

# **Consumer Values Model of Status Consumption: A Cross-Cultural Empirical Analysis of Chinese, French and American Generation Y Consumers**

## **Introduction**

*“The Young do not know enough to be prudent and therefore attempt the impossible – and achieve it generation after generation” Pearl S. Buck (a.k.a. SaiZhenzhu)*

In an era of globalization marketers are looking for large groups or segments of consumers that have strong, homogeneous bonds which allow for the standardization of marketing strategy across country borders (Parment 2013). To successfully carry out a global strategy universal needs and motivations must exist (Levitt 1983). While using age is useful for creating and describing groups of consumers, it does little for understanding the underlying motivations of their consumptive behaviors. Alternatively, generational cohorts experience defining moments during their coming of age years which influence their values, preferences, attitudes, and behaviors (Djamasbi et al., 2011; Limon et al., 2009; Arsenault et al., 2008; Kotler and Keller 2006; Polegato et al., 2006; Gutman 1982). Values are core beliefs or desires that guide or motivate attitudes and deeds in a variety of settings and situations (Arsenault et al., 2008). A person's values formed during their formative years and supported by their peers remain relatively stable throughout their life-time (Hung et al., 2007; Schewe et al., 2004). Personal values are shaped through the assimilation of environmental information and are directly related to culture (Limon et al., 2009).

Status Consumption is the motivational process by which individuals try to improve social standing through conspicuous consumption of products that give status (Eastman et al., 2012). If Generation Y is a global segment for status products, then not only will members of their generation who live in different cultures share similar consumption patterns, but their consumption will also be driven by similar motivations and have shared meaning (*Keilor et al., 2001*). While many generational cohort researchers have focused on behavioral outcomes, there is a need for more investigation into the underlying forces that are driving these measurable outcomes (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2011). An enhanced understanding of the underlying values that influence status consumption of Generation Y across cultures, can form the basis for designing and implementing more effective and efficient global segmentation, product development, and communication strategies.

Given their cultural specificity and critical impact on consumer behavior, personal values are a crucial instrument for evaluating behavioral similarities and differences across cultures (Limon et al., 2009). The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between generational cohort values, culture, and status consumption. Specifically, this manuscript outlines an empirical study of Generation Y's status consumption in China, France, and the United States. First the literature on generational cohort analysis, values, and status consumption is reviewed, a theoretical basis for this research is proffered, methodology detailed, and results, conclusions, implications, caveats and areas for future research are discussed.

## **Review of Relevant Literature**

***Generational Cohorts.*** A generational cohort is a group of individuals who are born in the same time frame (generally a 20 to 25 year period) and share similar life experiences during their

coming of age years which are associated with common values and priorities that may persist over their lifetime resulting in distinct attitudes and behaviors (Eastman et al., 2012; Jackson et al., 2011; Moore et al., 2008; Hung et al., 2007). Coming of age years are from adolescence to young adulthood and are marked by a convergence of openness or vulnerability to new ideas coupled with developments in value formation (Jennings et al., 2005). When individuals can attach personal meaning to these early shared experiences, it is significantly more likely to impact their values, attitudes, and behaviors and create filters thru which they interpret subsequent experiences (Wolburg et al., 2001; Schuman et al., 1989). Research by Greenberg and Tobach (1997), suggest that intra-generational brains react to stimuli in similar ways. Likewise, a survey of rural Chinese found that self-reported important events experienced during ones' impressionable years were remembered significantly more frequently and accurately than respondents who were not of an impressionable age (Jennings et al. 2005).

**Chinese Generations.** As noted previously, we are what we experience when coming of age (Schewe et al., 2004). Since people from different cultures come from different histories and experiences, they're coming of age value determinants often differ. Moreover, other countries generations don't always correspond precisely with American generations. This is especially true of China which has undergone unprecedented social and economic change. According to Hung et al., (2007), cohort differences should be greater in transitional economies because by definition they are volatile. Hung et al., (2007) identifies three generational cohorts in China: Red Guards, Modern Realists, and Global Materialists.

**Red Guard.** The Red Guards in China came of age from 1966 to 1979. Age-wise they correspond with late Boomers and early Xers from America. The Red Guards came of age during the Cultural Revolution when China was closed to the rest of the world and commercial activities came to a halt because of social and political class struggle. They are known as the 'Lost Generation' because they were not prepared for a drastically changing world. As a result of their unique coming of age experiences, they are pessimistic, frugal, and conservative in consumption attitudes and behaviors. They consider shopping a burden and are less likely to consume novelty or foreign brands (Hung et al., 2007).

**Modern Realists.** Modern Realist came of age between 1980 and 1991, which corresponds age-wise with late Xers and early Yers in the United States. Modern Realists grew up in a society whose economy was changing from Marxist Socialist to Market Socialist following China's four modernization plan emphasizing agriculture, industry, technology, and national defense. As a centrally planned economy, egalitarianism was emphasized. The market system emphasizes competition and individual accomplishment which has resulted in many Modern Realist moving to newly created economic zones, accumulating personal wealth, and achieving middle class status (Hung et al., 2007). Modern Realist came of age with modern marketing methods which along with their increased affluence have led to increased materialism. When it comes to purchasing, Modern Realists are novelty seekers who shop for leisure (Hung et al., 2007).

**Global Materialists.** Global Materialist came of age after 1992 which corresponds with American Generation Y. Others studies refer to China's Global Materialist as Generation Y born 1982 to 2000 (e.g., Shapero 2013). Like American millennials they are the highest educated, most affluent, and technologically literate generation in China's history. Their impressionable

years are marked by increased affluence, globalization, technology boom, China's one-child policy, and rapid social and political change.

As a result of China's one-child policy, Generation Y was raised very differently from their parents. They've had six adults (2 parents, 4 grandparents) dotting on them since birth earning them the title of 'little emperors and empresses' (Shapero 2013). As the future of the family they feel great pressure to succeed academically and professionally. Consequently, many members of China's Generation Y suffer from unhealthy perfectionism which has made them allergic to criticism (Lynton et al., 2010). As a result of this unique up-bringing, they feel a sense of entitlement, often are not team players, and have expectations that outweigh their expertise. While face is still important, modesty and humility are fading as members of this Generation become more competitive and individualistic compared to the group orientation of previous generations (Shapero 2013; Zakaria 2011).

The opening of China, globalization, and technological advancements led to increased foreign investment which created jobs, increased incomes, expectations, and influence from the West (McEwen et al., 2006; Hung et al., 2005). As a result, Generation Y is the most materialistic generation yet. They measure success by showing their ability to purchase and consume material things in a very public way (Shapero 2013). Members of Generation Y place a higher value on novelty than previous generations and shop for leisure (Hung et al., 2007). They have high awareness of and preference for foreign brands (McEwen et al., 2006) yet show low amounts of brand loyalty (McEwen 2005).

**Culture.** In an era of globalization, international travel, global media, multinationals, immigration, study abroad, international tourism, common language (i.e., English), and decreased magnitudes of differences in political systems, culture is becoming a less important influence on consumption, particularly among younger citizens (Keilor et al., 2001; Tse et al., 1989). Keilor et al., (2001) in a study of Malaysian, American, and French consumers found that younger consumers showed a weaker sense of national identity and ethnocentrism than their older counterparts regardless of national borders. An additional finding was that national identity is negatively related to education level. Thus, individuals from different cultures who came of age during globalization are more similar than their counterparts who did not come of age during globalization. This finding is corroborated by Shukla (2010) who found that middle-aged and older Indians' consumption behavior was significantly more influenced by traditional values than younger Indians. Alternatively, Quelch (2003) argues that local companies have improved their operations in response to Globalization and in a classic response to a recession are more likely to buy local. Furthermore, multinationals may have pushed standardization too far particularly in terms of communication (Quelch 2003). While a global consumer maybe beginning to emerge it is not yet a complete reality (Keilor et al., 2001).

