

Materialistic Values Versus Sustainable Consumption Practices in Qatar's Multicultural Society: Insights for Policy Strategies

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Consumption values concerning materialism and social status are evolving in Qatar, signaling a transitional shift toward sustainable consumption practices. This policy brief presents findings derived from a recent survey that offers decision-makers valuable evidence on the consumption values driving economic behavior toward sustainable consumption practice in Qatar. Amid rapid economic modernization, there is a growing tension between traditional prudence and global consumerism. The findings highlight an emerging shift in consumption values toward sustainability, reflecting an increased awareness of environmental impacts and the importance of adopting sustainable consumption practices. These evolving social values regarding consumption behavior present a critical opportunity to guide policies that foster responsible consumption aligned with Qatar's sustainability goals.

Behavioral economics models provide a valuable framework for designing strategies that promote shifts in consumption values and behaviors toward more sustainable consumption practices¹. Understanding consumption values and social status comparisons in a multicultural society like Qatar's is critical in navigating the economic policy landscape, which is shaped by diverse demographic and economic factors in addition to cultural influences, and ensuring a sustainable future. Using SESRI's Consumption Values Survey data, the objective of this policy brief is to share key findings on consumption values and social status comparison and evaluate perceptions of sustainable consumption practices in Qatari society.

Data Sources

Data obtained from the "Consumption Values and Behavior Survey of Qatar 2024," which was conducted by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) were used for this analysis. This nationally representative survey employed computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) and stratified random sampling across Qatar's administrative zones to gather data from 2,026 households, including 983 Qataris and 1,043 high-income expatriates.

The survey collected comprehensive information on residents' income, consumption patterns, economic well-being, consumption values and preferences, and sustainable consumption behaviors. The survey assessed the socio-cultural, psychological, and economic factors influencing consumption values and behaviors using multidimensional scales rooted in behavioral economics. This robust methodological approach allows a comprehensive understanding of consumption dynamics in Qatar, supporting evidence-based policy development.

Consumption Values and Social Status Comparisons

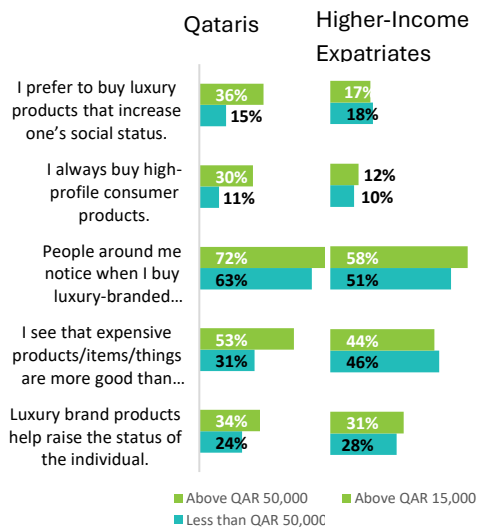
Consumption values regarding materialism encompass judgments based on product quality, price, convenience, personal tastes, social status comparisons, and socioeconomic factors, influencing how consumers evaluate and choose goods and services².

This section presents results on perceptions of social and material values among Qatari residents.

A large proportion of respondents (72% Qataris and 58% of higher-income expatriates) stated that people around them notice them when they buy luxury branded products (Figure 1).

The results indicate significant differences in consumption values and preferences between Qataris and higher-income expatriates. The income level is a remarkable predictor of social values regarding the acquisition of luxurious goods. In particular, larger proportions of Qatari nationals with a higher monthly income agreed with all the statements related to luxury consumption than expatriates (see Figure 1). Notable differences are found in social value perceptions between Qataris with income above QAR 50,000 and Qataris with an income below QAR 50,000. For instance, significantly higher proportion of Qatari nationals with an income above the threshold (QAR 50, 000) reported a preference for luxury goods that increase social status (36%) and high-profile consumer products (30%) than those with a lower income 15% and 11% respectively, (see Figure 1).

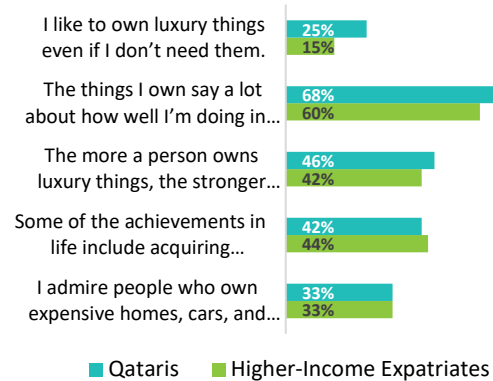
Figure 1. Agreement with Social and Material Values of Consumption Goods by Respondents' Nationality and Income Level



Research shows that individuals care about their not only consumption relative to others, deriving utility not only from owned goods but also the social status these goods confer³. Understanding how social status comparisons relating consumption behavior help to understand how material possessions signify achievements and social status.

