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Bachelor's Programme in Economy and Society

# **The factors affecting young Chinese people's fashion choices**

The importance of conspicuous consumption

by

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to explore the extent to which young Chinese consumers are making conspicuous consumption of fashion products. With China's increasingly rapid economic development, the income and consumption levels of the Chinese middle class are rising. Younger people, thanks to higher household income levels, also have more wealth at their disposal. Thus young Chinese are allocating their more spending to products in the fashion industry, including fashion clothing, footwear, and fashion accessories. At the same time, there has been an emergence of young Chinese designers creating their own independent fashion brands. However, it is also young Chinese people who are more likely to make conspicuous consumption, in most cases buying fashion products they do not need or like as much out of comparison with their peers or to build an identity of being fashionable. In my research methodology, I define the young consumers of fashion products as 18 to 30 years old. I will use questionnaires and interviews to explore young Chinese consumers' motivations when purchasing fashion products and their reasons for choosing to consume them or not. The results of the study show that young Chinese people do generally tend to be conspicuous consumers of fashion products, but there are also some other consumption factors, such as price and material, that are valued by young people.*

**Keywords:** *conspicuous consumption, fashion consumption, young Chinese people, China's economic growth, Chinese middle class, consumption factors, sustainability*

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# 1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, China has developed rapidly on the whole level, especially its economic growth has been much faster than other countries around the world (Rodrik, 2014). By 2018, China ranked second in the world in terms of economic power as measured by GDP, gradually moving towards being an advanced economy (Sicular, Yang, & Gustafsson, 2022). As seen in Figure 1, China's GDP is up to \$17.73 trillion as of 2021 and is gradually catching up to the United States through decades of economic growth and already surpassing Japan within Asia. This economic growth has led to more consumption, and more Chinese are able to dispose of wealth to make consumer choices (Sicular, Yang, & Gustafsson, 2022).

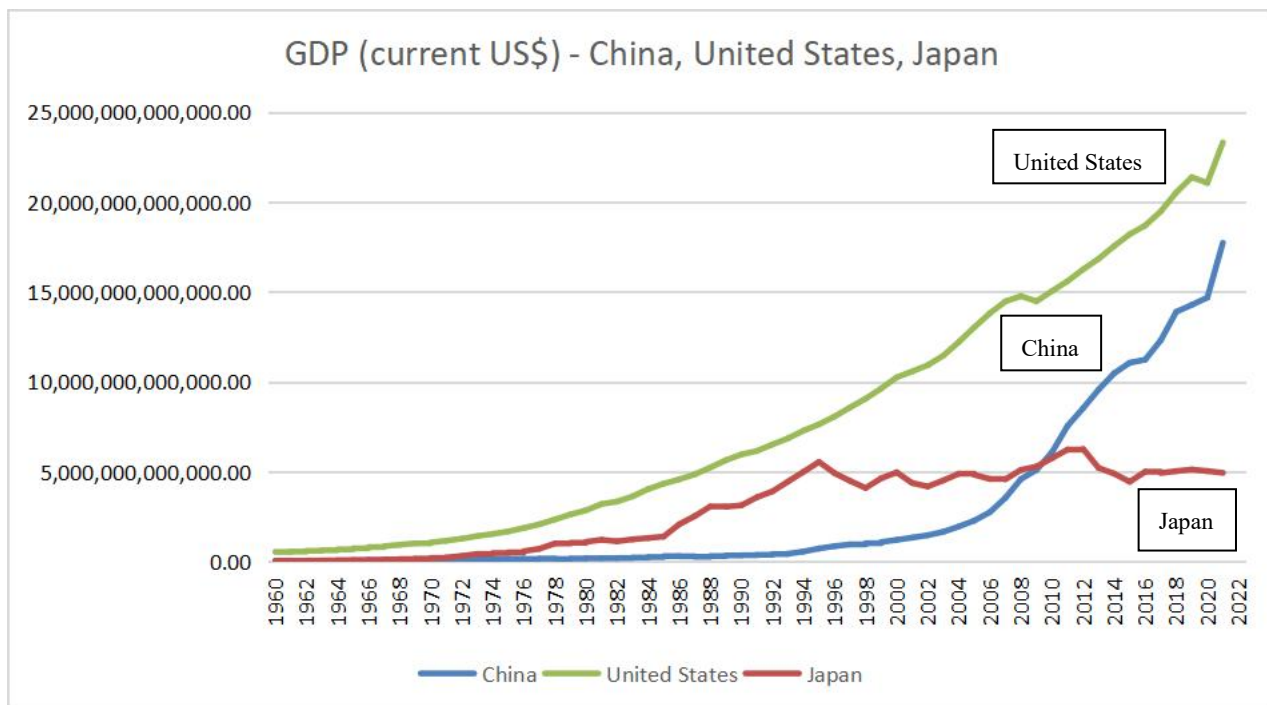
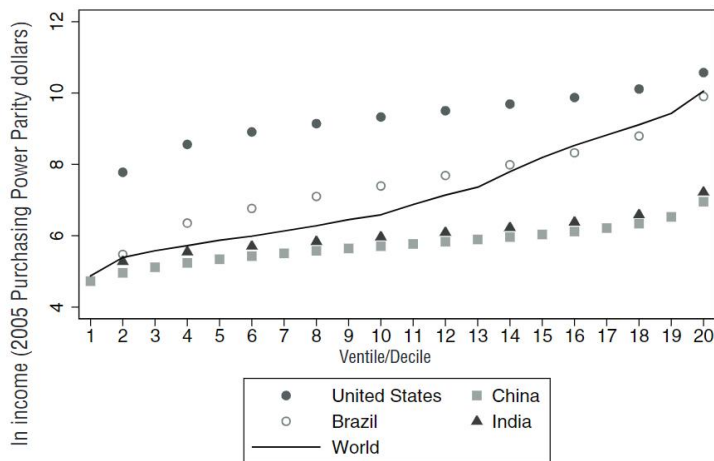


Figure 1: GDP in USD of China, United States, and Japan Source: Adapted from World Bank, 2023, The Author Made

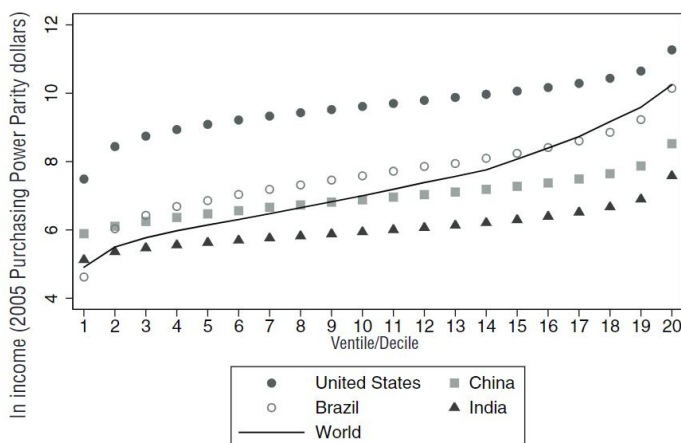
## 1.1 The Rise of Chinese Middle Class

China's middle class has been expanding rapidly since the 1980s, learning from the market development patterns of Western countries and other developed Asian countries, creating potential for consumption expansion and economic development in China (Li, 2006). Similarly, the size of the middle class continues to grow as the economy has grown exponentially in recent years (Li, 2006). As a result of rising income levels, more Chinese citizens are moving towards relative affluence and achieving "A moderately prosperous society (xiaokang shehui)" as proposed by the Chinese government with the aim of common

prosperity for the general population, and thus consumption levels have increased significantly (Sicular, Yang, & Gustafsson, 2022). Figures 2 and 3 show China's income levels in 1988 and 2005, which show that in just two decades, China's income levels and consequently its consumer purchasing power have increased significantly. This is the boom that has been brought about by the rise of the middle class (Rodrik, 2014).



**Figure 2: Income Distribution in the World and Selected Countries in 1988, by Decile or Ventile** Source: Rodrik, 2014



**Figure 3: Income Distribution in the World and Selected Countries in 2005, by Decile or Ventile** Source: Rodrik, 2014

Today, the Chinese middle class has the purchasing power to spend freely on higher quality goods and services due to its large population base and affluent income levels (Sicular, Yang, & Gustafsson, 2022). At the same time, the children of the affluent middle class (known as the second generation middle class), the younger generation in today's society approximately under the age of 30, have become the mainstay



of today's Chinese consumer market (Tsang, 2013). As Tsang (2013) mentioned, their consumption is based on the family income generated by their parents as the main source of funds, and influenced by their parents' consumption attitudes. When considering the Chinese middle class from an international perspective, their large population size is sufficient to change global consumption demand and has an important role in the evolution of global consumption behavior and consumption patterns (Sicular, Yang, & Gustafsson, 2022).

