



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

Celebrity Worship as a Predictor of Materialistic Values among Pakistani Youth: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

Celebrity worship has become one of the more consequential media and psychological forces shaping young people's values and consumption in the digital age, yet its link with materialism has rarely been studied outside Western cultures. Drawing on Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986), this quantitative cross-sectional study examined the relationship between celebrity worship and materialistic values among Pakistani university students ($N = 316$) recruited through convenience sampling. Both measures performed excellently: the Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS; $\alpha = .975$) and the Material Values Scale (MVS; $\alpha = .904$). Celebrity worship and materialism were very strongly related, $r = .746$, $p < .001$, well above the $r = .30-.50$ typically reported in Western samples, and celebrity worship alone accounted for 55.6% of the variance in materialistic values ($R^2 = .556$, $\beta = .746$, $p < .001$). Strikingly, 47.5% of the sample scored in the Borderline-Pathological range of the CWS, pointing to a high prevalence of obsessive celebrity attachment within a clinically meaningful range. Men and women did not differ significantly on either celebrity worship or materialism. These results offer some of the first quantitative evidence from Pakistan directly linking celebrity worship (as distinct from general influencer exposure) to materialism, and carry clear implications for media-literacy education, mental-health support, and youth-focused digital media policy.

Keywords: Celebrity Worship, Materialism, Pakistani youth, Parasocial interaction, social media, Quantitative research



Introduction

Due to technological advancements and the advent of social media platforms, there has been a dramatic shift in the balance of cultural influences, image development, and value formation in individuals, notably youngsters, as a result of the radical change in global communication systems. The modern society has also seen the rise of celebrities into a formidable cultural force that influences people, their perception, desires, and behavioral patterns. With the help of social media networks like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, among others, celebrities have become increasingly visible and accessible online, which has increased their power by allowing people to consume celebrity material on an unprecedented scale. This has resulted in the so-called notion of celebrity worship, a psychological phenomenon characterized by the individual's adoration, emotional attachment to, and identification with a celebrity. Celebrity worship is no longer a passive admiration process but a complicated social and psychological mechanism that interferes with attitudes, values, and belief systems (Zsila et al., 2024).

The conceptual framework of celebrity worship is a continuum of casual admiration to the intense and possibly pathological participation. At the low end, a person can simply follow celebrities to have fun and socialize, whereas at the high end, they can develop strong emotional bonds and even develop obsessive behaviors and feel that there is a personal attachment to the celebrity. This process can be explained through the absorption-addiction model (McCutcheon et al., 2002), according to which people are first drawn to the life of a celebrity as an entertainer, but with time, it can turn into an addictive habit with obsessive thoughts and actions. Higher degrees of celebrity worship have also been associated with lower self-esteem and identity-related difficulties (McCutcheon et al., 2002; Zsila et al., 2021).

Extreme celebrity worship is not just a theoretical issue. The data gathered in this study demonstrate that a significant number of youth fall in the clinically relevant ranges for the Celebrity Worship Scale categories. For example, in the present study, 47.5% of university students in Pakistan were found to be in the Borderline Pathological range of the CWS, corresponding to the category in which people get obsessed with an idol and have a sense of 'personal connection' with a celebrity (McCutcheon et al., 2002). The fact that this number is so prominent makes it a priority to study the Downstream effects of Celebrity Worship, especially its impact on values such as materialism, with an empirical and public health perspective in Pakistan.



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

This phenomenon of celebrity worship has been greatly amplified by the advent of social media, which has given rise to what is known as parasocial interaction, which allows for one-sided conversations between people and celebrities who may or may not be aware of their existence. This type of communication gives a sense of closeness and openness, which makes celebrities look more approachable and persuasive. Celebrities can use social media platforms to discuss personal facets of their lives hence the creation of emotional connections between them and their audiences. As a result of this, individuals are more likely to internalize and imitate the values, attitudes, and actions promoted by celebrities. Effects especially take a serious turn in young people, where these individuals are at crucial stages of identity formation, and are extremely sensitive to external manipulations. (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Shamim & Azam, 2024).

Materialism means the significance of acquiring wealth, goods, and status as the main objectives of life (Richins, 2004). It is highly linked to consumerism, social comparison, and the seeking of external validation. The modern culture of consumers tends to associate success and happiness with material items, and people are inclined to focus on material achievement and the purchase of luxury goods. Materialistic values have always been linked to other negative psychological outcomes, such as a decline in well-being, an increase in anxiety, and a loss of life satisfaction, which are all known to be consistently documented in literature (Dittmar et al., 2014).

The relationship between celebrity worship and materialism is not arbitrary but subject to evident psychological processes. There are three theoretical lines of explanation for this relationship. One way is via parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956), which leads fans to form an emotional attachment to the celebrities that they consume, making their behaviour significant and relevant to their own lives and something to be emulated. Second, social comparison (Festinger, 1954) involves making comparisons with other people or ideal images about wealth and success, leading to a desire to reduce the perceived gap and to seek it through material acquisition within the realm of the fan's admiration of the celebrities. Third, cultivation (Gerbner et al., 1986), or repeated exposure to celebrity driven media, allows the use of luxury products as a measure of success to become accepted as a norm, which in turn alters the perceptions of what young audiences believe is desirable and attainable. These mechanisms make celebrity worship more than just passive admiration; they transform it into a psychologically active process in which aspirational identification leads to materialistic values (Festinger, 1954; Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Young people are particularly susceptible because they are still in their formative years, during which they are just beginning to discover their identity and feelings and



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

may be easily swayed by their social surroundings. Celebrities typically serve as role models, exuding images of success, beauty, and social standing that appeal to young people. The celebrity culture's impact has increased over the past few years in Pakistan due to the development of digital media and the rising popularity of social media platforms. Due to the Pakistani youth's increased exposure to global media, they are now able to engage with both domestic and international celebrities. This exposure has helped in spreading consumer culture and embracing materialistic values. The media have been changing exponentially in Pakistan, and celebrities have been at the center, producing opinions and influencing the consumer behavior of the people. The images of them promoting products and brands produce effective identifications between material goods and success and make consumers follow the same patterns of worship (Afzal et al., 2024; Azhar et al., 2023; Shamim & Azam, 2024).

