RESEARCH ON CURRENT CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF COLLEGE
STUDENTS IN CHINA

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As an important part of the consumer group in society, the consumer behavior of university students is highly representative and forward-looking. Therefore, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to pay attention to and study the consumption behavior of university students, to find out the unreasonable factors and their causal factors, and to guide the healthy consumption of university students through the three-dimensional education of society, family and school, so as to promote students' overall development and social progress.

This article starts with the basic theories of consumer behavior, conducts surveys in four universities in Dalian, classifies and describes students' consumer behavior based on Maslow's theory of needs and sustainable consumption theory, and outlines the current situation of students' consumer behavior, identifies the main problems of students' consumer behavior, analyses the reasons consumer behavior of students from four aspects: society, family, school and the students themselves. Finally, based on the empirical data, the main countermeasures to solve the consumption problems are proposed.

Keywords: college students; consumer behavior; sustainable consumption; new consumer

Introduction

Research background

The consumer behavior of university students is an important reflection of their values. In the domestic environment where the economy is developing rapidly and the scale of universities is expanding, university students, as a group of consumers who receive higher education and decide the future development of the country, have a profound impact on the entire country and society whether their consumer behavior is reasonable or not (Dai & Song, 2006).

The guidance and education of students' consumer behavior is an important part of their education. It is the responsibility of society to establish the correct consumer attitudes.
among university students, and the education of consumer attitudes is a huge and complex systemic project that cannot be achieved overnight. It is the responsibility of the whole society to establish a correct consumer concept among university students (Jiang, 2002).

In recent years, the number of works on the consumption behavior of university students has been increasing, marking a new stage in the study of the consumer behavior of university students in China.

It is of great practical significance and theoretical value to analyze and study the current situation of university students' consumer behavior, identify the unreasonable factors among them and provide guidance and education.

**Research problems**

University students are an important part of the consumer group in society because they have higher education, broader knowledge, more complex knowledge structures and deeper theoretical levels. They represent the most active, most responsive and least conservative group of intellectuals and are the driving force of future social development. In times of rapid social change and transformation, the values of university students often determine the direction of social change (Deng, 2005).

The exemplary effect of Western consumerism and hedonic consumer concepts and lifestyle is particularly strong and widespread among contemporary university students in China, which has led to new characteristics of university students' consumer behavior in the era of globalization, as well as to confusion in the convergence and collision of Chinese and Western views on consumption (Cui, 2004).

This has led to confusion between the Chinese and the Western views on consumption, with high consumption, overconsumption, blind imitation, illegal consumption, and other irrational consumption becoming a topic of social concern. Therefore, it is necessary for us to analyze and study this special group of consumers objectively and scientifically, to explore the characteristics and laws of consumption of contemporary university students, and to clarify the interrelationship between various social factors affecting the consumer behavior of contemporary university students, to do a good job in educating university students and correctly guiding their consumption (Li, 2006).

**The objective of the study**

In recent years, the number of works on the consumer behavior of university students has increased, which marks a new stage in the study of the consumer behavior of university students in China. It is of great practical significance and theoretical value to analyze and study the current situation of university students' consumer behavior, identify the unreasonable factors among them and provide guidance and education.

- To collate the relevant theoretical literature on the study of Chinese university students' consumer behavior and positive consumer behavior.
- To analyze the data collected from the survey and summarize the current situation of the consumer behavior of contemporary university students.

**Scope of the study**

The study is based on a review of literature and theoretical knowledge of consumer behavior and consumer psychology, and a survey is designed to investigate and analyze the structure of university students' consumer behavior and their attitudes towards consumption.
Research significance

The formation of values is closely related to the usual behavioral habits. Some students have the idea of extravagant consumption and hedonism, and some of them even talk about such verbal phrases as "life is short, enjoy it in time", which highlights the lack of education and guidance on student consumption. This highlights the current situation of insufficient education and guidance for university students on the concept of consumption.

Therefore, analyzing the consumption structure of university students, identifying the problems in their consumption and guiding them in a reasonable way is a process of cultivating values based on behavioral education, which is highly relevant at the current stage of university students' unreasonable consumption structure and unhealthy consumer concepts (Cui, 2004).

Through the cultivation and guidance of consumption and money concepts, students will understand the importance of healthy and positive consumer concepts, which will play an extremely important role in the development of correct values and will also play an important role in promoting the overall development of students.

With the rapid expansion of universities, the number of university students' consumption groups in China is increasing, and under the influence of many factors, the consumption structure of college students is also changing, and some students have the phenomenon of unreasonable consumption structure, which brings greater burden to their families and society (Lin, 2001).

