



UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA

Department of General Psychology

**Department of Developmental Psychology
and Socialization**

**Bachelor's Degree Course in Psychological
Science**

Final dissertation

**Conspicuous consumption,
sustainability, and economic
inequality: A cross-cultural
comparison**

Supervisor

Professor Caterina Suitner

Co-supervisor

PhD Silvia Filippi

Candidate: Abdullah Osama

Abdelmoneom Mahmoud

Elhesewi

Student ID number: 2041337

Academic Year 2024

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father, Osama Elhesewi.

Your mere presence throughout this journey has been my greatest sources of strength. You have been the perfect role model, a person I can always look up to. I wanted to share this moment with you, but unfortunately, you passed away earlier this year. Without your support and faith in me, I wouldn't be standing here today, having completed the first step in my new career in psychology. I dedicate not only this thesis but also any future success in my life to you.

Thank you for believing in me and for being the extraordinary person you were.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Cateriana Suitner for her steadfast guidance, thoughtful consideration, and invaluable expertise throughout the course of my thesis. Her direction has been instrumental in shaping this work.

A heartfelt thank you to Silvia Filippi for her support and encouragement. Her confidence in me has been a great source of inspiration.

For my love, my life, my wife, Dalia, a special recognition for her enduring love and unwavering patience during this challenging phase of my life. Her presence has been a source of strength and comfort, and I am deeply grateful for her unfaltering belief in me.

To my dear friends Jalal and Mohsen, for making this journey lighter with their companionship and friendship.

I am also grateful to my whole family, my mother, sisters, and Omar, Islam, and Abdelrahman for their constant support and encouragement.

Finally, I extend a very special thanks to Mahmoud Shaaban, my companion, friend, and utmost believer. Your belief in me has been invaluable. Without you, I would not be the person I am today.

Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of sustainability among consumers engaging in conspicuous consumption in two distinct societies: Egypt and Italy. Drawing from literature's suggesting that environmental concern extends beyond Western societies, we investigate whether conspicuous consumption correlates with a tendency towards green or sustainable consumption in these contexts and whether attitudes towards sustainability and climate change mediate or enhance this relationship. Additionally, we examine the correlation between perceived inequality and conspicuous consumption across these societies, considering the mediating role of status-seeking behaviors. Utilizing survey data, our study reveals significant differences in consumer behaviors and perceptions between Egypt and Italy, with Egypt exhibiting higher levels of perceived inequality, status-seeking, and conspicuous consumption compared to Italy. Contrary to prevailing literature, we find no significant correlation between perceived inequality and conspicuous consumption. We explored potential explanations, including the use of a self-report survey and questions about perceived inequality. Furthermore, we reveal significant positive associations between consumers' attitudes, intentions, and reported purchase behavior towards green products, challenging previous findings and emphasizing the importance of understanding and shaping positive attitudes and intentions towards sustainability to drive actual adoption and consumption (Mostafa, 2007). Additionally, we uncover positive correlations between perceived inequality and attitudes towards climate change in both societies, highlighting the potential link between sensitivity to socioeconomic disparities and environmental concerns. These findings have significant implications for policymakers, businesses, and researchers aiming to promote sustainable consumption practices and address climate change and inequality on a global scale.

Keywords: inequality, conspicuous consumption, sustainability, culture

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Introduction

Economic inequality manifests through uneven distribution of income and unequal access to resources, such as health, employment, and public services, leading to widening disparities among the richest, middle, and poorest segments of society (Van de Werfhorst & Salverda, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012). This inequality not only exacerbates social tensions but also contributes to elevated crime rates, mortality, and declining social cohesion (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Sommet et al., 2018). Moreover, research indicates that income inequality correlates with various societal, psychological, and economic indicators of diminished well-being, implicating social status and its psychological and physiological ramifications (Kasser, 2002; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

Particularly relevant to psychological perspective, the impact of economic inequality extends beyond objective measures to include perceived disparities (Lembregts & Pandelaere, 2014; Nishi et al., 2015; García-Sánchez et al., 2018). This perception influences decision-making and consumer behavior, with psychological processes playing a significant role (Walasek and Brown, 2015, 2016; Jetten & Peters, 2019). Relevant for this thesis, the consequences of income inequality not only affect individual well-being but also sustainability, as affluent societies exhibit higher carbon footprints due to increased consumption levels (Gibson et al., 2011; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2022). Mounting carbon emissions, surpassing critical thresholds, pose a grave threat to the environment, necessitating a shift towards more sustainable consumption patterns (Hansen et al., 2013). Understanding the drivers of consumption and identifying pathways towards sustainable solutions have become imperative in mitigating environmental degradation and promoting societal well-being.

