



# Branding: The Socio-Psychological Impacts on Low Income Adolescents of Pakistan

Maryam Jabbar

Queen Mary, University of London

Mashkur Zaman

Ryerson University, Toronto

## Keywords

Branding,  
Low Income  
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**Abstract - This paper aims to answer the question: Are there any relationship between the effect of branding and materialistic behavior of low-income adolescents of Pakistan (aged 17-25)? The paper incorporates quantitative measures to empirically test the formulated hypotheses of the study with the reference to previous works of different authors in addressing the effect of branding on low-income adolescents of Pakistan. A total of 100 specific (i.e. age 17-20 & 21-25) respondents participated (final sample size = 60) in the survey from two sets of universities in two different locations (Islamabad & Lahore) at Pakistan.**

**The classification helps to understand the impact of brands on susceptible young adults in developing materialistic behavior of an emerging nation. It is intended to serve as a indication for parents, educators and policy makers willing to understand materialistic behavior in young adolescents**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Global Prevalence of Branding

Modern times have seen an ever-increasing stream of corporate propaganda, which has altered the way individuals, communities and even nations respond to products and services. According to Odih (2007), the rise in oligopolistic industries, which produce differentiated goods, has increased popularity of branding models for identifying distinctive characteristics of products and promoting their superiority in markets. Manufacturers feel the need to create points of differentiations and unique selling propositions in this growing standardization of mass produced products. For this reason, branding is frequently used as a means of discrimination, disguised under warm emotional appeals; to let corporations make their offerings stand out from the ordinary clutter.

Branding began centuries ago when it was essentially designed to give people information about goods and services. However, in the present day and age it provides lesser information about the product and stays more focused on the lives, especially the emotional lives, of prospective consumers (Kilbourne, 1999). Brand names were developed as a way to lay title, against stealers and forgers, to personal ownership of the formula, invention or design

embodied in a product (Wernick, 1994). Hence, brands reduce risk for both the consumers and the manufacturers along-with creating differentiation for products. For this reason, marketers are compelled to build eager consumers simply through effective and efficient branding strategies. Now, 'the decades have seen more and more of [branding], appearing in more places than ever before, with more and more of it brilliantly designed...' says Packard (1980).

Where branding products and services connects them to their manufacturer, it also helps in portraying them in a way that helps the target audience to identify with them, and to fix associations as images, signs and symbols to them. Brands have been used as elements of publicity, serving to identify products, and to guarantee their quality to the prospective buyer, indicates Wernick (1994). Furthermore, brands serve as symbol carrying devices for subconscious need fulfillment of consumers. Packard (1980) notes that, "all popular movements from Christianity's cross to the Nazis' swastika have their distinctive symbols", and so does every successful brand. Symbols serve the purpose of attracting consumers towards brands in a way that they become a part of consumers' lives and sometimes even their personalities as well as their identities.

The underlying point of every brand remains to persuade potential customers that the product or service is worth the price they pay, as well as their attention.

This is why marketers and brand managers are interested in the whys of consumers' behavior in order to understand the motivations behind purchase decisions of particular brands. This enables them to manipulate consumer habits and choices in favor of their respective brands. As the job of a marketer is to produce more consumers, it has led to an increased use of psychological research and emotional ploys to sell products (Kilbourne, 1999).

Psychological techniques probe consumer egos through symbolized commodities, enabling more and more of it to pass into our hearts and minds without our seeing it or knowing it; and its appeals and promises have been devised with ever more sophistication, and with ever-greater subtlety, implanted deep inside our heads, explains Packard (1980).

### **1.2 Branding: Encompassing Negativity**

The extensive use of psychological techniques for probing and manipulation has its constructive as well as seriously negative consequences. Perhaps the most serious offense branding commits is that it tries to invade the privacy of consumers' minds. It is this right to privacy, to be either rational or irrational, that everyone must strive to protect (Marineau, 1957).

As Natarajan and Bagozzi point out (cited in Isaksen and Roper, 2008), "The world has witnessed the dawning of the age of mass consumption and periods of conspicuous consumption, it has seen a proliferation in brands . . ." and branding is effective in its "ability to transform the present into a moment of lack and disenchantment" explains Odih (2007).

Thus, branding subsequently leads to a worldwide state of hyperconsumerism, which results in people getting into a trance where being is having, desire is lack. In this situation, no need or desire is translated into reality without a commodity to accompany it (Wernick, 1994). Human beings are inherently materialistic, and this mass consumption is justified consequently as an outcome of natural human instincts.

### **1.3 Adolescents' Vulnerability to Excessive Exposure to Branding**

This state of "hyperconsumerism" (Saxton, 2005) not only pressurizes adults to consume excessively, but also has an even greater impact on children and adolescents. Individuals, in their early and mid adolescent years, form their self-images in order to distinguish themselves from their older and younger generations. This makes them a lucrative target for

various industries in using the approach that fourteen to twenty-four year age group represents the consumers of today and tomorrow's potential regular buyers. Children begin to shape their identities not according to their environment or culture alone, but also according to the stuff that they consume. This makes them extremely important for marketers as an audience for creating long lasting relationships, by embedding brands in their everyday lives and identities. Adolescents have a yearning to make an impression, make their mark, make themselves stand out from the masses, to be powerful and this is exactly what brands facilitate them in doing, by selling ego-gratification, selling reassurance of worth, selling them a sense of TOTAL POWER; while creating an illusion of empowerment for these young minds. It is appalling to see the "amount of commercialism our children are being exposed to" says (Packard, 1980).

Worldwide, the adolescent age group is gaining prominence for researchers and policy-makers (Faizunnisa and ul Haque, 2003). The world is experiencing the largest cohort of adolescents in history, with about 1 billion youngsters of ages 13-24, most of who belong to the developing countries. Hamilton and Catterall suggest (cited in Isaksen and Roper, 2008) that majority of research is predominantly focused on the middle-class population, and it seems that, marketing research has largely neglected low-income consumers, and hence even less is known about how low-income adolescents in a developing country are affected by consumerism.

## **2. Reaching out to Low-Income Adolescents of Pakistan**

The case with the level of research conducted in Pakistan concerning adolescents is that hardly any research is being done to gain knowledge of how vast emerging markets are changing their lives. Author Zahid (2009) highlights that Pakistan "is classified amongst the low-income countries of the world". The country is in grips of population explosion while ranked 6th as the world's most populous countries of 2008 (World Population Data Sheet, 2008); with a total population of 174,579,000, with city dwellers making up 34% of the population - estimates of the International Data Base of United States Census (2009). Recently, Pakistan is facing the ever-largest adolescent population, stresses Zahid (2009).

Almost 33% of the total population is between 10-24 years of age, making adolescents represent a bulge in the population pyramid. It is forecasted that the country will have its largest cohort of young people in the next five years, which will have serious implications at a variety of levels in the future (Faizunnisa and ul

Haque, 2003). Thus, giving attention to adolescents for research and policy-making is quite important for a country like Pakistan, where there is a considerable number of adolescents (Pakistan Census Organization, 2001), and that too comprising mostly of the working and low-income classes.

Like for adolescents all over the world, the transition of Pakistani adolescents from childhood is also a turbulent period. "Psychological changes can be overwhelming and confusing for Pakistani adolescents" (Durrant, cited in Population Council, 2001). These adolescents are prone to going through circumstances that might prove to be risky (Arnett, 2006), and a large part of these circumstances and risks can be attributed to exposure to all the branding that takes place around them.

Branding, advertising, and consumer behavior along with their impacts on low-income teenagers sometime presents as "vicious cycle" suggest Isaksen and Roper (2008). Too much pressure is usually put on through extensive branding and advertising on Pakistani youngsters, especially on the low-income, which sometimes leads to divergent behavior, sometimes including drug abuse (especially solvent abuse), delinquency, depression and suicidal behavior, states Arnett (2006).

Low-income people usually indulge in symbolic consumption, meaning that they consume brands, being deluded that they are fulfilling their inherent desires and self-images. As Knights discusses (cited in Odih, 2007) that brands prove as a commodified means of averting the risk of impoverishment and thus help in avoiding social embarrassment. This is when low-income people consume more even though they have limited means just to measure up to what the other people (usually of higher status) are consuming.

