Would You Pay for Image? E-commerce Clothing Purchase Research of Female Undergraduates in China

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Abstract. As online clothing shopping has become more and more common, the results and findings of research into the factors that influence online shopping are increasing, and the attitudes of this group of new generation women towards online clothing consumption are worth exploring. This study focuses on how social media and e-commerce platforms influence female university students’ stylized clothing consumption behaviour and the relationship between female university students’ stylized clothing consumption and self-image presentation. Questionnaire were conducted with 450 participants. The questionnaire was divided into three parts, including a survey of basic information about Chinese female university students, their ideas about clothing needs and factors influencing their consumption behaviour towards stylized clothing. This research found the influence of advertising factors of e-commerce platforms and recommendation factors of social media on consumer behavior. At the same time, purchasing behavior of consumers is also affected by other factors, such as brand. The study found that e-commerce platforms and social media influence consumers by showing the desired wearing effect, with e-commerce platform advertising being more effective than traditional advertising, while social media is a new marketing trend where consumers are more likely to compare the desired effect, the reference effect and the actual effect to decide whether to make a purchase.

Keywords: online shopping · stylized clothing consumption · self-image presentation · female university students

1 Introduction

With the platform professionalism and diversity of forms of online shopping, the consuming channel has mostly shifted from offline to online. According to the Internet Development Report In China, the number of Internet users had reached a 1,011 billion, the Internet penetration rate had reached 71.6%, and the usage rate of online shopping

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https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-31-2_420
had reached 80.3%, an increase of 3.8% compared to 2020. Online shopping is becoming one of the aspects of life shaped by the internet.

In past studies of online apparel consumption behavior, researchers have focused on examining the factors that influence online shopping, arguing that women in Generation put a high value on convenience in buying clothes, fashion consciousness is also an important dimension [1], brand consciousness and fashion consciousness relate positively to the frequency to look at and buy clothing with a smartphone. Compared with other consumer behavior, online consumption has recreational or hedonic shopping behavior [2].

What’s more, online clothing shopping behavior is also influenced by others’ feedback and evaluations, and the researchers found that in clothing rental platforms, people place a high value on positive social feedback regarding their appearance in the dress and the appropriateness of the dress for the event [3]. The Chinese region is influenced by the culture of collectivism, and researchers believe that people value the evaluation of being in a group and circle, which influences people’s consumption choices in two ways, on the one hand in that if the clothing an individual buying online is appreciated by the people around the individual, this will encourage continued online purchases in the future. On the other hand, this also helps brands that are sought after by specific circles building a high degree of brand loyalty [4].

Furthermore, with the continuous improvement and development of e-commerce platforms, the display of goods has extended to new forms of marketing such as e-commerce platform advertising and live streaming, and it is widely believed that e-commerce consumption is positively associated with impulse consumption. Impulsiveness related positively to the frequency to look at and buy clothing with a smartphone [2].

And then, as the E-commerce platforms develop steadily, the merchandise display extends to new ways of marketing such as E-commerce platform advertisements and live broadcasts. It is generally believed by academics that there is a positive relationship between E-commerce consumption and impulsive spending. Park and Lennon (2004) considered that people are getting impulsive spending easier when watching television shopping. Recent studies also showed that impulsiveness related positively to the frequency to look at and buy clothing with a smartphone [2].

There had been made achievements on consumer research on an E-commerce platform in academic. The E-commerce consumers from different regions showed their pursuit of fashion, meanwhile concerned about evaluation from others. The results were the one that was very closely tied to our stylized consumption behavior research which is based on self-image building. However, the previous academic research on consumption behavior was often placed in a general context, suggesting the influence of others’ evaluations on consumer behavior partially while the extension of related studies remains relatively gap.

Based on this, there are two research questions which highly relevant:

RQ1: How social media and e-commerce platform affect consuming behavior of stylized clothing in female undergraduates?

RQ2: What’s the relationship between consuming behavior of stylized clothing in female undergraduates and their self image presentation?
2 Method

2.1 Data Collection

Questionnaire is a kind of print which records the survey contents systematically in the form of questions. A perfect questionnaire must have two functions: to convey the question to the person being asked and to make the person being asked happy to answer it.

