



Analysis of the Impact of Influencer Economy on University Students' Consumer Psychology Under Consumerism Trends in China

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ABSTRACT: With the application of new technologies such as big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence, media technology has naturally been updated and upgraded. Currently, online shopping has become the main consumption and shopping mode for people, and people's consumption psychology and consumption patterns have fundamentally changed. As the main force of Internet users, college students have naturally become the best audience for live-streaming e-commerce on the most popular short-video platforms nowadays. The influence of the online celebrity economy on the college student audience mainly focuses on the fan effect and idol worship. Behind this lies the fact that the Internet caters to the loneliness and curiosity of college students and other audience psychology. With the gradual rise of the online celebrity economy, the consumerist trend in current Chinese society has gradually influenced consumers and given rise to various consumption behaviors, such as symbolic consumption and fan culture, herd consumption, and advanced consumption. As "digital natives", college students have become the most important audience for online live-streaming e-commerce. Under such circumstances, the significant impact of the consumerist trend on the consumption psychology of college students is self-evident.

KEYWORDS: Influencer Economy, College Students, Consumer Psychology

I. Introduction

Consumerism is the product of the interaction and accumulation of alienated consumption concepts and behaviors. This alienated consumption concept is manifested in people's excessive pursuit and worship of material things, regarding

consumption as a lifestyle and cultural value, while neglecting the essence of human beings and the true meaning of life. At the same time, consumerism also manifests as a pathological consumption behavior, where people, in order to satisfy their material desires and vanity, are willing to overconsume, waste resources, and even go into debt, bringing negative impacts to both individuals and society. The consumerist trend originated in the United States during the economic boom of the 1920s and spread and intensified in the rapidly developing Western societies after World War II (Brunner et al., 2022). During this period, the unique economic culture of capitalist societies provided fertile ground for the rise and development of consumerism. With economic growth and technological progress, people's living standards improved, and the consumer market expanded significantly, providing conditions for the breeding of consumerism. At the same time, capitalist societies also emphasized the promotion of consumption and business, stimulating people's consumption desires through advertising, media, and other means, further promoting the development of consumerism.

As a social trend, consumerism is closely related to the unique economic culture of capitalist societies. However, we should recognize the negative impacts of consumerism, such as resource waste, environmental pollution, and excessive debt, and explore healthier and more sustainable consumption and lifestyle patterns. The academic community generally believes that the consumerist trend began in the 1980s. With the improvement of residents' income levels in China, the influence of the consumerist trend has been expanding in China and has given rise to various consumption behaviors (Yang Jun, Huang Zhaoqiong, 2022). In the face of



this situation, we should guide the consumerist trend with Marxism, making it an important task to strengthen ideological and propaganda work and exert the leading role of socialist ideology.

II. Theoretical Foundations and Current Status of Influencer Economy

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

As is well known, internet celebrities establish connections with consumers through various means, such as showcasing products, sharing experiences, and building personal brands, etc.

It has become a kind of trust and recognition. This connection makes it easier for consumers to accept the products or services recommended by internet celebrities and generate a desire to purchase. The internet celebrity economy precisely takes advantage of this consumer psychology and behavior pattern to achieve a complete economic activity. At the same time, the internet celebrity economy also benefits from the powerful dissemination power of modern internet and social media, enabling this influence to expand rapidly. Through functions such as sharing, liking, and commenting on social media, internet celebrities can quickly attract a large number of fans and form a strong community effect. This community effect further strengthens the influence and appeal of internet celebrities, making the products or services they recommend more easily accepted and purchased by consumers. Therefore, the emergence and development of the internet celebrity economy is not only a product of the internet and social media, but also a product of a profound understanding and utilization of consumer psychology and behavior patterns. It effectively influences consumers and stimulates their purchasing behavior, thereby promoting a series of complete economic activities and becoming an economic force that cannot be ignored in modern society. From the perspective of the internet celebrity economy, the study of consumer purchasing behavior has become a hot topic, with theoretical foundations including but not limited to the SOR theory and celebrity theory(Sun et al., 2021).

