Empowering Women in Consumerism: Insights on Consumption Behavior and Motivations in the Age of Online Media

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Abstract. This research paper explores the diverse backgrounds, motivations, and mindsets of female groups, while also delving into the distinctive characteristics and marketing strategies employed by luxury brands, and how online media responds to these dynamics. The purpose of this study is to provide valuable insights that empower women to approach consumerism with a rational perspective and gain a nuanced understanding of the influence wielded by online media. The research gathers a significant portion of the relevant literature, followed by a meticulous classification and summarization of similar literature and journals. The findings reveal that women born in the 1980s, possessing higher levels of education and middle-to-upper income, tend to assign significant value to the symbolic aspects of goods. Furthermore, societal attention, online media accolades, and personal vanity emerge as crucial contributing factors to the propensity for irrational consumption of luxury items among this demographic.

Keywords: Female consumers, consumption motivation, luxury brands, consumerism.

1. Introduction

In today's society, many women find themselves enticed by various forms of consumerism promoted through online media, often becoming ensnared in a whirlwind of materialism where consumption is elevated to the highest purpose of life. The impulsive pursuit of luxury goods is a particularly prevalent manifestation of this phenomenon.

The primary research inquiries of this study revolve around understanding the motivations driving female consumers of luxury brands and evaluating how online media influences this behavior. A comprehensive review of existing literature has revealed several key insights. Firstly, it is evident that the majority of female consumer groups belong to the post-80s age bracket, and their purchasing preferences are significantly influenced by factors such as income level and educational background. Furthermore, women exhibit distinct preferences for consumer brands that align with the aesthetic sensibilities of the modern era, effectively catering to their sense of vanity. Additionally, consumption motivations within this demographic are predominantly rooted in the allure of symbolic value or the perspective of societal expectations, with certain luxury brand marketing strategies further encouraging this consumerist mindset.

Notably, online media platforms play a substantial role in perpetuating irrational consumption behaviors, often glorifying activities associated with excessive shopping, primarily driven by the pursuit of traffic and profitability. It is crucial to acknowledge that the scope of existing literature is limited to specific luxury brands, and while there is a degree of uniformity, the evolving economic landscape may impact existing consumption values and behaviors surrounding women's luxury brands.

It is important to recognize that consumption in a consumer-driven society encompasses more than just symbolic expenditure and should not be overly generalized. Rather, it serves the purpose of obtaining genuine value and fulfilling genuine needs. This study remains theoretical in nature, devoid of field interviews and surveys, hence, the validity of the gathered information and data must be taken into consideration.

In terms of research materials, a comprehensive collection of literature comprises books, journals, doctoral theses, and master's theses. This research employs textual analysis and comparative assessment to derive meaningful insights.

The central thesis of this study centers on the interplay between age group, income level, and educational background in the context of women's luxury goods consumption. By scrutinizing elements such as a brand's marketing value, product attributes, and the underlying motivations and psychology of consumer behavior through a lens of social gender, it becomes evident that women born in the 1980s with higher education levels and middle-to-upper income brackets exhibit a propensity to assign significant value to the symbolic aspects of goods. This inclination is further exacerbated by the attention received from male society, the adulation garnered from online media, and their own sense of vanity, all of which emerge as pivotal factors driving irrational luxury consumption among this demographic.