The ability to understand cultural similarities and differences can determine success or failure of global business endeavors. U.S. companies, for example, lose \$2 billion annually from overseas business failures due to lack of cultural understanding (Vierregge et al., 2011). There are many classifications of culture but Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions are well validated in the business literature and suitable for cross cultural studies despite criticisms of too few dimensions, possible political influence, and assumption of intra-cultural homogeneity (Chung et al., 2012).

Hofstede's five cultural dimensions are Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long-term Orientation (See **Figure 1** for a graphical comparison of China, France, and the United States on each of Hofstede's five dimensions) (Hofstede 1980).

Power Distance (PDI) is defined as the extent to which less powerful members of society within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally in their country. China's PDI of 80 is on the high end of the scale indicating that inequalities amongst people are acceptable (Geert-Hofstede.com). Although not as high as China, France's score of 68 is still high on the PDI scale. In France, superiors have privileges and are often inaccessible to those of lower rank (Geert-Hofstede.com). France is highly centralized and information flows in a hierarchical manner. The U.S.'s PDI of 40 is low on the PDI scale which is evidenced by a focus on equal rights for all individuals (Geert-Hofstede.com). There are fewer hierarchical structures to navigate and communication is informal, direct and participative.

Individualism (IDV) refers to the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. China's IDV of 20 is a very low score indicating a highly collectivist culture where individuals focus on what is in the best interest of the group (Geert-Hofstede.com). It should be noted however, that Asian members of Generation Y are significantly more individualistic than Asian Boomers (Vieregge et al., 2011). France's IDV score of 71 indicates an individualistic society where the focus is on taking care of one's self and their immediate family (Geert-Hofstede.com). Autonomy is valued immensely. The U.S. scores 91 on the IDV scale indicating a highly individualistic society where the focus is on self (Geert-Hofstede.com). Individualistic societies have been shown to be more consumption oriented than collectivist cultures (Hofstede 1994).

A high score on the Masculinity (MAS) scale indicates that a society is driven by achievement, competition, and success (i.e., masculine traits). A low score on the MAS scale indicates that the predominant values of society are taking care of each other and overall quality of life (i.e., feminine traits). China's MAS score of 66 indicates that China is a masculine society that is success oriented and driven (Geert-Hofstede.com). France's MAS score of 43 indicates a relatively feminine society focusing on overall quality of life as opposed to professional achievement (Geert-Hofstede.com). The U.S.'s MAS score of 62 indicates a masculine society with a focus on competition and success (Geert-Hofstede.com). In summary the high MAS scores of China and the U.S. indicate a philosophy of living to work whereas France's low score on this dimension indicates that they work to live.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) refers to the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. China's UAI score of 30 is low indicating the Chinese are comfortable with ambiguity (Geert-Hofstede.com). France's UAI score of 86 is high indicating that the French are uneasy in ambiguous situations (Geert-Hofstede.com). They prefer structure, detail, background, and rules. When these are lacking stress is often the result. The U.S.'s score of 46 on the UAI scale indicates uncertainty acceptance (Geert-Hofstede.com). As a result, Americans are often open to new ideas, products, people and places.

Long-term Orientation (LTO) reflects the extent to which a society is future oriented rather than taking a conventional short-term view. China's LTO score of 118 indicates a strong long-term

orientation which leads to persistence and perseverance (Geert-Hofstede.com). At a LTO score of 39, France is a short-term oriented society (Geert-Hofstede.com). As such, consumption is driven by instant gratification and tradition. The U.S.'s LTO score of 29 indicates that the U.S. is a very short-term oriented society (Geert-Hofstede.com). As a result, Americans have a 'what have you done for me lately' philosophy.

***Status Consumption.*** Status is defined as a form of power that consists of respect, consideration, and envy from others, or a position or rank in society awarded to an individual by others (Eastman et al., 1997). Status Consumption has been defined alternatively as consumers purchasing of goods for the status they confer regardless of income or social class (Shukla 2010), enhancing social status and self-concept thru conspicuous consumption (Phau et al., 2008), and a motivational process by which individuals try to improve social standing through the conspicuous consumption of products that give status (Eastman et al., 2012). Status consumption increases self-esteem which improves one's standing in the social hierarchy (Shukla 2010).

Status Seekers are defined alternatively as people who continuously strive to surround themselves with visible evidence of superior rank (Shukla 2010), people who consume products to demonstrate a superior level of status to themselves and others (Eastman et al., 1997), and people who purchase goods to satisfy symbolic needs (Phau et al., 2008).

Brands have symbolic benefits that provide expressive value and functional benefits that provide utilitarian value. Brand status refers to consumers' perceptions of quality, prestige, and price of a brand and its capacity to act as a status or success symbol (O'Cass and Choy 2008). Hence, status brands provide symbolic benefits. Publically consumed goods portray status such as clothing, liquor, jewelry, housing, automobiles, and sun glasses (Eastman 1997; Bekir 2011; Shukla 2010). As an illustrative example, consider Dominique Perrin, President of Jeweler Cartier Alain, who said, "What people want when they wear a name like ours is to be recognized wearing it."

***Status Consumption and Generational Cohorts.*** Research by Herbig et al., (1993) posits that each generation is more materialistic than prior generations. Generation Y is the most materialistic yet as consumption is central to their sense of identity and acquisition of status or cool (Sullivan 2008; Paul 2001). Eastman et al., (1997) make the following distinction between materialism and status consumption: materialistic people value their possessions both those that convey status and those that do not. O'Cass and Frost (2002) found that younger consumers are driven by the need to possess and display status brands. It should be noted however, that a study by Kennett-Hensel et al., (2011) found that United States members of Generations Y and X were not significantly different in terms of prestige sensitivity. Moore et al., (2008) found Millennials and Traditionalists are significantly more prestige sensitive than Baby Boomers. Corroborating this finding, Lundstrom et al., (1999) in a study of French and American Generation Xers and Baby Boomers found that American Xers were the most materialistic followed by American Boomers, French Xers were the third most materialistic and French Boomers the least materialistic. When comparing French and American Xers while both are materialistic, American Xers score significantly higher on how others perceive their purchases compared to

French Xers. French Xers were more internally driven (i.e., possessions bring happiness) (Lundstrom et al., 1999).

***Status Consumption and Culture.*** People in every age in every culture have always hunted for ways to obtain social cachet (Bekir et al., 2011). Like a technological innovation materialism and status consumption have spread around the world (Ger et al., 1994). Status consumption was once considered a Western value. As such, Wong et al., (1998) found that Western teens are more likely to engage in luxury consumption than Eastern teens. Now countries all over the world, where the utility of products is measured by the social advantage which they extend, have significant levels of status consumption (Eastman et al., 1997).Luxury goods have become more affordable and accessible to new customers and more consumers are willing to pay a premium price for status (Eastman et al., 2012). Third-world consumers are often attracted to and indulge in aspects of conspicuous consumption often before they've secured basics such as food, clothing and shelter (Belk 1988). Developing countries are acquiring an interest in status consumption much more rapidly than occurred in the U.S. and Europe (Belk 1988). Corroborating this finding, Tse et al., (1989) found that Eastern countries are acquiring hedonic shopping values in a different sequence and quicker than occurred in the West. Consider the case of China. Two generations ago status products were hated symbols of decadent capitalism (Tse et al., 1989). Now, due to internal policy changes, globalization, and influence from Hong Kong and Taiwan, China is more status conscious than ever (Tse et al., 1989). According to Eastman et al., (1997), in China status is seen more through the ownership of products than from occupation or family reputation. As an example, Cognac is an instantly recognized worldwide symbol of success. Throughout Asia, if you can afford to consume cognac, you have arrived (Ram 1994). Additionally, Ger et al., (1994) found that materialism increases significantly when citizens are released from communism.

