Materialism, Attitudes, and Social Media Usage and Their Impact on Purchase Intention of Luxury Fashion Goods Among American and Arab Young Generations

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Social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Foursquare provide consumers with tremendous opportunities to create and disseminate brand-related content and product usage information around the world. This study investigates whether materialism, an important construct of consumer behavior, is a consequence of social media usage, which also influences users’ attitudes toward social media advertising (SMADV) among American and Arab young social media users. In addition, this study examines the relationship between materialism and purchase intention of luxury fashion goods across American and Arab users. Overall, the results suggest that Arab social media users exhibited higher levels of materialism and social media usage as well as more favorable attitudes toward SMADV than did American users. In both samples, social media usage positively predicts materialism and users’ SMADV attitudes. Both samples showed positive relationships between materialism and purchase intention toward luxury fashion goods. Theoretical and managerial implications for global online advertisers are provided.

Keywords: materialism, social media advertising, purchase intention, luxury goods, Arab consumers

The role and importance that consumers place on possessions and consumption, namely, materialism, is an important area of study for advertisers. Past research has suggested that users’ consumption of traditional media is related to their level of materialism (Ger and Belk 1999; Goldberg and Gorn 1978) because the media provides consumers with values, norms, and behaviors—all central aspects of consumption. There has been a significant amount of research investigating the relationship between traditional forms of media and materialism, such as television and print advertising (Churchill and Moschis 1979; Lens, Pandelaere, and Warlop 2010; Richins 1987), and a handful of studies on the relationship between the Internet and materialism (Chan 2005; Chang and Zhang 2008; Jiang and Chia 2009). Yet there is a lack of understanding regarding the relationship between materialism and a popular newer form of media: social media.

This study examines whether consumers’ materialism value is associated with their usage of social media among users in varying cultural and economic market conditions. Specifically, the current study investigates whether social media usage is a significant predictor of materialism levels and users’ attitudes toward social media advertising (SMADV) among American and Arab young social media users. In addition, the relationship between users’ materialism levels and purchase intentions toward fashion luxury items is also examined between both consumer groups.

Social media outlets such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Happy Network in China, and Cyworld in South Korea provide online advertisers with new ways to build long-term relationships with consumers in a way that is engaging and targeted (Chen and Haley 2010; Chu 2011; Chu and Kim 2011; Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright 2008; Eckler and Bolls 2011; Gangadharbatla 2008; Paek et al. 2011). For this reason, advertising expenditures for SMADV is predicted to reach $8.09 billion by 2012 worldwide (eMarketer 2011a). The Internet Advertising...
Going Global: Social Media in the Middle East and the United States

The Middle East region is comprised of 12 Arab countries, specifically Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine (the Gaza Strip and West Bank), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen. Enhanced regional economic performance has led to increased consumer media spending and advertising revenues (Dubai Press Club 2009). The regional advertising market, estimated at $13.733 million grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.4% in 2010 (Pan Arab Research Center 2011). Industry experts estimated that online advertising expenditures were approximately $160 million in 2011, which represents a 55% annual growth rate (Media Middle East 2010). It is said that consumers within the region have similar cultural values, norms, and beliefs (Karande, Almurshideed, and Al-Olayan 2006), which can be attributed to a shared language, religion, and geographic proximity (Cleveland 1964).

Social Media Al Arabia

International social media outlets, primarily originating from the United States, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, have the highest usage rates within the Middle East region (Dubai Press Club 2009). As social media in the Arab region evolves from the early stages of adoption, local social websites are gaining traction, including platforms such as Jeeran, a social site that provides Arabic content and interface. However, at present, global social media leaders such as Facebook still maintain the lead position in terms of popularity and new users in the Arab region. For example, Twitter recently witnessed a rapid influx of users from the Arab region. The increase of Twitter users in the region can be attributed to the rise of the civil movements often referred to as the Arab Spring, which corresponds to social protests and demonstrations occurring in the Arab region (particularly Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Bahrain) starting in December 2010 (Dubai School of Government 2011a; Ghannam 2011). While government restrictions on social media platforms remain a barrier to usage, recent reports show that Arab users are utilizing proxy sites and other technologies to circumvent these structural impediments. In fact, countries with high levels of Internet restrictions conversely also had relatively high penetration rates for popular social media such as Facebook and Twitter (Dubai School of Government 2011a).

Similar to many emerging markets the Middle East region is characterized demographically by a “youth bulge” (Mahajan, Banga, and Gunther 2005), which has an immense impact on social media usage. For example, it is estimated that approximately 75% of Facebook users from the Arab region are between the ages of 19 and 29 (Dubai School of Government 2011b) and are similar in terms of media usage behaviors and cultural values across the Arab region (Dubai Press Club 2009). The “Net generation” tends to spend a large proportion of their discretionary incomes on media consumption and show a high propensity...
toward digital technologies compared to older cohorts. This underscores potential growth for the medium as well as increased opportunities for marketers to use social media to target young consumers. In contrast to the gender breakdown of social media users in America, social media usage within the Arab region is skewed toward males (Dubai School of Government 2011b).

