

Beyond Nostalgia: Decomposing Ideology and Heritage in Post-Socialist Consumer Choice

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Abstract

Does socialist ideology shape consumer choice decades after regime change? We leverage German reunification as a natural experiment to isolate ideological effects, analyzing 5.2 million retail transactions. We define a dual classification system to test for both heritage nostalgia and ideological avoidance. East Germans simultaneously prefer heritage brands, for example, for washing machines, showing a preference that is 10.8 percentage points higher, while avoiding Western premium brands. The ideological avoidance effect is the more powerful mechanism, suggesting class-based brand rejection outweighs cultural nostalgia. Critically, effects are product-specific: heritage preference requires authentic historical production, and avoidance weakens when premium brands dominate the market. Our findings offer credible evidence of lasting socialist socialization effects, providing implications for managers entering post-transition economies.

Track: Retailing & Omni-Channel Management