Kasser and Kanner note (cited in Isaksen and Roper, 2008), there is to date a severe lack of literature surrounding the psychological impacts of this branded consumption culture. Hence, there is a good reason to examine the low-income teenagers of Pakistan and how they are socially and psychologically affected by the current global state of hyper and symbolic consumption.

### 3. Literature Review

Recently, growing attention has been paid to the fact that we are living in a consumer culture wherein, having the 'correct' possessions and brands are of optimum importance. (Isaksen and Roper, 2008). Many researchers however, have pointed out that

commercialism undoubtedly inculcates materialistic natures in consumers by inclining them towards hyperconsumerism and symbolic consumption, where they start to feel the need to attach themselves to certain brands in efforts of trying to attain self-completion. Piacentini and Mailer (2004) describe, that the term symbolic consumption refers to the use of products and brands to "develop and communicate identity", as well as to "symbolize social distinctions".

As Lash and Urry (1994) comment that the building of international brands and global advertising has turned citizens into consumers, and more than basing citizenship on political rights and duties, it is rather, based on products of consumption. Marcuse (1964) also argues while strongly criticizing consumerism that, "'advanced industrial societies' have created false needs, which integrate individuals into the existing system of production and consumption via mass media, advertising, industrial management, and contemporary modes of thought" and that consumerism is a form of social control.

The idea is that this control only allows people to be free in their perceptions of choice, and this freedom of choice is limited to buying in the pursuit of happiness.

This is enunciated by the fact that, people are becoming self-image buyers, explained as the notion of "symbolic self-completion" which suggests that people engage in symbolic consumption in order to fill/disguise specific aspects of their self (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, cited in Isaksen and Roper, 2008).

Therefore, brands assist people in buying a projection of their own selves. That way the images preselect their audiences, select out of a consuming public, people with personalities having an affinity for the image (Crosno et al., 2009), making the work of marketers and brand managers easy by making consumers self-image buyers. Brands achieve success when consumers start having terrific loyalties for brands, such as feelings of fondness towards brands of clothing, soap, cereals etc., and this happens with the prevalence of 'subliminal' appeals, or 'implants': words or images used during branding processes that make consumers yearn for products that will in some way make them complete.

Kasser and Kanner (2003) suggest that as a consuming population, people form deep emotional bonds with their brands, to the extent that they start determining who they are and how they are perceived through them.

However, as Kasser (2002) points out that, "Materialistic values lead people into a style of life and way of experiencing that do a rather poor job of satisfying their needs".

Nevertheless, in the longer run when people start

feeling less contented, then they pertain to buy more in order to satisfy themselves and their individual urges, by one brand or the other. This in due time translates into “narcissism, which indicates that what attracts and appeals most to people is themselves” (Dalmy, 2005). The materialistic culture we live in encourages materialism and hyperconsumerism, which benefits brands because people who feel empty make great consumers; the emptier one feels, the more likely they are to turn to products, to make them feel complete and whole. This phenomenon is global and is not only affecting adults but is demeaning younger minds as well. Presently children worldwide are growing up in a toxic environment, one made more toxic by branding (Kilbourne, 1999).

Social roles, expectations, activities, and responsibilities distinguish adolescence from childhood and adulthood. This period has lasting consequences for individuals, families, communities, and nations (Population Council, 2001). As the world faces its largest adolescent population, the actions of younger people will shape the size, health, and prosperity of the world’s future. (Faizunnisa and ul Haque, 2003).

While advocating for ensnaring adolescents Miller (1946) explains that even though it takes time, but if you expect to be in business for a long time, then you need to think of the profits you can make by “conditioning a million or ten million children who will grow up into adults trained to buy your product.” Eager minds can effortlessly be molded, to what they are exposed to.

They consume and buy brands by the minute, and comprise of a vast market for brands. This is why farsighted marketers try to cash this opportunity today while securing their business and profits for tomorrow, by molding adolescents. Dr. Riesman (cited in Packard, 1980) says that, “comparable media today train the young for the frontiers of consumption – to tell the difference between Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola.” Marketers blatantly are not too interested in older people.

This is for two reasons; first, that they already have established brand loyalties and second being that they have limited incomes. For this reason, Wood (2007) explains that advertisers spend fortunes on research to learn about young adolescents. Channel One boasts (cited in Kilbourne, 1990), ‘One relationship with 8.1 million teenagers lasts for a minimum of six years.’

The motivation also derives from the reality that, ‘children are reaching for an opportunity to explain themselves in terms of “self images” and in this day

and age it is brands that portray these images’ says Dr. Dichter (1964).

Shaffer and Kipp (2009) affirm that an individual’s cognitive abilities develop between childhood and adolescence and, as a result, their self-concept becomes more psychological, more abstract, and more of a coherent, integrated self-portrait. It is thus important to get children while they are young, so that their brand habits may become an integral part of their personal images. What brands tell children is to be free, to be rebels, to be addicted, to be consumers... and many young people fall for this brainwashing.

Adolescent minds envision that renowned brands somehow transform their lives by giving them social standing and respect, and that by using a certain brand they will be accepted as being fashionable and harmonized with the rest of the world. By wearing a particular brand of clothes, or shoes, or using a certain brand of shampoo, they feel that, “This is important, therefore I am important” (Kilbourne, 1999).

Thus, they believe that brands give them social acceptance and some kind of status. This is what makes them eager to pay handsome amounts to acquire these brands, satisfying the belief that those brands represent an image Saxton (2005).

It is a common known fact that aspirations, goals, and behaviors of individuals are mainly dependent on how they perceive themselves in comparison to others. (Chang and Arkin, 2002). In this global village, similar peer groups are converging and now exhibit quite similar characteristics, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or culture. Children obviously follow the present craze or fad to keep up with the rest of their age fellows not only nationally but globally and teenagers are particularly susceptible to peer pressure.

It is at this stage of development that teenagers start to look to peers, rather than parents, for guidance in identity formation, consumption choices, and general behavior (Shim, 1996). Adolescents demand popular branded products, which usually include expensive clothing, and accessories that are used to socially integrate with peer groups (Chaplin and John, 2007).

Mandrik, Fern, and Bao (cited in Isaksen and Roper, 2008) found evidence to support their hypothesis that strong peer influence outweighs intergenerational influences on brand preference. Social comparisons are central to this stage of development as teenagers are setting benchmarks for themselves, and form their self-concepts based on the opinions and behaviors of their peers. (Isaksen and Roper, 2008).

This is why “In the eyes of the media, the youths of the

world are becoming a single, seamless, soulless target audience” (Kilbourne (1999) and in order to reach this young audience, brand managers and marketers reach out to the influential opinion leaders in that group. This is why the industry creates the illusion of peer acceptance via globally accepted brands (Smith and Martin, 1997). Therefore, peer acceptance is they key to adolescents’ well-being; hence, why marketers strive to recruit the “cool kids” for marketing campaigns (Wells and Marwell, 1976).

Desperate to be unique in a conformist culture, young individuals follow the crowd right over the cliff when they adopt compulsive shopping for recreation, stuff or starve themselves, and sometimes even engage in dangerous activities like drinking, smoking or engaging in dangerous sex (Dittmar, 2005; Kasser, 2002).

Branding and promotional gimmicks lessen their resistances, while weakening their resolve, so later on young children exhibit willingness to accept even the harmful products, which put them to a path of obliteration. Evidence from the US and UK suggests that children preoccupied with possessions such as clothes and electronic equipment show higher rates of mental health problems, which is more prevalent in children belonging to the lower income brackets (Ward, 2008).

It is this discrepancy in possessions that elevate feelings of social exclusion among low-income adolescents, and thus magnifying the negative, psychological experiences of living in poverty (Ridge, 2002).

The assessment of quality, based on material possessions is particularly significant in the lives of low-income adolescents due to the importance they place on peer acceptance, social inclusion, and “fitting in.” (Isaksen and Roper, 2008). Shultz, Belk, and Ger (1994) note that individuals with restrained consumption capabilities are likely to have a greater desire for material possessions because they have a keener sense of their relative deprivation, and thus, feel pressured to keep up with the going trends around them.

