

TRADING ETHICS FOR POSSESSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Is there a correlation between consumers' levels of materialism and their ethical values and ultimately their behavior? Little research has been performed surrounding consumers' ethics and the correlation of consumer materialism levels. The purpose of this study is to analyze whether there exists a correlation between ethics and the level of materialism in Generation X, utilizing Muncy and Vitell's consumer ethics and Richins and Dawson's materialism scales of measurement. The results coincide with the original study of Muncy and Eastman's convenience sample in that Generation X rendered a negative correlation between materialism and consumer ethics.

Key words: materialism, consumer ethics, correlation of materialism and ethics, Generation X, Gen X

INTRODUCTION

A small but powerful segment commonly known as Generation X (Gen X), those born between 1960 and 1982 will dominate the market by 2010 (Alch, 2000; Brown et al., 1997; Holtz, 1995; Strutton et al; Tulgan, 2000a). Studies have identified some of the key attributes of the generation, however little research has been performed to develop an understanding their ethical values and the driving forces behind them. Gen X was reared in an independent, latchkey environment which suffered from high divorce rates and corporate downsizing (Fisher, 1999). This change in family structure and guidance left Gen X to fend for itself in the fast paced technological age.

Accordingly, Gen X developed values based on childhood exposures. As a cohort, they have entered the workforce and marketplace. Today both workforce and market place are filled with questionable ethical practices. World Com and ENRON predominately mark the business environment while Martha Stewart's insider trading removes the once wholesome household icon from her pedestal. But unethical practices are not limited to the public figures. Most notably televised looting during the national disaster of Hurricane Katrina, which feature a Policemen carrying merchandise as well give rise to the questionable ethical actions and materialistic desires of today's consumer base. Is the drive for material gain so important that individuals are willing to compromise societal ethical standards?

This study analyzes the consumer base of Generation X. The study explores Gen X's materialism and consumer's ethical values and the relationship between the two. This study expounds upon Muncy and Eastman's 1998 study, which focused on business school students. A diverse population of Gen X is used to further depict the Gen X cohort.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Inglehart introduced a theory in 1977 stating that the values an individual holds as an adult have been fashioned by socio-economic variables during one's childhood. If one is raised during a time of material scarcity as a child, the person will be more materialistic than a child raised during more affluent times, when money is less of a concern and there is relative economic stability (Inglehart, 1977). Inglehart describes the generation in terms of their presence under the American flag and constitution. However, others believe that socio-economics alone is not entirely responsible and add that life changing events such as parental divorcing and desire to enhance self-concept may also influence ones materialistic attributes (John, 2005; Roberts, Manolis and Tanner, 2006).

Materialism, Ethics and Generation X

Materialism research is marked throughout marketing literature and has given rise to ethical and social implications from both buyer and seller perspectives. Richins and Dawson (1992) suggest that materialists are self-centered and are more apt to spend money on themselves versus family, friends, or civic organizations; that

materialists place less emphasis on interpersonal relationships than do those low in materialism. They further elaborate that materialists place possessions and the acquisition of possessions at the center of their lives; they value possessions as a means of achieving happiness, and that they use possessions as a means of indicating their success.

This drive for possessions has given way to purchases taking on personal and social meanings in a symbolic manner. The symbolism of the object reflects the purchaser, with gender being the most basic dimension. Materialists strive to obtain these symbolic possessions in order to be noticed. Men are more aggressive than women in trading off material gain to obtain a status symbol (Huberman et al., 2004) Wand and Wallendorf (2006) point out products with low potential for status signaling are not influenced by people's orientation to materialism, while products with high potential for status signaling are. According to Belk (1985), materialism is defined as "The importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions...At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest source of satisfaction. Thus, materialism appears to be very closely tied to possessions; their use in individual expression and the belief that they define who and what a person is." The desire to be perceived as successful and affluent is prevalent in the US economy. In a study performed by Christopher and Schlenker (2000), it was found that when students judged a subject to be affluent (have perceived material wealth); they also rated the affluent target as "less considerate of others."

