

Consumption among Brazilian Women and the Role of Persuasion: An Analysis of Hedonic/Utilitarian Values in a Materialistic Scenario

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Abstract

Persuasion can be understood as an active effort to change attitudes. Within this context, this paper analyzes the influence of persuasion in the hedonic and utilitarian values within a materialist view of consumption. To this end, an survey was conducted with Brazilian mothers and daughters who frequented shopping centers. The initial results showed that the relationship between materialistic consumption and hedonic/utilitarian attributes may be mediated by persuasion. Soon after, the moderating hypothesis showed that, depending on the generation (mother or daughter) and which personalities exert greater persuasion, the trajectories referred to in the theoretical basis may be differ in direction or value.

Keywords: persuasion, materialistic consumption, hedonic and utilitarian attributes

1. Introduction

Imagine the following scene: Maria and Renata, they are mother and daughter, respectively, are shopping in a shopping center in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Like most middle class women in developing countries they experience a sensation that less than ten years ago was unknown to them: the feeling of being able to go shopping in a shopping center at least twice a week. This fact is explained by the growth in income and consumption of women in developing countries like Brazil and India.

When these two women pass in front of a TV they see the news that Steve Jobs had died. Renata quickly looks for more news on her smart-phone while her mother is watching the news on the TV. After a few minutes, looking at the facilities in the shopping center, Renata says to her mother that if Steve Jobs were the manager of the shopping center, several things would be different: the products and services would be more efficient and exciting. Her mother takes a look around and says that if Lady Diana were the manager of the shopping center, there would be more useful and pleasant services and products.

It can be seen that in this situation there are two different generations and both are persuaded by different personalities. In addition, both are looking for utilitarian and hedonic attributes in the products.

Experts report that materialistic consumption is growing annually in the developing countries. Therefore, this paper poses some questions: can the persuasion of different personalities in a materialist consumer environment (a shopping center) influence the hedonic and utilitarian consumption values? Also, are different generations (mothers and daughters) persuaded in the same way? By examining theoretical references that relate materialistic consumption (Belk, 1984; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Richins, 2004; Rindfleisch et al., 2009), attitudes and persuasion (Allport, 1935; Bohne & Dickel, 2011; Gawronski, 2007; Thurstone, 1928), and hedonic and utilitarian values (Chittur et al. 2008; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Novemsky & Ratner, 2003, Voss et al., 2003), this paper analyzes the influence of persuasion on hedonic and utilitarian values in a materialist view of consumption.

1.1 *The Relationship between Attitudes and Persuasion*

Historically, most scholars of the contemporary social psychology agree, in general, regarding the existing definitions on the subject of attitude. However, the models that explain this concept vary considerably among

academics and market professionals. Firstly, attitude can be understood as a mental and neural predisposition to behave in a systematic way in relation to a product or service (Bohne & Dickel, 2011; Gawronski, 2007; Malhotra, 2005). Thus, one can infer that attitudes are stable dispositions that are stored in the memory, in contrast to temporary judgments based upon provisional information (Gawronski, 2007).

If attitudes are considered stable predispositions they can be measured (Gawronski, 2007; Greenwald & Banaji 1995; Himmelfarb, 1993; Thurstone, 1928). By constructing scales, researchers attempt to analyze the concept of attitude and inter-relate it with other existing concepts, such as persuasion. The relationship between attitude and persuasion has been studied since the Allport's seminal work (1935).

Broadly speaking, persuasion can be understood as an active effort to change attitudes (Crano & Prislin, 2007; Gawronski, 2007). In this context, a change of attitude results from a different set of information that may or may not modify existing predispositions at a given time, changing the mental and neural predisposition of the attitude (Bohne and Dickel, 2011).

1.2 The Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

Several studies have looked into the relationship between attitudes and persuasion (Allport, 1935; Bohne & Dickel, 2011; Crano & Prislin, 2006, 2007; Gawronski, 2007; Thurstone, 1928). Attitudes represent favorable and unfavorable feelings towards an object (Allport, 1935). In addition, they can be considered evaluative judgments consisting of cognitive and affective reactions (Crano and Prislin, 2006). Thus, persuasion can lead the consumer to have a particular behavior. Therefore, this research studied the process of persuasion in two different generations: mothers and daughters. For this purpose, two theoretical bases were used: (a) materialistic consumption; and (b) utilitarian and hedonic product value.