Although people in the lower social brackets do not particularly strive hard to get into a higher social layer, they can be persuaded, merchandisers have learned, to move up their consumption (Packard, 1980). Elliott and Leonard (2004) thus suggest that consumption in fact engenders social inequality, as material possessions and brands become so important that they start signifying the “quality” of individuals and their social status. The issue of looking towards the upper classes and desiring to consume what the affluent echelon consumes is particularly applicable

to the newly developed and developing countries like Pakistan.

Here people in majority live either below the poverty line or very close to it, with a considerable amount of populace belonging to the working class, such as white-collar workers, tradesman, skilled and semiskilled workers and laborers (World Bank Group, 2006). With inflation and an increase in the cost of living, it is quite difficult for Pakistanis to manage on one family member’s income (Durrant, cited in Population Council, 2001). However, these financial constraints are not taken into foremost consideration when low-income adolescents are seeking expensive brands in order to fit in with the more affluent ‘in-crowd’.

Arnett (2006) explains that due to globalization and advancements in technology, Pakistan is facing a very strong Western influence, especially in the urban centers.

The availability of satellite TV in majority of urban households, leading to an influx of the Western culture, consequently creates a lot of confusion among the adolescents. This is evident as they are being pulled diametrically opposite from their religious and Eastern values towards readily adopting the Western ways.

Social mobility, aspiration and achievement drives, movement of an individual and his family from one level to another, translation of economic goods into socially approved symbols, to achieve higher status, are key concerns for the Pakistani youth (Rappaport et al., 2003).

The idea of Keyfitz (cited in Isaksen and Roper, 2008) suggests that there is now a “world standard package” of material goods, which people “need” and are expected to own—for example, televisions, mobile phones, and cars. Such possessions may indeed be considered as “standard” for the average middle-class consumer.

These expectations and aspirations to get hold of these standard brands and products associated with them are also in the hearts of the low-income adolescents of Pakistan, but the consequences of these expectations and aspirations for those who cannot afford these items are, the awakening of feelings of inadequacy and a reduced concept of self for these young individuals.

The recent increase in shrewd branding compels young individuals of Pakistan to become excessively compulsive while demonstrating recklessness towards their individual personalities, identities and individual as well as social well-being.

Complications arise when adolescents, especially low-income adolescents, lose their religious, cultural and social uniqueness in pursuit of synchronizing with the modern Westernized branded image, while losing their individual self-concept and being highly susceptible to interpersonal influences.

#### 4. Research Aims

The literature highlights that there is an increasing population of adolescents worldwide, their consumption patterns are of extreme interest to marketers and to maintain consistent future profit growth, they use untiring efforts to attract youngsters to use their products. These activities have various manifestations in their personalities during the formation of their identities and self-concepts while being, positively or negatively, influenced by other people within their peer and reference groups.

However, the literature studied, evidently lacks research on low-income adolescents, and the impact that branding has on these individuals, who cannot afford to purchase material possessions to build their identities (through branded possessions), and thus, are largely ignored. Therefore, the possible socio-psychological problems they might face due to this state of materialistic consumption are considerably unspecified.

This is especially true for people living in the developing world that comprises of nations which are generally considered as having low levels of per-capita incomes and that the people have far less purchasing power than developed countries.

Therefore, the adolescents of these countries exhibit a different attitude towards branding, and those who fall into the low-income category reveal an altogether sundry behavior when their consumption of branded goods is discussed. Thus, considering the limited exploration related to social as well as psychological impacts of branding and hyperconsumerism on the youngsters of low-income developing countries, this paper centers around the empirical examination of how and to what extent low-income youth of Pakistan is affected by commercialism. The study also tends to pinpoint how branding creates probable exclusion of low-income adolescents based on their possessions and consumption practices.

This paper aims to inspect the differences in materialistic behavior of mid-late adolescents (17-25 year olds) of Pakistan, as they appear to be most vulnerable to social comparisons and external consumption pressures from society. A comparison

between high and low-income individuals is made, to identify their orientation towards consumption of branded goods in order to form a better concept of their selves, an approach used by Isaksen and Roper (2008). Furthermore, the relationship between the age group of adolescents and their compulsive consumer behavior is evaluated, based on the technique applied by Chaplin and John (2007).

#### 5. Hypotheses

The research questions derived from gaps found in the scripts reviewed, relate to socio-psychological impacts of branding on low-income adolescents of Pakistan, in-order to help extend the content of knowledge relating to the subject of how branding affects this specific group, while exerting undue pressure of consumption on them.

The first research hypothesis aims to examine the extent to which the assumption (pointed out in the literature) that low-income adolescents have diluted individual identities and self-concepts compared to high-income adolescents, holds true for Pakistani adolescents.

Thus, the first hypothesis is similar to that of Isaksen and Roper's study (2008), but with a specific target group in mind for the most vulnerable consumers of Pakistan as follows:

**H1:** Adolescents (17-25 years) belonging to low-income groups have lower self-concept clarity compared to their high-income counterparts.

The second hypothesis that is based on suggestive information that low-income adolescents are highly prone to being influenced by higher-income persons, and is derived from Isaksen and Roper's paper (2008) as:

**H2:** Adolescents (17-25 years) belonging to high-income groups have lower susceptibility to interpersonal influence compared to their low-income counterparts.

The third research question has its extraction from a study conducted by Chaplin and John (2007) and hypothesizes that mid-adolescents have a lower clarity regarding their self-concept compared to late-adolescents, as described below:

**H3:** 17-20 year old low-income adolescents are more materialistic than the late-adolescents (between 21-25 years), because of having a lower Self-Concept clarity scores.

The last question relates to testing of self-concept clarity in relation to the extent to which adolescents are influenced by peer pressure during their consumption behavior and assumes that those youngsters who have a better self-concept will be less prone to interpersonal influences and vice versa as suggested by Isaksen and Roper (2008).

**H4:** There is a negative correlation between self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influences.

## 6. Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on a combination of previous works of Chaplin and John (2007) and Isaksen and Roper (2008), and incorporates quantitative measures to empirically test the formulated hypotheses. Variables are devised to best suit the research questions relating to how branding affects Pakistani low-income adolescents (between 17 and 25 years of age), while gaining insight of how confident these individuals are with their identities (with or without consuming branded products), how much they deem others' opinions significant while purchasing and using brands and how the strength of their self-concept is related to them being influenced by others. Furthermore, the variable, which caters to the research hypothesis of age having an effect on the adolescent consumers, is also defined.

### 6.1 Independent Variable: Exposure to Branding

The independent variable, which induces changes in the dependant variable, is 'exposure to branding'. It seems to be the reason why formation of a concrete self-concept is undermined and susceptibility to interpersonal influence for consumption of branded goods strengthened or vice versa.

### 6.2 Dependant Variables: Self-concept Clarity and Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

The first dependant variable identified is self-concept clarity (Isaksen and Roper, 2008) - the extent to which adolescents relate to brands for the formation of their personal identities, whether or not they are content with consuming generic products or need branded material possessions in-order to feel adequate, and how much they strive to attach some kind of personal or symbolic meaning to high end brands. The second dependant variable is susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Isaksen and Roper, 2008) – the degree to which adolescents get affected by opinions of peers related to the products

they consume, if reference groups play a pivotal role in driving consumption behavior, and if the possibility of social exclusion haunts them while they consume generic products.

### 6.3 Moderating Variable: Age Group & Intervening Variable: Economic Status

Moderating variable is the one that creates some kind of relation between self-concept clarity and interpersonal influence, which is the age group to which the adolescents belong (Chaplin and John, 2007). Whereas, the intervening variable having principal affect in shaping the consumption behavior for these youngsters is economic status, whereby low-income is the congregation under consideration for the consequences that branding has on this segment and is crucial for the study.

### 6.4 Theoretical Model

After determining the variables for testing the research questions, the following theoretical model (Figure 1) is constructed to appropriately depict the socio-psychological impacts of branding on low-income adolescents of Pakistan.