While economic growth has brought increased purchasing power to China's middle class, it has also brought further development in production. China's raw material production and primary product processing plants are located throughout the country and are large in scale, and with an abundant domestic labor force, they are able to provide the market with sufficient goods for consumption (Xing, Xu, Li, & Mao, 2022). At the same time, China has developed a digital economy in recent years, with major media companies developing online merchandising businesses, and the online platform achieves the mode of direct trading between consumers (Liu, Lu, Wang, & Long, 2021). These improvements in production, demand, and technology along with China's development have undoubtedly created more opportunities for people to consume.

## **1.2 Research Background**

The younger generation in China who approximately under the age of 30 has generally received a good education from their middle-class families and has access to more high-quality resources in society, which has allowed them to be exposed to a wide range of consumer markets and related fields (Tsang, 2013). However, in contrast to their parents' emphasis on frugal consumption, the enrichment that globalization has brought to young people has led them to pursue consumerism for personal enjoyment and for the purpose of seeking recognition (Podoshen, Li, & Zhang, 2011). Consumption in the fashion industry is the most visible form of consumerism by young Chinese people, who are prone to over-consumption of fashionable clothing, backpacks, and other fashionable products, as well as conspicuous consumption for the purpose of showing off (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013). They achieve social status through the pursuit of fashionable products, so the consumption of fashionable or popular products is particularly important in such a society (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013). Likewise, many young Chinese people spend a lot of money imitating others to buy fashion products out of vanity and comparison, such as comparing whose luxury bags are more expensive, which is also a manifestation of conspicuous consumption (Xing et al. 2022).

Whether it is fashionable clothing or luxury goods with brand equity, most young Chinese purchase them more for the purpose of showing off their wealth among their peers (Barrera & Ponce, 2021).

In this paper, I will discuss conspicuous consumption in terms of a multidimensional structural consumption behavior for the purpose of pursuing social status, showing off to others, and blindly following the trend (also known as herd consumption).

Previously, Giovannini, Xu, and Thomas (2015) and Sun (2011) investigated the high level of conspicuous consumption of luxury goods among the previous generation, the 30-50 year old in the present society. So far, some studies have separately examined the reasons and motives for conspicuous consumption, and some studies have only looked at the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods by young Chinese. However, in my research, I will focus on young Chinese people's conspicuous consumption of fashion products in the whole fashion industry including luxury goods, trendy brands, and street-wear brands. Meanwhile, considering the timeliness of the study I define the 18-30 year old group in today's society as young people. In addition, in the post-covid era, people's consumption patterns and decisions may change, and this study also compensates for the consumption of young people in China after the pandemic.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Because of these gaps, I would like to explore the consumption choices of young Chinese consumers in the fashion industry. Thus, my research question is as follows:

*“To what extent does conspicuous consumption affect fashion consumption among young people in China?”*

I focus my research on the conspicuous consumption behavior of young people in China for fashion products and also explore other potential factors that influence consumer choices. Therefore, I derive two sub-research questions,

*“SubRQ1: Apart from conspicuous consumption, what other factors affect fashion consumption among young people in China?”*

and *“SubRQ2: If conspicuous consumption is the most important factor, why? ”*

## **1.4 Aims and Objectives**

Through this study, I hope to explore the extent to which conspicuous consumption influences the fashion consumption of young Chinese people, as well as to explore the reasons behind the conspicuous consumption of fashion products by them. Moreover, other important consumption factors besides conspicuous consumption are also worth exploring. To achieve that goal, I used a combination of questionnaires and interviews to collect data. The questionnaire was designed to determine the extent of conspicuous consumption by ranking the important factors that influence the fashion consumption of young Chinese people. The interviews, on the other hand, were more direct in guiding respondents to provide information about their experiences and reasons for conspicuous consumption, while asking them about other important consumption factors they value.

## **1.5 Purpose**

Through this study, I hope to understand the general consumption choices of young Chinese people for fashion products in today's era, and what motivations exist for their consumption. At the same time, conspicuous consumption, as a common way of consuming fashion products, has always influenced people's consumption choices. Through this study, I also hope to understand the reasons for conspicuous consumption among young people in China today. Finally, this study presents the extent to which young Chinese people are concerned about and understand fashion sustainability, while highlighting the ecological hazards associated with unsustainable and environmentally unfriendly fashion production and consumption behaviors.

## **1.6 Outline of the Thesis**

In the remainder of this thesis, I will first provide a theoretical illustration in the second part, which will support the practical implications of my research direction through a review of the existing literature and confirm the tendency of young people to be more conspicuous consumers through previous relevant studies. In Chapter 3, I will present the research methodology and data collection methods I used, including the implementation process and steps, as well as the difficulties and obstacles in data collection. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of the data collection and analyze the corresponding results regarding the extent of conspicuous consumption. In Chapter 5, I will discuss these results and compare them with previous literature on the consumption behavior and motivations of young Chinese people to

generate more ideas about young people's consumer choices. Finally, in Chapter 6, I will provide an overview of the complete thesis, summarizing my findings in order to hopefully contribute to future research.

## **2 Literature Review**

In this chapter, I will first introduce the economic background of this study, which also includes a review of the research on digital consumption, fashion consumption, and sustainable fashion in China. I will then review theories related to the field of consumption, including conspicuous consumption motives.

### **2.1 Background**

#### **2.1.1 Increasing Wealth of the Chinese Middle Class and Shifting Consumption Patterns**

Since the 1980s, the incomes of the majority of the Chinese population have gradually increased from below the global average to the middle income level (Rodrik, 2014). Rodrik (2014) states that China has expanded its production through increased industrial and manufacturing development, while the products of manufacturing are used in export trade, achieving rapid economic growth and creating a greater distribution of income. He notes that as China's economy grew, common Chinese citizens gradually became middle class, and by 2005, Chinese households accounted for a large portion of the global middle class, with a median income of about \$1,303, almost reaching the world average. This increase in wealth has also led to an increase in purchasing power, with more Chinese spending on high quality products for their own enjoyment, such as villas, cars, and clothes as their standard of living has improved (Sicular, Yang, & Gustafsson, 2022).

However, as Chinese youth continue to flow into the Chinese market, consumption patterns are shifting (Podoshen, Li, & Zhang, 2011). Tsang (2013) notes that an earlier group of the middle class, probably around the age of 50-60 today, shaped their children's tastes and perceptions of consumption by creating a better education for them through their own social relationships. Therefore, she points out that the younger generation today, roughly 20-30 years old, has access to a wider range of social resources and types of consumption. Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011) note that the younger generation's parents have

experienced Cultural Revolution in China and are influenced by Confucianism, which emphasizes frugal spending and the need to save money. Similarly, Zhang (2021) points out that during the Cultural Revolution, the choices available for consumption were limited and some products were considered to be discarded, especially clothing with unique styles. She notes that frugality and simplicity were promoted during the Cultural Revolution, encouraging people to consume less clothing, and that high levels of wealth and purchasing power would symbolize capitalists who would be suppressed by the government for their social status. She states that in those days if clothes were worn out, one needed to patch them up themselves rather than buy new ones.

According to Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011), after the reform and opening up until the 2000s, Chinese consumers were gradually led to a more modern market, where the uniqueness and novelty of products imported from the West attracted Chinese consumption. They point out that by now, with the globalization of the market and the increased level of disposable wealth of young people, their consumption is more based on personal enjoyment and they want to show their personal wealth through consumption. And according to Tsang (2013), as middle-class parents continue to create wealth to support their children's living, young Chinese people are more likely to consume rather than work or produce. In other words, they are happy to spend the wealth provided by these parents. In addition to this, the emerging digital consumption also offers different consumption patterns for young people (Song & Sun, 2020).

### **2.1.2 China's Digital Consumption**

In the previous chapter I mentioned that the development of China's digital economy has opened up more shopping avenues for consumers. Sun, Wang, Cao, and Lee (2022) mention that digital marketing and online stores have been the dominant mode of consumption since the late twentieth century due to advances in network technology, overtaking traditional offline store sales. Mainolfi (2020) points out that for the fashion industry, new technologies for online consumption have brought a different sense of experience to consumers, enabling the same range of product selection through digital channels as can be made in physical stores. Similarly, Song and Sun (2020) mention that online shopping is very convenient for the selection of goods and services and that the prices of goods are competitively low. As of the end of 2019, they said the number of people participating in online shopping in China accounted for 74.8% of all internet users, and people's consumption patterns have changed. They point out that online consumption uses big data models to organize consumers' spending history, which leads to recommending more items

that they may be interested in. At the same time, they suggest that convenient payment systems and secure transactions save consumers' time costs. For merchants, they believe that digital transactions can combine suppliers, warehouses, and logistics channels, which also saves their rent and other expenses involved in opening physical stores.

