

## The Tantalizing Factors Associated with Compulsive Buying Among Young Adult Consumers

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Received 15 February 2012; Accepted 22 April 2012

### Abstract

Most economies cannot prosper without production and mass consumption. However, when consumers overspend to keep up with the Joneses, they will be in trouble, both financially and psychologically. Indeed, when consumers allow spending to take over their lives, they suffer from an obsessive disorder commonly known as compulsive buying. The purpose of this paper is to propose a conceptual model based primarily on existing scientific and empirical research to explain the possible mechanism responsible in young adult consumers' development of compulsive buying tendencies. The role of television viewing, family and peer communication environment on the development of materialistic values among young adult consumers is reviewed. Next, the effect of materialism on the development of compulsive buying behaviour is re-examined, and an integrated model of compulsive buying is formulated. On the basis of prior empirical research, materialism is highlighted as a possible moderator in the relationship between television viewing, family and peer communication environment influences on the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers. Prior studies conducted in the domain of family environment and compulsive buying behaviour among young adult consumers, did not address (any) specific effect of family communication patterns on the development of compulsive buying

tendencies.

**Key words:** Compulsive buying; Materialism; Television viewing influences; Family and peer communication environment influences; Young adult consumers

Eric V. Bindah, Md Nor Othman (2012). The Tantalizing Factors Associated with Compulsive Buying Among Young Adult Consumers. *International Business and Management*, 4(2), 16-27. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ibm/article/view/j.ibm.1923842820120402.1025> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ibm.1923842820120402.1025>

### INTRODUCTION

Studies have found that people often interact with socialization agents and then take in consciously and unconsciously social norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors endorsed by these agents (for example, Kasser, 2002; Schor, 1999; Korten, 1999). As postmodern society grows more and more atomistic, individualistic and alienated, socialization agent becomes more and more powerful, (Croteau and Hoynes, 2000). Ward (1974a) offered a classical definition of consumer socialization: —the processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace (p. 2). On the other hand, research reviews and empirical studies conducted across cultures and nations have defined materialism from various social, cultural, psychological, and economic perspectives: a way of life, a value orientation, a cultural system, a personality trait, a second-order value, an aspiration (e.g., Bindah and Othman, 2011; Daun, 1983; Fox and Lears, 1983; Ward and Wackman, 1971; Inglehart, 1981; Mukerji, 1983; Belk 1984; Richins and Dawson, 1990; Kasser and Ryan, 2002). Belk (1984) observed that materialism reflects the importance a

consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. When materialism is viewed as a value orientation, it is commonly centred on three main components: acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success (Richins and Dawson, 1990). According to Richins and Dawson (1990), materialism viewed as a value, is described as an organizing central value that guides people's choices and behaviour in everyday life. It is an enduring belief that acquisition and possessions are essential to happiness and success in one's life. Broadly defined, materialism is any excessive reliance on consumer goods to achieve the end states of pleasure, self-esteem, good interpersonal relationship or high social status, any consumption-based orientation to happiness-seeking and a high importance of material issues in life (Ger and Belk, 1999).

Most economies cannot prosper without production and mass consumption. However, when consumers overspend to keep up with the Joneses, they will be in trouble, both financially and psychologically. Indeed, when consumers allow spending to take over their lives, they suffer from an obsessive disorder, known as compulsive buying. Advertising scholars O'Guinn and Faber (1989) defined compulsive buying as chronic, repetitive purchasing that became a primary response to negative events or feelings and that provided immediate short-term gratification, but that ultimately caused harm to the individual and/or others. Compulsive spenders come from all income groups (Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych, 1987). According to Boundy (2000), one type of compulsive spender is a status-directed image spender: This type of compulsive spender uses money in a highly visible way, always picking up the tab, driving expensive cars, living well, even when the money's not there to cover it. The image spender is driven by an insatiable need to be admired and to appear important and powerful, even if he or she has to be deep in debt and dodging creditors to do it. Because it is important for image spenders to be among the elite, they crave preferential treatment, whether it's getting the best table in the restaurant, flying first class, or staying in luxury suites. And they are particularly vulnerable to any marketing pitch that plays on this. In some cases, compulsive buying is inherited. Particularly, parents display the compulsive buying patterns and children will follow their example in the future. In today's families, parents tend to indulge or reward their children with material things. Children who are rewarded with things often develop a pattern of rewarding themselves as adults with commodities when they feel down or stressed out (Boundy, 2000).

