

Discussion on the Concept of Over-consumption

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Abstract—Over-consumption has become a major problem faced by the world today, including the waste and exhaustion of resources caused by excessive consumption, and obesity caused by excessive consumption of unhealthy food. In recent years, research on over-consumption has shown a growing trend, but few studies have a clear definition of over-consumption. Therefore, this study uses text analysis to retrospectively analyze the literature on over-consumption in the past decade, and further explore over-consumption by analyzing the definition of over-consumption, the object of over-consumption, the form of over-consumption and the measure of over-consumption to further more discuss on the concept of over-consumption. This study establishes a research framework. It believes that over-consumption includes both excessive purchase and excessive consumption, but it cannot simply be summarized and measured by “buy more” or “consume more”, but rather exploring from narrow and broad perspectives. In a narrow sense, in terms of individual behavior of consumers, over-consumption refers to the consumption behavior that causes consumers to purchase or consume more products than planned, and produces a psychological reaction of regret or embarrassment. The object is not related to “hedonic products” or “products that are not good for health” or “products of non-renewable resources”. Broadly speaking, it is aimed at the public interest of the society and the well-being of mankind, that is, over-consumption is non-essential consumption that has negative consequences which refers to the purchase or use of more “hedonic products”, products that are not good for health and “products of non-renewable resources”.

Keywords—over-consumption; excessive purchase; excessive consumption

I. INTRODUCTION

On November 11, 2018, China's online shopping platform - Tmall hit a turnover of 215.3 billion yuan in 24 hours. In less than 16 hours, it broke the record of 2017's double eleven-day trading volume of 168.2 billion. In recent years, with the rapid development of the network and the popularity of smart phones, the online shopping platform has established a safe golden flow mechanism and smooth logistics channels, making online shopping easier and safer, and therefore greatly promoted the development of online shopping. But looking back, the amount of these 215.3 billion transactions, how much is hidden from the consumer's excessive purchase? Is it because of the promotion method of the industry that allows consumers to purchase in a planned way? Or the conspicuous purchase using the promotion as a

scorpion to persuade themselves to satisfy themselves through the offer?

Worldwide, the crude oil used to make many consumer products has been doubled in 2010 compared to 2000 (OPEC, 2013). In 2015, world crude oil consumption reached 92.98 mb/d. (OPEC, 2016). People's personal items are getting more and more, mobile phones are getting bigger and bigger, and this increased consumption is not all that people need, and some is non-essential consumption to maintain some "morbid" needs in modern society.

On the other hand, it is reflected in the social and health problems caused by excessive intake of calories. Obesity has become a worldwide problem that can be compared to epidemic diseases (World Health Organization 2007). In the United States, the 10 years since the 1980s were the fastest time for Americans to gain weight. More than 64% of American adults over the age of 20 have problems with overweight or obesity (Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2003/2004). This situation not only leads to serious medical and economic consequences, such as 2002 The United States has paid more than \$92.6 billion for health care for overweight people (National Center for Health Statistics 2004), and it has also created many social problems. According to relevant media reports, every year when the United States recruits troops, more than 40% of young women and 25% of young men are disqualified because they are overweight. In the past decade, the width of revolving doors in department stores has increased by 20%, apparel manufacturers have had to produce more and more oversized clothes, and automakers have continued to advertise "more space inside the car." According to statistics, in order to bear the increasing weight of Americans, American airlines will pay an additional 750 million US dollars in fuel costs each year (Zheng Yuhuang, Su Dan, 2014). People eat significantly more than in the past. However, this is not because their bodies become in need of more food, but they have consumed excessive calories. The practice field has also tried to change the size of the package, for example using small packages to control food intake, but studies have shown that under certain conditions, small packages will increase consumption (Argo & White, 2012).

Since the 1990s, more and more fields have begun to focus on over-consumption, such as in the fields of medicine, nutrition, psychology, marketing, sociology, ecology, economics, and housekeeping. In recent years, research on over-consumption has shown a growing trend, but few studies have a clear definition of excessive consumption. In

particular, the over-consumption behavior discussed by the Institute is only to explore whether it consumes more layers than before (Deng, Srinivasan, 2013; Argo & White, 2012). However, what is over-consumption? Is it just a concept built up in quantity?

This study explores the concept of over-consumption from several perspectives on the definition of over-consumption, the object of over-consumption, the form of over-consumption, and the way it is measured.

II. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

A. *Relevant Definitions of Over-consumption*

In recent years, questions about over-consumption have been widely discussed, such as in the fields of medicine, nutrition, psychology, marketing, sociology, ecology, economics, and housekeeping. However, there is currently no unified opinion on its definition and terminology (Håkansson, 2014). This study intends to gradually clarify the concept of over-consumption from the definitions associated with it.

