



Consumption Behaviors of Chinese Generation Z: Apply to Culture and Creative Products

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Abstract. Generation Z(Gen Z) is becoming the main consumer of cultural and creative market in China. Hence, this thesis mainly focuses on research what are the special consumption behaviors of Chinese Gen Z by qualitative study, the study shows: 1) Subculture enthusiasts of Gen Z will gain a sense of community identity when purchasing the specific cultural creative products. 2) Gen Z Consumers consider the purchase behavior could show their personality or it is one of the way to present themselves. 3) For Gen Z, the way to present culture is more important than the existence of culture itself or product itself.

Keywords: Culture and creative products · Consumption behavior · Generation Z

1 Introduction

Generation Z refers to the Internet generation born from 1995 to 2005, accounting for 27% of China's total population. As digital natives, they are born in the digital world with complete technology of PCs, Mobile, Gaming Devices and Internet (Westlund, 2010). According to data from the Ali Research Institute, more than half of consumers of cultural and creative(C&C) products are Generation Z. The Mobile Internet Blue Book "China Mobile Internet Development Report (2019)" shows, the Internet has spawned a variety of niche cultures, such as Internet celebrity culture, fan culture, two-dimensional culture, Han suit culture, and other special niche cultures clusters which attracts numbers of C&C product buyers. The vast majority of C&C providers will require targeting the Gen Z in China as it is the main consumption group. Therefore, a thorough study of the Gen Z consumer behaviors of cultural and creative products is a major task.

2 Three Hypothesis According to Marketing Literature

Tajfel (1979) proposed that the groups (e.g. social class, family, football team etc.) which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world¹.

Social Identity Theory (Saul Mcleod,2019) informed a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership, people will subconsciously look for groups that

match their attributes to verify their social value, and such groups will form a subculture which attract more and more subculture lovers gathering.

This can well explain that the cultural entrepreneurship industry takes a cultural connotation or cultural symbol as the core, uses cultural entrepreneurial products as a medium to attract consumers with the same hobbies to form a cultural community, and then quickly and efficiently promote and update through the power of the Internet.

Hypothesis 1: Subculture enthusiasts of Gen Z will gain a sense of community identity when purchasing the specific cultural creative products.

Brands are perceived to possess a personality that consumers use as an avenue for self expression or to experience the emotional benefits by which the brand differentiates itself from others (Lan Phau, Kong Cheen Lau, 2000). Brand personality can be defined as set of human characteristics associated with a given brand and it tends to serve a symbolic or self-expressive function rather than a utilitarian function². Brand personality, like human personality, is both distinctive and enduring³. For instance, the personality of Fido Dido is seen to be 'It's cool to be you', 'Normal is boring', 'Dare to be different'. Nike is identified as 'Just do it' while Pepsi is always associated with 'youth, spirit and excitement' when we think about it. Consumers of these brands are thought to share similar traits.

Hypothesis 2: Gen Z Consumers will choose cultural and creative products with brand personality that match their own personalities, and they consider the purchase behavior could show their personality.

One of the common precepts of contemporary consumer research is the notion that products may serve as symbols, and hence may be evaluated, purchased and consumed based upon their symbolic content (Zaltman and Wallendorf 1979). The symbolic meaning of a product in some product classes, overcome or dominate its technical performance as a determinant of consumption⁴. This is especially likely if the product is frequently used to signify social position and/or selfidentity.

Applied to the cultural and creative industry, when consumers buy cultural and creative products, they are not only buying the product itself, but also buying the cultural identity represented by the product. If the values advertised by the product are in line with one's own pursuit, or the product's own cultural attitude can resonate with consumers, it becomes the motive of consumer behavior⁵.

Hypothesis 3: For Gen Z, the way to present culture is more important than the existence of culture itself.

3 Studying Chinese Gen Z Consumers of C&C Products

3.1 Semi-structured Interviews (SSIs) with Chinese Gen Z Consumers to Identify What Are Their Special Consumption Behaviors

In order to better understand what are the consumption behaviors of Chinese Gen Z when they purchasing C&C products, I decided conduct semi-structured interviews with them, as it is at the base of structured questions with an elastic agenda of open-ended questions that allow extended probing, in order to get richer, deeper and more complete information, during the two-way communication, some answers beyond expectations will be obtained in terms of unpredictable development.

Ignoring the influence of gender, occupation, age, educational background and other incalculable factors on the survey, I chose 130 friends and strangers as participants who were born in 1997–2002 and have high frequency of purchasing C&C products.

3.2 Consumer Behavior Coding and Analysis.

The research questions will be based on three core questions about the hypotheses, and each core question will be further asked connected with the interviewer's answers to explore their deep consumer psychology as much as possible. The three core questions are:

- a. Do you have a sense of community identity when purchase the subculture and creative products that you love?
- b. What kind of C&C brand attract you the most?
- c. The traditional culture itself or the way to present culture which one motivate you to purchase C&C products?

The structure of the entire interview is to answer simple multiple-choice questions to determine the classification, ask the core questions and describe why, then further in-depth questions based on the respondent's answers for core questions. There are no restrictions on the open link, and both parties are free to play. I transcribed some important information and select part of them to do a coding (see Table 1).

During the interview, every respondent showed strong personality characteristics and consumer behavior, but to some extent different consumer attitudes are related to consumption levels. Assuming to exclude the interference of consumption level, according to the coding and analysis, there are three top consumption behaviors of Chinese Gen Z and the subsets of those three behaviors (see Fig. 1):

Buy for social: Shopping is a simple and straightforward way to socialize, looking for expressions of group identity.

Buy Who I AM: Character setting, self-shaping.

Buy for pleasure: Consume for happiness without more reason.