In the prevalence of digital marketing, social media platforms can influence consumer engagement (Sun et al. 2022). Social media influencers, who may be celebrities or famous bloggers, promote the products they sponsor on social media, such as through live streaming, and many people choose to purchase these products as a result, which significantly influences people's online consumption behavior (Sun et al. 2022). In addition, the findings of Song and Sun (2020) suggest that young people are more likely to consume online. Similarly, Sun et al. (2022) indicate that 70% of Generation Z aged under 28 in China prefer to purchase products via social media.

### **2.1.3 China's Fashion Consumption**

Based on the increase in wealth level and the development of the digital economy, the consumption of fashion products has been increasing over the years, especially among young people who are more materialistic in their consumption of fashion products (Podoshen, Li, & Zhang, 2011). According to O'Cass and Siahtiri (2014), China has become the third largest luxury market in the world, and many luxury brand companies see China as a major market for their marketing because of its increasingly wealthy and status-conscious consumers. Similarly, Sun et al. (2022) state that China already accounts for 30% of global luxury spending, and Chinese consumers are expected to contribute one trillion RMB (0.145 trillion USD) to the global luxury industry by 2025. The demand for luxury brands in China continues to show significant growth as more well-known fashion brands enter the Chinese fashion wear market (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2014). At the same time, as the Covid-19 lockdown in China is gradually relaxed and people are able to re-enter shopping malls to consume fashion products, the potential for inelastic consumption could again drive an increase in luxury consumption (Sun et al. 2022).

Generally, Chinese consumers have a positive attitude toward western fashion brands, and they tend to consume more international brands than Asian brands (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013; O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2014). In fact, China is constantly encouraging people to consume more national brands and encouraging entrepreneurs to build Chinese local brands (Xing et al. 2022). According to Xing et al. (2022), China is

promoting fashionable clothing made by traditional crafts, such as silk techniques. Such products bring a real cultural heritage to Chinese trendy consumers (Xing et al. 2022). These are ways to build up young people's aesthetic and consumption views, promoting Chinese fashion culture while enhancing the national pride of "Made in China" and undoubtedly guiding young people's consumer behavior (Wang, 2022).

In the study of Chinese fashion trends, Wang (2022) points out that since around 2018, the Chinese 'Guochao' is on the rise, with 'Guo' referring to China and representing the Chinese cultural symbols of the products and 'Chao' referring to the fashion design of the products. She states that Guochao is an emerging Chinese fashion where designers combine Chinese cultural characteristics with international fashion aesthetics to promote a more recognizable image of Chinese fashion design internationally. She indicates that Chinese youth are eager to find national and cultural identity, so they are more likely to recognize these Chinese designs and are increasingly turning to consume Guochao products. According to Wang (2022), Chinese fashion brands are now seen as a new wave in the global fashion industry and the low reputation of Chinese export brands compared to global brands is being solved. In addition to internationally recognized fashion brands, Chinese youth are beginning to spend on original Chinese brands and elements of Chinese culture (Wang, 2022).

#### **2.1.4 Sustainable Fashion**

The production of clothes often emits large amounts of waste gases and liquids, thus causing serious environmental damage, and the large amount of clothing consumption also contributes to this pollution (Xu, Zhou, Jiang, & Shen, 2022). Sustainable consumption behavior refers to the choice of products by individuals to mitigate environmental impacts, and in the case of clothing, post-consumer conservation of clothing to increase the life cycle is also a sign of sustainability, such as purchasing environmentally friendly materials or recycling used clothing (Jung, Choi, & Oh, 2020). According to Xu et al. (2022), China is the world's largest textile producer, and textile waste and used clothing discarded in China amount to tens of millions of tons per year. However, eco-friendliness and sustainability in the fashion industry have received less attention in China in the past years, and although there is now an increased interest in the topic of sustainability among Chinese consumers, environmental issues are not taken into account when it comes to actual consumption (Jung, Choi, & Oh, 2020).

Chinese consumers, due to aesthetic and conspicuous consumption values, tend not to choose to consume sustainable clothing that looks ordinary, and Chinese society lacks norms for sustainable consumption (Jung, Choi, & Oh, 2020). Furthermore, in a study by Xu, Chen, Burman, and Zhao (2014), it was shown that Chinese people have a low level of consumption of second-hand clothes, that they have sufficient purchasing power to directly consume new fashionable clothes and therefore do not want to buy clothes that have been worn by others, and that the large scale of production in China ensures the yield of new clothes. However, in response to Chinese consumers' concerns about the cleanliness of second-hand clothes, Xu et al. (2014) argue that China's second-hand clothing market is gradually standardizing the process of cleaning and disinfection and the source of the clothes so that consumers can buy with assurance, and more second-hand clothing trading platforms are emerging.

## **2.2 Theory**

Patsiaouras and Fitchett (2012) present Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, in which conspicuous products are used to fulfill two missions, one is to achieve due functionality and the other is to bring a degree of consumer satisfaction. They propose that in Veblen's theory of the leisure class (TLC), consumption is a manifestation of the status-seeking desires of the wealthy and aristocratic leisure classes, who demonstrate their wealth and social status by comparing the products they consume with each other, a consumption behavior that Veblen describes as a phenomenon of showing off and conspicuousness. They point out that the purchase of fancy cars and luxury villas are the reflection of this effect. In addition to Veblen's theory, scholars have researched the characteristics of conspicuous consumption behavior.

Conspicuous consumption is a purchase made by consumers based on brand awareness and the popularity of the products as essential factors (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2014). Conspicuous products are distinguished from general consumer goods in that they function solely to satisfy the consumer's desired reputation (Podoshen, Li, & Zhang, 2011). These products are often easy to use or display in public in front of others and thus get praised by others (Lewis & Moital, 2016). According to Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011), conspicuous consumption is when individuals flaunt their level of wealth through highly extravagant consumption, and consumers purchase some products in order to seek recognition in a higher social class group, and they do so to assert their social status. Zhu, Geng, Pan, and Shi (2022) indicate that people will always consume an excessive amount of products to satisfy their need to show off to others. Barrera and Ponce (2021) also suggest that young people with competitive personalities are more likely to choose



conspicuous consumption in order to follow trends and pursue social status, while need-based personalities tend not to follow the trend of purchasing conspicuous products.

Similarly, Lewis and Moital (2016) describe conspicuous consumption as a quest for affluence and the demonstration of one's wealth through the purchase of conspicuous products. They note that the herding effect is also a major driver of conspicuous consumption, with people considering what others around them say about certain products and their experiences with them after purchase to decide whether to purchase them. Similarly, the greater the pressure from peers, the more likely people are to follow their friends and peers in purchasing a particular brand or product (Sun et al. 2022). Furthermore, in addition to the high price of the product, Lewis and Moital (2016) state that the fashion attributes of the product are the reason why people are able to show others that they are aware of the fashion industry, which often comes from the unique design and style of the fashion product. They mention that public self-awareness also influences conspicuous consumption that people try to create a deep and unique impression in the public eye by purchasing expensive conspicuous products. They also propose that materialism is reflected in people's desire to possess expensive products and to show their economic capabilities with the purpose of owning conspicuous products, which is likewise one of the reasons for conspicuous consumption. In addition, they present that conspicuous consumption is also motivated by the psychology of comparison brought about by self-esteem, and people will always want to acquire better products than others. Finally, in Lewis and Moital's (2016) study, young people are more likely to spend conspicuously on fashionable clothing, a conspicuous product that they can usually afford and is smaller, than on cars and houses.

According to O'Cass and Siahtiri (2014), fashionable clothing is closely related to the consumption habits of social groups because the temporary attributes of fashion reflect the changing recognition of members of social groups for particular things. Consumption of fashionable clothing can be recognized by managing one's public identity, thus balancing people's sense of belonging to a social group (Lewis & Moital, 2016). Fashionable clothing is also the best example of people's pursuit of social status through brand-focused consumption (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013). In other words, brand recognition is the most important conspicuous characteristic of fashionable clothing (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2014). O'Cass and Siahtiri (2013) mention that many young Chinese are influenced by consumerism and desire to get psychological satisfaction by constantly buying the latest fashionable clothes, and that having an abundance of fashionable products symbolizes in their minds the elevated social status that comes with it.

