

Chinese University Students' Self-Concept and Purchase Decision for Clothing

Yuan Cao

Abstract—Clothing is a significant part of social life. They are a kind of visible “selfhood” than keep warm. People can express their ideas and the images they have of themselves through clothing, and the consumption concept has evolved significantly. As a distinct consumer group, Chinese university students exhibit more complex consumer behavior and psychology. Chinese university students have a high potential for consumption. Thus, this paper chose Chinese university students as subjects, studying their self-concept and purchase decision, and then discussing the relationship between them. Factor analysis is used to investigate the situation and dimensions of students' self-concept and clothing purchasing decisions to better understand the quantitative relationship between them. Questionnaires on Chinese university student's self-conception and clothing purchase decision is designed to divide the factors. Chinese university student's self-conception mainly includes 4 factors: positive impulse, extraversion, personality, and pragmatic. Their clothing purchase decision mainly includes 5 factors: quality service, variety choices, brand loyalty, social responsibility. Through correlation analysis, there exists relevance of various degrees between self-concept and purchase decision. There are differences between one's ideal self and one's actual self, resulting in different purchase decision. According to the survey findings, Chinese university students are increasingly seeking individualism, fashion trends, and diversity in their clothing selections, therefore marketers should emphasize this in their brand communication and promotion efforts.

Index Terms—Chinese university students, self-concept, purchase decision, clothing.

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese university students' consumption has taken on a new trend of consumption. Yet frugality is a traditional eastern concept of consumption. This inherent contradiction plays a key role in the diversification of the consumption structure and the emergence of new consumption forms among young people. Clothing is no longer merely a means of daily wear, but also a means of expressing personal aesthetics and self-worth, as it has become such a significant instrument for self-expression. university students, as a distinct consumer category, are not yet financially self-sufficient. However, the enormous consumption potential buried behind them should not be underestimated, and they are the primary consumer force that cannot be overlooked in the future.

Reference [1] suggests that the self-concept include an individual's self-esteem and an understanding of the clarity, harmony, development, effectiveness, and personal interest

in the development status' capacity and potential. The self-concept model in [2] is the reference model chosen by most scholars for their research. This model suggests that the self-concept can be divided into four dimensions: the ideal and real, private, and social self. Based on clinical practice, Reference [3] presents the real self and its counterpart, the ideal self. They argue that the ideal self represents the individual's desire to acquire a self-concept, an ideal concept. The real self is a self-perceived being, reflecting their experiences and objective observations and evaluations, through which people can understand their true selves. Reference [4] argues that the self is 'impressionable' and very susceptible to contextual influences. Reference [5] argues that consumers are drawn towards brands that reflect both their actual self and ideal social self-concepts. Reference [3] emphasizes that consumer decision making refers to the process by which consumers rationally choose and evaluate a product, brand, or service. Consumer decision-making consists of two main types, ideal and emotional consumption. The ideal consumption is a consumption pattern in which consumers focus on the value for money of the products they buy. The emotional consumption decision, on the other hand, refers to the consumption pattern that consumer tend to satisfy their spiritual needs through consumption and hope to reflect their social status and personal taste through products. Reference [6] presents that consumers' decision-making processes and psychosocial effects are reflected through their purchase intentions, desired social images, and perceptions. Reference [7] is the first to use empirical research to measure consumer decision styles, noting that consumer decision styles refer to the psychological dispositions that consumers exhibit towards certain choices. Reference [8] studies the applicability of the consumer decision style inventory across different cultures, using university students from India, Greece and New Zealand as well as the United States. The study concluded that the consumer decision style inventory has a strong applicability and is largely applicable across these countries, with cross-cultural consistency. Some of the dimensions may vary according to culture. In addition, Reference [9] uses the consumer decision style scale to test young people in the USA and Korea. The results shows that the consumer decision style scale is equally applicable to Korean and American youth. Reference [10] also uses the consumer decision style scale to test students in Guangzhou, concluded that consumption decision styles can be classified into five dimensions, namely time, price, brand, quality, and choice confusion. To achieve a consumer-brand match, or congruence, firms must consider both the brand personality and the consumer psychological concepts and motivation, to understand consumers better [11]. Reference [12] studies that clothing mediates between the naked body and the social

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world as a symbol of the self. For quite some time, marketers have known that consumers utilize clothing to construct their self-identities and communicate those identities to others. Reference [13], [14] presents that the key to purchase decisions is to link values and self-concept.

However, to achieve a consumer-brand match, or congruence, firms must consider both the brand personality and the consumer psychological concepts and motivation, including self-guides and self-esteem to understand luxury consumers better.