Based on this theoretical framework, we develop a theoretical model that evaluates persuasion in a group of Brazilian mothers and daughters. Figure 1 shows the proposed path and the conceptual framework.

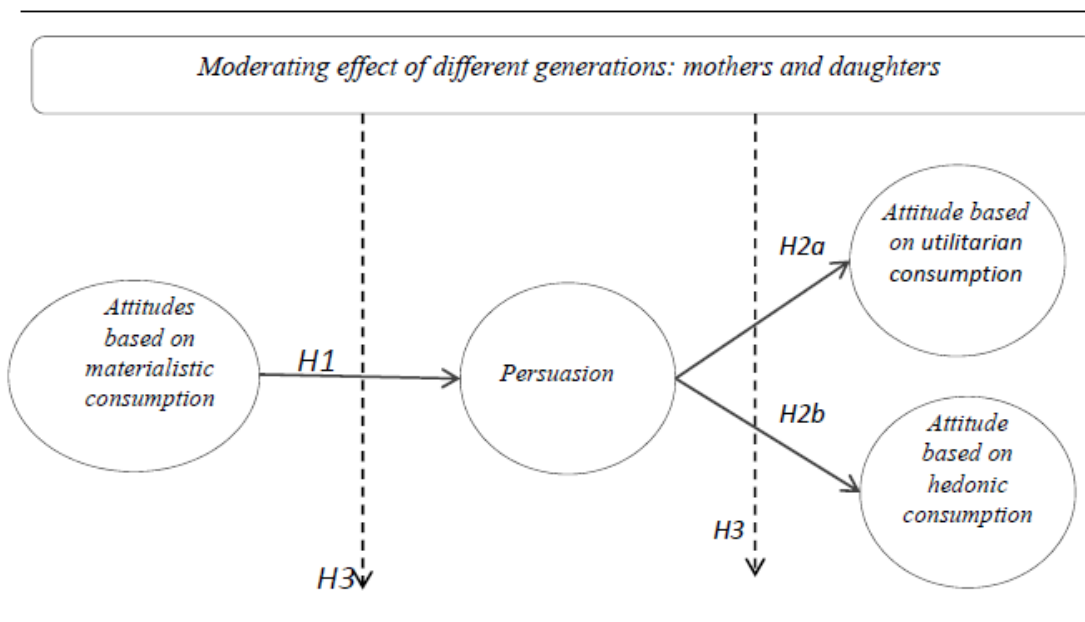


Figure 1. Theoretical model and hypotheses

1.2.1 Persuasion and Materialistic Consumption Attitudes

In the last two decades, researchers have studied materialism and confirmed its influence on consumption (Rindfleisch et al., 2009). Materialistic consumption is understood as the acquisition of goods and products in which the people aim to reach the highest levels of materialism (Belk, 1984; Richins & Dawson, 1992). This means, that in this type of consumption the value of ownership will tend to guide the quantities of goods purchased (Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Richins, 2004). Thus it presupposes that the materialistic consumer is one who emphasizes possessions and money for personal happiness and social progress. This consumer develops strong relationships with certain types of products in order to answer existential dilemmas (Rindfleisch et al., 2009).

As persuasion focuses on a possible change of attitude, it is expected that a different set of information may or may not modify existing predispositions in materialistic consumption. Thus, materialistic consumption is probably related to persuasion. Therefore, it is expected that:

H1: Materialistic consumption attitudes are associated with persuasion.

1.2.2 Persuasion and Hedonic and Utilitarian Attributes

Finding ways to incorporate emotional the experience in consumer and market research has been a constant challenge, especially regarding the evaluation of attributes. Within the range of attributes observed by the consumers, two groups are often studied by researchers: utilitarian and hedonic (Chiturri et al., 2008). The difference between the functional/utilitarian and hedonic attributes has recently assumed an important role in consumer research (Veryzer and Wesley, 1998).

The utilitarian value refers to the attributes that make up the product and are necessary for its performance. This type of value is considered an intrinsic advantage of the product, and is related to the basic motivations of consumers (Liang & Wang, 2004; Keller, 1993). Utilitarian values emphasize the objectives and tangible attributes of products, being more concerned with the functionality of the goods (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Hedonic values are subjective based on the experience itself giving pleasure, such as joy and confidence. These values are not intended for comfort or utility, and ignore the utilitarian perspective (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Novemsky & Ratner, 2003). While utilitarian value is concerned with tangible, cognitive, conscious and economic aspects, hedonic value refers to the symbolic, aesthetic, psychological and emotional aspects of consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, Voss et al., 2003).