The questionnaire is simple and easy to use, not only saves financial resources and time, but also can be investigated in a short period of time to a lot of information. The questionnaire is generally taken anonymously, if there are questions involving privacy, the respondents will not be reluctant to express their true intentions and affect the results of the questionnaire. By contrast, its disadvantage is that it has certain limitations. The questionnaire designer designed the scope and number of questions, which limited the respondents’ answers and may not reveal more detailed and deeper information.

The interview method is a method of collecting information through interpersonal communication between the investigator and the respondent in the form of purposeful interview inquiries. Interviews can also be divided into direct or indirect interviews. The advantage of direct interviews is that the purpose of the survey can be explained, and when the respondents do not want to answer for some reasons, the investigator can explain the actual situation, which ensures accuracy. The disadvantage is that it is a waste of time and cost. Indirect interviews have the advantage of speed, scope, and low cost. The telephone interview is generally less formal for both people, which also ensures accuracy. The disadvantage is that there will be many people who take an uncooperative attitude and refuse the call.

This research is on the stylized clothing consumption. The participants are Chinese female university students ranging from freshmen to senior year, which are in transition from high school in uniforms to working professionals with a professional dress code. Their styles of clothing is variable, in other words, this group is highly representative. We distributed questionnaires in social networks through WeChat groups, sending to Moments and asking female friends to repost our questionnaire. These WeChat groups are mainly dormitory groups, year groups, college groups, and even alumni groups established after high school graduation. The group in our social networks, excluding the elders and male university students, basically fits the criteria of the survey. Besides, age and gender thresholds are set in the questionnaire so we can filter out the invalid ones. The questionnaires were distributed at 10:40 am on 26 March 2022 and until now we have returned 450 questionnaires, of which 413 are valid and the study population is eligible. The demographic characteristics of the participants were: female, between the ages of 18–22, Chinese nationality, and all had an undergraduate education level.

2.2 Research Design

In terms of variable design, this research combined theories to study the correction of stylized clothing consumption and the following factors. The first one is the influence of advertising on e-commerce platforms on people’s perception and consumption behavior. The second one is the influence of Key Opinion Leader (KOL) and celebrities on
social platforms on people’s self-presentation. The last one is the impact of forms that combine content and consumption quickly, such as live streaming, on people’s impulse consumption. Based on the previous study, we hope to further study the consumption behavior of internet e-commerce and social platform stylized marketing and consumers’ purchase of stylized clothing.

In terms of survey design, we divided the questionnaire into three parts. The first part was about basic information of students in Chinese universities, including genders, ages, monthly income, monthly clothing expenditure, etc. The second part mainly aimed to measure the notions of dressing in female undergraduates, which led us to understand the demands of stylized clothing consumption. The third part investigated the influence factors of stylized clothing consumption by Likert scale, which covered dimensions of advertisements, celebrities, social media, etc. In this part, we found out different altitudes as well as strong and weak relationship between stylized clothing consumption and various media contacts.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

A total of 413 college students aged from 18 to 22 were researched for this survey of female college students purchasing clothing on e-commerce platforms. In terms of basic income and living expenses, 61% of the audience was in the range of 1000–2000 yuan, of which 70% chose to spend a total of 500 yuan or less on clothes every month. In terms of the number of clothes purchased and the unit price, three-quarters of the girls chose to buy 2 or 5 pieces of clothes, and only a quarter of the girls will buy more than 10 pieces of clothes. 70.2% of the girls are willing to choose the unit price of clothes within 200 yuan.

Of the 413 female university respondents who were eligible to this research, only three of them chose not to consider clothing style when buying clothes on e-commerce platforms, the remaining 410 respondents would consider clothing style when buying clothes on e-commerce platforms (99.3%). This shows that, stylized clothing consumption among female university students is very predominant and common. Only a very few people do not consider the style of their clothing Generally speaking they do not only purchase a piece of clothing simply for its comfort or practicality but for its style to meet their needs. There is a strong relationship between this kind of stylized clothing consumption and presentation of self-image. Stylized clothing for female college students with a need to present themselves (Figs. 1, 2 and 3).

