

The Relationship between Advertising and the level of Materialism among Adolescents in Hong Kong

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Abstract

The high level of materialism as a negative value was generated by the mass media and advertising industry on Hong Kong adolescents. The adolescents consider possessions of material goods as a way to achieve success, happiness, as well as self-fulfillment for developmental needs. This paper proposed a theoretical model of adolescents' level of materialism, their attitude towards advertising, and the attraction to media celebrities. The relationship among all variables was tested. Quantitative research method was adopted in this study, and a questionnaire was distributed to City University of Hong Kong undergraduate students. The findings revealed that attraction to media celebrities was positively related to adolescents' materialism. Meanwhile, adolescents' attitudes towards advertising were also a positive predictor of attraction to media celebrities. Yet adolescents' attitudes towards advertising did not lead to a high level of materialism directly. In addition, the limitation and recommendations for further research were also discussed.

Introduction

Globalization of world markets in recent years has generated high levels of materialism in many places. In the past few decades, Hong Kong has successfully developed into a global financial centre. As an international city with emphasis on economic development and consumption, it is no surprise that a substantial percentage of Hong Kong people had material orientation based on wealth. Considerable attention has been paid to the growth of materialistic adolescents in Hong Kong. As Hong Kong adolescents grow up, they are exposed to different kinds of mass media for information and entertainment purposes. They learn consumer behaviours from the media. Flooding of advertisement in the society, which encourages overconsumption, also leads to an escalating trend in materialism among Hong Kong adolescents.

Advertisements use different kinds of strategies to persuade consumption. Using media celebrities to support the brand name and image is a common and effective advertising strategy. Therefore, many firms are willing to invest large amounts of money to link their brands to attractive media celebrities as well as their qualities, such as likeability, trustworthiness, etc. (Atkin and Block 1983). As a result, firms can take some

advantages in underpinning their products or services in the competitive market (Erdogan 1999).

The current study aims at investigating the level of materialism among Hong Kong adolescents by focusing on the role of advertisements. In addition, the relationship among adolescents' attitude towards advertisements, the effect of using celebrities as a part of advertising strategy, and the level of materialism were also examined.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between adolescents' attitudes towards advertisement in general and their attraction to media celebrities?
2. What is the relationship between adolescents' attraction to media celebrities and their level of materialism?
3. How does TV consumption influence adolescents' attraction to media celebrities and their level of materialism?

Literature Review

Materialism

Some studies considered materialism as a personality trait that manifests the characteristics of envy, non-generosity, and possessiveness (Belk and Pollay 1985). Meanwhile, others viewed materialism as a kind of personal values emphasizing the importance of possessing material goods (Richins 1991). This study considered materialism as a negative value that it is very important for materialists to owe material possessions in their life to attain centrality, happiness, and success. Acquisition centrality means materialists are keen to have more material possessions, and as a result, acquisitiveness becomes their life goal. Materialists also believe that having the possessions they wanted is a way to achieve happiness and well-being. Therefore, materialism is further defined as "the importance a person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary to reach desired end stated including happiness" in the current study (Richins and Dawson 1992:307).

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory suggests mass media is an important socializing agent where heavy television viewers are more likely to rely on what they see on television as representative of reality (Gerbner et al. 1986).

According to cultivation theory, the world portrayed in television is actually different from reality. Images portrayed on television are usually exaggerated and fictitious for entertainment purposes. It is suggested that heavy television viewers tend to believe the real world is similar to what they have seen on television, which means television "cultivates" reality. In the case of materialism, as luxurious items are always

shown on television programmes and advertising, heavy viewers tend to believe that the whole society and the people around them are wealthier than they actually are. Heavy viewers are more likely to increase their consumption and seek the high living standard shown on television. Thus, they become more materialistic. In addition, professionals, such as doctors and lawyers occur much more frequently on television than in real the world (Gerbner et al. 2002; Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1994; O’Guinn and Shrum 1997). As a result, the values, attitudes, and beliefs sanctioned in television programmes would be circumscribed, and more and more people would believe that the world in television equals to reality (Gerbner et al. 1980, 1982). In addition, television commercials frequently pair products with happy consumers, which lead to an unhealthy belief that possessions bring happiness. Meanwhile, Hajjar (1997) discovered that characters on television were generally dominated by the middle class. The luxurious images shown on television described the unrealistic and exaggerated lifestyles in detail that encouraged audiences to imitate these kinds of lifestyles (Belk and Pollay 1985). O’Guinn and Shrum (1997) also supported that television is likely to use consumption to symbolize the high social status of television characters. Heavy television viewers tend to associate possession of luxurious items with social status, prestige, and power—the result of these media portrayals. Eventually, they tend to be more materialistic, by purchasing luxurious items, in order to keep up with the affluent lifestyles in television.