Inequality and status-seeking

In societies characterized by wider inequality gaps, emphasis is placed on income and social status, leading to heightened social comparison, resource competition, and a stronger drive to attain status (Bowles & Park, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Corak, 2013). This social stratification fosters greater social distance and promotes behaviors centered around status-seeking, such as pursuing prestigious employment or acquiring symbols of social standing (Rege, 2008; Hopkins & Kornienko, 2009; Bertrand & Morse, 2013; Bricker et al., 2014; Walasek & Brown, 2015, 2016; Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2019).

Social status refers to an individual's relative position within a group in terms of significant dimensions like resource possession, physical attractiveness, wealth, or knowledge (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). Status-seeking behavior involves endeavors aimed at enhancing one's social standing by investing in resources to improve socioeconomic position (Walasek &

Brown, 2015, 2016). Recent studies have underscored the positive association between the purchase of positional or high-value goods and objective economic inequality (Walasek and Brown, 2015, 2016; Du et al., 2021). Positional goods, in this context, confer elevated social status upon their possessors (Walasek et al., 2018). For instance, Walasek & Brown (2015) demonstrated a correlation between greater income inequality in North American states and increased online searches for status-related products like jewellery, luxury clothing, and designer brands. Similarly, Du et al. (2021) found that heightened perceptions of inequality prompted greater pursuit of positional goods in low-status conditions. These findings highlight the interplay between economic inequality and consumption patterns, status-seeking behavior, materialism, and spending habits (Bertrand & Morse, 2013; Charles & Lundy, 2013; Walasek & Brown, 2015, 2016; Ryabov, 2016).

Status Consumption and Conspicuous Consumption

In the extant literature, status consumption and conspicuous consumption are often treated as synonymous, yet they possess distinct characteristics. Status consumption, defined as the pursuit of higher social standing by acquiring products that symbolize status, differs from conspicuous consumption, which focuses more on the obvious display of wealth and social position (Kilsheimer, 1993; O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). While previous studies have explored links between conspicuous consumption and status goods, little attention has been paid to understanding the relationship between status tendencies and conspicuous consumption behaviors (Bernheim, 1994; Echikson, 1994; Ireland, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984).

Conspicuous consumption, associated with enhancing prestige through public demonstrations of wealth, encompasses expenditures aimed at ego inflation and ostentatious displays of affluence (Veblen, 1899; Mason, 1981). In contrast, status consumption revolves around the desire to gain prestige through ownership of status-laden products, with less emphasis on public demonstration (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). Status consumption focuses on acquiring symbols of high class and luxury, linked to social success and achievement, driven by intrinsic motivations (Chan et al., 2015; Jaikumar & Sarin, 2015; Amatulli et al., 2018). Conversely, conspicuous consumption involves purchasing goods to gain recognition in society by flaunting wealth, influenced by extrinsic factors such as social comparison and approval-seeking behavior (Veblen, 1899; Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; O’Cass & McEwen, 2004).

While both concepts involve acquiring products signalling social position, status consumption is driven by internal motivations and aims to signal status through luxury brands, while conspicuous consumption responds to social comparison by openly displaying possessions (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). Thus, understanding the distinctions between these

constructs enhances comprehension of consumer behavior and motivations in relation to social status and wealth display (Mazzocco et al., 2012).

Materialism and Consumption

Consumption of status goods is often supported by attitudes and beliefs emphasizing materialism, where individuals prioritize material possessions as markers of social success (Kasser & Kanner, 2004). Materialism, as defined by Richins & Dawson (1992), revolves around the centrality of material acquisition in individuals' lives, viewing possessions as crucial to their happiness and personal success. Highly materialistic individuals tend to gauge success, both their own and others', based on the quantity and quality of possessions owned (Richins & Dawson, 1992). This value system influences consumption preferences, with materialistic individuals often prioritizing products that signify status (Wang & Wallendorf, 2006). Additionally, they attribute utilitarian functions to their possessions, viewing them as sources of security, happiness, and recognition (Kim et al., 2017).

However, high levels of materialism can lead to adverse individual and societal outcomes, including reduced personal well-being (Kasser & Kanner, 2004; Wang et al., 2020) and increased consumerism, which poses environmental concerns (Hurst et al., 2013). These consequences underscore the complex interplay between materialistic values, consumption behaviors, and their broader societal implications.

Materialistic orientations have been linked to lower life satisfaction and diminished well-being, potentially leading to compensatory and overconsumption tendencies (Sukhdev & Shallu, 2013). Moreover, materialistic values may hinder pro-social and public-welfare behaviors, reducing engagement in sustainable practices (Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Good, 2007; Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Sukhdev & Shallu, 2013).