Status consciousness strongly drives Chinese youth's consumption of fashion clothes, and they tend to consume brands that distinguish them, while high-end fashion also implies higher social status (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2014). Similarly, Lewis and Moital (2016) note that fashionable clothing brings young people the self-esteem they need to satisfy in society, and luxury goods in particular build a public identity for young people as wealthy and fashion-conscious. Zhang and Kim (2013) mention that Chinese luxury consumers usually focus on external social needs rather than internal personal needs, they generally desire luxury products even though China's per capita income is relatively low, and they buy luxury products in order to fit into higher social groups. Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011) suggest that Chinese interdependent perceptions emphasize group similarity, that people follow group uniformity in their consumption, and that Chinese consumers' materialistic pursuit behaviors lead them to consume large amounts of luxury goods.

### **2.3 Research Gap**

The literature reviewed above studied the causes of conspicuous consumption, the motivations for conspicuous consumption, young people's conspicuous consumption of luxury goods, and the conspicuous consumption of the Chinese. I define young people as aged 18-30 and combine these literature studies to focus on the consumption motivations of young people in the whole fashion industry, especially the conspicuous consumption behavior, in today's Chinese society, where the economy is booming and new consumption channels are widely emergent. Meanwhile examining the similarities and differences between young people mentioned in the literature and young people in today's society through a fresh sample of 18-30 years old young people in the next chapter of the Methodology. In addition, the digital economy and sustainable fashion reviewed above are linked to the research questions that explore other consumption factors.

## **3 Methodology**

In my research, I want to explore the extent to which young Chinese people spend conspicuously in the fashion industry, as well as other important consumption factors other than conspicuous consumption when they purchase fashion products. In order to obtain more current data, I chose to use a primary data

collection method. On the one hand, this ensures that the results I collected are relevant to the research topic and that the data can directly answer or complement my research questions to the appropriate degree. On the other hand, since my research deals with the field of fashion, and fashion trends are constantly changing over time, I wanted to collect feedback that people gave me based on current fashion trends to ensure the authenticity of the data.

### **3.1 Research Methods**

For the specific implementation of my research methodology, I use a mixed research method of quantitative and qualitative research. In the quantitative research method, I chose to conduct a questionnaire distribution, while I will conduct a qualitative research in the form of one-on-one interviews. The results of the questionnaires collect general data and a survey of consumption factors, while the interviews are more specific and collect the respondents' ideas about fashion consumption.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

The scope of my study is based on young consumers in China, therefore, I first limited the age range of the study population. According to Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011), 18-35 years old are defined as young consumers in the consumption of fashion clothes. However, in O'Cass and Siahtiri's (2013) study, they fixed the range of the young consumer group as 18-24 years old. Similarly, in the study by Zhu et al. (2022), they selected 17-25 years old as the sample of young consumers. In order to avoid a narrow age range that would result in data that are not representative of the majority of the younger generation in society, and to avoid overlap with other generational definitions of age range, I set the age range of young consumers in my study to 18-30 years old. 18-30 years old includes both college students who are still in school and young adults who have just entered the workforce.

College students, including students at domestic universities and Chinese students studying in other countries around the world, usually have no income and rely on their families for regular living expenses and spending. Young people in the workforce, on the other hand, usually have a regular salary and perhaps rely on family income to subsidize their spending, but spend basically from what they earn through their jobs. These two groups of young people are representative of the general living conditions of young people in China. Moreover, this age group has the ability to make their own consumption choices while having the appropriate funds at their disposal for consumption, thus avoiding the influence of

having their consumption choices made by their parents, who are largely responsible for their consumption expenditures until they reach the age of 18.

After specifying the age range, I will further specify the sampling scope of the data survey. Since my study is on young people in China, sampling across the whole of China will maximize the reliability of the data source. At the same time, it ensures a large and diverse sample based on China's large population size. In addition, more and more young Chinese people and students are choosing to study in foreign countries, most of whom have better family income levels and higher living costs. And studying abroad gives them access to more consumer channels and platforms than domestic students in China, and they tend to have higher spending possibilities. Therefore, international students as a large group of young Chinese people are also representative of the sampling for my consumption study. Hence, in my study, the sample data are all drawn from young Chinese people aged 18-30 and Chinese students aged 18-30 who are studying abroad. Next, I will describe the survey methodology used in my study.

### **3.2.1 Questionnaire**

For the use of quantitative research methods, I conducted a general survey on the consumption factors of young Chinese people in the fashion industry through a questionnaire. Therefore, I named the questionnaire topic as "The most important factors when consuming fashion products (clothing/shoes/bags, etc.)". In the questionnaire, I designed the questions in the form of a simple selection and ranking, and there were two questions. The first question was presented in the form of a choice: "1. Age: under18, 18-30, 30+". Through the selection of participants I filtered out the age that fits my previously defined age range for analyzing the results of the study, which is 18-30 years old. The second question of the questionnaire was set to rank the relatively common factors influencing consumption, in which I listed the factors that could be chosen from previous references in the literature and the attributes of the product itself, while I also provided the option of 'other' for participants to fill in. This question was presented as: "Rank the importance of the factors you might consider when purchasing fashion products (some factors are seen as unimportant if not considered when purchasing): Product material/quality, Price, Brand popularity, Chinese made brand (place of origin), Sustainability in production/personal use, Products are on trend, Functionality, Copy the style of others/icon, Other\_\_\_".

In order to avoid some participants choosing only one or two factors that they considered important and

ignoring the importance of ranking, I specified that participants should at least rank all of the factors listed. Thus, in the question I stated that “some factors are seen as unimportant if not considered when purchasing”, so the participants will rank those factors behind. This ranking was sufficient to illustrate the reasons why young Chinese people generally consume fashion products. Furthermore, based on my previous definition of conspicuous consumption, it can be assumed that ‘Brand popularity’ and ‘Products are on trend’ represent conspicuous consumption among these factors.

I randomly sent out the questionnaire to Chinese people of the middle class and above income level living and studying/working in China, such as students of Chinese universities and employees of some domestic and international companies. It is also distributed to some Chinese students studying in foreign universities. As I described in 3.2, the income level of students is based on the regular living expenses provided by their families. The level of disposable wealth of such groups can usually afford fashionable products (Liu et al. 2021). I made my questionnaire publicly available on an online platform through a relevant questionnaire application (“Questionnaire Star”, or “Wen Juan Xing” in Chinese), ensuring that anyone who sees it can participate in answering it. At the same time, I spread my questionnaire through social media and look for people around me to help me further spread the questionnaire in their social networks of study/work.

After collecting the questionnaire responses, I use Excel to draw statistical tables to help me analyze the results. First, I removed results outside of the age range of 18-30 years. For the remaining valid results, I created a table based on the overall importance of the ranked composite scores, thus exploring the factors that young people tend to consume fashion in general. Second, for the presentation of the ranked results, I created a table of the percentage of each factor ranked first to highlight how important certain factors are to participants’ fashion consumption compared to others. I also created a bar chart based on the sum of the percentages of the top three occurrences of a particular consumption factor for each participant in the ranking, which makes the sum of the top three positions more convincing for analyzing the propensity of a particular factor to consume as a participant than looking at each factor being ranked first individually, and makes the exploration of conspicuous consumption in answering the research questions more general. In addition, since the factors available in the questionnaire involve material and price as attributes of the product itself, the real motivation for people to consume fashion products is perhaps after reflecting on these two points, so this is also more relevant to the theme of my research on consumption motivation.

Based on this ranking set-up, the latter factors were those rarely or not at all considered by the participants.

### 3.2.2 Interview

Considering the feasibility and validity of the interview results in answering my research questions, I made a snowball selection within my social network that I can reach for interview samples. Similar to the questionnaire, respondents were drawn from middle-class Chinese aged 18-30 studying/working in China, as well as Chinese students studying abroad, again with income levels based on their families' regular support for living expenses. These groups help me to explore the consumption behavior of young Chinese in the fashion sector while adding more insight into the reasons why young Chinese spend conspicuously in fashion. Considering the implementability of the interviews, I chose eight to ten people as the sample size for the interviews. Due to the small number, for each interviewees, I tried to guide them to give a more comprehensive and specific content of their responses to facilitate my subsequent analysis and discussion. To ensure the accuracy of the interview content recording, I audio-recorded each interview and compiled the important responses.

I use a semi-structured interview format with six open-ended questions to guide the interviewee's thinking on each question and provide sufficient space for them to respond, which will contribute to the reliability of the interview results. The interviews were conducted via one-on-one video calls, in which I asked the interview questions one by one and the interviewees answered freely. The interview questions are listed below in Table 1:

*Table 1: Interview Questions Source: The Author Made*

Interview Question	
1.	Do you prefer to buy fashion products online or in store? Why?
2.	Have you set a budget for those fashion purchases? (Monthly/Seasonally purchasing budget, also budget for a single item)
3.	Have you bought something just because it is fashionable? (Based on brand famous/expensive, no design consideration)
4.	Have you bought some fashion products that you wore once and then stopped wearing it?
5.	Is sustainability a consideration when you buy fashion products? (Environmental ecology friendly

	in production/personal use)
6.	Do you want this fashion product you bought to help you shape your identity in front of others?