Adolescents’ Attitudes towards Advertising

Consumer socialization refers to the process that adolescents develop consumer-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes. As a matter of fact, many past studies proved that advertising has been serving as an important agent of consumer socialization. The study of Moschis et al. (1978) supported that adolescents learn from mass media as well as advertising. TV and advertising consumption were positively related to the actual consumption. Moschis and Moore (1982) also showed a significant relationship between advertising consumption and consumer role perception. In addition, Ward and Wackman (1971) investigated the relationship between the attitude towards advertising and consumer socialization. The study suggested that adolescents who have higher motivation to watch advertisements are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards advertising.

All the above studies supported that advertising provides information for viewers and, at the same time, serves as an important agent for consumer socialization. One of the main concerns about consumer socialization is that adolescents would have preference for material possessions as a means of achieving success, happiness, and self-fulfillment. This can be considered as a negative effect that may lead to a high level of materialism among adolescents (John 1999).

Adolescents' Attraction to Media Celebrities

It is understandable that adolescents tend to form special attachments to media celebrities because they are in transition to adulthood. Imitation of media celebrities enhances their transition as well as assists them to form a mature adult identity (Erikson 1968). Caughey (1978, 1985, 1994) suggested that adolescent admirers regard media celebrities as their idealized self-images. They want to have the similar personality traits and qualities possessed by the media celebrities. Adolescents also mentioned that they would like to imitate their favourite media celebrities in terms of physical appearance, abilities, values, and attitude.

A survey showed that adolescents who claimed that they have an attachment to their favourite media celebrities were more likely to refer their choice of identity as well as decisions to their idols. Furthermore, adolescents admitted that apart from physical appearance, their idols also have an influence on their attitude and personal values, such as beliefs about work ethic and morality (Boon and Lomore 2001). An empirical research revealed that adolescents are influenced by media celebrities in selecting and switching brand (Martin and Bush 2000). Adolescent consumers said that they are more likely to use products that are endorsed by attractive media celebrities (Lafferty and Goldsmith 1999).

The relationship between adolescents' attraction to media celebrities and their level of materialism was explained by the following paths: First, the source of attractiveness model suggested attractive media celebrities are more persuasive than an ordinary person who is generally perceived as less attractive (Kahle and Homer 1985). Apart from arousing public attention and maintaining it, media celebrities also help achieve high recall rates as a marketing strategy, especially in a highly competitive market (Croft et al. 1996; Friedman and Friedman 1979; Kamen et al. 1975; Kamins et al. 1989; Ohanian 1991; O'Mahony and Meenaghan 1997). Second, in the transition process of becoming an adult, adolescents would like to generate an idealized self-identity for self-enhancement. Thus, they are easily influenced and consume the brands endorsed by the attractive media celebrities (Swann et al. 1982). The process mentioned above is regarded as a compensation for adolescents to obtain the images that they do not have (Woodruff-Burton and Elliott 2005). Overall, attraction to media celebrities and trying to compare themselves to attractive media celebrities may influence adolescents to be more materialistic.

Past Studies in Hong Kong

Some local studies about adolescents' materialism have been done in the past. A qualitative research about the habit of Hong Kong adolescents to consume luxurious brands discovered that they are keen to imitate the lifestyles and consumption patterns of celebrity models (Chan 2005).

In fact, Hong Kong adolescents love owning material possessions. An interview survey conducted among more than two thousand secondary school students in Hong

Kong aged 15–18 revealed a high level of materialism among Hong Kong students. Two-thirds of the respondents claimed that they would feel satisfied after consumption. It is because they could own things they wanted now. About 13% of the respondents agreed that there was an increase in self-esteem after consumption, while 12% of the students thought that consumption facilitates their personal image (Ming Pao 2004).

Hypotheses

H1: Adolescents who have positive attitude towards advertising will be more attracted to media celebrities.