Conversely, sustainable consumption is associated with self-transcendence and collective-oriented values, emphasizing selflessness, concern for public welfare, and interconnectedness (Pepper et al., 2009; Segal & Podoshen, 2013; Sevgili & Cesur, 2014). Research suggests a negative relationship between materialism and sustainable consumption, indicating that materialistic tendencies may impede environmentally responsible behavior (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Bakırtaş et al., 2014; Bergman et al., 2014; Ku & Zaroff, 2014). Overall, materialism and conspicuous motives are perceived as obstacles to achieving sustainable consumption and a sustainable society.

Recent academic research has increasingly focused on status as a driver of sustainable consumption (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Dastrup et al., 2012; Zabkar & Hosta, 2013; Sexton & Sexton, 2014; Brooks & Wilson, 2015; Van der Wal et al., 2016). Sustainable products,

although often more expensive or lower in quality compared to conventional alternatives, allow consumers to signal their willingness to bear additional costs for the benefit of nature and society (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Addressing consumer status motives can potentially promote their preference for greener products (Griskevicius et al., 2010), a concept termed "conspicuous conservation" (Sexton & Sexton, 2014). However, positive effects of status motives on sustainable consumption may be contingent on factors such as product visibility and perceived costs. Visible, high-cost ecological products are more likely to enhance social status than less visible, cost-saving consumption-reducing behaviors (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Brooks & Wilson, 2015). Therefore, while conspicuous motives can drive sustainable consumption under specific conditions, such as when visibility and costliness align, they may not always lead to environmentally friendly behaviors.

Overview of the study

Contrary to an often-used argument that environmental concern is a post-material value that tends to be evident in western societies only, consumers in developing countries are also concerned about environmental or social issues and are increasingly willing to pay additional money for sustainable products (Auger et al., 2010; Mohamed et al., 2012; Guarin & Knorringa, 2014; Shaban & El-Bassiouny, 2017).

Our research aims to delve into the perception of sustainability among consumers engaging in conspicuous consumption in two distinct societies: Egypt and Italy. Specifically, we seek to understand whether being a conspicuous consumer correlates with a tendency towards green or sustainable consumption in these contexts. In this year's Climate Change Performance Index CCPI, Italy is ranked 44th, while Egypt dropped two places to 22nd, positioning it among the medium-performing countries (Burck et al., 2023). Egypt and Italy present intriguing cases for comparison due to their diverse cultural and religious contexts. Egypt, predominantly Muslim, often emphasizes modesty and communal values, potentially influencing consumption habits. In contrast, Italy, with its predominantly Catholic population, may have different attitudes towards consumption, influenced by its rich cultural heritage. Exploring these differences and similarities can provide valuable insights into how cultural and religious factors shape consumer behavior and sustainability attitudes in different societal contexts. Moreover, we aim to investigate whether attitudes towards sustainability and climate change moderate or enhance this relationship, as illustrated in Figure 1. Additionally, we plan to revisit the established correlation between perceived inequality and conspicuous consumption (Bricker et al., 2014; Walasek & Brown, 2015, 2016; Velandia-Morales et al., 2022), comparing the findings across the two societies. We will also examine whether status-

seeking behaviors mediate this connection, drawing from the work of Velandia-Morales et al. (2022), as depicted in Figure 1. Studying the Egyptian and Italian markets offers a compelling opportunity for comparison, particularly in the context of the relationship between income inequality and conspicuous consumption. Given that much of the empirical research in this area has predominantly focused on developed economies (as highlighted by Charles et al., 2009; Ordabayeva & Chandon 2011), examining these two distinct societies provides a unique perspective.

Our study aims to replicate and extend these results to Egypt and Italy, determining if similar patterns emerge in these cultural contexts. In summary, our study aims to shed light on the intricate dynamics between conspicuous consumption, sustainability attitudes, perceived inequality, and status-seeking behaviors, comparing these dynamics across different cultural contexts.

