Chapter 8
A Digital Scholarship Project on Materialism Among Children and Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses a digital scholarship project collaborated between the Department of Communication Studies and the University Library of Hong Kong Baptist University. The main objective of the project is to develop a publicly accessible website to showcase the various research methodologies used in 14 studies conducted by the first author as well as their findings. These 14 studies were carried out to analyze how materialism affected children and youth in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Macao (Macau), and Singapore. The website shares original data sets, research instruments, interview transcripts, and drawings of interviewees. More importantly, research results are visualized in an interactive manner. It is hoped that the website could facilitate other researchers to develop models, test hypothesis, and conduct cross cultural analysis on materialism. The website is also designed to provide guidelines for educators and parents to counteract the undesirable effect of commercial communication to children and youth. This chapter discusses the research and the digital projects, marketing strategies of the website, and self-reflection of the first author.

INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong is a consumer society. Many people, including children and youth, are exposed to a tremendous amount of advertising and promotional messages that market different products and services. These messages encourage them to consume, to buy the latest models of consumer goods, to own luxurious and branded goods, or even to spend beyond their means.

Irresponsible consumption leads to problems of debt. Indeed, the adoption of materialistic values by young people affects the balance between the private and public choices they make throughout their life (Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, & Bamossy, 2003). Research literature also shows that endorsement of materialistic values has undesirable effects on the psychological well-being of individuals (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002). Respondents who endorsed materialistic values strongly experienced a lower level of self-actualization, vitality, and happiness while experiencing a higher level of anxiety and unhappiness (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002).

Developmental psychologists, educators, parents, marketers, and policy makers are interested in understanding how children and adolescents develop materialistic values with age and what factors are related to their adoption of the values. In the past years, we conducted ten quantitative studies and four qualitative studies on this topic. A variety of research methodologies were used, including sampling surveys, a visual method of asking children to draw pictures of a person with or without a lot of toys, and personal interviews. These studies engaged participants from both urban areas and rural areas in Hong Kong, Macao, mainland China, and Singapore. A body of knowledge was thus accumulated.

Recently, there was a discussion on the ideas of scholarship, digitality, and openness in the higher education context (Goodfellow, 2013). Some scholars attempted to align research practices and sharing of research outputs with public engagement and knowledge co-creation (Jenkins et al., 2005).

The application of computing to cultural artefacts has opened new opportunities for the study of humanities (Fay & Nyhan, 2015). Within academia, a new field of knowledge called digital humanities is evolving (Fay & Nyhan, 2015). There are many definitions of digital humanities. Fay and Nyhan (2015) considered digital humanities research as a body of knowledge arising from an interaction between computing and the humanities which often involves applications of computing tools and techniques to investigate problems of the arts and humanities. In this chapter we adopt the following definition that was arrived at in The Humanities and Digital Camp for Liberal Arts Colleges (THATCamp LAC) in 2012, according to which digital humanities are "a learning community focused on reflexive engagements with digital tools and methods to investigate the humanities, i.e., studies of human culture. Digital humanities value collaboration, plurality, investigation of human

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