Questions one and two asked about young people’s exposure to fashion consumption channels and young people’s budget for fashion consumption spending, respectively, and were dedicated to exploring young people’s consumption patterns and spending plans. Questions three and four explored the extent to which young people pursue fashion products. Question five directly explores the concern for sustainability and environmental protection. The final question six examines the status and value that young people bring to themselves in their fashion consumption.

### 3.2.3 Difficulties in Data Collection

There were some potential obstacles in the process of data collection. Although my questionnaire questions were designed to be relatively simple, during the collection, there might be some people in the company who were not interested in my research topic and thus did not want to answer, and similarly, many college students allocated their time to study and entertainment and might not want to spend their energy answering my questionnaire, making it relatively difficult to collect a large enough sample. When conducting the interviews, some respondents were initially unclear about how to answer the questions I asked, or they answered the questions from a perspective that differed from my research topic. In addition, the reliability of the data is somewhat questionable: the questionnaire, although answered anonymously, may have been chosen by participants based on the idea of fashion consumption as generally propagated by society, thereby failing to consider their own preferences. Similarly, interview participants may have been hesitant to admit too much conspicuous consumption behavior, wishing to portray themselves as more rational spenders than they actually are.

### 3.3 Research Limitation

In addition to the obstacles encountered in data collection, there are some limitations in the method of collecting data in the study and in the final data obtained. First of all, there are some other factors that were not examined in my study. The questionnaire only specified the company type (domestic/international company) of the participants’ workplaces, lacking a detailed description of the industries, so there is an effect of differences in perceptions of the study topic between industries, for example, workers in fashion media companies tend to have more views on the topic, while workers in

technology R&D companies perhaps lack interest in fashion topics. In the selection of interviewees, although income was specified as above the middle class level, a detailed breakdown of income levels within the middle class income range is still missing, and thus income as a basic source of consumption expenditure is a potential factor that is missing from the examination in my method. In addition, the gender of the questionnaire participants and interviewees can be used to compare the similarities and differences in the degree and views of conspicuous consumption. Although my interviews also involved interviewees of different genders, I did not use this as criteria for comparison.

While the China-wide approach to data collection enriches the diversity of the sample, there are also differences in consumption due to differences in price levels and per capita purchasing power levels across regions, which in turn affects the uniformity of the controlled factors in the survey. In addition, the different regions involve contrasting long-standing inequality between rural and urban China. According to Sicular, Yang, and Gustafsson (2022), China's reform and opening-up policy since 2000 has promoted population mobility, with a large rural population rapidly flocking to cities and providing sufficient labor for urbanization. By 2018, more than 90% of China's middle class is urban, and the urban-rural gap in China is growing (Sicular, Yang, & Gustafsson, 2022). As a result, the income level and development of rural China are much less than that of urban China, which is a potential difference that may exist in the study population.

Considering the implementability as a bachelor's thesis, it was difficult to obtain a large sample within the limited time frame of the survey, while the screening of the interviewees was limited to the social connections that I had access to. Besides, the randomly assigned questionnaire could not guarantee that the participants were fully involved in all regions of China. Therefore, the sample size collected from both the questionnaires and interviews was relatively small, and although the scope of the survey was generally sufficient for my research needs, the sample size was not large enough to represent the consumption behavior of all young Chinese people.

## **4 Results**

In this chapter, I will first present the results of the questionnaire and interviews, followed by an analysis



of the results' answers regarding consumption channels, conspicuous consumption, and fashion sustainability.

#### **4.1 Collection of Questionnaires**

After distributing the questionnaire, I conducted a two-week long data collection to ensure that as many responses as possible could be collected. A total of 145 people responded to the collected questionnaire, with 11 participants under the age of 18 and 33 participants over the age of 30, representing 7.59% and 22.76% of the total number of participants, respectively. For the subject of my study, there were 101 participants between the ages of 18 and 30, accounting for 69.66%. In accordance with my previous explanation of age selection in Chapter Methodology, I will mainly observe and analyze the responses of these 101 participants aged 18-30.

Since the questionnaire software can display the IP address of the user, I counted that of the 101 participants, 37 were from Beijing, the capital of China, accounting for 36.63% of the total number of participants aged 18-30. 41 were from regions other than Beijing, including the northern cities of Baoding, Dalian, Shijiazhuang, Taiyuan, and Tianjin, the northwestern city of Xi'an, the southwestern city of Chengdu, the southeastern cities of Shanghai and Nanjing, as well as the southern island cities of Sanya and Haikou, accounting for 40.59% of the total. The remaining 23 were all Chinese students from abroad, including France, Canada, the United States, and Sweden, accounting for 22.77% of the total.

In the results of the second question of the questionnaire, for the importance of the factors that people may consider when buying fashion products, first, Table 2 presents the overall score of ranking. The scores were calculated mathematically according to the ranking position of the factor and the number of times the factor was ranked in that position. The first position in the ranking scores 9 points, the second position scores 8 points, and so on. The total score for a factor is calculated by multiplying the number of times the factor was ranked in that position by the position score, and then adding the total score for each position the factor was ranked in and dividing it by the total number of people to calculate the overall score. For example, if a factor is ranked first by 6 people, then the total score of the factor in the first position is  $9*6=54$  points, then add the total score of the factor in other positions and divide it by the total number of 101 people to get the overall score of the factor. The higher the score, the more often the factor was ranked in the top position by the participants, which is the factor that most participants tend to

consider when spending on fashion.

**Table 2: Overall Score of ranking** Source: The Author Calculation

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Overall Score</b>
Product material/quality	7.69
Brand popularity	7.45
Price	6.59
Products are on trend	5.45
Functionality	4.95
Sustainability in production/personal use	4.43
Chinese made brand (place of origin)	4.16
Copy the style of others/icon	3.12
Other____	0.2

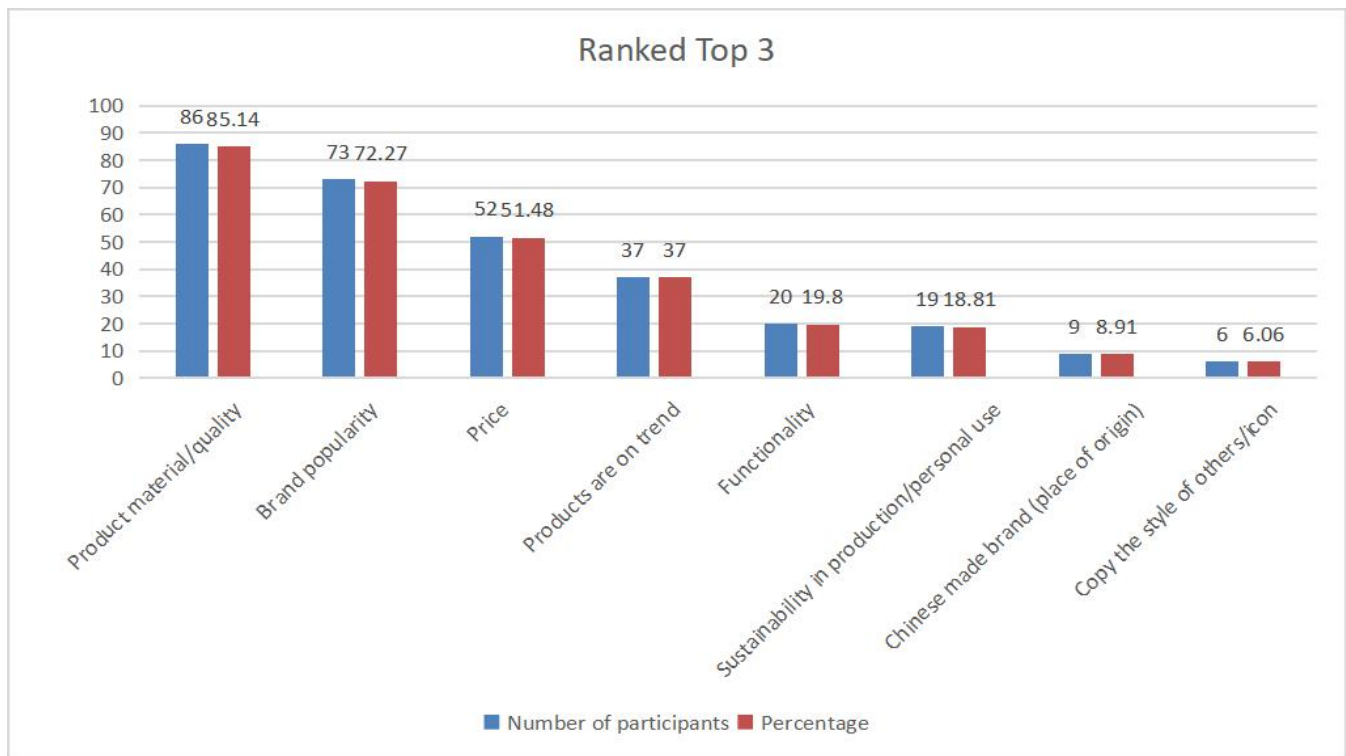
As shown, ‘Product material/quality’ received the highest overall score of 7.69, with ‘Brand popularity’ coming in second at 7.45. These two factors were relatively close and both scored above 7, proving that they are the two factors that participants generally value the most when it comes to fashion consumption. The next two factors, ‘Price’ and ‘Products are on trend’, received overall scores of 6.59 and 5.45, respectively, ranked third and fourth. Although not the most important factors, these two still ranked in the top half of all eight factors I provided in the questionnaire. Compared to the next four factors, these two factors are still what most people prioritize when consuming fashion products. Ranked in the bottom four were ‘Functionality’, ‘Sustainability in production/personal use’, ‘Chinese made brand (place of origin)’, and ‘Copying the style of others/icon’ are relatively less considered or ignored by participants.