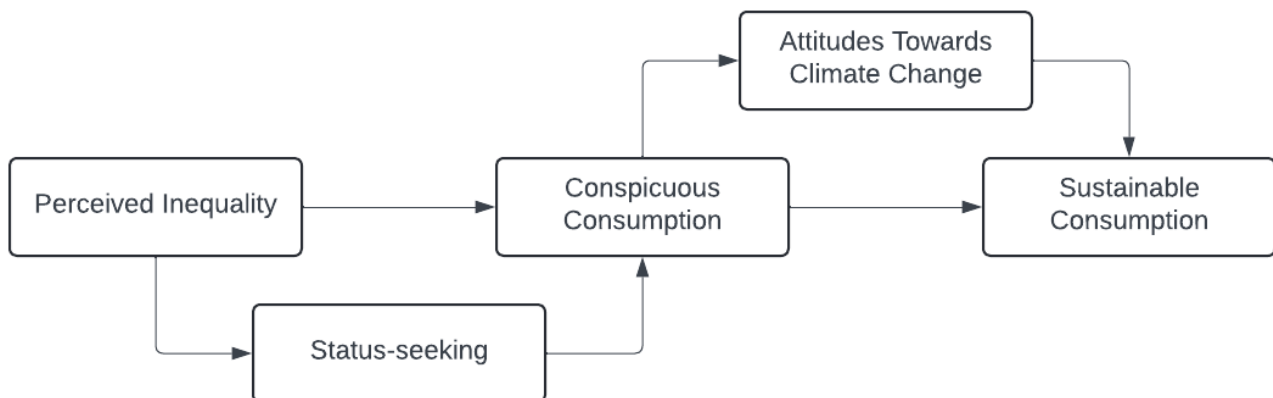


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Methods

Participants

Participants in our study were drawn from the university community, including undergraduates, postgraduates, professors, and faculty members. In Egypt, the sample comprised 350 participants, including 184 females, with a mean age of 24.79 years ($SD = 7$). Similarly, in Italy, the sample consisted of 326 participants, including 235 females, with a mean age of 24.13 years ($SD = 6.66$). To determine sample size, we conducted a sensitivity power analysis for a bivariate correlation of a sample of 350 and 326 participants. This sample size allows us to detect an effect size as small as .17 with a power of .90 (and an alpha level set at .05).

Procedures and Measures

We developed an online survey on the Qualtrics platform and distributed it through social networks using Facebook and WhatsApp groups comprising students from various classes and departments at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport in Alexandria, Egypt. In Italy, participants were gathered from the University of Padua. The distribution message included basic information about the survey and a link for access. The survey was identical for both samples, with only the country name adjusted in the items to reflect the respective location. Each item was translated into Arabic and Italian, while also displaying the English version. All constructs in the study were measured using various items on five-point Likert-type scales (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree). Attitudes are best measured using multiple measures, and environmental issues are typically measured through several items rather than single-item questions (Gill, Lawrence, & Taylor, 1986). All items are based on scales that have been previously validated. The survey was divided into seven sections as follows.

Perceived Inequality

Perceived inequality was measured using two items from the Attributions for Cross-Country Inequality Scale (ACIS) (Vezzoli et al., 2024). Participants were asked to respond to the following statements: "Overall, how much do you think is the wealth gap between the poorest and richest people in Egypt/Italy?" and "Actual economic differences between rich and poor people in Egypt/Italy are too large". ACIS was chosen for its validity in assessing causal attribution for cross-national inequality and its reliability across countries, having been validated in Italy, the UK, and South Africa. Additionally, one item from the ACIS scale was used to measure status perception, specifically: "To which of the following social classes would you say your own family belongs?".

Status Seeking

We employed the Kilsheimer Status Scale (Kilsheimer, 1993), consisting of five items, such as "I would buy a product solely for its status" and "I would pay a premium for a product if it conveyed status" to examine status-seeking behaviors. This scale, also utilized in a recent study by Velandia-Morales et al. (2022) on the relationship between perceived inequality and conspicuous consumption, demonstrated its relevance in delineating the mediating role of status seeking.

Conspicuous Consumption

Utilizing the Social Consumption Motivation Scale (Moschis, 1981), we gauged conspicuous consumption tendencies, focusing specifically on the conspicuous dimension.

This scale, featuring four items such as "Before making a purchase, it is essential to consider what friends think of different brands or products" highlights the emphasis on social validation in consumption decisions. Notably, this scale's relevance was underscored in the recent study by Velandia-Morales et al. (2022), further validating its applicability.

Attitudes/Perception Towards Climate Change

To assess attitudes towards climate change, we employed the scale developed by Christensen & Knezek (2014), comprising 10 items such as "I am concerned about global climate change" and "I believe there is evidence of global climate change". This scale is divided into two parts: one-part measures attitudes or beliefs towards climate change, while the other part assesses intentions. For our study, we focused on using the part related to attitudes, which captures individuals' beliefs and attitudes regarding climate change in straightforward language. Its selection was influenced by its simplicity, originally tailored for middle school students, ensuring accessibility and ease of comprehension. Additionally, for measuring intentions related to green or sustainable purchase, we utilized another scale, Green Purchase Intention Scale GPI, which will be mentioned below.