Indeed an important question is what drives consumers to buy or shop beyond their means? Faber and his colleagues found that possessiveness was not

what led people to become compulsive buyers even though compulsive spenders did score higher on Belk's materialism scale than general consumers. Their studies showed that consumers' self-feelings and interpersonal relationships often triggered their compulsive spending; for example, a key motivation for compulsive buying might well be to overcome negative emotions and try to feel better temporarily (Faber, 2000). Belk (2000) suggested that compulsive consumption could be motivated by attempted self-enlargement or compensation for a diminished sense because materialistic consumers had a strong desire to regard possessions as their extended selves. Dittmar and her colleagues (2000) argued that compulsive buyers were more likely to believe that consumer goods were an important route toward success, identity, and happiness than were ordinary consumers. Accordingly, they found that compulsive buyers scored higher on Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialism scale than non-compulsive consumers. They also believed that compulsive buyers purchased consumer goods, especially clothes and jewelry, to bolster their self-image by drawing on the symbolic meanings associated with products to bridge the gaps between how they saw themselves (actual self) and how they wished to be or to be seen (ideal self). Many scholars have classified compulsive buying as an impulse control disorder (for e.g., Faber, 1992; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989) while a few scholars argue that compulsive buying possesses features of obsessive compulsive disorders (e.g., Christenson, et al., 1994; Frost, Steketee and Williams, 2003). Compulsive buying is a logical negative consequence of a consumerist society. It is intricately connected with materialism, self-esteem, status consumption, emotional tensions, and other psychological disorders. Understanding the phenomenon will not only help young consumers learn discreet spending habits and educate parents about compulsive buying, but also remind credit card companies and marketers to be careful while targeting to young adult consumers.

The purpose of this study is to propose a conceptual model based primarily on existing scientific and empirical research to explain the possible mechanism responsible in young adult consumers' development of compulsive buying tendencies (see figure 1). First, the role of television viewing, family and peer communication environment on the development of materialistic values among young adult consumers is reviewed. Next, the effect of materialism on the development of compulsive buying behaviour is re-examined. This paper highlights materialism as a possible moderator in the relationship between television viewing, family and peer communication environment influences on the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers. Prior studies conducted in the domain of family environment and compulsive buying behaviour among young adult consumers, did not

addressed the possible effect of family communication patterns on the development of compulsive buying tendencies. This leads us to the following research questions and objectives of this study.

**Research Questions**

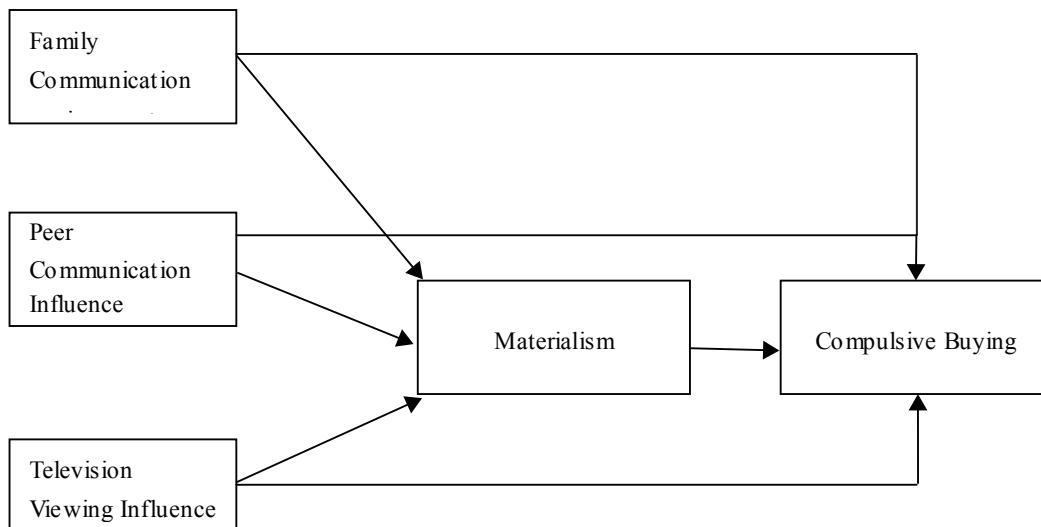
- (1) Does family communication environment influences the development of materialistic values among young adult consumers?
- (2) Does materialism influences the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers?
- (3) Does family communication environment influences the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers?
- (4) Does peer communication influences the development of materialistic values tendencies among young adult consumers?
- (5) Does peer communication influences the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers?
- (6) Does television viewing influences the development of materialistic values among young adult consumers?
- (7) Does television viewing influences the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers?
- (8) Does materialism moderates the relationship between family communication environment and compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers?

