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The Effect Of Materialism, Gender and Nationality on Consumer Perception of a High Priced Brand.

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Abstract

This study examines the link between materialism, gender and nationality with consumers' perception of a high priced brand of apparel. The work focuses on the differences in perception of a high priced brand. It indicates that young people hold different perceptions of a brand depending on their sex and nationality. The study also examines the materialistic tendencies of customers, focussing on gender and nationality differences. Five research questions were put forward and the results indicated that there is a difference in perception of a high priced brand between domestic and international customers and between customers of different sex.. However, materialism was found to have little effect on brand perceptions.

Introduction

Possessions and their acquisition occupy a central role in the lives of the materialists (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Possessing and acquiring is central to materialists because they indicate success and provide happiness. Individuals are commonly involved to some extent in the pursuit of happiness, however it is the pursuit of happiness through acquisition rather than through other means like personal relationships and achievements that distinguishes materialists. More often than not materialists tend to judge their own and others success by the number (of) and quality of possessions accumulated. The value of possessions stems not only from their ability to confer status but from their ability to project a desired self image and identify one as a participant in an imagined perfect life (Campbell 1987). The range of success for a materialist depends to a large extent on the possession of products that depict certain desired images.

As Richins (1987), Belk (1988), Mowen (1995) and Solomon (1999) suggest, some consumers emphasize the material significance of image. Having more materialistic values is often associated with the use of possessions to convey an impression and also retaining possessions instead of disposing them (Belk 1985). Materialistic individuals are believed to value items that are consumed publicly and possess public meaning, rather than private, personal or subjective meanings (O'Cass and Muller 1999). Such products include clothing, cars, houses etc (Beaudoin, Moore, Goldsmith 1998). For example, a product such as apparel is largely consumed publicly and possesses public meaning and satisfies various needs such as the expression of identity (Kaiser 1990, O'Shaugnessy 1987) and self image (Kaiser 1990, Morganosky and Vreeman 1986) as well as giving individuals a way to impress others (Gould and Barak 1988). The crucial dimension of possessions for any materialist is utility, appearance, financial worth and the ability to convey status, success and prestige, all of which may be satisfied through the purchase of high priced apparel. Individuals have an understanding that a particular possession will convey a strong message or signal to the world of what and who they are (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Younger consumers (under 30) tend to be very conscious of their image and the products they possess or acquire (Beaudoin, Moore, Goldsmith 1998). Fashion clothing is a product that has a high potential for symbolic meaning, and purchase of it may be impacted by consumers' materialistic tendencies in the under 30 age group.

Research Questions

1. *What are the main factors that convey materialistic tendencies in consumers and do these factors differ between males and females, Australians and Non-Australians?*
2. *Do brand perceptions of high priced fashion clothing differ between males and females?*
3. *Does perception of high priced fashion clothing differ between Australians and Non-Australians?*

4. *Is there a significant association/relationship between gender and purchase intention of a high priced fashion brand and Australian/Non-Australian, purchase intention of a high priced fashion brand?*
5. *Is there a significant association/relationship between gender and materialism and Australians/Non-Australians, materialism?*

Method

The methodology was based on the development and administration of a self-administered questionnaire using convenience sample of 104 students at an Australian university. All the students were undergraduate marketing students under the age of 30. The sample had 59 males and 45 females. Of the 104, 34 were Australians and 70 were non-Australian students. The survey also contained a number of statements on brand perceptions related to apparel. The data was factor analyzed using principal components analysis with varimax rotation (Grimm and Yarnold 1998), and Pearson correlation (Hair, Anderson,Tatham and Black 1998). The research questions were analyzed with T-tests to compare the two groups (males, females and Australians, non-Australians).