Table 3 shows the total number and percentage of participants who ranked the factor as number one. According to Table 3, among the 101 participants in the age range collected, 47 people ranked ‘Brand popularity’ as the first factor, accounting for 46.53% of the total number of participants. Nearly half of the participants ranked the brand value of a fashion product as their top priority when consuming. After this, 29 participants ranked ‘Product material/quality’ as the top factor, accounting for 28.71% of the total. Again, nearly one-third of the data indicates the relative importance of this factor in fashion consumption choices. Only one participant ranked ‘Chinese made brand (place of origin)’ and ‘Products are on trend’ first, so it can be said that they are not the participants’ top considerations.

**Table 3: Factor Ranked First** Source: The Author Calculation

<b>Ranked First</b>		
<b>Factors</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Brand popularity	47	46.53%
Product material/quality	29	28.71%
Price	12	11.88%
Functionality	6	5.94%
Sustainability in production/personal use	4	3.96%
Chinese made brand (place of origin)	1	0.99%
Products are on trend	1	0.99%
Other____	1	0.99%
Copy the style of others/icon	0	0
<b>Number of valid responses</b>	101	

Figure 4 shows the total number and percentage of times a factor was ranked in the top three positions by participants. The values in the figure are obtained by adding up the number and percentage of times each factor was ranked in the top three positions. As shown in the figure, ‘Product material/quality’ is still in the highest position, with 86 participants ranked this factor in the top three positions and about 85.14% of participants preferring to consider product material. ‘Brand popularity’ continues to be a close second, with 72.27% of participants ranked it in the top three, and this factor is also the main consideration for most people. Similarly, ‘Price’ and ‘Products are on trend’ still ranked in the top half of the eight factors, and they were still relatively important considerations for participants. Although Figure 4 shows roughly the same results as Table 2, the overall proportion of the top three positions taken together provides a general indication of participants’ extent of conspicuous consumption.



**Figure 4: Factor Ranked Top 3** Source: The Author Calculation

It is worth mentioning that when I look at the discarded responses from the 30+ age range in the questionnaire collection, they also have a relatively obvious conspicuous consumption behavior. Among this group, ‘Brand popularity’ was ranked in the top three by 14 people out of 33 responses, accounting for 39.39%, just after ‘Product material/quality’ and ‘Price’, indicating that they attach more importance to the conspicuous characteristics of fashion products. Also, 12.12% of the participants give priority to ‘Brand popularity’ when spending on fashion, thus making conspicuous consumption. To some extent, this illustrates the conspicuous consumption of the age group over 30.

#### 4.2 Collection of Interviews

During the interview collection process, I ended up contacting a total of 9 people as interviewees. Respondents 1, 2, and 8 are students from Chinese universities, male and two female respectively. They have an ongoing interest in the fashion industry and are keen consumers of fashion products such as sneakers and fashion bags. Respondents 3 and 5 are male and female workers from the journalism and education industries respectively, with the latter having studied in the UK. Respondent 4 is a Chinese student studying at a French university. Respondents 6 and 7 are male fashion communication students and fashion media workers respectively, with a thorough knowledge of the fashion industry and

involvement in it. Respondent 9 is a Chinese student studying at a Swedish university.

In response to question one, six of the nine interviewees prefer online spending and three prefer offline stores, however, they all combine online and offline stores based on factors such as price. In the answer to question 2, all 9 respondents set a certain level of budget for purchasing fashion products, where they set a price range for purchasing a fashion item, roughly around 1000-3000 RMB (144-433 USD) for clothing and 1000-6000 RMB (144-866 USD) for shoes, while considering their own wealth level and whether the price matches the quality of the product. No. 2 has a higher budget for fashion bags and chooses a classic and versatile style. No. 4's spending comes from living expenses provided by his parents, so he sets a lower budget for individual items to reduce his parents' financial burden. In terms of monthly or quarterly budgets, most interviewees do not have a fixed budget. No. 2's monthly budget is appointed to 30% of her savings, while No. 5 plans her consumer spending through monthly financial management.

Almost every respondent in questions 3 and 4 had consumed products based solely on their fashion attributes, or the popularity of the product, and would not continue to wear it after its fashionable phase had passed. However, No. 4 continues to wear fashion products that have gone out of style, also out of a desire to make the most use of them. 5, 6, 7, and 9 consider the material and design of the products carefully and try them on to determine whether they match their own dressing style. In the responses to question 6, most respondents would use fashion products to shape their own dressing style and show their taste, and would like to show how much they know about the brands and styles they wear. For example, respondents 6 and 7 would choose niche brands to show their individuality in fashion wear. Respondents 3 and 8 would choose original Chinese fashion brands to make a unique impression. Respondents 1 and 4 want to be approved by others for the style they shape. Also, they would like to find friends who like the same brand, style, or culture (e.g. skate culture, basketball culture) to discuss fashion issues together. In response to question 5, interviewees generally do not care about the sustainability of fashion products when they consume them, but they mostly tend to give their old clothes to friends for recycling and generally do not throw them away or waste them directly.

### **4.3 Consumption Channels**

In the interview questions, I focused separately on the respondents' choice of consumption channels. Young people today are exposed to a wider range of consumption channels than previous generations.

China's advanced e-commerce has created an increasing number of online shopping platforms that have improved the way young people shop. As I mentioned in 4.1, the majority of them prefer to spend online. Respondents 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9 all believe that online shopping is very convenient, with access to a wide variety of brands and product types, and with China's well-developed logistics industry, the delivery time of products is guaranteed. They also believe that online offers regular discounts and better prices than offline. Respondent 2 mentioned that the offline mode is relatively time-consuming to return and exchange, and that trying them on can easily lead to impulsive spending, while online spending allows you to save the product first, thus allowing you to think over whether you need the product or not, thus reducing unnecessary spending. Respondent 8 mentioned that for some fashion brands, the product updates in the official online stores would be faster, allowing them to be the first to access the new products and choose to consume them.

However, respondents 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 emphasized the sense of consumer experience in offline stores, where they can feel whether the products match their aesthetics and style by trying them on. Especially for higher priced products, although online shopping platforms provide multi-angle pictures of the products, the only way to make an accurate judgment is to try them on in person. However, respondent 1 also mentioned that if the online price is more cost-effective, he would go back to online shopping after trying on the product. Respondent 5 stated that for luxury goods, offline stores can guarantee that the products are authentic, while online stores are often prone to buying fakes. Respondent 7 also pointed out that the value of the product is more important than the price. Offline stores can visualize the materials of the products and can judge whether the price of the products matches the value, and then consider whether the price of the products is affordable for himself. Thus, the examination of consumption channels shows that price, the value of the products, and the consumption experience are all factors that influence young Chinese people's fashion consumption in addition to conspicuous consumption.

