



Young Consumers

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All that glitters is not gold: do materialistic cues in advertising yield resistance?

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate emerging adults' emotional responses to a commercial with materialistic cues, and the commercial's perceived and actual effect on materialism – taking the role of pre-existing attitudes toward advertising into account.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper used a mixed-method design to gauge emotions evoked by materialistic cues both qualitatively and quantitatively. Emotions were assessed using both open-ended and close-ended questions. Perceived effectiveness was also measured using close-ended questions. To establish the commercial's actual effect, an online experiment was conducted. In total, 179 individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 years participated.

Findings – Emerging adults' pre-existing attitudes toward advertising predicted their emotional responses toward a commercial with materialistic cues (i.e. influencing whether they are negative, neutral or positive) as well as the perceived effectiveness of materialistic cues in advertising. A one-time exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues does not increase materialism.

Practical implications – Emerging adults who dislike advertising, tend to also dislike advertising with materialistic cues and perceive it as less effective. However, young consumers with an interest in advertising do appreciate the use of materialistic cues and perceive them as being effective. Although no actual effect was found, this could be a reason for advertisers to use materialistic cues.

Originality/value – This paper is the first to investigate consumers' emotions toward materialistic cues, and to study their perceived and actual effect. Moreover, it is the first to examine the link between advertising exposure and materialism among emerging adults.

Keywords Advertising, Mixed-methods, Emerging adults, Materialism, Resistance

Paper type Research paper

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Similar to the transition from childhood to adulthood, advertising slowly evolves over time and has adopted different methods of communicating to its audience. Throughout the decades, advertising shifted its focus from promoting the operational features of a product to promoting materialistic themes (Belk and Pollay, 1984). Materialistic themes highlight the values of materialism, such that products provide happiness and can be seen as an indication of success when they are owned. To construct these themes, advertisers are using materialistic cues. Materialistic cues are conveyed through the use of small subtle signals within an advertisement or commercial that usually manifest themselves as luxury products which are not associated with the main selling focus. For example, commercials for the perfume "Axe" frequently make use of materialistic cues. In its commercials, Axe often features cues such as expensive cars, clothes, gadgets and jewelry, though none of the products relate to personal scent. Advertisers use these cues because they serve to enhance a commercial's mood and its persuasive intent (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2004; Borgerson and Schroeder, 2002). On an overarching level, materialistic values in advertising have had an influence on the rise in consumer culture (Zhang and Shavitt, 2003; Han and Shavitt, 2005), which may explain why advertising matured into the use of these cues.

According to [Richins and Dawson \(1992\)](#), materialism is a state that can be influenced over time. This state comprises three values: the centrality of possessions to one's life, the amount of happiness and the amount of perceived success an individual obtains by acquiring objects. Commercials with materialistic cues strategically highlight these values. By promoting a product featuring happy characters surrounded by luxury items, advertising affirms the values of materialism to the audience – who may become vulnerable to these messages. Literature confirms our vulnerabilities to this theme of advertising, as studies have shown that adults with high materialism use the act of acquiring possessions as coping mechanisms for obtaining happiness and success; moreover, that materialistic commercials can also influence purchasing behaviors and materialism in adults ([Kasser and Kanner, 2004](#)). Other studies have shown that in context of minors (i.e. aged 17 years or younger), advertising exposure increases the frequency of purchase requests and overall materialism ([Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003](#); [Oprea et al., 2014](#)). Although literature exists for the effects of materialistic cues in advertising on minors and adults, there are few studies on emerging adults (i.e. aged 18-25 years). This demographic is arguably the most insecure and heavily reliant on the norms of media and their peers ([Rimal and Real, 2003](#)). In a study by [Jiang and Chia \(2009\)](#), emerging adults were found to be more materialistic with increase in exposure to advertising. Yet, little is known about how materialistic cues in advertising are perceived by emerging adults themselves.

To understand emerging adults' perceptions of advertising and their perceptions of materialistic cues in advertising, it is important to investigate the types of responses emerging adults produce when exposed to commercials. It is widely understood that stimuli can elicit different responses in different individuals. Therefore, using qualitative methods to catalogue the potential array of positive, negative and neutral emotions could prove useful in understanding quantitative analyses on materialism and the perceptions of it. However, we have yet to discover which type of emotions these commercials will exhibit. Therefore, our first research questions for this study is:

RQ1. What kinds of emotions are elicited from emerging adults when they are exposed to a commercial with materialistic cues?