H2: Adolescents who are more attracted to media celebrities will be more materialistic.

H3: Adolescents who spend more time on television will be more attracted to media celebrities.

H4: Adolescents who spend more time on television will be more materialistic.

Theoretical Framework

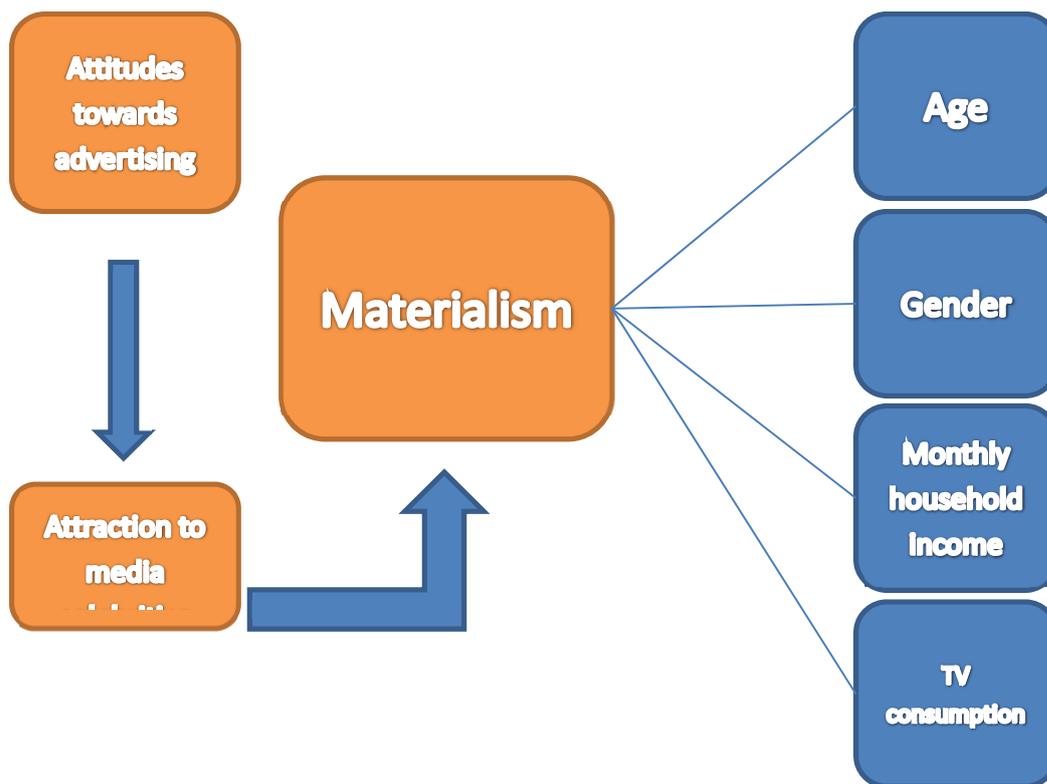


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework suggested that adolescents develop their materialistic value orientation through the attachment to media celebrities. There may not be a direct relationship between attitudes towards advertising and the level of materialism. Yet

through the process of attraction to media celebrities, advertising may trigger the high level of materialism. It is because advertisements always represent an idealized picture of media celebrities as a marketing strategy to encourage consumption by arousing public attention and demonstrating social reward of using the products. It is also a common strategy to link the products with wealthy lifestyles. At the same time, adolescents are more likely to learn consumer behaviours from advertising and adopt materialistic values through the process of social learning (Kasser et al. 2004). Moreover, the exaggerated and unrealistic consumption pattern of media celebrities and the actual living standard may further increase the desire for material possessions (Sirgy 1998).

Other factors such as age, gender, household income, and television consumption also have an influence on the level of materialism. Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework.

Referring to the model of consumer socialization, there are different stages for adolescents to mature into adult consumers through a development process (John 1999). The exposure to materialistic models and values make adolescents become more materialistic. Meanwhile, there are numerous developmental changes taking place as an adolescent gets older. For example, he/she encounters more different people from diverse backgrounds, including those who are regarded as “successful” and possess a lot of luxury items. Therefore, they are more likely to compare themselves with the rich. This may result in a higher level of materialism in older adolescents.

