

Research on the Acceptability of Minimalist Consumption in China

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Abstract: *In the era of prevalent consumerism, a new consumption concept has quietly emerged, namely minimalism, which advocates not to buy more than the actual need. This consumption concept has gained a lot of attention and imitation in recent years, as videos of such lives have become popular on social media platforms. Under the background of abundant materials, these people give up enjoying the pleasure brought by materials and live according to the opposite consumption concept, which is worth studying. This report aims to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what minimalism is, how people of different age groups view it and why they choose it, and to explore the factors that influence the mainstream lifestyle of minimalism in society. To this end, this paper will put forward four research questions, which are: 1. What is minimalism? 2. How do middle-aged and elderly Chinese and young Chinese think about minimalist life? 3. What is the motivation that prompts some people to choose minimalist consumption mode in modern life with abundant material conditions? 4. Why isn't minimalism a mainstream lifestyle these days? . In order to clarify these four questions, this paper interviewed 7 people of different age groups, and summarized 11 findings from the collected interview answers. On this basis, the 11 findings were analyzed in combination with theories related to consumer behavior. At the end of the paper, based on these findings, suggestions are proposed for consumers, businesses, marketers and governments to better improve consumer experience in the future.*

Keywords: *minimalist consumption, consumer behavior, mainstream lifestyle, environmental burden, social responsibility*

1. Introduction

A major trend in the 21st century is consumption. The development of manufacturing provides consumers with various product choices, while various promotional activities frequently appear on online and offline platforms prompt them to hoard a large number of products on a regular basis (Choi, 2011)^[6]. For example, the popularity of shopping festivals around the world encourages consumers to buy more products each year. The most representative example is black Friday in the United States, and Singles Day in China has even broken records year by year (Oral & Thurner, 2019)^[18]. In addition, the mass media often even promoted to the public the idea of consumption as an indicator of personal success and the pursuit of happiness, and the pursuit of luxury material life gradually became a cultural identity (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002)^[5]. However, in today's social pressure, many people live beyond their means in order to maintain the so-called bright appearance. In this materialistic era, a new and contrary consumption concept has quietly emerged: minimalism, a lifestyle within your means (Kantengwa, 2019)^[12]. In this lifestyle, people will easily give up unnecessary things and try not to buy more than they actually need (Kumar, 2021)^[14]. They are obsessed with reducing the number of things they own and creating a clean and relaxing environment for themselves in the videos they share on YouTube. This kind of consumption idea concrete manifestation in their video usually have a small house (smaller space available usually can inhibit shopping desire), simple white walls, a bed, only with the need in the kitchen items, a few clothes, and buy only what they really need current to save additional money (D'Avella, 2018)^[7]. Such videos usually receive hundreds of thousands or even tens of millions of views. There are a large number of viewers posting comments about their yearning and support for such life. It can be found that the minimalist lifestyle is not only popular in the United States, more and more people are choosing to live this way, and the trend is catching on around the world (Rebecca, 2019)^[20]. For example, the Japanese brand Muji, which advocates minimalist style, has been favored by consumers from all over the world in the 40 years since its establishment (Martin Roll., 2020)^[15].