The lack of empirical research on the effects of celebrity culture on young people's values in Pakistan, particularly those relating to materialism, coincides with the rise in popularity of celebrity culture there. The majority of the literature available has been carried out in Western societies, which restricts their generalizability to Pakistani society. Consistent with parasocial interaction theory, people who feel close to celebrities are more likely to adopt their values and behaviours. Extreme celebrity admiration has also been linked to psychological difficulties such as anxiety, which may compound materialistic orientations (Brooks, 2021).

Considering the above, the current paper aimed to examine how celebrity worship can be used to predict materialistic values among young people in Pakistan. Using a quantitative research approach, this study attempted to generate empirical data about the connection between these factors and advance our overall understanding of the impact of media on adolescent behavior.

Significance of Study

The relevance of this study extends to a number of areas. It analyzes the intersection of celebrity worship and materialism in a non-Western setting, which, theoretically, expands the body of knowledge at hand. The bulk of the research on such concepts has been conducted in the industrialized world, and the findings may not accurately reflect the realities of the developing world, where cultures, media coverage, and social processes are very different. Research on Pakistani youngsters will add to the body of knowledge on how the media affects people worldwide and how they internalize it into various cultural environments.

In a practical perspective, the research results will have significant implications to a number of stakeholders. Teachers can apply knowledge to create media literacy



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

courses to teach students to analyze the content available in the celebrity world with high criticism and how to avoid blind following materialistic ideals. The study can be used by policymakers to develop a regulation structure that will result in the media engaging in responsible issues and ensure youth are not exploited by the marketing system. Additionally, the improved comprehension of mental health healthcare professionals on the psychological effects of celebrity worship would give them the opportunity to develop specific interventions that play the role of addressing people with maladaptive media worship and materialistic tendencies.

Rationale of the Study

This study is relevant and needed because of four mutually interconnected empirical and theoretical concerns that create the rationale for this study. The existing literature shows that the vast majority of the celebrity worship–materialism studies are conducted in Western countries. Whether these effect sizes are preserved, reduced or amplified in other cultural settings, including non-Western settings like Pakistan, where the celebrity culture exists in a different media setting within Lollywood, cricket celebrity culture, K-drama fandom and a growing social media influence economy remains empirically unexamined. This study aimed to fill this gap and provides some of the first Pakistan-specific quantitative evidence on the celebrity worship–materialism relationship which enables direct comparison with international benchmarks.

Although there has been growing anecdotal concern about pathological celebrity worship among Pakistani youth, it has never been empirically documented. According to the present study, 47.5% of the Pakistani university students fall in the range of Borderline Pathological (BP) of CW scale which is associated with obsessive thoughts, delusional personal connection with celebrities and readiness to do extreme things on behalf of celebrities (McCutcheon et al., 2002). This prevalence figure provides a compelling empirical justification for investigating the downstream effects of celebrity worship, especially its impact on materialistic value formation, as a pressing public health problem in Pakistani educational institutions, mental health services, and media policymaking.

Third, the Cultivation Theory by Gerbner et al. (1986) suggests that long-term exposure to celebrity driven media over time will alter young people's perceptions of social reality as they come to accept the materialistic values that the celebrity media continually promote as normal and desirable. The media environment in Pakistan, where the rich lifestyle and material prosperity of Pakistani and international celebrities are projected consistently across Instagram post, TikTok video, and YouTube channels, is exactly the kind of focused and materialistic symbolic



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

environment where deep value change is most likely to occur, as described by the Cultivation Theory. However, so far, no empirical study in Pakistan has attempted to test if the same cultivation mechanism is functioning in the case of Pakistani youth. This test is offered in the present study.

Fourth, the literature consistently reports that females are more prone to engaging in celebrity worship than Males, as yet, the same assumption has not been tested in Pakistan's context, where female social media influencers and female fandom of K-drama are found to be equally as intense as male's in Pakistan, whereas male's are found more prone than females in celebrating male cricketers. The hypothesis of differential functioning of gender differences in celebrity worship and materialism in Pakistan compared to Western societies is an empirical one that may have implications for the design and targeting of any media literacy intervention. The present study is directed specifically to this question in the context of hypothesis testing and provides cultural-based evidence to an assumption that has rarely been tested using non-Western samples (Shamim & Azam, 2024; Zsila et al., 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Though celebrity culture has grown to be a prominent feature in Pakistan's digital media, the psychological and value-related effects of celebrity worship among Pakistani youngsters remain critically underexamined. Although there is an established positive correlation between celebrity worship and materialistic values in international studies, these studies exclusively rely on Western samples. It is an empirical query whether these associations are replicated, weakened or significantly amplified in the Pakistani context, where celebrity culture is manifested in a unique form and dynamic of Lollywood stardom, cricket hero worship, K-drama fandom, and a booming social media influencer economy.

Another and a more pressing aspect of the topic is the issue of pathological celebrity worship among the youth of Pakistan. The present study is able to document that 47.5% of the Pakistani University students fall in the Borderline Pathological range of the Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS), which shows obsessive thoughts, delusional feelings of personal connection with celebrities, and readiness to engage in extreme behavior on a celebrity's behalf. This demonstrates that approximately half of the surveyed individuals display a degree of celebrity worship linked to well-documented psychological dangers, such as compulsive shopping behavior, identity confusion, and anxiety. This prevalence has never been systematically discussed in the empirical literature in the context of mental health services, university counselling, media policy, and education in Pakistan (McCutcheon et al., 2002).