Several studies have attempted to explain the influence of the functional and the emotional in attitudes and to what degree persuasive messages can change the predisposition of attitude at the time of consumption (Cervellon & Dub'e 2002, Huskinson & Haddock 2004). A clear relationship exists between consumer motivations and persuasion. In some cases, people have an emotional involvement that can be expressed in values (Lau-Gesk and Meyers-Levy, 2009). According to the evaluated hypotheses, the emotional associations of an object are activated more rapidly than non-emotional (cognitive) associations. It can be inferred then, that emotional utilitarian experiences are directly associated to consumer attitudes (Allen, 2005). Thus, it is expected that:

H2a: Persuasion will exert less influence on utilitarian (than hedonic) product value.

H2b: Persuasion will exert more influence on hedonic (than utilitarian) product value.

1.2.3 Differences in Consumption between Different Generations: Mothers and Daughters

The abundance of options to choose from in the retail market has led to greater complexity in the techniques of persuasion. This increased complexity of supply is brought about by the continued growth in market competitiveness, by the expansion in the amount of information about goods and services and the forms by which it can be accessed (Hanzaee and Aghasibeig, 2008). In addition to these factors, there are the different forms of demand. These may be expressed in the existing concepts of consumption, derived from the emergence of several generations of consumers. These various generations have made decision-making at the time of consumption increasingly complex (Bauer et al., 2006, Zhou et al. 2010).

The classification of individuals into generations is of use when attempting to understand some characteristics related to consumption (Foscht & Schloffer, 2009; Kue & Voon, 2007; Hudson, 2010). Members of all generations have experiences in childhood and adolescence that affect their view of consumption and labor (Bakeell and Mitchell, 2003). This is the case, for example, of daughters and mothers today. Both have undergone experiences that affect their choices in distinct ways. In this context, consumers are seen to react in different ways to persuasion be it through stimuli intended to foster action, identification, feelings and images (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2010). Therefore, it is expected that daughters and mothers would react differently to a persuasion technique. And that form of persuasion is linked to their previous experiences. Thus, it is expected that:

H3. Consumer differences between mothers and daughters moderates the proposed path between materialistic consumer attitudes, persuasion and utilitarian/hedonic product value.

2. Design of the Method

The method was divided into two parts. The purpose of the first part was to study the relationship between attitudes based on material consumption and attitudes based on hedonic and utilitarian consumption. Then, the impact of persuasion on this relationship was analyzed. The second part was concerned with studying the differential impact of persuasion on the two groups: mothers and daughters. Briefly, in a hypothetical scenario, a group of daughters aged

between 17 and 32 years was presented with a questionnaire that included questions related to hedonic and utilitarian attitudes of materialistic consumption in a shopping center. Soon after, the persuasive influence of important public personalities, such as Steve Jobs, Barack Obama, Mark Zuckerberg, Lula, etc was assessed. In another hypothetical scenario, the mothers of these children, aged between 35 and 64 years, were grouped together. They were then exposed to the same issues associated with hedonistic and utilitarian attitudes of materialistic consumption in a shopping center. However, the persuasive influence of personalities from their epoch, such as Mandela, Ayrton Senna, Pope John Paul II, Lady Diana, etc. was assessed. Both groups of Brazilian mothers and daughters are influenced by these people, according to research conducted among 40,455 individuals by Cia de Talentos, in partnership with the People Next View, TNS Research International and the ISTOÉ Magazine.