Green Purchase Attitudes Scale (GPA)

This scale was employed to gauge participants' attitudes toward green purchases, consisting of three items: "I (1= dislike; 5= like) the idea of purchasing green", "Purchasing green is a (1= bad; 5= good) idea", and "I have a/an (1= unfavorable; 5 = favorable) attitude toward purchasing a green version of a product". This scale has been established as both valid and reliable (Taylor & Todd, 1995). Previous research has utilized this scale, which employs three statements coded by five-point semantic-differential scales, to operationalize the global measure of attitudes toward green purchases (Chan, 2001). Furthermore, Mostafa (2007) adapted this scale to Arabic and utilized it in a study in Egypt to investigate the Green Consciousness of the Egyptian Consumer, underscoring its relevance and applicability across different cultural contexts.

Green Purchase Intentions Scale (GPI)

Similarly, this scale was utilized to assess participants' intentions to engage in green purchase behavior. This scale, comprising three items, includes the following statements: "Over the next month, I will consider buying products because they are less polluting", " Over the next one month, I will consider switching to other brands for ecological reasons" and "Over the next one month, I plan to switch to a green version of a product". It was adapted from Ling-Yee (1997) and has been previously used by Chan (2001) to study the intentions of Chinese consumers regarding green purchases. Furthermore, Mostafa (2007) adapted this scale to

Arabic, indicating its suitability for assessing purchase intentions across diverse cultural backgrounds.

Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP)

Finally, the construct of AGP was operationalized using a two-statement semantic differential scale, which are: "I (1= never; 5= always) buy the products because they are less polluting" and "I (1= never; 5= always) switch to other brands for ecological reasons". Adapted from Chan and Lau's (2000) study on the antecedents of green purchases in China, this scale measures the actual green purchase behavior. Mostafa (2007) also adapted this scale to Arabic, underscoring its utility in assessing green purchase acceptance in various cultural contexts.

Results

Reliability Analysis

The reliability analysis indicated satisfactory internal consistency for all measured constructs. The Cronbach's alpha values were as follows: Status-seeking scale ($\alpha = 0.78$), Conspicuous consumption ($\alpha = 0.78$), Attitudes towards climate change ($\alpha = 0.88$), Green Purchase Attitudes Scale (GPA) ($\alpha = 0.81$), Green Purchase Intentions Scale (GPI) ($\alpha = 0.85$), and Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) (correlation between its two items $r = 0.76$).

Mean Comparison

Comparing the mean scores of each construct between Egypt and Italy revealed notable differences as you can find in Table 1. In Egypt, Perceived Inequality ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 0.52$) was higher compared to Italy ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.72$). Similarly, Egypt exhibited higher mean scores for Status-seeking ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.58$) and Conspicuous Consumption ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.92$) compared to Italy status-seeking: ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 0.61$); conspicuous consumption: ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 0.93$). However, Italy demonstrated slightly higher mean scores for Attitudes Towards Climate Change (Egypt: $M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.66$; Italy: $M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.49$). Green Purchase Attitudes Scale (GPA) reflects individuals' underlying beliefs and attitudes towards environmentally friendly products. In Egypt, respondents exhibited a mean score of 4.18 ($SD = 0.68$), indicating a generally positive attitude towards green products. In Italy, the mean score was slightly higher at 4.31 ($SD = 0.58$), suggesting a marginally stronger inclination towards sustainability in purchasing behaviors among Italian consumers. Green Purchase Intentions Scale (GPI) captures individuals' expressed intentions or willingness to engage in future purchases of environmentally friendly products. In Egypt, the mean score on this scale was 3.72 ($SD = 0.85$), indicating a moderate intention towards green purchasing behavior. Similarly, in Italy, the mean score was 3.65 ($SD = 0.83$), suggesting a comparable level of intention to engage in sustainable consumption practices. Green Purchase Acceptance Scale

(AGP) measures the actual adoption of green products by consumers, providing insights into the tangible manifestation of sustainability attitudes and intentions. In Egypt, respondents reported a mean score of 2.82 ($SD = 1.02$), indicating a moderate level of acceptance or integration of green products into their purchasing habits. In contrast, Italian respondents had a slightly lower mean score of 2.74 ($SD = 0.92$), suggesting a similar but marginally lower level of actual adoption of green products compared to their Egyptian counterparts.