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

Thirdly, the theoretical mechanism whereby celebrity worship leads to materialistic values has not been specifically tested in Pakistan. The cultivation theory proposed by Gerbner et al. (1986) suggests that repeated long-term exposure to celebrity driven media content over the years can affect the audience's perception of reality, leading them to adopt materialistic values as the common social norms and as desired life goals. In an environment like Pakistan, where celebrities promote luxurious lifestyles and material prosperity on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, the concentrated materialistic symbolic environment identified by Cultivation Theory is the most conducive to deep and persistent value alteration. However, no previous Pakistani study has empirically tested whether this cultivation process is operating among university students. (Gerbner et al. (1986).

Fourth, within the Pakistani context, the impact of gender on the formation of celebrity worship and the materialistic consequences of such worship have not been fully theorized. There is a long tradition of previous research confirming that female fans are more extreme than male fans in their behaviour of “celebrity worship”. In contrast, in Pakistan, male celebrity worship of social media influencers and cricketers is very apparent, while Indian celebrity culture and K-drama appeal to both sexes equally. Previous research demonstrates some gender differences in celebrity worship and materialism that are consistently reported in Western samples, which have not been tested in Pakistan and therefore remains unresolved whether gender differences in the constructs exist, are reproduced, or are eliminated in Pakistani youth.

Hence, the main question of the study is: How much does celebrity worship affect materialistic attitudes among Pakistani university students, and how do gender dynamics, cultivation processes, and the prevalence of borderline pathological worship influence this relationship in the Pakistani cultural context?

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

To analyze the relationship between the level of celebrity admiration and the endorsement of materialistic values among youth.

To identify if celebrity worship significantly predicts a desire for material wealth and possessions.

To investigate the difference between males and females in the concept of worshiping celebrities and their materialistic values among university students of Pakistan.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does celebrity worship significantly positively predict materialistic values in Pakistani university students?



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

RQ2: Does the intensity of overall celebrity worship correlate with the level of materialistic values among Pakistani university students, and to what extent is it predictive of materialistic values?

RQ3: Are there any significant differences between male and female Pakistani university students regarding celebrity worship and materialistic values?

Hypotheses

In order to achieve the stated objectives, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1: Celebrity worship is positively related to materialistic values.

H2: Overall celebrity worship intensity significantly predicts higher levels of materialism.

H3: Male and female students differ significantly in both their levels of celebrity worship and materialistic tendencies.

Literature Review

In the fields of consumer research and media psychology, the connection between celebrity culture and value development in young people has become a key topic of study. Celebrity worship has transformed over the past two decades from a passive adoration of famous people into an active psychological force that influences attitudes, identities, and consumer habits, especially in young people and teenagers (Shamim & Azam, 2024; Zsila et al., 2021). The proliferation of social media platforms has made celebrities more accessible than ever, enabling young people to interact with celebrity material at an unprecedented level. The internalization of materialistic values, which places a high priority on wealth, material possessions, and material success as central life objectives, is one of the most well-documented outcomes of this increased exposure. In contrast, materialistic values are consistently linked to negative psychological consequences such as lower life satisfaction, higher anxiety, and compulsive buying behaviour (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; McCutcheon et al., 2002; Richins, 2004; Wei & Huang, 2024). A systematic review by Brooks (2021) synthesizes the wide range of factors associated with celebrity worship across this growing literature.

Theoretical Frameworks Connecting Materialism and Celebrity Worship

A number of theoretical approaches shed some light on the connection between the phenomena of celebrity worship and materialism. These theories can be used to describe how and why young people can emulate the lifestyles of popular celebrities and become materialists.



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

Parasocial Interaction Theory

According to the Parasocial Interaction Theory, which was first put forth by Horton and Wohl (1956), media consumers form one-sided but emotionally significant relationships with media figures and have genuine psychological reactions as though the interaction were reciprocal. In the context of celebrity worship, these parasocial relationships lead followers to view the values, conduct, and consumer habits of their favorite celebrities as personally relevant and worthy of imitation. Young adults who indulge in heavy parasocial connectedness can mimic habits, consumption behavior, and lifestyles of their favorite celebrities, including materialistic approaches. Seeing celebrities who show off their expensive items or extravagant living may establish perceived standards of affluence and power, which provoke materialistic desire. These one-sided relationships are highly persuasive in that they provide young people with the opportunity to feel that they belong to the celebrities without their reaction to foster the feelings of admiration and identification on a higher level.

Celebrity Worship- Absorption-Addiction Model

The Absorption-Addiction model put forward by McCutcheon et al. (2002) explains two stages of celebrity worship. Absorption is an increased interest and fascination with the lifestyle of a specific celebrity, whereas addiction refers to obsessive notions that may disrupt everyday activities. Recent research indicates that people who exhibit absorption and addiction propensities are more apt to internalize the celebrity values, such as a tendency to be materialistic. As a result, adolescents who exhibit a greater degree of celebrity worship are more prone to seeing material things as indicators of their identity and social standing (McCutcheon et al., 2002; Wei & Huang, 2024).

Social Comparison Theory

Festinger (1954) first suggested the Social Comparison Theory, which states that people assess their own worth by comparing themselves to others, especially those they consider to be better or more socially desirable. When it comes to celebrity worship, young people often tend to make comparisons between themselves and the material and lifestyle indicators that celebrities portray on the internet. Such comparisons may lead to a sense of inferiority or envy, the need to obtain material objects to be similar to the desired personalities. Comparisons in terms of social identity in the digital space increase because content is more about consumption, luxury, and status, as curated by the elite (Wei & Huang, 2024).

