Impact of Social Relationships on Consumption Behavior among High School Students

Yundi Wang [1, a]

[1] Ersha International Campus, Guangzhou Zhixin High School;

[a] 3286637298@qq.com

Abstract. This study investigates the influence of social relationships on consumption behavior among high school students, with a focus on family, friend, and social media relationships. Through a comprehensive survey conducted among students from different types of high schools, including vocational, international, and ordinary high schools in Guangzhou, China, various aspects of social relationships and consumption patterns were analyzed. The findings reveal significant differences in social media relationships among the three types of high schools, with implications for consumption behavior. While differences in real-life relationships among students are relatively insignificant, social media relationships play a crucial role in shaping consumption disparities among high school students. Therefore, promoting rational consumption among high school students may benefit from regulating internet usage and guiding behavior on social media platforms.

Keywords: High school students, social relationships, consumption behavior, social media.

1. Introduction

In today's society, high school students, as the main participants of the new generation, have increasingly attracted attention to their consumption behaviors. With the widespread use of the Internet and the rise of social media, high school students are no longer isolated consumers; their consumption decisions are more influenced by social relationships. Therefore, understanding how high school students' social relationships shape and influence their consumption choices has become a research task of significant practical and theoretical value.

Over the past few decades, significant changes have occurred in social structure and values, profoundly affecting individuals' social relationships and consumption attitudes. Especially in the information age, the prevalence of Internet technology has diversified the formation and expression of social relationships, providing a broader platform for high school students' social relationships and consumption behaviors. High school students are at the peak of information acquisition and social activities, and their consumption choices are no longer just a reflection of practical needs but also a comprehensive manifestation of social relationships, identity, and aesthetic trends. Understanding the consumption patterns of high school students, as the main participants in future society, not only helps businesses better meet their needs but also has far-reaching implications for the future development of society as a whole. By gaining an in-depth understanding of how high school students' social relationships influence consumption, we can better comprehend the consumption psychology and behavior of the new generation, provide scientific basis for market decisions, and promote sustainable socio-economic development. Currently, most research agrees that adolescent consumer behavior may be influenced by parents, peers, and the internet or mass media, but there is much debate about the extent of influence. Goodrich & Mangleburg (2010) argue that parents have the greatest influence on adolescents' social power perception and purchasing behavior, so marketers should position products to gain parental approval. Mishra & Maity (2021) suggest that peers have the most significant influence, followed by media and parents. In cultures with high individualism and power distance, parents and peers have a greater influence on adolescents' attitudes toward brands.

This paper will be divided into five parts: Introduction, Literature Review, Questionnaire Design, Statistical Analysis of Results, and Conclusion. In the introduction, we will introduce the background, research objectives, and significance of the study, providing readers with a comprehensive understanding of the impact of high school students' social relationships on

consumption. The following chapters will unfold one by one, delving into the role and influence of high school students' social relationships in the field of consumption.

2. Literature Review

In understanding the consumption behavior of high school students, the measurement of social relationships is crucial. A multidimensional assessment of social relationships can delve into three main dimensions: family, peers, and the internet, revealing their potential influences on high school students' consumption decisions. This chapter will combine previous research and theoretical frameworks to deepen the understanding of social relationship measurement through a literature review.

2.1 Study of Family Relationships

In past research, the influence of family relationships has been widely studied. The family is where individuals first encounter society and forms the basis of social relationships. Parents are the first contacts for children in their early growth. In consumer socialization research, the influence of parents is achieved through family communication patterns, measuring the frequency of parent-child interactions (Mishra et al., 2018). Kim et al. (2009) pointed out that the quality of family communication significantly influences adolescents' consumption decisions. Mother-son communication patterns are significantly related to adolescents' decision-making styles and family purchasing influence, with mothers' concept-oriented communication positively correlated with children's utilitarian decision-making style (e.g., cautious and thoughtful decisions) and social/attention-seeking decision style (e.g., entertainment and pleasure decisions).