The most famous definition associated with this is in 1899. Veblen put forward the concept of "Conspicuous Consumption" and "Vicarious Consumption" in the book "The Theory of the Leisure Class". Because both forms of consumption increase the level of consumption but do not substantially improve the quality of consumer self-perception, these two forms of consumption are considered problematic and wasteful. Based on this position, some scholars have pointed out that over-consumption is a strategic problem because of the improper coordination leading to an increase in consumption levels (Schelling, 2006).

Another related definition is a common definition of dichotomy, "hedonic consumption" – to satisfy short-term vices and "utilitarian consumption" – to satisfy "real" and long-term preferences (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000).

In addition, there are studies that define over-consumption from the perspective of harming an individual's physical health. For example, "If consumption leads to adverse consequences, such as overweight, it is considered as over-consumption" (Jain, 2012), "Consumption exceeds the level that the body can tolerate." (Ponthiere, 2011).

There are also studies that define over-consumption from a broader perspective – the consequences that will be brought to individuals and society, such as "the non-essential consumption that is not conducive to the development and well-being of individuals and society, but to maintain certain needs of modern society." (Albinsson & Perera, 2012).

In summary, although there are many definitions of over-consumption, there is a common feature that is the improper consumption that will bring negative consequences.

B. *Objects of Excessive Consumption*

In terms of over-consumption, past studies have pointed out that most of the objects of over-consumption are concentrated in hedonic or "vice goods" (de Witt Huberts et

al. 2012; Jain, 2012), such as the food that regarded as "unhealthy", "high-calorie" and "high-fat" (Barson et al. 2011; Williams et al. 2011), as well as alcoholic beverages and cigarettes (Cherukupalli, 2010; Quick and Bates, 2010). When purchasing these goods, consumers often only consider the short-term benefits, while ignoring long-term consequences.

There are also studies that have different interpretations of "hedonic products." For example, there is a study that defines over-consumption as consuming commodities that does not "conform" with the needs and desires of traditional Marxism (Slater, 1997).

Some studies have no clear object, but use "material" or "tangible goods" to refer to objects of over-consumption (Grauerholz & Mckenzie, 2012). For example, goods and services that need to use non-renewable resources or overdraft future consumption (Mursa, 2012).

C. *Forms of Over-consumption*

In terms of research topics, they can be roughly divided into two categories, one is to study the behavior of excessive purchase, and the other is to study the excessive consumption after purchase. Among them, the latter are more directly related to over-consumption.

1) *Excessive purchase behavior:* Forsythe (2003) research shows that the majority of users of the Internet are rich and highly educated. With the popularity of plastic money, such as credit cards and stored value cards, these ethnic groups are facing a potential crisis of excessive purchase in online shopping, because consumers are likely to overdraw their debts-paying ability in the face of too many commodities they want to buy to put themselves in the mud of financial crisis. In addition, the convenience of using credit card payment, the low perception of consumers on the risk of electronic money, it is easy to unwittingly purchase excessively during the shopping process.

Researchers on the other side of excessive purchasing are shown in terms of promotional information and social impact. Mishra & Mishra (2011) compared the sales of organic foods and unhealthy foods with price promotions and incremental promotions, and found that for unhealthy foods, consumers are more satisfied with incremental methods than price promotions. Consumers are often unaware that they inadvertently over-purchased unhealthy foods that they don't need. The research of Luo, Andrew, Song, & J Aspara (2014) showed that consumers are more inclined to buy group-buy goods that are time-limited and popular.

However, some studies have pointed out that consumers buying luxury goods, especially the brands that are more flamboyant, are to establish a relationship with the upper class, while the upper class tends to buy more subtle brands (Bagheri, 2014). So it considered the conspicuous consumption, such as the purchase of luxury goods, as over-consumption, which is suspected of moral abduction.

2) *Excessive consumption after purchase:* As for the over-consumption after the purchase of the product, there

have been few studies in the past, mainly focusing on the “hedonic products”, especially the consumption research on the food part. Generally speaking, it mainly discusses from the aspects of packaging, appearance of products and self-esteem of consumers on their appearance.

In the past, it has been confirmed in the literature that people eat food not only because of physical hunger, but also because of "family and friends", "packaging", "label", "color", "name", "placement and container", etc. (Wansink, 2004). Therefore, packaging not only affects consumers' real-time purchasing decisions, but also affects consumption after purchase.

The article on the impact of packaging on over-consumption is focused on the transparency of the packaging, the size of the packaging and the labeling of the information.