Figure 2 shows that Qatari nationals (25%) were more likely to own luxury consumption goods than expatriates (15%), reflecting the cultural norms that make the ownership of luxury products a symbol of a higher social status. A higher proportion of Qataris reported that owning more luxury items indicates stronger social status (46%) and that possessions reflect a prosperous life (68%) as compared to expatriates (42% and 60% respectively, see Figure 2). Most respondents (62%) agreed that their possessions reflect how well they are doing in life.

Figure 2. Agreement with Social Status Comparison and Happiness Statements by Respondents' Nationality

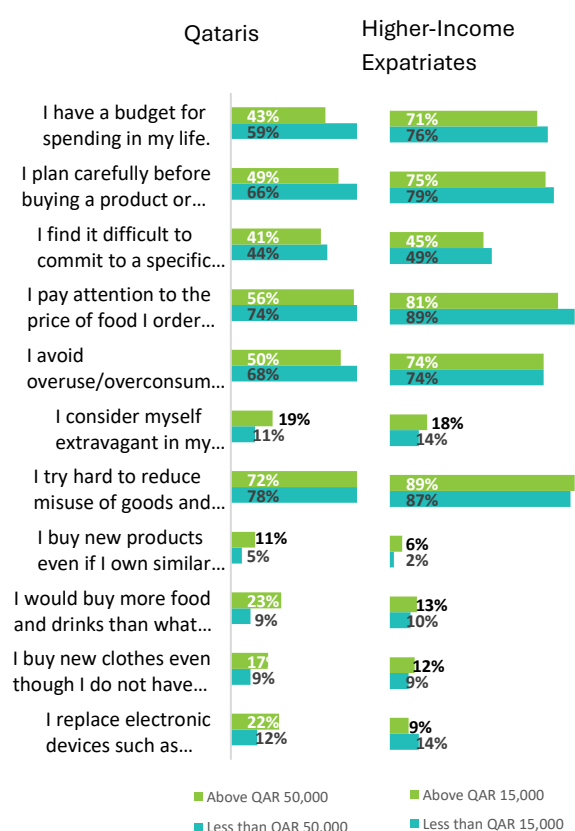


Sustainable Consumption Practices

Sustainable consumption behavior refers to the choices and actions of consumers that prioritize environmental sustainability throughout the entire lifecycle of products—from production and usage to disposal⁴.

Nearly half of Qataris and over two thirds of expatriates are conscious of sustainable consumption practices. Higher-income expatriates demonstrated a stronger commitment to sustainable practices, with 73 percent budgeting regularly, compared to 50 percent of Qataris, and 77 percent planning purchases carefully, as compared to 57 percent of Qataris. Similarly, a higher proportion of expatriates (73%) reported avoiding overconsumption than Qataris (59%) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Agreement with Sustainable Consumption and Budget Planning Practices by Respondents' Nationality Income Level



SES and Nationality Disparities

There are notable disparities in sustainable consumption practices regarding social values based on nationality and socioeconomic status variables, specifically education, gender and per capita monthly consumption expenditure quintile. Qatari nationals exhibited higher levels of consumption-oriented materialistic and social status values as compared to expatriates highlighting the need to address these disparities through targeted policy initiatives regarding pro-environment economic behaviour in Qatar. Substantial disparities were found in the perceptions of social norms and sustainable consumption practices between low-and high-income Qatari households highlighting a key opportunity to improve awareness of sustainable consumption practices.

The study provides baseline evidence for the duality of materialism as well as sustainable consumption practice highlighting the latter as a psychological counterweight to the prevalence of the hedonistic values of consumption among Qataris. Over half of the respondents expressed a preference for environmentally friendly and energy-efficient products. Gender and education related differences in attitudes toward non-essential spending underscore the need for targeted interventions, including tailored messaging and financial literacy programs, to promote sustainable consumption values and behaviors across diverse demographic groups. The findings of this study present a critical opportunity to guide policies that foster responsible consumption aligned with Qatar's sustainability goals. Integrating sustainability into consumption values can shift societal norms, encouraging the wider adoption of environmentally responsible practices.

These findings align with Qatar's National Vision 2030, which prioritizes sustainable environmental practices development by fostering equitable economic growth to ensure a high standard of living for all residents

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Policy Recommendations

1. Targeted awareness campaigns and incentive-based programs are essential in promoting sustainable consumption practices for higher income groups in Qatar.
2. Embedding sustainability in consumption values can transform societal norms, encouraging the broader adoption of environmentally responsible behaviors and practices.
3. Gender, education and nationality related differences in attitudes toward non-essential spending underscore the need for policy interventions targeting economic behavior.