- (9) Does materialism moderates the relationship between peer communication and compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers?
- (10) Does materialism moderates the relationship between television viewing and compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers?

**Objectives of Study**

- (1)To examine the role of family communication influences on the development of materialistic values among young adult consumers.
- (2)To examine the role of materialism on the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers.
- (3)To examine the role of family communication influences on the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers.
- (4)To examine the role of peer communication influences on the development of materialistic values tendencies among young adult consumers.
- (5)To examine the role of peer communication influences on the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers.
- (6)To examine the role of television viewing influences on the development of materialistic values tendencies among young adult consumers.
- (7)To examine the role of television viewing influences on the development of compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers.

**1. LITERATURE REVIEW**



**Figure 1**  
**Proposed Conceptual Framework**

### 1.1 The Relationship Between Family Communication Environment and Materialism

The degree of influence that a child has in purchasing is directly related to patterns of interaction and communication within the family (Bindah and Othman, 2011; Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Carlson, et al., 1992; Rose, 1999). Research on family communication has linked the type or quality of communication to a variety of parental practices and consumer competencies in children. Family communication provides a foundation for children's approach to interact with the marketplace is inextricably linked to parental approaches to child-rearing (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Rose, 1999), and influences the development of children's consumer skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Moschis, 1985). Research in this area has generally utilized a single respondent, with early research primarily focusing on adolescents (Moschis and Mitchell, 1986) and later research examining the perceptions of mothers of younger children, under the age of 10 (Carlson, Grossbart and Tripp, 1990; Rose, Bush and Kahle, 1998). The domain of family communication includes the content, the frequency, and the nature of family member interactions (Palan and Wilkes, 1998). The origins of family communication research in marketing can be traced to a study conducted in political socialization which utilized two dimensions from Newcomb's (1953) general model of affective communication, (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). The first dimension, *socio-orientation*, captures vertical communication, which is indicative of hierarchical patterns of interaction and establishes deference among family members (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). This type of interaction has also resulted in controlling and monitoring children's consumption-related activities (Moschis, 1985). The second dimension, *concept-orientation*, actively solicits the child's input in discussions, evaluates issues from different perspectives, and focuses on providing an environment that stimulates the child to develop his/her own views (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). This type of communication results in earlier and increased experience and learning of different consumer skills and orientations among children (Moschis, 1985).

Studies have showed that the family environment affects the endorsement of materialistic values (e.g., Bindah and Othman, 2012; Moschis and Moore, 1979; Moore and Moschis, 1981; Flouri, 1999). Research have found that family environments were very important predictors of the adolescents' materialism to the extent that their mothers' materialism level and report of family communication style alone could reliably predict their child's level of endorsement of materialistic values (Flouri, 1999). Children in families that use socially-oriented communication patterns, which stress harmony among family members and the avoidance of conflict demonstrate higher levels of materialism (Moschis and Moore,

1979). Children in families that use concept-oriented communication patterns, which encourage independent thinking, demonstrate lower levels of materialism (Moore and Moschis, 1981). Adolescents who communicate less frequently with their parents about consumption have been found to be more materialistic (Moore and Moschis, 1981). It should be stressed, however, that socially-oriented and concept-oriented communication patterns are not mutually exclusive. For example, a survey found that Chinese families exhibited higher levels of socially-oriented as well as concept-oriented family communication (Chan and McNeal, 2003).