#### **4.4 Conspicuous Consumption**

In the presentation of the questionnaire results, each of the three charts answered my research questions to some extent. According to my previous definition, participants generally place a high value on 'Brand popularity' when consuming, which according to respondent 2's explanation is consumption for the social status that the brand brings to them. This undoubtedly reflects conspicuous consumption behavior. In addition, 'Products are on trend' as a factor in the top half of the ranking also reflects participants'

conspicuous consumption behavior, according to respondent 4's explanation of choosing to buy trendy products, people will buy products for their fashion and trendy attributes, so as to show others that they have products that are in the current trend, which is a kind of blind following of fashion trends. The overall score reflects the fact that a high percentage of young Chinese people consider the conspicuous features of fashion products in terms of their judgment of conspicuous consumption. The top three combined scores prove that at least 80% of young Chinese believe that conspicuousness is an important consideration. The first-ranked statistic shows that at least 45% of young Chinese people directly choose to spend on conspicuous consumption.

In the examination of the interviews, respondents 6 and 7 pointed out that Chinese university students generally do not establish a dressing style of their own, and they will directly choose popular products or well-known brands with high prices. In this way, when peers around them are able to see these fashion products being worn by them, it plays a role of showing off and also indirectly showing to the peers around them that they are following the fashion trend. Such people occupy a high percentage of Chinese university students who blindly follow the trend to buy certain popular brands, ignoring their own needs and their own aesthetic judgment of the products. According to respondent 7, this creates a serious homogenization phenomenon: "Everywhere in Chinese universities you see young people wearing the same trendy brands of T-shirts, fashionable shoes that are in fashion. In winter, they change into the same down coats and jackets". Respondent 6 pointed out that some students even overspend in order to buy popular and expensive fashion products, and keep paying off the advance amount every month. This shows that conspicuous consumption behavior has widely spread to young people in Chinese universities.

Interview respondents also have some obvious conspicuous consumption, while their responses help me explore more about other drivers of fashion consumption among young Chinese and the reasons for conspicuous consumption. Respondent 1 is rational in his consumption of street-wear and basketball brands that he continues to focus on, taking into account the design concept and his needs. But at the same time, he believes that he needs to show that he is a person who follows fashion trends by wearing products from famous luxury brands, even though he does not familiar with these luxury brands. Therefore, for fashion products that are relatively unknown to him but with very conspicuous characteristics, he would choose conspicuous consumption based on brand awareness. Respondent 2 bought some luxury bags to meet the needs of social occasions, and she said that in the future workplace, bags will be used as a tool

for people to compare with each other, and carrying a famous brand bag can also promote chatting topics and interpersonal relationships with colleagues. Respondent 3 was attracted by the special design elements in fashion products, such as the addition of Chinese symbols to sneaker designs. Respondent 4 chooses to follow the herd approach to fashion consumption. He tends to blindly buy the same fashion clothes from people around him, but when he subsequently learns about the brand culture and the background of the creation, he will carefully consider whether he really likes the brand's products in his future consumption.

In addition, apart from conspicuous consumption, respondent 7 emphasized the material and layout of fashion clothes, with some niche brands using unique materials and making the design more detailed. Respondents 2, 3, 5, and 6 pay more attention to the functionality of fashion products, which can meet different needs in different occasions. Respondent 9 considers the comfort of fashion products first, if the clothes fit well and are comfortable, they will last longer.

#### **4.5 Sustainability**

In the interview, I talked about the concerns about sustainability in the fashion industry. On the one hand, it comes from the producers of fashion products, that is, the brands and companies, in the application of sustainability concepts in the production process, such as the environmental protection properties of the materials and whether the production process is eco-friendly. On the other hand, consumers are concerned about the subsequent treatment of their products, whether they dispose of them in a sustainable way after use, such as donating old clothes and recycling second-hand clothes. While most people do not consider and are not interested in the sustainability of production processes and materials, two fashion professionals, respondents 6 and 7, provide me with additional insights.

Respondent 6 chooses to consume fashion products made of materials that are ecologically and naturally friendly and common, and he strongly rejects some special animal skins and materials and processes that seriously pollute the environment, such as synthetic fibers and plastics, as well as tie-dyeing. But interestingly, he added that denim is the most popular garment in the fashion industry and in the world, and that the process of making denim produces a lot of waste water, which is far less harmful to the environment than the above, but also causes water pollution. Given the classic nature of the material and the fact that denim is a fashion item that people can hardly avoid buying, he would still choose to buy it.



Respondent 7 also gave his consumer opinion on denim products, choosing brands that are more durable and long-lasting. Compared to fast fashion which mass produces and sells denim jeans, he would choose a brand that produces small quantities of denim jeans with guaranteed quality, despite the higher price. Also, because of his interest in outdoor sports such as camping and surfing, he calls for the consumption of fashion products that protect the marine ecosystem during the production process. In addition, he pointed out that the mass production of any clothes is not environmentally friendly, so sustainability should be a factor that producers and brands take into account, not consumers, which is the responsibility of those upstream of the fashion industry.

It is worth mentioning that, as a journalist, respondent 3 is also interested in the concept of sustainability. He continues to be interested in the outdoor brand Patagonia's concept of protecting the planet and their approach to reducing carbon emissions by recycling waste cotton for reprocessing. Similarly, respondent 8 stated that although she does not actively care about sustainable production, she would choose to buy products based on eco-friendly concepts once she learns about them. One example is Converse's recycled plastic canvas shoe series. In addition, for the sustainable disposal of clothing, respondents choose to donate their clothing for reuse, and respondent 7 also remake old clothing to make new, unique fashion products. Overall, the concept of sustainable production may not yet be a major driver of fashion consumption among young Chinese, but as more and more brands promote their choice of eco-friendly materials and pollution-reducing production processes, it is possible that more young Chinese will take an interest and participate in the process.

## **5 Discussion**

The main purpose of this study is to assess the extent to which young Chinese people consume fashion products conspicuously and why they do so when it comes to fashion consumption, as well as to explore the main factors, other than conspicuous consumption, that determine young people's fashion purchases. The findings show that young Chinese people in general are prone to conspicuous fashion consumption and they use the conspicuous products they consume for different purposes, which also serve as different reasons for their conspicuous consumption. In addition, apart from conspicuous consumption, young Chinese people also take into account other factors such as price, material, and environmental protection

when consuming fashion.

First, in general, the results of my study support previous literature on the conspicuous consumption of fashion products by Chinese people and young people while answering the question of the extent of conspicuous consumption of fashion among young Chinese people. As described by O’Cass and Siahtiri (2013), young Chinese people’s conspicuous consumption of fashion clothes is the consumption of brands and fashion popularity. 101 questionnaire participants presented me with findings that most young Chinese people put the most value on brand awareness of fashion products, and they place relative importance on the popularity of products. Similarly, the majority of the 9 interview respondents also place relative importance on fashion attributes and brand classics when it comes to fashion consumption.

Besides young people, it is worth mentioning that the questionnaire results of aged 30+ confirm the findings of Sun (2011) regarding the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods by the generation born between 1984 and 1990, which is now just the right age for the 30+ group. It also confirms the study by Giovannini, Xu, and Thomas (2015), which highlight that the generation born between 1977 and 1994 is more brand conscious of fashion luxury products. This generation spends their wealth leisurely to satisfy their needs, and their public self-awareness makes them inclined to the popular opinions of their peers when it comes to consumption, also a reflection of conspicuous consumption (Giovannini, Xu, & Thomas, 2015).

Second, with regard to the consideration of consumption channels, it is evident from the interviewees’ responses that young Chinese people are generally exposed to a full range of shopping channels. This is also in line with the widespread of online shopping as a new shopping channel as noted by Song and Sun (2020). Mainolfi (2020) mentions that online consumption is upgrading the sense of the experience, not only from multi-dimensional pictures and videos presenting the products but also many model displays. Similarly, respondents suggested that the sense of experience of online shopping is progressing, even with some sneakers being able to be tried on by AI. Respondents also pointed out that based on the images on the shopping platform, they can easily compare how they look and decide whether to buy the fashion product. In addition, respondents noted that online shopping platforms help people to have quick access to different brands and products, and that delivery time is quick, which is what Song and Sun (2020) mention that online shopping saves consumers’ time costs.

However, some respondents noted that for clothing, offline in-person try-on is more helpful in matching one's outfit style than online pictures, and largely influences the consumer decision. Similarly, they believe that clothes serve people, that in-person experience is most important, and that internet data is subject to inaccuracy. They mentioned that for some limited edition sneakers, queuing up to buy them offline in person would enhance the shopping experience and provide a sense of satisfaction when buying them. Some respondents believe that some expensive products such as luxury goods are difficult to buy authentic on online shopping platforms and that it is a waste of time to determine their authenticity. Thus, the respondents' doubts indicate that there is room for improvement in China's digital consumer platforms, and that while the convenience of product selection and logistics mentioned by Mainolfi (2020) and Song and Sun (2020) can be achieved, the shopping experience cannot fully replace the service integrity of offline stores, and the quality of high-end products sold online is questionable.

