

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A SCALE MAKES: AN EXAMINATION OF MATERIALISM AND RELIGIOSITY MEASURES

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ABSTRACT

Materialism and religiosity are two cultural values of interest to marketing researchers focused on the changing global marketplace and the impact of marketing efforts on evolving cultural values in developing countries. Efforts to effectively explore these values, however, have been complicated by difficulties encountered in any kind of cross-cultural research. This paper presents the lessons learned regarding scale selection and sensitivity to cultural differences in terms of the successful measurement of constructs related to cultural values. The authors have been exploring this aspect of consumer behavior for the past ten years. A major data collection in the 2002/2003 timeframe used the dominant scales of the time to gather information on consumers' levels of materialism and religiosity; however, both of these scales yielded reliabilities, as measured by Cronbach's alphas, which made the analysis of the data and conclusions drawn from the research problematic. Major modifications have been made by authors of the materialism scale in the intervening years since that effort (Richins 2004). In addition, measures of religiosity have been improved to better capture this construct in a variety of countries with differing approaches to practicing faith (Worthington et al. 2003).

Given these developments, in 2012 the authors embarked on a new data collection effort in countries where the original collection effort had taken place ten years before. The new survey instrument incorporated the improved measures for materialism and religiosity, with the materialism attitude scale having no subscales and that for religiosity having three: Intrapersonal Religious Commitment Scale, Interpersonal Religious Commitment Scale, and the Religious Attitude Scale, all of which were measured separately for each country.

The Material Attitude scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha value exceeding .7 (the acceptable level suggested by George and Mallery 2003) in the USA ($\alpha = .767$), and Croatia ($\alpha = .836$). In China, the Cronbach's alpha was .531 which is considered poor, but not unacceptable. This represents a significant improvement; the Materialism scale in the authors' prior research in the USA, China, and Croatia all had alphas less than .7 (.696, .528, and .601 respectively).

In the previous research, the reliability of the authors' measure of religiosity, although marginally reliable for the United States and Croatia, was unacceptably low for China. Using the new religiosity measure, Cronbach's alphas for the Intra- and Inter-personal Religious Commitment Scales, as well as the Religious Attitude Scale, exceeded a Cronbach's alpha of .7 for the USA (.967, .914, .914), China (.722, .801, .856), and Croatia (.898, .894, and .920).

Research based on the previous measures of materialism and religiosity is then flawed, creating major issues for analyses of relationships between them, as well as the models within which they are major constructs to be tested. These flaws represent a lack of understanding of both the constructs themselves (e.g. religiosity) and the most effective survey methodology for increasing the accuracy of responses regarding these constructs (e.g. materialism). Results of the present assessment of the reliability of the new measures reveal a major improvement. Future research exploring the important cultural values of materialism and religiosity in a global context based on these measures will most likely produce significantly different outcomes.