor was labelled as *acquisition and possession* of goods, while second factor

indicates the *money oriented* attitude of students. Both components have an eigenvalue higher than one and explain the 50% of total variance of the whole sample rating (Table 3). YMS factor structure was the basis of further examinations distinguishing respondents' attachment to material goods.

Table 3. Principal component analysis of YMS

	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	Variance explained
Acquisition, possession			
I really enjoy going shopping.	,836	3,826	38,259
I'd rather spend time buying things, than doing almost anything else.	,826		
I have fun just thinking of all the things I own.	,574		
I really like the others that have very special clothes.	,538		
I like to buy things my friends have.	,431		
Money orientation			
The only kind of job I want when I grow up is one that gets me a lot of money.	,800	1,166	11,648
When you grow up, the more money you have, the happier you are.	,762		
I would be happier if I had more money to buy more things for myself.	,500		

Source: Authors

Correlations among materialism components and terminal values indicate the motivations behind personal goals (Table 4). Although *being well respected* is one of the least important value it is significantly correlated to both two factors and materialism as well. Hence we can suppose that the sense of being respected is influenced by wealth and financial success according to the respondents. Likewise *security* is in significant relationship with acquiring things desired and money earned. In this sense security can be

considered as the result of welfare and a secure social-economic state. It is not surprising that *material success* strongly and significantly correlates to money orientation and materialism. But the *sense of accomplishment* means rather immaterial, less intangible and more intrinsic success. Since there is no correlation between materialism and the *fun and enjoyment*, the motivations behind enjoyment stayed unrevealed.

Table 4. Correlation of materialism components and the list of values

		YMS	Acquisition, possession	Money orientation
Being well respected	Pearson	,310**	,232**	,267**
	Significance	,000	,001	,000
	Respondents	189	189	189
Security	Pearson	,210**	,192**	,231**
	Significance	,004	,008	,001
	Respondents	189	189	189
Material success	Pearson	,343**	-	,491**
	Significance	,000		,000
	Respondents	189		189
Sense of accomplishment	Pearson	-,183*	-	-,228**
	Significance	,012		,002
	Respondents	189		189
Sense of belonging	Pearson	,170*	,182*	-
	Significance	,019	,012	
	Respondents	189	189	
Warm relationship with others	Pearson	,165*	,160*	-
	Significance	,023	,028	
	Respondents	189	189	
Self-fulfillment	Pearson	-	,182*	-
	Significance		,012	
	Respondents		189	
Self-respect	Pearson	-	,172*	-
	Significance		,018	
	Respondents		189	
Fun and enjoyment	Pearson	-	-	-
	Significance			
	Respondents			

Note* p < 0,05; **p< 0,01 (two tailed)

Source: Authors

5.3. The impact of social media use

Regarding the best-known visible social media sites (SNS) in Hungary – Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest – only 9 of the 189 respondents do not use Facebook regularly. 103 of them are logged in all the day and the majority of respondents check Facebook notifications and timeline at least once a day. 75% of students use Instagram too but only 70 of them are logged in all the day. Pinterest as an emerging visible SNS is used only by the 21% of the respondents.

The main motivations to use SNS are keeping in touch with friends (mean: 6,57), just for fun (mean: 4,89) and following others’ sharings and photos (mean: 4,84). The least frequent motivations of users are promoting

themselves (mean: 1,84) and becoming popular (mean: 2,13). Uses and Gratification scale is adequate to perform principal component analysis. Only two of 19 items were excluded from the analysis because of weak factor loadings. PCA resulted five different components namely *creativity and self-extension, surveillance and knowledge about others, coolness, remembrance and friendship*. The significant correlations among SNS motives and materialism components are represented in Table 5. Because of several significant relationships we can suppose observing others status updates including visual contents shared and using SNS to gain popularity are attached to materialistic attitude. *Remembrance* is not correlated to any of the materialism factors and *friendship* is correlated only to the YMS (0,158; p < 0,05).