Ethics is determined by what is considered the normative ethical standard that is derived from moral philosophy Consumer ethics is defined as "The rightness and wrongness of certain actions on the part of the buyer or would-be buyer in consumer situations" (Fullerton et al., 1996). Marnburg (2001) points out that although areas of study such as business ethics is a field in itself to be studied, the linkage between and evaluation of psychological traits and behavioral effects is imperative. The area of consumer ethical research can be divided into three categories: (1) specific behaviors that have ethical implications, (2) normative guidelines for business and consumers on ethically related issues, and (3) developing a conceptual and empirical basis for understanding ethical decision-making by consumers (Vitell and Muncy, 1992).

The degree of materialism an individual possesses can affect the level of ethics shown in decision making and behaviors. For example, Richins and Dawson (1992) point out several cases where erratic moral judgments were made or crimes were committed in order to maintain or gain material possessions. A recent example of this can be identified during the US national disaster Hurricane Katrina, where even police were caught on camera looting non life essential items such televisions and running shoes.

This gives rise to understanding the idealistic behaviors and the driving forces behind them. Steenhaut and Van Kenhove (2006) found that idealism is a significant mediator between human values and consumer ethical beliefs. They state that the higher the level of importance a consumer places on self-enhancement rather than self-transcendence the less the consumer tends to be idealist. The more importance the consumer attaches to tradition, conformity and security the more idealistic the consumer

is which positively influences the consumer's evaluation of ethical behaviors. Fullerton et al. (1996) found evidence to support that "there is a lack of congruence relative to what is acceptable in relation to one's actual behavior and in the market place in a given situation where that behavior has the potential to enhance utility." Moreover, they conclude with a managerial implication that "young affluent and educated consumers should be pinpointed in promotional efforts aimed at ethical concerns with the objective being one of heightening awareness of the consequences of such questionable behaviors."

Generation X is the emerging consumer base consisting of 44 million members depending on start and end dates (Alch 2000; Hays 1999; Jennings 2000; Schwartz, 1992). For the purpose of this study, Gen X is defined as people born between the years of 1965 and 1977, the core generation (B. Tulgan, personal communication). There is a great deal of controversy over the intellect, ethics, and other attributes of Gen X. The literature suggests two streamline depictions, with the predominance on the negative attributes. While a few depict the cohort as well-educated, self-reliant entrepreneurs with technical savvy, more often they are seen as irrational, self-absorbed, "brats". Strutton, et al. (1997) suggests that Thirteeners, the thirteenth generation under the American Flag, (Gen X), "are more likely to attempt to rationalize away unethical retailing consumption behaviors than their parent's generation."

Gen X is merely a product of their environment. According to Fisher (1999), most Gen Xers have been predominantly on their own, living mainly with only one natural parent. They are children born to a generational era that offered little in terms of empathy. Self-consumed, "boomer" parents struggled through divorces, finding employment, changing social norms, and political turmoil. The children were left to fend for themselves, figuring out what was good and bad, and what they determined as right and wrong. They developed values based upon the experiences they created out of boredom and necessity in order to survive (Holtz, 1995). Tulgan (2000b) attributes their values and attitudes to their "latchkey" childhoods; children fending for themselves while parents worked.

Muncy and Eastman (1998) utilized the Gen X cohort in a study to explore the issue of whether consumers, who are more materialistic, have different ethical standards than those who are not. They found evidence indicating that materialism is negatively correlated with people's higher ethical standards as consumers. By their own omission, one of the limitations of the study was that the test group consisted of only business students at two major United States universities. Additionally, after having reviewed results from several limited sample tests in ethical studies Vitell and Muncy (1992) concluded, "To gain a better understanding of the consumer's ethical beliefs, research is needed that studies a broader cross-section of the adult population." The controversy over the emerging generation's attributes leads the way to investigating Gen X's materialistic and ethical levels and whether there is a correlation between the two.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCALES OF MEASUREMENT

This study seeks to answer one central question: Is there a correlation between Generation X's materialistic and consumer ethical values. From this, two additional questions are derived; (1) What are Generation X's materialist values, and (2) What are Generation X's consumer ethical values?

