A World beyond Family: How External Factors Impact the Level of Materialism in Children

This article explores and puts together eight important factors influencing materialism in children aged 8–12 years using a large sample from Spain. An analysis of the relationship of this set of factors with children’s materialism using structural equation modeling is provided as well. Results suggest that external influences are more important for Spanish children than family influences. Finally, the article provides a roadmap for practitioners as well as government agencies, and suggestions for further research.

The rising level of materialism in children and adolescents has prompted growing concerns among parents, educators, and social scientists (Chaplin and John 2007). Children are especially vulnerable and have been exposed to an upsurge of consumption. Aggressive marketing targeting children began in the 1980s (McNeal 1992) and has expanded ever since. In 2004, Schor reported that expenditures in marketing aimed at children in the United States had reached $15 billion a year, up from only $100 million in 1983 (Schor, 2004).

Along with children’s involvement in consumer society, children’s materialism (or a tendency to value material possessions as a path to happiness) has become a research area for many scholars. Over the last 35 years, a stream of research has explored the links between children’s materialism and several other factors, such as age (Chan 2013; Chaplin and John 2007; Flouri 2004; Goldberg et al. 2003), self-esteem (Chaplin and John 2007, 2010), parents’ materialism (Chaplin and Lowrey 2010; Flouri 1999; Goldberg et al. 2003), family income (Chan and Cai 2009; Goldberg...
et al. 2003), family disruption (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 1997; Roberts, Manolis, and Tanner 2003), media exposure (Buijzen and Valkenburg 2003, 2005; Churchill and Moschis 1979; Moschis and Moore 1982), and the influence of peers (Achenreiner 1997; Chan and Prendergast 2007; Flouri 1999) or media celebrities (Clark, Martin, and Bush 2001; La Ferle and Chan 2008). Knowledge of the factors linked to children’s (and adolescents’) materialism has advanced by leaps and bounds over the past 40 years, as has understanding of the interactions and relations among variables, although interpretations often vary.

This article enriches the literature with a research study that evaluates the influence of a range of factors identified in the literature on children’s materialism using structural equation modeling. This study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, from a theoretical perspective, the study builds on the background of materialism, and is developed based on previous research and theoretical frameworks (e.g., Dávila and Casabayó 2013). Second, from a methodological perspective, in order to gather more realistic information, a double survey to children (492 girls and boys aged 8–12 years) and their parents (385) was designed and conducted.

The article is organized as follows. The second section presents the conceptual background and hypotheses. The third section explains the research study and the results. Finally, the conclusions and directions for further research are explained in last section.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Materialism has been studied extensively. In the academic literature, several definitions of materialism appear. For instance, Belk (1984) defined materialism as:

The importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central role in a person’s life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in life either directly (as ends) or indirectly (as means to end). (Belk 1984, 291)

For Richins and Dawson (1992), materialism revolves around three related values: centrality (a tendency to place possessions and their acquisition at the center of one’s life), the pursuit of happiness (the view that possessions are essential to one’s satisfaction and well-being), and

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1. The term consumerism is now sometimes used as a synonym for materialism, although it was first coined to describe the 20th-century movement for defending consumers from corporations (Swagler 1994).
possession-defined success (the tendency to judge one person’s success by the number and quality of his possessions).

In addition, there is a major stream of research that seeks to discover and measure the negative effects of materialism on people’s well-being, such as unhappiness, lower subjective well-being, and depression (Belk 1984, 1985; Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Kasser and Ahuvia 2002; Kasser et al. 2004; Larsen, Sirgy, and Wright 1999; Richins 1987; Richins and Dawson 1992; Ryan and Dziurawiec 2001; Swinyard, Kau, and Phua 2001).

Furthermore, some scholars argue that these drawbacks of materialism can be moderated by social and personal values (Baker et al. 2013; Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; La Barbera and Gürhan 1997; Rindfleisch and Burroughs 2004). Finally, authors proposing an explanation to these negative outcomes are also found in the literature (Kasser 2002; Rindfleisch and Burroughs 2004).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Several factors have been identified in the literature as fostering materialism in children. But these factors have been, so far, explored in independent studies, rather than put together in a comprehensive model. In 2013, Dávila and Casabayó performed a literature review to identify the main factors that influence materialism in children. They included in their search articles from 1978 to 2012 that met two criteria: (1) the article studied the influence of a factor or set of factors in children’s materialism, and (2) it included children under 14 years in at least part of the sample (Dávila and Casabayó 2013). Additionally, the key factors of materialism in children are classified into three groups: individual factors, semicontextual factors, and contextual factors. As shown in Figure 1, individual factors refer to a child’s inherent characteristics, while semicontextual and contextual factors are linked to the setting in which a child is born and brought up. According to the authors, semicontextual factors, also called family influences, are considered a separate set of factors, as family is the main context for human development (Bronfenbrenner 1986) and literature on materialism has explored many family-related variables. Finally, contextual factors refer to influences stemming from outside of the family, such as peers, media exposure, and admired icons.

