

Research and Analysis of Undergraduates' Consumption Behaviors in the New Era

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Abstract

Since 1999 when Chinese government decided to expand undergraduate enrollment, the number of China's undergraduates has surged. As time passes by and with constant changes and development of social economy, the undergraduate group, as a special group, has been paid extensive attention to by all walks of life. Many behaviors of undergraduates become the research objects. As the "Chosen One" of the new era, contemporary undergraduates are living with the supervision and under the opinions of all walks of life. In the new era, changes constantly take place in undergraduates' consumption behaviors and influences over them are changing. Hence, it's especially important to conduct full studies on and analysis of undergraduates' consumption behaviors. This paper, based on existing domestic theories and the author's experience, carries out an in-depth exploration of contemporary undergraduates' consumption behaviors, analyzes their consumption status and features, locates the consumption mistakes, causes and solutions, further illustrates factors influencing undergraduates' consumption, and identifies their consumption trends, which can effectively instruct undergraduates' consumption behaviors. At the same time, it can enable university educators, families and the society to grasp undergraduates' consumption behavior features and development trends in a more accurate way, and help better instruct and educate undergraduates' consumption.

Key words: Contemporary undergraduates; Consumption psychology; Consumption behavior

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INTRODUCTION

At present, undergraduates don't have correct cognition of their own consumption behaviors; neither do they realize that consumption is not only a material life process but also the process of cultural, exchange and social life. While clearing up objects in physical sense, consumption builds objects in both social and cultural aspects and make individuals integrated in social systems. Besides, their consumption concept and its training directly influence the formation and development of their outlook on the world, thus generating significant influences over their lifetime morality behaviors. Accordingly, it's of important practical significance to pay attention to undergraduates' consumption status, grasp their consumption psychological features and consumption behavior guides, and teach them to establish reasonable consumption concept.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Consumption is a social activity which connects economy and culture and the junction point of economic life, cultural life and social life.

Consumption is not only the exchange and communication channel in the economic field and daily life but also the field which combines capital and daily life practices. Hence, consumption is of operation and marketing significance; besides, it bears important cultural and social importance.

Consumption demonstrates that people establish certain social relations of division of labor, cooperation,

exchange and interaction with others through their roles of producers and consumers. "Consumption is not only the process of consumers' pursuing maximized individual effectiveness in the economic sense but also the process of consumers' significant building, news differentiation, cultural categorization and social relation regeneration in a sociological sense."

At the social transition period, with reform in social economy, undergraduates' consumption behaviors have undergone great changes from traditional single model to diversification and socialization. They pursue high-end and brands, frequent high-consumption cultural entertainment places, are equipped with first-rate communication devices, often take taxi while going out, and get together to make friends, etc.. Although the proportion of such groups is little but the number is great and negative influences are generated. Blind consumption, comparison consumption, conspicuous consumption, face consumption and premature consumption are quite common among some undergraduates.

At present, undergraduates don't have correct cognition of their own consumption behaviors; neither do they realize that consumption is not only a material life process but also the process of cultural, exchange and social life. While clearing up objects in the physical sense, consumption builds objects in both social and cultural aspects and make individuals integrated in social systems. Besides, their consumption concept and its training directly influence the formation and development of their outlook on the world, thus generating significant influences over their lifetime morality behaviors. Accordingly, it's of important practical significance to pay attention to undergraduates' consumption status, grasp their consumption psychological features and consumption behavior guides, and teach them to establish reasonable consumption concept. Besides, it plays a decisive role in social stability. Its major research significance is manifested in the following aspects:

Firstly, the influences of their immense consumption over related industries can be better analyzed. China's gross enrollment rate is still low in the world. It can be expected from China's economic and educational development that the gross enrollment rate of colleges and universities will witness enhancement, which means the number of undergraduates will increase stably and the huge quantity will be greater than all other countries in the world. Therefore, their consumption will be quite surprising. Suppose that a student spends RMB 8,000 every year and in the next few years, their consumption value will reach about RMB 200 billion. The impetus of such huge sum on the associated industries cannot be ignored. The consumption scope of undergraduates is relatively narrow. The study on their consumption behaviors can help related enterprises conduct product and service R & D and sales in a pertinent way and fully seize the stable market.