Cultivation Theory and Consumer Culture

Cultivation Theory, initially proposed by Gerbner et al. (1986), asserts that extended and repeated exposure to media content progressively molds public views of social



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

reality; heavy media consumers adopt the ideals, norms, and worldviews routinely represented in the media. In the context of celebrity culture, cultivation theory predicts that sustained exposure to celebrity-driven media, which predominantly depicts riches, luxury consumption, and material success as normal and sought after, fosters a materialistic symbolic environment in the minds of viewers. Young viewers start to view conspicuous consumption and material acquisition as normal indicators of a prosperous and satisfying existence over time as they are significantly exposed to celebrity lifestyles on platforms including Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

This developed attitude presents materialism as a common and expected social reality rather than as an extraordinary ambition. Therefore, cultivation theory explains not just why materialism is related to celebrity worship but also why the link gets stronger with more platform use. The more intensively a young person consumes celebrity material, the more thoroughly their view of normal is formed by the materialistic values that celebrity media constantly depicts. More broadly, consumer culture research shows how media discourses lead people to link possessions with personal success, therefore incorporating materialistic logic into the formation of daily identity (Afzal et al., 2024; Azhar et al., 2023; Shamim & Azam, 2024).

Conceptual Definitions

Celebrity worship is a psychological model that is determined by emotional involvement, admiration, and imitation of the behaviors of celebrities, which is usually measured with instruments such as the Celebrity Worship Scale (McCutcheon et al., 2002). Youth refers to a group of people between 18 and 30, which includes high school, college, and the first stages of the profession. Influencer exposure involves interaction with or observing content by social media influencers who advertise aspirational lifestyles.

McCutcheon et al. (2002) developed and validated the Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS), which is the most widely used tool for measuring celebrity worship. The CWS operationalizes celebrity worship as a single dimension with three hierarchical levels, each reflecting a higher level of psychological attachment with a celebrity. The least extreme kind of celebrity worship is the first level, Entertainment-Social, in which people are mostly drawn to a celebrity for their entertainment value and find enjoyment in discussing celebrities in social situations.

The second stage, Intense-Personal, denotes a stronger emotional and quasi-romantic relationship to a celebrity, characterized by obsessive feelings, a sense of empathy with the celebrity's triumphs and setbacks, and the belief that there is a special connection between the fan and the famous person. The third and most severe



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

degree, known as Borderline-Pathological, involves impulsive actions and obsessions linked to the celebrity as well as a readiness to commit crimes on their behalf. Consistent with the scale's hierarchical structure (McCutcheon et al., 2002), CWS scores follow this pattern, with most people falling at the Entertainment-Social level and fewer and fewer reaching the Intense-Personal or Borderline-Pathological thresholds. These distinctions are very relevant to the current investigation. People who are at the Intense-Personal and Borderline-Pathological levels are far more prone to incorporate celebrities' materialistic consumption habits into their own sense of self (Wei & Huang, 2024).

Click or tap here to enter text. Richins (2004) developed and validated the Material Values Scale (MVS), which is used in the current research to assess materialism. The MVS views materialism as a personal value with three main components: acquisition centrality (how important material possessions are in a person's life), acquisition as the pursuit of happiness (the idea that owning things is necessary for a good life), and possession-defined success (the way people judge success based on how many and what kind of things they own). The MVS showed strong construct validity and reliability across many samples (Richins, 2004), establishing it as the gold standard for materialism assessment in consumer psychology and media effects research. The short-form MVS (9 items) utilised in the current study has been extensively used in cross-cultural settings, with research verifying its psychometric acceptability for non-Western groups (Richins, 2004).

Materialism and Celebrity Worship: International Evidence

The beneficial link between celebrity worship and materialistic values is supported by a rising body of empirical research from around the world. Dittmar et al. (2014) conducted a multinational survey of young people and discovered a strong correlation between celebrity worship ratings and materialistic and narcissistic orientations, demonstrating the cross-cultural consistency of this association. Wei and Huang (2024) further found that, even after controlling for overall social media usage, Chinese emerging adults' celebrity adoration specifically predicted conspicuous consumption and upward social comparison, identifying celebrity worship itself as a driving force behind materialistic outcomes. Additionally, Azhar et al. (2023) found that, in a cohort of Pakistani students, the internalization of influencer lifestyles was the strongest predictor of a materialistic value orientation.

The role of social media channels in exacerbating these consequences has also been highlighted by recent research. From celebrity worship to materialism, there is a clear behavioral path, according to Djafarova and Bowes (2021) and Shamim and Azam



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

(2024), who found that Generation Z consumers who follow Instagram influencers are considerably more inclined to make impulsive purchases motivated by aspirational identification, which is the desire to own what their favorite influencer owns. By repeatedly exposing users to aspirational lifestyle material even in the absence of active searching, the algorithm-based content distribution mechanism on TikTok increases the cultivation effect described above. In a large-scale representative study, Zsila et al. (2024) found that celebrity worship is still widespread among all age groups and that the Intense-Personal dimension is the most strongly associated with identity absorption and consumer behavior. Taken together, these results show that social media influencers are now the most prevalent form of celebrity in the modern world and that platform-specific exposure has a major impact on how young people throughout the globe view the connection between celebrity worship and materialism (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Gerbner et al., 1986; Zsila et al., 2021).

Systems of connection between Celebrity Worship and Materialism

Celebrity worship can be transformed into materialistic principles of Pakistani youth through social comparison, parasocial identification, and social media envy. Family expectations, religious norms, and economic restrictions represent cultural moderators that further affect materialism expression (Wei & Huang, 2024).

