

Effect of Advertisements on Body Image and Materialism Among Adolescents: A Gender Perspective

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The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of advertisements on the body image and materialism among adolescents. The participants completed the research instruments which included Advertisements Questionnaire (Daud, Farooq, & Anwar, 2011), Body Image Questionnaire (Smith & Peterson, 2014) and Material Value Scale (Richins & Dawson, 1992). The sample of the study was 400 participants (boys = 200, girls = 200) with age range from 14-20 years selected from educational institutes of Islamabad. The results of the study indicated that exposure to TV advertisements lead to dissatisfaction with body image among adolescents and increased materialism. The results of the study also indicated nonsignificant gender differences regarding their perception about body image and materialism.

Keywords: Advertisements, body image, materialism, adolescents

Mass media plays an important role in the modern world, as it is the primary source of communication. Advertisements are the main source of conveying information to people. It is able to subliminally filter through ideas about how identities are constructed within society. Advertisements are receiving a lot of appreciation and acceptance by the people. Critics of advertisements accuse them, allege them as source for propagation of promotion of harmful products, sexism, and manipulating people and they cause moral and intellectual pollution (Rekha & Maran, 2012).

Advertisements manipulate adolescents emotionally and instigate them to buy certain thing which could be considered the only purpose of life. The advertisers pay more attention to physical appearance and sexuality in order to promote their products. The criteria for the body

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image set by the current day culture is that one should have an excessively thin body and strive for shrinking it continuously. This standard for the adolescents about how they should look is set by the mainstream media (Vanvonderen, 2002). As a result, adolescents who fantasize thin models, have the perception that thinness is appreciated and develop dissatisfaction for their own body, and they get involved in different behaviors like cosmetic surgeries, using beauty products etc, in order to gain the standards that are set by the media images (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006).

Advertisements intentionally put a lot of pressure on the adolescents to get critical about themselves (Huebscher, 2010). A study was conducted by Daud et al. (2011) to explore the impact of advertisement on life style of Pakistani youth. The results of the study indicated that TV advertisements have long lasting effect on behavior of youth. Some of the effects are really damaging for our society, which are generally based on combined family system, established religious and cultural value and where majority of people cannot not afford to purchase the product, which have severe temptation for youth in the race to show power.

Women are assumed to be more inspired by the media images, having feelings of dissatisfaction with their physical appearance. Khan, Khalid, Khan, and Jabeen (2011) introduced the idea of body image dissatisfaction in female teenagers and found that whether females are very thin or very fat they are not satisfied with their body image. This is because of increasing impact of media which have provided females with a perfect figure of their body to look beautiful.

Rekha and Maran (2012) suggested that the advertisements put pressure on body dissatisfaction and body image perception among women. Mostly the women are not satisfied with their current body shape. They either want to have a thin body shape and figure, or they want to have larger body figure than their current body shape.

Dissatisfaction about body image is not the problem of only one culture or society, it is rather found in every culture/society. Parker, Haytko and Hermans (2008) did a cross-cultural comparison to study effect of body image on gender in US and China. They found out people of US, both men and women are more concerned about their body image as compared to Chinese. People of US have more pressure to maintain a thin body image because they are more inclined to mass media world where they see advertisings about body image for whole of their life.

Another major role played by advertisements is that they prompt materialism among people (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003).

Materialism is preoccupation with money and possessions and the idea that personal wealth and material possessions are key to success (Fournier & Richins, 1991). Chan and Cai (2009) conducted a study to investigate the effect of television advertising in rural and urban Chinese. They found that the people who heavily view television advertisements tend to be more materialistic than those who are light viewers.

Chan and Prendergast (2007) studied materialism and social comparison in adolescents. They found peer communication corresponds to social comparison with friends. This social comparison and media figures positively relate to materialistic values. Adolescents who compare their personal possessions with their friends or media persons believe that possession is the only purpose of life and is the only way to be successful and happy.

Materialism is thought to be the most important aspect of life which increases eagerness for luxuries. Ali, Ramzan, Razi, Khan, and Fatima (2012) studied the level of materialistic thoughts in people. When these luxuries are not achieved they may give rise to psychological problems in people.

This line of research is important because it aims to study the link between body image and materialism in adolescents. Advertisements portray images of thin and attractive models which causes dissatisfaction about the body image among the adolescents. They adopt different ways like getting expensive surgeries, using beauty products, depriving themselves from healthy food in order to attain the idealized body. Advertisements are also portraying materialism as one of the most important aspect of life which again is leading to life dissatisfaction. Adolescents get dissatisfied from their life when they do not get what they want. They give more importance to materialistic values in life. With reference to Pakistani culture there is no direct research exploring the effect of Advertisement exposure on body image and materialism in adolescents. Hence, the present research aimed to explore the effect of advertisement on the body image and materialism among adolescents. It also aimed for exploring the gender differences on study variables.

Method

Sample

The sample for the study was selected on the basis convenient sampling. The sample consisted of 400 individuals (girls = 200 and boys = 200) with the age range from 14-20 years. The sample was

selected from different private and government educational institutes of Islamabad.

Instruments

The following instruments were utilized for the study purpose. The details of the scales are given mentioned below.

