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## The perception of materialism in a global market

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Item Type	Article
Authors	Parker, R. Stephen;Haytko, Diana;Hermans, Charles
Publisher	Academic and business research institute
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-07-10 20:33:14
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/176532">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/176532</a>

# **The perception of materialism in a global market: a comparison of younger Chinese and United States consumers**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study addressed the question of materialism as represented by young consumers in the United States and China. An electronic survey was administered to a sample in each country. Respondents included 186 students at a large mid-western public University in the United States and 314 students at a large satellite university in Dalian, China. The results indicate that while there are many significant differences that exist between the two sample populations, most scores seem to be very close to a neutral response indicating that neither group report being particularly materialistic. In total, responses for 17 of the 22 questions asked were found to be significant at the .05 level.

Keywords: Materialism, Material Success, Acquisition Centrality, Pursuit of Happiness



## Introduction

Materialism is not a new concept or topic of discussion in the area of Marketing. Indeed, marketers, to a very large degree, rely on the materialistic nature of consumers to entice them to purchase both products and services. It seems obvious that materialism is a learned characteristic and is therefore a characteristic which marketers can influence in most any cultural setting. If marketers wish to influence a culture's feelings towards materialism they need to have a better understanding of the nature of materialism, as well as the cultural background of the consumer segment that is being targeted.

As global markets such as China begin to open to Western companies, and therefore western cultures, it becomes more appropriate to investigate the cultural backgrounds of international consumers. Marketers must ascertain the level of "desire" versus "need" that consumers feel for a variety of products and services in each country in which they conduct business. For example, much has been made of the "global teenager" theory which asserts that as teens around the world have access to much of the same information and influences, they are likely to have the same desires and needs for similar products. Unfortunately, little empirical cross-cultural evidence exists to support or reject this conclusion. Cross-cultural studies should be able to provide marketers with empirical data that would lead them to a better understanding of the levels of materialism that are held by young consumers in different cultures.

The purpose of this study is to address the question of materialism as represented by young consumers in the United States and China. These specific markets were picked due to the massive size that each market represents as well as the fact that the U.S market represents a developed economy while China represents an important developing economy which may well feel the increasing influence of western advertising and the increasing interaction among the two economies.

## Literature Review

While the concept of materialism has been widely studied, there has not yet been agreement on an absolute definition of the term. Early research conducted by Ward and Wackman (1971) suggested that materialism was the result of individuals viewing material goods and money as a path to personal happiness and social progress. Belk (1984, p. 291) refined the definition of materialism to "...reflect the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in life..." He suggested that the traits of possessiveness, non-generosity and envy could be used in consumer research and that non-generosity and envy may well lead to dissatisfaction with one's life. Later, Belk combined the three aforementioned individual subscales into one overall materialism scale and reported, as hypothesized, a negative relationship between materialism and happiness (Belk, 1984). More recently, Richins and Dawson (1992) conceptualized materialism as a value that could be divided into three subsets made up of centrality (one's possessions play a central role in life), happiness (possessions are linked to one's well-being and satisfaction with life) and success (the degree to which one believes that the more possessions one has the more successful they are). It was concluded that while materialistic individuals are more likely to be dissatisfied with their circumstances than with themselves, they are likely to keep their wealth and are not likely to share money or possessions with charitable organizations or even with individuals with which they have relatively close ties (family and friends).

While a great deal of research has been conducted on materialism, there is not total agreement in how this concept or value affects consumers. For example, Burroughs and

Rindfleisch (2002, p.2) note that finding a sense of well being through the accumulation of material things seems to be a “futile quest.” However, while they do report that many materialism studies have concluded that individuals who are very materialistic tend to be less satisfied with their life and face greater psychological risks there may be intervening factors. An example of this seems to have been found in a study conducted by La Barbera and Gurhan (1997) where they found that while Belk’s (1984) non-generosity and envy dimensions were negatively related to well being in respondents who reported being “born again” Christians, the same dimensions were found to be unrelated to those respondents indicating they were not “born again” Christians. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) concluded that these findings might indicate that one’s beliefs and values may be influencers of materialistic needs. While no one disputes the influences of materialism, there does seem to be a need to better understand its influence on consumer purchasing patterns. This is particularly true for international or cross-cultural studies. If values may be an intervening factor in materialism, it would seem reasonable to assume that cultures that hold differing values may be affected by the concept of materialism in differing ways.