Results

The results of the factor analysis indicated that materialism contained three factors. The first factor was labelled success with factor loadings between .403 for *I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes* to .690 for *I like to own things that impress people* and Cronbach alpha of .69. The success and achievement aspect is employed for judging one's self and other through possessions. The second factor was labelled as acquisition centrality, this factor contains items that represent the extent to which one places possession acquisition at the centre of ones life. The factor loadings ranged between .415 for the *things I own aren't that important to me* to .812 for *I usually buy only the things I need* and Cronbach alpha was .643. The third factor was labelled happiness and contains items that represent the belief that material possessions are essential to satisfaction and well being in life, and factor loadings ranged from .232 for *I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things* to .632 for *It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.* Cronbach alpha for this factor was .69. The Cronbach alpha values reported by Richins and Dawson (1992) were .71 for centrality, .74 for success and .73 for happiness. The alpha values in this study are slightly lower.

The next set of results pertain to the construct of Armani, the perception towards it and the purchase intention. The factor loadings varied from .535 for *owning this brand makes the owner very happy* to a high of .888 for *this brand is purchased primarily for its image.* In fact, image and prestige came out as the strongest factors for Armani. The second highest factor loading was for *this brand is purchased for its high-priced exclusivity* having a loading of .800. This construct contained items that represented the image of Armani. Carver (1989, p580) has pointed out the appropriateness of combining component scores into a summed measure representing a latent construct. He also noted that by doing this researchers have assumed that the underlying construct is assessed indirectly by measures of its various manifestations. Therefore the three sub scales were summated resulting in a composite score representing materialism.

What are the main factors that convey materialistic tendencies in consumers and do these factors differ between males and females, Australians and Non-Australians?

A T-test was undertaken to explore if differences between Australian and Non-Australian consumer's perception towards materialism existed (see table 1). The results are t(96)=1.109, p=.270. By inspecting the group means it is indicated that there is no significant difference between the average materialism score for Australians and Non-Australians. The difference in the means is .10. However, it is quite interesting to note that there is a difference of .18 between the means of males and females (see table 1). The f test is quite significant and the results in this case are t(88.5)=-2.095 p=.039. The positive value means that the males had a higher average score. This means that there is a difference between the materialistic tendencies of males and females whereas there is no difference between Australians and Non-Australians.

Table 1: Comparison of Australian and Non-Australian, male and female perception towards Materialism

	Mean	p<	t
Australian	3.1620	NS	1.109
Non-Australian	3.0605		
Male	2.9962	.05	-2.095
Female	3.1730		

Do brand perceptions of high priced fashion clothing differ between males and females?

A T-test was undertaken to examine if any differences between males and females exist in perception of the brand Armani (see table 2). There was no statistically significant difference between the males and the females in their perception and attitude towards Armani. They more or less agreed on all the aspects of Armani. However, there was a difference of .78 between the means of the males and females when it came to the purchase intention (see table 3). In this case the results were t(100)=3.1, p=.003. On inspecting the group means, it is found that the average score for male intention to purchase is higher than the female intention to purchase. As Armani is generally viewed as a male brand, this is consistent with expectations that the males are more prone to purchase Armani compared to females.

The next T-test was done to determine if there is any difference between Australians and non-Australians towards the brand Armani (see table 2). A statistically significant difference was found for only one item on the Armani scale, *this brand is purchased primarily for its image.* In this case the results were t(96)=-2.57, p=.011. The difference is -.5, the negative sign indicates that the Non-Australians had the higher average score. This means that the Non-Australians consider Armani to be a image brand more than the Australians do. However, there is no statistically significant difference between the Australians and Non-Australians for the intention to purchase Armani (see table 3). This shows that both Australians and Non-Australians have similar intention to purchase Armani whereas, they differ only on the aspect of image but agree on all the other aspects like high priced exclusivity and prestige.

Table 2: Comparison of Male and Female, Australian/Non-Australian perception towards the Brand Armani

		Mean	p<	t
Armani 1	Male	3.2881	NS	.941
	Female	3.0909		
Armani 2	Male	3.2034	NS	.904
	Female	3.0227		
Armani 3	Male	3.0339	NS	-.322
	Female	3.0909		
Armani 4	Male	4.1017	NS	-.320
	Female	4.1591		
Armani 5	Male	3.7288	NS	-.591
	Female	3.8409		
Armani 6	Male	3.9153	NS	-.346
	Female	3.9773		
Armani 1	Australian	3.3000	NS	.475
	Non-Australian	3.1912		
Armani 2	Australian	3.1333	NS	.137
	Non-Australian	3.1029		
Armani 3	Australian	3.2000	NS	.978
	Non-Australian	3.0147		
Armani 4	Australian	3.7667	.05	-2.578
	Non-Australian	4.2647		
Armani 5	Australian	3.7333	NS	-.355
	Non-Australian	3.8088		
Armani 6	Australian	3.6667	.055	-.1.941
	Non-Australian	4.0441		