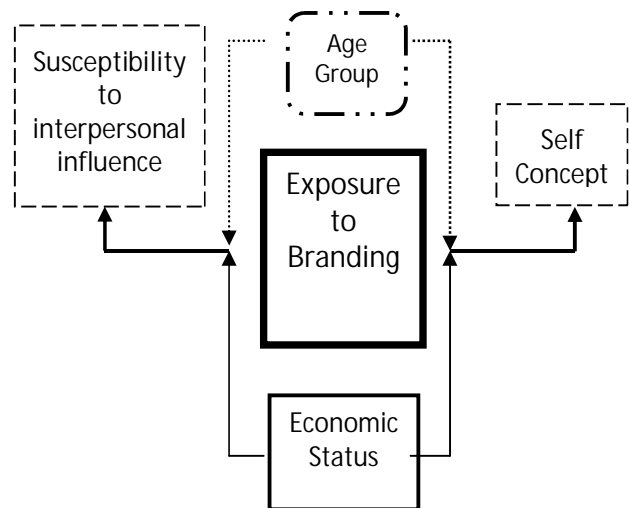


Figure 1: Theoretical Model for Impacts of Branding on low-income adolescents of Pakistan

### 6.5 Study Design

The design of this study is hypotheses testing with correlation investigation method (Chaplin and John, 2007; Wood and Bettman, 2007; Isaksen and Roper, 2008; Esch et al., 2009) in a non-contrived field study setting (Malhotra, 2007), with methods appropriate for stepwise "exploratory model building" (Wright, cited in Isaksen and Roper, 2008).

Exploratory design is selected because of its flexibility, and ability to evolve, capture and understand insights relating to the research questions (Malhotra, 2007). The sample group taken is relatively small which makes exploratory model easily applicable. This approach helps in determining the consumption behavior of and psychological orientations towards branding for adolescent respondents, while investigating critical topics for the study from the respondents' point of view.

## 6.6 Procedure

A questionnaire survey was conducted in two universities in Islamabad and two universities in Lahore over a period of two weeks during August 2009, including 100 respondents (25 from each university) for the purposes of data collection. Rationale behind the selection of these four specific universities was that they have a mix of students as well as academics belonging to a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, and thus, targeting a random blend of respondents was possible.

Prior to approaching the potential university students to participate in the study, verbal and written permission was taken from the university officials to commence a survey in the selected universities. Respondents were requested to participate in the survey by two Masters qualified representatives (one for each city) on behalf of the researcher based in London. The questionnaires were sent via email to the representatives and completed responses were mailed back to the researcher.

The socio-economic groups were decided based on average monthly income and provision of "world standard package" items as pointed by Keyfitz (cited in Isaksen and Roper, 2008) such as refrigerators, televisions, personal computers, mobile phones, air-conditioners, cars in respondents' homes.

The questionnaire survey procedure was selected as it was considered more effective compared to individual interviews for recording responses while maintaining confidentiality and respondents' integrity.

A stratified sampling technique (Malhotra, 2007) in which probability method is incorporated, was applied. First, the relevant stratum - a subset of population sharing common characteristics was identified, which in this case were age brackets, education levels and communal environment. Random sampling was then used to select a sufficient number of subjects from this stratum to create generalized findings (Dittmar, 2005).

First of all the respondents were informed about the purpose of study, both verbally by the researcher representatives, where they explained the difference between generic products and brands, and discussed reasons for branding while encouraging respondents to consider the role of brands in their lives – the method of Isaksen and Roper (2008); and by written information on the questionnaire sheets.

## 6.7 Survey

To test the hypotheses (based on self-concept clarity, interpersonal influence and age specificity for materialistic orientations amongst low-income adolescents of Pakistan) the dependant variables were operationalized by asking respondents several questions regarding their age, gender, average household monthly income in Pakistani Rupees (PKR.), and the availability of basic daily use items. Questions like the types of products they prefer to buy, the amount of money they spend and are willing to spend on shopping for brands, whether or not they give importance to opinions of others in-order to be accepted while purchasing brands, the kind of personality they possess etc. were probed. Some other information gathering questions were asked, like the purchase stimulating factors, purchase behavior, and importance of social acceptance, influence of brand image etc., on purchase decisions.

This was done through several scales while devising the questionnaire, particularly nominal, 5 point likert - ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' and ordinal scales (Chaplin and John, 2007; Wood and Bettman, 2007; Isaksen and Roper, 2008; Esch et al., 2009).

For instance, 'I believe that personal qualities and achievements are more important than material possessions', 'I do not feel the need to have the latest brands in-order to help me feel good about myself', 'I find myself being confident most of the time and satisfied with what I have' for self-concept clarity scales; and 'Wearing branded clothes/shoes and using branded products gives people a better status in community', 'It is important for me to consider others' opinions while making purchase decisions', 'I usually compare myself and the things I have to others' for interpersonal influence scales.

The mean of responses would yield overall individuals' scores of self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influence, with higher scores indicating a more diluted, unclear self-concept and higher scores suggesting less susceptibility to interpersonal influence respectively (resulting from scales and measures defined for analyses, where 1=Strongly agree,



2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree and 5=Strongly disagree).

Univariate logistics analyses for independent variables with descriptive statistics, frequencies, correlations and t-tests, using SPSS Statistics 17.0 for Windows and Microsoft Excel 2007, were applied, to determine the relationship between brand exposure and consumption behavior for brands, identity forte, influence of reference and peer groups, and age for the low-income adolescents of Pakistan as separate variables. Therefore, a categorical and thematic analysis was conducted to test the research hypotheses. Reliability analyses for the scales were also conducted to assess whether the dependant variable scales adequately measure self-concept clarity and interpersonal influence or not.

Variations between high and low-income adolescents are hoped to give evidence to prove whether or not “restricted consumption results in an unclear concept of self and therefore makes a low-income adolescent more susceptible to interpersonal influence” (Isaksen and Roper, 2008), as well as the idea that mid-adolescents have a lower self-concept and are more prone to peer pressure compared to late-adolescents (Chaplin and John, 2007).

## 7. Presentation of Findings

One hundred participants (56 male and 44 female) were given the survey questionnaires, with none resulting in a no response.

As the rest did not satisfy the screening criteria of a specific average household income and age groups. 50 percent of the sample belonged to the low-income groups with average monthly household income between the clusters ranging ‘under PKR.7000 to

After the 100 questionnaires were filled and screened for responses, only 60 responses comprising of 30 male and 30 female (with 15 high-income and 15 low-income respondents each) qualified to make the sample for analysis.

PKR.20,000’ and 50 percent of the sample were from the higher income groups with average monthly income between ‘PKR.20,000 – PKR.30,000 +’.

These income groups were selected, as they were considered most appropriate in representing the general household income brackets of common Pakistani families. From the total sample, 5 percent adolescents had an average monthly household income of PKR.7000 or less, 21.7 percent had PKR.7000 – PKR.12,000 and 23.3 percent had PKR.12,000 – PKR.20,000 respectively; and in the high-income group 21.7 percent had PKR.20,000 –

PKR.30,000 and 28.3 percent had an average monthly household income of more than PKR.30,000. Furthermore, from 60 adolescents, 55 percent belonged to the age group 17-20 years (i.e. 33 respondents) and 45 percent (i.e. 27 respondents) were from the age group 21-25 years. (Tables 1 and 2 show descriptive statistics and frequencies for age and average monthly household income respectively)

Age

|               | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid 17 - 20 | 33        | 55.0    | 55.0          | 55.0               |
| 21 - 25       | 27        | 45.0    | 45.0          | 100.0              |
| Total         | 60        | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Frequencies - Age

Average monthly household income

|                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Under 7000 | 3         | 5.0     | 5.0           | 5.0                |
| 7000 - 12000     | 13        | 21.7    | 21.7          | 26.7               |
| 12000 - 20000    | 14        | 23.3    | 23.3          | 50.0               |
| 20000 - 30000    | 13        | 21.7    | 21.7          | 71.7               |
| 30000 +          | 17        | 28.3    | 28.3          | 100.0              |
| Total            | 60        | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Frequencies - Average Monthly Household Income

**7.1 Reliability of Scales**

As the research questions are related to the extent to which exposure to branding has an impact on the socio-psychological development and wellbeing of adolescents, especially low-income adolescents, the scales were designed in a way to measure this effectively. For this reason, the means of the 15 scales for self-concept clarity (SCC<sup>1</sup>) and susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SIP<sup>2</sup>), each, were put to a reliability test to see whether the scales adequately measured the two dependant variables with exposure to branding and average monthly household incomes as the independent and intervening factors respectively. A reliability analysis produced Cronbach's a values (on standardized items) of 0.525 for SCC and 0.763 for SIP, suggesting that the scales are reliable for testing the hypotheses. (Table 3 shows the reliability scores of Means of SCC and Means of SIP respectively)

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|--|------------|
| .505             | .525   | 2          |

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|--|------------|
| .563             | .763   | 2          |

Table 3: Reliability Scores - Means of SCC and SIP

**8. Results**

The results of the whole sample (60 respondents) show that from a total of 33 respondents of age group 17-20 years, 20 prefer international brands, 11 chose local brands and 2 said that they use generic products. Similarly from the 27 respondents from 21-25 years group 12 prefer international brands, 13 suggested liking for local brands and again only 2 agreed that they use generic products as shown in Table 4 and Figure 2.