Table 5. Uses & Gratifications and materialism factors correlations

	YMS	Acquisition, possession	Money orientation
Creativity and self-extension	229**	-	-
To share my life with other people			
To depict my life through photos			
To create art			
To document the world around me			
To remember something important			
To show off my photography skills			
Surveillance and knowledge about others	,190*	,150*	,217*
To follow my friends			
To see what other people share			
To see my friends visual updates			
To like my followers photos			
Coolness	-	,147*	,284**
To self-promote			
To become popular			
To find people with whom I have common interests			
<i>Note*</i> p < 0,05; <i>**</i> p< 0,01 (two tailed)			

Source: Authors

In order to explain the effect of SNS use a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. The dependent variables of the regression were the *acquisiton, possession*, the *money orientation* and the *materialism* in general. Regressors and their impact are summarized by Table 6. The three different models are significant at 1% and 5% significance levels. Acquisition, possession and matereialism in general are

influenced by self-extension, surveillance and being cool as SNS use motivations. Money oriented attitude is effected by surveillance and coolness motives. Remembrance and the city of residence (Budapest or not) have no impact on any dependent variables. Friendship influences only materialism in general (B = 0,161; p < 0,05) and gender effects remarkably acquisition, possession (B = 0,555; p < 0,01)

Table 6. Hierarchical multiple regression

Dependents	YMS		Acquisition, possession		Money orientation	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
Creativity and self-extension						
Creativity and self-extension	0,163*	0,138*	0,177*	0,177*	-	-
Surveillance and knowledge about others	0,257**	0,217**	0,188**	0,188**	0,150*	0,150*
Coolness	0,336**	0,284**	0,184**	0,184**	0,147*	0,147*
Model statistics	YMS		Acquisition, possession		Money orientation	
R ²	0,406		0,418		0,211	
F-value	9,096		9,740		4,318	
Significance-level	0,000		0,000		0,015	
Standard error of estimation	1,093		0,918		0,982	
To see what other people share	-		-		-	
<i>Note*</i> p < 0,05; <i>**</i> p< 0,01 (two tailed)						

Source: Authors

6. DISCUSSION

Our study provides several information and explanation related to teenagers' preferences. Teenagers were found to be moderately materialist (YMS mean: 3,58). Their materialism can be connected to their sense of security and being well-respected. Hence we can suppose they place importance on welfare, social – economic state and existential concerns. These findings confirmed the direction of recent materialism researches regarding satisfaction with life, personal well-being, happiness (e.g. Wang et al, 2017).

According to our results social media use is an everyday routine during adolescence. Most of the students are logged in continuously all the day. Thus their everyday activities might be fragmented by notifications and informations available or answering. In accordance with former scientific findings (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016) social network activities can be identified as creativity and self-extension, surveillance and knowledge about others, coolness, remembrance and friendship.

Although multiple regression analysis confirmed the expectations regarding the relationship of observing others on social network sites and materialism, but provided evidences on the impact of SNS content creation on materialism. The "coolness" component as a motive also influences remarkably all the materialist factors. This finding moderates the theory behind our research: not only the social comparison driven passive observation but the active content formation can effect attachments to material goods.

Concluding our results the young adults of the near future are tending to choose a job or professional guaranteeing more money and now the are feeling happiness is determined by the welfare and money available. Teenagers of our sample are currently dissatisfied with their consuming possibilities, hence they are willing to consume more if it is possible or possess more valuable goods. Their materialism is connected to their sense of security and influencing their relationship with others.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The limitations of our study are: the non-representativeness and the homogeneity of the sample. A geographically diversified sample providing information about the attitude of students attending to schools located in the not equally developed regions of Hungary would possibly result in more fruitful consequences. Further limitations are the explanatory variables involved into the models. There are several other antecedents to materialism like current social-economic state, family communication or peer relationships.

We found significant relationships between terminal values preferred by teenagers and their materialism. Since the direction and causality of this relationship could not be proved further qualitative research should be done in order to justify the impact of values on materialism.

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