Importantly evidence suggests that the influence of family communication, as generalized to other situations, persists well into adulthood; it appears to become part of the developing individual's personality that he/or she carries outside the home (Moschis, 1985). A study by Moschis et al. (2009) incorporated the influences of family structure and socialization processes into the life course perspective. The researchers explained that the integration of the literature with life course perspective facilitates the investigation on the nature of materialism and its impact on consumer behaviour. Data were collected among young Malaysian adults (aged 18 to 22 years), and a positive relationship was hypothesized between the person's exposure to a socio-oriented family communication environment during the adolescent years and the materialistic values held as a young adult consumers. On the other hand, Chaplin and John (2010) took a different approach in viewing parents and peers as important sources of emotional support and psychological well-being, which increase self-esteem in adolescents. In the study, supportive parents and peers boosted adolescents' self-esteem, which decreased their need to turn to material goods to develop positive self-perceptions. Recently, Moschis et al. (2011) have examined the role of family communication and television, by assessing their effects on youths in four countries that represented the Eastern and Western cultures: Japan, Malaysia, USA, and France. The study used an anonymous self-administered survey of young adults aged 18 to 32 years in two diverse Eastern countries: Japan and Malaysia. The findings of the study suggested that the influence of the socio-oriented family communication structure on materialistic attitudes in Western cultures might be indirect by affecting the youth's patterns of television viewing. The findings also suggested that concept-oriented family communication had no effect on youth's development of materialistic values, regardless of cultural background.

While there are many studies in the area of religiosity and materialism, very few have emphasized it's aspects into the context of family communication environment. In a recent conceptual study by Bindah and Othman (2012), the link between young adult consumes, characterized by a religiously-oriented family communication at

home and the effect on the development of materialistic values tendencies was established. Later on, the authors conducted a study in Malaysia (Klang Valley region) among young adult consumers, and the results of the study indicated a significant relationship between young adult consumers characterized by a religiously-oriented family communication at home and materialism (see Bindah and Othman, 2012).

## 1.2 The Relationship Between Peer Communication Influence and Materialism

In the consumer context, many aspects of socialization, including an understanding of materialism, arise from peer communication. It has been recommended that research along these lines be furthered by breaking down peer relationships into factors such as frequency of interaction and communication. Many studies have investigated peer communication to capture its effect on the development of materialism among young adult consumers.

There are very few and well established research conducted in the area of peer communication and influences and its relationship with materialism (e.g., Moschis and Churchill, 1978; Churchill and Moschis, 1979). Most previous researchers either focused on children or adolescents, and very few research have examined the effect of peer communication on young adult consumers and its relationship with materialism. Moschis and Churchill (1978) have examined the influence of family communication, on youth's development of specific consumer related motives and values in the context of consumer socialization among adolescents within the age group of (12 to 18 years old). It was reported that adolescent peer groups were particularly significant sources of influence. Children learned from peers "expressive elements of consumption" or "affective consumption" ("styles and moods of consumption"). In the study, the researchers hypothesized that the more frequently an adolescent communicated with their peers about consumption matters, the more positive the individual's materialistic attitudes would be. The result of the study indicated that the correlation between peer communication about consumption and materialistic values was positive and statistically significant and thus suggesting that youths may learned the expressive aspects of consumption from their peers. Adolescents appeared to acquire several cognitive skills by interacting with their peers. Peer communication about consumption variable was related positively to the adolescent's and materialism. Churchill and Moschis (1979) conducted another research with adolescents from both urban and rural areas with respect to peer communication about consumption, in which the researchers hypothesized a positive relationship between the adolescent's frequency of communication with his/her peers about consumption matters and the strength of his/her materialistic attitudes. Their findings indicated that materialistic values increase with the

extent of peer communication. Their research findings also indicated that peer influence may be of significance in situations involving conspicuous consumption. These speculations and findings supported a hypothesized positive relationship between the adolescent's frequency of communication with his/her peers about consumption matters and the strength of his/her materialistic attitudes.