2. The theories

For some people, money and material things are the purpose of their lives, because they believe that money can buy what they desire and being rich will bring them more happiness. This belief is very common in modern society and is widely known as materialism (Dittmar et al., 2014)^[9]. There two reasons why people become inclined to materialistic values : first, the experience of psychological needs not being satisfied due to material scarcity leads individuals to adopt materialist values in an attempt to compensate for painful insecurities. Secondly, people are exposed to the influence of social values or popular culture that encourage material value (Kasser et al., 2004)^[13]. However, Minimalism is not a voluntary choice for everyone, but an inevitable social and cultural shift as we move into the 21st century. The Great Recession of 2008 led to a huge minimalist movement, as shopping in second-hand stores became fashionable, as did rustic simplicity (Rebecca, 2020)^[21]. Recently, psychologists from Purdue University and the University of Virginia analyzed data from 1.7 million people in 164 countries and found that an individual's ideal income of \$95,000 per year had the highest level of life satisfaction, and people earning between \$60,000 and \$75,000 per year had higher emotional health, It's also better for family harmony, and once income crosses that threshold, more money is actually associated with lower happiness (Danielle, 2021)^[8]. Multiple studies have shown that high-spending lifestyles and material values are not a reliable path to happiness. Instead, materially simpler lifestyles, such as minimalism, which focuses on intrinsic values, are believed to contribute to happiness and fulfillment (Hausen, 2019)^[11]. Minimalism, promoted by those who wish to live a simple life based on conscious consumption, aims to reduce the disposal of materials and the accumulation of excess goods and supported by the idea that "less is more", they buy only what they think is necessary and challenge the so-called consumer society by avoiding excessive consumption (Dopierala, 2017)^[10]. It can be found that they sought the maximum utility and value of the products in the process of consumption, and maintained a utilitarian attitude towards the products (Szmigin & Piacentini, 2018)^[23]. At the same time, they understand that excessive consumption and accumulation are harmful to the environment and will lead to repeated purchase of certain goods in the long run, which will have negative impact on the society as a "domino effect" (Schor, 2005)^[22]. They express their value for the environment through their insistence on minimalist consumerism. The essence of minimalism is to reject flashy and irrational shopping and criticize the social harm caused by excessive consumption (Dopierala, 2017)^[10]. Therefore, generally speaking, minimalist consumers experience highly participatory decision-making in the process of shopping, because the replacement frequency of each product is very low for minimalists, and they need to conduct sufficient investigation and alternative evaluation of products before making appropriate purchase decisions. To ensure that they make a rational decision to buy high-quality products, so as to meet their needs to the greatest extent and avoid repeated purchases resulting in waste (Szmigin & Piacentini, 2018)^[23]. In general, minimalism is considered to be a voluntary choice of simple lifestyle. Voluntary simplicity (VS) focuses on eliminating clutter in one's personal life without feeling deprived (Ballantine & Creery, 2010)^[3]. However, the important thing is that voluntary simplicity does not mean choosing to live a poor life, because living in poverty is not a voluntary choice. Thus, the decline in material wealth is usually a result of minimalism, not minimalism itself (Dopierala, 2017)^[10]. There is nothing inherently wrong with owning material property (Wilson & Bellezza, 2021)^[24]. What is wrong is that people attach too much importance to material possessions and not enough to health, relationships, and relationships (Wilson & Bellezza, 2021)^[24]. Minimalism, on the other hand, as a kind of voluntary lifestyle choices, allowing individuals to personal life important things, conscious and deliberate decision to become meaningful for myself, to some extent, improved the personal engagement and perception of life to the happiness of life (Dopierala, 2017)^[10].

3. Research purpose and questions

Under the background of abundant material, there are still some people who choose to give up the pleasure brought by material and live with the opposite consumption concept. This consumption psychology is worth studying. Therefore, this report aims to have a more comprehensive understanding of the definition of minimalism and the different views of people of different age groups on minimalism, as well as the reasons why they choose minimalism, and on this basis explore the factors that influence minimalism to become a mainstream lifestyle in society. This paper will put forward four research questions, which are as follows:

- (1)What is minimalism?

(2)How do middle-aged and elderly Chinese and young Chinese think about minimalist life?

(3)What is the motivation that prompts some people to choose minimalist consumption mode in modern life with abundant material conditions?

(4)Why hasn't minimalism become a mainstream lifestyle?

4. Study and results

For these four research questions, I interviewed 7 relatives and friends around me, and their basic information is as follows:

Table 1: Personal information of interviewees

The serial number	Name	Age	Relationship to me	Interview place	The duration of the interview
1	Ms. Han	The 40s	Family	China	15mins
2	Mr. Zhang	The 20s	Classmate	China	10mins
3	Ms. Liu	The 30s	Family	China	20mins
4	Mr. Zhang	The 70s	Family	China	15mins
5	Mr. Wang	The 20s	friend	China	20mins
6	Ms Hu	The 50s	Family	China	10mins
7	Miss Li	The 20s	friend	China	12mins

Table 2: Interview questions and summaries of answers

Research question 1: What is minimalism?
Key interview questions: What is your idea of a minimalist lifestyle? Is it manifested in the material level of nothing, or just spiritual level of satisfaction and peace
Summary of interview answers and key findings: All of the interviewees agreed that minimalist consumption must be reflected in the pursuit of such a lifestyle on the spiritual level rather than just the lack of material level.
1. Four out of seven respondents believe that living a minimalist life voluntarily is the true manifestation of minimalism. The reason for material scarcity may be that economic conditions are not enough to support more consumption desire, not that they choose to live this kind of life voluntarily. For those who are relatively rich, their economic strength could have provided them with a richer material life. However, their minimalist consumption concept drives them to voluntarily give up satisfying their various desires and instead choose to restrain them. Only this kind of life that actively chooses to basically meet material needs at the spiritual level can be regarded as the embodiment of minimalist consumption concept.
2. The remaining interviewees also believe that minimalist consumption concept is reflected in the spiritual level, because the cognitive level of consciousness will affect their behavior. Only when consumers themselves recognize minimalist consumption concept in the spiritual level, they will follow their inner thoughts and put such ideas into practice.
The Key interview question: The minimalist consumption mode causes inconveniences in life, such as increasing the purchase frequency of food and daily necessities, or refusing to buy intelligent machines makes it take more time to complete some housework that could have been replaced by modern machines, which increases the burden of life. If the daily life becomes more complicated due to minimalist consumption, it is also a normal manifestation of minimalist consumption?
Summary of interview Answers and key findings: 3. All agree that this is not a normal form of minimalism. Minimalism is difficult to strike a balance between material possession and time reduction. They believe that minimalism should be the lowest level of material needs without affecting normal life. Before the implementation of the minimalist consumption, minimalist should make reasonable planning, such as nearly period of time according to their own needs, plan for the number of commodity purchase in advance, in terms of the choice of some modern science and technology products they don't have to be too demanding, things can improve the life happiness, such as washing machines, sweeping robot can be purchased. In addition, the interviewees believe that if they choose to live a minimalist life at the cost of life happiness, just to show that they advocate the minimalist consumption concept, such a formalistic life is meaningless.
Research question 2: How do middle-aged and elderly Chinese and young Chinese think about minimalist consumption?
Key interview questions: What do you think of minimalism as a consumption style, and would you