Consumer self-concept influences all aspects of consumer behavior, and there is a certain cognitive and affective nature to purchase decision as an important factor in the field of consumer behavior. Therefore, most researchers assert that self-concept has some relevance to purchase decision. However, not many researchers have conducted on the consumer behavior of Chinese university students, especially in clothing. This study analyses the link between Chinese university students' self-concept and purchase decision. This study concludes that brands should meet the individual needs of university students, their pursuit of quality and service when developing their marketing strategies. Avoid homogenization and grasp the fashion trendsetter, whereas establishing a strong sense of social responsibility for the brand. This paper is organized as follows: Section II provides methods. Section III describes the results. The discussion is presented in Section IV. Finally, the conclusions are drawn in Section V.

II. METHODS

A. Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis is formulated on a summary of the collated literature, the development of the questionnaire is completed, and the scales of self-concept and purchase decision are identified through factor analysis. In general, the self-concept consists of two main basic norms, one is the maintenance of self-consistency and the other is the reinforcement of self-respect. In turn, these two are somewhat related in that self-respect is the basis for achieving self-consistency, but to achieve self-respect, one must first allow their behavior to constantly converge towards the ideal self, so this paper proposes the first hypothesis:

H1: The difference between the real self and the ideal self can have an impact on the purchasing behavior of university students.

The psychological perceptions and consumption characteristics of consumers when shopping is at the heart of purchase decision research. It follows that there must be a correlation between purchase decision habits and consumer self-concept. Therefore, the second hypothesis of this study is as follows:

H2: The relationship between university students' purchasing decision habits and consumer self-concept.

B. Research Steps and Procedures

To investigate the discrepancies between university students' realistic and ideal self-concepts, as well as their apparel purchase decision, students in the first to fourth year of university are the main subjects of this study. First,

through pre-study and combined with the actual situation of the project study, the items that are not significant are removed. Exploratory factor analysis is conducted to screen items and initially determine the structure of the Self-Concept Scale and the Clothing Purchase Decision Scale for college students.

Then release of official questionnaires through the online questionnaire research platform. The subjects are randomly selected to administer the test to 250 Chinese university students, invalid questionnaires are removed, and 231 valid questionnaires are finally collected. Gender composition is 97 (42.0%) male and 134 (58.0%) female. There are 53 (22.9%) only children and 178 (77.1%) non-only children. Additional information on the respondents is shown in Table I. Participation is voluntary.

TABLE I: BASIC INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONNAIRES

	Frequency	Percentage(%)	
Grade	First Year	29	12.6
	Second year	43	18.6
	Third Year	50	21.6
	Fourth year	109	47.2
Major	Science&Engineerring	79	34.2
	Arts& Sciences	83	35.9
	Medicine	4	1.7
	Arts	31	13.4
Monthly clothing expenses	Others	34	14.7
	Under ¥500	97	42.0
	¥500-¥1000	66	28.6
	¥1000-¥1500	38	16.5
	¥1500-¥2000	19	8.2
	¥2000 and up	11	4.8

Chinese university students' self-concept is classified into two categories: ideal and realistic self-concept. The four sub-dimensions of the realistic and ideal scales are positive impulse, extraversion, personality, and pragmatic. Responses are scored on a 5-point scale: 1 "fits very well", 2 "fits fairly well", 3 "fits generally", 4 "doesn't quite fit " and 5 "not at all". The university students' self-administered clothes purchase decision scale is divided into five dimensions: quality service, variety choices, brand loyalty, fashion trends and social responsibility. The responses are scored on a 5-point scale: 1 "strongly agree", 2 "somewhat agree", 3 "generally agree", 4 "not quite agree ", and 5 "strongly disagree".

TABLE II: MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SELF-CONCEPT

		Positive impulse	Extraversion	Personality	Pragmatic
Real	Mean	18.809	8.796	7.943	8.030
	Standard deviation	6.793	2.992	2.755	2.728
Ideal	Mean	24.930	10.424	9.086	7.653
	Standard deviation	6.113	2.791	2.524	2.456

Table II shows the mean and standard deviation of Chinese college students' self-concept. The total scores of the real and ideal self-concepts are compared in an independent sample t-test. It shows a significant difference between the two groups, with the ideal self-concept scoring significantly higher than the real self-concept. $t=-8.369$, $p=0.000$, t stands for significance test values of regression parameters, p stands for the probability of a sample observation or a more extreme result when the original hypothesis is true. It indicates that

Chinese university students desire to be more impulsive and energetic, more extroverted, and more independent. They want to be more straightforward and practical.