When considering elicited responses, it should be acknowledged that general attitudes toward advertising can have an effect on the persuasiveness of an advertisement ([Mehta and Purvis, 1995](#)). If viewers are predisposed toward having negative attitudes toward commercials (i.e. deeming commercials to be not credible or trustworthy), the effect of the message is jeopardized ([Beverland and Farrelly, 2010](#); [Rozendaal et al., 2011](#)). To explore why commercials with materialistic cues cause positive (or negative) reactions in some but not in others, this study intends to evaluate the role of respondents' general attitudes toward advertising. Therefore, the second research question of our study posits:

RQ2. Do predetermined attitudes toward advertising influence the type of emotion elicited by emerging adults when watching a commercial with materialistic cues?

Next, we aimed to establish whether negative emotions toward advertising in general affect emerging adults' perception on whether or not they perceive a commercial with materialistic cues to be effective in influencing them. We know from previous studies that people tend to think that others are vulnerable to advertising, but that they themselves are not (called the third-person effect, proposed by Davidson in 1983 and tested in a wide variety of studies; see [Paul et al., 2000](#)). Those who dislike advertising in general tend to ignore it as much as possible to shield themselves from its effects ([Mehta, 2000](#); [Rozendaal et al., 2011](#)). Therefore, we propose the third research question of our study:

RQ3. Can emerging adults' general advertising attitudes predict whether or not they perceive a commercial with materialistic cues to be effective?

Lastly, there is little reason to suspect that emerging adults would differ from minors and adults and *not* be vulnerable to long-term effects of advertising on materialism; yet, given that emerging adults are more susceptible and reliant upon the messages of media and

peers (Rimal and Real, 2003), we want to establish whether advertising can have short-term, direct effects on their materialism. Therefore, the fourth and final research question is as follows:

RQ4. For emerging adults, can a commercial with materialistic cues result in higher materialism after one exposure?

To answer *RQ1-RQ4*, we asked respondents to view Paco Rabanne's commercial for their "One Million" perfume. This advertisement is 30 seconds long and bombards its viewers with symbols of materialism: it features two attractive characters repeatedly snapping their fingers, resulting in the pair receiving expensive shoes, jewelry and – by the 10 second mark – a bag filled with money. It is important to emphasize that the main focus of this study is not on the effect of the commercial, but on emerging adults' attitudes toward and perceived effectiveness of its materialistic cues. We used a mixed-method design and gave respondents a variety of open- and closed-ended questions to determine their thoughts.

These research questions will be developed in the following sections.

Responses to materialistic cues in advertising (*RQ1*)

Over time, advertising has evolved from a utilitarian approach to a materialistic one. The majority of present day research on advertising inadvertently explores the effects of materialism and materialistic cues within advertising. Thus, when considering the first research question on whether or not advertising elicits an array of positive, negative and neutral emotions, we can turn to previous literature that does not specifically focus on advertising with materialistic cues. Previous research by Edell and Burke (1987) found that advertising can elicit different kinds of emotional responses in emerging adults; yet the authors only distinguish between positive and negative feelings. In their research, the authors classify "boredom" as a negative emotion. However, Goetz *et al.* (2014) pose that boredom has several types, most of which fall between the positive and negative emotions continuum. Their research contends that most emotionally neutral type of boredom is indifference. Thus, when looking at the range of emotions elicited in research by Edell and Burke (1987), we propose the reclassification of boredom as a more neutral leaning emotion, thus extending the range so that advertising can elicit positive, negative and neutral responses. By accounting for the findings of Edell and Burke (1987) and Goetz *et al.* (2014), we hypothesize the following:

H1. Exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues can elicit positive, negative and neutral emotions.

General responses to advertising (*RQ2*)

To further engage and explore responses toward advertising and its relation to materialistic cues in advertising, it is beneficial to understand what influences certain beliefs and values. Several authors use the elaboration likelihood model to explain the mechanisms behind the cultivation of responses toward materialistic cues in advertising as well as advertising itself (Cheung and Chan, 1996; Schroeder, 2005; Shrum *et al.*, 2005). The elaboration likelihood model contends that individuals process messages (e.g. commercials) using one of two different routes, which are the central processing route and the peripheral route (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). The central route suggests that individuals will process messages with high scrutiny, and rely on previous attitudes and opinions about the subject. If one has a positive attitude toward advertising, he/she may be more likely to be motivated to process materialistic cues. The peripheral route posits a contrasting approach, in which uninterested individual are not motivated to think critically about a message and rely upon heuristic cues (e.g. attractive actors, music and auxiliary products).