like to live in that way?
<p>Summary of interview answers and findings: All said they thought this was a great way to spend and admired minimalists for their self-control. 4. However, among the interviewees, 4 middle-aged and old people over 30 and 1 young person said that they would not choose such consumption mode, because they could not restrain their desires. It is not easy to live such a materially rich life now, and they do not want to restrain their curiosity about new things. At the same time, many of their desires in childhood have not been realized due to the living conditions, which is still considered as a kind of regret until now. Therefore, in order not to continue to have regrets for themselves, they will not choose such a way of life. 5. Two other young people also said they support this way of spending, but they would not choose such a lifestyle at this stage. Because they are surrounded by consumerist friends, they think they will be very unsociable if they choose a minimalist approach to spending. They also say they don't want to differentiate themselves by choosing a unique consumption concept. But they said that if they were older, they might consider living a minimalist lifestyle.</p>
<p>Research question 3: What motivates some people to choose a minimalist way of consumption in a modern life with abundant material conditions?</p>
<p>Key interview questions: What do you think is the reason why some people choose to consume minimalism in today's material world?</p>
<p>Summary of interview answers and findings: 6. The three interviewees believe that these people are influenced by social media. They may see other people living a minimalist life through the Internet and think this life is fresh and cool, so they want to imitate this consumption way and create more novel experiences for their own lives. 7. The two interviewees believe that such people may want to convey their image of a virtuous person who cares for the environment to the people around them through this consumption concept. 8. The other two interviewees believe that these people may decide to change their lifestyle to follow the minimalist consumption mode due to their previous purchasing behaviors, such as spending money in a random way resulting in financial constraints, and the chaotic living environment caused by the accumulation of a large number of products at home.</p>
<p>Research question 4: Why hasn't minimalism become mainstream these days?</p>
<p>Key interview questions: Since minimalism can not only reduce the cost of the earth's resources, but also help people to spend less, why don't you think minimalism has become a mainstream way of consumption in society?</p>
<p>Summary of interview answers and findings: 9. Both respondents said that minimalism has not become a mainstream consumption style in society because hedonism, consumerism and comparison are prevalent and widespread. The pressure of modern life is huge, and consumption can bring people enough pleasure. The excitement and stimulation generated when receiving new items will make people addicted to consumption. 10. The other two interviewees said that due to the development of industry and science and technology, the speed of product upgrading is constantly increasing, and consumers are constantly attracted by the new functions of new products, which leads to consumers constantly buying the latest products in order to become the forefront of fashion. 11. The other three respondents said minimalism is not a mainstream way of spending because the government does not encourage it. Because reduced consumption will lead to a large number of business bankruptcies, which will further reduce tax revenues. If the economic power of a country is affected then the country will be threatened by other countries, so minimalism cannot be implemented on a large scale.</p>

5. Integration with theory

From the interview results, it can be found that minimalist consumers actively give up rich material life at the spiritual level, and actively choose to control the purchase quantity of goods at the lowest level of demand. This consumption concept should not only stay at the level of formalism, but is the result of a consensus from the deep heart to the actual action. Thus it can be found that minimalist consumption behavior tends to the psychological realm of the superego described by Freud's psychoanalysis theory. They completely restrain their innate instincts and desires and at the same time abandon the social common sense and logic followed by most people to act. On the premise of not touching the social conventional moral standards, they constantly internalize moral ideals, social precept and norms in the process of growing up, using social morality or one's own principles to constrain one's behavior to reach the realm of the superego (Szmigin & Piacentini, 2018)[23]. Similar