According to the SOR theory, various elements in the internet celebrity economy influence consumers through the stimulus-organism-response framework. These elements may include people, products or services, and consumption scenarios or platforms(Lee& Chen,2021).In the internet celebrity

economy, people may be well-known internet celebrities, bloggers, or opinion leaders. They influence consumers by showcasing their products, services, or lifestyles. Products or services are also an important element in the internet celebrity economy. Internet celebrities attract consumers' attention by showcasing various products or services, such as fashion clothing, beauty and skincare products, and daily necessities. These products or services may stimulate consumers' purchasing desires through unique packaging, design, functions, or brand stories. Consumption scenarios or platforms are also an indispensable element in the internet celebrity economy. Internet celebrities establish connections with consumers through various social media platforms, e-commerce platforms, or offline physical stores. These platforms attract consumers' attention and purchases by providing convenient shopping experiences, personalized recommendations, and favorable prices. At the same time, internet celebrities may also enhance consumers' perceived value and emotional connection to products or services by creating unique consumption scenarios and brand atmospheres. In summary, from the perspective of the SOR theory, various elements in the internet celebrity economy influence consumers through the stimulus-organism-response framework. These elements form an external stimulus, triggering changes in consumers' cognition, psychology, emotions, or feelings, and thereby promoting their purchasing behavior and other responses. This theoretical model helps us deeply understand the behavior mechanism of consumers in the internet celebrity economy and provides useful references for related research and applications.

According to the celebrity theory, internet celebrities are a new type of celebrity following traditional celebrities. Like traditional celebrities, they possess certain influence and appeal and can influence and guide the public's cognition and behavior through their image and words(Shi et al., 2021).As celebrities in the internet celebrity economy, the value transformation of internet celebrities mainly lies in their ability to attract attention. Only by attracting more attention can they convert the symbolic capital of their celebrity status into other forms of capital. This includes converting attention into commercial value, such as obtaining economic benefits through advertising endorsements and brand collaborations. Meanwhile, internet celebrities can also transform their attention into personal brand value. For instance, they can establish their personal brands through social media platforms and become opinion leaders or experts in



certain fields, thereby gaining more attention and recognition. With the maturation of the live-streaming industry chain, the celebrity images of internet celebrities are professionally packaged and promoted, creating distinct character settings. This has more effectively driven consumers' purchasing behavior. By carefully crafting their images and showcasing their personalized life attitudes and values, internet celebrities have stimulated consumers' purchasing desires and emotional resonances. This emotional connection makes it easier for consumers to accept the recommendations and influence of internet celebrities, thus facilitating the formation of purchasing decisions.

In conclusion, the internet celebrity economy promotes the development of the consumer market through the values and influence represented by internet celebrities. It not only changes traditional consumption patterns and concepts but also becomes a new economic and cultural phenomenon in modern society.

2.2 Current Status

At present, short-video platforms have entered a period of accelerated commercial development. The diverse advertising, public relations, publicity, and marketing systems created by e-commerce institutions and leading media organizations on some new media platforms each have their own characteristics. In addition, interactive marketing activities that stimulate wide user participation have also attracted the attention of many platform users. Such marketing activities start with the opinion leaders and internet celebrities on the platform, building multiple activities or themes through viral spread forms to arouse users' interest, and encouraging users to actively participate through some reward mechanisms.

In recent years, with the sudden popularity of short videos and the continuous expansion of the live-streaming e-commerce and other internet celebrity economy business models, many professional MCN institutions for nurturing internet celebrities have emerged in China, and they have rapidly expanded and grown with the help of the platforms. The rapid development of the internet celebrity economy and MCN institutions is inseparable. MCN (Multi-Channel Network) is a multi-channel network that first appeared on YouTube. It refers to signing multiple professional content creators (PGC) and providing them with resource support, cooperation management and other services to achieve continuous content output (Yanqiu, 2021). The emergence of MCN institutions has provided strong support for the rise

of the influencer economy. They help influencers develop and grow better by providing them with comprehensive training, promotion, marketing and other support, thereby promoting the development of the entire influencer economy. MCN institutions play an important role in the development of the influencer economy. They not only provide professional training and support for influencers, but also provide them with more opportunities and resources through cooperation with various brands and enterprises, helping them better exert their talents and creativity. The role of MCN institutions is extremely significant for content production. When the competition pressure on individual influencers gradually increases and it is difficult to balance continuous high-quality content output and operation, the role of MCN institutions becomes extremely convenient and efficient. This integrated industrial institution will cooperate with platforms to provide a set content production and marketing promotion route for its contracted influencers, and provide comprehensive commercial services such as traffic monetization for influencers, and extract a share according to regulations. This helps both the platform and individuals to create a large number of traffic influencers while ensuring high-quality content production and marketing.