2.2 Study of Peer Relationships

High school students are in the adolescent stage, where they encounter peer pressure in the process of developing unique identities and establishing social relationships. Peer relationships occupy an important position in high school students' social circles. Many studies emphasize the potential influence of peers on individual consumption behavior (Moretti, 2011; Agarwal et al., 2021). Grohmann & Sakha (2019) suggest that respondents with higher cognitive abilities are less susceptible to peer effects, while those living in small villages are more susceptible. Bursztyn et al. (2014) argue that when someone purchases an asset, their peers may also want to purchase it, both because they learn from their choices ("social learning") and because their ownership of the asset directly influences others' utility from owning the same asset ("social utility"). Niu (2013), through an online survey of teenagers, found that teenagers who engage in planned purchasing behavior can be considered rational consumers, as they are not concerned with fashion, entertainment, or hedonistic shopping consciousness, but rather focus on brand, price, and quality. Indeed, teenagers' purchasing decisions can be reinforced by peer influence. However, peer effects also play a significant role in adolescent alcohol consumption, smoking, and illegal drug use (Lundborg, 2006).

2.3 Study of Social Media Relationships

With the sudden surge in the use of social media by young consumers, globalization and economic growth have brought about significant shifts in consumption habits, production, and technological revolutions. Social media platforms have become reliable sources of communication with consumers and are shaping consumer purchasing intentions (Jain et al., 2020). Factors such as social media, online interaction, and online leadership have become important influences on consumption decisions (Shah et al., 2023). Social networks have expanded the scope of teenagers' social comparison, self-assessment, and self-enhancement, thereby enhancing their ability to develop consistent identity positions (Livingstone, 2008). Cheung et al. (2011) found that most people use Facebook for instant communication and contact with friends. Group norms also significantly influence our willingness to use Facebook. When users perceive their values to be

similar to those of the group, they are more inclined to use Facebook. Enjoyment is a key determining factor in using social networks as a tool to support purchase decisions (Di Pietro & Pantano, 2012). Social media shares similarities with peer effects, but social media is more likely to trigger the need for identity affirmation.

3. Planning and Implementation of the Survey

The main purpose of this study is to explore the influence of high school students' social relationships on their consumption behavior, with a specific focus on family networks, friend networks, and internet social networks. The specific survey content includes family background, composition and characteristics of social networks, internet usage, and individual consumption habits.

This study adopts a multidimensional questionnaire design, combining analysis of existing literature with practical considerations to ensure the comprehensiveness and rationality of the questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into three main parts: the first part gathers basic information to understand the basic situation of the respondents, including gender, school type, grade, and parental occupation. The second part delves into social networks to understand in detail the behaviors and interactions of high school students in family, friend, and internet social networks, as well as their attitudes and perceptions of these networks. The third part focuses on consumption behavior, exploring high school students' consumption of food, entertainment, and learning, including consumption frequency, expenditure level, and consumption motivations.

To ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of the survey, a combination of multiple survey methods is employed. Firstly, an electronic questionnaire is used, designed through the "Questionnaire Star" platform, and the questionnaire links are distributed to respondents through social media and school intranet channels. Secondly, face-to-face interviews are conducted within the school premises to ensure sample diversity and comprehensiveness. Thirdly, classroom surveys are conducted, with teachers distributing questionnaires during break times.

The survey targets high school students in Guangzhou, with schools selected through random sampling to ensure the representativeness of the survey results. A total of 145 questionnaires were distributed, with 13 questionnaires refused or abandoned midway. After strict review and removal of invalid samples, the number of valid questionnaire samples reached 132, with an effective rate of 91%. The questionnaires cover different grades, school types, and family backgrounds of high school students. During the data cleaning process, some unqualified samples were deleted to ensure the accuracy of statistical analysis. The achievement of the effective sample rate meets expectations, providing strong data support for subsequent statistical analysis.