Secondly, undergraduates' consumption concept plays an important instructive role in social consumption concepts. In China, with increasing graduates, their role of guiding is much stronger in social trends. They are receivers and spreaders of new ideology and constitute the majority of high-income groups. Their consumption concepts in college are usually transferred to society and further influence their families and people around them, thus making them important instructors and practitioners of social consumption concepts. As a result, the study on undergraduates' consumption behaviors can help us learn about their future consumption trends and at least judge and predict the future consumption concepts of the entire society at a certain level.

Thirdly, methods which instruct their correct consumption should be concluded. Studies on their consumption behaviors can summarize the right ideologies and methods to instruct undergraduates' consumption, enhance their consumption awareness, and train their ability of managing finance in a scientific way and guiding the right way of consumption. College is a higher stage of education when undergraduates possess strong ideological analysis ability, have their own way of dealing with problems, are able to treat consumption rationally, cognize the functions of money, know how to make ends meet, work out a budget plan for necessities in life, and then open up the consumption field focusing on learning and with comprehensive quality improvement as the purpose while they have extra money (if their family conditions permit).

Fourthly, misunderstanding of their consumption and wrong consumption concepts should be found out, which is helpful to take precautions and targeting as undergraduates' consumption education. The number of primary and middle school students is huge in China. In the next few years, they will successively enter colleges and universities and the current undergraduates can set an example. To analyze the active consumption concepts and carry them forward as well as correcting the negative concepts can enable the new students to establish correct consumption concepts and colleges and universities to guide healthy and correct consumption concept education.

Fifthly, it's helpful to make objective and just evaluation of undergraduates' consumption. Most of the previous studies on undergraduates' consumption criticize their bad consumption behaviors and the negation attitude towards their consumption concepts is the mainstream, which is yet unfair. We cannot make rash criticism or negate their consumption behaviors; instead, we should learn about their consumption conditions and understand causes for such behaviors. Undergraduates are social people as well and their behaviors and ideologies are not isolated. We cannot just evaluate them at the student level. Studies on their consumption behaviors can present comprehensive and objective evaluation standards which are only fair to them.

2. CONNOTATION AND FEATURES OF UNDERGRADUATES' CONSUMPTION BEHAVIORS

Undergraduates' consumption behaviors refer to the process in which undergraduates and junior college students consume material and spiritual products in daily life according to their economic conditions (usually determined by the economic conditions of their families) in order to satisfy their demands. Undergraduates' consumption behaviors possess all the features of general consumption behaviors.

Compared with general consumers, undergraduates are a special consumption group.

First of all, in terms of age, undergraduates are at their youth stage and they are mature in both physical and ideological aspects. They have the ability of labor. However, after entering colleges and universities, most of their time and efforts are spent in learning, and cannot be completely engaged in production activities, thus having no stable economic income.

Secondly, undergraduates have stable economic sources. Their living expenses are given by parents in every semester and sometimes their parents wire money every month. Even families which are not rich will try to satisfy students' consumption demands.

Third, most of undergraduates leave their hometown for further study and thus live independently without constraint of their parents. They have the absolute right to dispose of their living expenses. This is what's special in undergraduates' consumption.

3. ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY UNDERGRADUATES' BASIC CONSUMPTION ITEMS

Firstly, electronic products. Contemporary undergraduates have grown up with network and science & technology. With increasingly updated electronic products, what modern undergraduates care about computers and mobile phones are not whether they can afford it or not but more about product personalization and branding. Electronic products have become an integral part of undergraduates' life to a great extent, and one of the factors which can change undergraduates' lifestyle and life habits to the greatest extent. According to the survey, most of modern undergraduates' electronic products are purchased by their parents. The cost of electronic products is a big expenditure in their living expenses.

Secondly, online shopping. With technological development and network popularization, online shopping has been a fad and contemporary undergraduates are obsessed with it. Most undergraduates have online shopping experience and almost all global products are gathered on the internet, which goes beyond the

traditional space limitation and is extremely popular among contemporary undergraduates.