Shukla (2010) found that status consumption of the same product has different meanings in different countries. In individualistic cultures (e.g., Britain) the consumption of status liquor is driven by internal perceptions of self-esteem and are independent of consumption occasion. In collectivist cultures (e.g., India) consumption of status liquor is driven by the external motivation of ostentation (i.e., how others see them) and is highly dependent on occasion (i.e., public vs. private consumption) (Shukla 2010). Similarly, Monga et al., (2008) in a cross-cultural study between the U.S. and India found that cultural differences for prestige brands (e.g., Rolex) were much smaller compared to functional brands (e.g., Timex). In a study of French and American consumers, Lundstrom et al., (1999) found that Americans were more materialistic than French consumers.

Due to a lack of financial resources, access difficulties, and weaker enforcement of intellectual property rights, individuals from developing countries are significantly more likely to opt for deceptive status signaling by buying fakes (Bekir et al., 2011). Their results show that Tunisian college students were significantly more likely to purchase fake sun glasses than French students (Bekir et al., 2011). Similarly, Asia has quality fake luxury brands that are consumed and generally accepted at all levels of society (Chadha and Husband 2006).

***Status Consumption and Gender.*** Regarding the impact of gender on status consumption, Eastman et al., (1997) found that males are significantly more status conscious than females in

China. A study by Jackson et al., (2011) found that females experience significantly higher amounts of hedonic shopping value than males. A study of U.S. Generations Y, X, and Baby Boomers by Eastman et al., (2012) found no significant differences in status consumption based on gender, income, or education. Likewise, Apeageyi (2011) found that the traditional masculine norm (i.e., avoidance of femininity, pursuit of aggression, achievement/status, self-reliance, strength, homophobia, etc.) is dying. Thus, men's fashion and appearance are used as status symbols (i.e., traditionally feminine symbols). According to Hung et al., (2005), due to changing social expectations, rising incomes, and increased Western influence, Chinese women have developed a new awareness of their femininity and the possibility of new social identities marked more by consumption than family or occupation.

**Theoretical Foundation.** See **Figure 2** for a Consumer Values Model of Status Consumption. As mentioned in the above literature review, generational cohort experiences during one's coming of age years significantly influence their value formation (Jennings et al., 2005). Other value determinants that have been identified in the literature include reference groups (Wolburg et al., 2001), socio demographic variables such as income, age, gender, life-stage etc., (Gurau 2012), culture (Limon et al., 2009), current environmental conditions such as the Great Recession (Burke 2009), and personal characteristics such as level of involvement (O'Cass and Choy 2008).

The unique composition of these value determinants combines to form one's personal values. Personal Values are core beliefs or desires that affect attitude formation and behaviors and actions. Values play an important role in consumer behavior because they represent fundamental feelings about what is and what is not important in life and thus form the motivational foundation for brand attitudes and consumption behavior.

When an individual's values are in line with a marketer's values, the greater the brand/person fit the greater the attraction from both parties (Ehrhart et al., 2011). It is important to Millennials to know that you value what they value (Gloecker 2008). Individuals are attracted to an environment based on the degree to which they perceive that they fit in that context (Ehrhart 2011). A study by Polegato et al., (2006) found that when there is a divide between personal values and brand values, liking of that brand's advertising is diminished. By linking brands to their personal values, consumers strengthen their brand attachment (Limon et al., 2009). Young consumers are more likely to be affected by status brands symbolic characteristics, by feelings evoked by the brand, and by the degree of congruency between the user's self-image and the brands image (O'Cass and Frost 2002). Like attitudes, attraction leads to intent which leads to status consumption (Gloecker 2008).

Brands have symbolic benefits that provide expressive value such as snob appeal, exclusivity, uniqueness, standard of excellence, and association with wealth and success. When these symbolic benefits are congruent with an individual's personal values, their willingness to pay more increases (O'Cass and Choy 2008).

In summary, cohort influences, socio-demographic variables, culture, current environmental conditions, and personal characteristics have a significant impact on the formulation of the value 'Status.' When a brand's status values and benefits are congruent with an individual's personal

values, mutual attraction is the result. When personal and brand values are incongruent, relationship failure is the result. Mutual attraction leads to intent to buy and a willingness to pay more for status products which in turn leads to status consumption. Status Consumption impacts value determinants such as self-concept. One sobering aspect of this model is that there are more paths to failure than success.

For this study, we examine the cohort influences of Generation Y on the value 'Status.' The effect of the demographic variable gender on status will be explored. Age is controlled for by having a homogeneous sample. The effects of culture on status will be explored by examining similarities and differences in status consumption between members of Generation Y in China, France, and the U.S.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: There are no differences in Price-based Status Consumption between male and female members of Generation Y in China, France, or the United States.

H2: There are no differences in Priced-based Status Consumption between Chinese, French, and American Generation Y.

### **Methodology**

**Questionnaire.** The Prestige Sensitivity measuring instrument for this study was adopted from Lichtenstein et al., (1993) which has been well validated in the literature (**See Appendix**) (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2011). Lichtenstein et al., (1993) define prestige sensitivity as: "Favorable perceptions of the price cue based on feelings of prominence and status that higher prices signal to other people about the purchaser." Items were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

**Sample Selection/Size.** In addition to accessibility, Generation Y in China, France, and the United States were chosen because of the cultural, political, and economic differences which have been detailed previously. France was chosen because they dominate world-wide sales of luxury goods (Ram 1994). China was chosen because of rapid macro-environmental change and economic growth. The Generation Y sub-segment of current college students were chosen because of their size, trendsetting tendencies, have not yet fully established loyalties, expect to have a high standard of living, are more receptive to new products, and significantly influence their parents purchases (Wolburg et al., 2001).

A total of 900 usable responses were collected in a convenience fashion on four college campuses. The Chinese and French samples were collected with pen and paper during class time. The American sample was collected using a snowball sample via email. See **Table 2** for a profile of all respondents.

**Reliability and Validity.** If Scales are applicable across cultures, then similar patterns of reliability and factor loadings should emerge. A Cronbach's alpha of .818 is well above the .70 or higher suggested by Nunnally (1967) for the level of reliability to be suitable for further statistical analysis. Cronbach's alphas by country are reported in **Table 2**. While the China and U.S. samples easily clear the .70 mark (.841 and .842, respectively), a Cronbach's alpha of .672



for France falls short. According to Hui (1988), however, Cronbach's alphas in the .50s and .60s are acceptable for cross-cultural research given the construct is complex and multifaceted. The use of a homogeneous sample (e.g., college students), which implies a small variance, may also have lowered the Chronbach's alphas (Ger et al., 1994).