Moore and Moschis (1981) have studied the influence of peers as socialization agents and the effects of demographics variables on adolescents' consumer learning within the context of a conceptual model of consumer socialization. In their study, materialism was included as part of the consumer learning properties. The researchers hypothesized that the more frequently an adolescent communicated with peers about consumption matters, the more positive the individual's materialistic attitudes would be. The results was significant. It was found that the frequency of peer communication seems to lead to the development of materialistic orientations. The researchers concluded that the expressive aspects of consumption may be acquired from peer. Later, Achenreiner (1997) conducted a study to examine the materialistic attitudes of children across a wide age span, using a large sample, and a multi-item materialism scale, and examined the relationship between materialistic attitudes in children and susceptibility to peer group influence. The materialistic attitudes of children, ranging in age of 8 to 16 year old were examined using a multi-item materialism scale for children. The findings indicated that materialism was a relatively stable trait, varying only marginally with age, despite the numerous developmental changes taking place as a child gets older. The study also examined the relationship between materialism and susceptibility to peer influence and found a significant correlation. The findings supported the hypothesis that materialism and susceptibility to influence were positively related. The research was critical for a better understanding how materialistic attitudes develop and the role peer influence had on these attitudes. Regardless of age, children who were higher in susceptibility to influence also tended to be more materialistic. Flouri (1999) have examined the extent to which family environment mediate the relationship between family structure, religious attendance susceptibility to interpersonal influence communication with peer about consumption and materialism among mothers with children from college students aged between 16 to 23 years old. The results indicated that materialism was positively related to communication with peers about consumption issues. Materialism was independently predicted by the extent of peer influence. Materialism in adolescents was positively related to communication with peers about consumption issues and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. However within a maternal sample, adolescents' materialism correlated with peer influence. The results also showed that materialism in

adolescents was independently predicted by the extent of peer influence. In another study, Chan and Prendergast (2007) surveyed adolescents aged 11 to 20 to ascertain whether adolescents in Hong Kong endorsed materialistic values, and to examine the influences of interpersonal communication on adolescents' tendency to engage in social comparison and endorse materialistic values. They found that peer communications were positive predictors of social comparison with friends, and that peer influence had a positive correlation with materialism. The findings also indicated that normative peer influence was related to social comparison with friends while informative peer influence was not.

On the other hand, Chan and Zhang (2007) have examined the influence of peers and media celebrities on young people's endorsement of materialistic values in China. As the Chinese culture is said to be collective, it was expected that social relations, both personal and celebrity-mediated, played an important role in the establishment of consumption values. The respondents for the study were university students aged 18 to 24 years old in Beijing. The results indicated that peer communication and susceptibility to peer influence were positively related to social comparison. Motivation for viewing advertisements was positively related to imitation of celebrity models. In turn, both social comparison and imitation of celebrity models were positive predictors of materialism. The results of their study revealed that peer communication was positively correlated with social comparison. The level of peer communication reflected the frequency of peer interaction. Respondents who frequently communicated about advertisements and consumption with friends were more likely to engage in social comparison, because much of their communication is about possessions and brands. Social comparison in turn had a positive correlation with materialism. Respondents who compared their possessions with the possessions of friends and media celebrities came to believe that possessions were related to success and happiness, and that possessions occupy a central position in life. The findings of the study was also interpreted as showing that those who placed a high importance on material possessions were keen to engage in social comparison and peer interaction. The study has shown that when youth have higher levels of communication with peers, and were more vulnerable to their influence, they tended to engage in social comparison more often. And, this in turn predicted their level of materialism.

La Ferle and Chan (2008) have examined the influence of marketing communication factors, specifically social influences factors, peers on adolescents' endorsement of materialistic values in Singapore, with adolescents age 13 to 18 years old. They found that respondent would seek advice from peers when they buy products. In the study peer influence explained 40% of the

variance in materialistic values, and was found to be significant predictors of materialistic values among adolescents. Multiple regression analysis indicated that peer influence were positive predictors of materialistic values. Respondents who perceived higher level of peer influence were more materialistic. The study indicated that social influences played an important role in predicting levels of materialism among adolescents in Singapore. Furthermore, Roberts, Manolis and Tanner (2008) have investigated adolescents susceptibility to peer influences, and how this susceptibility impact materialistic values and compulsive buying, using a sample of adolescents from grade 7 through 12 whose ranged aged were from 11 to 19 years old. The results of their study indicated peer influence was shown to increase the level of materialism. Based on the background study, the following hypotheses are developed to identify factors that distinguished 'high materialism' and 'low materialism' groups, and to determine the relative importance of these factors in predicting group membership. Recently, another study conducted among young urban adults consumers in Malaysia indicated a significant and positive association between peer communication and materialism (Bindah and Othman, 2012).

