

Emulating Western lifestyles: Consumption and carbon footprints in less industrialized countries

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In recent decades, a new global middle class has exploded, with a total population exceeding one billion people. A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* explores the consumption attitudes of some of these members of the "new class."

"Our primary interest with this new class concerns climate change," write authors Tuba Üstüner (Colorado State University) and Douglas B. Holt (University of Oxford). "Many pundits and marketing experts claim that these consumers seek to emulate Western lifestyles. If this is so, then the Earth is in particular trouble, for we can hardly afford to double the [carbon footprint](#) that the USA and the EU already generate."

The authors studied the status consumption of 36 married women in Turkey. The subjects were upper-middle-class secular women in their 30s and 40s. The authors encouraged participants to reveal their status strategies while they discussed their tastes and preferences of homes, interiors, vacations, fashions, and services.

"We discovered two very distinct class fractions within this sample," the authors write. "These two fractions rely upon different consumption strategies as a result of differences in childhood [socialization](#)."

The more educated, cosmopolitan group, they found, was fixated on emulating Western lifestyles, with a focus on the United States. "In

Turkey, elite childhood education defines the most important cultural asset to be perfect command of the English [language](#) (or, occasionally French or German), not Turkish language, literature, or history," write the authors. Family trips and attending college in the West promote an "in-depth knowledge of Western Lifestyle."

In contrast, the less-educated women organized their consumption around Turkish status symbols. "Their status consumption strategy has two central dimensions: acquiring expensive goods that have been consecrated by Turkish tastemakers of the upper class, and receiving public deference in luxury service encounters."

"We hope that this model proves to be useful for those seeking to intervene in efforts to avoid producing Western levels of environmental degradation in these countries," the authors conclude.

More information: Tuba Üstüner and Douglas B. Holt. "Toward a Theory of Status [Consumption](#) in Less Industrialized Countries." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): June 2010. A preprint of this article (to be officially published online soon) can be found at journals.uchicago.edu/jcr).

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