For fans of animation, Lolita and other quadratic elements, street culture, Marvel superheroes and other typical subculture followers, purchasing related C&C products is a break through to get into their interest social group. Hot and unique or precious C&C products could be the capital of the communication and social activity, they sharing, learning and interacting through social media in order to get a community identity⁶. Having the same things as your peers can better maintain social relationships, and it is also an ice-breaking opportunity for people you don't know but you want to know.

- Finally, we can confirm that hypothesis 1 is valid: Subculture enthusiasts of Gen Z will gain a sense of community identity when purchasing the specific cultural creative products, and that is important symbol for socializing. Base on that, we will have a recommendation in terms of community identity.

Table 1. Coding for part extract

Extract	Code	Category	Theme
I will buy some special or popular cultural and creative products in order to be more integrated into the circle of the two-dimensional culture. We have common interests and hobbies. This is the first step to understand each other, and to a certain extent this is also my identity tag	Hot item Social identity Common topic Subculture group	Socialism	Buy for social
I think C&C has their own personality, and personality speaks. I would buy it because I think the product itself is very cool and very individual. I prefer special things. If the design of the product is creative or cultural, or I think it is interesting, then buying it will also make me feel like I am cool and special.	Personality Special Product design Cultural connotation	Individualism Unique aesthetic	Buy what I am
I think for C&C products, the product itself is not the most important, because there are many products that can provide the same function. The creative design and the cultural connotation embodied in it can attract me more. If this kind of culture is very distinctive or precious, I don't really care about the usefulness of the product at all, buying this product will make me happy	Ignore function Distinctive culture Product design Cultural connotation Consumption emotion	Hedonism Self-expressionism Emotional	Buy for my pleasure

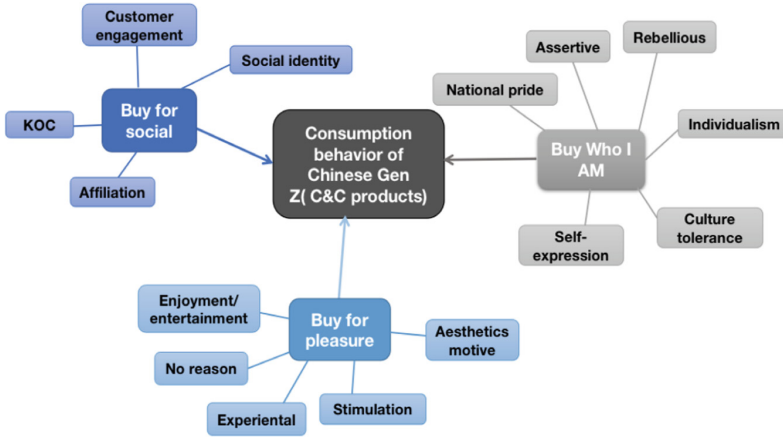


Fig. 1. C&C products Consumption behavior of Chinese Generation Z

The survey shows that Gen Z has their own aesthetic preferences for the consumption of C&C products, which is a way to show their personality. They are also more tolerance for culture and product presentation, they can accept and try a variety of different styles, or buy certain products that are rebellious and exaggerated from a traditional perspective in order to highlight their differences⁷, and will also support domestic products for national pride. Everyone showed their individualism and express “Who I Am” anytime, and that is exactly the interesting points for the interview.

Because it is difficult to generalize the consumption behavior of the target audience, C&C products are also exploring different styles, just like Gen Z keep trying new things and styles that fits with “ME”, but there is no doubt that traditional and primitive aesthetics can no longer meet the needs of consumers, and bold, deliberate, individual, and connotative products will get a bonus of the market⁸.

- Lastly, we can get a conclusion test for hypothesis 2, that Gen Z Consumers consider the purchase behavior could show their personality or it is one of the way to present themselves, as for the brand personality that match their own personalities, it is not so obvious in my interview research.

One of the strong motivation of Gen Z consume C&C product is “My pleasure, right now”. Spending money for happiness is the true idea of many young people. The purchase behavior of Gen Z is sometimes very straightforward. Their purchase logic is: good-looking, so buy it, buy it, then happy. Therefore, their choice of C&C products largely depends on the creative design and appearance of the product that of straightforward feeling. Products allowing consumers to experience surprises and emotions during the first contact and subsequent use to creates experience value, and allowing consumers to feel the real interaction with the product⁹, which is also what makes them happy.

Consumer behavior is a value comparison. Gen Z consumers buying C&C products will compare the meaning of the products, including brand value, positioning, or the story of the products themselves. That is to say, if the product does not have brand value, loss

of a background derivative story, and missing to show a unique cultural connotation, it cannot touch the consumer's purchase motivation, or if these touching culture and meanings are not deep enough, it will be regarded as consumable consumption, which can be bought or not¹⁰.

- Hence, if C&C products own cultural connotation + creative design, will be more powerful than product itself, we can say hypothesis 3 is meaningful: For Gen Z, the way to present culture is more important than the existence of culture itself or product itself, so dig for deeper cultural connotation and present it through product marketing is necessary.

However, there are some limitation SSIs:

- a. Expression bias: Both sides of the interview could not fully understand each other's statements, which would easily lead to limits on the topic. Ice-breaking questions should be normal and straightforward, don't let correspondent think too much.
- b. Survivor bias: Some of the participants are my friends or people I familiar with, birds of a feather flock together, they have different personality but to some extent, we have some similar interest or values, that may leading the conversation to a certain direction but can not present most of Gen Z. If they all comes from the same subculture group, then their consumption behavior will highly matched.

4 Conclusion

Subculture enthusiasts of Gen Z will gain a sense of community identity when purchasing the specific cultural creative products. They will consider the purchase behavior could show their personality or it is one of the way to present themselves. For Gen Z, the way to present culture is more important than the existence of culture itself or product itself.

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