### **1.3 The Relationship Between Television Viewing and Materialism**

Extensive number of research were conducted among various samples of children, adolescents and young adult consumers across various cultures, to establish the relationship between television viewing and materialism (see Bindah and Othman, 2011). Based on previous research reviews in this domain, television was found to have a number of essential qualities that contribute to its impact as an agent of consumer socialization (Bindah and Othman, 2011). First, television is ubiquitous (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). In terms of exposure, television rivals many traditional socialization agents such as school, church, and even parents (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). Second, television's effects are often invisible. Because so many people watch television, its effects can become obscured (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). In addition, television has other characteristics that contribute to its socializing effect. Television supplies its viewers with images, accounts, and stories of life that are often far removed from the viewer's daily experience and social milieu (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). Cultivation theory would assert that television will influence personal values as well as societal perceptions, as dominant program content becomes assimilated into personal value structures over time. Because content analyses have shown that materialism is commonly and favorably portrayed in television programming (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997; Shrum et al., 2005).

Pioneering studies conducted by Moschis and Churchill (1978) have examined the influence of mass

media, on youth's development of specific consumer related motives and values in the context of consumer socialization, and the findings indicated that the correlation between the strength of favorable attitudes toward materialism and the amount of television viewing was statistically significant (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). Another study conducted by Churchill and Moschis (1979) to assess the interrelationships among television viewing and materialism among adolescents found that the amount of television viewing was positively correlated with materialistic values. Other studies conducted among children to examine the effect that television has on children found that young heavy viewers of television are more vulnerable to televised materialistic values (Bybee, Robinson and Turow, 1985). Shrum, Burrough and Rindfleisch (2005) research showed that television viewing cultivated perceptions of the prevalence of societal affluence through a memory-based process that relies on the application of judgmental heuristics. Their work examined whether cultivation effects could be generalized to consumer values such as materialism, and whether these values judgments were also processed in a heuristic manner. The findings of their study revealed that television viewing was positively associated to materialism.

#### 1.4 The Relationship Between Materialism and Compulsive Buying

Faber and O'Guinn (1992) constructed a clinic screener to identify compulsive buyers in the general population by examining in-depth interviews with self-reported compulsive buyers. They suggested that materialism were associated with compulsive buying. Some compulsive buyers have developed their addictive buying tendencies because they envy the status products or services others have and they purchase compulsively to secure both social status and self-esteem (Boundy, 2000). Belk (2000) suggested that materialistic consumers had a strong desire to make possessions as extensions of themselves, so some compulsive spenders acquired possessions for self-enhancement. In addition, compulsive buyers scored higher on Dawson and Richins' (1992) materialism scale than non-compulsive consumers. Dittmar (2000) explained that compulsive buyers showed great interests in visible status products such as designer clothes and jewelry. Mick (1996) conducted two survey studies to explore the effect of socially desirable responding on dark-side (negative) variables of consumer research such as materialism and compulsive buying. He identified a strong positive correlation of materialism and compulsive buying ( $r = 0.43, p < 0.01$  for the first study and  $r = 0.35, p < 0.01$  for the second study).

Rindfleisch et al. (1997) study confirmed that materialism and compulsive buying were strongly correlated ( $r = 0.36, p < 0.01$ ) while their major findings revealed that young adults from disrupted families scored

higher on Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialism scale and Faber and O'Guinn's (1992) compulsive buying screener than did those from intact families. A survey of 669 teenagers by Roberts, Manolis, and Tanner (2003) showed that compulsive tendencies were positively correlated with the centrality and success dimensions of materialism measured with Richins and Dawson's (1992) scale (the factor inter-correlation for centrality:  $r = 0.67, p < 0.01$ ; success:  $r = 0.38, p < 0.01$ ). Watson's (2003) study explained why materialists were more likely to become compulsive spenders. He found that highly materialistic people were more likely to view themselves as spenders and had more favorable attitudes toward borrowing.

Compulsive-buying tendencies have been explored in different cultures such as Germany (Scherhorn et al., 1990), Canada (d'Astous et al., 1990), Mexico (Roberts, 1997; Roberts and Sepulveda, 1999), Israel (Shoham and Brencic, 2003), and South Korea (Lyi, Lee, and Kwak, 1997; Kwak, Zinkhan and Crask, 2003). A Cross-cultural study by Kwak, et al., (2003) showed that in an Eastern culture compulsive buying might not be a unidimensional construct as it was in the United States. However, the reliability that their Korean samples yielded (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.71$  and  $0.76$ ) was acceptable and very similar to their U.S. sample's reliability ( $\alpha = 0.75$  and  $\alpha = 0.76$ ). These findings suggested that the compulsive buying scale was measuring the same construct in a different cultural context.