The results of Factor Analysis for the entire sample indicate a two factor solution (See **Table 3**). The first factor is significant (i.e., Eigenvalue > 1) with an Eigenvalue of 3.614 and explains 31% of the variance in the data. Factor 2 is significant with an Eigenvalue of 1.202 and explains 22% of the variance. Taken together the two Factors explain 53% of the variance.

Next, we examine the factor loadings and structures of each country separately. The results of a Factor Analysis for China and the United States both indicate a 2 Factor solution (See **Table 4**). Factor 1 in China is significant with an Eigenvalue of 3.996 and explains 44% of the variance. Factor 2 in China is significant with an Eigenvalue of 1.137 and explains 12.6% of the variance. The two China factors taken together explain 57% of the variance. Similarly, Factor 1 in the U.S. is significant with an Eigenvalue of 4.027 and explains 35% of the variance. Factor 2 in the U.S. is significant with an Eigenvalue of 1.051 and explains 21% of the variance. Taken together the two factor solution explains 56% of the variance for the U.S. sample. The results of a Factor Analysis for France indicate a Three Factor Solution (See **Table 5**). Given that France's factor loadings and factor structure differ from China and the U.S., France will be eliminated from cross-cultural comparisons. Intra France results are reported below.

For both China and the U.S., Status Statements 1 through 4 load high on 1 Factor which is labeled *Positive Self-Feelings* and Status Statements 6 through 9 load high on Factor 2 which is labeled *Positive Social Consequences*. Given Status Statement 5's similar cross-loadings in each sample, it was eliminated from cross-cultural analysis.

Next we examine the reliabilities of each factor within each country. Regarding *Positive Self-Feelings* the Cronbach's alpha for China is .780 and .857 for the U.S. which is above the .70 established by Nunally(1967). Regarding *Positive Social Consequences*, the Cronbach's alpha for China is .744 and .646 for the U.S. While China is above the acceptable range, the U.S. falls short. As mentioned previously, Hui (1988) posits that Cronbach's alphas in the .50s and .60s are acceptable for cross-cultural research.

In summary, similar reliability coefficients and factor loadings are indicative of metric equivalence and are thus suitable for a two country (China and the U.S.) cross-cultural statistical comparison.

Results of Factor Analysis indicate a three factor solution for France (See **Table 5**). Status Statements 2, 3, and 4 load high on Factor 1 and is labeled *Positive Self-Feelings*. Status Statements 1, 5, and 6 load high on Factor 2 and is labeled *Projected Self-Image*. Status Statements 7, 8, and 9 load high on Factor 3 and is labeled *Positive Social Consequences*. Next we examine the reliabilities of each Factor. *Positive Self-Feelings* has a Cronbach's Alpha of .801 which is acceptable for further statistical analysis. *Projected Self-Image* and *Positive Social Consequences* has a Cronbach's alpha of .553 and .430 respectively and will be eliminated from further statistical analysis.

## Results

**Descriptive Statistics.** Each statement was posed and rated by respondents on a five-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The means and standard deviations for each of the nine status statements are contained in **Table 6**. Overall frequencies for each status statement as well as frequencies by country are presented in **Table 7**.

**Analysis of Variance.** As mentioned previously, because of a lack of metric equivalence France has been eliminated from cross-cultural comparison. To ascertain the impact of Culture and Gender on Status Consumption, ANOVAs were run on each Factor (*Positive Self-Feelings* and *Positive Social Consequences*, respectively) by country (China and the U.S.) and gender. The results indicate that there is a significant difference in *Positive Self-Feelings* from status consumption between China and the U.S. as well as statistically significant interaction between country and gender (See **Table 8**). Post Hoc Analysis indicates that American members of Generation Y experience significantly more *Positive Self-Feelings* from status consumption than Chinese members of Generation Y. The interaction between country and gender is represented graphically in **Figure 3**. Univariate Analysis of Variance was then run on *Positive Self-Feelings* by gender for both China and the United States. The results indicate that there is no statistical difference in *Positive Self-Feelings* between male and female members of Generation Y in China (See **Tables 9**). In the U.S. the P-value for a Univariate Analysis of Variance of *Positive Self-Feelings* and gender is .051 which is borderline statistically significantly different (See **Table 10**). Post Hoc Analysis indicates that male members of American Generation Y experience significantly more *Positive Self-Feelings* from status consumption than their female counterparts.

A second ANOVA tested for differences in the *Positive Social Consequences* of status consumption by country and gender (See **Table 11**). The results indicate that there is a significant difference in *Positive Social Consequences* by country and gender. Post Hoc Analysis indicates that Chinese members of Generation Y feel the *Positive Social Consequences* of status consumption significantly more than their American counterparts. Moreover, male members of Generation Y feel the *Positive Social Consequences* of status consumption significantly more than female members of Generation Y.

An Univariate Analysis of Variance was run on *Positive Self-Feelings* and gender for France (See **Table 12**). The results indicate that there is no difference between men and women in France in terms of *Positive Self-Feelings* from status consumption.

**Conclusions.** The results of this research show that some members of Generation Y value status and seek it through consumption. This trait is not universal for current college students intra-culturally and certainly not cross-culturally. While each of the countries studied have members who seek status through consumption, they place different levels of importance on the reasons for doing so. Eastman et al., (1997) defines status seekers as people who consume products to demonstrate a superior level of status to themselves and others.

The results of this research indicate that American Generation Yers engage in status consumption to demonstrate a superior level of status to themselves, while Chinese members of Generation Y engage in status consumption to demonstrate a superior level of status to others.

Specifically, members of China's Generation Y engage in status consumption for the positive social consequences that they receive from doing so significantly more than their American counterparts. This behavior is externally motivated (i.e., they are motivated by the prominence that such consumption gives them in the group). This finding is consistent with Hofstede's .20 Individualism score for China which indicates a highly collectivist culture where individuals focus on the group.

American Generation Yers who engage in status consumption are significantly more likely to do so because of the positive self-feelings derived from the consumption (i.e., internally motivated) than their Chinese counterparts. The United States Hofstede's score on Individualism of .91 indicates a highly individualistic culture. This finding is consistent with Hofstede (1994) who found that Individualistic cultures are more consumption oriented. These series of findings are consistent with Eng et al., (2010) who distinguish between non personal perceptions of luxury (i.e., what others think) and personal perceptions of luxury (i.e., what you think) and Shukla (2010) who found that consumers of status products from individualistic cultures (e.g., Great Britain) were internally motivated while consumers from collectivists cultures (e.g., India) were externally motivated.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in status consumption between Chinese and American members of Generation Y is rejected. While members of China's Generation Y maybe more individualistic and status conscious than previous Chinese Generations, they are not yet as individualistic as their American counterparts. While the impact of culture on consumption may be weakening due to technology, global media, study abroad and other forms of foreign travel, more multi-lingual citizens, and decreased magnitudes of political difference, especially for members of Generation Y (See Keilor et al. 2001, Tse et al., 1989), the results of this study clearly show that culture does impact the underlying motives for engaging in status consumption. Therefore, one must conclude that college-aged Generation Y members are not a global segment for status products.

Regarding gender, men derive significantly more positive self-feelings from status consumption than do women in America. *Similarly, males experience significantly more positive social consequences from status consumption than their female counterparts for the China and American Sample combined.* These results are consistent with a study by Eastman et al. (1997), who found that men were significantly more status conscious than women in China and inconsistent with Eastman et al., (2012) who found that there are no differences in status consumption between men and women in the U.S. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in status consumption between male and female members of Generation Y is rejected. When it comes to consumption, Generation Y men are more status conscious than Generation Y women.