As noted by Telser (1971) and Wurff, Bakker, and Picard (2008), advertising growth closely corresponds to economic activity. In the past 20 years the UAE has played an important economic role as a major trading center for the Middle East region (Business Monitor International 2009). With regard to social media usage, the UAE represents more than 40% of all users in the Middle East (Malin 2009) and also has the second highest rate of membership of social media globally (Dubai School of Government 2011a, 2011b). In addition, the UAE hosts almost 60% of the Middle East region’s mobile application development (Dubai Press Club 2009), signaling the importance of this market regionally with respect to digital media. In light of the ongoing discussion the UAE was regarded as an appropriate market regionally with respect to digital media. In light of the ongoing discussion the UAE was regarded as an appropriate market in which to examine consumer values, attitudes, and usage behaviors toward social media in the Arab region.

In contrast, the United States is the leading global economy with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of $47,400 (Central Intelligence Agency 2013). With regard to advertising expenditures worldwide, the United States is the leading advertising market, with an annual growth rate of 4% (Nielsen 2010). According to eMarketer.com (2009), online advertising expenditures in the United States is projected to reach $34.0 billion by 2014. Social media is one of the leading online activities for American Internet users (Madden 2010). The majority of social media users are young adults; recent reports indicated that nearly 70% of American Internet users between 18 and 29 year olds use social media (Lenhart et al. 2010). With increasing advertising spending on social media by global brands, it is imperative to examine whether differences exist in materialistic values, SMADV attitudes, and social media usage between these two important consumer groups, namely Arab and American young social media users.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Materialism

Materialism has been defined as the belief that goods and money is the central path to happiness and social progress (Belk and Pollay 1985a, 1985b). Richins and Dawson (1992) defined materialism as a “set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one’s life” (p. 308). Specifically, these authors defined three key components in the materialism construct: (1) acquisition centrality, (2) acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and (3) possession-defined success.

Acquisition centrality refers to the central importance placed by a consumer on the pursuit of possessions. In this vein, several scholars view materialism as a lifestyle choice that dedicates how consumers choose to live their daily lives as well as how they set their long-term life goals (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Second, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness is explained as the driving force behind the search for and value of possessions. Individuals that possess materialistic values pursue goods with the rationale that acquiring possessions will help them achieve a heightened sense of well-being and satisfaction in life (Ward and Wackman 1971). Finally, possession-defined success is described as the tendency by materialists to measure success in terms of their possessions. That is, materialists “view themselves as successful to the extent that they can possess products that project desired images” (Richins and Dawson 1992, p. 305).

In a recent study, Cleveland, Laroche, and Papadopoulos (2009) stated that materialism values may differ across consumption contexts because branded products assume different meanings to various individuals. These differences can be attributed to varying socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors (Griffin, Babin, and Christensen 2004). In another study, Eastman and colleagues (1997) found that although consumers across cultural and economic conditions shared similar responses to materialism and consumption of status or luxury products, the respondents across countries varied in terms of their materialism levels. Ger and Belk (1999) noted that higher levels of materialism can be found in societies undergoing socioeconomic and cultural change. Wong, Chung, and Zaichkowski (1999) reported that consumers in Hong Kong experiencing a surge in socioeconomic status (SES) were likely to embrace self-image and lifestyle changes. In another study investigating materialism among Russian immigrants in the United States, Lerman and Maxwell (2006) found that at the time of immigration Russian consumers, who hailed from a nonconsumer society, did not differ in terms of materialism levels compared to American consumers. These mixed findings underscore the need for more research across different economic, social, and cultural contexts.

Moreover, materialism has become a growing issue of concern with regard to consumers in emerging markets (Chan 2005; Ger and Belk 1999; Lee and Workman 2011; Podoshen, Li, and Zhang 2011). In recent times, young Arab consumers have experienced increased SES (Eid 2010) and access to new forms of Western media, including social media via rapid adoption of Internet and mobile devices (Karidy and Mourad 2010). Kalliny and Gentry (2007) have noted that Arab culture is changing due to the influx of Western media influences. This uptake of international media refers to the consumption of media vehicles and channels that provide content produced outside of the Middle East—most notably, Western television series, Hollywood movies, entertainment programs, music, and news content. Consumers, particularly young adults who are the heaviest users of social media, may search, produce, and respond to multiple types of information, including brand- and consumption-related messages. The convergence of traditional forms of international media (e.g., satellite television, radio, and print) coupled with new media (e.g., social media, mobile, and Internet-facilitated
communications) has created a “hypermedia space” that may impact social and cultural values (Kraidy 2007). The effect of this may be similar to findings in other emerging markets such as China, where young consumers have adopted a more consumption-oriented lifestyle, shifting toward higher materialistic values (Chan 2005; Pollay, Tse, and Wang 1990).