2.1 Measures

The questionnaire contained four constructs (each with five variables) that were measured directly in the research: (1) attitudes based on materialistic consumption, (2) attitudes based on hedonic consumption, (3) attitudes based on utilitarian consumption and (4) persuasion. All the constructs were assessed using a Likert scale. In the first three the questions were related to the constructs was based on a confirmatory study (Belk, 1984; Chittur et al. 2008; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Moschos & Churchill, 1978; Novemsky & Ratner, 2003; Richins, 2004; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Rindfleisch et al., 2009; Voss et al. 2003). A separate pre-test was conducted with seven selected consumers to check the variables and validate the questionnaire. The questions assessed the attitudes of materialistic consumption, hedonic and utilitarian in a shopping center. Persuasion was assessed using questions that demonstrated the influence of two groups of people in practices associated with consumption. Before asking the questions related to persuasion, the researcher showed photos of these influential people. The respondents answered five questions designed to measure the persuasion power of these people in their consumption in the shopping center:

- (a) If these people could help organize the shopping center where I do my shopping this would definitely be a success.
- (b) If these people did an advertisement in the shopping center I probably would buy the product if I had money.
- (c) If these people were the owners of the shopping center where I do my shopping the service would be better.
- (d) If these people could sell products in the shopping center they would be better.
- (e) If you were to buy a brand new shopping center these people advised me to use another because they tried and not liked.

2.2 Sample Design and Method Procedures

The sample consisted of three hundred and fifty individuals divided into two groups: one hundred seventy-five daughters and one hundred seventy mothers. The sample was conducted in a shopping center in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil. Firstly, the data were collected from the daughters. Soon after, the mothers responded to another questionnaire. Both groups answered questionnaires in a period of ten weeks over the months of September, October and November 2011.

In the daughters group, the mean age was 22.8 years with a standard deviation of 3.56. They often frequented the shopping center 2.55 days per week and, on average, stayed there for 2.29 hours. Around 80% of the sample was attending higher education and 74.9% was single.

In the mothers group the mean age was 48.1 years with a standard deviation of 6.36. They often frequented the shopping center 1.8 days per and, on average, stayed there for 1.81 hours. Half had no university degree and 52.7% were married or widowed.

Structural equation modeling was used to test our proposed theoretical model. We tested the scales for dimensionality, reliability and validity using confirmatory factor analysis. In terms of convergent validity, all factor loadings of the final measures are highly significant ($P < 0.01$). In addition, the average loadings for each construct exceed the minimum of 0.5 suggested by Hair et al. (2005). In terms of divergent validity, we used the average variance extracted by the measure of each factor. In this sense, results provide further evidence of convergent and divergent validity, since all the constructs had both satisfactory reliability (≥ 0.80) and extracted variance (≥ 0.65) (Hair et al., 2005). As mentioned, for moderation tests, multi-group analysis was performed. For that, the sample was divided in two groups: daughters and mothers.

3. Results - General Model

Results showed that the model fits the data well (chi-squared/degrees of freedom = 2.56, $p < 0.001$, root mean square

error of approximation = 0.056, non-normed fit index = 0.92, and comparative fit index = 0.42). Figure 2 presents the findings for the integrated of model. Sample included in the model ($n = 350$).

