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Comparison of Consumption Differences among Chinese and Thai Teenagers

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Abstract. Consumerism, a core value or lifestyle centered on the pursuit of material abundance, often links personal satisfaction with consumption behavior. With the development of the global economy and society, these values are becoming increasingly common and accepted, particularly among young people. This paper focuses on the similarities and differences in consumer attitudes, behavioral habits, shopping preferences, and social influencing factors among adolescents aged 13-19 in China (the world's second-largest economy) and Thailand (a renowned tourist destination). Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including data analysis and literature review, the paper analyzes these differences by focusing on four specific consumer-related concepts and areas: consumption platforms, consumption motivations, payment methods, and consumption sectors. This paper finds that while the consumption attitudes of adolescents in the two countries share many similarities, they also differ significantly, stemming from their different cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Thai adolescents are relatively more inclined to spend their income immediately, while Chinese adolescents are more inclined to save their income. Furthermore, due to the development of infrastructure and logistics, Chinese adolescents are more accustomed to shopping online. On the contrary, since Thailand's logistics industry still has relatively room for improvement, and one-fifth of the country's population and nearly half of its GDP are concentrated in the Bangkok metropolitan area, offline stores are more popular among Thai teenagers because of their convenience.

Keywords: Consumption Differences, Adolescents, Consumer Motivations, China, Thailand

1. Introduction

With the increase in disposable income among young people (such as lucky money and pocket money) and the growing convenience of shopping, teenagers have become a significant component of the consumer base, and their proportion is steadily increasing year by year. Furthermore, as young people are a country's primary resource and future security, guiding them in prudent and moderate consumption is a topic worthy of in-depth discussion.

Due to the impact of the internet both domestically and internationally, the scale, methods, and trends of consumption among Chinese youth have fundamentally changed compared to 5-10 years ago. Most Chinese products (daily necessities, entertainment products, etc.) are also becoming more

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youthful and internet-oriented (e.g., idol stars, anime and manga). Thailand, a culturally open and inclusive tourist destination, has also been increasingly impacted by online platforms in recent years, and this shift in consumption patterns has garnered widespread public attention. This article focuses on the similarities and differences in consumer attitudes, behavioral habits, shopping preferences, and social influences among adolescents aged 13-19 in China (the world's second-largest economy) and Thailand (a renowned tourist destination). Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, data analysis and literature review, this article analyzes these differences by focusing on four specific consumer-related concepts and areas: consumption platforms, consumer motivations, payment methods, and consumption sectors. As both China and Thailand are developing countries in Asia, studying the consumption patterns of these two groups of adolescents is crucial for guiding Chinese youth in moderate and rational consumption.

2. Comparison of consumption differences between Chinese and Thai teenagers

2.1. Consumption platform

At present, online transactions are the main mode of transactions in China. Young people mainly purchase goods through large shopping platforms such as Taobao, JD.com, and Douyin rather than traditional offline business models. At present, the number of young Internet users in China is about 185 million, and the age of Internet users is also showing a trend of getting younger [1]. The popularity of online payment in China is attributed to the high penetration rate of mobile electronic devices (especially among young people), the simplicity and convenience of large-scale app applications, and the existence of a complete consumer platform to support its development. According to statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, China's online retail sales of physical goods are expected to reach 130,816 billion yuan in 2024, representing a 6.5% increase over 2023 and accounting for approximately 26.8% of the country's total physical consumer goods(see Figure 1) [2]. The development of China's online market is also attributed to the advancement of national infrastructure and the maturation of various logistics companies' distribution systems, which have significantly reduced the cost of delivery. In 2021, China's express delivery business volume reached 108.3 billion pieces, breaking the 100 billion mark for the first time. China has long become the world's largest express delivery market. As early as 2020, there were more than 9 million physical goods e-commerce stores and more than 210,000 express service outlets in China [3]. At the same time, some content (such as trends, livestreaming, and product recommendations) on social media and short-form video platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, and Xiaohongshu also influences the consumption decisions of many teenagers. Furthermore, the virtual nature of online transaction apps like WeChat and Alipay can prevent teenagers from understanding the specific scale of their purchases, potentially leading to overspending.

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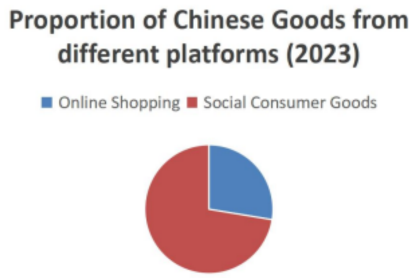

Figure 1. China's social consumption and online shopping account for the proportion of physical goods

Due to underdeveloped infrastructure, Thailand's current main trading platform is mainly offline retail. Generally, the delivery fee for goods purchased online in Thailand is about 20-150 baht [4]. At the same time, Thailand's main population and economic activities are concentrated in the Bangkok metropolitan area and its surrounding areas [5], making it the only super city in the country. Therefore, apart from cross-border transportation, most people do not have a high demand for online shopping, which is another reason why online shopping cannot develop in Thailand. However, with the gradual rise of online shopping platforms such as Shopee or Lazada, and the increase in logistics demand in other parts of Thailand (such as northern, southern, and northeastern Thailand), as well as the great success of local Thai logistics companies such as "Flash Express" in imitating the Chinese logistics model, the online shopping trend in Thailand is also slowly rising. At the same time, the content posted on social media such as Instagram and TikTok has a significant impact on the consumption habits of young people in the country. At the same time, the concept of pre-consumption among most Thai people is also one of the important reasons for this data. To sum up, although there are differences and gaps in the consumption platforms of Chinese and Thai teenagers, the directions of their influence are roughly similar - both are greatly impacted by consumption based on online platforms. Compared with adults, teenagers' consumption concepts are relatively weak and easily distorted. Therefore, the country has taken measures to actively guide and prevent unhealthy trends.