Although gender has been included in the theoretical framework, there were no consistent results in the past studies. For example, male adolescents have a higher level of materialism than female adolescents (Achenreiner 1997; Churchill and Moschis 1979). Meanwhile, the level of materialism between young boy and girls are similar in Hong Kong (Chan 2003).

As mentioned in the previous part of the literature review, the cultivation theory suggests that television is a medium with abundant materialistic messages. Indeed, it has been proven that materialism is correlated with heavy television consumption across different cultures (Sirgy et al. 1998). The reason behind this is that there is a large difference between reality and the idealized lifestyles that are frequently shown on television. Those unrealistic images portrayed on media trigger comparison, and thus, satisfaction towards life would decrease (Braun and Wicklund 1989). Therefore, TV consumption was included in the theoretical model to test its relationship with the level of materialism among Hong Kong adolescents.

Monthly household income was included in the theoretical model in order to test the relationship between wealth and materialism. Some studies suggested that the differences between the real-life experiences of the lower-income group and the lifestyles shown on television were more discrepant. Therefore, the poor tend to be affected by television more easily because of the overt differences in perspectives (Gerbner et al. 1980). Meanwhile, other studies took the opposite view. The higher-income group, whose life

experiences are similar to what is portrayed on television, would create resonance. The materialistic messages were magnified with direct experiences, and this would cause an increase in cultivation effects (Hawkins and Pingree 1982). In addition, Ahuvia and Wong (2002) suggested that people who grow up in an environment with better living standard and luxurious possessions (higher-income group) were more likely to suffer from a high level of materialism. Therefore, it is important to test how household income is related to the level of materialism.

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

In the current research, quantitative research method was adopted. The relationship among the level of materialism, adolescents' attitude towards advertising, and their attraction to media celebrities were investigated through conducting a survey in City University of Hong Kong in March. The target population was the undergraduate students of City University. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the target respondents in order to collect primary data. In total, there were 174 completed questionnaires. The sample size of males and females was almost equally distributed. Of the respondents, 43% were male and 57% were female. As the target population was undergraduate students, all the respondents were aged 18–25. Of the sample, 63.2% was aged 18–21, and 36.8% was aged 22–25. Questionnaires were distributed in classrooms immediately before or after general education and sociology class sessions of City University. Based on the pilot test, which has been conducted in early March, it took about 5–7 minutes for the respondents to complete the questionnaire. An online questionnaire was also distributed to the students through Facebook. After the students have finished the questionnaire, they were asked to help invite other City University students to do it. There were instructions and guidelines in both the hard copy and online versions of questionnaire. The participants were advised to read the instructions and guidelines before they started. It provided a brief introduction for the purpose of the study and has emphasized on the voluntary and anonymous nature of the questionnaire in order to ensure confidentiality. All the collected questionnaires will be destroyed after the research is completed. The data collected from both hard copy and online versions were processed and analyzed by SPSS.

Measures

Three scales were borrowed from the scholars and past studies in order to measure the three major variables in this study, which includes the level of materialism, attitudes towards advertising, and attraction to media celebrities. All the constructs were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale. It ranged from “strongly agree” = 1 to “strongly disagree” = 5. Altogether, 35 questions were included in the questionnaire. In addition,

the amount of TV consumption and demographic information, including age, gender, and monthly household income, was asked in the last part of questionnaire.

Materialism

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 18 statements that test the level of materialism among adolescents in Hong Kong. In reference to the study of Richins and Dawson (1992), materialism was conceptualized as a set of beliefs that emphasized the importance for a person to possess things he/she wanted. Three subscales representing acquisition centrality, the definition of success, and the pursuit of happiness were included in this scale.

1. Acquisition centrality – the importance for materialists to possess things which makes acquisitiveness become their life goal. This subscale consisted of six items. Some items, such as “the things I own aren’t all that important to me,” had to be scored reversely.
2. Pursuit of happiness – the extent for materialists to think possessions are essential to obtain life satisfaction and well-being. This subscale also consisted of six items. “Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.” Some statements, such as “I wouldn’t be any happier if I owned nicer things,” required revised scoring.
3. Definition of success – the belief that judging themselves and other people by those successful achievements. This subscale consisted of five items. Once again, some items, such as “I don’t place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success,” were negatively stated that revise scoring was needed.

The Cronbach’s alpha scores for the materialism scale were 0.80–0.88 across items in past studies.