General responses to advertising may not only predict how we process advertising (Petty and Briñol, 2014), but also how we react to it. Research has found general attitudes toward

advertising to be either favorable or unfavorable (Shavitt *et al.*, 1998; Gal-Or and Dukes, 2003; Li and Miniard, 2006; Kaiser and Song, 2009; Chittithaworn *et al.*, 2011). Edell and Burke (1987) found that positive and negative attitudes toward advertising in general correlate with positive and negative emotions elicited by specific advertisements. Individuals who hold negative attitudes toward advertising may reinforce their negative attitudes toward advertising when exposed to it (Boerman *et al.*, 2012). In the context of understanding how materialistic cues can influence emerging adults, it is important to understand if and how pre-existing attitudes toward advertising in general affect the type of emotion that is elicited after an exposure to a commercial. To account for the two distinct types of attitudes toward advertising (i.e. positive and negative), we propose the following two hypotheses:

H2a. When exposed to a commercial with materialistic cues, emerging adults with less favorable attitudes toward advertising show negative emotions.

H2b. When exposed to a commercial with materialistic cues, emerging adults with more favorable attitudes toward advertising show positive emotions.

Perceived effectiveness of advertising (RQ3)

The determining factor that dictates which route someone will use to process a message depends on how motivated they are to process a message. When motivation to process a message is high, individuals will adopt a central route approach; if motivation is low, they will seek a peripheral route (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). With regard to commercials and materialistic cues, respondents with materialistic values would be more likely use a central route to process a commercial – actively looking at products and brands for social comparative purposes (Li, 2013), whereas one uninterested in a materialistic lifestyle would not be motivated to scrutinize the commercial closely. If one dislikes a topic or perceives it to be irrelevant for them, they will be less likely to be motivated to process a message and retain their existing attitudes (Petty and Briñol, 2011).

In light of the elaboration likelihood model, Shrum *et al.* (2005) have found that individuals have to pay attention to an advertisement for it to affect them. This poses an additional challenges for advertisers when trying to reach audiences who hold negative attitudes toward advertising. When viewers critically reflect upon advertisements, it may result in actively ignoring the message (Friestad and Wright, 1994) and, by extension, the materialistic cues contained within (Bellman *et al.*, 2010; El-Adly and Aicinena, 2010). Yet, some individuals enjoy commercials (Shavitt *et al.*, 1998; Li and Miniard, 2006). Moreover, they find advertisements useful to establish social standing (Chan and Prendergast, 2007). Therefore, it does not come as a surprise, when considering the elaboration likelihood model, that increased motivation to process a message leads to increased susceptibility to persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). We extend these findings and postulate that emerging adults' previous attitudes toward advertising dictate whether or not they are consciously avoiding or seeking commercial content, and that actively avoiding content would leave one to conclude that he/she is invulnerable to cues in advertising, whereas actively seeking content could be driven by the thought that the cues in advertising are informative and, hence, effective:

H3a. The use of materialistic cues in commercials is perceived as non-effective by emerging adults with less favorable advertising attitudes.

H3b. The use of materialistic cues in commercials is perceived as effective by emerging adults with favorable advertising attitudes.

Cultivation of materialism (RQ4)

According to Jiang and Chia (2009), advertising can cultivate materialism in emerging adults, and it does so via its perceived effectiveness. The more advertisements emerging adults are exposed to, the greater is its perceived effectiveness (i.e. in their case, defined as the effect on others), and the greater the perceived effectiveness, the greater one's

materialism. At the heart of this work is the hypothesis of accommodation, which stipulates that:

[...] a person may infer others' attitudes from presumption of media influence on others, and then social influence would drive the same person to adapt his or her own attitudes and behaviors to correspond to that perception (Jiang and Chia, 2009, p. 320).

To support both *H3-H3b*, and test this mediational hypothesis by Jiang and Chia (2009), the fourth hypothesis of this study is:

H4. Emerging adults' perceived effectiveness of advertising is positively related to their level of materialism.

