South Asian Journal of Management Sciences
Vol. 19(2): 246 – 264, 2025
DOI: 10.21621/sajms.2025192.05

Status, Society, and Spending: Peer Pressure, Popularity, and Attitudes toward Luxury Products Consumption among Youth in Balochistan, Pakistan

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Abstract: *The study is investigating the way peer pressure and Popularity can actually influence the attitudes of youth towards luxury products consumption in Balochistan, Pakistan. Based on the Social Consumption Motivation Theory (SCMT) the study is further assessing the mediating role of the social consumption motivation (SCM). The data was collected from 300 students of university with a structured questionnaire and a covariance based Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used with AMOS 20. The Results are highlighting that peer pressure and Popularity significantly predict the SCM, that is positively shaping the attitude of the youth towards luxury products. Bootstrapped mediation analysis confirmed that SCM mediates both the relationships. The study is contributing to the literature by extending the SCMT for properly understanding the geographical and cultural context and also by offering empirical mediational evidence from the students that is the youth of Balochistan. The practical implications for consumer-education initiatives and marketers are discussed based on the attitudes and the buying behavior of the youth of Balochistan.*

Keywords: *Popularity, Social Consumption Motivation, Peer Pressure, Attitude and Buying Behavior.*

Introduction

Background of the Study

Social conformity is strongly shaping the luxury consumption as individuals are using different expensive brands for signaling their status and also to align with the expectations of their peers (Tan et al., 2022; Gil et al., 2017). The Luxury products are serving as social signals with SCMT in which popularity and peer pressure are central influences on the overall attitude towards various brands (Wiedmann et al., 2020; Hoskins et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2022). Peer pressure focuses on the influence on the consumption of groups (Sun et al.

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2021) on the other hand popularity is focusing on being admired by others and it is mostly measured through a sociometric nomination (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998; Santor et al., 2000; Bleakley & McCarthy, 2024). According to SCMT the consumers are often displaying purchases for gaining social influences and approval in order to impress people with high-status brands that enhances the sensitivity further towards symbolic cues (Wei et al., 2024; Welsch & Kühling, 2009; Shim et al., 2011; Vraga & Tully, 2021; Fuschillo et al., 2022).

Luxury consumption among the young adults is mostly shaped by the social dynamics mostly in status-sensitive and collectivist societies. The recent studies show that peer groups and popularity cues can strongly influence the symbolic consumption choices that are activating the impression-management motives and the social comparison process (Kim & Jang, 2023; Park & Lin, 2022). The evidence comes from metropolitan and western samples mostly so less urbanized and socially conservative regions like Baluchistan are unexplored. It is crucial to understand the response of the youth in these contexts to popularity and peer pressure because it is essential for extending the overall scope of the Social Consumption Motivation Theory (SCMT), which states that social motives are mostly shaped by the symbolic value that is attached to the products.

Research Gap of the Study

Previous literature is demonstrating that peer pressure and the social status concerns are shaping the luxury products consumption but there is very limited research that has examined the mechanisms in Pakistan. Also, virtually there is no specific focus on the youth of Baluchistan that is a region which is categorized by different economic conditions, cultural norms and the social hierarchy structures (Naseer et al., 2023). The research studies that are present rarely focus on SCMT for explaining how social cues trigger the internal motivations that influence the luxury attitudes. There is a gap that exists for understanding the mediating role of the social consumption in the overall relationship between peer pressure, Popularity and the attitude towards luxury goods within the sociocultural settings. Cavender & Kincade, (2014) state that having a favorable attitude for luxury brands is very difficult as they are costly and also the consumers are not easily ready to purchase them. Marketers are focusing on understanding these different drivers of attitudes of the customers (Anderson et al., 2021). The research article is focusing on assessing the

impact of popularity and peer pressure on such key determinants with the social motivation being considered as the mediating variable.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to focus on how does peer pressure and Popularity shape the attitude of the youth of Baluchistan towards luxury products and to test if the social consumption properly mediates the relationship by focusing on the concepts of the Social Consumption Motivation Theory (Raji et al., 2019). The study is basically focusing on the SCMT because all the different variables are from the framework as they contribute to the theory. The findings are offering proper practical value for helping the different marketers that understand the factors for properly shaping the attitude towards the different luxury brands which allow them to properly tailor their product offerings in a comparatively effective manner (Tuskej et al., 2013).