The three sets of factors (individual, semicontextual, and contextual) can be organized in layers around the child, a display that bears some connections to Belk’s concept of multiple levels of self (Belk 1988, 2013). For Belk, possessions can be considered an extension of self, and they
can be arranged in concentric layers around the inner self. The layers in his conception are individual, family, community, and group, a schema similar to the classification of the factors of materialism used in this study. Clearly, other classifications are available. Life course theory (Moschis 2007) proposes three theoretical orientations: normative, or the roles and social norms that affect consumer behavior; stress, or people’s reaction to stressful situations; and human capital, or the resources, qualifications and skills people acquire in their life span. Some factors, such as family disruption or even peer influence, can be associated with stress, while others such as attitude of children to ads vary with the accumulation of human capital. It is also possible that more than two orientations play a role in a given factor: e.g., is peer influence also affected by human capital, as the latter promotes the development of psychological maturity which enables children to act against the desires of their friends?

Building on the above-mentioned framework, this study explores the relationship between materialism and some family factors and external factors observed in Spain, using gender and family income as control variables. The factors selected and the corresponding hypotheses are as follows.

### Individual Factors

#### Gender

Boys have shown greater materialism than girls in western samples (Achenreiner 1997; Churchill and Moschis 1979; Goldberg et al. 2003;
Moschis and Churchill 1978). In contrast, experiments in China did not find a significant difference in materialism between boys and girls (Chan 2003; Chan, Zhang, and Wang 2006). Children in western societies may identify with their fathers, who score higher than women in materialism (Flouri 2007) and who tend to focus more on material objects as indicators of success in life.

Semicontextual Factors—Family Influences

Family Income

Children in low-income households are reported to be more materialistic than those in higher-income families (Chan and Cai 2009; Goldberg et al. 2003). This counterintuitive finding is explained because children who lack material resources value material possessions and wealth more than children who already have them.

Family Disruption

Family disruption positively influences materialism in children, as reported by Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Denton (1997) and Roberts, Manolis, and Tanner (2003), although in this latter experiment family disruption related only to the happiness dimension of materialism in the Richins and Dawson scheme (the other two dimensions are centrality and success). This could be explained by the stress that divorce imposes on children, as well as the arousal of feelings of self-doubt and insecurity which in turn foster materialism (Chang and Arkin 2002). Hypothesis 1 was defined thus:

H1: Children of disrupted families are more materialistic than children of intact families.

Family Communication Patterns

Socio-oriented communication “is typified by encouraging the youngster to maintain harmonious interpersonal relations, avoid controversy and repress his inner feelings on extra-personal topics” (Chaffee and McLeod 1972, 153) and concept-oriented communication is the emphasis given to a child to “express his own ideas, become exposed to controversy and challenge the views of others” (Chaffee and McLeod 1972, 153). In a sample of teenagers, Moschis and Moore (1979) found that socio-oriented family communication relates positively to materialism. Children forced to conform to norms and repress their feelings are more likely to indulge in consumption than children who can discuss their points of view, possibly because advertising and consumption are so ubiquitous in our societies
that it is impossible to forbid children’s access to them, and only parents’
discussions and explanations can lower their materialistic influence.
Hypothesis 2 was defined thus:

H2: Socio-oriented communication is positively related to children’s materialism.

Contextual Factors—External Influences

School Type
Parents who want to stress religious education of their offspring can
send them to religious schools. In Spain, these private schools are mostly
Catholic and state-aided whereas state schools are wholly funded from the
public purse. Catholic schools may create an environment that discourages
the development of materialism in children, given the reported emphasis
of religious teachings on spiritual rather than material aims. Hypothesis 3
was defined thus:

H3: Children in religious schools are less materialistic than children in non-religious
schools.