**Hypothesis 1**

The first research question tackles the psychological impact that exposure to branding has on low-income adolescents of Pakistan by distorting the formation of a concrete self-concept.

|                |                      | Age     |         |       |
|----------------|----------------------|---------|---------|-------|
|                |                      | 17 - 20 | 21 - 25 | Total |
| Brand Exposure | International Brands | 20      | 12      | 32    |
|                | Local Brands         | 11      | 13      | 24    |
|                | Generic products     | 2       | 2       | 4     |
|                | Total                | 33      | 27      | 60    |

Table 4: Frequencies of Age and Brand Exposure

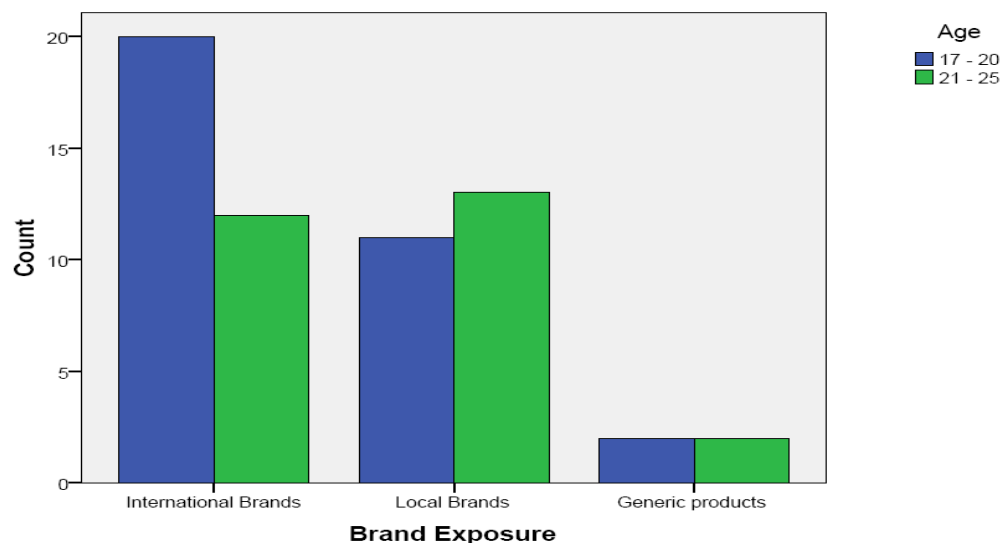


Figure 2: Graph for Age and Brand Exposure frequencies

<sup>1</sup> Self-concept clarity (SCC)

<sup>2</sup> Susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SIP)

**H1:** *Adolescents (17-25 years) belonging to low-income groups have lower self concept clarity compared to their High income counterparts.*

To test this assumption, respondents were asked the extent (1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree and 5 = Strongly disagree) to which they thought the 15 statements were true for them or not.

The means values of every individual were calculated for all the statements with higher means corresponding to lower self-concept clarity. Mean scores were as hypothesized with higher means showing that respondents tend to disagree with the statements more, when they were stated in a way that lower means would have revealed a better and clearer self-concept.

The means (M) of individual self-concept clarity for low-income group with average monthly household income between less than PKR. 7000 is M=3.6, that of PKR.7000 – PKR.12,000 is M=3.22, and for PKR.12,000 – PKR.20,000 is M=3.109.

|                | Brand Exposure      | Mean Individual SCC |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Brand Exposure | Pearson Correlation | 1                   |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .356                |
|                | N                   | 60                  |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Exhibit 1: t-test for Mean SCC

Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported as lower-income adolescents have lower self-concept clarity than their higher-income counterparts. (Exhibit 1 depicts the Mean SCC results).

Data was further analyzed for the degree of correlation between the independent variable i.e. brand exposure and dependant variable self-concept clarity.

The Pearson correlation coefficient depicts a positive value of  $r = 0.356$  at significance  $p = 0.005$ , meaning that higher brand exposure results in a higher mean for self-concept clarity, whereas, a higher mean of self-concept clarity means a more diluted self-concept for the respondent.

Hence, this further supports the first hypothesis that more the low-income adolescents are exposed to branding, the lower is their self-concept compared to the high-income adolescents. (Exhibit 2 shows the correlation for Brand exposure and mean for self-concept clarity).

| Average monthly household income |               | N  | Mean   |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----|--------|
| Mean_Individual_SCC              | Under 7000    | 3  | 3.6000 |
|                                  | 7000 - 12000  | 13 | 3.2205 |
|                                  | 12000 - 20000 | 14 | 3.1095 |
|                                  | 20000 - 30000 | 13 | 2.4513 |
|                                  | 30000 +       | 17 | 2.5608 |

|                     |                             | t-test for Equality of Means | t-test for Equality of Means |                 |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                     |                             |                              |                              |                 |                 |
|                     |                             | t                            | df                           | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference |
| Mean_Individual_SCC | Equal variances assumed     | 2.908                        | 14                           | .011            | .37949          |
|                     | Equal variances not assumed | 1.361                        | 2.040                        | .304            | .37949          |

Exhibit 2: t-test for Mean SCC

For the high-income groups with average monthly household income between PKR.20,000 – PKR.30,000 is M=2.45 and for PKR.30,000+ is M=2.56. The independent t-test resulted in the  $t=2.908$  and significance value  $p = 0.011$ .

**Hypothesis 2**

The second hypothesis suggests the social impact of branding through exerting peer pressure on low-income adolescents of Pakistan stating that they have a higher tendency to be affected by peer pressure and feel the

need for social inclusion more than the high-income youngsters.

**H2:** *Adolescents (17-25 years) belonging to high-income groups have lower susceptibility to interpersonal influence compared to their low-income counterparts.*

In order to put this hypothesis to test, the respondents were again asked the extent (1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree and 5 = Strongly disagree) to which they agreed to the 15 statements that were designed to measure the scales for susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

The same method of calculating means of every individual for all the statements was used and it was found that higher the means, lower was the susceptibility to interpersonal influence, as hypothesized.

Meaning that higher scores show that respondents tend to disagree with the statements more, when they were stated in a way that lower means would have actually revealed a higher susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

The independent t-test resulted in the  $t=3.557$  and significance value  $p=0.001$ . Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is also supported as higher-income adolescents have a lower susceptibility to interpersonal influence compared to their lower-income counterparts. As can be seen in Exhibit 3.

This data was further analyzed for the degree of correlation between the intervening variable, average monthly household income and the dependant variable of susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The Pearson correlation coefficient depicts a positive value of  $r = 0.617$  at significance  $p = 0.000$ , meaning that higher the income group the adolescents belong to, higher is the mean for susceptibility to interpersonal influence, where a higher mean depicts lower susceptibility to interpersonal influence, thus a lower proclivity for high-income groups to be pressurized by others for adopting brands.