Regarding the choice for their regular wear, there are 43.6% (180) of respondents chose random, 22.6% (94) of respondents chose fixed, and 33.7% of them chose variable. Respondents were split more evenly into three. It indicates that the number of people choosing Variable and those choosing Fixed and Random are similar which also means that the number of people with a wide range of clothing styles is similar to the number of people with a fixed outfit and those who dress more casually. Therefore, it can be seen that there is a difference on the number of people who consider style of clothing when purchasing comes to wearing. There are nearly 43.6% of people consider more about
other factors, such as the comfort of clothing, matching of occasions, etc., rather than considering self-image display predominantly (Figs. 4 and 5).

### 3.2 Influences Between Advertisements and Social Media

In terms of the impact of e-commercials on clothing consumption, there are more than one third of people choosing impact degree 3, while the second largest proportion of people chose degree 4, with 151 (36.6%) and 114 (27.6%) respectively. The number of people who chose 2 and 5 have marginal difference, with 58 (14%) and 61 (14.8%)
respectively. The research indicates that based on the different quality of advertisements, as well as variable audience media usage, the impact of e-commercials is obviously different. More than half people chose impact degree of 3 or 4, which showed there’s large part of people considered advertisements couldn’t play a decisive role though, it still played a positive role. The advertisements carry ideal clothing presentation by beautifying products, which is a good way to stimulate people to purchase (Fig. 6).

The descriptive statistics show that 26.4% (109) of the respondents thought that traditional media advertising had less than 3 influence on them, 44.8% (177) thought that traditional media advertising had more than 3 influence on them and 30.8% (127) chose influence level 3. The results show that traditional media advertising has a strong influence on clothing consumption behavior of female college students. Traditional media
including newspapers, magazines, television, radio and so on. Even with the decline of traditional media and the perceived rise of new media, these advertisements are still accepted by consumers through these channels and have a greater impact on the clothing consumption behavior of most female students without getting attention. Traditional media advertising still plays a role that can not be ignored.

Despite the fact that the percentage of people who consider style when buying clothes on e-commerce platforms and the percentage of people who consider style when wearing clothes for regular use are both high, and stylized clothing consumption behavior is already common and predominant which showed in the former questions. However, 89.6% (370) of respondents were still influenced by clothing fabrics and materials greater than or equal to 3. Only a tiny minority of 10.4% (43) considered themselves to be less influenced by clothing fabrics and materials. This indicates that The results show that stylized clothing consumption behavior does not conflict with the pursuit of comfort and practicality. Clothing made of good fabrics and materials not only meets the most basic physical and safety needs of consumers, but also their growth needs (love and belonging, respect) and even their self-fulfillment needs by presenting a better style of clothing.

From the influence of buyer shows on consumer behavior, the research found the proportion of people at 89.9% chose great than or equal to 3, while that of chose 4 are the most, with 35.8% (148). This indicates that audience are considerably affected by buyer shows. Differ from model pictures, the buyer shows can more easily reflect the real feature of cloth, like size, color, etc., which can provide audience with different reference according to their own figure. This research also showed that, audience can compare advertisements with true effect to make sure whether purchase this cloth, which indicates that most people actually won’t purchase cloth impulsively. What’s more, buyer shows are generally the presentation of true effect of cloth, whereas the problems about quality can seldom be displayed, therefore, attaching great importance to buyer shows can reflect young women significantly pay attention to the presentation of real figure.

From the influence of model picture on consumer behavior, the research found that 18.4% (76) chose clothing consumption behavior to be influenced by the model picture less than level 3, 45.1% (186) chose greater than level 3 and the greatest number of people chose level 3 at 36.6% (151). It can seen that the influence of the model picture on the clothing consumption of the respondents is at a high level. The links to purchase on e-commerce platforms are not only a choice of sizes, colors and styles, but the first thing that comes to mind when you search for any of the clothing keywords in the search bar is a picture of the model and there are many pages that take up a large area of the whole page. They have a picture in their minds of the model wearing the clothes, rather than a single piece of clothing that exists. They decide whether or not to buy by considering whether the style of clothing presented by the model matches the self-image they need to express (Fig. 7).