**Implications for Marketers.** The results of this study make several contributions to the Marketing Literature. First, this study contributes to the extant literature by identifying differences in the underlying motives of status consumption across two distinct countries. Second, this study cross-culturally validates Lichtenstein et al., (1993) *Prestige Sensitivity Scale*. Lastly, this study contributes to the literature by adding additional information on gender's impact on status consumption.

Generation Y is made up of heterogeneous individuals both within and between countries. As such, generational cohorts are not valuable for global segmentation in the status consumption arena. While the opportunity for standardized products exists, marketing communications should be adapted to each culture. Communications that reflect the consumption related values associated with status consumption in each culture will bring Generation Y consumers one step closer to purchase. Congruity of individual and brand values should be at the forefront of strategic design which will enhance brand positioning. Building values into brand strategies creates the opportunity to target both products and messages more closely with desired value states (e.g., *Positive Self-Feelings* or *Positive Social Consequences* associated with status). Linking your brand to consumers' personal values will strengthen the emotional attachment that they feel towards your brand which is a powerful form of loyalty.

Because of their high tech savvy and high value placed on status, marketers should target Generation Y's opinion leaders, particularly in China where 'who' says it is more important than 'what' is being said. The explosion of digital socialization allows for word-of-mouth on a mass scale. Opinion leaders are a good place to start the conversation.

Members of Generation Y are prime targets for prestigious, publically consumed goods. Marketers can use nested or sub brands (e.g., PINK) to reach young members of Generation Y and then upgrade them to the parent brand (e.g., Victoria's Secret) as they age and their incomes increase. Further, brand strategy should focus on status maintenance or enhancement, but be subtle. Generation Y consumers are marketing savvy.

**Limitations.** First, the sample for this study was drawn in a convenience fashion. Furthermore, the sample is homogeneous with respect to age and education which limits generalizability, but is necessary for cross-cultural comparisons. Second, the scale employed in this study does not reflect specific brands or product categories but rather general consumer tendencies towards the acquisition of status goods and symbols. Third, the status statement means maybe under reported in this study due to social desirability bias. Stated alternatively, is it socially acceptable to admit to seeking social status through consumption? It is also possible that status seeking is a subconscious process and thus under reported.

**Areas for Future Research.** Future status consumption research could focus on the use of specific brands and attempt to tie individual values to brand awareness, brand preference, purchase intentions, and purchase. Another area for future research would be to compare the status consumption of non-college young members of Generation Y with college members of Y. Status consumption comparisons of multiple generations cross-culturally would be another fruitful area of research. Lastly, the construct 'Status' should be explored further. Do Generation Y consumers derive status because of wealth, feeling successful, feeling 'cool', exclusivity, uniqueness, frugality, or something else?

## **Closing**

*"The Young do not know enough to be prudent and therefore attempt the impossible – and achieve it generation after generation," Pearl S. Buck (a.k.a. SaiZhenzhu)*

Members of Generation Y such as Mark Zuckerberg, Prince William, and Serena Williams have had a big influence on the success and failure of organizations. ***The next 30 years belong to Generation Y as they will increasingly influence the success or failure of organizations as leaders, employees, consumers, and taxpayers.*** Young members of Generation Y are heterogeneous within cultures and even more so between them. And they are very different from any generation that has come before them. Understanding the similarities and differences of members of Generation Y across cultures will allow marketers of Global brands to more effectively match their brand values with consumer values. After years of excess and a poor economy, Generation Y's Baby Boomer parents are tapped out. To stay viable, marketers of status products will have to increasingly target members of Generation X and especially Generation Y on a global scale to remain successful. When doing so, they should think globally act locally.

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**Table 1**  
**Generation Y Birth Year Variation**

<b>Birth Dates</b>	<b>Authors</b>
1977-1987	Eastman et al., (2012)
1977-1988	Reisenwitz et al., (2009)
1977-1989	Parment (2013)
1977-1990	Djamasbi et al., (2011)
1977-1994	Pamela Paul (2001); Sojka et al., (2008); Sullivan et al. (2008); Zakaria et al., (2001); Hill et al., (2012); Soulez et al., (2011)
1977-1996	Solka et al., (2011)
1978-1998	Ramna et al., (2011)
1978-2000	Chhabra (2010)
1979-1994	Montgomery et al., (2003); Zdravkovic (2013)
Late 70s-Early 90s	Ferguson (2010)
After 1980	Wells et al., (2012); Gurau (2012);
1980-2000	Jain and Pant (2012); Gloeckler (2008); Hartman et al., (2011)
1981-1987	McEwen (2005)
1981-1994	Mirpuri and Narwani (2012)
1981-1995	Jackson et al., (2011)
1981-2000	Bristow et al., (2011); Arsenault et al., (2008)
After 1982	Moore et al., (2008)
1982-1995	Strutton et al., (2011)
1982-2000	Shapero (2013)
1982-2003	Short et al., (2011)

**Table 2 – A Profile of All Respondents**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>All Respondents</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>United States</b>
Sample Size	n = 900	n = 434	n = 105	n = 361
Gender				
Male	n = 351 (39.4%)	n = 163 (38%)	n = 35 (34%)	n = 153 (42.6%)
Female	n = 540 (60.6%)	n = 266 (62%)	n = 68 (66%)	n = 206 (57.4%)
Cronbach's $\alpha$	$\alpha = .818$	$\alpha = .841$	$\alpha = .672$	$\alpha = .842$



**Table 3 – Factor Analysis All Respondents  
Total Variance Explained**

	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative%
1	3.727	41.410	41.410	3.727	41.410	41.410
2	1.241	13.789	55.199	1.241	13.789	55.199
3	.899	9.992	65.190			
4	.726	8.072	73.262			
5	.653	7.253	80.515			
6	.576	6.397	86.912			
7	.510	5.671	92.583			
8	.388	4.308	96.891			
9	.280	3.109	100.00			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

a. 2 components extracted.

**Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component	
	1	2
prestige1	<b>0.648</b>	0.107
prestige2	<b>0.777</b>	0.249
prestige3	<b>0.845</b>	0.171
prestige4	<b>0.814</b>	0.121
prestige5	<b>0.551</b>	0.320
prestige6	0.092	<b>0.759</b>
prestige7	0.352	<b>0.623</b>
prestige8	0.218	<b>0.634</b>
prestige9	0.091	<b>0.699</b>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

**Bold** indicates that variable loads on that factor

**Table 4 – Factor Loadings China and USA**

<b>Status</b>	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Overall Loading</b>	<b>China Loading</b>	<b>USA Loading</b>
People notice when you buy the most expensive brand of a product.	Positive Self Feeling	.648	.738	.642
Buying a high priced brand makes me feel good about myself.	Positive Self Feeling	.777	.790	.841
Buying the most expensive brand of a product makes me feel classy.	Positive Self Feeling	.845	.804	.860
I enjoy the prestige of buying a high priced brand.	Positive Self Feeling	.814	.600	.852
Your friends will think you are cheap if you consistently buy the lowest priced version of a product.	Social Consequence	.759	.824	.661
I have purchased the most expensive brand of a product just because other people would notice.	Social Consequence	.623	.744	.591
I think others make judgments about me by the kinds of products and brands that I buy.	Social Consequence	.634	.685	.804
Even for a relatively inexpensive product, I think that buying a costly brand is impressive.	Social Consequence	.699	.637	.487

**Table 5 – Factor Analysis France  
Total Variance Explained**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative%
1	2.626	29.181	29.181	2.626	29.181	29.181
2	1.666	18.508	47.690	1.666	18.508	47.690
3	1.106	12.287	59.977	1.106	12.287	59.977
4	.904	10.048	70.025			
5	.821	9.125	79.149			
6	.634	7.049	86.199			
7	.590	6.551	92.750			
8	.378	4.204	96.954			
9	.274	3.046	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

a. 3 components extracted.

**Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component		
	Self-Feeling	Projected Self-Image	Social Consequence
prestige1	.116	<b>.677</b>	.035
prestige2	<b>.861</b>	.029	.072
prestige3	<b>.869</b>	-.019	.067
prestige4	<b>.773</b>	.199	.016
prestige5	.124	<b>.798</b>	.004
prestige6	-.087	<b>.633</b>	.366
prestige7	.332	.233	<b>.462</b>
prestige8	-.184	.209	<b>.610</b>
prestige9	.232	-.111	<b>.832</b>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

**Bold** indicates that variable loads on that factor

**Table 6 – Status Consumption by Country**

<b>Status</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>United States</b>
People notice when you buy the most expensive brand of a product.	$\mu = 3.58$ $s = .973$	$\mu = 3.41$ $s = 1.009$	$\mu = 3.77$ $s = .873$	$\mu = 3.73$ $s = .932$
Buying a high priced brand makes me feel good about myself.	$\mu = 3.04$ $s = 1.059$	$\mu = 2.96$ $s = .976$	$\mu = 2.93$ $s = 1.094$	$\mu = 3.17$ $s = 1.129$
Buying the most expensive brand of a product makes me feel classy.	$\mu = 3.04$ $s = 1.126$	$\mu = 2.77$ $s = 1.046$	$\mu = 3.18$ $s = 1.125$	$\mu = 3.32$ $s = 1.143$
I enjoy the prestige of buying a high priced brand.	$\mu = 2.72$ $s = 1.213$	$\mu = 2.12$ $s = 1.037$	$\mu = 3.30$ $s = 1.082$	$\mu = 3.25$ $s = 1.123$
It says something to people when you buy the high priced version of a product.	$\mu = 3.31$ $s = 1.041$	$\mu = 3.04$ $s = 1.000$	$\mu = 3.53$ $s = .995$	$\mu = 3.56$ $s = 1.035$
Your friends will think you are cheap if you consistently buy the lowest priced version of a product.	$\mu = 2.48$ $s = 1.076$	$\mu = 2.59$ $s = 1.025$	$\mu = 2.39$ $s = 1.164$	$\mu = 2.38$ $s = 1.096$
I have purchased the most expensive brand of a product just because other people would notice.	$\mu = 2.08$ $s = 1.036$	$\mu = 2.04$ $s = 1.005$	$\mu = 1.63$ $s = .863$	$\mu = 2.26$ $s = 1.093$
I think others make judgments about me by the kinds of products and brands that I buy.	$\mu = 3.06$ $s = 1.066$	$\mu = 2.97$ $s = 1.017$	$\mu = 3.29$ $s = 1.054$	$\mu = 3.11$ $s = 1.116$
Even for a relatively inexpensive product, I think that buying a costly brand is impressive.	$\mu = 2.64$ $s = 1.098$	$\mu = 3.00$ $s = 1.050$	$\mu = 2.13$ $s = 1.012$	$\mu = 2.34$ $s = 1.030$

$\mu$  = Mean

$s$  = Standard Deviation

Likert Scale 1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree

**Table 7 – Status Consumption Frequencies**

<b>Status</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>CHINA</b>	<b>USA</b>	<b>FRANCE</b>
People notice when you buy the most expensive brand of a product.	SD = 30 (3%) D = 101 (12%) N = 195 (22%) A = 436 (50%) SA = 118 (13%)	SD = 23 (6%) D = 48 (12%) N = 126 (30%) A = 175 (42%) SA = 44 (11%)	SD = 6 (2%) D = 44 (12%) N = 48 (13%) A = 206 (57%) SA = 56 (16%)	SD = 1 (1%) D = 9 (9%) N = 21 (20%) A = 55 (53%) SA = 18 (17%)
Buying a high priced brand makes me feel good about myself.	SD = 77 (9%) D = 189 (21%) N = 294 (33%) A = 267 (30%) SA = 57 (6%)	SD = 32 (8%) D = 94 (23%) N = 167 (40%) A = 108 (26%) SA = 17 (4%)	SD = 32 (9%) D = 72 (20%) N = 96 (27%) A = 125 (35%) SA = 36 (10%)	SD = 13 (12%) D = 23 (22%) N = 31 (30%) A = 34 (32%) SA = 4 (4%)
Buying the most expensive brand of a product makes me feel classy.	SD = 86 (10%) D = 204 (23%) N = 253 (29%) A = 261 (30%) SA = 77 (9%)	SD = 50 (12%) D = 116 (28%) N = 147 (35%) A = 83 (20%) SA = 19 (5%)	SD = 26 (7%) D = 70 (19%) N = 76 (21%) A = 141 (39%) SA = 48 (13%)	SD = 10 (10%) D = 18 (17%) N = 30 (29%) A = 37 (35%) SA = 10 (10%)
I enjoy the prestige of buying a high priced brand.	SD = 166 (19%) D = 247 (28%) N = 197 (22%) A = 207 (24%) SA = 61 (7%)	SD = 134 (32%) D = 152 (37%) N = 89 (21%) A = 28 (7%) SA = 13 (3%)	SD = 25 (7%) D = 76 (21%) N = 83 (23%) A = 135 (38%) SA = 38 (11%)	SD = 7 (7%) D = 19 (18%) N = 25 (24%) A = 44 (42%) SA = 10 (10%)
It says something to people when you buy the high priced version of a product.	SD = 43 (5%) D = 167 (19%) N = 220 (25%) A = 357 (41%) SA = 82 (9%)	SD = 25 (6%) D = 102 (25%) N = 129 (32%) A = 132 (33%) SA = 18 (4%)	SD = 11 (3%) D = 56 (16%) N = 73 (20%) A = 163 (45%) SA = 56 (16%)	SD = 7 (7%) D = 9 (9%) N = 18 (17%) A = 62 (60%) SA = 8 (8%)
Your friends will think you are cheap if you consistently buy the lowest priced version of a product.	SD = 159 (18%) D = 355 (40%) N = 203 (23%) A = 140 (16%) SA = 35 (4%)	SD = 61 (14%) D = 151 (35%) N = 127 (30%) A = 75 (18%) SA = 12 (3%)	SD = 72 (20%) D = 165 (46%) N = 58 (16%) A = 48 (13%) SA = 18 (5%)	SD = 26 (25%) D = 39 (37%) N = 18 (17%) A = 17 (16%) SA = 5 (5%)
I have purchased the most expensive brand of a product just because other people would notice.	SD = 294 (33%) D = 353 (40%) N = 124 (14%) A = 90 (10%) SA = 19 (2%)	SD = 142 (34%) D = 170 (41%) N = 63 (15%) A = 34 (8%) SA = 9 (2%)	SD = 96 (27%) D = 148 (41%) N = 53 (15%) A = 54 (15%) SA = 8 (2%)	SD = 56 (54%) D = 35 (34%) N = 8 (8%) A = 2 (2%) SA = 2 (2%)
I think others make judgments about me by the kinds of products and brands that I buy.	SD = 72 (8%) D = 209 (23%) N = 259 (29%) A = 299 (33%) SA = 56 (6%)	SD = 36 (8%) D = 104 (24%) N = 145 (34%) A = 129 (30%) SA = 17 (4%)	SD = 31 (9%) D = 84 (23%) N = 88 (24%) A = 129 (36%) SA = 29 (8%)	SD = 5 (5%) D = 21 (20%) N = 26 (25%) A = 41 (40%) SA = 10 (10%)
Even for a relatively inexpensive product, I think that buying a costly brand is impressive.	SD = 141 (16%) D = 300 (34%) N = 226 (25%) A = 190 (21%) SA = 34 (4%)	SD = 37 (9%) D = 103 (24%) N = 131 (31%) A = 137 (32%) SA = 21 (5%)	SD = 73 (20%) D = 157 (44%) N = 75 (21%) A = 44 (12%) SA = 11 (3%)	SD = 31 (30%) D = 40 (39%) N = 20 (20%) A = 9 (9%) SA = 2 (2%)

Rounded to the nearest percent.