Parameters	Egypt		Italy	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Perceived Inequality	4.73	0.52	4.09	0.72
Status-seeking	2.84	0.58	2.5	0.61
Conspicuous Consumption	2.89	0.92	2.28	0.93
Attitudes Towards Climate Change	4.3	0.66	4.45	0.49
Green Purchase Attitudes Scale (GPA)	4.18	0.68	4.31	0.58
Green Purchase Intentions Scale (GPI)	3.72	0.85	3.65	0.83
Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP)	2.82	1.02	2.74	0.92

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation. Marked in bold means that emerged as different ($p < .05$) in the t-test comparison.

T-test between Egypt and Italy

The t-test comparisons between Egypt and Italy further underscored the differences between the two societies. Perceived inequality ($t = -13.3646, p < 0.0001$), status-seeking ($t = -7.61138, p < 0.0001$), and conspicuous consumption ($t = -8.56487, p < 0.0001$) exhibited statistically significant differences between the two countries. However, attitudes towards climate change ($t = 3.338748, p < 0.9996$), GPA ($t = 2.776726, p < 0.9972$), GPI ($t = -1.15373, p < 0.1245$), and AGP ($t = -1.1043, p < 0.1349$) did not show significant differences.

Correlation between constructs in each country

In Egypt Between Perceived inequality and Conspicuous consumption equals $r = -0.07033, p = 0.186$, and between perceived inequality and Status seeking equals $r = 0.0009, p = 0.987$, between conspicuous consumption and status seeking equals $r = 0.427, p < 0.001$. Between Conspicuous consumption and Attitudes towards climate change $r = -0.01199, p = 0.822$, and between Conspicuous consumption and Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) $r = 0.060148, p = 0.258$, and between attitudes towards climate change and Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) $r = 0.117407, p = 0.027$.

Pearson's Correlations – Egypt									
Variable		PI	IA	SS	CC	ATCC	GPI	GPA	AGP
Perceived Inequality	r	—							
	p-value	—							
Inequality Aversion	r	0.243 ***	—						
	p-value	< .001	—						
Status-seeking	r	0.0009	0.021	—					
	p-value	0.987	0.697	—					
Conspicuous Consumption	r	-0.07	0.01	0.427 ***	—				
	p-value	0.186	0.85	< .001	—				
Attitudes Towards Climate Change	r	0.213 ***	0.107 *	-0.016	-0.012	—			
	p-value	< .001	0.045	0.763	0.822	—			
GPI	r	0.059	0.061	0.00006	-0.02	0.479 ***	—		
	p-value	0.269	0.249	0.999	0.703	< .001	—		
GPA	r	0.185 ***	0.066	-0.053	-0.069	0.489 ***	0.601 ***	—	
	p-value	< .001	0.213	0.316	0.192	< .001	< .001	—	
AGP	r	-0.056	-0.097	0.055	0.06	0.117 *	0.492 ***	0.47 ***	—
	p-value	0.292	0.067	0.298	0.258	0.027	< .001	< .001	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2: Correlations - Egypt

In Italy: Between Perceived inequality and Conspicuous consumption $r = 0.0236$, $p = 0.669$, and between perceived inequality and Status seeking $r = -0.013$, $p = 0.808$, between conspicuous consumption and status seeking $r = 0.5238$, $p < 0.001$. Between Conspicuous consumption and Attitudes towards climate change $r = -0.0158$, $p = 0.775$, and between Conspicuous consumption and Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) $r = -0.1411$, $p < 0.01$, and between attitudes towards climate change and Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) $r = 0.2954$, $p < 0.001$.

Pearson's Correlations - Italy									
Variable		PI	IA	SS	CC	ATCC	GPI	GPA	AGP
Perceived Inequality	r	—							
	p-value	—							
Inequality Aversion	r	0.576 ***	—						
	p-value	< .001	—						
Status-seeking	r	-0.013	-0.045	—					
	p-value	0.808	0.413	—					
Conspicuous Consumption	r	0.024	-0.027	0.524 ***	—				
	p-value	0.669	0.625	< .001	—				
Attitudes Towards Climate Change	r	0.116 *	0.238 ***	-0.161 **	-0.016	—			
	p-value	0.035	< .001	0.003	0.775	—			
GPI	r	-0.021	0.117 *	-0.145 **	-0.05	0.48 ***	—		
	p-value	0.7	0.033	0.008	0.368	< .001	—		
GPA	r	0.14 *	0.277 ***	-0.175 **	-0.133 *	0.596 ***	0.561 ***	—	
	p-value	0.011	< .001	0.001	0.015	< .001	< .001	—	
AGP	r	-0.00064	0.11 *	-0.165 **	-0.141 *	0.295 ***	0.625 ***	0.525 ***	—
	p-value	0.991	0.047	0.003	0.01	< .001	< .001	< .001	—

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3: Correlations - Italy

GPA, GPI, and AGP

In Egypt: The correlation between Green Purchase Attitudes Scale (GPA) and Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) equals 0.47, and the correlation between Green Purchase Intentions Scale (GPI) and Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) equals 0.492.