Another correlation was tested between brand exposure and mean individual SIP resulting in a negative  $r$  value =  $-0.70$ . Meaning higher the brand exposure, lower are the means for SIP and lower means show lower influence by interpersonal factors.

| Average monthly household income |               | N  | Mean   |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----|--------|
| Mean_Individual_SIP              | Under 7000    | 3  | 2.9778 |
|                                  | 7000 - 12000  | 13 | 2.4462 |
|                                  | 12000 - 20000 | 14 | 2.4714 |
|                                  | 20000 - 30000 | 13 | 3.2410 |
|                                  | 30000 +       | 17 | 3.1804 |

|                     |                             | t-test for Equality of Means |      | t-test for Equality of Means |                 |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
|                     |                             | t                            | df   | Sig. (2-tailed)              | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Mean_Individual_SIP | Equal variances assumed     | 3.557                        |      | .001                         | .42689          | .12000                |
|                     | Equal variances not assumed | 4.155                        | 37.4 | .000                         | .42689          | .10274                |

The means (M) of individual susceptibility to interpersonal influence for low-income group with average monthly household income between less than PKR. 7000 is  $M=2.97$ , that of PKR.7000 – PKR.12,000 is  $M=2.44$ , and for PKR.12,000 – PKR.20,000 is  $M=2.47$ . For the high-income groups with average monthly household income between PKR.20,000 – PKR.30,000 is  $M=3.24$  and for PKR.30,000+ is  $M=3.18$ .

Hence, this further supports the second hypothesis that high-income adolescents have a lower susceptibility to peer and interpersonal pressure. In other words, lower-income adolescents are more prone to interpersonal influences for the consumption of branded goods. (Please refer to Exhibit 4 and 5).

|                                  |                     | Average monthly household income | Mean_Individual_SIP |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Average monthly household income | Pearson Correlation | 1                                | .617                |
|                                  | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                                  | .000                |
|                                  | N                   | 60                               | 60                  |
| Mean_Individual_SIP              | Pearson Correlation | .617**                           | 1                   |
|                                  | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                             |                     |
|                                  | N                   | 60                               | 60                  |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Exhibit 3: Correlation between Average Monthly Household Income and Mean SIP

|                     |                     | Brand Exposure | Mean_Individual_SIP |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Brand Exposure      | N                   | 60             | 60                  |
| Mean_Individual_SIP | Pearson Correlation | -.070          | 1                   |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .597           |                     |
|                     | N                   | 60             | 60                  |

Exhibit 4: Correlation between Brand Exposure and Mean SIP

### Hypothesis 3

The third research hypothesis suggests that the younger the adolescents are, the lower their self-concepts will be.

**H3:** *17-20 year old low-income adolescents are more materialistic than the late-adolescents (between 21-25 years), because of having a lower Self-Concept clarity scores.*

To put this supposition to trial the initial test conducted was cross tabulation for age, average monthly household income and the mean individual SCC. There were 15 respondents from 17-20 years age group and 15 from that of 21-25 years that qualified as low-income adolescents. An average of the means of individual SCC for each group was calculated with values  $M=3.2103$  and  $M=3.2053$  for age groups 17-20 years and 21-25 years respectively (as seen in Crosstab Table 1 - Appendix).

As hypothesized earlier higher the mean value, lower is the self-concept clarity score, and from the results it can be concluded that the average for 17-20 year age group is vaguely higher than that of 21-25 years.

Therefore, this inclines toward the hypothesis of mid-adolescents having a lower self-image and identity compared to late-adolescents and brands do negatively affect their identity formation.

### Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis tends to check the relationship between the two-dependant variables self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

**H4:** *There is a negative correlation between self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influences.*

A simple correlation was carried out between the two variables and the resulting Pearson correlation coefficient value shows a medium negative correlation at  $r = -0.441$  with significance of  $p = 0.000$ . Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported that there is a negative relation between self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influence and there is an opposite effect with a change in either one, meaning that with a clearer self-concept and a more stable identity, the adolescent will be less prone to peer or interpersonal pressure for consumption of brands.

Through the tests performed on the data set, all the hypotheses were supported according to the assumptions of Chaplin and John (2007) and Isaksen and Roper (2008); regarding the age differences for materialism and identity distortions with high social pressures being proven true for the low-income adolescents of Pakistan resulting from over exposure to branding.

## 8. Analysis

This study attempts to explore socio-psychological impacts of branding on low-income adolescents of Pakistan, by incorporating a comparative study between low and high-income youth, to get empirical evidence in support of the research questions. Empirically examined data proposed links in the theoretical model (Figure 1) between exposure to branding, economic status, age group, self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influence for the low-income adolescents. Stepwise tests conducted to investigate these links and relationships for the overall state of consumerism of Pakistani adolescents, with a focus on low-income adolescents, reveal that the initial assumptions of the paper hold true. The findings provide an insight into the social and psychological states of adolescents regarding their specific consumption ethos.

Analyzed data results confirm that Pakistani low-income adolescents have a lower self-concept and a higher susceptibility to interpersonal influence as suggested by Isaksen and Roper (2008), with mid-adolescent group indicating a lower self-concept (higher self-doubt) than the late-adolescents following the theory of Chaplin and John (2007). In addition to these explorations, a negative link between low self-concept clarity and high susceptibility to interpersonal influence was also confirmed as previously proven by Isaksen and Roper (2008).

Supporting evidence while examining Pakistani low-income adolescents, side with the proposal of Isaksen and Roper (2008) that there is “an enhanced focus on obtaining *acceptable* brands [which] detract [low-income adolescents] from intra-psychic developments and may interfere with the formation of a stable self-concept.” These individuals seek social acceptance by being judged and approved by their peers and reference groups through consumption patterns and attitudes. The idea of Chaplin and John (2007) is also supported, that age differences relate to materialism and that there are age-related patterns in self-esteem, with mid-adolescents having a lower self-concept clarity and higher materialistic orientation, which is heightened even more with continuous exposure to branding and marketing techniques.

The independent t-tests showed that Pakistani low-income adolescents had lower self-concept clarity indicators than their high-income counterparts, serving as a sign that these individuals try to indulge in symbolic consumption in an attempt to manifest their identities and personalities through the brands that they purchase and consume.

These low self-concept clarity scores can also be interpreted as low-income adolescents having a more materialistic orientation in their consumption patterns. As previous works (Campbell et al., 1996; Burger and Guadagno, 2003; Dittmar, 2005; Chaplin and John, 2007; Isaksen and Roper, 2008), indicate that greater focus on materialism can detract adolescents from achieving self-actualization resulting in lowered security in the self.

This is further enunciated by the findings of t-tests related to interpersonal influence experienced by low-income adolescents compared to those belonging to higher income groups. Low-income youngsters concentrate more on being approved by others for what they purchase and consume.

The outcome of the tests for brand purchase decision drivers suggest that branded products are chosen over generic products only for the fact that they assist lower-income adolescents in becoming a part of the ‘in-crowd’. Kilbourne (1999) states that, young “opinion leaders” can influence what their friends eat, drink and wear and so, a simple yes from these leaders can legitimize any product or brand, which can trigger the lower end, comprising of those being influenced, to desire and strive for those products.

Thus, making fitting in, with peer approval, becomes far more important for low-income young individuals than considering their ability of purchase. When approval of others is required more than freedom of personal expression or personal satisfaction, it can be said that this becomes a major contributor in detracting these vulnerable young minds from forming a clear self-concept, depicting a negative correlation between self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

Pakistani adolescents in general seem to put extensive emphasis on following the trends and purchasing what is in vogue, while thinking that lacking the latest brands or failing to adhere to the latest fads and fashions, can result in social exclusion, while considering paying high prices for their purchases as completely justified.

This is especially true for the low-income Pakistani adolescents. The analyses attest the research hypotheses that low-income Pakistani adolescents give greater importance to social inclusion while toning down their impoverishment under the guise of branded consumption of the “correct brands”, which deteriorates their self-concepts to great degrees, while supporting Chang and Arkin’s (2002) view that high susceptibility may be a result of self-doubt. These adolescents associate possession of brands with acquiring social status, better peer affiliations, and

enhanced personality traits as they transcend into adulthood (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004).

Hence, the theory that increased involvement in consumerism negatively affects the self-esteem of poor youth (Shim, 1996) is confirmed.