Attitude to Ads
Evidence on the link between media exposure and children’s material-
ism is inconclusive. Some studies performed with teenagers find a positive
relationship (Churchill and Moschis 1979) or no significant relation (Chan,
Zhang, and Wang 2006). Greater exposure to TV ads is usually linked
to more materialism (Buijzen and Valkenburg 2003, 2005; Chan and Cai
2009; Moschis and Moore 1982), although La Ferle and Chan (2008) found
no link.

An important aspect of media exposure is the attitude toward ads. Chan
and Zhang (2007) found a positive correlation between this factor and
materialism. They also discovered that, when introducing these variables
in their model, TV watching became nonsignificant. This suggests the
possibility that watching TV is only a proxy for another construct, such
as attitudes toward ads. Children who hold positive attitudes toward ads
tend to believe advertising more and use ads as a normative influence. This
higher influence of ads will in turn develop materialistic traits. Hypothesis
4 was defined thus:

H4: Positive attitudes toward ads are positively linked to children’s materialism.

Media Celebrities
Celebrities act as role models for children, who strive to imitate them.
When these icons are associated with fame and money, they can contribute
to the development of materialistic attitudes. Some studies have found higher materialism in teenagers who admired celebrities (La Ferle and Chan 2008) or athletes (Clark, Martin, and Bush 2001). Hypothesis 5 was defined thus:

\[ H5: \text{Admiration of celebrities is positively linked to children's materialism.} \]

**Peer Pressure**

Materialism is higher in children susceptible to interpersonal influence (Achenreiner 1997; Flouri 1999) or willing to conform with peers’ wishes (Chan and Prendergast 2007). Children susceptible to interpersonal influence are eager to engage in consumption as a way to be accepted by the group. Reports of children fearing being bullied or beaten up for not wearing the right brand of sneakers (Elliott and Leonard 2004) indicate the extent to which peer pressure can encourage materialism in children. However, the influence of peer pressure on materialism is sometimes mediated by other factors such as self-esteem (Chaplin and John 2010). We propose that other mediators from our set of variables may exist, namely attitude to ads and imitation of celebrities.

Regarding attitude to ads, a negative relationship between susceptibility to peer influence and disbelief in advertising has been previously reported (Boush, Friestad, and Rose 1994; Mangleburg and Bristol 1998). Mangleburg and Bristol (1998) specifically found that teens’ susceptibility to normative peer influence was negatively related to skepticism toward ads—or, conversely, that children more susceptible to normative peer influence had better attitudes to ads. They measured normative (as opposed to informational) peer influence with a subset of the questions used by Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989). According to the authors, to the extent to which children conform to peers’ opinions in search of what is “cool,” they may accept less critically the models of “coolness” depicted in TV ads.

Regarding imitation of celebrities, we propose that a child who is easily influenced by peers’ choices on consumption is also more likely to be affected by vicarious influencers such as celebrities. A child who relies on peers to decide what to buy or wear is more likely to trust icons that appear on TV, movies, or the Internet when making choices about consumption. And both advertising and celebrities are, in turn, a source of materialistic messages. Hypothesis 6 was defined thus:

\[ H6a: \text{Susceptibility to peer influence is positively linked to children's materialism.} \]
\[ H6b: \text{The effect of susceptibility to peer influence on materialism is mediated by attitude to ads and imitation of celebrities.} \]
TABLE 1

Respondent Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender ( (n = 492) )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>249</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>49.4</td>
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<td>Age ( (n = 490) )</td>
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<tr>
<td>6–7</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>8–9</td>
<td>185</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>106</td>
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<td>11–12</td>
<td>182</td>
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<tr>
<td>13–14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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<td>Yearly family income ( (n = 339) )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under € 20,000</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>€20,000–€30,000</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>24.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>€30,000–€40,000</td>
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<td>€40,000–€50,000</td>
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<td>€50,000–€60,000</td>
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<td>€60,000–€70,000</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
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<td>Over €70,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
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<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STUDY

Sample

There are roughly 365,000 pupils aged 8–12 years in Catalonia, of which 65% study in state schools and 35% in state-aided or other private schools. Religious schools represent 58% of state-aided/other private schools and 21% of all schools (state and state-aided/private schools). Surveys were conducted in four state-aided schools, secular and religious, in the province of Barcelona. Access was provided by the school authorities. Children answered the survey in the classroom. In addition, a separate survey was sent to parents informing them of the research and asking them to take part. Children’s and parents’ surveys were strictly anonymous and confidential; they were only identified with a code number to match them up. The survey was answered by 492 children and 385 parents. The final sample consisted of 243 girls (49.4%) and 249 boys (50.6%) aged 7–13 years (mean = 10.40, SD = 1.48). The parent sample consisted of 289 mothers, 80 fathers, 3 grandparents, and 13 unidentified respondents. Table 1 gives demographic information about the sample.