In Italy: The correlation between GPA and AGP equals 0.525, and the correlation between GPI and AGP equals 0.625.

Perceived Inequality and Attitudes Towards Climate Change

In both Egypt and Italy, our study revealed a correlation between perceived inequality and attitudes towards climate change. While the correlation coefficients were modest ($r = 0.213$ for Egypt and $r = 0.116$ for Italy), they indicate that perceived inequality is associated with climate change attitudes in both countries.

Discussion

The mean comparisons between the two societies revealed significant differences in various constructs, shedding light on the distinct consumer behaviors and perceptions prevalent in each country.

In terms of **perceived inequality**, Egypt exhibited higher sensitivity compared to Italy, indicating potentially differing socio-economic landscapes that could influence consumer behaviors. Similarly, Egypt demonstrated higher mean scores for **status-seeking** and **conspicuous consumption**, suggesting a stronger emphasis on materialistic displays and

consumption habits in the Egyptian society compared to Italy. This is in line with the findings of studies such as Charles et al. (2009), which highlight the role of socio-economic factors in shaping conspicuous consumption behaviors. These perspectives possibly suggest that as socio-economic factors are influential, cultural differences may also contribute to variations in consumer behaviors across different societies.

Italy displayed marginally higher mean scores for **attitudes towards climate change**, indicating a potentially stronger inclination towards sustainability among Italian consumers. This observation suggests that environmental consciousness might be more prevalent in Italy compared to Egypt.

Perceived Inequality and Consumer Behavior: Departure from prevailing literature: Our findings diverge from the prevailing literature on the relationship between perceived inequality and status-seeking or conspicuous consumption. Notably, we observed no significant correlation between perceived inequality and these constructs, contrary to the established connection often documented in prior research. We can interpret this lacking link as the result of various factors, which we will discuss through exploring some potential explanations.

Perceived vs. Objective Inequality: One potential explanation for this disparity is our focus on perceived inequality rather than objective measures such as the Gini coefficient. Our decision to focus on perceived inequality is also supported by Andrew E. Clark and Conchita D'Ambrosio's research (2015) as they argue convincingly that perceived inequality better elucidates consumer behavior and psychological outcomes, influencing well-being and attitudes towards redistribution. By aligning with this perspective, our study aimed to tap into different psychological mechanisms underlying individuals' responses to inequality.

This approach contrasts with studies such as those by Lukasz Walasek and Gordon D. A. Brown (2015, 2016), where the correlation between objective inequality and Internet searches for status goods served as a proxy for status-seeking. Similarly, Saravana Jaikumar and Ankur Sarin (2015) utilized objective inequality measurements, primarily the Gini coefficient, in their investigation. These studies, while informative, may not fully capture the nuanced interplay between perceived inequality and status-related behaviors.

Methodological Considerations: Another notable difference lies in the methodology employed between our study and some existing literature. Unlike experimental procedures utilized in studies like that of Velandia-Morales et al. (2022), where perceptions of economic inequality were manipulated using the Bimboola Paradigm, our study relied solely on survey data without any experimental manipulation.

Experimental paradigms such as the Bimboola Paradigm offer controlled environments to manipulate perceptions of economic inequality. However, they come with inherent limitations. The artificial setting of experiments may not accurately reflect real-world behaviors, potentially leading to discrepancies between experimental outcomes and actual behaviors. Additionally, ensuring participant engagement with the manipulated scenario can be challenging, potentially introducing response biases. Moreover, the simplified manipulation of economic inequality may not fully capture the multifaceted nature of real-world inequality. This limitation is exacerbated by the homogenous assignment of all participants to the middle-income group in some experimental designs, restricting the diversity of perspectives.

In contrast, correlational studies like ours capture data in naturalistic settings, offering higher external validity and reflecting the nuanced complexity of economic inequality in real-world contexts through the self-reported survey method, without manipulations or hypothetical scenarios, and focusing on measuring income inequality as perceived by participants within their societies. However, correlational designs inherently lack the ability to establish causal relationships as effectively as experimental designs. Despite this limitation, surveys provide broader generalizability and offer a more realistic portrayal of societal dynamics by directly measuring participants' perceptions of inequality and reporting their actual perspectives without manipulation.

