The Mediating Role of Status Consumption on the Relationship of Materialism and Brand Engagement in Self-Concept

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Abstract: *Materialism plays a vital role in shaping consumer decision making and consumption process. It is investigated in the marketing literature from various perspectives. The current study takes account of materialism as a consumer personality trait. Further, it investigates the impact of materialism on brand engagement in self-concept through the mediating effect of status consumption in the designer clothing industry. The present study is constructed on Mowen's meta-theoretic model (3M). By using a survey based research design, 227 questionnaires collected from the customers of designer clothing. The structural equation modeling technique of partial least squares (SEM-PLS) was applied for data analysis. The findings show that status consumption mediates the relationship between materialism and brand engagement in self-concept. The direct relationship of materialism and brand engagement in self-concept has become insignificant because of the inclusion of status consumption as mediator. The study successfully investigated the impact of materialism on brand engagement in self-concept through status consumption.*

Index Terms: **Materialism, Status consumption, Brand engagement in self-concept.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Mowen [1] defines materialism as a consumer need for collection and possession of material goods. Belk [2] and Mowen [1] defined materialism as a personality trait. It is witnessed that the need to study materialism in the fields of consumer behaviour is growing over time. It is because of its significance and role in the field of marketing [3]. Materialism is associated with conspicuous or status consumption and brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) [4-9]. Although a host of studies can be found to investigate the relationship of materialism, status consumption and BESC however only a few attempted to investigate the association of materialism and BESC with the mediating role of status consumption [9-12]. The current study is an effort in this regard.

In the field of marketing, the materialism is studied for many reasons and from many perspectives. It has been examined as a predictor of product involvement, self-enhancement, status consumption and BESC [3, 9, 13, 14]. Eastman, et al. [15] found that materialism has a strong relationship with social status seeking tendency. Materialist consumers find success and happiness in possession of products and brands that signify status, self-expression and social standing. Flynn, et al. [9] investigated the association of materialism and status consumption and in turn the effect of status consumption on brand engagement. The current study further extends these efforts to designer clothing in Pakistan.

Following Belk [2] and Mowen [1], the current study aims at investigating the materialism as a personality trait. In the present study, researchers aim at proposing and examining the relationships by using Mowen [1] meta-theoretic model of motivation and personality (3M) as an underpinning theory. Mowen [1] suggests studying consumer behaviour along four hierarchies (elemental, compound, situational and surface traits). As many researchers constructed their conceptual models along these four hierarchies [9, 16-20] hence the current study also follows the same sequence. In this paper, the researchers construct their model along three hierarchies as an elemental trait (materialism), compound trait (status consumption) and situational trait (BESC) by following Flynn, et al. [9].

II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

A. Mowen's Metatheoretic Model of Motivation and Personality (3M)

Mowen [1] based his 3M model over the pillars of evolutionary psychology, trait theory, and control theory. It describes personality in the form of a hierarchy of motivational factors starting from a higher level of traits (Elemental) moving through compound and situational traits finally ends at surface traits [9]. Current study investigated materialism, status consumption and BESC as elemental, compound and situational traits respectively by following the lead of Flynn, et al. [9].

B. Materialism

Mowen [1] studied materialism as an important personality trait and took into

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account to construct his 3M model. Mowen [1] developed a unidimensional scale to measure materialism.. Eastman, et al. [15] found a strong relationship between materialism and social status seeking tendency. Materialist consumers find success and happiness in possession of products and brands that signify status, self-expression, and social standing. Consumers high on materialism believe that materialistic goods and services can transform their lives. Such consumers easily get ready to acquire debt to buy such goods. In this way, as already explained they involve themselves in financial troubles. Most of the times these are products to symbolize status like expensive cars etc. to boost the social standing or ego among peers [9, 21].