### **Cross-cultural Materialism**

While materialism has been widely studied in the United States, researchers have begun to examine how this phenomenon is influencing or demonstrated in other cultures. Ger and Belk (1996) examined the concept of cross-cultural materialism by using undergraduate and graduate respondents from 12 countries. They concluded that Romanian students showed the highest levels of materialism followed by students from the U.S.A, New Zealand, Ukraine, Germany and Turkey. Those respondents showing the lowest levels of materialism were from Sweden, France, Great Britain, India, Thailand, and Israel. It was concluded that variables such as dramatic cultural or social change might well lead to higher levels of materialism. This may be particularly true of Romania and the Ukraine, which had just emerged, from communism and Germany, which had just gone through a period of re-unification. Ger and Belk (1996) further conclude that materialism takes place in both Eastern and Western cultures, in developing and developed economies in collectivist and individualistic countries, and that some of the most materialistic countries have the least in terms of material possessions.

More recently, Eastman et al. (1997) compared the materialistic feelings of undergraduate students from Mexico, China, and the United States. These authors used the materialism scale developed by Richins and Dawson (1992) and found that the respondents from Mexico were the least materialistic while Chinese students showed the highest levels of materialism. However, they also found that one’s desire to purchase products representing status was the same for all three countries represented in this study. Clarke and Micken (2002) also found that Mexican students were less materialistic than students from Australia, France, and the U.S.A. These authors further conclude that products marketed to highly materialistic countries such as the U.S. and France should focus on product design while countries showing lower levels of materialism, such as Mexico, place a greater emphasis on the functionality of the product. Lundstrom and White (1999) used both U.S. and French M.B.A. students and their parents to examine the effect age might have on materialistic feelings. They concluded that students from the U.S. were significantly more materialistic and that older respondents tended to be less materialistic than younger consumers in both countries.

Pollay (1986 p. 21) examined the general effects of advertising on materialism and noted that, “The intent of advertising, especially in the aggregate, is to preoccupy society with material concerns...” and that these concerns for material things will keep consumers spending even though their basic needs are satisfied. In a similar vein, Sirgy et al. (1998) examined the role of

television viewing as it related to the concept of materialism. This study used a sample consisting of respondents from the United States, Canada, Turkey, Australia, and China. Perhaps not surprisingly, the global results of this study indicated that television viewing tends to both predict and reinforce terminal materialism (buying for the sake of buying) and suggests that marketers should consider advertising which stresses instrumental materialism (buying for the sake of meeting basic needs). While some differences were found between countries, the general conclusion of this study was that materialism was not conducive to satisfaction in life and that television viewing may very well lead to higher levels of materialism and therefore, greater levels of dissatisfaction in one's life. More recently, research conducted by Schaefer et al. (2004) examined respondents from China, Japan, and the United States. This study revealed that teens from China were less materialistic than those from Japan and the United States. This finding contradicts other research indicating consumers who are more economically deprived tend to be more materialistic. Teens from the United States were found to be the most materialistic of the three countries in question. Further, teens from the United States were found to be the most convinced that possessions were a significant determining factor in how they were perceived by others.

### **The U.S. Adolescent**

After a review of research conducted over a twenty-five year time frame, John (1999, p. 202) concluded "One of the most enduring concerns about consumer socialization is that our culture encourages children to focus on material goods as a means of achieving personal happiness, success, and self-fulfillment." She further concluded that children learn to value material things at a very early age and then express these values in various ways during different stages of life. There can be little doubt that John's concern was well warranted and that "materialistic" is a good descriptor of the American adolescent. Dolliver (2007 p.26) describes American youth as being "not at all bashful in declaring their enthusiasm for money and the things it can buy" nor do they believe that they will be less materialistic when they become adults. For example, 74% said that they would be happier if they had more money to purchase things they desired. The vast majority indicated that they enjoyed shopping and wanted to have things that their friends have. They further indicated that they were looking forward to jobs where they would earn the most money and believed that purchasing expensive consumer goods would make them happy as adults. Marketers should give this tendency toward materialism considerable thought as Kennedy (2001) finds that this market is made up of a minimum of 76 million consumers, and perhaps this number could be over 100 million in the near future, with a spending power of over \$600 billion a year. Kennedy describes this group as being raised in a bull market by parents with more money than time and as predisposed to consume. Conversely, Kennedy believes that they are more responsible and mature than prior generations.