Transparent packaging has a double-sided effect. On the one hand, consumers can see food directly through transparent packaging, thereby increasing consumption (ie, highlighting effect). On the other hand, consumers can also see how much they have consumed through transparent packaging, thereby reducing consumption (ie regulatory effects) (Deng, Raji Srinivasan, 2013).

Highlighting food is a way to stimulate consumption (Wansink, 2004). In addition to hunger, consumers most often mention that the reason for consuming food is “I saw food” (Tuomisto et al, 1998). When seeing food, it will increase the signal of hunger, secrete saliva and insulin, release dopamine, and promote happiness and food craving through nerve conduction (wang et al, 2004). Therefore, the visual effect of food will increase food consumption. For example, transparently wrapped sandwiches are eaten more than sandwiches that use opaque packaging (Johnson, 1974). In contrast, when food visibility is prevented (eg, blindfolded), normal weight and obese people's food consumption will be reduced by about a quarter. (Barkeling et al. 2003).

But just as the visual effects of food can initiate and drive food consumption, it can also end food consumption (Wansink, Payne, and Chandon, 2007). The key factor in determining how much consumers consume is whether they are concerned about how much they eat, ie whether they are monitoring their own consumption. (Polivy et al. 1986). Many literatures have shown that monitoring is a key factor in determining the success or failure of self-control (Baumeister, 2002). Because consumers can monitor the amount of food remaining from transparent packaging, they may think they have eaten enough and stop using it.

All in all, transparent packaging has a dual effect on food consumption: promoting the prominent effect of food consumption and inhibiting the regulatory effect of food consumption.

In today's era, people are increasingly concerned about the relationship between diet and health. Although studies have shown that people use unhealthy diets and delicious foods to equate healthy diets with foods that are not good (Wansink, 2006), people think better than the taste of food for their own health benefits. If people think that a certain

food is healthy, they will not monitor how much they have eaten. At this time, the monitoring effect is suppressed, and the highlighting effect dominates the consumption after purchase. Conversely, if food is considered unhealthy, people monitor their own health for their own health considerations. At this time, the monitoring effect dominates the consumption after purchase.

The appearance of food is closely related to food consumption. The importance of food appearance is reflected in the fascination of those who cook to make dishes into visual art. Consumption will appetite after seeing the pizza, and the consumption and the appearance of the pizza are positively related. Visually mundane foods reduce appetite and cause obesity to significantly reduce weight (Marcelino et al. 2001).

The integrity of the appearance of the food also affects consumer judgment on the consumption of intuition, Julio and Barbara (2014) pointed out that because of the Law of Organization, consumers will think that products with incomplete appearance will be small than products with complete appearance, which relaxes the monitoring of self-food intake, and leads to over-consumption.

As for the size of the package, previous studies have found that under certain conditions, small packages will increase consumption because small packages can become an external regulator of consumer self-control. Consumers adjust their self-calorie intake because of the size of the package. For small-packaged foods, consumers may loosen control over themselves and over-intake unnecessary calories.

On this basis, Argo and White (2012) introduced the self-esteem in appearance as a regulatory variable, and found that people with low appearance self-esteem, who is in external control properties (package-related factors, signaling that regulates food intake)), is particularly sensitive. Therefore, small packages can increase the level of consumption compared to large packages or without packaging. The highlighted external control attributes on the small package, such as the visibility of the number of products, the location of the calorie content, and the amount of calories conveyed, further increase consumption, especially among those with low self-esteem. The most basic process is at least part of the cognitive drive. This effect is mitigated when the subject is placed under the load of the job. It has also been found that small packages have the effect of regulating food intake and mediating this effect.

However, most of the literature on over-consumption is directed at “unhealthy foods”, and the measurement methods are often based on whether they are consumed more. But for the consumer, how can be over? Does spending more represent over-consumption?

III. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of the above literature, this study believes that over-consumption includes both excessive purchase and excessive consumption, but it cannot simply be summarized and measured by “purchase more” or “consume more”, but rather exploring from narrow and broad

perspectives. In a narrow sense, in terms of individual behavior of consumers, over-consumption refers to the consumption behavior that causes consumers to purchase or consume more products than planned, and produces a psychological reaction of regret or embarrassment. The object is not related to “hedonic products” or “products that are not good for health” or “products of non-renewable resources”. Broadly speaking, it is aimed at the public interest of the society and the well-being of mankind, that is, over-consumption is non-essential consumption that has negative consequences which refers to the purchase or use of more “hedonic products”, products that are not good for health” and “products of non-renewable resources”.

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