

## ROLE OF PERCEIVED NORMS IN MATERIALISM AMONG ADOLESCENTS

**\*Seemab Rashid, \*\*Dr. Mussarat Jabeen Khan, \*Dr. Moazzama Abidi\*\*\*Ayesha Jahangir**

\*Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad, \*\*International Islamic University Islamabad, \*\*\*University of Houston-Victoria, USA

### Correspondence Address

**Dr. Mussarat Jabeen Khan**

Assistant Professor

Dept of Psychology

International Islamic University Islamabad

Email: [mussarat.jabeen@iiu.edu.pk](mailto:mussarat.jabeen@iiu.edu.pk)

### Abstract

*There is widespread consensus in the literature as to the interrelations between parents and peers communication and adolescents' materialism. The field of study however entails models that fling light on the channels of influence existing among these variables. The main objectives of the present study is to assess the direct and indirect effect of adolescents' perceived friends' materialism on their materialistic values through susceptibility to peer influence. Besides that moderating role of socioeconomic status and adolescents' perceived parents' materialism on indirect relationship of perceived friends' materialism and adolescents' materialism was highlighted in current study. This framework was tested with survey data of 400 adolescents having age range 18-24 years in Pakistan. Results indicated that adolescents' perceived friend's materialism was both directly and indirectly associated with their inclination towards materialistic values. This indirect effect was moderated by both socioeconomic status and adolescents' perceived parents' materialism.*

**Keywords:** Perceived friends' materialism, Perceived parents' materialism, Susceptibility to peer influence, Socioeconomic status, Adolescents' materialism.

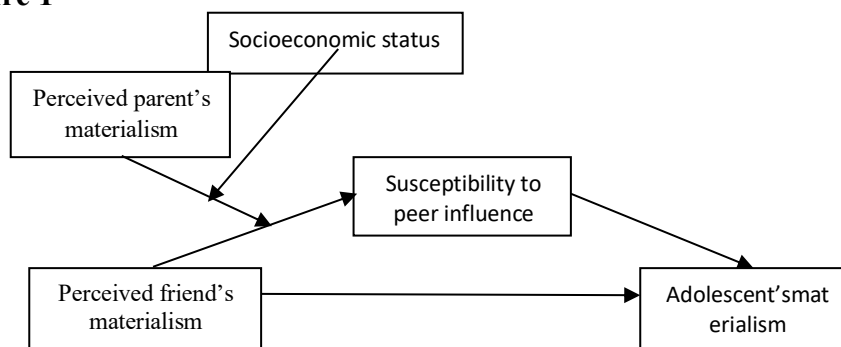
### Introduction

Marketing research has found growing trend of consumerism among adolescents. Adolescents desired to buy expensive things, and the things their friends had. They displayed their desire to have more money for the consumption of more things. They also expressed belief that more money would make them happier (Dolliver, 2007). So pursuit of happiness through acquisition of materialistic possessions is regarded as materialism (Fox & Lears, 1983) where personal happiness and social progress reside in the possession of material goods and wealth (Ward & Wackman, 1971). Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, and Barmossy (2003) suggested that level of materialism kept on increasing among adolescents day by day which captured attention of parents, educators and consumer advocates. Since 1970, social research has used various segments of social psychology, social learning theory, role modeling theory, and adolescent knowledge of marketing to measure materialism (Clark, Marten, & Bush, 2001). Common research finding is that socialization affects adolescent's materialism (Bristol & Mangleburg, 2005; Clark et al., 2001). Smith (1776) suggested that people consume not only to satisfy psychological needs but also social needs. They consume in order to identify them as worthy members of the society. Vast number of researches highlighted the role of social influence in transmission of consumption attitudes, goals and motives to adolescents through observation, modeling and reinforcement. Family and peer communication were regarded as predictors of materialism among adolescents (Moschis & Moore, 1981; Churchill & Moschis, 1978). Communication plays an important role in not only formulating perception about existing norms (as when people use dominance of behavior depicted in media to sketch their perception about prevalence of that behavior) but