Advertisements Questionnaire (Daud et al., 2011). This measure consists of 15 items based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree* which measured the impact of advertisements in changing life style. The reliability of the scale was reported to be .86 by original authors. The alpha coefficient for the present study were .66.

Body Image Questionnaire (Smith & Peterson, 2014). Body Image Questionnaire was used to evaluate the impact of television viewing on the appearance in programming. It is a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 7 = *Always* and the composite reliability is reported to be .87 by authors. The scale consists of 18 items, with two subscales including Television Programming and Television Advertising having 9 items each. For the present study alpha coefficient was .86.

Material Value Scale (MVS; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Material Value Scale by Richins and Dawson (1992) was used to measure the propensity towards materialism. It consists of 18 items and is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. It consists of three subscales including Acquired Happiness, Success, and Acquired Centrality. The scale consists of 18 items. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) found the reliability of the overall scale to be .82. For the present study the results showed acceptable alpha reliability ($\alpha = .65$).

Procedure

The research is based on correlational research design. Permission to use the scales for the study purpose was taken from authors. Then various government and private educational institutes were approached and permission was taken from the college authorities for data collection. The participants were provided with necessary information regarding the research and their informed consent was taken. Performa regarding nature of the study was attached with the questionnaires and they were assured that the information taken from them would be kept confidential and will be used only for research purposes.

Results

To achieve the objectives of the study Simple Linear Regression analysis and *t*-test was performed.

Table 1

Simple Linear Regression Analysis to Test Effects of Advertisements on Body Image and Materialism (N = 400)

Variables	<i>B</i>	95% CI
Body Image		
Constant	29.28	[15.00, 43.57]
Advertisement	0.86*	[0.499, 1.220]
<i>R</i>	.23	
<i>R</i> ²	0.52	
<i>F</i>	21.98*	
Materialism		
Constant	49.32	[43.68, 54.95]
Advertisement	0.284*	[0.10, 0.39]
<i>R</i>	1.69	
<i>R</i> ²	0.29	
<i>F</i>	11.47*	

Note. CI = confidence interval.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 1 indicates predictive features of advertisements on the body image and materialism. The results indicate that exposure to advertisements positively predicts dissatisfaction with body image ($p < .01$). Furthermore, exposure to advertisements positively predicts materialism ($p < .05$). Results reveal that exposure to advertisements leads to dissatisfaction with body image and higher materialism among adolescents.

Table 2

Gender Differences on Body Image and Materialism (N = 400)

	Boys (<i>n</i> = 200)		Girls (<i>n</i> = 200)		<i>t</i> (398)	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Body image	63.01	21.56	63.0	19.9	.005	.99	-4.06	4.08
Materialism	59.78	6.47	58.32	9.37	1.81	.07	-0.123	3.04

Note. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

Table 2 indicates mean, standard deviation and *t*-values for body image and materialism. The results indicate nonsignificant difference on body dissatisfaction and materialism in boys and girls.

Discussion

The present study was undertaken to investigate how the advertisements influence the body image perception and materialism among adolescents.

The research findings indicated that exposure to advertisements leads to dissatisfaction with body image and higher materialism among adolescents. These findings are supported by earlier literature, for instance, Lemire (2013) investigated body image and behavior is influenced by media image. The results of the study indicated the women who are dissatisfied with their looks, they had engaged in diets and exercise, not for their health but instead to gain a certain look. Besides, the findings also indicated that equal percentage exists between the people who are satisfied or dissatisfied with their present looks and body image. Adolescents feel dissatisfied with their body image when they compare themselves to the media images and adopt different ways to attain perfect and ideal body image (Sparhawk, 2003). Wollbrink (2004) conducted a study to investigate the results of media marketing and development of consumerism in teenagers. According to Wollbrink (2004), the main source of media marketing is television, magazines, and internet. These media source also act as an information source for the teenagers. The advertising agencies mainly focus on adolescents because they are the people who are most vulnerable mass media consumers. This media marketing leads to high level of materialism among adolescents. Although, parents and peers are an important source of developing materialistic value but the media has most influence on developing these values. Advertisements prompt adolescents to use and buy the advertised products for their self-enhancement. People who are more fascinated by media are more inclined to be materialistic (Kwan, 2013).

The study aimed to explore gender differences on body image and materialism. However, nonsignificant differences based on gender were found for study variables and the findings were not in line with existing literature.

Conclusion

Overall, results of the study indicate that advertisements have great influence on teenagers. When they compare themselves with the media images showing ideal body and physical appearance, people feel dissatisfied about themselves and might engage in different

behaviors in order to get the desired body image. This dissatisfaction related to body image is found across both genders. Furthermore, advertisements are also engaged in marketing of expensive brands, in order to motivate the target population which mostly includes teenagers, to buy those brands in order to look good and appealing. The results indicated that people who are frequently exposed to advertisements develop materialistic values and it is prevalent in both girls and boys. They give more importance to material possessions and are considered as a sign of achievement and success.

Limitations and Suggestions

The sample size of the study was small and restricted to only one city, so the results cannot be generalized to the whole population. All the instruments used in the study were self-reported measures which increases the chances of biasness. In future studies, other qualitative methods must be used to study the effect of advertisements in order to reduce chances of biasness.

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