Attitudes towards Advertising in General

The second part of the questionnaire, which consisted of 10 statements, tests the adolescents’ attitudes towards advertising. The scale aimed at testing the adolescents’ predispositions to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner towards advertising in general. There were two dimensions in the scale (see table 1). The first dimension was people’s belief and evaluations towards advertising, while the second dimension was behaviours and emotions towards advertising. Items included in the first dimension were based on the study developed by Bauer and Greyser (1968). Meanwhile, the second dimension was used to measure people’s tolerance of advertising. The Cronbach’s alpha score for the six items in dimension 1 was 0.769, while for the four items in dimension 2 was 0.704.

Table 1
The Two Dimensions of Attitude towards AD Scale

Dimension 1
1. Advertising is essential to our society.
2. Most advertising insults the intelligence of the average consumer.
3. Advertising is a useful information source.
4. In general, advertisements present a fair picture of the product being advertised.
5. In general, advertisements present a fair picture of the product being advertised.
6. Advertising is a useful information source.
Dimension 2
7. I would switch the channel immediately if commercials come up.
8. Commercials are fun to watch.
9. Advertising is annoying.
10. I wish there were fewer commercials on TV.

Attraction to Media Celebrities

The scale of attraction to media celebrities was developed based on the studies of Kasser et al. (2004), “exposure to materialistic models,” and McCutcheon et al. (2003), “celebrity attitude scale.” Seven statements shown in table 2 were extracted to measure the adolescents’ tendency to be attracted to media celebrities.

Table 2
The Seven Statements in the Scale of Attraction to Media Celebrities

1. I have frequent thoughts about my favourite media celebrity.
2. I hope I can be as smart as media celebrities.
3. I hope I can be as attractive as media celebrities.
4. I hope I can be as successful as media celebrities.
5. I want to be as stylish as people appearing in ads.
6. I want to be as trendy as models in magazines.
7. I aspire to have the lifestyle of media celebrities.

All the statements were positively stated and with reference to the literature review. For example, as mentioned before, Hong Kong adolescents always had a high aspiration to imitate the lifestyles of celebrity models (Chan 2005). Therefore, the statement “I aspire to have the lifestyle of media celebrities” was constructed. The inter-item reliability in the past similar study was 0.872.

Television Consumption

Television consumption was also an important variable suggested by cultivation theory. It was measured by asking the respondents to rate the average number of hours they spend on television each day.

Pilot Test

By using the three scales mentioned above and based on television consumption, a draft questionnaire was constructed. Three students who are studying applied sociology and two students who are studying information management in City University of Hong Kong were invited to participate in the pilot testing. After that, the questionnaire was revised for accuracy and clarity through interviewing the five students.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Data

Of the respondents, 43% were male and 57% were female. All the respondents were aged 18–25. The mean age was 21.8 years old. In order to facilitate data analysis, the respondents were categorized into two age-groups, which were the younger age-group (aged 18–21) and the older age-group (aged 22–25). This enhanced the testing of the relationship between the level of materialism and age. Of the sample, 63.2% was aged 18–21, and 26.8% was aged 22–25. For the income distribution of the respondents, 60.3% of the respondents reported that they live with families with a monthly household income less than HK\$12,000, which is lower than the average monthly household income in Hong Kong. It could be concluded that only a small portion of well-off families was included in the sample when compared with the Hong Kong population. Of the sample, 15.4% of adolescents had claimed monthly household incomes above HK\$30,000. On average, the respondents spend 1.95 hours on television each day, which is equal to 13.65 hours per week. About 12% of the respondents claimed that they do not watch television.

Reliability of the Scale

As all the three scales were drawn from other scholars and the scale of attraction to media celebrities has been modified, it was necessary to test the reliability of each scale before operating other analyses. According to table 3, one of the subscales of materialism, Happiness, was not reliable enough. However, the overall scale of materialism still sustained a high level of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha of attitudes towards AD was also far from satisfactory. The Cronbach's alpha if item deleted was used to see whether some of items could be deleted in order to obtain a more reliable scale. But the result showed that there was no significant increase of reliability since the Cronbach's alpha of all items was quite similar. Therefore, varimax rotation of factor analysis was used to

differentiate the original scale. Yet no clear factors could be extracted, and the number of items could not be reduced to a smaller scale.