**Table 8 – Univariate Analysis of Variance –Positive Self-Feelings by Country and Gender (China and USA)**

**Between-Subjects Factors**

Variable	Value Label	N
Country	China	392
	United States	354
Gender	Male	297
	Female	449

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Self Feeling

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-Value
Corrected Model	60.073	3	20.024	28.176	.000*
Intercept	6816.561	1	6816.561	9591.653	.000*
Country	58.866	1	58.866	82.830	.000*
Gender	.565	1	.565	.794	.373
Country*Gender	3.159	1	3.159	4.445	.035*
Error	527.322	742	.711		
Total	7647.750	746			
Corrected Total	587.395	745			

\*Indicates significance at the .05 level.

**Table 9 – Univariate Analysis of Variance  
Self-Feeling by Gender (China)**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P-Value</b>
Between Groups	.543	1	.543	.872	.351
Within Groups	242.923	390	.623		
Total	243.466	391			

**Table 10 – Univariate Analysis of Variance  
Self-Feeling by Gender (USA)**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P-Value</b>
Between Groups	3.103	1	3.103	3.840	.051*
Within Groups	284.399	352	.808		
Total	287.501	353			

\*Indicates significance at the .051 level.



**Table 11 – Univariate Analysis of Variance – Social Consequence by Country and Gender (China and USA)**

**Between-Subjects Factors**

Variable	Value Label	N
Country	China	405
	United States	356
Gender	Male	302
	Female	459

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Social Consequence

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-Value
Corrected Model	10.042	3	3.347	5.816	.001*
Intercept	4900.594	1	4900.594	8514.181	.000*
Country	3.474	1	3.474	6.035	.014*
Gender	6.120	1	6.120	10.632	.001*
Country*Gender	.407	1	.407	.706	.401
Error	435.714	757	.576		
Total	5536.438	761			
Corrected Total	445.757	760			

**Table 12 – Univariate Analysis of Variance – Positive Self-Feelings by Gender (France)**

**Between-Subjects Factors**

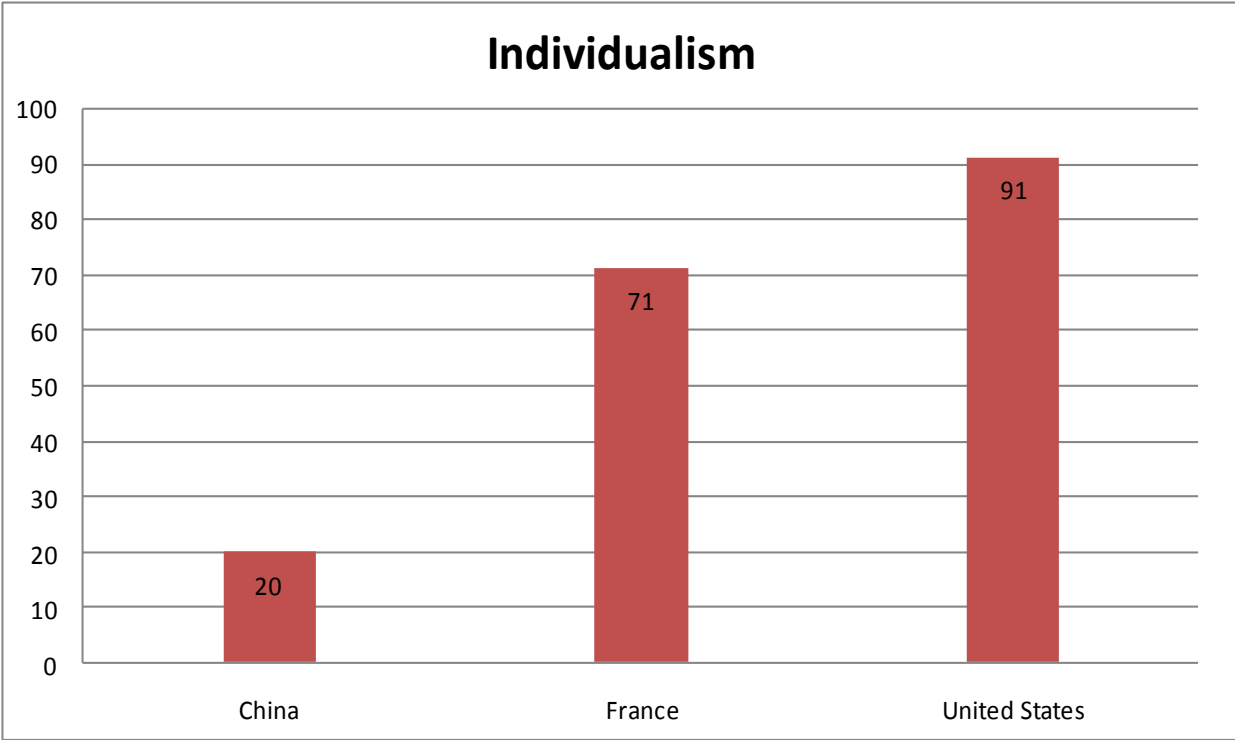
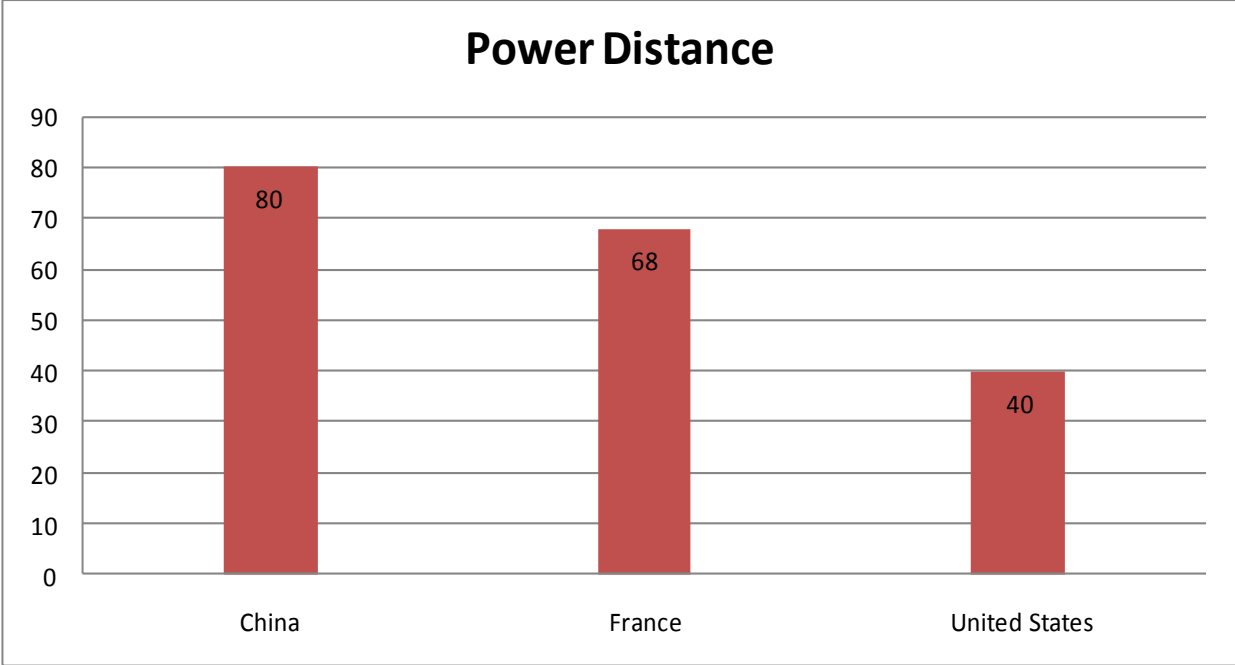
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Value Label</b>	<b>N</b>
Gender	Male	35
	Female	68