2.2. Consumption motivation

As explained above, trends, social media, public opinion, and influencers on social media have an indelible impact on teenagers. In China, the explosive growth of products like dolls, anime-themed merchandise, and trendy brands often coincides with the development of the internet. Recognizing teenagers' limited financial management skills, these companies prioritize youth-oriented, trendy products to attract younger consumers. Companies often create buzz online about their products, creating an impulse buy for the public (especially teenagers), which becomes their primary consumer motivation.

Thai teenagers typically pursue fast fashion and co-branded products, such as those from ZARA, H&M, and Pop Mart. The active secondhand shopping platform also reflects the "buy-display-re-sell" cycle. Furthermore, the growing and younger demographic of Thailand's beauty and cosmetics consumer base (ages dropping to 12-15 years old) suggests that beauty products (particularly Korean beauty products) are increasingly dominating consumer motivations among the country's youth. At the same time, with the development of AI and the expansion of online channels, or driven by demand for other types of knowledge, the knowledge available through the internet or AI large

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language models (LLMs) can now meet basic or even expanded knowledge needs, eliminating the need to purchase physical goods primarily for education or information dissemination.

Therefore, adolescents' consumption motivations are diverse, potentially influenced by both external public opinion and their own personal motivations.

2.3. Payment methods

In 2022, China will have 950 million smartphone users and 900 million internet users. Online payments, such as WeChat or Alipay, are the mainstream payment method in China. In 2020, online payments (mobile payments) accounted for 65% of the country's total payments, with a penetration rate far exceeding that of most upper-middle-income developed economies(see Figure 2) [6]. However, the popularity of online payments also brings some additional problems, such as the inability to shape the concept of money in young people, which may lead to impulsive spending or poor financial management, causing people to buy goods that are of no value to them.

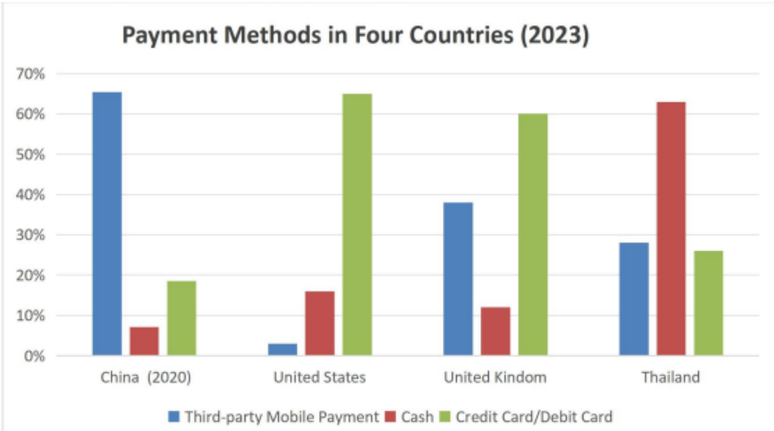

Figure 2. Payment methods in four countries

While online payment penetration among Thailand's younger generation is as high as 80%, it's undeniable that cash still accounts for 40% of all payments nationwide, contributing to a relative restraint among Thai youth when purchasing goods. Furthermore, due to the underdeveloped nature of online shopping in Thailand, offline purchases of mid- to high-priced goods still dominate Thai purchases, resulting in a relatively slow rate of product upgrades and a lack of demand for new products. These various payment methods also lead to varying consumer attitudes and preferences. The above suggests that the differences in payment methods between Chinese and Thai youth lie in the areas of electronic and mobile payment versus cash consumption.

2.4. Consumption concepts

Compared to Chinese teenagers, Thai teenagers are more inclined toward consumerism. This is largely due to the devaluation of the Thai baht following the Plaza Accord in 1985, which led to a greater willingness among the general public to convert their currency into valuable goods or enjoy life early. Furthermore, due to Thailand's school management system and the development of offline retail, Thai teenagers have more time to spend than their Chinese counterparts. In contrast, most Chinese schools and various sectors of society provide educational and guidance on proper consumer spending for young people, leading to a relatively cautious approach among most Chinese

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teenagers. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant gap in consumer attitudes between Chinese and Thai teenagers.

3. Conclusion

In summary, the similar consumption motivations of young people in China and Thailand are primarily driven by the internet and the trends it shapes. However, different payment methods and shopping conveniences contribute to the differences in their primary purchasing platforms and purchasing needs. Furthermore, due to historical and cultural factors, young people in the two countries hold distinct consumer perspectives. This demonstrates the heterogeneity of the impact of consumerism on youth in different countries. However, this article focuses primarily on descriptive comparisons and fails to quantitatively reveal the causal pathways of the culture-consumption interaction, lacking a mechanistic analysis. Future research could also comprehensively explore urbanization structures, differences in platform algorithms, and household savings concepts.

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