## 9. Discussion

Throughout this paper, the literature examined and the research conducted indicate that worldwide adolescent population tends to consume brands with the deliberation that the brands they use not only express their personalities but also help them in establishing their identities. Piacentini and Mailer (2004) along with Chang and Arkin (2002) suggest that having branded material possessions at their disposal is central to the identity formation for adolescents.

However, Kasser and Kanner (2003) are of the thought that a more materialistic orientation results in lower levels of satisfaction with a reduced psychological well-being for these individuals, with special problems posed for low-income adolescents. Research evidence and compositions give useful information into the psyche of adolescents and their justifications for consumption of and need for brands. These young people associate with various brands for quite a lot of reasons, of which the desire to associate and sometimes even dissociate with certain groups to gain acceptance and avoid exclusion is primary (Ridge, 2002). In connection with this yearning for being part of 'something exciting' there is evidence that implies that brands are integral for the formation of a stable concept of self (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004; Saxton, 2005; Isaksen and Roper, 2008).

It has been found that youngsters enjoy consuming specific brands, even when they not explicitly visible to others, just as a means of reinforcing their self-identity. (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004; Dittmar, 2005). Usually young people seek luxury and try to fulfill appearance standards more than considering factors of economic affordability or product reliability while they make their purchase decisions, suggests Packard (1980).

The fact however, remains that this kind of approach, which adolescents frequently display, leads to an inclination towards materialism, which is undoubtedly exploited by marketers and those associated with branding.

The tendency of young people trying to fit in and consuming what is the going trend exerts all sorts of

pressures (social, economic, psychological etc.) on those who cannot readily purchase these hot favourite items.

These raised consumption standards lead to higher social comparisons between high and low-income groups, more prevalent in budding adolescents only because they are prone to vulnerability due to an absence of a fully developed self-identity and concept. This in turn makes them much more susceptible to being influenced by external factors like peer pressure and fear of being bullied with their material possession deficiencies.

Concerns about materialism, states of hyperconsumerism, high levels of brand dependency and how these develop in adolescents are quite intriguing, especially when low-income adolescents from a low-income country like Pakistan are concerned. An average common person of the country generally has to face scarce resources, heightened uncertainty due to economic and social burdens of maintaining a normal and acceptable standard of living.

The added pressures of compliance with consumption trends in such a situation lead to more troubles especially for low-income individuals whose own identities are not fully developed, who are extremely vulnerable to societal concerns.

Research evidence shows that low-income teenagers and youngsters—who are least likely to afford it, are the ones most drawn to the consumption culture (Isaksen and Roper, 2008), which seems to be true for Pakistani adolescents as well. Furthermore, Saxton's (2005) study suggests that disorders such as depression and low self-esteem are a result of high concerns for consuming what everybody else is.

## 10. Implications

Due to high visibility of brands (Isaksen and Roper, 2008), it is important for Pakistani low-income adolescents to desire and somehow try to get their grips on the right and most accepted brands, failing to do so brings fear of blatant social exclusion as their lower social and economic states are highlighted. Literature reviewed and study results show that it is this vulnerability of low-income adolescents that make them vulnerable and hinders their identities from being developed in a way that would be more personally specific and tangible.

However, Elliott and Leonard (2004) are of the view that it may not be brands alone that specifically contribute to self-concept formation or distortion but rather, an intensified aspiration to only obtain popular brands detracts low-income adolescents from being able to form a clear concept of self. Packard (1980)

supports this point when he says that low income people might not strive enough to move up their social and economic class, but they can be made to move up their consumption. Such aspirations to obtain the latest, trendy, typically expensive brands, is likely to increase the propensity of low-income adolescents' involvement in crime, theft, and violence (Kilbourne, 1999; Abid, 2000; Ahmad et al., 2004). Similarly, findings of the current study show that there are indeed some negative impacts of consumerism on low-income adolescents of Pakistan for which the role of branding cannot be overlooked.

Population Council (2001) documents that some of the problems that Pakistani children have to suffer due to social exclusion stemming from poverty, include mental as well as physical health disorders such as anxiety, decreased self-esteem, depression, drugs and solvent abuse with suicide as worst case scenario.

There is an understanding that materialism in one way or the other has gotten embedded into the very core of the Pakistani society, and part of this materialism is owed to the extensive exposure to national and international branding gimmicks.

Adolescents belonging to every class are affected. It is important to note that it is currently only the restricted access to brands, inability to afford them or coping with restricted consumption which augments some of the negative impacts that living in poverty already has on the identities and self esteem of the low-income adolescents (Isaksen and Roper, 2008). The question however remains that could this rise in materialism have so many upsurges that it starts contributing directly and more intensely to the problems, having the pivotal role in identity crises, social exclusion and immense external pressures, faced by these already disturbed persons.

This question should be given critical importance by all the constituents—parents, educators, public policy officials, consumer researchers as well as brand manufacturers who have some kind of influence in developing, shaping or maneuvering the consumption patterns of Pakistani adolescents. Chaplin and John (2007) emphasize that, “addressing this issue holds the promise of understanding more about materialism, about how values develop in our families and communities, and about how children become socialized as consumers in contemporary society.” Strategies that aim at increasing self-esteem among adolescents might be helpful, so that they focus more profoundly on self-development rather than material goods. This could be most effective at the earlier stages of adolescence as formation of self-concepts is underway, where identities as well as perceptions and

consumption behaviors can be modeled in a more positive manner. Wernick (1994) agrees that teachers, parents as well as peers can participate in this endeavor, giving young minds a sense of self-worth and accomplishment while coaching how not to exert peer pressure, and at the same time how not to be influenced by it. This is in accordance with what Chaplin and John (2007) recommend, that enhancing self-esteem amongst adolescents proves more effective in reducing materialistic orientations. Isaksen and Roper (2008) also state that, “Until the targeting of children and teenagers can be stemmed or controlled, the efforts of parents and educators are sorely needed. Considering all of the reported negative impacts of materialism, ‘society might want to take steps to temper this orientation through education, public policy, or otherwise’.”

## 11. Limitations

This research has some limitations that stir a need for further investigations related to the same subject. For instance, the sample's profile is not fully depictive of the whole population of Pakistani adolescents. Given the fact that convenience stratified sampling is used for the selection of respondents; the population is under-represented. As the sample approximates the urban adolescent population of two major cities of the country, further in depth investigations are required to get a better and bigger picture denoting most of the population. This paper and its results are similar to some previous researches; however, it has significance of being one of the first studies carried out in Pakistan to empirically assesses the socio-psychological impacts of branding on adolescents, with the low-income segment being the center of discussion. This study can serve as the basis for future researches. Therefore, replications should follow with diverse hypotheses and more variables to analyze the brand orientations of Pakistani adolescents in more detail.

## 12. Future Research

An area that can be further explored in accordance with the recommendation of Isaksen and Roper (2008) is to determine, in detail, if an increased desire for branded goods further reduces self-esteem and self-concept among low-income teenagers or if the scores remain constant for individuals. In addition to this, research emphasis must be laid on establishing the cause and effect relationships between branding and marketing on low-income Pakistani adolescents' social and psychological well-being. Furthermore, as Campbell et al. (1996) point out that certain links might exist while keeping the context of different countries, cultures and societies in mind. The exploration of these elements could also signify specific effects of commercialism on



general adolescent well-being.

This paper found that there are some differences in the self-concept clarity scores of mid and late adolescents of Pakistan; with mid-adolescents having lower self-concept clarity. However, owing to a small sample size, these scores did not have major differences. These age related differences and factors can prove to be interesting for future investigations. Furthermore, research carried out by Arnett (2006) reveal that Pakistani male adolescents have a better perception of self-image compared to the female adolescents. This assumption, not considered by the present study, that gender based differences might have influences on adolescents' self-concept clarity or susceptibility to interpersonal influence could provide a good base for future studies.

Prior studies imply that there is also a link between prolonged exposure to western media and advertising that lowers self-esteem of low-income adolescents even more, which can be prevented through media awareness education; and adolescents could be encouraged to resist the pressures of consumerism while protecting their self-esteem and increasing guard against peer pressure. In addition to empirical work, qualitative methods could also be used to gain deeper understanding of the emotional impacts of consumption pressures and how adolescents can deal with them (Isaksen and Roper, 2008).