The authors Shrum and Rindfleisch (2002) use cultivation theory to explain their findings in which television viewing cultivates materialism through learned values on what material items mean to one's life, and the expectation to participate in material culture. Yet, to this day, the precision of the cultivation theory and the mechanisms behind are still to be defined (Potter, 2014). Mechanisms and consequences of cultivation theory such as age have been tested, and results show that older age groups are less susceptible to cultivation effects. The differences in age and susceptibility could be the product of media consumption itself, as youngsters are spending upwards of 7.5-10 hours per day in front of a screen with advertising capabilities (Rideout *et al.*, 2010). With youth consuming a large amount of media, the expectation of participating in material culture and its inherent value lends credence to practical cultivation theory studies.

In a previous study, emerging adults who watched greater amounts of television were more inclined to believe that material items are more widely owned and available (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). Not only are the beliefs that material wealth is widely available and a sign of financial success products of greater television exposure, but increased exposure to television – specifically, advertising – also leads to greater social comparison, and as a direct result, increased materialism (Chan and Prendergast, 2007). The two effects may compound on one another: youth are heavy media consumers and concerned with peer norms and social comparison (Rimal and Real, 2003), making them susceptible to materialistic advertising. In our final hypothesis for this study, we argue that if cultivation theory is a cumulative process, emerging adults are, at least slightly, affected by the exposure of one commercial containing materialistic cues.

H5. Exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues will increase materialism among emerging adults.

To summarize, the list of hypotheses and rationale is provided in Table I.

Methods

Sample and procedure

The study was part of a graduate-level university course at a university in The Netherlands. Students were tasked with recruiting respondents through their extended networks in January 2014. Respondents who participated were informed that the experiment was related to advertising and brand attitudes. Their anonymity was guaranteed and they were informed that they were able to end their involvement at any time they wished. Twenty respondents dropped out halfway through the survey, and thus their cases were removed from the sample. In total, 179 completed surveys were obtained. Demographic data pertaining to respondents' education level, gender and age were measured ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.66$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.88$; 66.5 per cent female). Educational level can predict attitudes toward advertising, and thus was included as a control in the analyses (Shavitt *et al.*, 1998). Due to recruiting through extended networks, the sample comprised of an international mix of emerging adults.

Individuals who were contacted were met with a brief message and link to the survey explaining the experiment and its education benefits for students. Once respondents

Table 1 Hypotheses and rationales

<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
<i>H1.</i> "Exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues can elicit positive, negative and neutral emotions"	Although Edel and Burke (1987) found that advertising elicits just positive and negative responses, Goetz et al. (2014) argue that boredom and indifference should be reclassified as a neutral emotion
<i>H2a.</i> "When exposed to a commercial with materialistic cues, emerging adults with less favorable attitudes toward advertising show negative emotions"	Individuals process advertising with high scrutiny, thus relying on prior attitudes to form opinions (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986 ; Edell and Burke, 1987)
<i>H2b.</i> "When exposed to a commercial with materialistic cues, emerging adults with more favorable attitudes toward advertising show positive emotions"	
<i>H3a.</i> "The use of materialistic cues in commercials is perceived as non-effective by emerging adults with less favorable advertising attitudes"	
<i>H3b.</i> "The use of materialistic cues in commercials is perceived as effective by emerging adults with favorable advertising attitudes"	People who hold negative views toward advertising are more prone to ignoring the message; those who hold positive views toward advertising are motivated to pay close attention (Friestad and Wright, 1994 ; Shavitt et al., 1998 ; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). The first group may feel that advertising cannot affect them, whereas the second group may readily admit being influenced
<i>H4.</i> "Emerging adults' perceived effectiveness of advertising is positively related to their level of materialism"	Jiang and Chia (2009) tested the influence-of-presumed-influence model and found a relationship between perceived effectiveness and materialism and materialism
<i>H5.</i> "Exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues will increase materialism among emerging adults"	Emerging adults are a highly impressionable demographic, whose large amounts of television watching leads to higher social comparisons and greater materialism

opened the link, they were met with a brief introduction and request for consent, followed by a video to test their device's audio and video capabilities (given the necessity of working audio and visual components for the survey stimulus). Respondents were asked multiple choice questions about the sound and visuals in the video. Every respondent was able to correctly answer the questions; thus, no respondents were removed from the survey because of technical discrepancies.