III. Research on College Students' Consumer Psychology

China's economic development has entered a new normal, and consumption has become the core driving force for economic growth. College students grow up in the era of rapid development of the Internet. As the natives of the Internet, their consumption and entertainment must have a very obvious imprint of the Internet.

3.1 Consumption Motivations

Consumption motivation refers to the desire that drives consumers to make purchases. Consumption motivation includes both physiological and psychological motives. The online shopping consumption motives of the college student group are mostly consistent. Firstly, the most prominent feature is "curiosity-driven" consumption. A notable characteristic of college students in terms of consumption is their curiosity, that is, the pursuit of novel and distinctive goods or brands. They may be more inclined to purchase new, fashionable or unique items to showcase their individuality and stand out from the crowd. Secondly, another consumption feature among college students is the herd mentality. They might



follow trends and purchase products endorsed by internet celebrities to meet their social needs or gain recognition from others.

Under the catalysis of the internet celebrity economy, college students have a relatively high level of trust in the consumption information conveyed by the media and are greatly influenced by it. Many students believe that the amount of information and the promotion intensity of goods in media advertisements are directly related to the quality and performance of the products. In other words, they think that the greater the advertising promotion intensity, the better the quality and performance of the goods. Because in their subconscious, they believe that goods promoted through mass media must have passed multiple relevant department reviews before being put on the market for sale, and thus their quality and reputation should be guaranteed.

3.2 Cognitive Attitudes Toward Consumption Information

The guiding role of consumption information on consumers is quite obvious. Consumers, by obtaining consumption information such as advertisements and social media recommendations, process and encode this information to form impressions and cognition of products, thereby stimulating their consumption desires and leading to consumption behaviors. It can be seen that media promotion has a crucial impact on consumption behavior. The better the effect of media promotion, the more likely consumers are to be stimulated to engage in consumption behavior. If consumers have a high level of trust in the consumption information they obtain, they are more likely to rely on media promotion to make consumption decisions. It is worth noting that the above phenomenon also exists in the college student consumer group. As a specific consumer group, college students are also influenced by media promotion. For instance, products endorsed by famous stars or promoted by internet celebrities often attract the high attention of college students. College students show a high level of attention and interest in products endorsed or promoted by famous stars and internet celebrities. This further proves the influence of media promotion on the consumption behavior of college students.

Although college students have reached adulthood, they are not economically independent and are in a transitional stage from students to social individuals. During this stage, their consumption concepts include both rational thinking and irrational impulses, which makes them more

susceptible to the influence of media promotion. When purchasing goods, college students may unconsciously recall the images or promotional slogans of stars or internet celebrities, or develop a strong consumption motivation due to their idol worship of stars and internet celebrities. This motivation is the result of the subconscious demand cognition caused by the impact and appeal of media promotion. Especially in the current context of consumerism, under the influence of the consumerist trend, the economy of internet celebrities has developed rapidly, and online consumption is convenient and intuitive. College students generally have the characteristics of weak consumption planning and advanced consumption, which makes them more susceptible to the influence of online media promotion.

4. Economy to College Students' Consumption Psychology under the Tide of Consumerism

The continuous spread of the consumerism trend will constantly erode and impact the ideological values of people in contemporary society, especially college students who are more likely to be influenced by this trend. From an ideological perspective, the harm is not only that it may lead college students to regard endless consumption as the ultimate meaning and pursuit of life, but also that it may gradually erode them with Western culture and values in their daily lives, thereby undermining socialist values. Under the influence of the consumerism trend, the spiritual life of some college students has lost its subjectivity and independence, which is manifested in the following aspects.

4.1 Thinning of Ideals, Beliefs and Life Pursuits

Consumption includes material consumption and spiritual consumption. Human beings' free and all-round development should involve both material and spiritual demands. Moreover, spiritual pursuits often contain higher aspirations for ideals and beliefs. However, under the erosion of the consumerism trend, material consumption has been elevated to a higher status. People abandon noble spiritual pursuits to satisfy their endless material desires, taking hedonism and money worship as the dominant values. This phenomenon greatly weakens individuals' sense of responsibility and commitment in society. The correct purpose of consumption should be to meet people's needs and serve their free and all-round development. It should not be a "puppet" controlled by strong material desires (Liu Weijie, Lu Ziyue, 2022). As young adults, college students' ability to



distinguish right from wrong is still relatively weak. Therefore, under the influence of this trend, they are easily trapped in the vortex of material worship and eventually become the apostles of desires in the endless pursuit of material things.