It may be of interest to researchers to look at prior research to determine how materialism has become such an impacting variable on today's youth. Early research conducted by Moschis and Churchill (1978) found a positive relationship between family discussions about consumption and adolescent feelings about consumption. They further found that the more television an adolescent watched and the more interaction they had with peers the more likely they were to hold more materialistic attitudes. These authors concluded that it is an adolescent's social environment that influences their perception of the importance of consumption and materialism. Bristol and Mangleburg (2005) also report that the type of family a teen has grown up with may partially determine how materialistic they will be. For example, they suggest that teens are more likely to be influenced by television viewing and peers if they were raised in more protective or consensual families than if they were raised in pluralistic or laissez-faire families.

Achenreiner, (1997) provided information from approximately 300 children, that indicated that materialism, is a relatively stable trait that varies very little with age. It was also found that children who scored high on materialism scales were very susceptible to peer influences. Other studies of youth in the United States have examined materialism more extensively. For example, based upon an extensive study of 540 parents and 996 children, between the ages of 9 and 14, Goldberg et al. (2003) concluded that children who were found to score high on the Youth Materialism scale were found to be more influenced by advertising/promotion, shop more, save less, earn more of their own money, and influence their parents purchasing behavior more so than those children who scored lower on the materialism scale. They further indicated that parents seem to transmit the tendency towards materialism to their children. The one finding that differs from many other studies is that materialism and the level of happiness of the child were not negatively related. Conversely, one must also consider that this was the perception of the parent as to their children's level of happiness and not a self-reported level of happiness from the child's perspective.

The literature discussed here would clearly indicate that adolescents in the United States are in many ways raised to be materialistic and are therefore influenced significantly by advertising and peer pressures to purchase the newest products. Unfortunately, the one thing most all researchers agree on is that materialistic people tend to be less happy and less satisfied with their life.

### **The Chinese Adolescent**

Euromonitor International (2006) estimates that there will be approximately 334 million Chinese adolescents (ages up to 19) by 2015. The Chinese adolescent market is an enormous market and therefore of great interest to western businesses. While much has been written about the global teenager phenomenon, there still exists a real question as to whether teens representing differing countries share the same levels of materialism. Again, there seems to be some confusion on this issue that may be the result of a rapidly changing China. The dramatic changes that took place in Chinese economic policy in the late 1970s and early 1980s seem to have brought about significant changes in the Chinese cultural views of materialism. Belk and Zhou (1987) indicated that this new appreciation for capitalism has placed Mainland China on par with Taiwan in terms of materialistic desires for foreign made brands that represent higher status. Belk and Zhou (1987, p. 480) conclude that, "It is clear that consumer wants are growing rapidly in the People's Republic of China, and that because of this unprecedented event, China represents the greatest experiment in consumer behavior to ever be conducted." This experiment is clearly worth millions of dollars to western companies who understand how Chinese culture is changing and how the Chinese consumer makes purchase decisions.

This march toward materialism may be a more subtle and progressive movement rather than a sudden or dramatic shift in the Chinese culture. A result of the Chinese one child policy has been the emergence of what is commonly known as the "little emperor" or a child who gets everything they want from parents and grandparents. Shao and Herbig (1994) believe that this policy has created a generation of spoiled children who are demanding and materialistic. They further indicate that the parents of these children will give up material possessions so that their children will have more and that they are living their lives through their children. While this trend would seem to be an economic boon to retailers, Belk (2002) suggest that this may not necessarily be the case. Belk suggests that while this generation may be given more material things than prior generations, they may not only be the most spoiled generation but also the most pressured generation. He reports anecdotal information on how these little emperors may get what they want but only if it helps them develop their educational backgrounds. This would

seem that material things are given as a reward for succeeding academically rather simply because the family wants to shower the child with material things.