4. Analysis of Survey Results

4.1 Basic Information

In this survey, there were a total of 108 female participants, accounting for 82%, while there were 24 male participants, accounting for 18%. Vocational high school students were the most numerous, totaling 104 people, accounting for 79% of the total. International high school or international department students and regular high school students were 13 and 15 people, respectively, accounting for 10% and 11%. In terms of grade, there were 106 students in Grade 12, 20 students in Grade 11, and 6 students in Grade 10, accounting for 80%, 15%, and 5%, respectively.
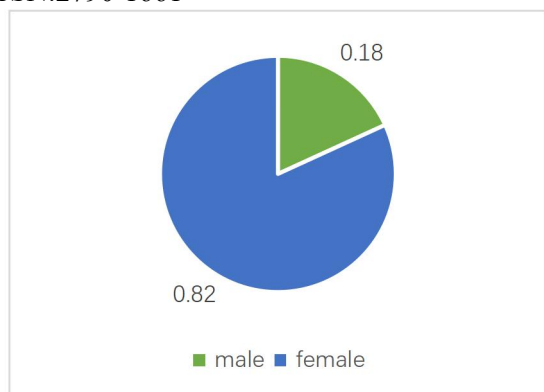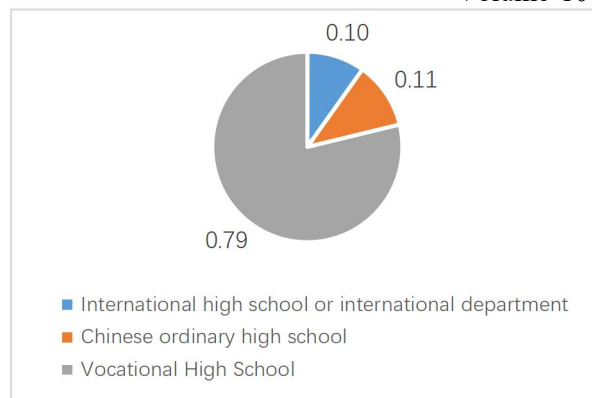
Fig.1 gender distribution
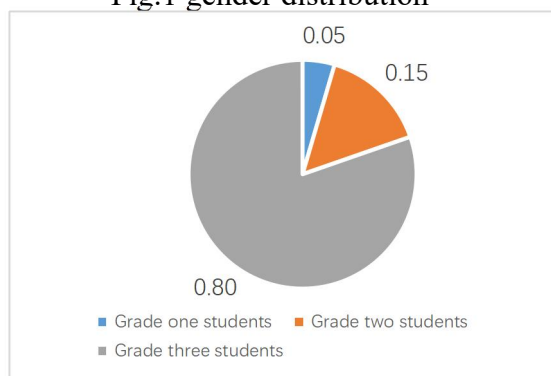

Fig.2 school type distribution

Fig.3 grade distribution

4.2 Family Relationships

Regarding frequent communication with family, all three types of high schools have a similar level of closeness, with proportions ranging from 0.67 to 0.68. When it comes to making decisions, consulting with family members is highly common across all three types of high schools, with proportions exceeding 0.8. All students from the International high school or international department chose to consult with their family members. In terms of confiding troubles or sharing interesting events with family members, the proportions for the International high school or international department and Chinese ordinary high school were 0.92 and 0.8, respectively, both higher than Vocational High School's 0.68. This may be because students at Vocational High School are about to enter the workforce, so their mindset is more mature. Regarding frequently liking or commenting on family members' social media posts, Chinese ordinary high school students accounted for 0.8, Vocational High School students accounted for 0.68, while students from the International high school or international department only accounted for 0.38. This may be because students from international schools come from relatively affluent families, and their parents are relatively busy with work, resulting in fewer social media posts related to daily life, leading to fewer likes or comments from students. When it comes to frequently going out shopping with family members, the proportions are similar across all three types of high schools, ranging from 0.6 to 0.7.