In order to understand the relationship, the dimensions of each construct must be considered. The survey instrument utilized to measure materialism is Richins and Dawson's 1992 value-oriented materialism survey instrument. Richins and Dawson (1992) point out that the literature suggests materialism is a mind set and collection of attitudes, towards the importance of acquiring possessions during the span of one's life. Richins and Dawson identified three central themes that appeared repeatedly throughout materialism literature: centrality, pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success. From these central themes, an 18 item, 5-point Likert scale, anchored by strongly disagree and strongly agree respectfully, was developed and validated by Richins and Dawson to measure the construct of materialism as per the description in social sciences literature. Seven items measured for centrality, five for happiness, and six for success. For the purpose of this study, materialism is the independent construct consisting of the three variables centrality, happiness, and success. Consistent with, Richins and Dawson (1992), the variables are defined as follows. Centrality: "Materialism is a life style in which a high level of material consumption functions as a goal and serves as a set of plans. Materialism thus lends meaning to life and provides an aim for daily endeavors." Happiness: "The pursuit of happiness through acquisition rather than through other means (such as personal relationships, experiences or achievements)." Success: "Materialists tend to judge their own and others' success by the number and quality of possessions accumulated."

Although the scale was shortened in 2004, the original scale is used for comparison purposes and consistency (Richins, 2004). Materialism and its components will be measured by means and standard deviation. Results equal to or less than 1.25 are considered not high and tending towards low, results above 1.25 is considered not low in materialistic attributes and tending towards high as the results graduate towards 5.0 on the 5-point Likert scale.

The original Muncy and Vitell (1992) consumer ethical scale of measurement is utilized to explore consumer ethical values for Gen X. Although the original scale was updated in 2005, the original instrument is used for consistency and comparison purposes with Muncy and Eastman's 1998 study on the correlation between ethics and materialism. The twenty-seven item instrument, measured on a five-point, Likert scale, represents four dimensions of consumer ethics: proactively benefiting, passively benefiting, deceptive practices, and no harm no foul. The scale is anchored by strongly believe that is wrong, to strongly believe that is not wrong. Consumer ethics is considered the dependent construct for this study and defined as, "The rightness and wrongness of certain actions on the part of the buyer or would-be buyer in consumer situations" (Fullerton et al., 1996). Four dependent variables will be analyzed in accordance with Vitell and Muncy's scale development, proactively benefiting, passively benefiting, deceptive practices, and no harm no foul. These variables are defined in accordance with the original 1992 Vitell and Muncy's consumer ethics scale. Proactively benefiting is when the consumer actively seeks to benefit at the expense of the seller, such as drinking a can of soda without paying for it. Passively benefiting is benefiting at

the expense of the seller without actively pursuing it, such as not saying anything when the server miscalculates your bill in the consumer's favor. Deceptive practices is defined as actions in the buying process where the buyer is intentionally deceiving the seller, such as returning merchandise to a store and claiming it was a gift when it was not. No harm no foul is also a dimension of the buying process. This dimension involves actions by the consumer such as recording an album without paying for it, because the consumer does not perceive a direct, attributable, micro-level harm even though harm does occur.

Consumer ethics and its components will be measured by means and standard deviation. The Vitell and Muncy scale of consumer ethics does not define levels of ethical values. They merely point out that 3.0 is considered neutral, and make reference to above and below the neutral point as anchored by "strongly believe that is wrong and strong believe that is not wrong. Therefore, an assumption is made of what constitutes high and low consumer ethical values. This assumption is that anything below 3.0 will be considered not low and descending towards high consumer ethical standards and, anything above 3.0 will be considered not high consumer ethical values and ascending towards low consumer ethics, five being the lowest. If a mean is rendered equaling 3.0, this is considered neutral meaning not high or low, $p = .05$.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

A survey was administered to 221 Gen Xer's. Prospective participants were asked to provide the year that they were born, in order to ensure they were Generation X as defined by Tulgan 2000a. Diversity was assured by utilizing email distribution. Results were from a cross section of America as indicated by the demographic results and were from several different states. Of the 221 surveys administered, only 2 were unusable, rendering a usable $n = 219$.