Therefore, there is a need to redeem the limitations of this study by conducting future explorations related not to Pakistani adolescents only but also to the worldwide adolescent and child population. This can give more insightful facts of consumption behavior, attitudes towards branding and consumption motivations of these important yet under studied individuals, for collection of reasonable literature. After all, this segment will be the one to shape and size the future consumption and social patterns of a global society.

### 13. Conclusion

This study backs the assumptions made that exposure to excessive branding does have a negative effect on the socio-psychological development and orientation of low-income adolescents of Pakistan. These results are in conjunction with what Isaksen and Roper (2008) postulated that there is a felt need of low-income adolescents for gaining approval from peers, and that prevalence of branding in the teen market, results in increasing materialistic behaviors exhibited by their generation.

This research proves that Pakistani low-income

adolescents exhibit likeness to the western adolescents and their attitude towards brand consumption. With having lower, more diluted concepts about their personalities they put their individual identity formation at risk. These youngsters are inclined towards hyper-consumption to disguise their economic set back and experience strains of social exclusion in case they do not maintain the status quo by following the norms of branded consumptions. In addition to the affects that branding has on these individuals, impact is magnified when low-income youth lays enhanced focus on acceptance from their social circles and high-income peers.

Packard (1980) notes that children are living, talking records of what is told to them every day, and industries are effective enough in selling products as symbols, images and identities to persuade these vulnerable consumers to indisputably accept their offerings, while putting their well being at stake. This becomes clear when one considers that low-income adolescents are keener to consume and display brand names than high-income teenagers (Isaksen and Roper, 2008) while deteriorating their personal development and identity formation process. Chang and Arkin (2002) also argue that materialism is often used as a way to cope with poverty, which proves as a clear counterproductive effort with having worsened manifestations for juvenile minds and personalities. In the name of freedom of choice, they are exposed to merely more things to buy. Fashion becomes necessity and buying becomes freedom, which adolescents actively seek to break free from their constrained boundaries. As a result, these individuals start to focus even more on narcissist behavior and fulfilling the "here and now" (Isaksen and Roper, 2008) desires. Therefore, this report suggests that branding messages that are thought to be harmless on a visible front might actually not be as safe on a more concealed level.

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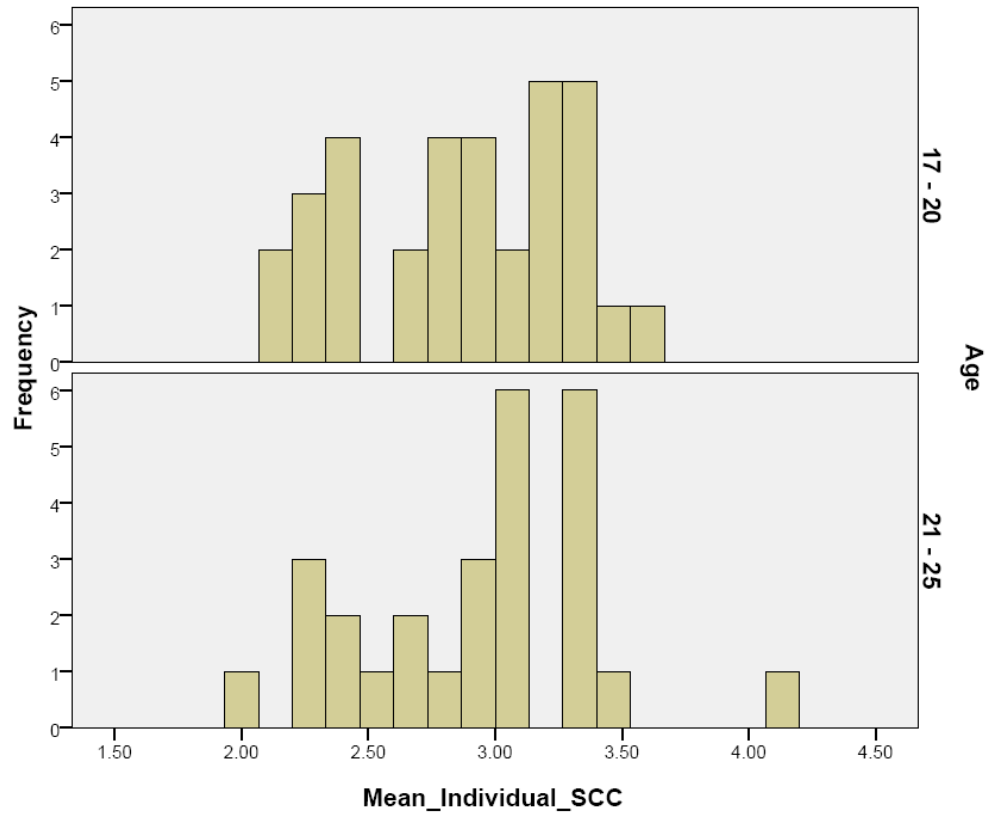
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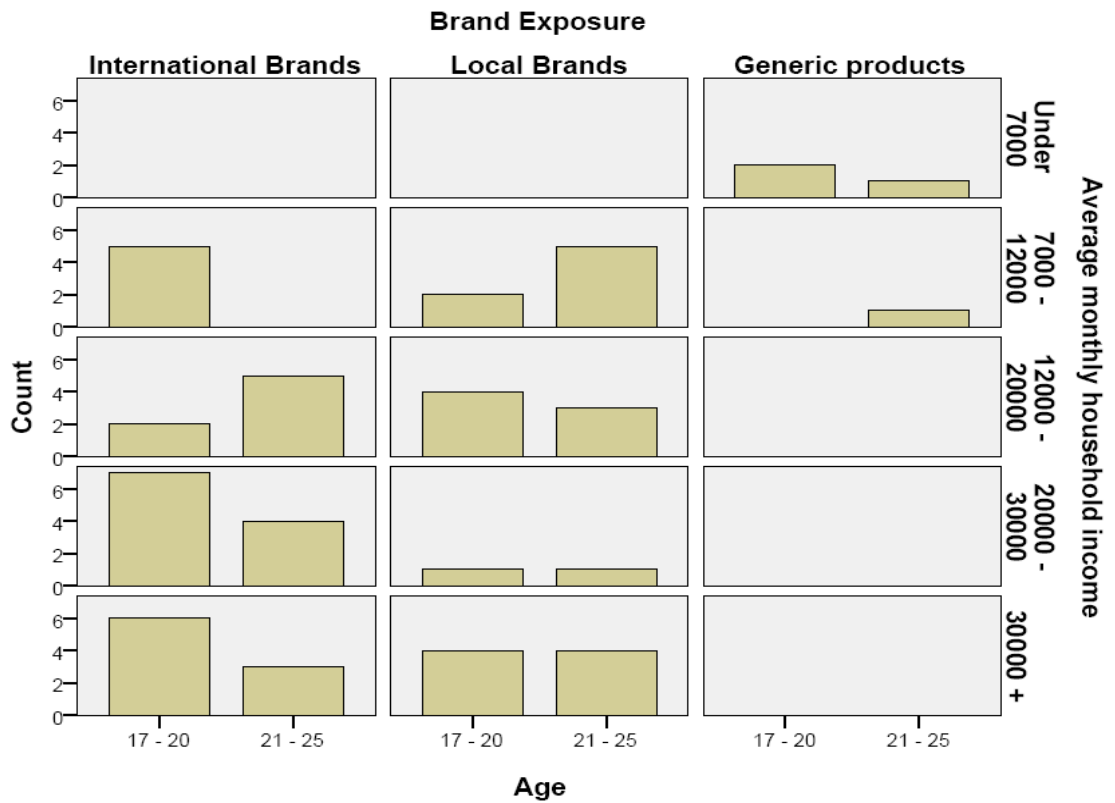
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Appendix



Graph 2: Responses for Brand Exposure, Age of Adolescents and Average Monthly Household Income



Graph 1: Mean for SCC and Age of Adolescents