The mean and standard deviation of Chinese university students' clothing purchase decision are shown in Table III. There are five dimensions of Chinese university students' clothing purchase decision: quality service, variety choices, brand loyalty, fashion trends and social responsibility.

TABLE III: MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' CLOTHING PURCHASE DECISION

	Quality service	Variety choices	Brand loyalty	Fashion trends	Social responsibility
Mean	29.640	13.909	12.372	11.649	11.004
Standard deviation	8.8103	4.1268	3.160	2.669	3.173

Results of correlation analysis table between realistic self-concept and clothing purchase decision are shown in Table IV. Chinese university students' realistic self-concept is substantially connected with their clothes buying selection. In particular, the positive impulse dimension of realistic self-concept is significantly correlated with all other factors except brand loyalty. When purchasing apparel, Chinese university students are positive impulse give greater attention to quality service, variety choices, fashion trends and social responsibility. All other elements of clothing purchase decision are substantially connected with extroversion except variety choices. It indicates that extroverted students are not completely concerned with variety choices when purchasing clothing. Personality is significantly correlated with all other factors except social responsibility. It indicates that students who pursue personalized self are influenced by the quality service, variety choices, brand loyalty and fashion trends when making their purchase decision. Pragmatic is only significantly correlated with fashion trends, but not with any of the other factors. It indicates that students in this category are more concerned with fashion trends. The total self-concept score is significantly correlated with all factors except for brand loyalty, which is not significantly correlated with any of the other factors. *and ** are to distinguish between 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance in the correlation analysis. *stands for sig<0.05, ** stands for sig<0.01. In general, it is considered significant as long as it is achieved*.

TABLE IV: CORRELATION ANALYSIS TABLE BETWEEN REALISTIC SELF-CONCEPT AND CLOTHING PURCHASE DECISION

	Quality service	Variety choices	Brand loyalty	Fashion trends	Social responsibility	Total
Positive impulse	0.263**	0.159*	0.041	0.169*	0.223**	0.265**
Extraversion	0.186**	0.100	0.035	0.170**	0.184**	0.200**
Personality	0.149*	0.177**	0.157*	0.143*	0.095	0.201**
Pragmatic	0.083	0.073	0.058	0.147*	0.122	0.124
Self-concept	0.259**	0.180**	0.084	0.213**	0.231**	0.286**

Results of correlation analysis table between ideal self-concept and clothing purchase decision are shown in Table V. The dimensions of the ideal self-concept and the factors of clothing purchase decision are basically significantly correlated. In particular, the positive impulse dimension is significantly correlated with the quality service and the total score of the factor in the clothing purchase

decision, but not with the others. The extroversion dimension of self-concept is significantly correlated with all factors except fashion trends and social responsibility. It indicates that extroverted students value quality service, variety choices and brand loyalty when buying clothes. The personality dimension is not significantly correlated with quality service and social responsibility but is significantly correlated with the other factors. It indicates that students with the personality self-characteristic value fashion trends and variety choice when buying clothes. And they have higher brand fidelity. The pragmatic dimension is not significantly correlated with the other factors, except for brand loyalty and fashion trends. It indicates that students in this category value quality service, variety choices and are more likely to buy from social responsibility when making purchase decision. The total score of self-concept is significantly correlated with all factors except brand loyalty, which is not significant. This means that people with a strong self-concept are more concerned with quality service, variety choices, fashion trends and social responsibility. *and ** are to distinguish between 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance in the correlation analysis. *stands for sig<0.05, ** stands for sig<0.01. In general, it is considered significant as long as it is achieved*.

TABLE V: CORRELATION ANALYSIS TABLE BETWEEN IDEAL SELF-CONCEPT AND CLOTHING PURCHASE DECISION

	Quality Service	Variety choices	Brand Loyalty	Fashion trends	Social responsibility	Total
Positive impulse	0.155*	0.082	0.087	0.072	0.117	0.158*
Extraversion	0.179**	0.132*	0.165*	0.126	0.065	0.198**
Personality	0.083	0.150*	0.161*	0.188**	0.062	0.159*
Pragmatic	0.271**	0.200**	-0.068	0.094	0.141*	0.230**
Self-concept	0.224**	0.168*	0.119	0.145*	0.135*	0.241**

III. RESULTS

A. Developed A Self-Concept Scale and A Purchase Decision Scale for University Students

This paper established a self-concept scale and a purchasing choice scale for Chinese university students. The self-concept of Chinese university students contains four dimensions: positive impulse, extraversion, personality, and pragmatic. And the purchase decision has five dimensions: quality service, variety choices, brand loyalty, fashion trends and social responsibility. The results are validated by exploratory and validating factor analysis.