also in showing behavior parallel to that influence (when people make base of their action as the behavior communicated to them) (Lapinsky & Rimal, 2005). Lapinsky and Rimal (2005) suggested that human behavior is shaped by the perception about dominant behavior. There are two types of norms, collective norms and perceived norms. Existence of norms at collective level, group, community or culture is regarded as collective norms (Arrow & Burns, 2004) while comprehension of such norms by an individual is called perceived norms. Collective norms act as codes of conduct that either facilitate or inhibit behavior of members of group while interpretation of such norms by the members of group is regarded as perceived norms. For example college students may perceive that majority of their peers consume alcohol (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986) so they think that they can lose their friendships if they don't consume alcohol (Rimal & Real, 2003). It's worth noted that perceived norms are not necessarily parallel to collective norms (Chia & Lee, 2008) but they are equally influential as collective norms in cultivating materialism among adolescents. In current study, we have investigated the role of adolescents' perceived parents and friends' materialistic values on their inclination towards materialistic values. There are certain circumstances when people are approved but do not practice particular behavior (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Chaplin and John (2010) suggested to study family income and susceptibility to peer influence as playing influential role in the relationship of perceived parents/peers materialistic values and adolescents' materialism. It means that if one perceived his parents and friends as materialist then inclination towards materialism depends on his susceptibility to peer influence. Susceptibility to peer influence gives meaning to their perception of parents and friend's materialistic values which is hypothesized to determine their inclination towards materialism.

Besides social influence, Flouri (2004) argued that children from high economic insecurity of the family were found to be more materialistic as compared to children from economically secure families. It is also suggested that young consumers with less affluent households (Goldberg et al., 2003) and greater level of susceptibility to their friends (Achenreiner, 1997; Goldberg et al., 2003) lead to development of materialism among them. So we seek prelude evidence for our view of testing simultaneously the moderating influence of socioeconomic status and perceived parents' materialistic values on indirect relationship of adolescents' perceived friends' materialism and their own materialistic values (see figure 1).

**Figure 1**



*Figure 1: moderation of indirect effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism by Perceived parent's materialism which is further moderated by socioeconomic status*

Prior researchers have found direct relationship of adolescents' perceived parents and perceived friends' materialistic values and their own materialistic values (Chia, 2010; Chaplin & John, 2010). Both perceived parents and friends' materialistic values have appeared in prior studies on materialism but our interest here is to assess the role of socioeconomic status and perceived parents' materialistic values as moderating the indirect effect of adolescents' perceived friends' materialistic values on their own materialistic values through susceptibility to peer influence. It is important to both marketers and social workers to have a better understanding of the potential impact of parental responsiveness on Susceptibility to peer influence (Yang & Laroche, 2011).

Present research will provide new insight to research on materialism and contribute significantly to comprehension of materialism among adolescents by highlighting social influence perspective and Inglehart scarcity hypothesis. Previous researches offers a valuable set of findings about predictors of adolescents materialism but the current research contributes in assessing role of perceived norms, susceptibility to such perceived norms and their effect on adolescents' materialism.

In the following sections, not only relationship of perceived parents'/friends materialistic values, susceptibility to peer influence and adolescents materialism but also effect of socioeconomic status on adolescents inclination towards materialism have been highlighted.

H1: Adolescents' perception of friends' materialism is directly related to adolescents' materialistic values

H2: Susceptibility to peer influence mediates the direct effect of adolescents' perceived friends' materialism on adolescents' materialistic values.

H3: Adolescents' perception of parents' materialism is directly related to adolescents' materialistic values.

H4: Socioeconomic status and adolescents perceived parents' materialism moderated the indirect relationship of adolescents' perceived friends' materialism and adolescents' materialistic values through susceptibility to peer influence.

### **Method**

#### **Sample and procedure**

Sample was comprised of 400 adolescents of both private and public colleges and universities having age range 18 to 24 years ( $M= 20.75$ ,  $SD= 2.084$ ). Convenient sampling technique was utilized. Males are 190 (47.5%) and females are 210 (52.5%) of total sample ( $N= 400$ ). Socioeconomic status was measured by Income per capita that is income per household. Income per capita grouped into 4 income quartiles (1 being poorest and 4 being wealthiest, 2 and 3 being middle class), 1st and 4<sup>th</sup> quartile contains approximately 25% of the sample it is called income quartile method which is the most objective and reliable measure (Mustard et al., 1995). With respect to socio economic status, adolescents from lower socioeconomic status ( $n = 100$ , 25%) middle socio economic status ( $n = 199$ , 49.8%) and upper socio economic status ( $n = 101$ , 25.3%).