Of the 219 usable surveys, 36.1% ($n=79$) were males, and 63.9 ($n=140$) were females. The income distribution represents a diverse sample: no answer 1.4% ($n=3$), under \$10,00= 5.5% ($n=12$), \$10,000-20,000 10.5% ($n=23$), \$20,001 - \$30,000 11.9% ($n=26$), \$30,001 - \$40,000 16.0% ($n=35$), \$40,001 - \$50,000 22.4% ($n=49$), \$50,001 - \$60,000 11.0% ($n=24$) and over \$60,000 21.5% ($n=47$). The average age of a respondent was 36 with a normal distribution. The demographic of education rendered only 2 non-responses. Of the 217 remaining survey responses, 200 had at least some education, and 17 had some high school or were high school graduates. This result supports Tulgan's (2000a) statement that the majority of Generation X is well educated. The majority of the participants, 44.3%, indicated they were performing in a professional capacity ($n=97$).

Reliability and Validity

Factor analysis was performed for both materialism and ethics. The materialism scale proved reliable, $\alpha=.7929$ with no covariance noted and four factors were derived. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was used to measure the sample for sampling adequacy and rendered significant results of .826. Bartlett's test of Sphericity also rendered significant. Three variables fell below the required .05 significant level for communalities, two of the variables measured centrality and the other measured

happiness. Four components explained 58.6% of the variance. The rotated factor loading rendered a clear picture of the pattern of loadings for each factor (see table 1). The loadings are consistent with the Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialism scale variables; however this data produced two factors to measure success. This is commonly noted throughout the literature and is the results of the shorter version introduced in 2004 by Richins.

Materialism Component Matrix				
	1	2	3	4
S1	0.526	0.222	0.465	0.204
S2	0.471	0.339	0.483	0.263
S3	0.477	0.112	0.184	-0.592
S4	0.514	0.477	0.357	2.00E-02
S5	0.597	0.28	0.291	-0.183
S6	0.576	-5.25E-02	-8.19E-04	-0.59
C1	0.385	-0.648	0.183	4.44E-02
C2	-0.53	0.48	-5.15E-02	0.116
C3	0.383	-0.172	-0.241	-0.202
C4	0.484	-0.471	0.193	0.284
C5	0.549	-0.416	-3.07E-03	-8.25E-02
C6	0.681	-0.206	-0.116	0.232
C7	0.446	-0.22	5.19E-02	0.22
H1	0.526	0.211	-0.472	0.175
H2	0.64	0.14	-0.291	0.192
H3	0.427	0.275	-0.392	-2.01E-02
H4	0.683	0.234	-0.318	6.16E-02
H5	0.513	0.141	-0.271	2.81E-02
Component Transformation Matrix				
	1	2	3	4
1	0.605	0.53	0.456	0.382
2	0.32	-0.802	0.504	0.004
3	-0.7	0.154	0.69	0.078
4	0.193	0.229	0.249	-0.921

Table 1 Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
S = Happiness, C = Centrality, H = Happiness

The scale for consumer ethics proved to be extremely reliable, rendering alpha = .9388 with no covariance noted. There were no items that could be removed to



increase this reliability. The data then was checked for skewness and kurtosis. These tests identified that two of the variables do not deviate from normality. However, the two variables, active and passively benefiting, do not meet the test for normality. When consideration is given to both kurtosis and skewness for a normal distribution, the variable passively benefiting is normally distributed, demonstrating only slight distortion. The variable of actively benefiting is highly distorted, rendering a kurtosis of 8.05 and skewness of 2.803, where a result of 1 or below represents normally distributed data (see table 2). A closer look at the raw data indicated that for this variable, there were few answers that were not a 1 response, "Strongly believe that is wrong". This result indicates support for the literature that suggests a high ethical value for Generation X.