In terms of the impact of celebrities on clothing consumption, research showed the number of people choosing 1, 4, 5 are the most, with 95 (23%), 95 (23%), 108 (26.2%), which indicates that the impact of celebrity shows polarization trend, on the one hand, consumers who are highly affected by the celebrities’ social media tend to imitate them. This is the reflection of emotion as well as expectation of their figure can be similar to famous people they like. On the other hand, there are some people disagree to pay too
much attention on celebrities, so they won’t buy the same clothes as these famous people. The impact of celebrities on clothing consumption is a way to display self-presentation, consumers imitate the image as well as characteristics of famous people by purchasing the same clothes (Fig. 8).

From influence of Taobao live on consumer behavior, there are 137 people chose degree 4, with the proportion of 33.2%. Compared to other degrees, the proportion of degree 4 is considerably significant, which shows that live has positive effect on clothing consumption.

Jiayi (2022) divided e-commerce live consumption into 5 parts, performance and entertainment, visible stimulation, interaction, immersing experience, group consumption. Taobao live revivification the consuming situation, anchors play the salesman’s role, and the live rooms are decorated like a shopping market. With the introduction of anchors, people watching live will feel immersing, when they find something liked at first sight, they may choose to buy it at once. Therefore, young women’s clothing purchase from the new forms like live show the feature of impulsion.

In terms of the impact of social apps like RED, Weibo on clothing consumption, research showed the proportion of people choosing degree 4 and 5 is around 70%, with 140 (33.9%) and 132 (32.0%), which indicates that most young people will be affected by social media when buying clothes online. People who have many followers from mainstream social apps work as key opinion leaders (KOL), audiences will choose to follow the KOL which has similarity with themselves and take their advice. Differ from imitating famous people, in clothing field, audiences will choose different KOL depending on their own size and style, which is a expression of preference and personality. The
KOL and audiences are interacted on each other, when audiences follow KOL, they also expect to show and shape the better self image (Fig. 9).

### 3.3 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis revealed that the influence of comprehensive external factors on clothing consumption and the influence of comprehensive recommended sources on the number of purchases showed a significant positive correlation, i.e. a high influence of comprehensive external factors on clothing consumption implies a high influence of comprehensive recommended sources on the number of purchases, and on the contrary, a poor influence of comprehensive external factors on clothing consumption implies a poor influence of comprehensive recommended sources on the number of purchases. It is vital to note that the positive correlation between the impact of combined external factors on clothing consumption and the impact of combined referral sources on the number of purchases does not mean that the impact of combined external factors on clothing consumption can significantly influence the impact of combined referral sources on the number of purchases.

The combined external factors’ influence on clothing consumption showed a very significant positive correlation with external factors 1–5. However, it was found that its correlation with recommendation source 1 was not significant, and they had no synergistic relationship with each other, indicating that when the influence of comprehensive external factors on clothing consumption changes, it does not affect or predict the influence of celebrities’ outfit recommendations on the number of purchases in TV programs, airports, etc., or when the influence of celebrities’ outfit recommendations on the number of purchases in programs, airports, etc. changes, it does not affect or predict the influence of comprehensive external factors on clothing consumption. However, at the same time, recommendation source 1 shows a very significant positive correlation with external factor 1 e-commerce platform advertising and external factor 2 traditional media advertising, a significant positive correlation with external factor 5 model figure, a very significant negative correlation with both clothing fabric material and external factor 4 buyer show, and a very significant The negative correlations with external factor 3 and external factor 4. It can be concluded that the sensitivity of female university students to various factors related to clothing consumption such as advertising, fabric quality, feedback from buyers’ shows and official model pictures actually changed when they were
recommended by celebrities and idols. The female students ignore the quality of the fabric and the feedback from any other normal buyers from lives because the good-looking celebrities and idols wear their clothes well, and pay more attention to the advertisements and official model pictures. This result partly verified the conclusion of Zhenqian Wei, Min-Young Lee, and Hong Shen (2018), which found that Fashion innovativeness has a positive effect on consumers’ intention to buy clothing online [4] (Table 1).