The study of the consumer behavior of university students, the identification of their consumption patterns, and the formulation of rational suggestions for their problematic consumption are conducive to improving their consumer structures and concepts, thereby reducing the economic burden on their families, and are of great importance to the construction of a harmonious society. At the same time, by creating a reasonable consumption structure and reducing unnecessary loss and waste in the consumption of university students, it is conducive to purifying the consumption environment on campus, thereby creating a positive and healthy consumption atmosphere in the whole society and promoting the process of building a harmonious society (Deng, 2005).

Hypotheses

H1: Monthly household income is positively correlated with total monthly consumption of university students.

H2: When university students consume due to the attitude factor, the attitude factor variable has the strongest correlation with gender.

Literatures review

Consumption and consumer behavior

Consumption is defined in a broad sense and in a narrow sense. Consumption in a broad sense includes production consumption, which refers to the consumption of tools, raw materials, fuel, manpower and other means of production and living labor in the production process, and personal consumption, which refers to the consumption of various material means of subsistence, labor, and spiritual goods by people to satisfy their own needs (Lu & He, 2003).
Consumption in a narrow sense refers to personal consumption. In general, when we talk about consumption, we mean consumption in the narrow sense, i.e., personal consumption. Individual consumption has a dual nature, being both a natural process and a social process (Guo, 2007).

On the one hand, people consume all kinds of consumer goods and services to satisfy their physiological and psychological needs, such as food to relieve hunger and clothing to protect themselves from cold, which reflect the natural process of consumption (Ma, 2006). On the other hand, people’s consumption activities are always carried out in the context of certain social relations and cannot be carried out in isolation from society, which is why they are social in nature (Wang, 2006).

Consumer behavior is the sum of people’s behavior in acquiring and consuming goods to satisfy their material and cultural needs in their daily lives (including clothing, food, housing, transport and labor), and in accordance with their income conditions, and it includes the ways and means of consumer behavior, the process of behavior and its changes (Xu, 2003). It includes the ways and means of consumer behavior, the process of behavior and its changes (Cui, 2004). Consumption is mainly characterized by the act of buying, which is the process by which people buy goods to satisfy their needs.

Consumer behavior is a means of satisfying a need or desire. The act of consumption is a product of mental activity. It is a process. Consumer behavior is not something that happens now when a consumer pays money or uses a credit card to obtain certain goods or services, it is a process (Shi & Huang, 2004).

According to individual economic theory, the process of consumer behavior can be divided into six stages:

1. Awareness stage: discovering the existence of a product.
2. Understanding stage: learning about the usefulness of the product.
3. Liking stage: developing a favorable impression of the product.
4. Preference stage: extending a favorable impression of the product to other aspects.
5. Persuasion stage: developing a desire to buy due to preference, believing that buying is a wise choice.
6. Purchase stage: the change from attitude to actual action. These stages are closely related and inseparable (Ma, 2002).

These six stages follow each other in time and coexist in space. It is a circular, spiraling process that always starts with the need to consume and ends with the satisfaction of the need to consume through various choices of purchasing activities.

**Consumer behavior of university students**

The consumer behavior of university students is usually defined as the process of consuming material and spiritual goods during their daily life, in order to satisfy their own needs and in accordance with their economic conditions (which mostly depend on the economic conditions of their families). The consumer behavior of university students meets all the characteristics of general consumer behavior. Compared to the average consumer, university students are a special group of consumers (Zhang, 2003).

First, university students are at an age when they are young, physically, and mentally mature and have the ability to work. However, as they are enrolled in higher education, they spend most of their time and energy on their studies and are not able to work full time and therefore do not have a stable economic income (Ruan, 2005).
Secondly, students have stable financial resources (Zhang, 2001). Their living expenses are either brought to school from home in a lump sum each semester or sent home every month. Even families with modest incomes do their best to meet their students' spending needs. In addition, most university students study away from home, live relatively independently and without parental restrictions, and therefore have absolute control over their own living expenses (Guo, 2007).

This is a special feature of university student expenses.

**New consumer theory**

American scholar David Lewis introduced the concept of the new consumer. He points out that the past few years have seen a rapid development and increase in the economic importance of a group of consumers whose attitudes, aspirations and buying patterns are different from those of any previous group of consumers - the new consumers (Dai & Song, 2006). They are called new because they have a very distinctive consumption style.

The authors point out that the new consumers are more individualistic, focused, independent and well-informed. Firstly, the new consumers are much better able to see and describe things with their eyes, to adapt and make sense of complex situations, and very quickly look away from computer games, pop records, television advertisements and films, i.e. they can quickly adapt to the rapid movement of their vision and make sense of certain information more easily; the new consumers are independent thinkers, with an increasing dominance of the consumer as an individual and a relative reduction in the importance of society (Cui, 2004).

