

Social Stratification, Materialism, Post Materialism and Consumption Values: An Empirical Study of Chinese Sample

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ABSTRACT

The increased income and modernity have greatly impacted Chinese consumers' attitudes and purchasing behavior, making them more sophisticated than ever before (Leong, 2000). As important personal values, materialism and post materialism have received a great deal of attention from both the academia and professionals. The reason is obvious. Not only can such deep-seated values influence one's attitudes toward personal and public issues (e.g., personal relationship, civic engagement), but also they affect one's psychological well-being and daily behavior including consumption behaviors (Belk, 1985; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Xiao & Kim, 2009).

A cursory review of past literature reveals that researchers have examined materialism primarily along two avenues: one puts materialism within a macro framework involving political interest or civic engagement (e.g., Davis, Dowley, & Silver, 1999; Inglehart, 1990); the other one takes a micro perspective which links materialism to consumer attitudes or behavior (e.g., Park & Rabolt, 2009; Xiao & Kim, 2009). The present study is aimed to bridge the gap between the above-mentioned two lines of research, shedding some light on the connection between macro environment and micro consumer behavior. Furthermore, the study examines the interrelationship among social stratification, materialism, post materialism, and consumption values, contributing uniquely to understanding Chinese consumers in the context of drastic economic and social changes.

Many criteria have been used to divide society into strata including both objective and subjective factors. The former consist of the factors such as profession, income, property, participation in government, and education, which often referred as hard status. The later include prestige, self-esteem, a person's social position, and so forth, which represent an individual's soft status. Building upon the literature, this study proposes and tests a conceptual model illustrating the relationships among different variables. Data were collected using survey method in a large metropolitan city in China. The results show that social status does not have a significant effect on materialism. Post materialism mediates the relationship between soft status and consumption values (buying for price, buying for pleasure, buying for identity). Post materialism has a strong positive effect on buying for pleasure and buying for identity. Furthermore, hard status and soft status are positively related to each other. Implications of research findings, limitations, and future research directions are discussed.