Thirdly, travel consumption. Modern undergraduates are the most dynamic group and pay great attention to the spiritual side of traveling. They broaden their view and witness different conditions and customs of varied regions and nations during the travel. They choose to go together with friends, classmates or some tour pals, which are a kind of social contact as well. In the survey, most of contemporary undergraduates go on traveling with the help of their parents; some of them save money by doing part-time jobs or getting scholarship. Modern undergraduates' travel has turned into a popular trend.

Fourthly, love relationship consumption. Contemporary undergraduates look forward to relationship so as to make it up for their emotional blank, kill time, strengthen life experience and gain spiritual satisfaction from the relationship, etc. The relationship is no longer about activities inside the campus. Rather, they pursue more material forms such as giving expensive gifts and going to fancy places, thus obviously increasing consumption in this aspect.

Fifthly, "capital accumulation" consumption. Modern employers have higher and higher requirements for academic degree and techniques. Many undergraduates will choose to prepare for postgraduate examinations, civil servant or different professional certificates or study abroad while facing great pressure from job hunting. Most of parents support such consumption very much and are generous to invest.

4. FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY UNDERGRADUATES' CONSUMPTION PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORS

Firstly, undergraduates' consumption structure is diversified and improvement of their consumption becomes a new trend. Social development makes students no longer satisfied with basic necessities of life only; instead, they seek spiritual and psychological consumption such as social intercourse, learning and entertainment. Diversity in undergraduates' personal needs and differences in demand degree and levels lead to diversification in consumption level and quantity, etc..

Secondly, undergraduates' consumption is dominant and reasonable. By dominance, it means that most undergraduates try to satisfy their learning demand and use necessary entertainment consumption to regulate their life while meeting with living consumption demands. Regards to responsibility, most undergraduates will make ends meet according to their family income level and their practical demands.

Thirdly, undergraduates' consumption psychology and behaviors pursue personalization and fashion. Contemporary undergraduates seek self-value and

are characterized by fragile and flexible thinking and extensive knowledge. They want personalized life and desire for demonstration of their personalities. Such consumption psychology and behaviors are more demonstrated in lifestyle and articles of daily use.

Fourthly, undergraduates' consumption psychology and behaviors fall short of reason. Following suits, comparing unrealistically and pursuing fashionable brands reflect undergraduates' consumption psychology and behaviors. Many undergraduates only enjoy themselves and don't consume based on their practical demands. They regard material desire and sensory happiness as the goals of life.

Fifthly, great differences exist between undergraduates' consumption levels. The difference in consumption level is mainly determined by their family conditions. Students who are born in rich families have higher consumption level and some students have extremely high consumption. Students who are still at the poverty line are concerned with their living expenses and tuition. Consumption polarization happens.

Sixthly, imbalance. Undergraduates come from different regions and families. Imbalanced regional economic development and industrial development lead to imbalanced family income. Besides, family structures are different, which will make undergraduates' consumption psychologies lose balance.

5. ANALYSIS OF CAUSES FOR UNDERGRADUATES' UNHEALTHY CONSUMPTION PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORS

At present, such problems in undergraduates' consumption as unplanned consumption, unreasonable consumption structure, unrealistic comparison, extravagance and waste, overly expenditure in relationship are caused by many factors and are not only related with negative ideologies under the greater social context but also relevant with lack of positive instructions on the part of families and universities.

Firstly, impact of social unhealthy values. Values are basic opinions which people hold when cognizing and evaluating different things and phenomena. It changes with changes in historical conditions and objective environment. People at different social periods have different values. Since the reform and opening-up, China has undergone immense changes which are not only reflected in the economic field but also people's ideologies. Today's undergraduates have full access to the society in campus "without walls". Some unhealthy and incorrect values in society such as unrealistic comparison atmosphere, extravagance and waste, money worship and hedonism erode contemporary undergraduates' ideology all the time. In recent years, due to rapid

economic development and improved people's living standard, some families have to get rich first and their consumption ways have undergone great changes. The traditional consumption concepts are strongly affected. Undergraduates' consumption psychology is immature and they are likely to compare with others in the group imitation while admiring secular material enjoyment.