Next, respondents were asked to answer questions regarding their demographics. Afterwards, the online software hosting the experiment randomly placed respondents in one of two groups, a control group ($n = 87$) and an experimental group ($n = 92$). The control group recorded their materialism scores prior to the exposure of the manipulation as to create a baseline to compare to for *RQ4*. Respondents placed into the experimental group answered materialism questions after watching the commercial for "One Million". Video embedding disallowed respondents to navigate through the video by skipping, rewinding or fast-forwarding. Although the measurement of materialism occurred at different timelines within the survey, other measurement items were recorded at identical points for both conditions. Responses toward materialistic cues were measured after the video for conditions, and questions regarding perceived effectiveness were asked at the end of the survey. After completing these questions, respondents were thanked for their time.

Measures

Open-ended responses feelings toward commercial. To gauge our respondents' type of responses to materialistic cues, we measured emotions using both qualitative and quantitative methods. To measure the emotions qualitatively, we asked our respondents "Please list two emotions you felt while watching the video".

Closed-ended responses toward commercial. Next, we prompted the question, “How does this video make you feel?” and asked the respondents to indicate this on a seven-point scale, ranging from (1) *Very bad* to (7) *Very good* ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.27$).

General attitudes toward commercials. To gauge respondents’ attitudes toward advertising, this study utilized three items adapted from Tsang *et al.* (2004). The response categories for each item ranged from (1) *Never* to (5) *All the time*. The first measure asked “How often do you think commercials are truthful?” ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.63$); the second “How often do you find commercials are nice?” ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.71$) and the third “How often do you find commercials are annoying” ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.77$).

Perceived effectiveness. We determined whether or not respondents found the commercial to be effective by asking them six items adapted from Richins and Dawson’s *Material Values Scale* (1992). The items were: “Was this video successful in suggesting that the product makes you successful?”, “Was this video successful in suggesting that the product is expensive?”, “Was this video successful in suggesting that the product is new?”, “Was this video successful in suggesting that the product makes you beautiful?”, “Was this video successful in suggesting that you need to own the product?” and “Was this video successful in suggesting that the product makes you happy?”. The response categories were on a five-point scale, and ranged from (1) *Strongly disagree* to (5) *Strongly agree*. Factor analyses indicated that the two items did not load onto the common factor (i.e. “Was this video successful in suggesting that the product is new?” and “Was this video successful in suggesting that the product is expensive?”), yet the remaining four items could be combined into one scale with strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.92$, $M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.24$).

Materialism. This study used nine items from Richins and Dawson’s (1992) *Material Values Scale*. The reason the scale was chosen for this study is because of its wide acceptance and usage in research (Richins, 2004). The nine items that were included were: “I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes”, “The things I own say a lot about how well I’m doing in life”, “I like to own things that impress people”, “I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned”, “Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure”, “I like a lot of luxury in my life”, “My life would be better if I owned certain things I don’t have”, “I’d be happier if I could afford to buy more things” and “It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can’t afford to buy all the things I’d like”. The response categories of these items ranged from (1) *Strongly disagree* to (5) *Strongly agree*. In line with common practice, the items were averaged into one scale ($\alpha = 0.85$, $M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.69$).

Control variables. To control for financial insecurities having an effect on materialism and the desire for material goods, we measured respondents’ financial satisfaction using a ten-point scale ranging from (1) *Very dissatisfied* to (10) *Very Satisfied* ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 2.22$). Lastly, we also understand that using a commercial that has previously aired may affect some of the results, and thus we asked our respondents whether they have seen the commercial before. Roughly half had seen the commercial before ($n = 89$) compared with those who had not ($n = 90$).

Results

A summary of the variables used in the subsequent analyses have been placed into [Table II](#) along with their respective correlations, to give a broad overview of the relationships between the variables we are investigating.

Responses to materialistic cues in advertising

To test *H1*: “Exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues can elicit positive, negative, and neutral emotions”, we compiled respondents’ open-ended one-word responses to the question about how the Paco Rabanne commercial made them feel. In total, there were 329 responses, and 112 unique answers. Of the responses, the top most frequently mentioned items were: *Happiness* ($n = 34$), *Boredom*, ($n = 33$), *Indifference* ($n = 22$), *Annoyance* ($n = 17$), *Disgust* ($n = 15$), *None* ($n = 11$), *Curiosity* ($n = 9$), *Anger* ($n = 7$), *Jealousy*

Table II Correlations between materialism, perceived effectiveness, advertising attitudes and responses to advertising