2. Consumption Behavior

2.1. Income Disparities Across Age Segments

The female consumer market can be broadly categorized into four segments: the young women's market, the market comprising young and middle-aged women, the middle-aged and elderly women's market, and the market catering to elderly women [1]. Each age group exhibits distinct preferences and purchasing behaviors. For instance, young women tend to gravitate towards novel and trendy products, seeking excitement and entertainment in their consumption choices. Conversely, the young and middle-aged women, shouldering responsibilities related to childcare and family support, predominantly invest in consumables and daily necessities, leading to frequent and substantial spending. They are more inclined towards purchasing discounted "family packages" [1]. As middle-aged and older women transition into the workforce, they find themselves with more leisure time yet facing potential declines in economic standing. Consequently, they are more drawn to high-quality, cost-effective products [2]. Among these diverse groups, post-80s women hold particular significance. Having grown up in the heyday of consumer society's evolution, they witnessed the shift from traditional consumer culture to one centered around symbolic consumption [3]. This cohort not only places importance on the availability and cost-effectiveness of goods but also endeavors to express their individuality through specific consumption choices, especially favoring well-established brands [3]. They utilize consumption as a means of self-definition, seeking precise identities within their social circles [3]. However, this phenomenon has also led post-80s women to sometimes blindly pursue elevated consumption practices within constrained economic circumstances. This can result in irrational choices driven by external influences, ultimately contributing to heightened life and work pressures. Consequently, the gratification and enjoyment derived from acquiring goods may be diminished [3].

2.2. The Impact of Women's Education

Research indicates significant disparities in the motivations of college students and high school students regarding the consumption of luxury goods. College students tend to exhibit more independent thinking, prioritizing the practical utility of goods over ostentation or conforming to herd mentality. This suggests that as a woman's level of education increases, the influence of social orientation on luxury consumption tendencies weakens [4]. Furthermore, highly educated women are less inclined to purchase counterfeit luxury goods and possess a deeper understanding of the brand culture associated with many luxury items, often favoring more niche preferences.

2.3. Characteristics of Women's Consumer Brands and Information Channels

Female consumer groups display a penchant for gathering product information from both online and offline channels, seeking a trifecta of comprehensiveness, accuracy, and effectiveness. They exhibit a keen sensitivity to public information and excel at information retrieval [5]. However, this

acuity can also render them susceptible to exaggerated advertising, potentially leading to purchases that may not be necessary or within their economic means. The literature highlights common features among many brands favored by women in terms of product, design, and promotion. These brands leverage women's attention to detail and refined sensibilities to offer products that align with women's self-image while also embodying innovation in line with the brand's ethos. In the current era, as women's cultural and economic standing continues to rise alongside a growing sense of independence, many women are rejecting societal stereotypes and eschewing products labeled with narrow gender associations. Brands have astutely recognized this paradigm shift and now strive to balance elements of both softness and strength, embodying maturity and independence [6]. Additionally, product packaging plays a noteworthy role in influencing women's consumption behavior. Exquisite packaging can evoke a sense of ritual, satisfying women's desire for a touch of indulgence and vanity.

3. Consumption Motivations

3.1. Psychology of Female Consumer Groups

In a progressively evolving society, both the tangible world and online media have started to emphasize the diversity of "beauty". Nonetheless, certain established "beauty standards" like the "A4 waist", a specific facial structure, and a defined waistline continue to wield influence. Across aspects of appearance, physique, and communication, women have historically been the recipients of more attention than men. The pursuit of "beauty" has become a daily endeavor for women, and the acquisition of products serves as an essential means to construct an image and refine personal taste within this pursuit [7]. Concurrently, contemporary urban women place significant emphasis on brand consumption. Their valuation of a product lies in the sense of elevated identity and status it bestows, the gratification and comfort derived from the act of consumption, and the fulfillment of vanity that arises from garnering the attention of others [8]. They tend to lean towards emotional consumption: during moments of happiness, shopping serves as a conduit to express joy, while in times of sadness, it becomes a method to alleviate stress and release pent-up emotions [9]. Over time, the social drive for consumption surpasses basic physiological needs, and spiritual fulfillment begins to overshadow material desires.

Furthermore, many women face considerable societal pressure to conform. In order to sidestep isolation and nurture a sense of belonging within a community, individuals often find themselves compelled to make certain conforming choices. On the other hand, a distinct subgroup seeks "uniqueness" through consumption, recognizing that staying ahead of trends greatly heightens their sense of distinction and novelty. Additionally, the marketing strategies employed by select luxury brands not only promote repeat purchases but also instill a sense of brand dependence among customers.