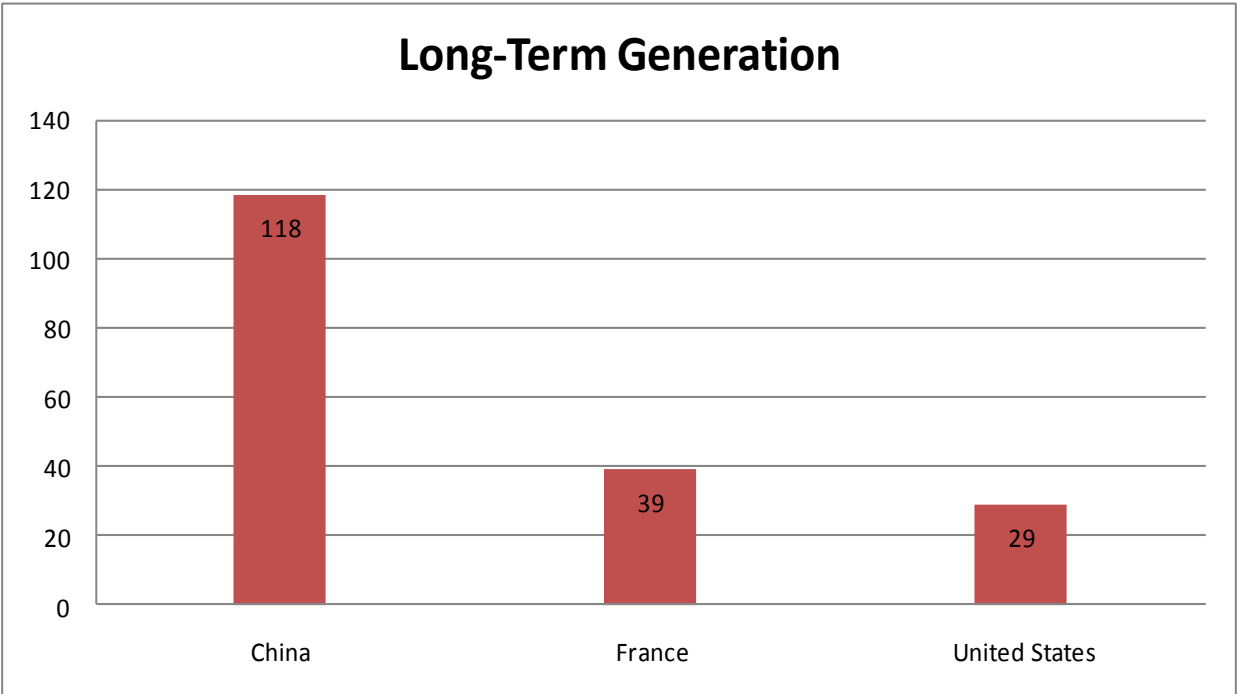
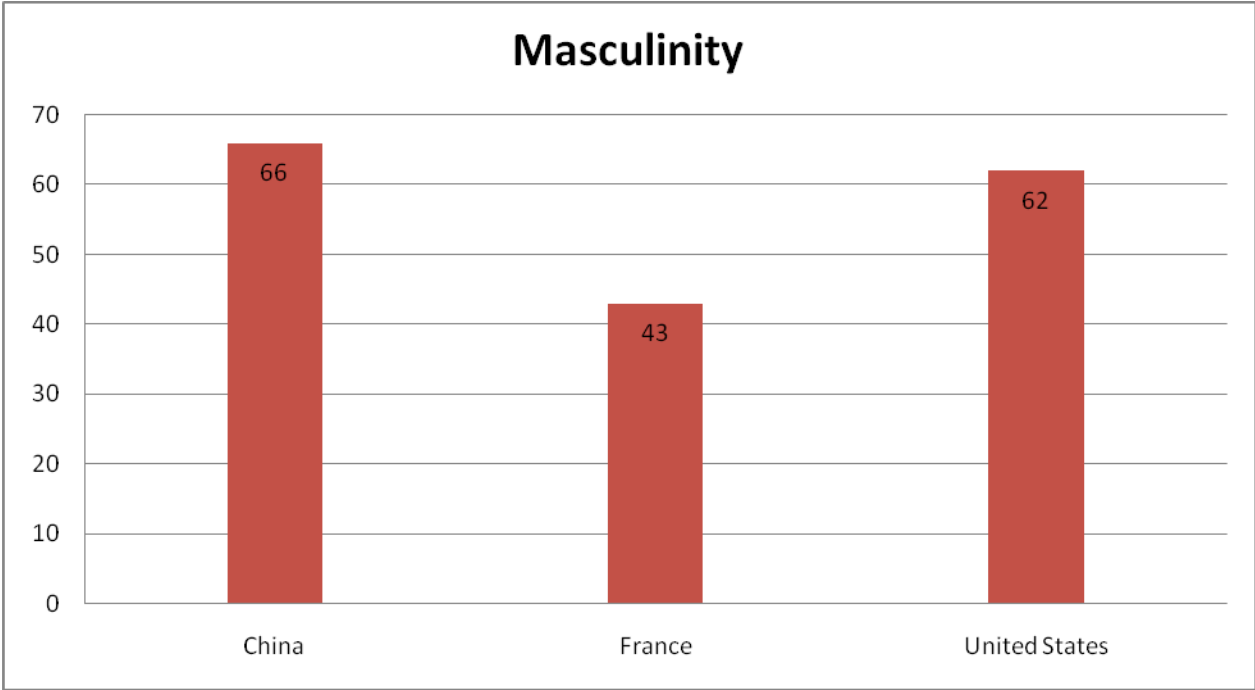
**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Self Feeling

<b>Source</b>	<b>Type III Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P-Value</b>
Corrected Model	.736	1	.736	.852	.358
Intercept	933.163	1	933.163	1080.794	.000*
Gender	.736	1	.736	.852	.358
Error	87.204	101	.863		
Total	1109.222	103			
Corrected Total	87.940	102			

**Figure 1**





## Uncertainty Avoidance