For the empirical research, children’s materialism was measured using the Youth Materialism Scale (YMS) designed by Goldberg et al. (2003).
TABLE 2

Correlation Matrix

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Children’s materialism</td>
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<td>2. Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Family income</td>
<td>-.22***</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
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<td>4. Family disruption</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.20***</td>
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<td>5. Socially oriented communication</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>Contextual factors – external influences</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. School type</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.55***</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>7. Attitude to ads</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Imitation of celebrities</td>
<td>.48***</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Susceptibility to peer influence</td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>.46***</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Goldberg et al. built on the adult scales by Belk (1984) and Richins and Dawson (1992) to develop their own scale and applied it to a sample of children aged from 9 to 14. The scale comprises 10 questions, such as “I would be happier if I had more money to buy more things for myself,” “I really enjoy going shopping,” or “when you grow up, the more money you have, the happier you are.” Answers to this scale, as well as most other questions in the survey to children, were measured on a 4-point Likert scale (YES, yes, no, NO). This scale is easier to understand for children, who may have trouble interpreting Likert scales with more options (Rossiter 1977). When possible, smiley faces were introduced along with the answer options.

Method

First, a correlation analysis was performed to test the hypotheses. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix between variables. Then, all factors were introduced into a structural equation model, using gender and family income as controls. The factors included in the model and their relationships are displayed in Figure 2.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

After analyzing the data, materialism had a statistically significant correlation with family income and with the four contextual factors (school type, attitude to ads, imitation of celebrities, and susceptibility to peer influence).
We tested our six variables (family disruption, socio-oriented communication, school type, attitude to ads, imitation of celebrities, and peer influence) in a structural equation model using SPSS AMOS. Gender and income were introduced as control variables. The resulting model has a chi-square value of 1247.22, CFI = 0.81, NFI = 0.71, RMSEA = 0.052, which indicates an overall good fit. The ratio chi-square/degrees of freedom is 2.32 ($\chi^2 = 1247.22$, df = 536), which is “indicative of an acceptable fit” (Arbuckle 2005, 493). The three variables with a direct effect on materialism are school type, attitude to ads, and imitation of celebrities. The fourth variable, susceptibility to peer influence, has a statistically significant influence on both attitude to ads and imitation of celebrities. The paths of family disruption and socio-oriented communication to children’s materialism are not statistically significant. The model is presented in Figure 2.
The measurement and relationships of each variable (including the control variables) are listed below.

Individual Factors

**Gender**

Materialism levels of boys and girls were virtually identical. The mean for boys was 1.335 and for girls 1.326, $t(490) = 0.18, p > .10$. Gender was also unrelated to materialism in the structural equation model ($\beta = .046, p = .10$). As a control variable, its effects on all the independent variables were not statistically significant.

**Semicontextual Factors—Family Influences**

**Family Income**

Income was measured with a single question in the parents’ survey on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Under €20,000 a year) to 7 (Over €70,000 a year). Family income was negatively related with children’s materialism ($\rho = -.222, p < .001$). Children in the upper quartile of materialism had lower family income (2.51) than children in the lower quartile (3.73), $t(168) = -4.51, p < .001$. Family income was, however, unrelated to materialism in the structural equation model ($\beta = .03, p = .72$). As a control variable, it only had a negative statistically significant effect on attitude to ads ($\beta = -.041, p < .05$).

**Family Disruption**

Family disruption was not measured directly but was discerned using information about family type. Children of intact families were classified into one group, and children of divorced, remarried, and single-parent households into another group. The mean of materialism for children in disrupted and single-parent households was higher (1.42) than materialism of children in intact families (1.31), but the difference did not reach statistical significance ($t(379) = 1.512, p = .131$). Family disruption was unrelated to children’s materialism in the structural equation model ($\beta = .043, p = .21$). We conclude that children of disrupted families in Spain are not significantly more materialistic than children in intact families. Thus, H1 was not supported.