Measure	1	2	2a	2b	2c	2d	3	4	5	6
1. Materialism	–									
2. Perceived effectiveness	0.13	–								
2a. [...] their product makes you successful?	0.05		–							
2b. [...] their product makes you beautiful?	0.09		0.87***	–						
2c. [...] their product makes you happy?	0.21***		0.72***	0.80**	–					
2d. [...] you need to own this product?	0.11		0.69***	0.70**	0.69**	–				
3. [...] commercials are truthful?	0.29***	0.24**	0.18*	0.24**	0.25**	0.21**	–			
4. [...] commercials are nice?	0.16**	0.17*	0.09	0.18*	0.18*	0.16*	0.13	–		
5. [...] commercials are annoying?	–0.22**	–0.021**	–0.15*	–0.22**	–0.20**	–0.17*	–0.29***	–0.39***	–	
6. How does this commercial make you feel?	0.43***	0.24**	0.14	0.20**	0.32**	0.23**	0.29**	0.25**	–0.26**	–

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

($n = 6$) and *Fun* ($n = 6$). Of the unique answers ($N = 112$), 72 responses were only listed once. Classifying the responses into positive, neutral and negative categories, the most frequent response was negative ($n = 120$), followed by positive ($n = 111$) and neutral ($n = 98$). The variety of unique answers, and the relatively equal classification of response classifications confirm that indeed an exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues will elicit positive, neutral and negative responses. Thus, *H1* is accepted.

General responses to advertising

Next, we tested the second hypothesis which dually proposed that emerging adults' positive attitudes toward advertising would predict positive elicited responses, and negative attitudes toward advertising would predict negative responses. We used respondents' closed-ended responses to Paco Rabanne's commercial as the dependent measure in a regression analysis. The three general attitudes toward advertising measures were then input as independent measures along with our control variables. The results are provided in [Table III](#). Judging from the results, each of the three *General Attitudes Toward Advertising* measures predicted the general response scores to the commercial; such that if respondents find advertising in general to be nice or truthful, they would be more inclined to indicate a positive response to Paco Rabanne's commercial. The opposite was also the case, as respondents who find advertising to be annoying were more likely to indicate negative responses to the Pace Rabanne commercial. Based on these findings, both *H2a* and *H2b* were accepted.

Perceived effectiveness of advertising

Continuing into the analysis of attitudes toward advertising, we had proposed for the third hypothesis that favorable attitudes will lead to greater perceived effectiveness of materialistic cues in advertising, and conversely that less favorable attitudes toward advertising will lead to lessened perceived effectiveness of materialistic cues in advertising. To investigate the hypothesis, we performed three regression analyses on *Perceived Effectiveness* with each of the *General Attitudes Toward Advertising* variables as the respective independent measures. The results from the regression analysis are listed in [Table IV](#). Each attitude measure has a significant effect. If emerging adults finds advertising in general to be "nice" or "truthful", they will be more likely to indicate that a commercial with materialistic cues is effective. The opposite can be said for those who find advertising in

Table III Regression analysis on “How does this video make you feel?”

Predictors	Model 1	Models	
	β	Model 2	Model 3
	β	β	β
“How often do you think commercials are truthful?”	0.224**		
“How often do you think commercials are nice?”		0.186**	
“How often do you think commercials are annoying?”			-0.226**
Age	0.025	-0.025	-0.022
Education	-0.132	-0.130	-0.152*
Gender	0.116	0.148*	0.125
Financial Satisfaction	-0.087	-0.094	-0.109
Has seen the commercial before	-0.273***	-0.247**	-0.260***
R^2	0.21	0.19	0.21
F	7.842***	6.769***	7.518***

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

general to be annoying, as they are less likely to acknowledge that materialistic cues in commercials are effective. Both *H3* and *H3b* are confirmed.

Cultivation of materialism

To understand materialism amongst emerging adults, we hypothesized that we would find a correlation between perceived effectiveness and materialism itself which would support previous literature findings. To test the relationship, a bivariate correlation was conducted. The variables *Perceived Effectiveness* and *Materialism* had a weak relationship that is marginally significant ($r = 0.13$, $p = 0.089$), thus indicating that whether or not one perceives materialistic cues in a commercial as effective will not necessarily be related to one's overall materialism. Lastly, in relation to emotions, emotional responses (i.e. *How does this make you feel?*) correlated significantly with both *Perceived Effectiveness* ($r = 0.24$, $p = 0.001$) and *Materialism* ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.000$).