Both methodologies present distinct strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing the importance of employing complementary approaches to comprehensively understand the relationship between perceived inequality and status-seeking or conspicuous consumption. Nonetheless, a limitation of our study is the disproportionate gender representation in the Italian sample, where female participants outnumber male participants. This imbalance could affect the generalizability of our findings and should be considered when interpreting the results.

Global Perspective: Our study's focus on Egypt and Italy provides fresh insights into how perceived inequality influences consumer behavior in both developing and developed country contexts. Most existing research on conspicuous consumption and consumer behavior in relation to inequality has concentrated on developed countries. For example, studies like those by Charles et al. (2009) and Ordabayeva & Chandon (2011) have extensively examined these phenomena within the United States, while Walasek & Brown (2015, 2016) predominantly included developed nations in their cross-national analyses. These studies often overlook developing countries, leaving a gap in understanding how inequality impacts consumer behavior in different economic contexts. By including Egypt, our research addresses

this gap and offers a comparative analysis that highlights potential differences and similarities in consumer behavior across diverse socioeconomic landscapes. This broader perspective is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of how perceived inequality shapes consumer behavior globally.

Conspicuous Consumption and Green Purchase Behavior: The correlations between conspicuous consumption and the Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) in both countries were relatively weak, indicating that conspicuous consumption may not strongly predict actual adoption of green products. This finding underscores the importance of considering various factors beyond conspicuous consumption in shaping sustainable consumption behaviors, such as environmental awareness, personal values and beliefs, social influence, economic factors, convenience and accessibility, brand trust and perception, as well as cultural and religious values.

Attitudes, Intentions, and Green Purchase Behavior: Additionally, the correlations between Green Purchase Attitudes Scale (GPA), Green Purchase Intentions Scale (GPI), and Green Purchase Acceptance Scale (AGP) in both Egypt and Italy reveal significant associations between consumers' attitudes, intentions, and actual purchase behavior towards green products. These findings align with the notion that consumers' attitudes towards green purchases play a crucial role in shaping their intentions to engage in sustainable consumption practices. Specifically, the strong correlations observed between GPA and AGP, as well as between GPI and AGP, suggest that favorable attitudes towards green products and intentions to purchase them are strong indicators of actual green purchase behavior.

These results challenge the findings of previous studies, such as Mostafa's research on the Egyptian market, which suggested a weak link between intention and actual purchase behavior (2007). Contrary to this assertion, our study indicates that in both Egypt and Italy, consumers' attitudes and intentions towards green purchases align with their reported adoption of green products. This suggests that despite potential discrepancies between declarative statements of environmental concern and actual behavior, consumers who hold positive attitudes towards sustainability and express intentions to purchase green products are more likely to follow through with their intentions and make environmentally friendly purchasing decisions.

Therefore, the strong correlations observed in our study underscore the importance of understanding consumers' attitudes and intentions towards sustainability in predicting their reported green purchase behavior. These findings have significant implications for marketers, policymakers, and businesses aiming to promote sustainable consumption practices,

highlighting the need to focus on shaping positive attitudes and intentions towards green products to drive actual adoption and consumption.

Perceived Inequality and Attitudes towards Climate Change: In both Egypt and Italy, our study uncovered a correlation between perceived inequality and attitudes towards climate change. While the strength of these correlations was modest, the consistency of the association across two culturally and socioeconomically distinct nations is noteworthy. These findings suggest that perceptions of societal inequality may influence individuals' attitudes towards climate change, indicating a potential link between socioeconomic disparities and environmental concerns. Such insights underscore the importance of considering broader societal factors when examining attitudes and behaviors related to environmental issues, highlighting the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental dynamics. Further research exploring the underlying mechanisms driving this relationship could provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to address both climate change and inequality on a global scale.

Conclusion

Through an in-depth exploration of consumer behaviors and perceptions in Egypt and Italy, this study has illuminated various facets of how perceived inequality, conspicuous consumption, and attitudes towards climate change intersect within diverse socioeconomic contexts. Our findings challenge conventional wisdom by revealing nuanced relationships and shedding light on the complex interplay between societal dynamics and consumer behavior. By focusing on perceived inequality rather than objective measures, we have contributed to a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying individuals' responses to inequality and its implications for consumer behavior. Additionally, our comparative analysis between Egypt and Italy underscores the importance of considering cultural, economic, and environmental factors in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors on a global scale. These insights have significant implications for policymakers, businesses, and researchers alike, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches to address pressing societal challenges such as inequality and climate change. As we move forward, further interdisciplinary research and collaborative efforts will be crucial in developing effective strategies to promote sustainable consumption practices and foster more equitable societies worldwide.

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