C. Status Consumption

Eastman, et al. [15] define status consumption as a consumer motivation to aspire improved social image via conspicuous consumption of status products. Status products are different than ordinary frequently purchased products as these are purchased and consumed to satisfy psychological, social and material needs [22].Eastman, et al. [15] empirically found that materialism has a strong relationship with social status seeking tendency. Materialist consumers find success and happiness in possession of products and brands that signify status, self-expression and social standing. Most of the times these are products to symbolize status to boost the social standing or ego among peers [9, 21]. Loulakis and Hill [23] investigated the relationship of materialism and social status in clothing and prove how it helps in signifying status to others. Flynn, et al. [9] studied the relationship of materialism as an elemental trait with status consumption as a compound trait.

Consequently, it is proposed that:

H1: Materialism has a positive and significant effect on status consumption

D. Brand Engagement in Self Concept

Sprott, et al. [25] define BESC as a consumer inclination to differentiate oneself by integrating a brand into one's self-concept. The authors argued that BESC is distinct from the concept of self-brand connection. As self-brand connection measures only the power of attachment of self with some particular brand; however, BESC viewed brands as integrated into the self-concept. Hence, the conceptualization developed by Sprott, et al. [25] is appropriate for the current study. Furthermore, BESC suggested the brands as integrated into a consumer's self-concept. Status products are also used to express one's self-concept or self-image [3]. [9] empirically investigated the association of status consumption and BESC and examined BESC as a situational trait.

H2: Status consumption has a positive and significant effect on BESC

E. Mediated Relationships

Flynn, et al. [9] investigated the association of materialism and status consumption and consequently of status consumption on BESC. Mediation of status consumption was also confirmed in this case. Goldsmith and Clark [7] and other scholars empirically studied the associations of brand engagement, materialism, and status consumption [10-12]. Materialism also positively influences BESC which further affects shopping positively [24, 25]. Goldsmith, et al. [3] empirically established that materialism, BESC, and status consumption has a positive effect on clothing involvement. The above stated direct associations of materialism with status consumption and BESC help researchers to propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Status consumption mediates the relationship between materialism and BESC

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Instruments

All measurements used in the current study are adopted from marketing and consumer behaviour literature. Materialism as a personality trait was measured along four items adopted from Licata, et al. [26]. It was originally developed and tested by Mowen [1]. Status consumption was measured by using the five-item unidimensional scale by Eastman, et al. [15], and it is widely used in marketing and consumer behaviour literature. BESC was measured by using the eight-item unidimensional scale developed by Sprott, et al. [25]. All scales have been used and validated multiple times in cultures at the global level.

B. Population, Sample and Data Collection

Respondents were the customers of designer clothing in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan. Islamabad was selected to be a representative city of the rest of the country. Mall intercept was employed in order to collect data from eight selected retail stores of leading brands in designer clothing.

Determination of sample size is one of the key decisions in empirical research. Many factors affect this decision like research objectives, population diversity and study limitations. A sample size larger than 30 and less than 500 is suitable for most research [27]. Hair, et al. [28] described that the sample size can also be determined from the ratio of the number of items in the questionnaire to the number of respondents. This ratio may be 1:5 or 1:10. Hence by later criterion the sample size for the current study was determined as 210 from the ratio of 1:10 (1 item=10 responses). As the research instrument was composed of 21 items hence 210 sample size was determined. To reach this number, 300 questionnaires were distributed; however 227 were found as complete for the use in further analysis.

Common method variance is an analysis that helps the researcher to determine the bias when the data is collected by using a single instrument and from the single source [29]. Harman's single factor test was used by applying principle component analysis technique without rotation [30]. Variance accounted for was 31.98% for the single factor that was less than 50%; hence it proves that the data is free from common method variance.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Data were analyzed by applying PLS-SEM through Smart PLS (v.3.2.7). At first, the measurement model was analyzed for reliability and validity of instruments. Afterward, structural model was run for hypothesis testing and mediation analysis.

