

The aim of the project

The question of the sources of teenage materialism is an issue of social importance that has not been sufficiently explored so far. Adolescence is a critical stage in human life since it is during this period that self-identity is formed. During these years peer acceptance becomes very important but parental influence weakens. In this context, questions concerning the origins of teenage materialism arise, e.g. What is a bigger influence that causes adolescents to be materialistic? Is it parental materialism or peer materialism? Is the teenager more materialistic when the mother is materialistic or when the father is materialistic or when both parents are materialistic? Or, is it peer materialism or sibling materialism that affects teenage materialism more deeply? The proposed project is an attempt to find answers to these and other relevant questions.

Furthermore, we will also examine other family-related and peer-related factors that may strengthen or undermine teenage materialism. We will look for an explanation of both how satisfaction from relations with parents, socioeconomic status of the family, family disruption events or family resources (e.g. time, affection, money) can change the transmission of parental materialistic values to their teenage offspring and how satisfaction from relations with peers or peer pressure can change the transmission of peer/sibling materialistic values to teenagers.

As a result of the development of technology, teenagers are becoming more and more exposed to the influence of various social media. Therefore, further questions arise: Which has a more profound impact on teenage materialism: that of other people (parents, peers, siblings) or that of the media? Which of the media types makes teenagers more materialistic: TV, the Internet or the mobile phone?

The media serve as a platform for communication and so do both the family and the peer group. Hence here is another question that should be answered: What is the role of family consumer communication type and what is the role of the frequency of peer-to-peer consumer communication in interpersonal-influence-induced (i.e. family, peers) teenage materialism and media-induced teenage materialism.

The research of the project

The research will include questionnaires and experiments. A group of 200 teenager students of Tricity middle schools, aged 13-16, will complete a set of questionnaires. They will answer questions about a) their life aspirations, preferences and materialistic attitudes; b) their family living conditions (i.e. socio-economic status, family disruption events, family resources); c) relationships with their siblings (i.e. satisfaction from the relationships); d) relationships with peers (i.e. satisfaction from the relationships, perceived peer pressure, frequency of peer-to-peer consumer communication); e) their use of TV, the Internet and mobile phones (i.e. frequency of use). Also the teenagers' parents (mothers and fathers), siblings (sister or brother) and a close friend indicated by the teenagers will fill in questionnaires. They all will answer questions about life aspirations and materialistic preferences. Additionally, the parents will provide information about their family living conditions (their education, professional and marital status, household income, number of children and type of consumer communication with their children).

Another group of teenagers, students of Tricity middle schools aged 13-16, will take part in 4 laboratory experiments designed to observe how situational activation of materialism – a) parental (mother's or father's) materialism, b) parent's and peer's materialism - can influence teenage materialism and also to look at how this relationship can be altered by activated disapproval (evoking sense of threat) of a parent (mother or father) or by a parent and a peer. Father's/mother's and peer's materialism will be activated by means of specially designed life scenes presenting materialistic or non-materialistic parents and peers. In order to activate threat of unacceptance, images of approving and disapproving faces (of persons at the age of the parents and peers) will be shown. Changes in the level of materialism will be recorded by measuring the teenagers' materialism before and after the experiment.

Reasons for undertaking the research topic

The research carried out on teenagers so far show that materialistic teenagers tend to be unhappy – their life satisfaction is lower, they experience more negative emotions, they suffer from behavioural disorders more often, they show more symptoms of health problems, they are less vital, they have worse concentration, they get worse grades at school, they are more susceptible to addiction, they undertake activities that may be harmful to health, they are poorer at self-actualization, they develop worse interpersonal relationships than non-materialistic teenagers. Therefore, the main and most important reason for taking up the subject of the research is the need to identify and describe the motives for adopting materialistic attitudes by teenagers. Extensive knowledge of the causes of materialistic aspirations and attitudes is critical in establishing future directions of necessary change and effective intervention measures that will result in creating a social environment which favours teenage well-being and leads to happiness in adulthood.