New consumers are independent thinkers and increasingly dominant as individuals, while the importance of society is relatively low; the new consumers demand product uniqueness while still ensuring practicality. In addition, new consumers are in an era of rapid social development, where the Internet and telephone are so widespread that they are particularly well informed about products (Ruan, 2005).

These characteristics are very much in line with the consumption characteristics of today's university students, and therefore it is necessary to analyze the consumption behavior and philosophy of university students in China based on the new consumer theory.
Culture of sustainable consumer theory

The concept of "sustainable consumption" first appeared in the 1994 United Nations Environment Program report Policy Dimensions of Sustainable Consumption, which stated that sustainable consumption is "the provision of services and related products to meet basic human needs and improve the quality of life, while reducing the use of natural resources and toxic materials and minimizing waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to endanger the needs of future generations (Zhang, 2006).

Sustainable consumption makes new demands on our existing consumption attitudes, habits, structures and patterns: on the one hand, we must oppose excessive frugality and the "developmental" nature of consumption, which only satisfies subsistence needs to the neglect of consumption; on the other hand, we must reject the "developmental" nature of consumption. "We must also oppose extravagance and wastefulness, especially the unrestrained focus on material enjoyment to the neglect of ecological and environmental constraints and social justice constraints, i.e. the neglect of the "sustainability" of consumption (Dai & Song, 2006).

Achieving sustainable consumption is fundamentally a question of the ecological ethics of consumption. Sustainable consumption aims to reduce the negative economic, social, and environmental impacts of people's consumption of products and services. Therefore, the core concept of sustainable consumption is to be green, moderate, civilized, and healthy. According to the research by Chinese scholars on sustainable consumption, sustainable consumption patterns should follow the following principles:

1. the principle of moderate consumption.
2. the principle of fair consumption.
3. the principle of people-oriented consumption.
4. the principle of scientific consumption.
5. the principle of harmonious consumption (Zhang, 2002).

Research methodology

This study used quantitative research methods. The study is based on a review of literature and theoretical knowledge of consumer behavior and consumer psychology. The questionnaire is designed to investigate and analyze the structure of university students' consumption behavior and their attitudes towards consumption, to understand in detail the current situation of university students' consumer behavior in Dalian.

The study is based on theories of consumer behavior, theoretical knowledge of consumer psychology, the rapid development of China's market economy and the fact that the consumption level in Dalian is relatively high among the cities in China. The thesis is based on the theoretical knowledge of consumer behavior, consumer psychology, communication, and other disciplines.

Based on the characteristics of contemporary college students' consumer behavior, a questionnaire on the current situation of college students' consumer behavior was prepared with reference to relevant materials.

Using non-probability sampling, 500 copies of the survey were distributed in four universities in Dalian to find out the current situation and problems of the consumer behavior of university students, which will provide strong evidence for the thesis.
A total of 500 students from four universities in Dalian, Liaoning Province, were selected for this survey. The questionnaires were distributed by non-random sampling, and 550 questionnaires were returned, of which 478 were valid, with a valid return rate of 86.9%.

The survey is in a closed-ended format. A closed-ended survey is one in which the researcher has designed the questions and the possible answers in advance, and the respondents can only choose one or a few ready-made answers from among the alternatives.

**Finding and conclusion**

**Survey on the monthly consumption level among students**

Monthly expenses are the average monthly cost of living for students during their university studies. This includes ordinary monthly expenses for basic food, clothing, housing and transport, as well as other expenses such as socializing, entertainment and leisure. Understanding the monthly consumption of university students helps us understand the general characteristics and consumption patterns of today’s students. In a survey of the total monthly consumption, we found that 62.4% of university students spend between RMB 500 and 1,200 per month; 25.7% spend less than RMB 500 per month, and 5.9% of students in difficulty spend even less than RMB 300 per month; on the other hand, 13% of students spend more than RMB 1,200 per month.

In the correlation analysis, we use Pearson's product distance correlation coefficient (abbreviated as r) to describe the correlation analysis of each factor. 0.90 is a significant correlation; and 0.90-1 is the highest correlation. The analysis found that the total monthly consumption of university students was not correlated with gender, major, grade and whether they were the only children, but was correlated with family location and monthly family income. It can be seen that the location of a university student's family has an influence on the total amount of monthly consumption.