While the “little emperor” phenomenon clearly exists to some degree, Chan (2003) found that Chinese children are not necessarily rushing towards materialism. Chan interviewed 246 children in Hong Kong and determined that, in general, Chinese children do not subscribe to materialistic values as guiding forces in their lives. She did, however, find that younger children tend to be more materialistic than older children. It was thought that this was the result of older children having more experience with materialism and that they more fully realized that having more things does not equate to being happier. She further concluded that exposure to television advertising did not necessarily contribute to greater levels of materialism. Schaefer et al. (2004) also found that while Chinese teens were more interested in owning the right things rather than just expensive things, they also held lower levels of materialistic attitudes than teens from the U.S. and Japan. It should be noted that the Chinese teens used in this study were from the less developed and more stable interior of China rather than the more progressive coastal areas. However, just a year later, Gu et al. (2005) found Chinese adolescents were now susceptible to peer group influence and marketing promotions which were resulting in greater tendencies toward materialism. They further found that media exposure was emerging as an important new variable in formulating adolescent attitudes toward materialism and that family influences were declining and, in fact, were found to be statistically insignificant in this study. Overall, Gu et al. (2005) concluded increased exposure to “globalization” in the form of advertising was a driving force in the increased interest in materialism within the Chinese culture.

Interestingly, Chan et al (2006) found that while the amount of advertising exposure by adolescents and teens have increased dramatically, they do not seem to have had much effect on materialistic tendencies. While they did find that adolescents who communicate more often with their peers tended to be more materialistic as did adolescents who watched advertising primarily for social motives, it was concluded that in general materialism is not held in high regard by Chinese adolescents. However, this is not to say that materialism is not being felt in the Chinese culture. Chan et al (2006) further concluded that one appears to become more materialistic with age and that older adolescents tend to be more materialistic than do younger consumers. They speculate that this is the result of having greater contact with older more successful individuals who possess luxury items that are seen as desirable status symbols. It is thought that as these older adolescents look to these more successful individuals they will use them as opinion leaders and strive to emulate their consumption behaviors. Most recently, Hung et al. (2007) has identified three specific cohorts in the Chinese population that may help explain the differing views on materialism. These three cohorts include: Red Guards, Modern Realists, and Global Materialists. The cohorts are defined based upon the economic conditions that were the norm during their formative years. The Red Guards represent those born during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1979) and these consumers hold attitudes of pessimism, they are more frugal, shop less, and are less likely to desire foreign brands. The Modern Realists (1980 – 1991) relate to the Economic Reform period and are more materialistic and enjoy shopping. The Global Materialists (1992 – present) relate more to globalization and are the most materialistic and particularly enjoy foreign products. It is thought that these individuals have been most influenced by social and economic changes that are the result of governmental or institutional change. If these cohorts are accurate descriptors of Chinese life, one would assume that Chinese adolescents growing up in today’s world are far more likely to enjoy and seek out material goods than their predecessors and that it would behoove marketers to recognize these differences and the underlying causes of cultural change. While the literature is somewhat contradictory, perhaps Arora (2005) described the situation most clearly by stating that the Gen Y generation of Chinese consumers will “lead the globalization of contemporary China. This group is

individualistic, entrepreneurial, and they are eager consumers of everything the Western marketplace has to offer.” There can be little doubt that based upon this information; a western company would be foolish not to try and fully understand the views of the various Chinese market segments.

Given that China represents an important developing economy, which may well feel the increasing influence of western advertising, the purpose of this study is to address the question of materialism as viewed by young consumers in the United States and China and to determine the most appropriate ways for western companies to approach, adapt to, and influence these potential consumers.

## Methodology

To better understand how respondents within the United States and China view materialism, an electronic survey was administered to a sample in each country. Since adolescents and college age groups comprise members that are learning the meaning of image and the often-perceived importance of material possessions, we selected a sample of college students for this study. Respondents included 186 students at a large mid-western public University in the United States and 314 students at a large satellite university in Dalian, China. It is important to note that Dalian, China is located along the rapidly growing coastline of China and is also a major port for international commerce. Demographic Sample Characteristics are reported in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Sample Characteristics**

	<b>China</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Sample</b>	314	186	500
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	162	99	261
Female	150	87	237
<b>Age</b>			
18 - 20	13	20	33
21 - 23	141	141	282
24 - 26	131	15	146
27+	28	9	37