Table 3: Comparison of Male and Female, Australian/Non-Australian perception towards Armani Purchase

	Mean	p<	t
Male	3.4828	.005	3.100
Female	2.7045		
Australian	3.3333	NS	.795
Non-Australian	3.1045		

Is there a significant association/relationship between gender and purchase intention of a high priced fashion brand and Australian/Non-Australian, purchase intention of a high priced fashion brand?

Is there a significant association/relationship between gender and materialism and Australians/Non-Australians, materialism?

The last two research questions focussed on relationship or association between gender and nationality with materialism and Armani purchase intention. Though the T-tests established the relationship to certain extent. Cross tabulation is done on this data set in order to find out if there is significant relationship or association(Tabachnick and Fidell 1996). In this case, gender is nominal and purchase intention is interval. In such cases the ETA value is important and in this case the ETA value is .296 indicating a weak and non-significant association (see table 4). When the cross tab is done for the nationality and the purchase intention of Armani, the results indicated that a weak association again. The cross tab for materialism and gender yielded results that showed a weak association (see table 5). The final cross tab was done for materialism and nationality and very interestingly, a very low ETA value again points out that there is a very weak association (see table 5). So the answer for research questions 4 and 5 will be that though there is a very heavy slant towards materialism and the intention to purchase Armani by males and females and also the domestic and international consumers a strong association between them was not observed.

Table 4: Cross tabulation for Gender, Nationality and Purchase intention of Armani

Gender	Purchase Intention Of Armani		
	High	Low	Chi Square
Male	43 (42.2%)	15 (14.7%)	.60
Female	21 (20.5%)	23 (22.5%)	
Nationality			
Domestic	22 (22.6%)	8 (8.3%).391	
International	40 (41.2%)	27 (27.8%)	

Table 5: Cross tabulation for Gender, Nationality and Materialism

Gender	Materialism		
	High	Low	Chi Square
Male	53 (51.4%)	6 (5.9%).317	
Female	41 (39.8%)	3 (2.9%)	
Nationality			
Domestic	28 (28.6%)	2 (2%)	.758
International	63 (64.4%)	5 (5%)	

Managerial Implications

An important implication from this study is that high priced apparel brands have been quite successful in portraying and conveying an image of exclusivity and prestige. The other positive aspect of this image is that consumers were willing to purchase these brands mainly for the sake of that image. It would be interesting to observe if there are any huge differences in the perception and purchase intentions of the consumers from the developed and developing nations. Another angle which can be pursued by high priced apparel makers is, to have a brand that is valued and purchased by both the sexes equally. The results indicate that Armani appeals strongly to males and they are oriented towards purchasing this brand with less purchase interest for the females. This is quite interesting because Armani doesn't position or promote itself as a typical male brand, it tries to appeal to both the sexes, unlike Tommy Hilfiger which has two separate brands for males and females. This indicates that Armani has to alter its promotional strategy to have a broader appeal or follow Tommy and separate the brands for males and females Future studies can also focus on the differences in perceptions of consumers in different age groups. It will be interesting to note the perception of consumers who are above the age of 50 and fall into the baby boomer category. Are there similarities between this age group and the younger age group? The answer to this will open up several possibilities for brand repositioning from high priced apparel brands like Armani.

Conclusion

Though the study answered all the research questions in an effective manner, the small size of the sample presents a high risk for external validity. Probably the scale employed in the study and the way it is measured has to be refined. For example, measures that will assess the extent to which individuals use material possessions or goods to define themselves or their group behaviour will aid the researchers to examine and analyse in a broader sense, the relationships consumers have with material objects or certain brands.

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