Among the students who spend more than RMB 1,200 per month, 71% of students whose families live in large and medium-sized cities and 29% of urban students, while no rural students spend more than RMB 1,200. 68.4% of students in large and medium-sized cities, and urban students spend more than RMB 800 per month. In contrast, 88.9% of rural students spend less than RMB 800 per month. This shows that there is a correlation between household location and the total monthly consumption of university students.

The correlation coefficient is r=0.519, which is positive and significant. 82.8% of students with a monthly household income of less than RMB 1,000 have a monthly consumption of less than RMB 800, while 73.3% of students with a monthly household income of more than RMB 5,000 have a monthly consumption of more than RMB 800, and 40% of them have a monthly consumption of more than RMB 1,200. These students spend more than RMB 1,200 per month.

**The current state of consumer attitudes among university students**

In a survey on whether university students often use shopping to regulate their mood, 51.7% of students chose "yes" and "quite yes", indicating that university students' consumption is clearly influenced by their mood. In the correlation analysis of the variable "often use shopping as a way to regulate my mood", we found the strongest correlation between this variable and gender. 69.5% of the female students chose "very much" and "quite often", while 38.2% of the male students chose both.
Most contemporary university students are in their twenties, and they are at the forefront of the times, pursuing new and different ideas, and keenly grasping fashion, lest they fall behind the trend of the times. In the survey, we found that 45.2% of students said that they were willing to spend more money on brand name products for the same quality of products because they could bring them a sense of satisfaction and self-confidence. Another 36.4% of students like to pursue fashionable and trendy products and always take pride in being the first to consume a product that is recently advertised by a retailer or seen in a fashion magazine.

The data shows that 71.5% of students would definitely invite themselves if they had the opportunity, 24.7% would choose "average" and only 3.8% would choose "not quite" and "very". Only 3.8% of students chose "not quite" and "not very".

**Conclusion**

Through this survey, we can see that as a group of young people receiving higher education, university students’ consumption is overall in a stable state, and pragmatic and rational consumption is the mainstream of university students' consumption at present.

The main thing is to spend within one's means. When shopping, the quality, usage and cost effectiveness of goods are the main factors that attract them to spend money. Affordability is the first factor that students consider when shopping. However, the advantages of the canteens, such as proximity, accessibility, convenience and speed still make them the main channel for students to eat. Students basically spend the money provided by their parents in a planned manner, and it is the mainstream of students' consumption to live within their means.

Secondly, the consumption structure is diverse. As the basic material needs of students are guaranteed, they begin to pursue the quality of life, and the direction of their consumption shifted to the need for goods and services and spiritual and cultural products. The trend is to increase the amount of money spent on communication, socializing and travel. The trend of diversification of consumption structure is obvious.

Thirdly, the psychology of consumption is very flexible. College students are in the stage of understanding things, and they can easily accept new things. When buying goods, they do not have a fixed concept of consumption, so whether it is the consumer concept from the family or society’s consumption fashion, the consumption psychology of university students will change, especially the influence of celebrities and advertising cannot be underestimated. The consumption psychology of university students shows a strong flexibility.

Fourth, the respect for sustainable consumption. When shopping, they tend to choose environmentally friendly products that do not pollute the environment or contribute to public health. They strive to practice a culture of sustainable consumption that is moderate, fair and people-oriented, and guide the public to moderate, civilized and healthy consumption. New consumers are also committed to sustainable consumption.

The consumer behavior and attitudes of university students are reasonable under current conditions. First of all, university students have no financial income, they have a fixed amount of money at their disposal each month, and they gradually develop a rational concept of consumption in their lives, trying to consume as carefully as possible given their limited spending power, so that they can develop a reasonable and healthy consumption
behavior. Secondly, university students are more capable of accepting new things and have various channels to learn about the outside world, which makes them very attractive to various new things in society. Furthermore, university students are highly educated and have a high sense of social responsibility, so they have a strong sense of identification with consumption patterns that are beneficial to the health of society.

However, we also find that there are some unreasonable aspects in the current consumption of university students. Some students' consumption is out of the harmonious environment of the university campus, and the phenomenon of undesirable consumption such as super high consumption and blind imitation consumption is serious.

Recommendation

First, it is necessary to optimize the social environment for college students' consumption, which is a prerequisite for guiding college students' healthy consumption; secondly, the concept of family should be changed and university students should be provided with moderate support, which is the backing guarantee for guiding university students' healthy consumption behaviors; thirdly, it is necessary to strengthen ideological and political work and enhance university students' "financial intelligence" education, which is the key to guiding university students' healthy consumption.

This is the key to guiding healthy consumption among university students; fourthly, university students themselves should strengthen their study and self-education, and establish a good consumer concept, which is the root of the problem.

References:


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