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

The Social Consumption Motivation Theory (SCMT) highlights the way luxury consumption is driven by social motives like social comparison and impression management rather than focusing on utilitarian need. For instance, buying products from luxury brands is not for quality but it is about signaling prestige and wealth. Previous reviews have properly explained the symbolic motivations for luxury products but they seldom explain the social cues like Popularity and peer pressure to the overall motivational process internally (SCM) that was tested empirically (Kim & Jang, 2023). SCMT is explaining the purchase decisions that shape the social influences instead of focusing purely on the personal needs. Previous research studies highlight that social consumption motivation predicted the preferences for design, variety and prestige (Martin & Turley, 2004; Clark et al. 2007). There are many consumers that use brands for self-expression and the different choices of the consumers are affected by the status, identity and social contexts. Marketers are trying to leverage the different motives for appealing to the consumer's social aspirations and also the need for belonging.

Peer Pressure and Attitude Towards Luxury Products

Peer Pressure refers to the impact of the peers on the decision making that is often overriding the personal preferences and it is strong among the youth that spends a lot of time within their peer groups (Song et al. 2021). The research studies show peer influences are shaping the attitude and the purchase decisions for different luxury products as individuals try to seek for recognition and group acceptance through consumption (Kang et al., 2022; Husain et al., 2022; Chu Lo et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2022). There are expensive brands that are being purchased frequently because people want to confirm to the social expectations and along with that, they want to manage their ability to properly manage such kind of pressure that influences their consumption patterns (Ndereyimana et al., 2021; Gil et al., 2017; Gill-Wiehl et al., 2021). The influences extend to different consumption behaviors that include impulse buying which according to (Davari et al., 2022) shows the peer pressure as a very significant determinant of luxury preferences.

H1: *Peer pressure has a positive and significant effect on attitudes toward luxury products.*

Popularity and Attitude Towards Luxury Products

Popularity shows that someone is being admired or liked by others and it is serving the different social incentive for the status-signaling consumption (Breslend et al., 2018). Many people are mostly using different products for enhancing their popularity which makes it an important determinant of the attitudes towards luxury brands (Zhu & Liu, 2021; Dhaliwal et al., 2020). The affective, sensory, and experiential attributes are shaped by the attitudes and it is found mostly in the young consumers that are present in the emerging markets (Husain et al., 2022; Calderon, 2018). Popularity is increasing the motivation for display status and it is positively impacting the luxury brand related attitudes towards purchase intentions (Hwang & Han, 2022; Liu et al., 2012).

Different Luxury products are focusing on social admiration that is associated with popularity that can be assessed through sociometric nominations or the self-reported impressions (Breslend et al., 2018; Bleize et al., 2021). People buy expensive items for social approval and recognition to be more popular among their peer groups (Chiang & Yang, 2018; Mushonga & Dzingirai, 2022; Stavropoulos et al., 2021; Sung et al., 2016; Cai et al., 2015; Purohit &

Radia, 2022). Previous studies show that luxury brand consumption was mostly driven by popularity motives (Sun et al., 2017)

H2: Popularity has a positive and significant effect on attitudes toward luxury products.

Social Consumption Motivation as Mediator between Peer Pressure and Attitude towards Luxury Products

Social consumption motivation (SCM) is the desire to use the consumption for influencing others by obtaining social approval. SCM is positioned as the mediator that links the external cues to the attitude formation (Martin, 2009; Labrecque et al., 2011). SCMT proposes that group pressure and peer pressure drives the individuals towards consuming products for conforming and signal status. Social consumption motivation reflects the overall desire of someone to display their purchases to others and it is strongly shaped by social influences (Martin, 2009; Shim et al. 2011). The consumers spend substantial time with their peers and that peer pressure is a key driver of the SCM (Mishra et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2014). Recent findings show that SCM mediates the attitudes towards luxury products (Wang et al., 2023). SCM is also increasing the sensitivity of social brand cues for motivating the consumers to use the high-status products for influencing others (Barauskaite et al., 2018; Labrecque et al., 2011). It is also predicting the preferences for variety, design and prestige that contributes towards luxury consumption (Martin & Turley, 2004; Clark et al., 2007). Social recognition and Peer pressure are key mechanisms for encouraging the purchase of luxury products according to (Irungu, 2017) that is supporting the proposed hypotheses.

H3: Social consumption motivation mediates the relationship between peer pressure and attitudes toward luxury products.