Research Gaps and Rationale of the Present Research.

Although the issues of celebrity worship and its relationships with materialism are increasingly becoming popular, there is limited direct evidence within the context of the Pakistani youth. The moderating variables (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural norms) and platform-specific effects as well as the mediating mechanisms, have not been sufficiently studied yet. The majority of studies are cross-sectional, which restricts causal derivation.

Pakistani Celebrity Culture and Local Context

International and Pakistani research is persistent in pointing out that increased materialistic values are linked to greater quantities of celebrity admiration in popular culture. In order to grasp the link between Pakistan's particular media scene and materialism in celebrity worship, the study must be contextualized within the nation. Commonly known as Lollywood, Pakistan's entertainment sector has historically centered celebrity culture around film stars, TV drama actors, and musicians whose lives are extensively highlighted in both conventional and digital media. But in recent years, the emergence of social media has fundamentally changed the character of Pakistani celebrity life. Emerging as a fresh and very powerful category of celebrity, Pakistani TikTokers, YouTube vloggers, and Instagram influencers often with millions



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

of followers and a great control over the consumption decisions and aspirational values of young Pakistanis. In addition to local celebrity culture, Pakistani youngsters have also been greatly affected by the worldwide popularity of Korean pop culture, sometimes referred to as the Korean Wave or Hallyu. Among Pakistani youth, K-drama shows and K-pop music have become quite popular; Korean celebrities serve as inspirational characters whose clothing, lifestyle, and worship patterns are widely emulated. For Pakistani youngsters, this confluence of local Lollywood celebrity culture, local social media influencers, and world K-drama fans produces a somewhat complicated celebrity scene that draws on both traditional cultural values and internationally distributed consumer imagery (Afzal et al., 2024; Azhar et al., 2023; Shamim & Azam, 2024).

According to Afzal et al. (2024), Pakistani customers who followed social media influencers exhibited notably higher impulse buying behavior and aspirational worship, therefore directly relating influencer exposure to materialist consumer outcomes. Likewise, other Pakistani research has shown that social media influencer content strongly shaped young people's buying decisions, with parasocial identification serving as a major intervening mechanism. In a Pakistani student sample, Azhar et al. (2023) found once again that the strongest predictor of materialistic value orientation was the internalization of celebrity lifestyles. Taken together, these regional studies demonstrate that the link between celebrity worship and materialism is not just a Western phenomenon but rather actively present in Pakistan's growing media environment (Azhar et al., 2023).

Methodology

The chapter describes how the relationship between celebrity worship and materialistic values was studied in Pakistani youth. It outlines the research design, the population, sampling procedure, sample size, research instruments, questionnaire design, data gathering procedure, and ethical issues. The choice of the methods was made in a way that will guarantee the reliability and validity of the research results and achievement of research objectives.

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study is quantitative. This is an appropriate method in that it allows the measurement of variables and examination of their associations in terms of statistical procedures. The survey design was cross-sectional, where data was gathered at a single time. The design is applicable in the examination of the relationship among variables in a large population.



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

The independent variable is celebrity worship, whereas the dependent variable is the materialistic values in this research. This design enabled the researcher to test the role of celebrity worship on materialistic values. It was also useful in the analysis of the role of other factors like gender, socioeconomic status, and social media platforms of preference.

Population

The study population is the Pakistani youth of the age group between 18 and 30 years. It is targeted primarily at students of universities who are actively engaged in the use of social media. This population was chosen, as the youth is more exposed to the celebrity culture and are more susceptible to be affected by the same. University students are also a diverse sample population having people representing various academic backgrounds and social groups. This assists in the generalization of the results to the broader population of the youth in Pakistan.

Sampling Technique

The current study used convenience sampling, a commonly used sampling method in social science research with students (Brooks, 2021). To ensure broad reach and diversity of sample, participants were recruited via various online channels. In particular, the survey link was shared through WhatsApp groups of students, Instagram and Facebook student community pages and by direct contact with the coordinators of the departments at several universities in Lahore such as University of the Punjab, Government College University Lahore and Lahore College for Women University etc. The universities were the target of both private and public institutions to represent all socioeconomic groups.

The entire survey was conducted online, using Google Forms, making it easy to access for any device and location in Pakistan. The choice of online administration was made because it is especially suited for studies on digitally active youth groups, and it enabled the participants to respond at their own time without social pressure. Although convenience sampling is not random, and thus does not yield strict generalizability, sampling bias was reduced by intentionally sampling from varying universities, cities, degrees and gender subsets.

Sample Size

The study included a total of 316 participants. The final analysis only counted the responses that were duly filled in to guarantee the quality of the data.

Research Instruments

The structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. This study involved the use of two standard scales and demographic questions.



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

The Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS), developed and validated by McCutcheon et al. (2002), was used to measure Celebrity Worship in this study. Using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree), the 23 questions in the CWS are assessed. The 23 items are combined to generate a composite mean score, with a greater score indicating a greater degree of celebrity worship intensity. The average score of participants dictates their hierarchical level among the three. The Entertainment-Social level (mean score 1.00–2.49) shows that people are only interested in celebrities for fun and social interaction. The Borderline-Pathological level (mean score 3.50–5.00) suggests obsessive thoughts, delusional emotions of personal connection, and a willingness to participate in extreme activities on behalf of the celebrity. On the other hand, the Intense-Personal level (mean score 2.50–3.49) signifies a stronger emotional and quasi-romantic relationship with a star. The CWS has demonstrated strong validity and reliability across multiple cultural contexts. The present sample had excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.975$). (McCutcheon et al. (2002)(McCutcheon et al., 2002)

The Material Values Scale (MVS), created and tested by Richins in 2004, was used to evaluate materialistic values. The nine-item short-form MVS evaluates three aspects of materialism: acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success.