After seeking formal permission from the high authority of selected universities, students were approached. They were provided with brief description about purpose and significance of the study. Detailed instructions regarding instruments had been provided and let them assured that their responses would be remained confidential and anonymous.

#### **Measures**

##### **Materialism**

Materialism was defined as the importance attributed to the ownership and acquisition of materialistic goods in the achievement of major life goals or desired states. It was measured

by 18-item Material Values Scale (MVS) (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Participants were asked to respond on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree. Higher scores indicated more materialistic values. Studies using material value scale reported strong alpha reliability coefficients having range from 0.73 to 0.88 (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Williams & Bryce, 1992; Yoon, 1995).

#### **Perceived Friend's Materialism**

Adolescents' perception of friend's inclination towards materialistic values was assessed by the perceived friend's materialism scale (Chia, 2010) which is modified version of youth materialism scale (Goldberg et al., 2003). It is 9 items scale assessing adolescent's perception of their friend's attitude towards material or monetary values. Higher scores indicated higher perceived materialistic values of friends. The responses were given on a 7-point scale, which ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree, where 1 stands for strongly disagree and 7 stands for strongly agree. The 9 indicators formed a reliable composite measure for adolescents' perception of friends' materialism  $\alpha = .89$  (Chia, 2010).

#### **Perceived Parent's Materialism**

To evaluate parent's materialistic values, parent's materialism scale (Goldberg et al., 2003) was modified by Chia (2010). The responses were given on a 7-point scale, which ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Higher scores indicated high materialistic values of parents. A reliability test showed that the 9 indicators comprised a reliable composite measure for adolescents' perception of parents' materialism  $\alpha = .88$  (Chia, 2010).

#### **Susceptibility to Peer Influence**

Susceptibility to peer influence was measured by the normative influence subscale of susceptibility to peer influence scale (Bearden et al., 1989). Six items measured the construct of normative influence. It is 5 point likert scale, ranging from 1=never to 5=every time. Higher score indicated more susceptibility to peer influence. Reliability test showed that the 6 items comprised high internal consistency,  $\alpha = .86$  to  $.92$  (Makgosa & Mohube, 2007; Yang & Laroche, 2009).

### **Results**

Reliability analyses were conducted for each rating scale being studied. Such analyses indicated acceptable levels of reliability where Cronbach's alpha reliability of perceived friend's materialism scale is  $.79$ , perceived parent's materialism scale  $\alpha = .80$ , susceptibility to peer influence scale  $\alpha = .78$ , material value scale  $\alpha = .65$ . Studies conducted in China reported Cronbach's alpha reliability of material value scale as  $.63$  to  $.66$  (Yang & Ganahl, 2004; Chan, Wang, & Zhang, 2006).

**Table 1**

*Multiple regression analysis of perceived parents' and friends' materialism predicting adolescents' materialism (N=400)*

Variables	Materialism		
	Model 1 B	Model 2	
		B	95% CI
Constant	36.57	33.53	[25.09,41.62]
Age	-0.14	0.001	[-0.408,0.41]
Education	-0.34	-0.37	[-1.51,0.77]
Gender	1.49	1.18	[0.13,0.29]
Perceived parents' materialism	0.28***	0.21***	[0.06,0.22]
Perceived friends' materialism		0.14***	[0.207,0.521]
R <sup>2</sup>	.14		.17
F	16.38***		15.99***

$\Delta R^2$	.03
$\Delta F$	12.50***

Note: B= Unstandardized regression weights, CI= Confidence interval,  $R^2$ = explained variance.

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess direct effect of adolescents' perceived friends' and perceived parents' materialism on their own materialistic values. Results indicated that perceived parents' materialism has significant positive relationship with adolescents' materialism explaining about 14% variance. H2 is accepted. Adolescents' perceived friends' materialism has significant positive relationship with adolescents' materialism explaining about 3% variance. H1 is accepted. (See table 1).