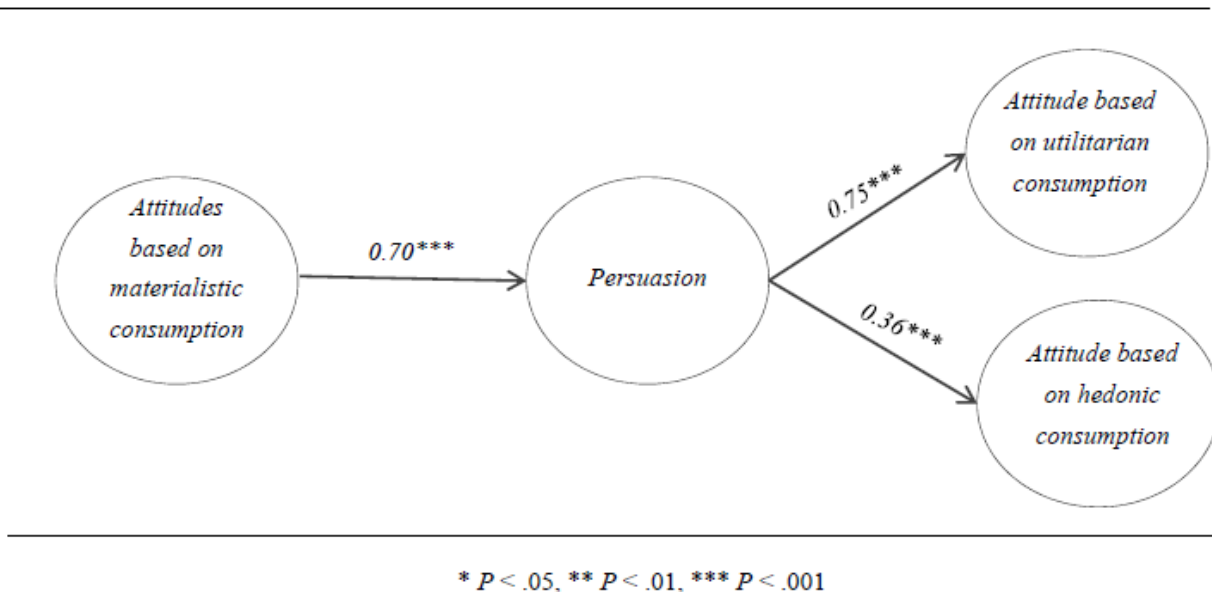


Figure 2. Findings of the model

3.1 Persuasion and Attitudes Based on Materialistic Consumption

In the first hypothesis materialistic consumption was associated with persuasion. Materialistic consumption was expected to have a direct relationship with persuasion. In this sense, the result showed that the materialistic consumption is positively ($\gamma = .70$, $p < 0.001$) related to persuasion. Thus, the hypothesis was confirmed with considerably high relevancy. Indicating that in environments where material consumption occurs, in this case a shopping center, there is a direct positive relationship with persuasion. That is, consumption oriented by material possessions will certainly be influenced by a different set of information that may modify the previously existing predispositions.

3.2 Persuasion and Hedonic and Utilitarian Consumption-based Attitudes

The next two hypotheses investigated the relationship between persuasion and product attributes. The tests were related to utilitarian and hedonic attributes. According to the studied theoretical references, persuasion was expected to have a stronger correlation with hedonic attributes with utilitarian attributes.

Firstly, according to the results, the relationship between persuasion and utilitarian attributes was positive ($\gamma = .75$, $p < .001$). Hence, H2a was confirmed. Thus, one can infer that, in the current study, persuasion had a positive influence on utilitarian attributes. Later, the relationship between persuasion and hedonic attributes was shown to be moderately positive ($\gamma = .36$, $p < .001$). Thus, H2b was also confirmed.

While hypotheses H2a and H2b were confirmed, what is particularly noteworthy among the results obtained with the general model is fact that, contrary to some studies (Cervellon & Dub'e 2002, Huskinson & Haddock 2004; Lau-Gesk & Meyers-Levy, 2009), the persuasion/utilitarian relationship is greater than that of the persuasion/hedonic. This implies that, in the inquiry conducted with Brazilian women in a materialistic scenario, persuasion has a greater influence on utilitarian values than on hedonic values. Therefore, in this case, persuasion acts more on non-emotional attitudes, in this case utilitarian, than on the hedonic attitudes.

4. Discussion: Might Generational Differences (Mothers and Daughters) Alter the Relationship between Attitudes and Persuasion?

In the last part of the results, the moderation hypothesis was examined. For this, simultaneous confirmatory factor analysis was performed for the latent variables common to both groups (mothers and daughters). The results of the multi-group model showed reasonably good results (chi-squared/degrees of freedom = 2.67, $p < 0.001$, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = 0.073, non-normed fit index = 0.85, and comparative fit index = 0.87). As explained earlier, the different generations were divided into two groups: daughters ($n = 175$) and mothers ($n = 175$).

The results for the proposed moderation show the values of the trajectories of the general model for the both daughters and for mothers. Thus, the moderation was structured in hypothesis H3. Table 1 shows the correlation differences in the two new models: mothers and daughters.

Table 1. Moderating effect

	Daughters	Mothers
Materialism → Persuasion	.13 **	.22**
Persuasion → Utilitarian Value	.35***	.49 *
Persuasion → Hedonic Value	.38 **	-.26 **

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

With regard the group of daughters, one can see that all the hypotheses were validated. However, compared to the initial inquiry (n=350) while the trajectories had lower values, they still remained consistent in terms of the directions of relationships. The relationship between materialism and persuasion had positive influence ($\gamma = .13$, $p < .01$). The relationship between persuasion and utilitarian attitudes also had a positive influence ($\gamma = .35$, $p < .001$). Finally, the trajectory persuasion/hedonic attitudes was also positive ($\gamma = .38$, $p < .01$).