B. The Differences between The Ideal and Realistic Selves of Chinese University Students

There are certain differences between the ideal and realistic selves of Chinese university students, in that they want to be more active, more outgoing, and more individualistic. They are pragmatic.

C. A Correlation between Chinese University Students' Self-Concept and Clothing Purchase decision

There is a correlation between Chinese university students' self-concept and clothing purchase decision. This shows that Chinese university students with impulsive motivation pay more attention to quality service, variety of choices, fashion

trends and social responsibility when buying clothes. Students with extroversion do not care about variety choices when buying clothes; students pursuing individuality and self-concept pay more attention to quality service, variety choices, brand loyalty and fashion trends when making purchase decision. Chinese university students who pursue individuality and selfishness are more concerned about the quality service, variety choices and brand loyalty when making their purchase decision. Chinese university students with the characteristic of individuality and selfishness are more concerned about fashion trends and variety choices when making their purchase decision, and have higher brand loyalty, indicating that students in this category value quality service, variety choices and brand loyalty when making their purchase decision. This indicates that students in this category value quality service, variety choices and are more likely to buy from brands with a sense of social responsibility when making purchase decision.

IV. DISCUSSION

We discovered that there is still a high desire and demand for the current clothes market after analyzing the self-concept and purchase decision of Chinese university students. Clothing should be designed to satisfy the demands of Chinese university students' self-concept and purchase decision, as well as to consider the needs of students from various life situations.

A. Meeting Individual Needs

As the psychology of cultural consumption develops to the stage of individual identity, extra attention should be paid to the individual needs of consumers. Chinese university students pursuing individuality and self-identity pay more attention to the fashion trends and quality service. Brands can push fashion trends, matching strategies, and other related contents on WeChat, Weibo, and RED. When releasing each season's new items, brands should focus on showcasing the design idea and distinguishing aspects of the products.

B. Catering to The Consumer Psychology of Different Self-Concept and Market Segmentation

Chinese university students with different self-concept have different deciding factors in generating purchasing behavior, so differentiate the categories to make different marketing strategies. Brands can launch courses such as tie-dye classes, handicraft classes, and fabric experience classes for consumers who have higher expectations for fabrics and workmanship. These classes will provide consumers with an in-depth understanding of the fabric production process and will attract their attention. Brands can launch everyday activities of public welfare, such as visiting left-behind children, paying attention to the empty nest elderly, and experiencing nature, when brands catch the attention of consumers who are more concerned about socially responsible enterprises. On the one hand, this type of customer can be screened out, and on the other hand, trust and loyalty to the company can be cultivated. Consumers who require diversity in product selection, regularly update different categories of products on the official website and on Weibo to keep this category of consumers fresh to the brand.

And consumers who have a particular affinity for the brand can collect their suggestions for store decoration because of the store's design. It attracts the customers' attention and eventually generating purchase behavior.

C. Constructing The Ideal Self-Concept and Attaching Importance to Experiential Marketing

Consumer behavior is largely influenced by the symbolic meaning embedded in the goods, and consumers' attitudes towards consumption are clearly influenced by their ideal self-concept. When the consumer's ideal self-concept is consistent with the brand personality, the more positive the attitude towards the brand, the stronger the consumer's feeling towards the brands and the more inclined to produce consumption behavior. As a result, brands must not only address the practical needs of customers, but also their emotional needs, and whoever occupies the psychology of consumers will occupy the consumer market. Chinese university students have different ideal and realistic self-concept and different personality psychology. After confirming the ideal self-concept of consumers, enterprises should not only provide consumers with satisfactory services and products, but also create and provide them with comprehensive and valuable experiences.

V. CONCLUSION

The self-concept in clothing is expressed in the way consumers choose products that match their self-concept when shopping. They dress the way they want to dress and portray themselves the way they want to portray themselves. The concept of self is part of the clothing self, and for this goal the body can be compromised. Chinese university students have a strong element of individuality in their self-concept and are increasingly demanding individuality in their clothing, so clothing that expresses their individual needs will be more popular with them. Brands should incorporate Chinese university students' pursuit of individuality, demand for fashion trends. Brands need for diversity in clothing choices into their designs, and conduct brand design communication and promotion based on the survey's actual situation and consumers' buying behavior analysis. In this paper, there are some limitations that may lead the results to deviate. Firstly, the research participants are mostly from China. Thus, the results may not represent the views of all consumers around the world. Secondly, this is a self-administered scale, and as the consumer self-concept involves several disciplines including consumer psychology, social psychology, and clinical psychology. The depth of the author's knowledge and understanding of certain knowledge may have an impact on the analysis and interpretation of the data.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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