On the other hand, 63.7% of Americans who had access to the Internet used social media in 2011 (eMarketer 2011b). In particular, Internet users under age 35 dominate usage, activity, and engagement. Although college students around the world are actively using social media as a major channel to get product information and advertising messages that lead to higher levels of materialism (The World Unplugged 2011), materialism is a socially specific concept that varies according to the cultural values of a particular society (Holt 1998). With the individualistic cultural orientation in the United States (Hofstede 1980), Americans users are less concerned with being part of a larger group and group norms, and therefore American social media users may not consider possessions important as indicators of success and necessary for happiness, which are important.

**H1.** Arab young social media users will have a higher level of materialism compared to their American counterparts.

**Attitude Toward Social Media Advertising**

Several studies have investigated the relationship between advertising attitudes in general across varying cultural and economic contexts. These studies have noted that consumers from developing countries tend to have more positive attitudes toward advertising in general (La Ferle, Edwards, and Lee 2008; Pierce 1971). For example, in examining the role of beliefs and attitudes regarding online advertising in the United States and Romania, Ying and Sun (2010) noted that, compared to American consumers, Romanian consumers had a more favorable attitude toward online advertising. These authors attributed this finding to the perceived link between economic development, opening up of the media, and advertising among consumers. Similarly, La Ferle, Edwards, and Lee (2008) noted that compared to their U.S. counterparts, consumers in China and Taiwan were more positive in terms of their attitudes toward advertising. With respect to Central and Eastern European countries, Petrovici and Marinov (2007) found that consumers from newly developing economies such as Romania and Bulgaria also tended to hold favorable opinions of advertising in general.

The young Arab generation from the Middle East region has witnessed increased economic expansion over the past 20 years, providing market expansion opportunities for global business (Business Monitor International 2009). Over the past 10 years, the aggregate nominal GDP for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region grew by 300% (Eid 2010). On the other hand, the U.S. economy is expected to experience slow expansion, with 2% to 2.3% growth in 2012 (Kiplinger.com 2012). Therefore, both markets have witnessed distinct economic patterns. As an emerging market region, where Arab consumers are witnessing increasing socioeconomic status and discretionary incomes, the second hypothesis predicted the following:

**H2.** Arab young social media users will have a more positive attitude toward SMADV compared to their American counterparts.

**Materialism, Social Media Usage, and Attitudes Toward Social Media Advertising**

Materialism is an important consumption-related consumer value that has been positively linked to media consumption. Several studies have found a positive relationship between materialism and television viewing (Churchill and Moschis 1979; Goldberg and Gorn 1978; Richins 1987). Other studies have found increased materialism in symbols, cues, and appeals used in national and international magazines (Belk and Pollay 1985a, 1985b). Recently, Chang and Zhang (2008) extended the materialism construct to the area of cyberspace, noting that materialism was a contributing factor in user attitudes and motivations toward online gaming. Others, such as Park, Burns, and Rabolt (2007), found that materialism was an important motivational factor in understanding consumer attitudes and behaviors toward Internet purchases. Thus, past research has indicated that individuals with high levels of materialism tend to be heavy users of media.

Social comparison theory (SCT) has often been used as a theoretical lens through which scholars have sought to understand the relationship between media usage and materialism values. Indeed, Richins (1995) and others such as Harmon (2001) have noted that users often engage in comparison between themselves and “idealized” messages found in mass media outlets. Two important sources of social comparison within the SCT framework include peer communication and idealized media images (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004), both of which can be found within the social media format. While Internet-based marketing communications have traditionally been used as an information-centric tactic, new applications of online platforms are increasingly being used in brand building to convey brand symbolism or consumption-related attitudes (Belch and Belch 2009). Internet mediums that allow rich media format, such as social media, enable marketers to provide users with content that combines sight, sound, and motion, much like television, but also include consumer interaction and feedback. In addition, with the rise in usage of interactive technologies such as social media, many users identify and seek support from online peer groups (Caplan and Turner 2007; Steinkuehler and Williams 2006) as well as integrate offline social relationships and lifestyle facets into their online identities. In a recent article Lehdonvirta (2010) argued that online arenas have increasingly become a place where material possessions and consumption styles are shared between users virtually.

Yet there is a lack of research examining the relationship between social media usage and materialism. Given that social media usage corresponds to a large proportion of time spent online, it is posited that social media usage and users’ level of materialism will be positively related for both American and Arab users. While cultural values may serve as an important antecedent to attitudes and behaviors (Kalliny and Gentry 2007), it is argued that the relationships between social media usage and
materialism may remain consistent across geographic borders because global consumers have been found to share similar lifestyles, media patterns, and behaviors (Ger 1999). Therefore, the following hypothesis was reached:

H3a. Social media usage will be positively and significantly related to materialism for American and Arab social media users.