Every item received a rating using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Significantly, Item 4 of the MVS (S2Q4) is reverse-worded and was reverse-coded before analysis; hence, a response of 1 was recoded as 5, 2 as 4, 4 as 2, and 5 as 1 in line with Richins's (2004) original scoring instructions. If this item is not reverse-coded, it will lower the composite materialism score incorrectly and skew reliability calculations. After reverse coding, a composite mean score over all nine items was calculated, with higher results reflecting more materialistic value orientations. The MVS had excellent internal consistency in the current sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .904$).

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire was designed by pooling the answers of the CWS Celebrity Worship Scale, the MVS Materialistic Value Scale, and some demographic questions. The demographic section comprised the age, gender, favorite celebrity type, favorite social media platform, and time spent on social media on a daily basis.

A Google Form was used in designing the questionnaire. This facilitated the giving out and receipt of responses. The questionnaire was made to look clear and easy to



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

understand before the final data collection was made to ensure that the questions were correct.

Data Collection Procedure

It was collected online so that there would be a greater number of respondents. The link to the survey was spread by social media, WhatsApp groups, and university platforms. Conducted the study by allowing participants a brief description of the research and how to complete the questionnaire.

Participants gave their voluntary participation and informed consent. They were given assurance that their final results would be anonymous and confidential.

Ethical Considerations

The participants also had the freedom to opt out of participation at any time, with no consequences. All participants were asked to give informed consent at the start of the survey. A few words about the nature of the research, the types of questions and the estimated time to complete the study was included at the top of the Google Form, explaining that participation was voluntary and that this was a short study. No personal information, including name, student ID or contact information, was gathered at any time, providing complete anonymity of responses.

Results

Participant Profile

The total sample size of this study was $N = 316$ Pakistani youth, who were recruited through convenience sampling. The sample was predominantly female ($n = 222$, 70.3%), with a majority aged 18-27 years ($279/316 = 88.3\%$). The majority of respondents were in a Bachelor's program. Table 1 shows the demographic information.

Table 1

Demographic Profile ($N = 316$)

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender	Female	222 (70.3%)
	Male	92 (29.1%)
	Other	2 (0.6%)
Age Group	18-22 years	118 (37.3%)
	23-27 years	161 (50.9%)
	28-32 years	34 (10.8%)



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

	33+ years	3 (0.9%)
Education	Intermediate	34 (10.8%)
	Bachelors	161 (50.9%)
	Masters	77 (24.4%)
	MPhil/PhD	44 (13.9%)

Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency is exceptional for both scales (Table 2). The Cronbach alpha of the Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS, 23 items) is 0.975 and 0.904 for the Material Values Scale (MVS, 9 items). The two values are above the .90 criterion for excellent reliability and thus offer a good psychometric basis for the study.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics

Scale	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Interpretation
Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS)	23	0.975	Exceptional (> .90)
Material Values Scale (MVS)	9	0.904	Excellent (> .90)

Descriptive Statistics and CWS Level Distribution

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics. Mean CWS score ($M = 3.296$, $SD = 1.074$) on a 1-5 Likert scale indicates moderate to high celebrity worship intensity in this sample. Mean MVS score ($M = 3.473$, $SD = 0.930$) indicates moderate to high materialism levels. The pre-computed CWS level categorization (Table 4) reveals that the majority of respondents fall in the Borderline Pathological category, a clinically significant finding.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	N	M	SD	Scale
Celebrity Worship (CWS)	316	3.296	1.074	1-5
Materialistic Values (MVS)	316	3.473	0.930	1-5

Table 4



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

CWS Level Distribution (McCutcheon et al., 2002)

CWS Level	Description	n (%)
Level 1	Entertainment-Social	71 (22.5%)
Level 2	Intense Personal	95 (30.1%)
Level 3	Borderline Pathological	150 (47.5%)

Note. CWS levels per McCutcheon et al. (2002) Celebrity Worship Scale norms. Level 3 (Borderline Pathological) represents the majority of this sample - a noteworthy clinical finding.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Celebrity Worship Positively Correlates with Materialistic Values

Pearson correlation was computed between CWS and MVS scores. Results revealed a very strong, statistically significant positive correlation, $r(314) = 0.746$, $p < .001$. This represents a large effect size by Cohen's (1988) conventions ($r > .50$), indicating that as celebrity worship intensity increases, materialistic values increase substantially. This finding strongly supports Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) intense celebrity exposure cultivates materialistic aspirations as fans internalize celebrity consumption lifestyles. H1 is strongly supported.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation between CWS and MVS

Variable	CWS	MVS
Celebrity Worship (CWS)	-	0.746***
Materialistic Values (MVS)	0.746***	-

*** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). $N = 316$. Large effect size ($r > .70$).

H2: Celebrity Worship Significantly Predicts Materialistic Values

Simple linear regression with CWS as the predictor and MVS as the outcome was performed. The model was highly significant, $F(1, 314) = 393.662$, $p < .001$. Celebrity worship strongly predicted materialistic values ($B = 0.646$, $\beta = 0.746$, $t = 19.841$, $p < .001$), explaining 55.6% of the variance in materialism ($R^2 = 0.556$). This is an extremely good predictive model in that for every one-unit increase in worship of celebrities, materialism values increase by 0.646 units. The R^2 value is quite high, .556,



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

in the social science field, where $R^2 > .30$ are considered large (Cohen, 1988). H2 is very well supported.