Our final hypothesis set out to determine if a one-time exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues would increase emerging adults' materialism. Conducting an independent *t*-test revealed that the means of the control group ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.68$) and the experimental group ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.70$) were not significantly different from one another, $t(179) = 0.96$, $p = 0.339$. In short, there was no difference in materialism scores, indicating that an exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues did not increase an emerging adult's materialism after one exposure.

Table IV Regression analysis on perceived effectiveness

Predictors	Model 1	Models	
	β	Model 2	Model 3
	β	β	β
“How often do you think commercials are truthful?”	0.221**		
“How often do you think commercials are nice?”		0.154*	
“How often do you think commercials are annoying?”			-0.200**
Age	-0.021	-0.066	-0.065
Education	-0.041	-0.040	-0.059
Gender	0.022	0.053	0.033
Financial satisfaction	0.034	0.026	0.013
Has seen commercial before	-0.098	-0.086	-0.090
R^2	0.08	0.05	0.07
F	2.323*	1.527	2.053

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Additional analyses

Due to the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) theory that people will be more affected by a persuasive message when they are interested in it, we conducted exploratory correlation analyses amongst respondents who either offered positive or negative qualitative responses (e.g. "Happy", "Joy", "Sad" or "Angry") ($n = 136$) and compared them to those who offered neutral qualitative responses (e.g. "Bored" or "Indifferent") ($n = 43$). For $H3$, we found no relationship between the *Perceived Effectiveness* of neutral responders and finding commercials to be truthful ($r = 0.13$, $p = 0.424$), nice ($r = 0.23$, $p = 0.138$) and annoying ($r = -0.20$, $p = 0.210$). For respondents who offered answers indicating an emotional response (e.g. "Happy" or "Sad"), correlations were found between *Perceived Effectiveness* and finding commercials to be truthful ($r = 0.27$, $p = 0.001$) and annoying ($r = -0.21$, $p = 0.013$), albeit not finding commercials nice ($r = 0.16$, $p = 0.069$).

A non-significant relationship was found in $H4$ between the correlation between *Perceived Effectiveness* and *Materialism* for respondents who gave neutral responses ($r = -0.01$, $p = 0.978$). Yet, when we ran this correlation analysis among respondents with emotional responses, the relationship was significant ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.022$), suggesting that there is a relationship between perceived effectiveness and materialism for people who had either positive or negative emotional responses. We verified these additional findings for $H4$ by comparing quantitative responses to the question about how the commercial made respondents feel. In total, 94 participants indicated quantitative neutral emotions on a scale (i.e. answered with "4" on the seven-point scale), and similar to the main results, no correlation was found ($r = -0.03$, $p = 0.759$). Yet, for the 85 individuals who indicated a quantitative negative or positive response to the commercial, the results confirm the previous correlation between *Perceived Effectiveness* and *Materialism* ($r = 0.27$, $p = 0.012$).

It appears that those who are indifferent to advertising do not let prior general advertising attitudes affect commercial specific attitudes and are less likely to succumb to consumer pressure from peers and the media.

Discussion

This study set out to determine what types of emotions commercials with materialistic cues can elicit amongst emerging adults, as well as to determine their perceived and actual effectiveness. Our results indicated that contrasting emotions are elicited by commercials with materialistic cues, and that they can be predicted by general attitudes toward advertising. Moreover, one's attitude toward advertising can predict perceived effectiveness of commercials. This research focused on emerging adults as they are a susceptible demographic to influences by media and peers; yet, few studies investigate emerging adults and their relationship to materialism. Lastly, previous literature found a relationship between perceived effectiveness and materialism; however, our research found only marginal significance for this relationship.

Using literature by [Edell and Burke \(1987\)](#), we proposed that advertising with materialistic cues would elicit positive and negative emotions, and extending on the works of [Goetz et al. \(2014\)](#), we also included neutral emotions. Results proved that indeed emerging adults respond to materialistic cues with positivity, negativity and plain indifference ($H1$). Although the quantitative measure revealed an average neutral opinion, when using qualitative measurement, individuals indicated less neutral emotional responses. Our study proved that these responses can be predicted by general attitudes toward television advertising ($H2$), confirming past research by [Edell and Burke \(1987\)](#) and explaining as to why some individuals have contrasting emotions elicited when viewing to commercials with materialistic cues.