With regard the group of mothers, one can see that all the hypotheses were validated. However, compared to the initial inquiry and (n = 350) the trajectory was in the opposite direction, indicating an inverse interference in the relationship. The direction of the relationship between materialism and persuasion remained the same, showing a positive value ($\gamma = .22$, $p < .01$). The relationship of the second hypothesis, that measured persuasion and the utilitarian attribute was shown to be positive ($\gamma = .49$, $p < .05$). By contrast, the relationship associated to hypothesis 2b, in the inquiry with the mothers, the sign was inverted, becoming negative ($\gamma = -.26$, $p < .01$).

In general, the results of the moderation showed the three central points. Firstly the relationship between materialism and persuasion is shown to be positive for both research. The γ relationships were different, but there was little variation between the research, thus demonstrating that in scenarios where materialistic consumption is present there is a direct relationship with persuasion.

The second point, the relationship between persuasion and utilitarian attitudes was positive in both samples - mothers and daughters. This implies that persuasion produces a direct influence on mothers and daughters, that is, the symbolic, aesthetic, psychological and emotional aspects of consumption are directly influenced by persuasion in the two samples. Nevertheless, although the trajectories show the same direction, their intensities are different. The relationship between persuasion and hedonic attitudes has a greater γ for mothers than for daughters. A possible reason for this may be that the important personalities for the daughters (Steve Jobs, Barack Obama, Mark Zuckerberg, Squid, etc.) have less emotional power of persuasion than the important personalities for the mothers (Mandela, Ayrton Senna, Pope John Paul II, Lady Diana, etc.). Thus, with respect to the hedonic attributes, it can be said that the daughters are less susceptible to persuasion than mothers.

The third and last point concerns the relationship between persuasion and utilitarian attitudes. This relationship was shown to be positive for the daughters and to negative for the mothers. This implies that persuasion generates a direct influence on daughters and an indirect influence on mothers, that is utilitarian, tangible and functional aspects of consumption are directly influenced by persuasion in the case of daughters, while the opposite is true in the case of mothers. One possible reason for this fact may be that the persuasive power of the important personalities for the daughters (Steve Jobs, Barack Obama, Mark Zuckerberg, Lula, et.) influences the cognitive aspects of consumption. Unlike the important personalities for the mothers (Mandela, Ayrton Senna, Pope John Paul II, Lady Diana, etc.) who do not demonstrate a direct power of persuasion. Thus, with respect to the utilitarian attributes, it can be said that the daughters are subject to persuasion, unlike the mothers.

4.1 General Discussion

This study examined the influence of persuasion on the hedonic and utilitarian values within a materialistic perspective of consumption. At first, the results confirmed the trajectories described in the hypotheses that involved materialism, persuasion and utilities and hedonic attributes. These findings suggest that the relationship between materialistic consumption and utilitarian/hedonistic attributes may be mediated by persuasion. This finding provides additional evidence for the studies in persuasion.

In a further step, the moderating hypothesis showed that, depending on the generation (mother or daughter) and which personality exerts persuasion, the trajectories referred to in the theoretical basis may differ in direction or

value. Based on this analysis it was possible to identify which form of persuasion was best suited for mothers and daughters in a shopping center. In the research, it was noted that persuasion that works with more utilitarian issues should be used for younger audiences, for the daughters. Whereas, persuasion that works with more hedonic issues should be used for the older public, in this case mothers.

Finally, this study provides, as a theoretical and empirical base, an applied model that studies the mediation of persuasion, thus unifying the understanding of the functional relationships regarding the factors related to materialistic consumption and hedonic and utilitarian attributes.

4.2 Academic and Managerial Implications

The results found in this study have both academic and practical relevance. For scholars, they contribute to the development of the field of theoretical research in persuasion, materialistic consumption and utilitarian/hedonic attributes. This is an extremely important challenge for the academic community because it is a traditional field that has evolved greatly in recent years. In practice, the model represents a useful reference for managers to develop their strategies. From a managerial perspective, this research may contribute towards improving techniques of persuasion.

4.3 Limitations and Further Research

This research has some limitations. Among them is the fact that the sample is by convenience. Future research that could include other consumer segments may also shed light on the phenomenon. Moreover, unlike previous research, we found that the relationship between persuasion and utilitarian attributes may be negative. This opens the way for questions regarding the role of persuasion and its effect on younger and older generations.

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