to the superego, minimalist consumers are perfectionists, and because they buy so infrequently, they need to make sure that every purchase meets their needs perfectly and that every purchase does not make them regret it. For example, to avoid poor quality products and have to throw away products resulting in waste of resources. Therefore, they usually experience a high-involvement process before making purchase decisions, such as extensive information collection and comprehensive product evaluation during the purchase process, so as to make a prudent purchase decision and careful post-purchase evaluation, so as to ensure that every purchase is efficient and worthwhile (Patterson, 1993)^[19]. It can be seen that minimalist consumers are developing their undeveloped abilities rather than doing things they cannot do, which reflects a state of consciousness that wants to break through their current state and sublimate to a state of mind (Mills, 2004)^[17]. For example, when they have a demand for a certain item, they should try their best to persuade and reflect on whether they really need such item, so as to ensure that their every shopping behavior is based on the instinct of restraining impulse and standing on the basis of extreme rationality and morality. In a positive sense, this superego state of mind can be a progressive and innovative attitude, a state of striving to show maturity and excellence (Mills, 2004)^[17]. In addition, it is found from the interview that both middle-aged and young people greatly support and admire those who can adhere to the minimalist life, but they are not willing to lead such a life, the reason is that they think they cannot control their desire and curiosity for new things. If they force themselves to curb their shopping urges in pursuit of a high-sounding minimalist lifestyle, they will feel unhappy. Therefore, it can be found that most people prefer hedonic consumption more than minimalist consumption. After meeting their basic needs for food, clothing, housing and transportation, they still want to continue to consume other products to enhance emotional pleasure in order to experience happiness (MBA Skool Team, 2020)^[16]. They also expressed doubts about whether minimalists can stick with minimalism for long. Short-term emotions affect the thinking and decision of minimalist consumers on product purchase and use (Barone et al., 2000)^[4], while minimalist consumers ignore the influence of long-term emotions, such as happiness. Research shows that when spending money, consumers with high happiness are more likely to engage in a relatively large number of leisure activities (Armour, 1999)^[2]. Thus, minimalist consumers who engage in less frequent purchases may be less happy than hedonists. When studying the motivation of minimalist consumers, it can be found that most interviewees believe that minimalists choose minimalist consumption because they are influenced by social media. According to humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, the Ideal Self is an idealized self created based on what you have learned from life experiences, social needs and what you admire from role models (Alley Dog, 2021)^[1]. Therefore, the respondents believe that some minimalists are motivated by the fact that the minimalist lifestyle of such bloggers in social media videos has become an example admired or envied by some viewers, so they imitate this as their ideal self. At the same time, the interviewees also believe that psychological activities are also the motivation to choose minimalism. Minimalists have consciously reflected on their previous shopping experiences of hoarding goods or spending too much money, which led to financial constraints. The interviewees believe that minimalists choose to change their existing consumption patterns and choose minimalist consumption patterns through this process of cognitive learning. In addition, it can be found from the interview answer to the last research question that due to the development of science and information technology, the process of updating and iterating new products and services is getting faster and faster. From extra-curricular knowledge, we can know that diffusion of innovations and innovation adoption process are respectively macro and micro processes in which innovation is accepted by consumers in a certain period. In order to continuously expand market share, a large number of businesses invest in continuous innovation and discontinuous innovation in their products and services, which continuously improve the functions of the old products or directly invent new products to replace the old ones. As a result, new products and services continually retain a strong appeal to consumers, driving consumers to pay for new products and services. Therefore, innovation in technology and information technology is one of the reasons why minimalism cannot become a mainstream consumption mode.

6. Conclusion

According to the above research findings, although all interviewees indicated that they were not willing to become minimalist consumers, they all affirmed the benefits of minimalism to the adopters and the earth's environment, such as helping such consumers save a lot of money and reducing the waste of the earth's resources. Therefore, it can be shown that minimalism still has many advantages worth learning. Even if consumers do not adopt minimalism, they should be rational when making purchase decisions and try to avoid falling into the trap of merchants' promotion and buying a lot of products that they do not need or cannot use up in order to take advantage of the advantages. In

addition, consumers can also try to find the products they need in the second-hand market, or put their unused items on the second-hand trading platform for sale, so as to increase the efficiency of the use of products. On the other hand, businesses should also assume their social responsibility by packaging and producing products with recyclable materials as far as possible. Meanwhile, they can also produce smaller products to help consumers avoid the waste of resources caused by inexhaustible consumption. In addition, marketing personnel, and the government should also urged consumers rational shopping now prevails in consumerism, the government should be posted on the public media platform on the minimalist consumption, help more people know about this niche concept of consumption, and guide consumers begin to pay close attention to and a waste of resources caused by excessive consumption and environmental burden.

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