Social Consumption Motivation as Mediator between Popularity and Attitude towards Luxury Products

SCM properly analyzes the peer pressure and Popularity into internalized motives that include normative conformity and impression management that is going to shape the favorable attitude towards the use of luxury products. Therefore, mediation is theoretically plausible and it is also empirically testable (Qu et al., 2017). Popularity is motivating the individuals for using certain products for gaining social approval that makes it a predictor of the consumption attitude and purchase decisions (Vehmas et al., 2018; Kukar-Kinney & Xia, 2017; Weisstein et al., 2016; Dhaundiyal & Coughlan, 2016;

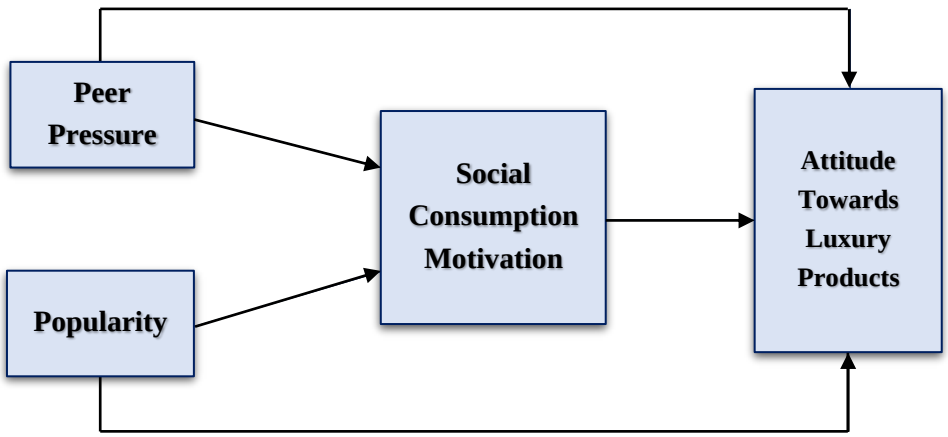
Zheng et al., 2019). Different luxury and specialized brands enhance the perceived popularity that are considered important determinants of the attitudes for luxury products that is consistent with SCMT that emphasizes on the role of social factors in consumption. Social comparison is encouraging the status consumption (Goldsmith & Clark, 2012), and it is also the different social motives are significantly influencing the luxury brand choices (Balderjahn et al., 2013; Blazquez et al., 2020; Eastman et al., 2018; Giovannini et al., 2015). The consumers that identify the brands that are aligning with the social goals are supporting the role of social consumption motivation as a proper mediator that is present between popularity and the attitudes towards the luxury products.

H4: Social consumption motivation mediates the relationship between popularity and attitudes toward luxury products.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the research is established based on the existing literature and also on theoretical foundations, which is shown in Fig. 1.

Figure 1.



Theoretical Framework of the Study
Peer Pressure and Popularity influence Attitude Toward the Luxury Products directly and indirectly through Social Consumption Motivation (SCM). N = 300; SEM (AMOS 20)

Research Methodology

The study is a cross-sectional research study that uses purposive sampling of university students in Baluchistan. The unit of analysis individual youth (students). It is acknowledged that purposive sampling limits generalizability beyond sampled institutions.

Participants and Procedures

The research is deductive and explanatory in nature. Purposive sampling was used for collection of cross-sectional data which is very difficult to generalize. Amjad & Danish, (2024) conducted a similar study and it is also consistent with findings of (Amjad, 2024). The data was collected from 300 university students by using a structured and self-administered questionnaire. The participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaires that had more than 20% missing data were excluded from the final sample for the analysis which was N=300.

Ethical Considerations

The cover letter for the purpose of the research study was included in the questionnaire. It was ensured that the anonymity of the respondents was ensured and their personal information was strictly kept confidential. Institutional approval was received from the institutional ethical review committee. The study focused on following proper institutional ethical guidelines; as the participants were provided clear and complete information and they were informed that their identity would be absolutely anonymous.

Instrumentation

The variables of the study were properly assessed and a standardized instrument was used that was previously validated and developed. The Likert scale for the study that was used ranged from 1 indicating strongly disagree till 7 indicating Strongly Agree and the negative items were reverse coded as well.

Peer Pressure

The Peer Pressure was measured using the 11-items scale that was adapted from (Santor et al. 2000). Example item: ‘I give into peer pressure easily.

Popularity

Popularity was assessed using eleven items adapted from (Santor et al. 2000), with sample statements including “I often do things just to be popular with people at college/university”.

Social Consumption Motivation

Social consumption motivation was evaluated using four items adapted from (Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis, 1981). Example item: "What others think of me matters to me".

Attitude Toward Luxury Products

This research measured attitudes towards luxury products using a six-item measure that was developed by (Gil et.al, 2017). Sample items are "All things considered, I rather like luxury" and "I could talk about luxury for hours."

Data Analysis

The structural and measurement model analysis was conducting by using the covariance-based SEM (AMOS 20) with the maximum likelihood estimation. The model estimation included factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha, average variance extracted (AVE) and the model fit indices (χ^2, χ^2/df, TLI, CFI, SRMR, RMSEA). The mediation effects were properly testing by focusing on bootstrap resampling (5,000 samples). The common method bias was used assessing the Harman's single factor test and also the single factor CFA comparison.