Consumer attitudes toward advertising in general have received much attention in advertising research literature (see Barksdale and Darden 1972; Durvasula et al. 1993). Past research has established that advertising attitudes may play an important role in consumer behavior (Lavidge and Steiner 1961). Indeed, empirical evidence from a body of research (e.g., MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986) suggests that advertising attitudes have an impact on purchase intention and brand attitudes. Past studies examining consumer attitudes toward online advertising in general have noted a similar usage-attitude pattern across cultural and economic settings (e.g., Stevenson, Bruner, and Kumar 2000; Wang et al. 2009; Wang and Sun 2010; Wolin, Korgaonkar, and Lund 2002). Yet there is a lack of investigation on consumer attitudes toward SMADV.

Previous research has noted that increased media usage is positively associated with high scores in advertising beliefs (Churchill and Moschis 1979; Richins 1987). More recently, in a study about consumer attitudes toward product placement in movies, de Gregorio and Sung (2010) found that the frequency of movie watching was positively related to consumer attitudes toward product placements. The authors draw upon Zajonc’s (1968) mere exposure effect, advocating that increased consumer familiarity with the medium is likely to impact their attitudes toward product placement. Several studies have found similar effects with regard to other forms of media (Smith and Moschis 1985). Recently, Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) noted that consumer attitudes toward user-generated content were positively related with their level of user-generated medium usage. Given the increased media expenditures for SMADV (IAB 2009) and the unique engagement and interactive features of this type of advertising, the current study extends the aforementioned line of research to SMADV. Thus the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3b. Social media usage will be positively and significantly related to attitudes toward SMADV for American and Arab young social media users.

Materialism and Purchase Intention of Luxury Fashion Goods

Dubois and Duquesne (1993) and de Mooij (2004) noted that consumers who purchase luxury goods often consume these products as a means to express their social status, success, and cultural group membership. The construct of materialism is posited to have a positive relationship with purchase intention of luxury goods because materialists tend to place a high level of importance on their personal possessions and products to indicate their social status (Eastman et al. 1997; Tai and Tam 1996). For example, Heaney, Goldsmith, and Jusoh (2005) examined the relationship between materialism, status consumption, and social comparison information among Malaysian consumers and found that materialism was positively and significantly related to consumption of status-related products.

As the portion of time spent on social media increases (eMarketer 2011a, 2011b), marketers of luxury brands are looking toward online platforms, such as social media, as a means to engage consumers with brand messages and for the purposes of e-commerce (Okonkwo 2009). In fact, social media promotional and retail strategies are becoming increasingly important for luxury brands (Balwani 2009), particularly in targeting young adult consumers. Popular luxury brands such as Burberry have increased efforts in SMADV and retail options in an effort to target young consumers in emerging markets such as China (Burkitt 2011). Similarly, digitally savvy millennials in the United States are future luxury buyers, causing brands such as Hermès and Chanel to delve into U.S.-based social network sites including Facebook and Twitter (Ortved 2011). With respect to the Arab world, currently several industry initiatives are budding within the region that involve the use of social media to target young consumers, particularly within the travel and fashion industries. These include marketing communications and SMADV efforts in social media from the leading UAE hospitality brand Jumeirah and luxury fashion goods (Nabbout 2012; Jumeirah Group 2011).

Bearing in mind these industry trends, the current study examined the relationship between materialism and purchase intention toward luxury products among American and Arab social media users. Past research has shown the link between materialism and consumption of status goods or luxury products is consistent across varying cultural and economic conditions (Eastman et al. 1997). Indeed, a growing stream of research maintains that consumer behavior, such as purchase intention, of particular segments maybe be consistent across countries (Farley and Lehmann 1986). Specifically, research has shown that groups or segments of consumers across national boundaries may have more similarities with one another than to other consumer groups with segments within a single country (Hassan and Katsanis 1994). Thus, it is proposed that this shift toward materialistic values will be related to purchasing intentions and behaviors of luxury goods, which are a symbol of prosperity. In particular, fashion items are considered as socially consumed goods that are appearance related and thus an important category of conspicuous consumption (Richins 1995).

H4. Materialism will be positively and significantly related to intention to purchase luxury fashion goods for American and Arab young social media users.

METHOD

Sampling and Data Collection

A self-administered online questionnaire was developed to examine the aforementioned hypotheses. Data were obtained from two university student samples from the United States and
United Arab Emirates. Specifically, a major university located in the Midwest region of the United States and a university in the metropolitan area of Dubai, UAE, were selected.