Continuing on this variable, these general attitudes toward advertising can also predict perceived effectiveness of advertising ($H3$) – that is, the perceived effectiveness of a

commercial that uses materialistic cues. Both [Petty and Cacioppo \(1986\)](#) and [Shrum *et al.* \(2005\)](#) found that increased motivation to process information heightens one's susceptibility to the message, and motivation to process is linked to one's attitude ([Petty and Briñol, 2011](#); [Petty and Briñol, 2014](#)). Although these findings were proven for adults and not children, we can now confirm from our study that these findings are applicable to emerging adults. Negative attitudes toward advertising may result in viewers being less susceptible to the message, as found by [El-Adly and Aicinena \(2010\)](#). Through this study, we now know that this is also true when considering the materialistic values in advertising. If viewers find advertising to be annoying, they report lower effectiveness.

Lastly, although emerging adults may be more susceptible to media and peer influence – they are not susceptible to short-term, direct effects on materialism after an exposure to commercials with materialistic cues (*H5*). We tested an association through the relationship of perceived effectiveness on materialism (*H4*), as previously found by [Jiang and Chia \(2009\)](#); however, only marginal significance for the relationship was found. Though, when an alternate analysis was performed, we saw that the relationship between perceived effectiveness was correlated with and predictive of materialism for those who had qualitatively responded with either positive or negative emotions, but not for individuals who had qualitatively responded with neutral emotions. These additional analyses provide support for [Jiang and Chia \(2009\)](#), but there is a caveat which is that respondents have to be engaged whether it is positively or negatively. This caveat is supported by [Shrum *et al.* \(2005\)](#), given that people have to pay attention for susceptible messages to be effective. Thus, it begs the question: is the threat to the susceptibility of advertising with materialistic cues not negativity, but instead, boredom?

These nuances found in the alternative analyses are most likely dependent on the type of advertisement that was shown and whether or not the respondent has seen the commercial before. As found in the results, participants who had indicated they had seen Paco Rabanne's commercial before had higher materialism scores than those who indicated that they had not seen the commercial before. This is thought to be an exemplification of the cultivation theory which states that the more someone is exposed to a message, the greater chance they will be more susceptible to it ([Gerbner and Gross, 1976](#)).

Conclusion

Our study contributed to the literature on emerging adults by finding evidence that this demographic reacts to commercials with materialistic cues with varying emotional responses. Responses can be predicted by looking at emerging adults' attitudes toward advertising. Thus, explaining why materialistic cues can cause reactions in some but not others. Emerging adults' attitudes toward advertising can also determine whether or not they perceive advertising to be effective. Although we only found partial support for the relationship between perceived effectiveness and materialism itself, as found by other authors, it helps to conceive a more elaborate and defining picture of the processes behind emerging adults' interpretation of materialistic cues in commercials. Furthermore, given that emerging adults are at a susceptible developmental stage in peer and media norms, our study concluded that their materialism thresholds are not high enough to be able to be affected by one exposure to a commercial with materialistic cues.

The results suggest practical implications for advertisers. Commercials with materialistic cues can elicit a range of emotions, and may be used strategically. Advertisers should avoid using materialistic cues for groups that generally dislike advertising, but utilize them for groups that favor advertising. In the alternate analyses, we saw that neutral opinions did not correlate to any perceptions or attitudes toward advertising. The theoretical implications from this paper provide more research on the specific demographic of emerging adults, as recent literature on emerging adults and materialism is a field to be continuously explored. We found partial support for the influence-of-presumed-influence model ([Jiang and Chia,](#)

2009), which predicts materialism as being dependent on perceived effectiveness, and added the finding of attitudes toward advertising predicting perceived effectiveness.

Future studies could investigate the mediation effect between attitudes toward advertising, perceived effectiveness and materialism, thus providing a link between a demographic that has advertising knowledge unlike children but is more susceptible to media influences than adults. Moreover, additional studies could determine the frequency of exposure to the commercials it would take to be able to see a difference in materialism. It is recommended that researchers should not use an international sample base because of the potential for varying degrees of cultural materialism acceptance. An additional suggestion includes the consideration of using an advertisement that is more obscure to audiences than the one that was used for this study because prior exposure had an effect on overall materialism scores. One can also argue for the investigation of the diminishing effect of materialistic cues with increased familiarity, as our findings seem to suggest that all that glitters is not gold.

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