Table 2 Kurtosis and Skewness of Consumer Ethics

	Variance	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness
Actively Benefiting	0.527	8.605	0.329	2.803	0.165
Passively Benefiting	0.819	0.425	0.329	1.021	0.165
Deceptive Practices	0.884	-0.742	0.329	0.251	0.165
No Harm No Foul	0.905	0.542	0.329	-0.959	0.165

Factor analysis produced four distinct factors for ethics. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was used to measure sampling adequacy and rendered a significant .914. Bartlett's test of Sphericity also demonstrated significance. Three variables fell below the required .05 significant level for communalities, two of these measured deceptive practices and the other measured passively benefiting. Four components explained 62.8% of the variance. The rotated factor loading rendered interesting results. While the loadings are consistent with the Vitell and Muncy's (1992) consumer ethic scale variables, there appears to be overlap of variables and some variables that measure other factors. The first derived factor measures deceptive practices. This factor includes two components from the no harm no foul variables. The second derived factor measures actively benefiting. Factor two is clear and consistent with the original scale. The third derived factor measures the dimension of passively benefiting and combines one variable from actively benefiting and two from deceptive practices. The fourth derived factor measures no harm no foul while comprised of only no harm no foul variables, does not include three of the intended variables (see table 3).

Ethics Component Matrix				
	1	2	3	4
AB1	9.57E-02	0.887	0.197	-6.73E-02
AB2	0.11	0.906	6.63E-02	-5.53E-02
AB3	0.163	0.83	0.218	8.83E-03
AB4	0.181	0.636	0.431	-3.30E-02
AB5	0.242	0.739	0.37	-6.25E-02
AB6	0.373	0.517	0.518	0.105
PB1	0.307	0.231	0.734	0.115
PB2	7.13E-02	0.263	0.644	3.02E-02
PB3	0.517	0.362	0.416	0.131
PB4	0.353	0.138	0.714	0.194
DP1	0.219	0.209	0.607	1.81E-02
DP2	0.442	0.147	0.553	6.21E-03
DP3	0.485	0.326	0.435	8.17E-02
DP4	0.631	0.194	0.317	0.23
DP5	0.686	0.125	0.284	8.63E-02
DP6	0.669	0.216	0.269	0.128
DP7	0.786	0.177	0.163	0.126
DP8	0.701	7.17E-02	0.16	0.195
DP9	0.647	4.93E-02	0.231	0.171
DP10	0.703	5.02E-02	0.341	0.14
DP11	0.567	0.265	0.101	0.206
NHF1	0.765	0.12	0.147	0.155
NHF2	0.661	9.86E-02	5.29E-02	0.321
NHF3	0.427	-7.26E-02	0.138	0.678
NHF4	0.375	-2.02E-02	9.15E-02	0.683
NHF5	9.70E-02	-1.84E-02	1.98E-02	0.869
NHF6	0.202	-5.56E-02	6.07E-02	0.776
Component Transformation Matrix				
	1	2	3	4
1	0.704	0.431	0.504	0.255
2	0.364	-0.697	-0.207	0.582
3	-0.379	0.494	-0.265	0.736
4	-0.477	-0.289	0.796	0.235

Table 3 Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
 AB = Actively Benefiting, PB = Passively Benefiting,
 DP = Deceptive Practices, NHF = No Harm No Foul

Variable and Construct Testing

To determine materialism and consumer ethical values, a mean and standard deviation were derived for each variable of both constructs. A simple t test was performed to determine if the means were significant and an ANOVA test was performed to test each variable. The means for the construct of materialism are: centrality, 2.9889; happiness, 3.3068; and success 3.4313. These results are

significant at $p = .0001$. Additionally each variable is significantly related towards the construct of materialism and these results are significant at $p = .01$. The overall mean for materialism rendered a 3.2415 with a standard deviation of .5116. This is significant at $p = .0001$ level. These results suggest that Gen X is not low in materialism and leaning towards higher materialistic values. Although, it is noteworthy to point out that they rendered results near the mean value, suggesting further exploring may be needed to better determine their materialistic values.