#### 1.5 The Relationship Between Television Viewing Influence and Compulsive Buying

The luxurious and affluent lifestyles frequently portrayed in mass media have raised the social comparison level and consumers' expectations of high living standards (Faber and O'Guinn, 1988). To keep up with the Joneses, compulsive spenders are often encouraged by popular media to buy status products they cannot afford. Their unhealthy overspending patterns appear to mimic the norm as portrayed in media (Faber and O'Guinn, 1988). On the other hand, the affluent settings in mass media, which do not necessarily reflect real social environments, may mitigate compulsive buyers' feelings of post-purchase guilt. Furthermore, the exposure to marketing communications on television can generate exaggerated feelings of low self-esteem, gloom, and tension and can provoke the predisposition to shop (Faber and O'Guinn, 1988).

There is also some empirical evidence to support the connection of commercial media and compulsive-buying tendencies. For example, d'Astous, Maltais and Roberge's (1990) survey of 394 French-Canadian adolescents aged 13-19 years revealed that their estimates of television viewing hours per day were positively correlated with their compulsive-buying tendencies ( $r = 0.11, p < 0.05$ ). Kwak, Zinkhan and Dominick (2002) tried to demonstrate the important effect of television advertising on viewers' compulsive- buying tendencies

by examining the moderating role of compulsive-buying tendencies in the cultivation effects of television shows and television advertising in both the United States and South Korea. They found that South Korean consumers who had higher compulsive-buying tendencies were more likely to have perceptions of a materialistic society by television advertising than others. It is understandable that a materialistic-society perception from viewers with high compulsive-buying tendencies might mitigate their psychological aspects of purchasing behavior, which, in turn, makes them continue to engage in the purchasing because their materialistic view derived from television may rationalize such abnormal buying patterns. In this sense, it proved that South Korean television content contributed in some ways to compulsive buyers' uncontrollable purchase drives. In the pilot survey with a convenience student sample ( $N = 360$ ) conducted at a large Midwestern university in spring 2004, the author found that U.S. college students' daily television viewing was positively correlated with their compulsive-buying tendencies ( $r = 0.17, p < 0.01$ ).

### **1.6 The Relationship Between Family Influence, Peer Influence and Compulsive Buying**

Researchers have proposed to take different approaches to investigate the phenomenon of compulsive consumption (e.g., d'Astous, Maltais, and Roberge, 1990). DeSarbo and Edwards (1996) argued that compulsive buying is related to different forms of drives and degrees of urge to buy and therefore compulsive buyers are heterogeneous groups. Previous research have however adopted a uniform dichotomous compulsive treatment of buying behavior and thus leaves open the key issue of whether individuals classified as compulsive buyers have different internal or external drives. Compulsive buying is not only linked to individual psychological traits such as dependence, denial, and depression but also linked to circumstantial factors such as family influences (Roberts, Manolis and Tanner, 2006), which is the subject of this present study. However, there is insufficient research related to family factors on compulsive buying behavior. As per the objective of this study, this paper attempts to establish the relationship between family influences, particularly family communication patterns on compulsive buying behaviour of young adult consumers.

The transition from adolescence to young adulthood is a period of vast transition both for individuals and their families (Arnett, 1999). The transition brings with it a new set of issues and as they establish an identity separate from parents during this transitional development stage and for parents as parents approach mid-life, and the parent-child relationship becomes more egalitarian. This group of consumers provides rich potentials for us to understand more on compulsive buying. For instance, this group of consumers enables us to investigate compulsive buying at the early stage and to identify different types of

motivations for compulsive buying.

In addition, previous research has found that peers' influence on teenagers' identity establishment is reflected through impacted teenagers' consumption (Mangleburg, Doney and Bristol, 2004). For instance, peer groups are voluntary in nature and are not directly responsible for monitoring teens' actions, but peers may provide an early forum in which teens can try out various aspects of the social self. In terms of buying and consumption, studies have shown that communication with peers positively affects teens' social motivation for consumption, materialistic values, and tendency to use peer preferences in making a product choice. Based on these evidences, it is proposed that peer influence has significant impact on compulsive buying tendencies.