Table 6

Simple Linear Regression: CWS Predicting MVS

Variable	B	SE	Beta	T	P
Constant	1.344	0.113	-	11.913	<.001
CWS	0.646	0.033	0.746	19.841	<.001

Note. $R^2 = 0.556$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.555$; $F(1, 314) = 393.662$, $p < .001$. Celebrity worship explains 55.6% of the variance in materialism.

H3: Gender Differences in Celebrity Worship

Gender differences were examined with one-way ANOVAs comparing gender groups (female, male, and a small “other” category, $n = 2$). Celebrity worship did not differ significantly across groups, $F(2, 313) = 1.163$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 \approx .007$ (derived from F). A parallel ANOVA on materialistic values was likewise non-significant, $F(2, 313) = 1.068$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 \approx .007$. Male ($M = 3.369$) and female ($M = 3.257$) respondents reported nearly identical celebrity-worship levels. Because the “other” category contained only two cases, this comparison is effectively male versus female. H3 is not supported. The present finding indicates that there is no difference between both genders in regard to celebrity worship, as earlier research done in the Western world has implied that females are more inclined to worship a celebrity than males.

Table 7

One-Way ANOVA: Gender Differences in CWS

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	2.686	2	1.343	1.163
Within Groups	361.503	313	1.155	
Total	364.189	315		

Note. $p > .05$. Male $M = 3.369$; Female $M = 3.257$.

Summary of Findings

Table 8

Summary of Hypotheses and Results

Hypothesis	Key Statistic	Decision
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Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

H1: CWS positively correlates with MVS	$r = 0.746, p < .001$ (large effect)	Strongly supported
H2: CWS significantly predicts MVS	$\beta = 0.746, R^2 = 0.556, F(1,314) = 393.662, p < .001$	Strongly supported
H3: Gender differences in CWS	$F(2,313) = 1.163, p > .05$	Not supported

The fact that 150 respondents (47.5%) fall into the Borderline Pathological category of the CWS is a worry for public health. Together with the strong connection between CWS and Materialism ($R^2 = 0.556$), it indicates that a large segment of Pakistani youngsters is susceptible to materialism-related psychological problems brought on by excessive celebrity worship. The implications of these results extend to mental health care, parental guidance, and media literacy instruction in Pakistani higher education institutions.

Discussion

H1 was strongly supported. The Pearson correlation of $r(314) = .746, p < .001$ represents a very large effect size by Cohen's (1988) conventions and is substantially stronger than what has been reported in prior celebrity worship–materialism research, where correlation coefficients typically range from $r = .30$ to $r = .50$. The present $r = .746$ suggests that in the Pakistani context, celebrity worship and materialism are not merely related constructs but deeply intertwined psychological phenomena that may be uniquely amplified by Pakistan's distinct celebrity media environment.

Several factors explain this exceptionally strong association. First, Pakistani celebrity culture is almost uniformly oriented around the display of material success. In the field of entertainment, whether it is Lollywood celebrities or any national cricketers, or even TikTok influencers, the Pakistani celebrities have consistently been known as the epitome of luxury consumption, branded goods and aspirations for how to achieve (Azhar et al., 2023). This results in a particularly intense materialistic symbolic presence for young audiences of Pakistan. Secondly, and most importantly, the strength of this relationship is well explained by Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986). Over time, as younger people are exposed to celebrity content on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, the reality of social media increasingly alters their perception of social reality, leading them to think that materialism is a natural and accepted way of life. This is because the $r = .746$ is very high, and may be linked to a more thorough knowledge of



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

the film and the value system, a system that would have been acquired over many years of intense exposure to the media of celebrities.

Third, Pakistan is a poor developing economy where the differences between the lives of aspirational celebrities and material reality are compounded, which leads to stronger materialistic drives than usually found across wealthier Western societies, and hence stronger relationships between the two. In the same way, Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) elucidates their desire to consume celebrities as personally meaningful and deserving of emulation, which means they are not merely looking at celebrities, but also consuming them as materials they want to emulate.

Celebrity worship is a significantly stronger predictor of materialistic values than any other predictor ($\beta = .746$, $R^2 = .556$, $F(1, 314) = 393.662$, $p < .001$), and accounted for an above-normal amount of variance for materialism, which is a large effect for any bivariate social psychological model (Cohen, 1988). A slight increase of 1 unit in the intensity of celebrity worship was paralleled by a significant but practically meaningful increase of 0.646 units in materialistic values.

The Absorption-Addiction Model (McCutcheon et al., 2002) best describes this prediction. As people become more involved with the celebrity rather than just a source of interest, they become more likely to adopt the celebrity's values, actions and purchasing habits into their own self-image. Suddenly, the extreme fan of the celebrity starts to covet what the celebrity coveted: luxury cars, designer brands, and aspirational travel. And the reason for that is because that's what the celebrity is associated with. This finding is also supported by Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which predicts that fans of celebrities at higher levels of celebrity worship will make more intense upward social comparisons with their admired celebrities, which will further strengthen their materialistic aspirations to bridge the perceived status gap. The $R^2 = .556$ achieved in this study, is much higher than the variance accounted for in similar studies in the Western context, highlighting the idea that the Pakistani cultural and media environment provides an ideal platform for celebrity worship to become manifest in materialistic values.

No support for H3. There were no gender differences for celebrity worship ($F(2, 313) = 1.163$, $p > .05$) or materialistic values ($F(2, 313) = 1.068$, $p > .05$), and the effect sizes were negligible ($\eta^2 \approx .007$ for both, derived from the reported F values). The present study, however, does not take this as an ordinary null result but suggests that it is indicative of the peculiar phenomenon and gender inclusiveness of the contemporary celebrity culture in Pakistan and should be more carefully theoretically interpreted.