In addition, marketization progress has profound influences over undergraduates' consumption concepts as well. Marketization brings about the public nature of consumption demands and causes heterogeneous demands as well. On the one hand, with increasing product variety on the market, people have more choices and their consumption demands are getting complicated. On the other hand, marketization leads to the formation of public markets, thus making consumption demands appear in a public form. Undergraduates have limited knowledge of the market economy so they are likely to be influenced by the market. Many merchants already fix their eyes upon the special consumption group of undergraduates and hold that the undergraduate consumption market carries great business opportunity. Those who can seize the university market which is huge and potential will gain great return. Therefore, some merchants use varied means and marketization including advertising, public relation and promotion approaches to attract undergraduates, thus stimulating their consumption and shopping enthusiasm. Campuses are permeated with varied ads and the seemingly favorable conditions are greatly tempting to undergraduates.

Secondly, lack of consumption knowledge education in universities. At present, the education about consumption knowledge is far from enough. Since 1980s, western countries have set up consumption course for children and regard consumption education as an important content of students' morality education. For instance, in order to let students maintain hardworking and thrift, Japanese government starts implementing consumption education for three-year-olds. American government conducts financial management education for five-year-olds so that they can live an independent life when they are 18. In Sweden, detailed contents ranging from general money knowledge to shop information are compiled for students to learn and train their financial quotient. Due to different factors, such education is obviously much weaker in China.

In China, some newspapers, films and TV make misleading reports and cover some contents with the themes of luxury consumption and life enjoyment, which is a wrong guide for undergraduates. Although ideological and political education workers in universities carry out national condition education and glorious traditions education as well as helping students set up correct life outlook and consumption concepts, there are no powerful methods and measures in face of problems, and problems

in undergraduates' consumption cannot be timely and effectively instructed. Numerous entertainment places such as restaurants, supermarkets and internet bars inside and around campuses attract undergraduates all the time. Besides, most of domestic university education focus on conceptual education and ignore the education of methods and abilities. Many students want to have reasonable and healthy consumption, conduct financial management and formulate their own consumption plans but universities don't provide such education. People don't know financial quotient knowledge and possess financial management ability when they are born. If conscious and standardized education is not implemented, no matter how smart people are, they cannot completely grasp such knowledge and possess the ability. This is what is missing in our education.

Thirdly, impact of family factor. Parents' own consumption psychology and behaviors influence their children in a subconscious way. Parents don't instruct children's consumption sufficiently and fail to timely correct their unhealthy and unreasonable psychology and behaviors. Besides, they didn't spend enough time to train undergraduates' financial management ability.

Fourthly, personal psychology factor. Undergraduates are subjects of consumption. Problems in undergraduates' consumption are mainly caused by their psychology. They didn't form good consumption psychology and behavior habits. Insufficient thinking ability and immature personality are major causes for bad consumption. It makes undergraduates not able to resist the material tempt and misunderstanding from the external world, thus giving rise to such irrational consumption psychology problems as unrealistic comparison, imitation and hedonism.

6. SUGGESTIONS ON INSTRUCTING UNDERGRADUATES' CONSUMPTION PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORS

Firstly, the society should advocate correct consumption concepts. The society should establish favorable consumption environment and atmosphere purify consumption surroundings, thus providing guarantee for the

formation of undergraduates' good consumption concepts, consumption psychology and behaviors. The society can publicize correct consumption psychology and behaviors to undergraduates via the internet, TV and the press.

Secondly, universities should conduct education related to consumption psychology and behaviors including consumption moral cognition, moral behaviors, moral emotions and moral consciousness. The set-up of related courses can help student's cognize the dangers of unhealthy consumption psychology and establish the right consumption psychology. Universities should build favorable consumption atmosphere and the training of undergraduates' favorable consumption psychology and behaviors should be regarded as an important part of campus cultural construction.

Thirdly, families should help children abandon unhealthy and unreasonable consumption habits and behaviors, instruct them to conduct scientific and reasonable consumption and form healthy and rational consumption psychology, and help undergraduates enhance financial management ability and train correct consumption habits.

Fourthly, undergraduates should set up correct consumption concepts. They should train good consumption habits and consume reasonably according to their practical conditions. Besides, they should work out a proper consumption plan, learn to consume and improve consumption ability in consumption practices.

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