

Social Media Engagement, Gender, Materialism, and Money Attitudes

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Conceptual framework. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020) defines social media as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).” Gen Z (i.e., born from 1997 onward) has fueled the rapid progression of social media usage (Dimock, 2019). As of 2019, the average daily social media usage in the U.S. was 123 minutes (Statista, 2020a). Among U.S. adults, 78% of women and 65% of men use social networking sites (Social media use, 2017; Statista, 2020b).

Social media use can trigger the process of social comparison. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) states that individuals evaluate their own social and personal worth on the basis of how they compare with others, perhaps as a method to develop a positive image of the self. Unlike images of professional models highlighted in traditional forms of media, images of peers found on social media are more realistic comparison targets (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). Comparison to peers has a stronger impact on self-evaluation than comparison to media models (Carey, Donaghue, & Broderick, 2014). Social media profiles on sites such as Instagram and Snapchat commonly feature images of attractive peers (e.g., pictures, selfies, outfit of the day, latest purchase).

The framework for this study was guided by social comparison theory and included three constructs: social media engagement, materialism, and money attitudes. Social media engagement is an individual’s degree of participation in social media (Khan, 2013). Reasons people engage in social media include information search, knowledge sharing, and entertainment about subjects of mutual interest (Khan, 2013). Materialism is a "set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life" (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 308). Money attitudes refer to a stable pattern of cognitive, emotional, motivational, and perceptual practices with respect to some aspect of money (Workman & Lee, 2019). Money attitudes of power and prestige are likely to relate to variables such as materialism, self-monitoring, social comparison, status consumption, and vanity. Social media provide a venue for materialist individuals and those who have money attitudes related to power and prestige to engage in social media to display signs of success such as expensive homes, cars, and clothes. Through posting pictures of their possessions, they may garner admiration of others as well as bolster their self-image. Traditionally, men’s identities have been tied to power and income. Therefore, men seem likely to score higher than women on money attitudes related to power and prestige and all three subscales of materialism (success, centrality, happiness).

The purpose of this study was to examine differences in materialism (success, centrality, happiness) and money attitudes, specifically power/prestige money attitudes between men and

women and between groups high and low in social media engagement. A secondary purpose was to examine some aspects of social media use among a Gen Z group. Hypotheses proposed were: H1abc: The high social media engagement group will score higher on materialism subscales of success, centrality, and happiness than the low social media engagement group. H2: The high social media engagement group will score higher on money attitudes related to power/prestige than low social media engagement group. H3abc: Men will score higher on materialism subscales of success, centrality, and happiness than women. H4: Men will score higher on money attitudes related to power/prestige than women.

Method. Data were collected in large lecture classes. The questionnaire included questions related to social media use such as favorite social media site, time spent on social media sites weekly, how often they check their social media sites each day, number of people they follow on social media, number of followers they have on their social media sites, how often they share their fashion styles on social media sites, and if they have their own fashion blog. In addition, instruments used were a 13-item social media engagement scale (Khan, 2017); 18-item materialism scale (Richins & Dawson, 1992), and 9-item money attitudes subscale: Power/prestige (Yamauchi & Templer, 1982). Each item was accompanied by a 7-point Likert-type scale. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, reliability, and M/ANOVA.

Results. Participants were 240 college students from about 50 different majors (147 males, 93 females; M age=21.42; 54 African American, 12 Asian, 138 Caucasian, 17 Hispanic and 19 other). After removing five items from the materialism scale that reduced reliability (2 from success, 1 from centrality, and 2 from happiness), Cronbach's alpha for each scale was: materialism total (.78), success (.70), centrality (.61), happiness (.77), money attitudes (.93), and social media engagement (.95). The top five favorite social media sites were Instagram (77), Twitter (55), Facebook (35), Snapchat (23), and YouTube (9). Participants spent from less than three hours to more than 12 hours weekly on social media sites. They checked their social media sites several times a day (less than 5 times n=46; 6-10 times n=62, 11-15 times n=37, 16-20 times n=35, more than 20 times n=56). The number of people they followed on social media ranged from 0 to 6000 (mode = 1000). The number of followers they reported ranged from 0 to 6000 (mode = 1000). They shared their fashion styles on social media sites (always--12, very frequently--4, frequently--23, occasionally--43, rarely--51, very rarely 24, never--73). Seventeen participants had their own fashion blog.

Participants were divided into social media groups based on the median score (n = 113 low; n = 112 high). MANOVA was conducted with gender and social media groups as independent variables; dependent variables were success, centrality, happiness, and money attitudes. There were significant effects for gender and social media group on (p < .000) on success, centrality, happiness, and money attitudes. ANOVA revealed that men scored significantly higher than women in success^{Men=15.85; Women=14.14}, happiness^{Men=26.68; Women=19.49}, and money attitudes^{Men=26.68; Women=19.49} (p < .000) but men and women did not differ in centrality^{Men=23.92; Women=24.54}. There were significant effects for social media group on success, centrality, happiness and money attitudes. ANOVA revealed that the group high in social media engagement scored significantly higher than the group low in social media engagement (p <

.000) in success^{High=16.50; Low=13.49}, centrality^{High=25.08; Low=23.39}, happiness^{High=13.92; Low=11.83}, and money attitudes^{High=26.21; Low=19.93}. All hypotheses were supported except H3b.

Discussion/implications. Results of this study show that this Gen Z group was highly involved with social media on a daily basis, checking social media sites, following other users, and sharing information with other users. Both men and women with higher (vs lower) social media engagement more strongly endorsed values related to materialism and money attitudes related to power and prestige. Further, men more strongly endorsed values related to materialism and money attitudes related to power and prestige than women. Consumer values and attitudes affect consumer decision making. If a consumer intends to post selfies of himself or herself wearing his or her latest outfit, then his or her purchase decision may be guided by the thought of displaying that purchase on social media for others to review. Practically, this will help retailers decide what products should be displayed on social media so as to attract Gen Z consumers.

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