Table I: Reliability and Validity statistics

	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
BESC	0.833	0.875	0.501
Materialism	0.807	0.868	0.624
SC	0.835	0.883	0.602

*BESC= Brand engagement in self concept *SC = Status consumption

A. Measurement Model

Measurement model helps to establish reliability and validity of all constructs used in the proposed model. The reliability of the survey instrument was ascertained with the help of Cronbach's Alfa(α) and composite reliability (CR). The suggested threshold value, in either case, is 0.7 or above [31]. Cronbach's Alpha and CR are above 0.7 (see table 1). Table 1 insert here

Convergent and discriminant validity was also established to confirm the validity of the measurements. Outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) were analyzed to ascertain convergent validity. As AVE values of all constructs were above 0.5 (see table 1) hence it established the convergent validity [32].

Table II: Square root of AVE(diagonal) and correlations

	BESC	Materialism	SC
BESC	**0.708**		
Materialism	0.295	**0.790**	
SC	0.524	0.380	**0.776**

For discriminant validity, the Fornell and Larcker [33] and cross-loadings criteria were employed. Fornell and Larcker [33] described that the square root of AVE of each construct should be greater than its highest correlation with the rest of the corresponding constructs. According to the values shown in table II, all constructs followed said criterion of Fornell and Larcker. The cross-loadings analysis further confirmed discriminant validity. As the outer loadings of all indicators of all constructs were greater than their cross-loadings (table III) on other constructs; hence it ascertained the discriminant validity once again [32].

B. Structural Model

The structural model was employed for hypothesis testing. All hypotheses were tested on the basis of path coefficients (β), the coefficient of determination (R^2) and level of significance (p and t-values). Hair, et al. [32] described that the value of β closer to 1 shows that the relationship is strong. The R^2 values measure the predictive powers of a model and can be strong (0.75), moderate (0.50) and weak (0.25). The relationship will only be significant if the t-value is 1.96 at 10% level of significance in the case of two-tailed tests [31]. The structural analysis of the current study showed that all direct paths (relationships) were positively related and statistically significant (see Table IV). Materialism was positively associated with status consumption. Status consumption was positively related to BESC.

Table III: Factor loadings and Cross Loadings determining Discriminant Validity

	BESC	Materialism	SC
BESC1	**0.643**	0.239	0.339
BESC3	**0.699**	0.213	0.372
BESC4	**0.684**	0.191	0.339
BESC5	**0.753**	0.206	0.419
BESC6	**0.74**	0.188	0.373
BESC7	**0.742**	0.243	0.393
BESC8	**0.688**	0.185	0.356
MAT1	0.073	**0.672**	0.175
MAT2	0.223	**0.785**	0.255
MAT3	0.242	**0.85**	0.353
MAT4	0.313	**0.841**	0.355
SC1	0.43	0.445	**0.801**
SC2	0.379	0.281	**0.807**
SC3	0.445	0.266	**0.817**
SC4	0.391	0.253	**0.744**
SC5	0.384	0.178	**0.703**

This overall model explained 48.2 percent variation in BESC. At individual level materialism explained 38 percent variations in status consumption and status consumption explained 48.2 % variations in BESC. These values of R^2 were of a moderate level [31]; however values above 0.20 are considered high in disciplines like consumer behavior [32]. Predictive relevance (Q^2) shows out of sample predictive powers of models. The blindfolding procedure was applied to calculate said values. Table V shows that all values of Q^2 were greater than zero which confirmed the predictive powers of the current model.

Table IV: Hypothesis testing

Path Relationships		β	t-Value	95% BCa-CI	
				LL	UL
H1	Mat→SC	0.380	7.476	0.304	0.471

H2	SC→BESC	0.48 2	7.915	0.387	0.58 6

** p>0.05, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit

Table V: The effect size

Variable	R^2	Q^2
Materialism	-	-
Status Consumption	0.144	0.077
BESC	0.286	0.131

C. Mediation Analysis

The present study used a bootstrapping procedure to analyze mediated relationships at 95% confidence level. It is a widely used method to test mediation in social sciences [34, 35]. The results of specific indirect effects given in table VI confirmed the role of status consumption as a mediating variable. As all relationships were found positive hence the mediation is complementary [32].