Table1 family relationship between different school type

	communication with family	consult with their family	confiding troubles or sharing interesting events	liking or commenting on family	going out shopping with family

Number					
International high school or international department	9	13	12	5	9
Chinese ordinary high school	10	12	12	12	9
Vocational High School	71	86	71	71	73
Rate					
International high school or international department	0.69	1.00	0.92	0.38	0.69
Chinese ordinary high school	0.67	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.60
Vocational High School	0.68	0.83	0.68	0.68	0.70

4.3 Friend Relationships

Overall, in most aspects of friend relationships, the three types of high schools are quite similar. All three types of high schools have high proportions of students engaging in casual chats with classmates and having friends to eat lunch with, both exceeding 0.9. Regarding having friends to confide in, Chinese ordinary high school and Vocational High School have higher proportions, accounting for 1 and 0.84, respectively, while the International high school or international department is slightly lower at 0.77. In terms of having friends to help, Chinese ordinary high school and International high school or international department are at 0.85 and 0.93, respectively, while Vocational High School is slightly lower at 0.73. The difference in having friends with similar reading hobbies among the three types of schools is significant. Chinese ordinary high school has the highest proportion at 0.93, while Vocational High School and International high school or international department are both at 0.69. This also indicates that the academic pressure at these two types of schools is lower than at Chinese ordinary high schools.

Table2 friend relationship between different school type

	casual chats	to confide in	to help	lunch	similar reading hobbies
Number					
International high school or international department	12	10	11	12	9
Chinese ordinary high school	15	15	14	14	14
Vocational High School	102	87	76	96	72
Rate					
International high school or international	0.92	0.77	0.85	0.92	0.69

department					
Chinese ordinary high school	1.00	1.00	0.93	0.93	0.93
Vocational High School	0.98	0.84	0.73	0.92	0.69

4.4 Social Media Relationships

Although over 0.85 of students frequently use the internet, high school students' interaction on social media is relatively low. In terms of frequently posting original content, all three types of high schools are below 0.5, with Vocational High School relatively higher at 0.45. The proportion of students who frequently repost or comment is higher than those who post original content, indicating that high school students use the internet more for browsing content rather than showcasing their lives. In terms of frequently receiving likes, Vocational High School has the highest proportion at 0.71, while the other two types of high schools are around 0.5. Regarding making friends with strangers online, the proportion in the International high school or international department is as high as 0.92, while Vocational High School has the lowest proportion at 0.69. This may be because students studying abroad tend to seek out alumni more extensively, needing more information, while students who are about to enter the workforce are more cautious.

Table3 social media relationship between different school type

	use the internet	post original content	repost or comment	receiving likes	making friends with strangers online
Number					
International high school or international department	11	4	5	6	12
Chinese ordinary high school	13	5	7	8	11
Vocational High School	90	47	53	74	72
Rate					
International high school or international department	0.85	0.31	0.38	0.46	0.92
Chinese ordinary high school	0.87	0.33	0.47	0.53	0.73
Vocational High School	0.87	0.45	0.51	0.71	0.69

4.5 Consumption Patterns

Overall, there are significant differences in consumption patterns among different types of high schools in terms of entertainment and daily expenses, while the gap is relatively small in terms of food consumption. Regarding cosmetics consumption, Vocational High School has a proportion as high as 0.85, while the International high school or international department is at 0.54. Chinese ordinary high school is at 0.33, which aligns with general expectations as there tends to be higher expectations for grooming among Chinese ordinary high school students. In terms of spending on new clothing, Vocational High School has a proportion of 0.67, Chinese ordinary high school is at

0.53, while the International high school or international department is only at 0.38. This difference could be due to the requirement of school uniforms in some schools. There are minor differences in online membership consumption, snack consumption, and fan economy consumption, which are all decisions that students can independently make, leading to a certain degree of similarity within the school environment.