Previous research has shown that, compared to other user groups, college students spend the most time online (Cowart and Goldsmith 2007). As noted, recent reports indicate that more than 70% of American Internet users between 18 and 29 years old use social media (Lenhart et al. 2010). In addition, Jones (2002) and Lenhart (2009) noted that young adult users (aged 18 to 24) and college students tend to have higher levels of access to the Internet compared to other consumer cohorts in the United States. Furthermore, results from past studies suggest that American college users have a high level of online purchasing frequency (Lester, Forman, and Loyd 2005), thus making this set of consumers an important market segment to study. Others such as Monen (2008) noted that, with respect to the UAE, approximately half of its national Internet users log on to social media regularly, with college students comprising a segment most likely to be active users. With regard to the Middle East, young consumers represent a high percentage of the total population—in fact, the “under-25, ‘net generation’ makes up around 35 percent to 47 percent of total population” (Dubai Press Club 2009, p. 7) and tends to be homogenous in terms of online behaviors and preferences for online media consumption. Based on the aforementioned reasons a student sample was deemed appropriate for the current study.

Subjects self-selected to participate in the study. They were provided with the survey link where they completed the online questionnaire. In the United States, 400 undergraduate students in four introductory communication classes were e-mailed an invitation to participate in the survey. Students were informed that participation in this study was voluntary and that course credit would be offered as compensation for participation. Of 347 surveys that were completed, 306 usable responses were employed in the data analysis after eliminating incomplete responses. In the UAE, 537 study participants were recruited from two introductory business classes and were also offered course credit as compensation for participation in the study. As the current study focused on young Arab consumers, participants who identified themselves as Arab and from one of a specific list of associated countries of origin (i.e., Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia, Somalia, Libya, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar) were selected for the study. Thus, 312 surveys were completed and useful for data analysis.

Measurement Instrument

First, the definition of SMADV was provided to the survey participants at the beginning of the questionnaire. Specifically, SMADV is defined as any marketer-generated, brand-related information in social media, including brand profile pages, sponsored news feeds, display ads, and search ads. Measurement scales used in the current study were adopted from past studies, including materialism (Richins and Dawson 1992), attitudes toward SMADV (Wolin, Korgaonkar, and Lund 2002), social media usage (La Ferle, Edwards, and Lee 2000), purchase intention of luxury goods (Yoo and Lee 2009), and demographic measures.

The Material Values Scale (MVS) developed by Richins and Dawson (1992) was used to measure materialism. The MVS has been widely used over the past decade and has produced consistent results both in national and international research (see Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Eastman et al. 1997). The MVS scale measures the three dimensions of materialism: (1) centrality of objects, (2) material possessions as a symbol of success, and (3) material possessions in the pursuit of happiness. In this study, Materialism was measured by 18 items of the MVS; these items refer to a person’s perception of objects and goods and services. These statements included “Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions,” “Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure,” and “I would be happier if I owned nicer things.” Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the statements based on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Disagree very much, 5 = Strongly agree).

Attitudes toward SMADV was assessed using four attitudinal items adopted from Wolin, Korgaonkar, and Lund (2002). Each item was measured on a 5-point scale (e.g., 1 = Bad, 5 = Good) and was derived from Mittal (1994) and Ducoffe’s (1996) well-established advertising attitude scales. La Ferle, Edwards, and Lee’s (2000) media usage scale was adapted to examine social media usage. Past research suggests it is easier and more accurate for respondents to provide an estimation of media usage from the previous day rather than estimating a weekly average (Bechtel, Acheaphol, and Akers 1972; La Ferle, Edwards, and Lee 2000; Sun, Hullman, and Wang 2011). For this reason, Social Media Usage was assessed by asking participants to provide media usage information from the previous day (e.g., “How much time did you spend on social media yesterday?”). To assess usage of different social media platforms, respondents were asked to indicate the time they spent on the following six categories: social networking sites (e.g., Facebook and MySpace), microblogging sites (e.g., Twitter), photo-sharing sites (e.g., Flickr and Snapfish), video-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube and Hulu), wiki sites (e.g., Wikipedia), and others. Social media usage was measured by a 10-point scale that ranged from 0 through More than 8 hours.

In addition, following Bush and Gilbert (2002), Absorption with Social Media was measured using a four-item, 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Unlikely, 5 = Likely). The Social Media Intensity scale was adopted from Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007), which assessed (1) users’ number of friends on their social networks and (2) the amount of time users spent per day on each social media site. Other items on the scale were measured using a 5-point, Likert type scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree).

To examine respondents’ Purchase Intention toward Luxury Goods, Yoo and Lee’s (2009) 5-item scale was used.
Specifically, respondents were asked to answer the question “How much would you like to purchase x in the future?” with choices from the following luxury brands Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Chanel, Rolex, and Hermès used in place of the variable x. The sample of luxury brands included were ranked as the top-five leading global luxury brands through the recent report on the Leading Luxury Brands 2008 (Interbrand 2008). In addition, past research has shown positive relationships between materialism and user inclination and frequency of fashion-related purchases (Lee and Workman 2011), thus the selected brands were deemed appropriate in the context of the current study. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Last, the questionnaire also examined demographic variables. Respondents were asked a series of demographic questions including cultural background (Arab versus non-Arabs), country of origin, age, gender, education level, and personal income.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results: Sample Characteristics and Social Media Usage