3.2. Reactions to Such Behavior on Online Media Platforms

The essence of consumption lies in abstracting things and commodities into symbols. Here, the functionality and utilitarian value of goods take a backseat, with the focus shifting towards the symbolic representations presented by these objects, embodying social class distinctions. Consequently, consumption behavior serves as a means for individuals to define their identity within society, resulting in a detachment from the true value of goods. This phenomenon gradually leads to a state of consumption alienation. The market, leveraging the influence of media, consistently amplifies and embellishes this narrative, endeavoring to normalize consumerism as a habitual way of life, thereby gratifying individual desires and fulfilling spiritual needs.

Online media platforms spare no effort in extolling and glorifying female "shopaholics," inadvertently cultivating a pathological mindset and permitting materialistic notions to flourish. Through a steady stream of daily reports, the media subtly implants notions of extravagant and impulsive consumption into the minds of female consumer groups, be it through words or images. This not only bolsters the popularity of the website and its content but also serves to advance the

commercial interests of the platform [10]. Regrettably, women have unwittingly found themselves swept up in the consumerist tide that characterizes the era of online media.

3.3. The Influence of Gender

From a gendered perspective, women's pursuit of "beauty" through consumption often inadvertently aligns with the standards and perspectives of a patriarchal society. Over an extended period, they have been excluded from crucial social spaces, lacking opportunities to voice their opinions. Consequently, they resort to expressing their preferences through consumption. The influence of gender on women's consumption behavior is significant. During the process of female consumption, the object being consumed undergoes a transformation into a specific symbol, a symbol determined by modern male-centric societal norms rather than biological gender disparities. Women's conduct and role expectations are gradually shaped by social norms and traditions, leading them to engage in behavior that conforms to societal norms for the sake of social interaction and belonging.

In today's diverse communication landscape, various forms of media tap into consumers' inner desires through carefully crafted imagery. Rather than rushing to explain the attributes and functions of a product, they first present a vision of a beautiful female image and associated values. This narrative suggests that women can attain personal fulfillment and seize control of their destiny through consumption, investing time and resources in themselves to achieve a refined quality of life, often encapsulated by an array of luxury goods [11]. However, it is crucial to note that these media portrayals and advertisements often harbor a degree of gender discrimination against women. Despite unprecedented improvements in women's social status, men still exhibit notable dominance in the consumption of certain high-end goods. They often assume the role of arbitrators, and women tend to exhibit confidence and conform to male-centric ideals of "beauty" only when their choices are validated by men. Pleasing men thus becomes a profound underlying motivation behind women's purchasing decisions. Furthermore, while many women bear the responsibility of household purchasing, a significant portion still engages in what could be termed as "proxy consumption," essentially providing services to the family or enhancing their husband's social image. These two dynamics encapsulate the primary motives driving women's consumption behavior in a society deeply influenced by the "male gaze" [12].

4. Summary

In conclusion, the intricate interplay of societal, cultural, and gender influences significantly shapes women's consumption behavior and motivations. The pursuit of "beauty" through consumption, while providing a means of self-expression and empowerment, can inadvertently perpetuate and reinforce patriarchal standards. Women's role in the consumer landscape is deeply embedded in social norms and traditions, reflecting a complex interplay of societal expectations and individual desires.

Moreover, the omnipresence of online media further amplifies these dynamics. It serves as a powerful tool for shaping perceptions of beauty, identity, and self-worth, often instilling materialistic ideals and perpetuating consumerism as a way of life. While media platforms and advertisements have made strides in recognizing and valuing women's autonomy and agency, there remains a persistent undercurrent of gender discrimination, particularly in the consumption of high-end goods.

Ultimately, women's consumption behavior is a multi-faceted phenomenon influenced by a spectrum of factors. It serves as a lens through which they navigate societal norms, express individuality, and seek fulfillment. As society continues to evolve, it is imperative to foster a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of women's consumption motivations, one that acknowledges their agency in shaping their own identities and values beyond the confines of traditional gender roles. This holistic perspective can pave the way for a more equitable and empowering consumer landscape for women in the years to come.

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