The electronic survey consisted of 18 statements, which dealt with materialism. The scale was drawn from a study by Richins and Dawson (1992) and consisted of three subscales representing defining success, acquisition centrality, and the pursuit of happiness. Each of the items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale which ranged from “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 5. The overall alpha for the Materialism Values scale has been shown to be between .80 and .88 across items in past studies. A second electronic scale, Materialism (Student), was also used in this study. This scale was developed by Brand and Greenberg (1994) and consists of five questions that are measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale which ranged from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7. The overall alpha for this scale is reported as being .52. Alpha scores for the scales used in this study are shown in Table 2. With the exception of Pursuit of Happiness for the Chinese sample (.581) all of the alpha scores were above the recommended .60 cut off for exploratory research (Hair et al., 1998). Indeed, when both samples were combined the overall alpha for the combined scale was found to be .881. A T-Test was then performed to determine if there were significant differences between the sample from the United States and the sample representing China. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 2  
Materialism Alpha Scores

	United States	China	All
<b>Defining Success Sub-Scale</b>	.848	.644	.752
<b>Acquisition Centrality</b>	.770	.687	.720
<b>Pursuit of Happiness</b>	.808	.581	.710
<b>Materialism (Student)</b>	.686	.697	.738
<b>All Materialism Items</b>	.906	.858	.881

**Table 3**  
**A Comparison of Materialism**  
**Between U.S. and Chinese Consumers**

	U.S.	China	T	df	Sig.
<b>Defining Success</b>					
I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes	3.100	3.070	0.246	420.310	0.806
Some of the most important achievements include acquiring material possessions	2.370	3.340	-9.680	397.090	<b>0.000</b>
I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.	3.040	2.960	-0.939	433.990	0.348
The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	2.930	3.200	-2.846	423.440	<b>0.005</b>
I like to own things that impress people.	3.100	3.270	-1.821	440.470	0.069
I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own	2.710	2.980	3.110	449.240	<b>0.002</b>
<b>Acquisition Centrality</b>					
I usually buy only the things I need.	2.860	2.970	1.065	450.070	0.287
I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.	2.890	3.030	1.575	459.620	0.116
The things I own aren't all that important to me.	2.560	3.000	5.036	448.220	<b>0.000</b>
I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical	2.860	3.070	-2.157	401.444	<b>0.032</b>
Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.	3.350	3.350	-0.580	432.931	0.953
I like a lot of luxury in my life.	3.520	3.150	3.751	437.690	<b>0.000</b>
I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.	3.280	2.930	-4.170	437.820	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Pursuit of Happiness</b>					
I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.	3.260	2.970	-3.347	421.940	<b>0.001</b>
My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have	3.320	3.190	1.238	402.550	0.216
I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.	3.160	3.180	-0.133	474.000	0.894
I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	2.450	2.670	2.212	473.000	<b>0.027</b>
It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.	3.320	3.180	1.434	475	0.152
<b>Materialism (Student)</b>					
When I watch commercials, I usually want what is shown.	3.310	3.960	-5.326	452.880	<b>0.000</b>
Most people who have a lot of money are happier than most people who have only a little money.	3.040	4.090	-7.358	421.540	<b>0.000</b>
Money isn't everything.	5.370	4.570	-5.469	440.170	<b>0.000</b>
Having a nice car is important, but school is more important.	5.830	4.510	-9.671	472.380	<b>0.000</b>
I don't care whether my clothes have a designer label on them.	4.710	4.180	-3.533	389.630	<b>0.000</b>

## Results and Discussion

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that while there are many significant differences that exist between the two sample populations, most scores seem to be very close to a neutral response indicating that neither group report being particularly materialistic. In total, responses for 17 of the 22 questions asked were found to be significant at the .05 level. The question that marketers must ask in interpreting this data is whether this lack of materialistic feelings is accurate and that the samples in this study are not as materialistic as they have been reported as being in past studies. Conversely, it is possible that the samples true feelings are masked, as it is not comfortable to admit that one has strong materialistic feelings. Perhaps before comparisons are made between the two samples it would be best to examine the apparent contradictions that appear within each sample group. For example, when one looks strictly at the sample from the United States most responses hover around the central or average importance level. However, when one examines the U.S. responses in the Defining Success scale the respondents indicate that they admire people who own expensive things and that they like to own things that impress people while also stating that they don't place much emphasis on material objects as a sign of success. Other contradictions are found in the Acquisition Centrality scale as they state that they like a lot of luxuries in their life but place less emphasis on material things than do others that they know. The Pursuit of Happiness scale shows that the respondents indicate that they have all of the things they need to enjoy life but also believe that life would be better if they owned things they don't have. It is possible that these responses indicate a desire for material things but reluctance to freely admit to having materialistic desires.