Third, with regard to the extent and motivations for conspicuous consumption among young people provided in the Results, the results of both the questionnaire and interviews provide that generally young Chinese people have significant conspicuous consumption behaviors. As Lewis and Moital (2016) note, young people are more likely to be conspicuous consumers, especially for smaller products such as clothing. The results of the questionnaire present that at least 80% of young Chinese people tend to consider the conspicuous features of a product when purchasing fashion products, and that around 45% of young Chinese people consume fashion products directly based on their conspicuous features. Almost every respondent in the interview also had a certain behavior and experience of conspicuous consumption. This is also in line with Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011), who suggest that the younger generation is living in an era of abundant material resources and that their consumption is based on pleasure and self-satisfaction and is often a form of conspicuous consumption.

In addition, the conspicuous consumption behavior of young Chinese in the study results is motivated by a variety of specific reasons, some of which also confirm the motives for conspicuous consumption provided by the literature. O'Cass and Siahtiri (2013), Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011), and Zhang and Kim (2013) all mention that people consume fashion and luxury goods with a desire for social status, trying to fit into certain high social classes to gain access to better social resources and to create a public impression that they are in a respectable social network. Similarly, in the respondents' answers, the consumption of fashion products is closely related to the creation of their public social identity, while the

purchase of luxury goods is a symbol of fashion and wealth status, and luxury goods also have a role in interpersonal relationships and communication. This result is in line with the Veblen effect mentioned by Patsiaouras and Fitchett (2012) to consume for the purpose of seeking social status and showing off wealth.

Sun et al. (2022) provide a picture of peer pressure in fashion consumption, where young people's materialistic pursuits make them compare with each other, and therefore not having certain fashion products can make them feel pressured. Respondents also mentioned that there are specific brands and popular products that they need to have and do not want to lose out to their peers in comparison. In addition, Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011) mention that Chinese people's perception of group similarity motivates them to follow the trend and is one of the reasons for conspicuous consumption. Respondents also pointed out that Chinese college students are generally unwilling to spend their time searching for unique fashion products and are more inclined to buy current fashion products or imitate others' fashion styles to buy the same products than to shape their own dressing styles.

Fourth, when considering other consumption factors, Wang (2022) note that elements of Chinese cultural characteristics are becoming widely integrated into fashion design, and that many young Chinese are gaining recognition through the purchase of these clothes. Similarly, respondents indicate that they would consume fashion items for the Chinese elements incorporated into their designs, which they viewed as a cultural consensus. Zhang and Kim (2013) mention that China's per capita income levels are not outstanding, but they commonly purchase luxury goods. However, the findings suggest that price is a relatively important consideration for young Chinese, with respondents noted that their fashion spending needs to be based on their wealth level and purchasing ability and that they weigh the price reasonableness of products. According to Sicular, Yang, and Gustafsson (2022), much of the growth in Chinese consumption is coming from the middle class, not the wealthiest group. Therefore their wealth level is probably not enough to support the purchase of large amounts of expensive luxury goods. In addition, the findings suggest that young Chinese are also concerned with the materials and functionality of fashion items, supplementing fashion consumption factors and motivations. The use of high quality materials can provide consumers with a comfortable user experience, and functionality can be fully developed to meet different uses in specialized settings.

Finally, in terms of environmental sustainability, respondents generally ignore environmental concerns in

fashion production. Jung, Choi, and Oh (2020) also point out that Chinese consumers lack awareness of the topic of fashion sustainability and tend not to choose sustainable products due to fashion attributes. Xu et al. (2014) note that Chinese consumers tend to buy new clothes rather than second-hand clothes that appear to be in less than excellent condition, and that respondents have little desire to buy second-hand fashion products. However, Xu et al. (2022) and the interviewees both mention that environmentally unfriendly fashion can cause serious ecological damage in the production process, such as water, ocean, and air pollution. The interviewees added that the producers of fashion brands should convey the production philosophy and the uniqueness of sustainable products to consumers so that they can personally appreciate the importance of sustainable fashion for our ecological protection.

There are potential limitations to this study, starting with the inadequate data sample that I mentioned in the previous sections, neither the questionnaire respondents nor the sample of interviewees are sufficiently representative of all young Chinese people and all regions, so there are certain data sample limitations for answering the research question ‘young Chinese people’. The findings of this study provide motivations and factors regarding the fashion consumption of young Chinese people in today’s society. While the study results confirm that conspicuous consumption for the purpose of showing off is the preferred consumption behavior of young Chinese people in general, and provide reasons for conspicuous consumption and other potential consumption factors, specific guidance on young people’s consumer choices is a lack of consideration in my research.

## **6 Conclusion**

The study explores the extent of conspicuous consumption in the fashion industry among young people in China today and also examines the reasons behind conspicuous consumption behavior and other factors that influence fashion consumption. Through this study, I attempt to understand the consumption behavior and motivation of today’s young Chinese people towards fashion products in the context of China’s rapid economic development and the increasing wealth of the middle class in recent years, as well as the common factors that drive young people’s fashion consumption.

The results of the study mainly indicate the prevalence of conspicuous consumption behavior among

young Chinese people and their focus on conspicuous attributes of products, such as brand awareness when it comes to fashion consumption. Among the 101 participants of the questionnaire, 45% of young Chinese people have conspicuous consumption behaviors, based on the participants' ranking of brand popularity and product on trend as important consumption factors. The results of the interviews also show that conspicuous consumption also stems from young people's level of awareness of different fashion products and the trendy attributes of the product. It is evident that conspicuous consumption has become a major factor influencing the fashion consumption decisions of young Chinese people today. In addition, interview respondents provided quality and material of fashion products, price, and functionality as relatively common considered factors as well.

Furthermore, contemporary young Chinese people are exposed to a wider range of consumption channels. Compared to previous generations, young people are living in a digital age where everything from offline stores to emerging online shopping platforms is a convenient way for young Chinese to consume fashion products. Besides, there is a general lack of concern among young Chinese about the sustainability of fashion. Whether it is a lack of concern for sustainable concepts in the production or the fact that they rarely choose to buy second-hand clothing, young Chinese in general do not seem to pay as much attention to ecology and environmental protection in their fashion consumption. However, as brands and the government work together to promote the idea of sustainability, more young Chinese people are becoming aware of environmental protection measures in fashion production and are choosing to consume eco-friendly products.

The main limitation of the study comes from the small size of the sample, regardless of questionnaires and interviews, which requires a larger sample to confirm the generalizability of the results and also to provide a more diverse interpretation of conspicuous consumption. Although this study was conducted within the context of young Chinese consumers, the findings suggest that the approach could be extended to different age groups, such as middle-aged and elder populations in society, while it could also be extended internationally to make comparisons of conspicuous consumption across different countries.

The significance of this study is that it reflects the strong perceptions and motivations of conspicuous consumption among young people in today's Chinese society, and the results suggest that products with conspicuous characteristics in the fashion industry can motivate young people to consume. The study correlates economic development and young people's consumption behavior by setting the context that

the increased consumption power of the Chinese middle class in today's era is based on economic growth. At the same time, the study combines the concern for fashion sustainability. In general, the shift in consumption patterns has made conspicuous consumption the foremost consumption behavior of young people in China, and along with the large amount of consumption, the lack of sustainability in fashion can bring us a lot of harm. The practical implication of this study is that by introducing fashion sustainability, it could be used by governments to implement consumer policies on sustainable development, such as educating young people on the importance of balancing rapid economic growth with environmental protection and sustainable consumption. Additionally, this study could be applied to fashion brands to develop marketing strategies targeting young people.

In the future, a larger sample of questionnaires would be worth collecting, and the sample could cover cities at each level of the city classification across China. Such data provides a comparison of city development scale and the impact of income levels on conspicuous consumption between cities, such as international metropolises compared to third-tier cities. Also, interviewees can be drawn from a wider range of young Chinese, such as implementing random street interviews to expand the sample. Thus, the study can provide a more accurate picture of the extent of conspicuous consumption among young Chinese people. In addition, comparisons of conspicuous consumption could be made based on the gender of the participants and the region they live in, and the international students mentioned in this study have a sufficient sampling range that can be studied separately as a unique group of young Chinese people.

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# Appendix 1

## Questionnaire questions

Questionnaire	The most important factors when consuming fashion products (clothing/shoes/bags, etc.)
1.	Age: under18, 18-30, 30+
2.	Rank the importance of the factors you might consider when purchasing fashion products (some factors are seen as unimportant if not considered when purchasing): Product material/quality, Price, Brand popularity, Chinese made brand (place of origin), Sustainability in production/personal use, Products are on trend, Functionality, Copy the style of others/icon, Other____