First, descriptive statistics were conducted to examine respondents’ demographic characteristics including gender, age, personal income, country of origin, and ethnicity in the Arab and American samples. Among the 312 Arab respondents, countries of origin included UAE (25.5%), Lebanon (17.0%), Egypt (9.9%), Syria (8.3%), Saudi Arabia (6.9%), Palestine (6.7%), Jordan (6.4%), Yemen (1.6%), and others (17.7%). In terms of gender, 59% of the respondents were male and 41% female. More than half (52.6%) of the Arab respondents were between 21 and 30 years of age, and 46.8% were under 20 year old. As for personal income (including family allowance), 43.2% of Arab respondents reported a monthly personal income of more than $1,000, and one-quarter of participants indicated a personal allowance of between $601 and $1,000; in addition, 31.8% reported a personal income of $600 or less.

In the United States, 75.8% of the respondents were Caucasian, followed by Asian American (11.4%), African American (4.2%), Native American (3.9%), and Hispanic or Latino (3.3%). As for gender, 42.8% of the respondents were male and 57.2% female. In addition, 65.0% of the American respondents were between 21 and 30 years old, and 34.3% were under 20 years. In regard to monthly personal income, 8.8% of the American respondents indicated a personal income of more than $1,000, while 15% of participants reported a personal allowance of between $601 and $1,000; an additional 76.2% of the subjects reported a personal income of less than $600. Demographic information of the sample is presented in Table 1.

Second, social media usage across the Arab world and the United States was examined. The t-test results in Table 2 indicated that overall Arab participants (M = 3.27) had a higher tendency to use social media than their American counterparts (M = 2.38) (t (1,616) = −7.09, p < .001). Specifically, the results showed that Arab respondents spent one to three hours on social media per day on average, whereas American respondents spent an average of two or fewer hours on social media on a daily basis. In regard to absorption with social media activity, the results indicated no significant difference between Arab and American participants (Arab: M = 3.10, American: M = 3.16, t (1,616) = .73, p = .47).

In terms of social media intensity, the results indicated that overall Arab users had a higher level of social media intensity than those in the United States. Specifically, the results suggested that American users tend to use social networking sites (American: M = 4.06, Arab: M = 3.56, t (1,616) = 6.11, p < .001) more than their Arab counterparts. On the other hand, Arab respondents had a higher tendency to use microblogging sites (Arab: M = 2.44, American: M = 1.68, t (1,616) = −9.30, p < .001), photo-sharing sites (Arab: M = 2.45, American: M = 1.62, t (1,616) = −9.78, p < .001), video-sharing sites (Arab: M = 3.0, American: M = 2.46, t (1,616) = −7.00, p < .001), and wiki sites (Arab: M = 2.64, American: M = 2.12, t (1,616) = −6.88, p < .001) than their American counterparts.

Hypothesis Testing

Prior to testing the proposed research hypotheses, reliability was assessed with Cronbach’s alpha for the Arab and American samples. The internal reliability for each scale measuring major variables appeared to be acceptable, as can be seen in the tables in this article. Further, we created an index for each variable by averaging items tapping the same construct.

To determine how materialism, attitudes toward SMADV, and social media usage vary across Arab and American respondents, descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests were used. Next, a structural equation model (SEM) was set up to examine the potential relationships among materialism, attitudes, and social media usage and explore any similarities and differences in such relationships between the two markets using multiple-group analysis. In addition, the SEM included a pathway linking materialism to purchase intention of luxury goods.

Hypothesis 1: Materialism Among Arab and American Users

The first hypothesis examined whether levels of materialism differ between Arab and American social media users. Overall, results from the independent samples t-tests suggested that Arab participants (M = 3.14) had a higher level of materialism than their American counterparts (M = 3.04) (t (1,616) = −2.87, p < .01). When examining the three subconstructs of materialism individually (symbol of success, centrality of objects, and pursuit of happiness), Arab respondents exhibited a significantly higher level of using material possessions as a symbol of success (Arab: M = 3.06, American: M = 2.92, t (1,616) = −3.03, p < .01) and centrality of objects (Arab: M = 3.13, American: M = 3.00, t (1,616) = −3.75, p < .001). On the other hand, no significant difference was observed for the pursuit of happiness construct (Arab: M = 3.23, American: M = 3.20,
### TABLE 1
Sample Demographic Characteristics

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Arab (%)</th>
<th>American (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sample composition</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>25.5</td>
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<td>Lebanon</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>Palestine</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20 years</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 30 years</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 40 years</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 41 years</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal monthly income</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $200</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$201 to $400</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$401 to $600</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$601 to $800</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$801 to $1000</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1000 to $1200</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1201 to $1400</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1401 to $1600</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $1600</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Arab n = 312; American n = 306.*