**Family Communication Patterns**

Socio-oriented communication was measured using the Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) adapted version of the scale used by Chaffee, McLeod,
and Atkin (1971). This scale comprised seven items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Sample items include “How often do you tell your child not to argue with you when you say no to their product request?” and “How often do you tell your child what products (s)he should or should not buy?” Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was 0.80 (mean = 3.05, SD = 0.75). Correlation between socio-oriented communication and children’s materialism was not statistically significant ($\rho = .079$, $p > .10$) and the path to materialism in the structural equation model was not statistically significant ($\beta = .015$, $p = .58$). Thus, H2 was not supported.

Contextual Factors—External Influences

School Type

Children in religious schools (one school in our sample) were less materialistic (mean = 1.20) than children in secular schools (mean = 1.38), and the difference was statistically significant $t(490) = -3.201$, $p < .01$. As income in the religious school of our sample was higher than in the secular schools, we ran a partial correlation to check that the difference was not an effect of income. Partial correlation between children’s materialism and school type was still significant when controlling for income ($\rho = -.121$, $p < .05$). School type path on materialism in the structural equation model, after controlling for gender and income, was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -.096$, $p < .01$). Thus, H3 was supported.

Attitude to Ads

Attitude to ads was measured using three questions extracted from Chan (2003): “Ads make me want to have more toys,” “Ads always tell the truth,” and “Ads tell me about what things I should have.” Respondents who strongly agree with these questions are more likely to believe TV commercials and use them as a normative influence. Cronbach’s alpha of the three questions was only .40 (mean = 0.70, SD = 0.60), which may be explained because these questions are not an established scale but instead reflect attitudes to ads such as normative influence and trust. All questions loaded into one single factor with an eigenvalue above 1.2 Attitude to ads ($\rho = .435$, $p < .001$) was positively linked to children’s materialism. The path of attitudes toward ads on materialism in the equation was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .298$, $p < .001$). Thus, H4 was supported.

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2. The eigenvalue for the factor was 1.366.
**Media Celebrities**

Imitation of celebrities was evaluated using four questions adapted from Chan and Zhang (2007): “I want to be as smart as movie idols,” “I want to be as stylish as people appearing in ads,” “I want to be as trendy as models in magazines,” and “I’d like to have the lifestyle of celebrities.” Cronbach’s alpha for the questions was .74 (mean = 1.27, SD = 0.84). Children in the higher quartile of imitation of celebrities were more materialistic (mean = 1.70) than children in the lower quartile (mean = 1.02) \( t(231) = 10.62, p < .001 \) and the correlation between imitation of celebrities and children’s materialism was both high and statistically significant \( (\rho = .478, p < .001) \). The path from imitation of celebrities to materialism in the structural equation model was positive and significant \( (\beta = .122, p < .001) \). Thus, H5 was supported.

**Peer Influence**

Susceptibility to peer influence was measured on a 7-item scale used by Achenreiner (1997) and Achenreiner, John, and Rao (1993), adapted from the scale by Bearden et al. (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). In the initial survey, children were given the option to choose either “sneakers” or “jeans” and answer the questions with their preferred product in mind. However, in the pilot test, children had trouble making choices and understanding the resulting questions, so in the final version, only “sneakers” was included in all questions. Sample questions included “I want to get the sneakers that my friends think are neat” \( (\text{sic}) \) or “If I think someone’s pretty cool, I’ll try to get sneakers like they have.” Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .77 (mean = 0.66, SD = 0.61). Susceptibility to peer influence was highly correlated to children’s materialism \( (\rho = .527, p < .001) \). But the structural equation model showed no direct effect of peer influence on materialism. Nevertheless, peer influence had a statistically significant effect on attitude to ads \( (\beta = .859, p < .001) \) and imitation of celebrities \( (\beta = .733, p < .001) \), suggesting that its effects on children’s materialism are mediated by these two variables. Thus, H6a and H6b were supported.

**DISCUSSION**

When putting together the factors identified in the literature as fostering materialism in Spanish children, several findings emerged. First, external factors are by far the most clearly linked to children’s materialism. The four factors classified in our conceptual framework as external influences (school type, media exposure, peer influence, and celebrities) all have
significant correlations with materialism. These results are more intriguing, as they come from a sample of children aged 7–13 years (with most children in the range of 8–12 years) and fail to support our original idea that family influences were predominant in younger children, while external influences became more important as children grew into teenagers.