The results also found that the influence of comprehensive external factors on clothing consumption was significantly correlated with recommendation source 2 and very significantly correlated with recommendation source 3. This suggests that when the impact of combined external factors on clothing consumption is high, the impact of watching live shopping guides on e-commerce platforms on the number of purchases is also relatively high, as is the impact of being recommended by online celebrity KOLs on social software on the number of purchases. Or the reverse of former and latter also holds, they are not causal but synergistic relationships. However, recommendation source 2 shows a very significant negative correlation with external factor 3 clothing fabric material, a significant negative correlation with external factor 4 buyer show, and a non-significant correlation with external factor 5 model picture, implying that when female university consumers watch Taobao and other e-commerce platforms live broadcasting room guide for more consumption, they also ignore more the clothing material fabric and slightly ignore the buyer show, while their sensitivity to sensitivity to model pictures did not change. At the same time, there was no significant correlation between recommendation source 3 and both external factor 3 and external factor 4, implying that female university consumers could not predict their attitudes towards clothing fabric and buyer show feedback on the clothing itself when they were recommended to spend more by online celebrities and KOLs on social apps such as Red and Weibo. This suggests that the guide words of the e-commerce platform’s live stream may have been more attractive and persuasive to female university students, causing them to put aside their doubts about the fabric as well as stop checking the real feedback of the buyer’s show, and that they were not reassured or doubtful about the fabric material of the clothing and the buyer’s show when they were recommended by the online celebrities and KOLs of social apps, not just believing the claims of the online celebrities and KOLs.

The effect of combined recommended sources on the number of purchases was negatively correlated with external factor 3, indicating that a high effect of combined referral sources on the number of purchases implies a poor effect of clothing material on clothing consumption, and similarly, a high effect of clothing material on clothing consumption implies a poor effect of recommended sources on the number of purchases. This suggests that when female university students are recommended by different sources to make more purchases, they ignore the material of the garment. Moreover, the influence of comprehensive recommended sources on the number of purchases showed a non-significant correlation with external factor 4 buyers’ shows, implying that the influence of comprehensive recommended sources on the number of purchases is not necessarily related to the influence of buyers’ shows on clothing consumption, and it is impossible to judge the size of the influence of buyers’ shows on clothing consumption simply by
<table>
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<th>External factors 3</th>
<th>External factors 4</th>
<th>External factors 5</th>
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<td>External factors 5</td>
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(continued)
Table 1. (continued)

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**At 0.01 level (two-tailed), the correlation was significant.  
*At level 0.05 (two-tailed) the correlation was significant  
External factors 1: E-commerce platform advertising  
External factors 2: traditional media advertising  
External factors 3: clothing fabrics and material  
External factors 4: buyer shows  
External factors 5: model pictures  
Recommended sources 1: celebrities’ outfit recommendations on the number of purchases in programs, airports  
Recommended sources 2: watch taobao and other e-commerce platforms broadcast guide  
Recommended source 3: Red, Weibo and other social apps recommended by Online celebrity KOL
the condition that the influence of comprehensive recommended sources on the number of purchases is high.

3.4 Regression Analysis

In terms of regression analysis, this research chose the consumers behavior as independent variable, including consumption of clothing styles, motivation and requirements. This research took the effect factors as dependent variables, like e-commerce advertisements, buyer shows, e-commerce live, social media and famous people. These dependent variables were combined and calculated the average, which was called Y (Table 2).