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

The previous literature on the subject has reported that females tend to worship celebrities more than males (Zsila et al., 2021). But Pakistan's celebrity scene resonates with both men and women via several different channels. Aspirations tied to cricket stars like Babar Azam, who get luxurious endorsements, wear branded shirts and travel around the world, act in the same way as Lollywood celebrities do with female fans, creating materialistic desires which ultimately boost their aspirations to become like them. At the same time, the Korean Wave has gained a surprisingly male and female audience in Pakistan, where K-drama series and K-pop music are a hit with both men and women due to their blend of romance, action, fashion, and aspirational lifestyle imagery that appeals across genders. In addition, the algorithmic system of content delivery on TikTok's platform means that all users are likely to see content about aspirational celebrity lifestyles, regardless of gender, which structurally levelled out the gendered exposure to celebrity lifestyles as typically documented in pre-social media era Western studies. This disproportionate sample size by gender (70.3% female and 29.1% male; derived from 222/316 and 92/316) may have also lowered the ability to detect the gender effects in the future and thus a more definitive test would come from a gender stratified sample.

Implications

This study offers several significant theoretical contributions to the field of media psychology. Primarily, it substantiates the cross-cultural relevance and generalizability of four major theoretical models within a South Asian, Muslim-majority context—a demographic where these frameworks are rarely tested concurrently. Specifically, the findings validate Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986), Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), and the Absorption-Addiction Model (McCutcheon et al., 2002).

The present results provide exceptionally strong empirical support for Cultivation Theory. The substantial variance explained by the model ($R^2 = .556$) indicates that sustained exposure to celebrity lifestyles on digital platforms cultivates a deeply internalized, materialistic value system among Pakistani youth, rather than merely shaping superficial attitudes. By continuously portraying material success as the standard for a fulfilling life, these platforms act as a symbolic space that heavily influences youth perceptions of social reality. Notably, this R^2 value surpasses many reported in Western studies (e.g., Dittmar et al., 2014; Richins, 2004), underscoring the profound potential of contemporary media to normalize materialism in a non-Western, developing context.



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

Furthermore, the alarming prevalence rate of Borderline Pathological (BP) celebrity worship (47.5%) reveals that nearly half of the sampled university students exhibit behaviors linked to documented psychological issues, such as anxiety, identity disturbance, and compulsive consumption (Brooks, 2021). Coupled with the strong relationship between celebrity worship and materialism, this finding presents urgent practical implications. There is a critical need for university counseling services and mental health professionals in Pakistan to recognize BP celebrity worship as a clinically relevant behavioral pattern. At a policy level, regulatory bodies such as PEMRA and the PTA should explore the development of guidelines for responsible celebrity content and mandate transparency for influencer marketing targeting young audiences.

Finally, the study's exploratory platform analysis adds a compelling theoretical dimension. Video-centric platforms like YouTube appear to foster particularly intense parasocial engagement (Ferchaud et al., 2018), potentially exacerbating the link between celebrity worship and materialism, a dynamic that warrants formal, hypothesis-driven investigation in future research. Additionally, the study's null finding regarding gender differences challenges established pre-social media Western literature, which historically posited gender as a significant moderator of celebrity worship (McCutcheon et al., 2002). This result aligns with a growing body of contemporary literature (Wei & Huang, 2024; Zsila et al., 2021), suggesting that the algorithmic homogenization of celebrity content across modern digital platforms may be rendering traditional gender distinctions increasingly irrelevant.

Limitations

First of all, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal conclusions, and longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to make causal conclusions and causal mechanisms. Second, convenience sampling is limiting in that it only represents University educated and digitally connected Pakistani youth and does not include lower socioeconomic groups and the rural population. Third, the extent to which the gender differences in H3 were observed might have been limited by the unequal distribution of males (29.1%). Fourth, social media platforms were considered as a category alone, rather than attempting to identify multi-platform usage, time spent, or type of content consumed. Fifth, self-report measures can be subject to social desirability bias, especially when it comes to worshipping celebrities, in a culture where this can carry social stigma.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship of celebrity worship as a predictor of materialistic values of 316 university students in Pakistan. Two out of three hypotheses



Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

were supported. The results of this study, which found the correlation between celebrity worship and materialism to be high ($r = .746$, $p < .001$) and the level of celebrity worship to explain 55.6% of the variance in materialistic values ($R^2 = .556$, $\beta = .746$, $p < .001$), respectively, provide among the first quantitative evidence from Pakistan toward understanding the relationship between celebrity worship and materialistic values outside Western contexts. These effect sizes are significantly larger than the previous Western studies findings ($r = .30-.50$), which indicates that Pakistan's focused materialistic celebrity media environment has an unusually strong cultivation effect on young media consumers.

One of the alarming results of the study was that 47.5% of respondents fell in the Borderline Pathological range of the Celebrity Worship Scale, which is a serious public health issue for Pakistani youth mental health services and educational institutions.

Directions for Future Research

Further research is needed to examine the mechanisms that mediate the relationship between celebrity worship and materialistic ideals. Some of the most theoretically plausible mediators are: uncertainty about identity, self-esteem, upward social comparison, and parasocial identification, and these pathways could be tested simultaneously via structural equation modeling. The current study cannot determine causal directionality; therefore, longitudinal and experimental designs are needed.

The findings should also be extended to the other parts of Pakistan, specifically the rural youth and older adults, and people with lower socio-economic status, to establish the limits of the current results. Last but not least, cross-national comparative studies between Pakistan and other developing countries with similar media environments would help to find out if the relationship between celebrity worship and materialism that has been found in this study is peculiar to the Pakistani context or is reflective of a pattern in digitally connected other developing societies.

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Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

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Vol. 4 No. 6 (June) (2026)

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