Table4 consumption between different school type

	Cosmetics	Clothing	Online membership	Snack	Fan economy
Number					
International high school or international department	7	5	7	10	8
Chinese ordinary high school	5	8	9	11	9
Vocational High School	88	70	53	84	70
Rate					
International high school or international department	0.54	0.38	0.54	0.77	0.62
Chinese ordinary high school	0.33	0.53	0.60	0.73	0.60
Vocational High School	0.85	0.67	0.51	0.81	0.67

5. Conclusion

From the above statistical data, it can be observed that the differences among the three types of high schools in social media relationships are more significant. Even though high school students from the three types of schools will face different choices after graduation, such as studying abroad, continuing domestic education, or directly entering the workforce, the differences among students in their real-life relationships, including school and family, are not significant. These differences include both the comparison within different types of high schools and the comparison between different types of high schools.

In contrast, in social media relationships, not only are the proportions significantly lower compared to family and friend relationships, but there are also significant differences among different types of high schools. Therefore, we believe that the consumption gap among high school students mostly stems from differences in social media relationships. Therefore, regulating high school students' internet usage and guiding their behavior on social media in a reasonable manner can help promote rational consumption among them.

References

[1] Agarwal, S., Qian, W., & Zou, X. (2021). Thy Neighbor's Misfortune: Peer Effect on Consumption. American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, 13(2), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20170634

[2] Bursztyn, L., Ederer, F., Ferman, B., & Yuchtman, N. (2014). Understanding Mechanisms Underlying Peer Effects: Evidence From a Field Experiment on Financial Decisions. Econometrica, 82(4), 1273–1301. https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA11991

[3]   Cheung, C. M. K., Chiu, P.-Y., & Lee, M. K. O. (2011). Online social networks: Why do students use facebook? Computers in Human Behavior, 27(4), 1337–1343. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.07.028

[4]   Di Pietro, L., & Pantano, E. (2012). An empirical investigation of social network influence on consumer purchasing decision: The case of Facebook. Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice, 14(1), 18–29. https://doi.org/10.1057/dddmp.2012.10

[5]   Goodrich, K., & Mangleburg, T. F. (2010). Adolescent perceptions of parent and peer influences on teen purchase: An application of social power theory. Journal of Business Research, 63(12), 1328–1335. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.12.004

[6]   Grohmann, A., & Sakha, S. (2019). The effect of peer observation on consumption choices: Evidence from a lab-in-field experiment. Applied Economics, 51(55), 5937–5951. https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2019.1638499

[7]   Jain, V., Gupta, A., Tyagi, V., & Verma, H. (2020). SOCIAL MEDIA AND GREEN CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR OF MILLENNIALS. 2456–9011. https://doi.org/10.31620/JCCC.06.20/16

[8]   Kim, C., Lee, H., & Tomiuk, M. A. (2009). Adolescents' perceptions of family communication patterns and some aspects of their consumer socialization. Psychology & Marketing, 26(10), 888–907. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20304

[9]   Livingstone, S. (2008). Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: Teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression. New Media & Society, 10(3), 393–411. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808089415

[10] Lundborg, P. (2006). Having the wrong friends? Peer effects in adolescent substance use. Journal of Health Economics, 25(2), 214–233. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2005.02.001

[11] Mishra, A., Maheswarappa, S. S., Maity, M., & Samu, S. (2018). Teenagers' eWOM intentions: A nature vs nurture perspective. Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 36(4), 470–483. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2017-0186

[12] Mishra, A., & Maity, M. (2021). Influence of parents, peers, and media on adolescents' consumer knowledge, attitudes, and purchase behavior: A meta-analysis. Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 20(6), 1675–1689. https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1946

[13] Moretti, E. (2011). Social Learning and Peer Effects in Consumption: Evidence from Movie Sales. The Review of Economic Studies, 78(1), 356–393. https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdq014

[14] Niu, H.-J. (2013). Cyber peers' influence for adolescent consumer in decision-making styles and online purchasing behavior. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 43(6), 1228–1237. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12085

[15] Shah, D., Webster, E., & Kour, G. (2023). Consuming for content? Understanding social media-centric consumption. Journal of Business Research, 155, 113408. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113408