**Table 2**

*Summary of hierarchical regression analysis predicting adolescents' materialism (N=400)*

Variables	Materialism		
	Model 1 B	B	95% CI
Constant	35.928	31.31	[22.28,40.35]
Age	-.035	0.001	[-0.408,0.41]
Education	-0.681	-0.570	[-1.713,0.578]
Gender	0.708	1.160	[-0.261,2.59]
Perceived friend's materialism	0.25***	0.18***	[0.102,0.255]
Susceptibility to peer influence		0.36***	[0.207,0.521]
$R^2$	.10	.16	
F	9.92***	12.14***	
$\Delta R^2$		0.04	
$\Delta F$		20.72***	

Note: B= Unstandardized regression weights, CI= Confidence interval,  $R^2$ = explained variance.

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Mediation analysis was conducted to assess indirect effect of adolescents' perceived friend's materialism on their own materialistic values mediated by their susceptibility to peer influence. Three separate regression steps were performed suggested by Barron and Kenny (1986). First step, perceived friend's materialism had significant effect on adolescent's materialism, second step showed significant effect of predictor perceived friend's materialism on susceptibility to peer influence and the last regression analysis suggested that susceptibility to peer influence significantly mediated the direct effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism (see table 2). Product of coefficient strategy with bootstrapping further validated indirect effect. Bootstrapping is a non-parametric method for assessing indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher et al., 2007). Exact normal distribution may only be found in large samples, but bootstrapping overcomes several problems with non-normally distributed variables such as power problems. Product of coefficient strategy (Sobel's test) suggested significant indirect effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism through susceptibility to peer influence ( $Z=3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results from bootstrapping yielded a significant mean indirect effect of adolescents' perceived friend's materialism on their materialistic values through their susceptibility to peer influence  $B= 0.06$ , with 95% confidence interval from 0.03 to 0.10. Thus H3 is supported.

**Table 3**

*Moderated mediation of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism (N = 400)*

DV		B	SE	95%BCCI	R <sup>2</sup>
SPI	Mediator variable model				
	Constant	25.49***	7.69	[10.37,40.60]	.23
	FMAT	-0.43*	0.20	[-0.84,-0.03]	
	PMAT	-0.38	0.25	[-0.87,0.11]	
	SES	-9.27	3.41	[-15.97,-2.57]	
	FMATPMAT	0.01*	0.006	[0.002,0.03]	
	FMATSES	0.26**	0.09	[0.08,0.45]	
	PMATSES	0.24*	0.10	[0.03,0.45]	
FMAT×PMAT×SES	-0.01*	0.003	[-0.01,-0.002]		
MV	Dependent variable model				
	Constant	31.78	1.51	[28.79,34.75]	.15
	SPI	0.19***	0.04	[0.11,0.26]	
	FMAT	0.19***	0.04	[0.11,0.26]	

Note: B= Unstandardized regression weights, SE= standard error, CI= Confidence interval, R<sup>2</sup>= explained variance.

\*\*\*p < .001, \*\*p < .01, \* p < .05

Indirect effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism through susceptibility to peer influence moderated by perceived parent's materialism which is further moderated by socioeconomic status was assessed by Process Macro (Hayes, 2013). Bias corrected bootstrapping was applied to get more accurate confidence interval (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). The significant interaction effect supported the assumption of moderated mediation that is socioeconomic status and perceived parents' materialism significantly moderated the indirect effect of perceived friends' materialism on adolescents' materialism. H4 is accepted (B= -0.01, 95% BCCI -0.01, -0.002) (See table 3).

**Table 4**

*Conditional indirect effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism at levels of moderator (N = 400)*

Mediator	Moderator1	Moderator2	B	SE	95% BCCI	
	PMAT	SES			LL	UL
Susceptibility to peer influence	-1SD	1	0.012	.013	-0.012	0.039
	-1SD	2	0.042	.014	0.018	0.072
	-1SD	3	0.071	.022	0.033	0.125
	Mean	1	0.034	.014	0.012	0.065
	Mean	2	0.046	.013	0.023	0.079
	Mean	3	0.058	.018	0.027	0.105
	+SD	1	0.056	.022	0.021	0.108
	+SD	2	0.051	.016	0.024	0.090
	+SD	3	0.045	.017	0.019	0.087

Note. N = 2000, Bootstrap resamples, LLBCCI=lower limit bias corrected confidence interval, ULBCCI= upper limit bias corrected confidence interval; B= unstandardized

regression weight;  $R^2$ = explained variance; PMAT=perceived parent's materialism; SES=socioeconomic status