The variance analysis chart shows that the regression model of this research has statistical significance, \( F = 3.561, P < 0.05 \), which indicates that there is linear correlation between independent variables and dependent variables. But in the question that whether consumers constantly buy same style of clothes, there isn’t strong significance to the impact of advertisements and social media. In our interview, six student said that there were many factors to choose clothes, like material, quality, comfort and so on. They have preference in one period, but it can be changed easily. One student said sometimes she would buy one clothes because of the famous people she liked, but when she isn’t crazy about them, the clothes would lose the meanings. Therefore, the advertisements and social media do have influence on consuming behavior, but they don’t play a decisive role.

This result partly verified the conclusion of mobile advertising research which found that the entire mobile advertising attributes measured have Positive and significant effect on customer purchase intention at 0.05 level of significance. Meanwhile, including many kinds of e-commercial advertisements, they found that informative mobile advertising has the highest significant value. But Frick & Vivian (2021) had different opinion about different products, they thought differ from clothing products, in the case of digital devices, it may be that people who spend more time online actually have a higher perceived need for owning digital devices, irrespective of online content perception [5] (Table 3).

In our research, the Q9 (do you buy clothes after comparing the difference between model picture and your own shape) has significant value, with \( p = 0.02 \), smaller than 0.05, which shows that in multiple regression analysis, this variable plays a significant role in predicting dependent variables. This indicates that on the one hand, people are affected by the advertisements and social media, which shows the ideal image of wearing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>Degrees of freedom</th>
<th>The mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>significance</th>
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dependent variables: Y
### Table 3. Regression analysis chart.

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<th>normalized coefficient</th>
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<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>standard error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
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<td>0.162</td>
<td>19.699</td>
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<td>0.076</td>
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<td>Comfortable or fashionable</td>
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<td>0.036</td>
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<td>-1.025</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

a. dependent variables: Y

the cloth, on the other hand, when consumers think the actual effect is similar to the ideal effect, they would like to buy the clothes. Differ from the traditional media, e-commerce advertisements can better meet the diverse demands of customers.

Under the influence of e-commerce advertising, consumers connect the content of advertisements with their own needs. In terms of clothing, the emphasis of advertising is often aesthetic, to show consumers the ideal effect of clothing. Consumers who are deeply influenced by advertisements and model pictures are often paying for the ideal clothes. Social media gave birth to the concept of social advertising and emerged as a new trend of marketing. KOL on social media are more realistic than advertisements. They act as consumers to recommend products to their audiences. Influenced by advertising and social media, the clothing buying behavior of consumers represents the feature of multiple comparison. The difference between model figure and real effect show strong linear significance to advertisements and social media, which shows that people who are into watching advertisements and using social media are more likely to compare the ideal effect, referenced effect and actual effect, to decide whether to buy.

This research found the influence of advertising factors of e-commerce platforms and recommendation factors of social media on consumer behavior. At the same time, purchasing behavior of consumers is also affected by other factors, such as brand. Widawska-Stanisz (2014) raise that brand “Reserved” gains new fans every day [6]. They are potential customers of Reserved shops. Fazal & Basheer said (2020), in Malaysia, advertisers can use valuable and attractive content in social advertising to enhance the emotions of Malaysian consumers toward fashion clothing brands [7]. Also, It is worth noting that each type of factor can also be subdivided into multiple types for study, and further conclusions may be drawn.
4 Conclusion

This dissertation was the result of an investigation into the effect of how social media and e-commerce platforms influence female university students’ stylized clothing consumption behaviour and the relationship between female university students’ stylized clothing consumption and self-image presentation. It is unfortunate that the questionnaire was less sophisticated, with more basic information, while the examination of factors influencing stylized consumption tended to be simpler. In terms of the result, the research has shown that e-commerce platforms and social media influence consumers by showing the desired wearing effect, with e-commerce platform advertising being more effective than traditional advertising, while social media is a new marketing trend where consumers are more likely to compare the desired effect, the reference effect and the actual effect to decide whether to make a purchase. The finding of this study has a number of important implication for future practice but there are several questions still remain to be answered such as apart from the influence of advertising on e-commerce platforms and social media on consumer behaviour, what other factors may also play a big role.

References

6. W.S. Agnieszka, Social media as a new channel for company communication on the example of clothing company[J]. 2014.