Table 3

Reliability Test of All Scales

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Materialism	18	.824
(Subscale) Centrality	7	.768
(Subscale) Happiness	5	.605
(Subscale) Success	6	.601
Attitudes towards AD	10	.511
Attraction to Media Celebrities	7	.871

Table 4

Attitude towards AD: Cronbach's Alpha If Item Deleted

Items	Cronbach's Alpha If Item Deleted
Advertising is essential to modern society.	.511
Advertising helps raise our standard of living.	.451
Advertising often persuades people to buy things they shouldn't buy.	.475
Most advertising insults the intelligence of the average consumer.	.482
In general, advertisements present a fair picture of the product being advertised.	.484
Advertising is a useful information source.	.540
Commercials are fun to watch.	.529
Advertising is annoying.	.403
I wish there were fewer commercials on TV.	.437
I usually switch the channel right away when a commercial comes on.	.505

Table 5
Factor Analysis of Attitude towards AD

Items	Extraction
Advertising is essential to modern society.	.573
Advertising helps raise our standard of living.	.534
Advertising often persuades people to buy things they shouldn't buy.	.673
Most advertising insults the intelligence of the average consumer.	.856
In general, advertisements present a fair picture of the product being advertised.	.678
Advertising is a useful information source.	.644
Commercials are fun to watch.	.522
Advertising is annoying.	.621
I wish there were fewer commercials on TV.	.651
I usually switch the channel right away when a commercial comes on.	.504

Descriptive Analysis of the Scales

Scale 1 – Attitude towards AD

As shown in table 6, the total mean score for attitude towards AD is $M = 31.25$. In this scale, the lower mean score represents a more positive attitude towards advertising. The statement with the lowest mean was “Advertising is essential to modern society” ($M = 2.17$). This indicated that adolescents agreed to the positive functions of advertising in the society. Meanwhile, the statement with the highest mean was “Advertising often persuades people to buy things they shouldn't buy” ($M = 3.95$). It explained that adolescents had no idea that they were being persuaded. In other words, adolescents did not notice their high level of materialism was induced by advertising.

Table 6
Mean Scores and Standard Deviation for Attitude towards AD

Items	Mean	SD
1. Advertising is essential to modern society.	2.170	.684
2. Commercials are fun to watch.	2.640	.834
3. Advertising is a useful information source.	2.700	.855
4. Advertising helps raise our standard of living.	2.950	.859
5. Most advertising insults the intelligence of the average consumer.	3.167	.874
6. I usually switch the channel right away when a commercial comes on.	3.270	1.015
7. Advertising is annoying.	3.356	.819
8. In general, advertisements present a fair picture of the product being advertised.	3.360	.926
9. I wish there were fewer commercials on TV.	3.6834	.852
10. Advertising often persuades people to buy things they shouldn't buy.	3.948	.821
Total Attitude towards AD	31.253	3.688

Scale 2 – Attraction to Media Celebrities

According to table 7, the total mean score for attraction to media celebrities is $M = 21.03$. In this scale, the lower mean score represented high degree of attraction to media celebrities. The item with the lowest mean score is “I hope I can be as successful as media celebrities” ($M = 2.89$), and the second lowest is “I want to be as stylish as people appearing in ads” ($M = 3.12$). This implied that adolescents tended to imitate the media celebrities in terms of success and style.

Table 7

Mean Scores and Standard Deviation for Attraction to Media Celebrities

Items	Mean	SD
1. I hope I can be as successful as media celebrities.	2.890	.985
2. I want to be as stylish as people appearing in ads.	2.940	.944
3. I hope I can be as attractive as media celebrities.	2.950	.990
4. I want to be as trendy models in magazines.	2.970	1.034
5. I hope I can be as smart as media celebrities.	3.070	.931
6. I aspire to have the lifestyle of media celebrities.	3.090	.996
7. I have frequent thoughts about my favourite media celebrities.	3.120	.998
Total Attraction to Media Celebrities	21.029	5.180

Scale 3 – Materialism

As shown in table 8 below, the total mean score for materialism is $M = 53.93$. In this scale, the lower mean score represented a higher level of materialism. The statement that adolescents agreed with most indicated that Hong Kong adolescents viewed material possessions as important achievements. They reported that the things they own are important to them, and the amount of material objects they own represent success.