Table VI: Mediated Relationships

Mediated Path	β	t-Value	95% BCa-CI	
			LL	UL
H3	Mat→SC→BESC	0.18 3	5.035	0.12 4	0.24 0

LL=lower limit; UL= upper limit

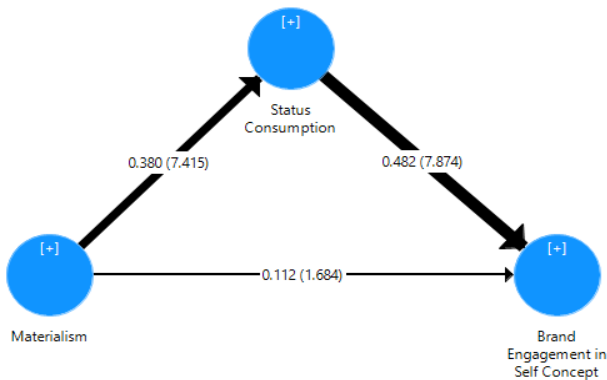
Fig. 1: Structural model results

V. DISCUSSION

A. Summary

The present study investigates the role of materialism in shaping consumer behavior. It studied the materialism as a consumer personality trait rather than a value for the customer. Mowen's (2000) 3M model was employed to understand the role of materialism systematically. More specifically, the researchers constructed a model to examine the mediating role of status consumption between the relationship of materialism and BESC hence the assessment of direct effects as well as mediating role of status consumption were the main objectives of this research paper.

Empirical findings not only confirmed previous findings but also substantiated the proposed mediated relationships [3, 9, 13, 36]. The present research also illuminated the worth of Mowen's 3M model in successfully examining the effect of broad personality traits to narrow situational traits.

B. Theoretical Implications

The present study contributes at three levels. Firstly, it studies the materialism as a personality trait by using the construct developed by Mowen [1], unlike previous researchers who studied it as customer value. Secondly, it investigates mediation to confirm the path from materialism to BESC through status consumption. Thirdly, it successfully applies Mowen [1] 3M model in this context. Direct relationships from materialism to status consumption and status consumption to BESC are confirmed and consistent to previous studies [3, 9, 13, 36]. The mediation of status consumption between materialism and BESC is consistent with previous literature.

C. Practical Implications

The findings of the present study are congruent to previous literature theoretically. Now Practical implications specifically for marketers of clothing brands are discussed here. The present study is very useful for those who are interested in the BESC of materialistic consumers. It suggests a systematic path to make the customers engaged in clothing brands. This is possible if the marketers of status-oriented clothing brands apply the tools of brand positioning as well as brand equity to construct such forceful images of their brands that can easily penetrate and become the part of the consumer's self. This research can also help marketers in designing the brand personalities of their brands and ultimately in target marketing. For those who are more focused on the dark side of materialism and status consumption, the present study points out the level of materialism and status consumption in consumers. A policy can be drafted to lower the level or intensity of materialism and related behaviors.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research also has limitations like many other empirical studies. The research was limited on three counts. Firstly the present research was cross-sectional and employed a mall intercept method to collect responses from designer clothing. It imposed a limit on the generalizability of the study. In future longitudinal or experimental designs can help to establish causality as well as the generalizability of results. Secondly, the model was focused on materialism as a predictor of status consumption and BESC as an outcome variable.

Moreover, the study investigated the mediation of status consumption only. In the future, the model can be extended by adding more predictors as well as outcome variables. Parallel mediating variables, as well as serial mediation, can also be introduced.

Thirdly, it was purely quantitative research. In the future, the mixed method approach can be applied to enrich the findings. Finally, the study can be conducted in other contexts, and cross-cultural comparisons can also be made by using the same model.

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