The finding that family-related factors such as family communication patterns and family disruption are nonsignificant in Spain contradicts research done in countries such as the United States, where these factors were significant in explaining children’s materialism. Our research reveals that in Spain, parents have lost much of their power to influence their children’s attitudes toward consumption and that peers, advertising, media icons, and schools play a major role in preventing or fostering materialism in youngsters. The reason for this loss of parental influence lies beyond the scope of this article. First, we do not know if it is a result of recent changes in Spanish families (increasing working hours, change in paradigms of education, or less time available to spend with children) or if it goes back to earlier years. Second, some experiments performed in the United States regarding family communication patterns (Moschis and Moore 1979) took place over 30 years ago, and those exploring family disruption (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Denton 1997; Roberts, Manolis, and Tanner 2003) over 10 years ago. Would these results still hold if experiments were performed in contemporary samples in the United States? It is worth noting, however, that some of the studies linking other family factors to children’s materialism are indeed very recent: parent’s materialism (Adib and El-Bassiouny 2012; Chaplin and John 2010), family income (Chan and Cai 2009), and religiosity (Speck and Peterson 2010).

Second, school type appears as a strong predictor of materialism in the final structural equation model. However, income and school type were highly correlated in our sample. Religious schools in the Barcelona area are mainly of medium-upper economic level, so our selected religious school was just representative of the universe. To ensure that school type had a real influence on children’s materialism, we also obtained the partial correlation of materialism and school type controlling for income, and it was significant ($\rho = -.121$, $p < .05$). Religious schools may influence children by transmitting a world view where spiritual ends are more important than possessions, and promoting the Catholic tradition that “The gospel condemns the worship of wealth” (as Pope Francis put it on March 5, 2014).

Our results seem to validate the model of materialism proposed by Kasser et al. (2004) who suggested that materialism arises from feelings of insecurity and exposure to materialistic models and values. Susceptibility
to peer influence was highly correlated to materialism, suggesting that an insecure child who strives for acceptance of his peers is more likely to become materialistic. In addition, admiration of celebrities was a significant predictor of materialism. A child who craves the lifestyle of the rich and famous will be more materialistic. But the effects of susceptibility to peer influence were mediated by other variables, namely attitude to ads and admiration of celebrities. A higher susceptibility to influence translates into children believing advertising more and aspiring to the lifestyle of celebrities depicted in the media, which in turn increases materialism.

Scholars who have thus far studied the relationship between susceptibility to peer influence and materialism have called for more research on peer influence (John 1999), further exploration of the causality between the two variables (Achenreiner 1997) or including more factors to build an integrated model (Chaplin and John 2010). Our research makes a significant contribution to this line, suggesting that both an increased trust in advertising and an aspiration to the lifestyle of the rich and famous work as two mechanisms through which susceptibility to influence results in higher materialism in children.

Our research has three limitations we wish to mention. First, it was carried out in a Western European country such as Spain, so generalizing to other cultures must be dealt with carefully. Our finding that children in religious schools are less materialistic than children in secular schools applies to a specific cultural and religious context. Further research should explore whether these results are also found in non-Christian societies, especially in Islamic and Eastern countries, or even in Catholic countries from different cultural backgrounds such as Latin American or African societies.

Second, common method variance (CMV)³ may affect the measurement of variables, as the dependent variable (children’s materialism) and all external variables were answered by children. Indeed, our two family factors answered by parents were nonsignificant. CMV poses a threat to the assertion that family has lost its influence on Spanish children, and that external factors are the most important ones. However, CMV will always be a threat as long as the dependent variable (children’s materialism) is measured with a questionnaire, either to children or parents. In this study,

³. Common method variance is variance that can be attributed to the method used to measure constructs more than to the constructs themselves. When the same person provides the measure of both the predictor and the predicted variable, the consistency motif suggests that he or she will try to maintain consistency in the responses, introducing possible biases (Podsakoff et al. 2003).
time and access constraints dictated that materialism be measured with a scale instead of more time-demanding methods such as collage techniques (for an example, see Chaplin and John (2007)). In addition, it seemed more appropriate to ask children themselves about their own materialism rather than building a measure based on teachers’ or parents’ perception, as the latter may be biased and incorrect. The low level of significance of the family-related variables hints that, even if CMV exists, these variables may indeed not be as strong a predictor of children’s materialism as are external variables.