The results for the construct of consumer ethics did not render such a clear pattern. The variables actively benefit and no harm no foul proved to be significant contributors of the component, $p = .01$. However, passively benefiting and deceptive practices failed to be significant contributors to construct consumer ethics. The means are as follows: actively benefiting, 1.3998 $p = .05$, passively benefiting 1.9415, $p = .05$, deceptive practices 2.4323, $p = .05$, no harm no foul, 3.6842, $p = .05$, and consumer ethics 2.3622, $p = .05$. These results suggest that Gen X may be okay with questionable ethical practices so long as no one else knows and/or no one is harmed. It may also be an indicator that perception of actions is more important than the actual action. Guta, et al. (2004) found results that suggest support of this as they determined that younger people are more apt to pirate software than older consumers, that this action is not perceived as wrong.

To answer the question of whether there is a correlation between materialism and consumer ethical values, a simple bivariate correlation was performed. The relationships between the three variables of materialism, the four variables of consumer ethics and both the constructs of materialism and consumer ethics were analyzed using Pearson correlation. All three variables of materialism rendered negative correlation with all four variables of ethics which the exception of centrality and actively benefiting. This rendered a positive correlation, .02 but is not significant at $p = .05$. As a matter of fact, while success and happiness did depict a negative correlation with the variable of actively benefiting neither is significant at $p = .05$. Furthermore, centrality was not significant with passive benefiting or the construct of ethics. The variable of happiness demonstrates strong negative correlation with all ethical dimensions except actively benefiting. Both no-harm no-foul and passively are significant at $p=.05$, while deceptive practices is significant at $p=.01$. The variable of success rendered similar results, depicting strong negative correlations, $p=.01$. Happiness and success are significantly negatively correlated with the construct of ethics, $p = .01$. Finally, the overall, construct of materialism depicts a strong negative correlation with consumer ethics at $p=.01$, utilizing Pearson correlation. These results mimic the results of Muncy and Eastman (1998) (see table 4).

		Actively Benefiting	Passively Benefiting	Deceptive Practices	No Harm No Foul	ETHICS
Success	Pearson Correlation	-.132	-.216**	-.279**	-.231**	-.269**
	Significance	.052	.001	.000	.001	.000
	N	218	217	218	217	216
Centrality	Pearson Correlation	.020	-.068	-.137*	-.176**	-.119
	Significance	.775	.318	.044	.009	.081
	N	218	217	218	217	216
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	-.068	-.168*	-.248**	-.165*	-.206**
	Significance	.319	.013	.000	.014	.002
	N	219	218	219	218	217
Materialism	Pearson Correlation	-.082	-.196**	-.286**	-.237**	-.254**
	Significance	.227	.004	.000	.000	.000
	N	217	216	217	216	215

Table 4

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Although this study was not about analyzing materialism and ethics, the study did render interesting results worth mentioning. For the construct of materialism, opposed to Inglehart's theory, this study suggests Gen X is not low in materialistic attributes. Additionally, while the means typically fell on the higher side, all centered at the midpoint of the scale suggesting impartiality. Success rendered the highest mean perhaps suggesting that symbolic possessions depicting achievement are more apt to be chosen by the cohort than those would simply be for non symbolic pleasure. This result further compounds the complexity of the generation. Consumer ethics scale demonstrated that Gen X does possess high ethical values. These results are significant at the $p > .01$ level. The dimension of no-harm no-foul rendered an interesting mean of 3.6842, which is consistent with the original study performed by Vitell and Muncy (1992) where they received means ranging from 2.81 to 3.80, and an overall mean of 3.21 for the same dimension. It is noteworthy to point out that this result suggests that because no perceived harm comes from these actions, the action may be rationalized as permissible depending on the severity of the action.