### TABLE 2
Social Media Usage Among Arab and American Users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability α</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Arab</th>
<th>American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall social media usage</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.27 (.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absorption with social media activity</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>3.10 (.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media intensity</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.82 (.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networking sites</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>3.56 (1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microblogging sites</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>2.44 (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photosharing sites</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>2.45 (1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video sharing sites</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>3.01 (.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikis sites</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>2.64 (.94)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Social networking sites enable users to visualize and articulate their social network and engage in social interactions in an interactive and multimodal form over the Internet. Microblogging sites consist of time-stamped entries that appear in reverse chronological order. Photo-sharing sites allow users to post, share, and view photo content. Video-sharing sites are a form of content sharing communities, which allow users to share and view video content. Wiki sites allow users to freely create, change, and edit webpage content using any web browser.*

***Significant at .001.
group analysis. The model’s Chi-square was 2366.565, which
confirmed hypothesis 2. The second hypothesis investigated whether differences ex-
 sist in attitudes toward SMADV between Arab and American users. Another independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the two samples. As shown in Table 3, Arab respondents reported having significantly more favorable attitudes toward SMADV than American respondents (Arab: M = 3.29, American: M = 3.07, t (1,616) = −3.30, p < .01), which confirmed hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3: Relationships Among Materialism, Attitudes, and Social Media Usage

The third hypothesis examined the potential linkage among materialism, attitudes toward SMADV, and social media usage among Arab and American users. The SEM was set up for both the Arab sample as well as the U.S. sample using multiple-group analysis. The model’s Chi-square was 2366.565, which was significant (p < 0.01), with a root mean square error of approximation of 0.063, indicating fairly good model fit. The result suggests that the relationship between materialism and social media usage is significant (CR = 4.044, p < .001) for Arabs as well as for Americans (CR = 3.373, p < .001). Arab users’ social media usage (β = 0.389, SE = .096) was a significant predictor of materialism. The relationship between social media usage and attitudes toward SMADV among Arab users was also found to be significant (CR = 2.370, p < .05). The results indicate that social media usage (β = 1.133, SE = .478) is also a significantly predictive variable of attitude toward SMADV among Arab users.

A similar pattern was observed in the U.S. sample. In examining the relationship between materialism and social media usage, the result indicated that the relationship is significant. That is, social media usage (β = 0.446, SE = .132) is a significant predictor of materialism. In addition, the relationship between attitudes toward SMADV and social media usage was similarly significant (CR = 3.420, p < .001). American users’ social media usage (β = .567, SE = .116) significantly predicted their attitude toward SMADV. Taken together, hypothesis 3a and hypothesis 3b were supported. The results are illustrated in Table 4.

Hypothesis 4: Relationships Among Materialism and Purchase Intention of Luxury Goods

The next hypothesis explored the potential relationship between materialism and purchase intention of luxury goods among Arab and American social media users. Using the SEM set up previously, the relationship for the Arab sample was found to be significant (CR = 6.961, p < .001). Arab users’ materialistic value (β = 1.002, SE = .144) was a significant predictor of purchase intention of luxury goods. When examining the relationship between materialism and purchase intention among American users, it was found to be significant (CR = 6.207, p < .001) as well. The results showed that materialism (β = .909, SE = .146) significantly predicts American users’ purchase intention of luxury goods. Thus, hypothesis 4 was supported.

DISCUSSION

This study presents an initial attempt to examine whether consumers’ materialism value is associated with their usage of new forms of interactive advertising media. Specifically, the current study investigates whether social media usage is a significant predictor of materialism levels and users’ attitude toward

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability α</th>
<th>Arab</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total materialism</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.14 (.50)</td>
<td>3.04 (.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol of success</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>3.06 (.60)</td>
<td>2.92 (.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrality of object</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>3.13 (.51)</td>
<td>3.00 (.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuit of happiness</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>3.23 (.75)</td>
<td>3.20 (.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward SMADV</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>3.29 (.81)</td>
<td>3.07 (.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, do you consider social media advertising a good or bad thing?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.46 (.98)</td>
<td>3.27 (.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, do you like or dislike social media advertising?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.34 (1.02)</td>
<td>3.00 (.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider social media advertising . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.23 (.95)</td>
<td>3.15 (.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To me, social media advertising is . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.16 (.93)</td>
<td>2.88 (.81)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Significant at .01; ***Significant at .001.

t (1,877) = −.63, p = .53) between the two samples. Thus, hypothesis 1 was partially supported. Table 3 provides results of t-tests.
SMADV among American and Arab young social media users. In addition, this study also explored the relationship between users’ materialism levels and purchase intentions toward fashion luxury items across two varying cultural groups. Overall, the results suggest that young Arab social media users exhibited a higher level of materialism, more favorable attitudes toward SMADV, and more social media usage than their American counterparts. In addition, social media usage is a significant predictor of materialism, whereas usage behavior is also positively related to users’ SMADV attitudes among both groups. The results further suggested that materialism predicts purchase intention of luxury goods among American and Arab consumers. These findings offer both theoretical and managerial insights into interactive advertising on a global scale.