Table 8
Mean Scores and Standard Deviation for Materialism

Items	Mean	SD
1. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	2.420	.820
2. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.	2.470	.780
3. The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	2.550	.871
4. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.	2.630	.946
5. I like to own things that impress people.	2.640	.847
6. Some of the most important achievements include acquiring material possessions.	2.720	.896
7. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.	2.750	1.017
8. I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.	2.793	.855
9. The things I own aren't all that important to me.	2.939	.930
10. I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own.	3.109	.843
11. I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.	3.213	.864
12. I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.	3.316	.936
13. I usually buy only the things I need.	3.345	.989
14. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I like.	3.370	.915
15. I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.	3.410	.950
16. I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.	3.437	.808
17. I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.	3.448	.883
18. I like a lot of luxury in my life.	3.48	.910
Total Materialism	53.925	8.062

Testing the Theoretical Model

Pearson’s correlation coefficient was first used to test the overall relationships among the three variables: materialism, attitude towards advertising, and attraction to media celebrities (results displayed in table 9). There was no significant relationship between attitudes towards advertising and the level of materialism ($r = .149$). Yet the correlation between attitudes towards advertising and attraction to media celebrities are significant ($r = .237$). Meanwhile, attraction to media celebrities was highly correlated with the level of materialism ($r = .408$). It proved that television consumption had significant effect on adolescents’ attitudes towards advertising, attraction to media celebrities, and materialism. Therefore, both H3 and H4 were rejected.

Table 9

Correlation Analysis of Materialism, Attitudes towards Advertising, and Attraction to Media Celebrities

	Attitudes towards AD	Attraction to Media Celebrities	Materialism	TV Consumption
Attitudes towards AD	---			
Attraction to Media Celebrities	.237**	---		
Materialism	.149*	.408**	---	
TV Consumption	-.154*	-.168*	-.010	---

N = 174

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Second, linear regression analysis was used to further examine the relationships among all variables. Three steps were involved in the linear regression analysis. In the first step, attitude towards advertising was used to predict attraction to media celebrities. The R-squared of the model was 0.056, indicating that the model actually accounted for 5.6% of the attraction to media celebrities score. As a result, H1 was accepted. Results are displayed in table 10.

Table 10
Linear Regression for Attraction to Media Celebrities

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig
Attitudes towards AD	.333	.104	3.201	.002
F	10.247			
R	.237			
R-squared	.056			
Regression df	1			
Residual df	172			
N	173			

N = 174

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

DV: Attraction to media celebrities

In the second step, attraction to media celebrities was used to predict the level of materialism of the respondents (table 11). The R-squared of the model was 0.166, indicating that the model accounted for 16.6% of the variance of adolescents' materialism score. H2 was supported.

Table 11
Linear Regression of Materialism

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig
Attraction to Media Celebrities	.635	.108	5.857	.000
F	34.307			
R	.408			
R-squared	.166			
Regression df	2			
Residual df	172			
N	173			

N = 174

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

DV: Materialism

In the third step, age, gender, and monthly household income were added to the regression model of materialism, the change in R-squared is 0.012, and it was not significant at 0.05 level. It meant that when the predictors were controlled, age, gender, household income did not show a significant effect on materialism value orientation. Results are shown in table 12.

Table 12

Linear Regression for All Variables

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig
Attraction to Media Celebrities	.619	.398	5.618	.000
Age	.366	.072	1.020	.000
Gender	-.462	-.028	-.405	.309
Monthly Household Income	-.387	-.080	-1.139	.256
F	9.135			
R	.422			
R-squared	.178			
Regression df	4			
Residual df	169			
N	173			

N = 174

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

DV: Materialism

Discussion

The current study significantly showed attraction to media celebrities is a positive predictor of materialistic values. It indicated that adolescents who are more attracted to media celebrities tend to be more materialistic. The possible explanation for this is that media celebrities are packed by the advertisers through glamorous clothing and expensive possessions. Upscale spending and purchase of luxurious items were associated with media celebrities as an advertising strategy to encourage consumption. Meanwhile, adolescents who tend to share a bond with their favourite idols for developmental need were more easily influenced by the idealized picture of media celebrities portrayed in advertising. Adolescents were motivated to purchase and use the advertised products for self-enhancement.