The study demonstrated a strong correlation between materialism and consumer ethics, with the variable of success being the most predominant. The negative aspect of this correlation suggests that as the desire for possessions is driven higher the less sound ethical practices will be utilized and visa versa. One could argue that the drive for material possessions affects ethical standards just as well as if an individual is less ethical they strive for more possessions. Muncy and Eastman (1998) point out the difficulties of determining this. Neither ethics nor materialism lends themselves to causal manipulation making this a research challenge to say the least.

The variable of centrality provided some interesting results. Centrality failed to correlate with two of the ethical variables actively and passively benefiting, thus contributing to the fact that centrality failed to correlate with the overall construct of

consumer ethics. This is interesting because regardless of direction of influence this result suggests that neither consumer ethics nor centrality will have an affect upon the other. As stated earlier centrality means that the possessions acquired are held close to the individual and become central in their lives. These items may become family heirlooms or perhaps houses passed on from generation to generation. Gen X appears not to be driven to acquire these type items. In a society that has become latent with disposable, convenience products that do not last the test of time but rather last to the end of their warranty, one has to ponder has the consumer base driven the products to these extents or is it the lack of centrality that is being addressed. It should be pointed out that although centrality failed to correlate with the overall construct, it did have strong correlation to the variable no harm no foul, $p = .01$. This is consistent with the other two materialism variables.

The sample did not produce results suggesting a strong relationship with actively benefiting, which is the only outwardly recognizable variable for the ethics scale. Each of the other variables, passively benefiting, deceptive practices, and no harm no foul are only see by the individual. This suggests that if an individual may be perceived as unethical in their behavior they will refrain from that action. However, if society as a whole is unaware of the unethical practice then this appears to be deemed as a plausible course of action. Possessions, as they relate to success, appear to be the driving force, holding the highest correlation of the three variables and the strongest significance of $p = .001$ across each of the ethics variables. The highest level of correlation is in the deceptive practices aspect. Because Gen X is not primarily driven by monetary advancement, these deceptive practices may assume more of a role in the arena of career advancement and status symbol acquisition rather than activities such as Martha Stewart's insider trading.

This has implications in both the marketing and business management arenas. From a management perspective, Gen X is interested in benefits that demonstrate they have achieved success. Practical, cubical offices may give way to the corner office with a view, a large desk and a fancy new job title. But, beware, because the cohort deems unseen unethical actions as acceptable, the individual may not be exactly what they depict on their resume. The relationship also is significant for marketers. Being primarily driven by key indicators that signal success, elite brand identity will have positive impact with Gen X. Products that are viewed as success symbols such as Rolex and Jaguar for instance may dominate purchases over traditional Timex and Lincoln. It would behoove marketers to fully understand how Gen X determines success symbols and gear their efforts towards satisfying those needs.

The study also has academic implications. The study adds to the body of knowledge by identifying Generation X and their attributes in addition to the fields of materialism and ethics. Academics can use this information and build upon, thus creating a more complete picture Gen X's characteristics. This information will provide practitioners with the knowledge of what motivates the current market segment to make purchases and what motivates them to become a loyal consumer. As practitioners move into an era that is based on consumer loyalty and customer satisfaction as a means of survival, knowledge of that consumer will pave the way to a more successful marketing mix.

CONCLUSION

The current study utilized a diverse population of Generation X rather than a business school convenience sample. The results were the same as the original convenience sample, thus demonstrating support of Muncy and Eastman's (1998) study for the negative correlation between materialism and ethics. The study also identified Gen X as not low in materialism and high in consumer ethical values building upon defining the Generation X cohort. This research thus opens doors for future research, while helping to form a firm foundation in the understanding of the diverse and complex, Generation X.

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