4.2 Absence of Moral Cognition and Core Personality

Under the influence of the consumerism trend, fast food culture and entertainment culture are prevalent, which may lead to deviations in college students' understanding of moral concepts. They may focus more on pleasure and superficial material pursuits while neglecting traditional moral values such as truth, goodness, and beauty. In the internet age, consumerism promotes the concept of symbolic consumption, where people display their identity and status by purchasing and showing off specific goods or brands. The prevalence of the influencer economy further promotes this consumption behavior. College students may hope to showcase their individuality and uniqueness by purchasing brand-name and fashionable goods, thereby creating symbolic distinctions from others. In the process of excessive pursuit of symbolic consumption, college students may become overly obsessed with material possessions, focusing excessively on the symbolic meaning of goods while neglecting their practical use value. They may become trapped in this pursuit and develop an excessive dependence on material things and over-consumption.

Consumerism is a product of Western capitalist society. Concepts such as "living for the moment" and "consumption is life" make people, while consuming the value of goods and exchanging for their use value, unconsciously form a certain recognition of the Western culture and values behind the goods. This is the terrifying aspect of capitalism.

4.3 Alienation of Lifestyle and Interpersonal Relationships

Consumerism is a value system that emphasizes material consumption and hedonism, often neglecting people's spiritual life and inner needs, and overly focusing on material enjoyment and consumption. This value system has a significant impact on the thinking and lifestyle of college students, causing them to gradually neglect their inner spiritual needs and pay more attention to material enjoyment and consumption. Moreover, when dealing with the relationship between the individual and society, they pay more attention to the satisfaction of personal needs and desires, while neglecting social responsibility and care for others.

Some college students hold a critical or even rejecting attitude towards mainstream culture and values. They blindly accept the values and lifestyle of consumerism, ignoring the respect and inheritance of traditional values. This attitude leads to the loss of the bottom line awareness among college students, that is, the lack of basic moral standards and values, making them prone to extremely irresponsible behaviors towards themselves and society. With the passage of time, the diversification of values has led college students to gradually lose respect for traditional values.

Some people tend to forget or even look down upon these traditional values. These excellent traditional values are of great significance for personal growth and success. However, under the influence of consumerism, college students have neglected these values, which has had a negative impact on their growth and success.

The spread and development of consumerism will inevitably lead to the emergence and prevalence of individualism, utilitarianism, hedonism and other values. These values emphasize personal rights and interests, pursue material benefits and pleasures, and ignore responsibilities and obligations to others. The influence of consumerism not only makes people indulge in material enjoyment and consumption, leading to a lack of faith and spiritual confusion, but also makes people lose themselves in the "utopia" it pursues, which is fictional and unrealistic, and thus deviate from the real needs and responsibilities of the real world. Moreover, consumerism conflicts with the collectivism, dedication to society, and the glory of labor advocated by socialist ideology. It emphasizes personal interests and pleasures while neglecting social responsibilities and collective interests. In daily life, people often pursue personal interests and pleasures, ignoring the values and social responsibilities advocated by socialist ideology. This makes socialist ideology face the predicament of being eroded in daily life. Consumerism emphasizes material enjoyment and consumption, pursues personal interests and pleasures, and neglects social responsibilities and collective interests. This value system and lifestyle are contrary to the essential needs and development laws of human society, which is not conducive to the healthy development and progress of human society.

IV. Conclusion

The influencer economy can transform the consumption intentions of fan audiences into



purchasing power, injecting new vitality into traditional economic models and exerting a significant impact on the vast number of college students. However, the influence of the influencer economy on the college student consumer group requires us to view it from a balanced perspective. On the one hand, college students have active minds. Under the correct guidance of positive influencers, they can develop rational consumption habits and transform into a group of positive purchasing power. On the other hand, college students are in their adolescence and have relatively weak abilities to distinguish right from wrong. They may have their values and consumption views distorted by negative influencers, leading to negative misalignment and deviation effects, and even blind and impulsive consumption. They are more likely to get involved in online lending and go astray. Especially in the current environment where consumerist ideology prevails, college students should be more vigilant about the drawbacks and harms of consumerist alienation brought about by the influencer economy.

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