Given the overall significant interaction term, significance tests were conducted on the hypothesis that the conditional indirect effect equals zero at specific values ( $M \pm 1$  SD) of the moderator. To obtain conditional indirect effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism at levels of perceived parent's materialism and socioeconomic status, Process Macro categorized perceived parent's materialism and socioeconomic status into three levels (Hayes, 2013) where mean reflects the medium level, -1SD and +1SD indicating low and high level of perceived parent's materialism and in case of socioeconomic status, lower represented by 1, middle by 2 and upper socioeconomic status was indicated by 3. Results indicated that at low level of perceived parents materialism, and lower socio economic status, indirect effect of perceived friends materialism on adolescent's materialism is non significant (95% BCCI: -0.012 to 0.039) as zero lies within that confidence interval. Indirect effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism becomes stronger with the increasing level of socioeconomic status at low level of perceived parent's materialism (B= 0.01 at lower, B= 0.04 at middle, and B=0.07 at upper socioeconomic status and all effects are significant) and medium level of perceived parent's materialism (B= 0.03 at lower, B= 0.05 at middle, and B= 0.06 at upper socioeconomic status and all effects are significant). Indirect effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism through susceptibility to peer influence is weaker with the increasing level of socioeconomic status at high level of perceived parent's materialism (B= 0.06 at lower, B= 0.05 at middle, and B= 0.05 at upper socioeconomic status and all effects are significant as zero lies outside the 95% bias corrected bootstrap confidence interval). If we take socioeconomic status as constant and compare level of perceived parent's materialism then it has been found that with the increasing level of perceived parents' materialism, indirect effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescents' materialism becomes stronger, at lower socioeconomic status (B= 0.01 at -1SD, B= 0.03 at M, and B= 0.06 at +1SD of perceived parents' materialism and all effects are significant as zero lies outside the 95% bias corrected bootstrap confidence interval) and middle socio economic status (B= 0.04 at -1SD, B= 0.05 at M, and B= 0.05 at +1SD of perceived parents' materialism and all effects are significant). But at high socio economic status, with the increase of perceived parents' materialism, effect of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism through susceptibility to peer influence becomes weaker (B= 0.07 at -1SD, B= 0.06 at M, and B= 0.05 at +1SD of perceived parents' materialism and all effects are significant). (See table 3). Generally speaking, it is therefore confirmed that socioeconomic status and perceived parents' materialism significantly moderated the indirect effect of adolescents' perceived friends' materialism on their materialistic values by showing susceptibility to materialistic friends.

### Discussion

The main contribution of this study is to assess the role of perceived norms in the development of materialistic values among adolescents. Perceived norms are the interpretation of collective norms by the members of the group. Present study was conducted to assess the direct effect of adolescents' perceived friends' materialism on their own materialistic values and to assess the role of susceptibility to materialistic friends on the development of materialistic value. Findings of the current study provided evidence of the direct and indirect of adolescents' perceived friends' materialism on their inclination towards materialistic values by showing susceptibility to their materialistic friends. The present study suggests that the adolescents who perceive their friends as materialistic, tends to be more materialistic if they show susceptibility to their materialistic friends. If they perceive that

their friends give regard to materialistic possessions and wealth, then they also want to achieve the same things which are approved by their friends. Findings of present research is consistent with the findings of prior researches that is peer influence found to be the most significant factor in cultivating materialism among adolescent (La Ferle & Chan, 2008). Roberts, Manolis, and Tanner (2008) suggested that susceptibility to normative influence leads to materialism and compulsive buying behavior of adolescents. Normative influence means the adolescents buy those things which are purchased by their friends in order to be part of their group. It has been suggested by the present study that adolescents who perceive their friends as materialistic, they incline towards materialistic values, when they show susceptibility to their friends. Bachmann (1997) study showed that materialism and susceptibility to peer influence were positively related to one another. It has been suggested by Keillor, Parker, and Schaefer (1996) that adolescents purchase branded cloths due to their peers influence. Brand demonstrates status which is conferred by other people. When adolescents are socialized in such manner, they buy products to show their status and enhance their self-worth. Such people who struggle to show conformity with the social norms are more inclined towards materialistic values in order to keep up with the joneses (Chang & Arkin, 2002).