Third, regarding the model fit, since this is a relatively new area of research, we may not have been able to incorporate all the latent variables of interest in the model. Further, the methodology was limited to a survey. We should be cautious while interpreting the good or acceptable model fit as it is possible to achieve a good fit even when the model needs better specification.

Despite its limitations, our research provides insights for families, educators, and government agencies. Our research suggests that efforts aiming at preventing materialistic attitudes in children could achieve better results by working on their critical reception of ads and their tendency to admire celebrities. Informing children about the selling intention of ads, and disclosing the not-so-glamorous aspects of celebrities’ lives, may help children to redefine their priorities regarding materialism.

The role of religious schools as a deterrent to materialistic attitudes must also be considered. Our research shows that children in religious schools were less materialistic than children in secular ones. Public policymakers should consider that some religious schools might be partners in the effort to prevent materialism in society. Further research might explore the mechanisms through which religious education curbs materialism in children, and whether some of them can be replicated in secular schools.

Furthermore, a great deal of debate has centered on the impact of TV programs, TV ads, and the Internet on children’s materialism. Our research shows, however, that the attitudes of children toward ads are a strong predictor of materialism. Parents and educators can work on their children’s trust of TV ads, or make them aware of the selling intention of advertising from a very early age, in an effort to diminish the effect of TV viewing on materialism. Moreover, parents, educators, and government should also consider that family income, family disruption, family communication patterns, and gender are not the main priorities when attempting to reduce the level of materialism of Spain’s younger generations.
APPENDIX 1

Scales used in the study, including mean, SD, and Cronbach $\alpha$

Youth Materialism Scale (mean = 1.33, SD = 0.54, $\alpha = .70$) (From Goldberg et al. 2003)

1. I’d rather spend time buying things, than doing almost anything else.
2. I would be happier if I had more money to buy more things for myself.
3. I have fun just thinking of all the things I own.
4. I really enjoy going shopping.
5. I like to buy things my friends have.
6. When you grow up, the more money you have, the happier you are.
7. I’d rather not share my snacks with others if it means I’ll have less for myself.
8. I would love to be able to buy things that cost a lot of money.
9. I really like the kids that have very special games or clothes.
10. The only kind of job I want when I grow up is one that gets me a lot of money.

Socio-oriented communication (mean = 3.05, SD = 0.75, $\alpha = .80$) (Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) adapted version of the scale used by Chaffee, McLeod, and Atkin (1971), measured in a 5-point Likert scale from 1 [never] to 5 [always])

How often do you tell your child …
1. That you know which products are best for him/her?
2. Not to argue with you when you say no to their product requests?
3. That you expect him/her to accept your decisions about product purchases?
4. Which products are or are not purchased for the family?
5. Which products (s)he should or should not buy?
6. That you have strict and clear rules when it comes to product purchases?
7. That (s)he is not allowed to ask for products?

Attitudes toward ads (mean = 0.70, SD = 0.60, $\alpha = .40$) (From Chan 2003)

1. Ads make me want to have more toys.
2. Ads always tell the truth.
3. Ads tell me about what things I should have.
Susceptibility to peer influence (mean = 0.66, SD = 0.61, α = .77)  
(Adapted from Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989, provided on request by Prof. Gwen Achenreiner)

1. I would want to get the sneakers that my friends think were neat.
2. It’s important that my friends like my new sneakers.
3. To make sure I get the best sneakers, I look at the sneakers my friends have.
4. I like to know what type of sneakers would make other people think I’m cool.
5. I feel more like my friends if I have sneakers, like they do.
6. I would ask my friends to help me choose the best sneakers.
7. If I think someone’s pretty cool, I’ll try to get sneakers like they have.

Imitation of celebrities (mean = 1.27, SD = 0.84, α = .74).  
(Adapted from Chan and Zhang 2007)

1. I want to be as smart as movie idols.
2. I want to be as stylish as people appearing in ads.
3. I want to be as trendy as models in magazines.
4. I’d like to live like celebrities do.

Questions answered in a four-point Likert scale, YES = 3, yes = 2, no = 1, NO = 0, unless otherwise specified.

The word sneakers was replaced in the survey by a picture of a sneaker.

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