There was no direct relationship between adolescents' attitude towards advertising and their level of materialism. As a matter of fact, the scale of attitude towards advertising, which was used in this study, only gave a general picture of the adolescents' attitude. It was suggested by some studies that the motives for watching them should also be considered. Moschis and Moore (1982) proposed that there are two dimensions of motives. The first one was seeking product information, while the second one was seeking talking points with other people for social motives. Indeed, the attitudes towards advertising are quite different from the motives of watching it. The study proved that adolescents who view advertisements to seek talking point were easily influenced by advertisements since they tended to pay more attention to the materialistic messages. Thus, a higher level of materialism is induced.

TV consumption has no significant effect on both adolescents' attraction to media celebrities and their level of materialism. With the rise of the Internet, television is no longer the dominant mass medium. In 2012, 78.6% of households in Hong Kong had a personal computer connected to the Internet (Census and Statistics Department 2012), and it was one of the highest rates around the world. There were 4.5 million active Internet users browsing the Internet every day in 2012. As a matter of fact, Hong Kong reached the top of Internet penetration in Asia as well as the world. Hong Kong's Internet infrastructure is excellent that the extensive broadband networks ensured most of the citizens can enjoy a high-speed Internet connection. Past studies showed adolescents spent the highest amount of time on the Internet. They considered the Internet is more flexible. With more convenient and flexible Internet, the decrease of adolescents' TV consumption was predictable. Therefore, cultivation effect of television was lessened, and TV consumption could not act as a predictor of materialism in this study. Furthermore, some studies suggested that magazines are generally retained for the purpose of entertainment and shopping activities, while television is retained for the purpose of knowing news and current affairs. Thus, magazines may have a stronger influence on adolescents' level of materialism than television.

In this study, age had no influence on the level of materialism. This result is opposite to John's (1999) model of consumer socialization. As the target population of this study was undergraduate students from City University of Hong Kong, the range of the age of the respondents was quite narrow. Although the ages of the students were recoded into younger age-group (18–21) and older age-group (22–25), all respondents were nearly in the same stage of developmental process. In addition, their life experiences were similar that they have gone through some public examinations, graduated from secondary school, and strived very hard to enter the university. As most of them did not have full-time work experience, the study could not show whether work experience would trigger higher level of materialism.

Monthly household income had no significant relationship with adolescents' level of materialism. It may be explained by the combined effect of the models of Shrum and Bischak (2001) and Gerbner et al. (1980). Some adolescents were affected by the large gap between the world in television and reality, which triggers the desire for material possessions. At the same time, other adolescents were double-dosed by the materialistic messages in television, and thus, the magnified cultivation effects result in a high level of materialism. Therefore, this study could not provide any evidence on the relationship between household income and materialism.

Limitations and Further Studies

The current study has successfully proved that there is no direct relationship between attitudes towards advertising and materialism but through the process of attraction to media celebrities. Yet one of the scales, attitudes towards advertising, was not reliable enough. Although Cronbach's alpha if item deleted and factor analysis have been done, there are no clear factors that could be extracted from the scale and reduced to some smaller scales. In addition, because of the limits on time and resources, this study did not adopt a probability sample. Therefore, the findings cannot be generated to the whole target population. The questionnaire consisted of three scales; two of them included a statement with reverse wording, which may result in confusion.

This is only a small-scale research conducted in City University of Hong Kong. It may be useful for future researchers to conduct studies in different universities or even cross-cultural studies. This allows comparison of materialism among adolescents in different places and investigation of whether there is a significant change of materialism level with different cultures. Further work is also needed to explore the relationship between the level of materialism and media usage in greater depth. For example, the types of television programme, other mass mediums, and the motives of watching advertisements should be included. Apart from quantitative work, a similar research about adolescents' level of materialism could be conducted in qualitative methods to see how motivation for social comparison with media celebrities could trigger high level of materialism. Finally, a future research on materialism could also examine the relationship

between age and life experience by comparing the materialism level among studying adolescents and working adolescents.

Conclusion

The current study proved that attitude towards advertising, attraction to media celebrities, and materialism are positively correlated. Yet there is no direct relationship between attitude towards advertising and materialism. The relationship between attitude towards advertising and attraction to media celebrities is not very strong. It implied that Hong Kong adolescents have the ability to be selective regarding media content. Empirical data is provided to support the proposed theoretical model. As materialism is considered as a negative value, the findings of the current study suggested that to discourage a high level of materialism among adolescents, one of the possible methods is to discourage upward social comparison with the media celebrities.

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