Regarding the role of socioeconomic status and perceived parent's materialism in influencing the indirect effect of adolescents' perceived friend's materialism on their materialistic values through susceptibility to peer influence, finding suggests that adolescent's perceived parent's and friend's materialism influence their susceptibility to materialistic friends which in turn cultivate materialism among them. The finding suggests that one's socioeconomic environment has major influence on his susceptibility to materialistic friends. Socioeconomic circumstances and mother's own values have significant impact on the development of materialism among their children (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995). So it means that socioeconomic circumstances and parent's materialistic values influences the relationship of perceived friend's materialism and adolescent's materialism. Adolescents belonging to lower socioeconomic status, with the increase of perceived parents materialism, their susceptibility to materialistic friends increases leading to cultivation of greater level of materialism among them. As previous researches suggests that adolescents belonging to less affluent households and more materialistic parents are more inclined towards materialistic values (Goldberg et al., 2003). According to scarcity hypothesis, one places greater subjective value on those things that are in limited supply, so his priorities are determined by his socioeconomic environment (Inglehart, 1990). Therefore those people who are economically deprived give more importance to acquisition of materialistic possessions. During economic downswings, people's emphasis on money increases (Ahuvia & Wong, 1995). According to socialization hypothesis, one's basic values are affected by the conditions prevailing during pre-adult years (Inglehart, 1990) and these values keep persistent for longer period of time. It means that children are socialized to value what's rare, forming a value system which generally persists through adulthood, although it may oscillate slightly due to variations in the larger environment in keeping with the scarcity hypothesis (Ahuvia & Wong, 1995). The present study results show that the adolescents from lower socioeconomic environment getting socialization from materialistic parents are more susceptible to materialistic friends, which results into cultivation of materialism among them. Similar pattern is observed in the middle socioeconomic status as well that is with the increase of perceived parent's materialism, the influence of perceived friend's materialism leads to development of materialism among adolescents. People belonging to middle socioeconomic status want to be a part of leisure class according to Veblen theory of leisure class (1899). At upper level of

socioeconomic status, with the increase of perceived parent's materialism, the influence of perceived friend's materialism on adolescent's materialism decreases. The more the adolescent's perceive their parent's as materialistic, less they show susceptibility to materialistic friends. So their inclination towards materialistic values is less when they perceive both parents and friends as materialistic. Adolescents of upper level of socioeconomic status don't feel scarcity of wealth and materialistic possessions, so if they find their parents and friends giving more importance to materialistic possessions and wealth, they show less susceptibility to materialistic life because their self-esteem is high. According to scarcity hypothesis, adolescents of upper socioeconomic status are less directed towards materialistic values as compared to middle and lower socioeconomic status who struggles to be a part of leisure class. They show susceptibility to their friends influence by purchasing products in order to reflect that they belong to high status. Veblen (1912) suggested that man has ability to associate himself with the leisure class through acquiring materialistic possession which gives him social position and prestige. On the other hand, adolescents of upper socioeconomic status don't want to show their status so they are less susceptible to materialistic life as indicated by the results of the present study. Flouri (2004) suggested that children from high economically secure families were found to be less materialistic as compared to children from economically insecure families. So the present study also suggest the same findings that adolescents from lower and middle socioeconomic status and greater materialistic values of parents lead to susceptibility of adolescents to materialistic friends and ultimately trap in the vicious circle of materialistic game. Adolescents of upper socioeconomic status show the reverse finding that is greater the materialistic parents and friends, less is their inclination towards materialistic values.

### **Implications**

This research will be proved beneficial for the society especially for the clinical psychologists, educators and counselors in providing them the true picture of how materialism is affected by the materialistic values of social environment and to help them in developing strategies for the reduction of materialism and let them be able to enhance their subjective wellbeing. It also provides practical guide to parents that is instead of giving importance to materialistic values, they should focus on intrinsic values like relationships and community values. As present study indicated that adolescents are not totally dependent on peers but parents do have influence on their behavior so parents can play an important role by monitoring the materialistic values of their children. It can help marketers to distinguish children who showed high susceptibility to peer influence from those who showed less susceptibility to their peers while knowing about the extent of parental involvement So They can develop different communication strategies to target these groups (e.g., peer-oriented vs. parent-oriented advertisements). Social workers can also utilize this information to teach parents to change their parental styles through parent-oriented educational programs.

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