

Materialism and Pro-environmental Consumption Behaviours

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Abstract

Economic prosperity enjoyed by Malaysians have changed their lifestyles, in that more emphasis is given to material possession. Even though domestic consumption may have propelled the economic growth and increase quality of life, the growing role of material life has sparked a growing concern over unsustainable consumption practices among Malaysians. This study attempts to assess the materialism values among Malaysians based on demographic factors only, and to analyze the pro-environmental consumption practices between individuals with different level of materialistic values. The results of this study indicate that generally most of the respondents fell under the category that possesses high materialistic values. Specifically, individuals of Bumiputra ethnic, married, aged between 30 to 40, officers from "A" and "B" categories, and those earning between RM1000 to RM2000 per month. The study also found that the mean score for environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviours for individuals with low and high materialism differs.

Keyword: Materialism, sustainable consumption, consumer behaviours, Malaysia

Introduction

Consumption is increasingly winning the centre stage in life throughout the world (Ger and Belk, 1999). High levels of consumption are generally taken to constitute the good life and/or success. In Malaysia, modernization and economic prosperity enjoyed by Malaysians have changed their lifestyles and led to a greater emphasis on material importance (Kalthom, 1996). Consequently, progress and success are measured by the possession of the latest or more advanced material comforts of life (Kalthom, 1996). The well-travelled locals who have high purchasing power become more appreciative of the finer things in life such as antique furnitures and fine dining. In fact, according to Kalthom (1996), many Malaysians are willing to spend a lot of money for decorative items such as furnitures and antiques to enhance their lifestyle and to prove their financial and social standing.

However, the growing role of material life is accompanied by a growing concern over unsustainable consumption orientation. This is due to the emergence of a new middle class society in Asia due to its recent economic boom which is linked to conspicuous and unsustainable consumption practices (CI-ROAP, 1999; Low, 1998). In Malaysia, it is reported that the quality of life adapted to materialism and excess