Previous research has shown that individuals with high materialism values are more likely to be interested in advertising messaging and new products (Goldberg et al. 2003) and are heavy users of mass media (Belk and Pollay 1985a, 1985b). Given increased global social media usage patterns, it is suggested that individuals with high levels of materialism may be a captive and lucrative audience for social media advertisers. Thus, understanding the relationship between social media usage and materialism offers practitioners new insights for segmentation and the development of relevant promotional content. Findings from the current study showed that social media usage was a significant predictor of materialism as well as favorable attitudes toward SMADV among Arab and American young users. Furthermore, results indicated that materialism was a significant predictor of social media users’ intent to purchase luxury products in both markets. These findings extend previous research on the link between media usage and materialism, as well as materialism and purchase intentions for luxury goods to online media platforms, particularly social media. In light of the current results, users across different cultural and economic situations appear to share similarities in terms of behaviors while exhibiting differences in their attitudes and values. Specifically, social media usage was found to be a significant predictor of materialism and positive evaluations of SMADV across markets. These results provide empirical evidence to suggest that advertisers may be well served to have global synergies in their social media marketing efforts and suggest that standardized elements of social media campaign may be appropriate when segmenting consumers via values, in other words, materialism. In addition, results suggest that promotional efforts such as SMADV should be complemented with e-retail efforts on social media for luxury brands.

Yet, as past research suggested, the context in which content is consumed has an impact on the recipients’ attitude and perceptions (Edwards, Lee, and La Ferle 2009). In particular, the materialism construct appears to have differences in meanings across markets. Results showed that Arab users placed higher emphasis on the centrality of goods in their lives and the use of possessions to indicate social success compared to their American counterparts. From a managerial perspective, these findings offer important considerations for online advertisers in terms of creative development. Specifically, advertisers may need to adjust their message strategies in their advertising appeals across markets. In addition, the notion that consumption leads to happiness was consistent across groups and may be employed as a theme in centralized aspects of campaigns; more targeted efforts will need to address message elements dealing with centrality of goods and status.

As a region home to many emerging markets and developing nations, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, with expanding media and advertising industries it is not surprising that Arab young adults displayed higher levels of materialism than American young adults; such a finding underscores the desire of these consumers to be integrated into the global marketplace (Kraidy 2007). Similarly, in accordance to past research on SES and attitudes toward advertising in general, Arab young adults were found to have more positive attitudes toward SMADV compared to American young adults. From a cultural perspective it has been noted that Arab consumers place importance on receiving product information through social sources such as family, peers, and friends (Al-Olayan and Karande 2000) thus, applying this preference on a virtual scale, social media may satisfy these unique consumer characteristics.

Abernethy and Franke (1996) and Taylor (2005) noted a lack of research focusing on consumers in the Middle East, despite the growing importance of these emerging markets to businesses.
(Karande, Almurshidee, and Al-Olayan 2006). Thus, the current study makes contributions to the understanding of consumer attitudes and behaviors in an underresearched consumer market. The Net-savvy youth segment represents a large proportion of regional populations in the Middle East and is a lucrative market for businesses (Media Middle East 2010). Given the positive consumer attitudes toward SMADV among Arab users, marketers may wish to allocate more of their online advertising efforts toward social media. In light of past research (Lavidge and Steiner 1961; Stevenson, Bruner, and Kumar 2000), it is likely that message recall and attendance will be favorable.

A few limitations in this study need consideration. First, this study analyzed cross-sectional data, which limits our understanding about causality. Materialism is a value that may change over time. To better demonstrate the causal relationship among variables, future studies should employ experimental or longitudinal designs to shed more light on the association between social media usage, materialism, and attitude. Second, despite the higher levels of social media usage and online purchase frequency among the young generation (Lenhart et al. 2010; Lester, Forman, and Loyd 2005; Menon 2008), the results from the college student sample used in this study cannot be generalized to the whole social media population in the United States and Arab world. Future research should use samples that consist of various age segments to enhance the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, the current study selected the top-five luxury brands based on current industry data, yet these brands correspond to fashion goods and thus may limit the generalizability of these findings to other product categories of luxury goods. It should be noted that SMADV allows peer-to-peer (within-user) interaction; this medium’s unique characteristic was not specifically tested in the current study. Finally, there are moderating variables that may affect the relationship between social media usage and materialism. For example, motivations for using social media may moderate the linkage between materialistic values and social media consumption patterns. Future studies could explore the relative role of motivational factors in the social media usage-materialism relationship formation.

NOTE
1. CR stands for critical ratio (the beta estimate divided by the standard error). Akin to a t-statistic, a value greater than 1.96 is considered significant at the 95% confidence level.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

![Diagram](image-url)

**FIG. 1.** Overall Structural Equation Model.