#### **Propositions:**

**P1.** Family communication influence is significantly related to compulsive buying among young adult consumers.

**P2.** Family communication influence is significantly related to materialism among young adult consumers.

**P3.** Young adult consumers from socio-oriented family communication tend to score high on materialistic values.

**P4.** Young adult consumers characterized by a concept-oriented family communication at home tend to score low on materialistic values.

**P5.** Young adult consumers characterized by religiously-oriented family communication at home tend to score low on materialistic values.

**P6.** Young adult consumers who communicate more frequently with their peers tend to score high on materialistic values.

**P7.** Young adult consumers who watch more television tend to score high on materialistic values.

**P8.** Young adult consumers who score high on materialism will tend to score high on compulsive buying tendencies.

**P9.** Young adult consumers characterized by a socio-oriented family communication at home tend to develop higher materialistic values which in turn lead to higher compulsive buying tendencies.

**P10.** Young adult consumers characterized by a concept-oriented family communication at home tend to develop lower materialistic values which in turn lead to lower compulsive buying tendencies.

**P11.** Young adult consumers characterized by a religiously-oriented family communication at home tend to develop lower materialistic values which in turn leads to lower compulsive buying tendencies.

**P12.** Young adult consumers who communicate frequently with their peers tend to develop higher materialistic values which in turn lead to higher compulsive buying tendencies.

**P13.** Young adult consumers who watch more television tend to develop higher materialistic values which in turn lead to higher compulsive buying tendencies.



## 2. CONCLUSION AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The information presented in this article suggests some generalizations supported by reasonably adequate evidence and others which are more speculative and require additional research. Given that the influence of family environment, particularly communication effect, persists well into adulthood, and on the basis of scientific and empirical research conducted in different cultural setting, it appears that specific family communication patterns employed at home can have a significant impact on the development of materialistic values among young adult consumers. This in turn, will impact on the compulsive buying tendencies of the consumers. The type of communications that takes place at home, can both directly and indirectly affect compulsive buying tendencies. For example, it is proposed that an individual who is characterized by a religiously-oriented family communication pattern at home will have the tendency to develop less materialistic values. Due to the tendency of developing less materialistic values, scientific evidence suggest that the impact on compulsive buying tendencies may be lower. Similarly when applied in the context of socio and concept oriented family communication patterns, variations in the degree of compulsive buying tendencies are expected.

Peer communication appears to have the tendency to affect the development of materialistic values among young adult consumers. The extent to which they will affect young adult consumers' development of materialistic values, will indeed depend on the nature and frequency of interaction patterns they exert on the individual. The nature and frequency of interaction can both directly and indirectly affect compulsive buying tendencies. For example, an individual who have the tendency to interact more with his/her peers will tend to develop more materialistic values. Due to the tendency of developing more materialistic values, scientific evidence suggests that the impact on compulsive buying tendencies may be higher. In other words the more individuals interact with peers about consumption matters, the more they have the tendencies to develop materialistic values. This may in turn leads to higher compulsive buying tendencies.

In the proposed model, television viewing appears to have the tendency to affect the development of materialistic values among young adult consumers. Again, the extent to which they will affect young adult consumers' development of materialistic values, will largely depend on the nature (for e.g., the type of programme categories and number of hours they spend watching their favourite programmes) and the frequency of interaction with the medium. The nature and frequency of interaction can both directly and indirectly affect compulsive buying tendencies. For example, an individual

who have the tendency to watch television very frequently may have the tendency to develop more materialistic values. Due to the tendency of developing more materialistic values, scientific evidence suggests that the impact on compulsive buying tendencies may be higher. In other words the more individuals watch television, the more they have the tendencies to develop materialistic values. This may in turn lead to higher compulsive buying tendencies.

As in any research, this study has its own limitations. First, it is conceptual in nature, and requires empirical evidence to support the propositions suggested. Testing the present integrated model cross-culturally may also provide different findings which may not be necessarily in support of the propositions of this present study. Second, the family environment is much broader and consist of more than just communication patterns, it involves other domain, such as family disruption. Future studies could look into the aspect of family environment alone, as it consist of various other components and provide an integrated model to study its effect on compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers. In addition, peer influences on the behaviour of individuals vary and go beyond the boundaries of interaction patterns. Future research could further explore the effect of normative and informative peer influence on compulsive buying tendencies among young adult consumers.

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