Results and Findings of the Study

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were utilized to explain the sample attributes about gender, age, and qualification. The descriptive statistics of scale variables were discussed concerning frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation.

The demographic data for this study was collected from the students, including their age, gender, mobile phone ownership, allowance money, education, number of siblings, and number of televisions at home. Among the 300 students, most were from the age group of 19 to 24 years old, and it was found that around 85% of the students did not have any employment as they were studying at the time. Among the respondents, there were 56% were male students and 44% were female students. Their responses helped the research study and shared valuable insights about the whole research.

Results and Discussion of Measurement Models

The measurement model indicated a marginal fit (CFI = 0.82; TLI = 0.82), that was improved as five low-loading items were removed. Before estimating the hypothesis, the measurement model was reviewed properly. The common

method bias was examined initially by using the Harman Single Factor test. After using the CFA, a common methods factor showed that the Chi-square was ($\chi 2 = 4723.31$, degrees of freedom = 524, $p < 0.05$), which was not an acceptable fit for the data as CFI was 0.42 and SRMR was 0.010. Then exploratory factor analysis was performed, which showed the first factor was around 17% total variance. It indicated that method bias was not problematic and there was a method effect that was also present in studies (Karimi & Meyer, 2019; Kock et al., 2021; Podsakoff et al., 2003) of this type.

The measurement model was refined, and the items were 40 with a 4-factor measurement model that was properly observed by focusing on the loading of all the constructs. The model showed a significant ($\chi 2 = 2237.65$; $p < 0.05$) result with 524 degrees of freedom. Model fit was examined, and it was confirmed that it normed to $\chi 2 = 2.21$, CFI = 0.82, SRMR = 0.052, and RMSEA = 0.044.

The measurement model provided a marginal fit (CFI = 0.82; TLI = 0.82). In order to improve the model, fit there were five items that had standardized loadings that were below 0.40 and very problematic cross-loadings so they were removed after proper examination of the modification indices and also the theoretical relevance. The refined model highlighted a lot more improved fit: χ^2 (613) = 1224.51, $\chi^2/df = 2.03$, CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.041 (90% CI [.035, .047]), SRMR = 0.053. The items that were removed were justified because their standardized loadings were less than 0.40, theoretically not aligned and having high residuals. All the retained constructs were achieved by focusing on Cronbach's alpha value that was greater than 0.70 and also the AVE value being higher than 0.50 that supported the convergent validity and reliability. The discriminant validity was also assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

There were total Five items that had standardized loadings that were below 0.40 and also had high residuals so they were removed to improve the model fit (Netemeyer et al., 2003). 5 such items were removed, and it improved the overall results of the study by doing that, so it allowed the researcher to find the impact of the variables properly. Peer Pressure and Popularity, along with social consumption motivation and attitude towards luxury products, were properly analyzed to understand the relationship among all the variables, following the assumptions. The Cronbach Alpha estimate exceeded 0.70, which showed that item-total correlation was appropriate. The standardized

items loaded properly with each construct with a significant value of $p<0.05$, which exceeded 0.42 (Netemeyer et al., 2003), so it showed that there is convergent validity. The 95% confidence interval (CI) does not have an estimate of 1.0, which is indicative of discriminant validity. The refined model properly explained the 21% of the variance that was present in Social Consumption Motivation with $R^2 = 0.21$ and it had 40% of the variance in the Attitude Toward Luxury Products ($R^2 = 0.40$). The predictor effect size (f^2) showed small effects for the Peer Pressure ($f^2 = 0.05$) and also the Popularity ($f^2 = 0.10$) on the SCM, and there was a large effect that was shown for SCM on Attitude ($f^2 = 0.35$).

Results and Discussion of Structural Models

The model is showing the maximum likelihood method that shows the yields are an acceptable fit: $\chi2\ (610) = 1223.62\ (p < 0.05)$; Normed $\chi2 = 2.03$; TLI = 0.82; CFI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.048 and RMSEA = 0.041. Peer pressure has a significant direct impact on social consumption motivation with a standardized path coefficient of (β) = 0.16, Critical Ratio (C.R.) = 2.26, $p < 0.05$. Hence, Hypothesis H1 is supported. Hypothesis H2 is also supported since popularity has a significant direct impact on the overall social consumption motivation with ($\beta = 0.22$, C.R. = 3.42, $p < 0.01$). Social consumption motivation has a positive impact on the attitude towards luxury products, which also supports the hypothesis ($\beta = 0.52$, C.R. = 9.32, $p < 0.01$), supporting the Hypothesis. The model has properly explained the 21% of the variance in SCM ($R^2 = 0.21$) and also the 40% of the variance in Attitude Toward Luxury Products which is ($R^2 = 0.40$), indicating that medium-to-large explained variance.

Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapped mediation analysis was used by focusing on 5,000 bootstrap samples at a 95% confidence interval.

Indirect Effects

Peer Pressure → SCM → Attitude:
Indirect effect: **$\beta = 0.083$**, 95% CI **[0.018, 0.152]** (CI does not include zero → significant)

Popularity → SCM → Attitude:
Indirect effect: **$\beta = 0.114$**, 95% CI **[0.042, 0.198]** (CI does not include zero → significant)

Direct Effects (After Including Mediator)

Peer Pressure → Attitude: **β = 0.14, p = .012**

Popularity → Attitude: **β = 0.26, p < .001**

Mediation Type

As the direct paths are significant even after including the mediator the mediation can be considered as partial mediation for both Peer Pressure and Popularity. This indicates that Peer Pressure and Popularity are both having an influence on the Attitude towards buying Luxury products directly and SCM is transmitting part of the effect that is consistent with the SCMT.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	***Path***	***Result***
H1	Peer Pressure → Attitude	Supported
H2	Popularity → Attitude	Supported
H3	Peer Pressure → SCM → Attitude	Supported (Partial mediation)
H4	Popularity → SCM → Attitude	Supported (Partial mediation)

Discussion

The findings of the SCMT reinforce that by focusing on showing external social cues that include popularity and peer pressure that activates the internalized motives for social consumption. This shapes the attitude of the students towards luxury products buying. This is aligned with the SCMT's claim that symbolic and also the impression management motives are driving the consumption in the status-sensitive environments. The results are all extending the research work of (Kim & Jang, 2023) as it demonstrates the mechanisms that are properly used for operating a less urban and less studied context like Balochistan in which the collectivist norms are making the social signaling very much salient. The study is contributing contextually by highlighting that the youth of Balochistan are from an area that is conservative in terms of social norms and has limited exposure to luxury brand environments. However, the youth still responds in a strong manner to social cues that involve peer pressure and status display. This is suggesting that

social symbolic consumption is operating even in the low income or marginalized regions that expands the boundary conditions of SCMT.

Chaudhuri, Mazumdar, & Ghoshal, (2022) studied the relationship between status signaling and luxury products consumption in emerging economies. Theoretically there is a partial mediation that shows SCM is psychological mechanism that uses the social pressure externally and it translates into luxury attitudes. So empirically it is strengthening the theoretical foundations of the SCMT in the non-Western developing country-based settings.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that the students of Balochistan have social consumption motivation that is impacting their attitude towards luxury products. The results of the study highlight that popularity and peer pressure play a positive and significant role in social consumption, motivation and attitude towards luxury products. The study correlates with the results presented by (Prendergast & Wong, 2003) who also observed similar social consumption motivation and expenditure towards Luxury Products. The study has also shown consistent results with findings of (Ngai & Cho, 2012) and similarly (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). Overall, the results empirically extend that Social Consumption Motivation Theory (SCMT) shows that external social cues like popularity and peer pressure are activating the internalized motives of social consumption that actually shapes the attitude of youth or students towards luxury products in the under-studied research based regional context of Balochistan.

The Practical implications of the study include information for marketers or brand managers to target youth segments by properly recognizing the role of social motives in the signaling. The strategies of communication that focus on peer pressure and popularity are important because they influence the students in Balochistan. Some consumer-education programs should be designed for improving the awareness of social influences. The limitations of the research would be using purposive sampling for university students in Balochistan as it is a cross-sectional design that is limiting the generalizability and it also precludes the causal inference. The sample is not fully representative of the population as it mainly focuses on the experiences of the students so the findings may be different from other youth that are not students in the province.

Future research studies should focus on employing probability based or some other multi site sampling or longitudinal study designs for testing the causal pathways. The researchers can focus further on mediators like materialism or social identity or some moderators like household income, digital media exposure or gender for understanding properly what kind of conditions or social motives are translating into luxury attitudes. There is a possibility to conduct some comparative studies across Pakistani provinces or among the urban or rural youth for getting more clarity in terms of the contextual boundary. Finally it can be concluded that the study is offering both empirical and theoretical contributions by demonstrating the mediating role of social consumption motivation among the youth luxury products buying attitude in Balochistan and it is properly highlighting the different avenues that can be focused in the future for more representative research.

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