The same contradictions can be found in the Chinese sample. The Defining Success scale shows that the Chinese respondents indicate it is important to acquire material things, that material things indicate how they are doing in life, and that they like to own things that impress people. Conversely, they indicate that they don't pay much attention to what other people own. The Acquisition Centrality scales show that while the Chinese sample indicates they usually buy things that they need and try to keep life simple. They also enjoy spending money on things that are not practical, and would enjoy buying things that are more luxurious. It may be that the reality of the Chinese sample not having enough money to allow them to purchase luxury items tends to force them into defensive feelings about being relatively satisfied with what they can purchase, all while wishing they could purchase luxury goods, they don't place too much importance on what they can't have.

It is easy to see the contradictions in the responses of both samples but it is also important to examine the numerous significant differences that exist between the two samples. As noted earlier, Table 3 indicates that responses to 17 of the 22 questions were found to be significantly different. Differences found in the Defining Success scale indicate that the Chinese sample is more likely to believe that acquiring material possessions is an important life achievement and that they believe that material things are indicators of how well they are doing in life, as well as enjoying how material things impress other people. Conversely, the Acquisition Centrality scale indicates that the Chinese sample is more likely to purchase only what they need, try to keep life simple in terms of possessions, and indicate that what they own is not all that important to them. However, the Chinese sample also indicates that they feel that they would be happier if they could afford to buy more things and that when they watch commercials they usually want what is shown. Conversely, the U.S. sample seems to be happier with what they have (perhaps because in general they have more already) and are less likely to want products shown in commercials.

The sample from the United States also shows some interesting differences. This group indicates that while they do like a lot of luxury in their life, they also believe that they put less emphasis on material things than do others and that they have the material possessions they need

to enjoy life. At the same time, they also indicate that it bothers them that they can't afford to purchase all of the things they would like to have. While the U.S. sample may appear to be somewhat less materialistic, the responses may well be skewed by the fact that the U.S. sample is likely to have more purchasing power than does the Chinese sample and has already obtained some satisfactory level of material consumption.

While the responses shown in this study appear to indicate that both samples are less materialistic than one would expect, we surmise that most people would feel some level of discomfort admitting to others, or perhaps even themselves, that they were truly materialistic and wished to accumulate possessions in an attempt to impress both themselves and others. This may be different in today's society than it was in past studies as we now have a better understanding of our materialistic behavior as a society. As consumers have been told over and over again how materialistic society is, there may, therefore be a more negative feeling associated with materialism. However, if one examines the data carefully, underlying trends do seem to emerge that indicate that the Chinese market is becoming more materialistic and that commercial advertising may have something to do with this trend. While the Chinese sample is likely to have less discretionary income, they do indicate a growing desire to purchase products to show their success in life. Western companies may well be able to enhance this desire to possess more by showing successful Chinese consumers in advertising and stressing the prestige of owning particular products.

### **Limitations**

As with any research project, this study has limitations. First, both samples were drawn from only one University in each country. The US sample was from a midwestern town, which is centrally located and very conservative. The China sample was from a satellite campus of an American University, meaning that the students on this campus must speak excellent English and are more likely to be upper-income, sophisticated Chinese. These two factors may have influenced the results, as the US sample may report lower materialism than other US students in more progressive communities, while the China sample may have reported higher materialism than other Chinese students who are less acculturated into western ideologies. These sample issues might explain the more neutral ratings of both samples on the materialism scales.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, 17 of the 22 scale items related to materialism were significant at the .05 level between samples of students in China and the US. However, the means for each item were not too far off of neutral, no matter the respondent. Future research could examine whether this is due to an actual lessening of materialism or whether the geographic location of the samples influenced the results. In addition, it would be interesting to replicate the study in other developing countries, such as India, to determine if materialism levels are increasing as the country becomes more and more exposed to Western branding and advertising campaigns. Longitudinal data is also needed to track the changes in materialism levels around the world, as economies contract and expand. Marketers must understand consumer behavior differences by country to better plan effective marketing appeals.

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