

## How Female Consumers Think of Themselves, Make Consumption and Show Loyalty to a Brand

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*As women's economic and social role has changed rapidly since the 1980s, their influence on the consumer market is increasingly being felt. Marketing managers have found it necessary to reevaluate their marketing strategies in order to serve female market more efficiently. This study explores the comparison of relationship between self concept, consumption behavior, and brand loyalty of Chinese female consumers by consumer segmentation based on marital status. In order to gain the research goal, we randomly approached Chinese female consumers on the main shopping street and office town in Shanghai and explained the intention of the research while they were selecting one of the multiple choices in the questionnaire. Chinese married women who show strong freedom self-concept are emotionally loyal to a specific brand. Single women with freedom self-concept and fervor self-concept, however, have contradictory attitude to brand loyalty. They are both indifferent consumers and emotionally loyal consumers. On the other hand, Chinese single women with fashion self-concept have consistently adverse attitude to conservative calculator, calculating consumer, and emotionally loyal consumer. They show indifferent attitude to brand preference, not sticking to any specific brand. Single women with consumption behavior of feeling expression disdain calculating consumer, but support emotionally loyal consumer. These women are target customers for a company seeking higher loyal consumers. Married women with consumption behavior of achievement expression are both calculating consumers and emotionally loyal consumers. They go up to higher level brand loyalty, the emotionally loyal consumer, only subject to the fulfillment of their comparing a brand with other competing ones. Thus they belong to a critical segment that has the potential and willingness to step forward to higher brand loyalty*

Field of Research: International Marketing, Market Segmentation

### 1. Introduction

In Asia female consumers do not just consume the traditional feminine products, but are also a potential market for a wide variety of products (e.g. credit cards, alcoholic drinks, and cigarettes). Women's influence on the consumer market is increasingly being felt. The root cause is their changing economic and social role. This has evolved extremely rapidly since the 1980s. Marketing managers are aware of the huge size and potentiality of the female market, and have found it necessary to reevaluate their marketing strategies in order to position their products and services to serve this market more efficiently (Sin et al., 2001).

This study uses the 5F model of self-concept and consumption behavior of Chinese female consumers in order to find out the relationship between their self-concept, consumption behavior, and the brand loyalty with particular focus on the comparison of married women and single women. Foreign companies trying to tackle Chinese market are expected to be able to take advantage of the result of this study in their marketing strategy formulation and implementation targeted to the female consumers based on the market segmentation by marital status.

## 2. Literature Review

Sin et al. (2002) approach Chinese women's role orientation and consumption values with the sample of Hong Kong women aged 18 or above. They define female role orientation as the common roles preferred and held by women in Chinese societies. The measurements for role orientation are family, societal, submissiveness, traditional, and socioeconomic orientation. With regard to consumption values, six values emerge that are aesthetic, instrumental, social, patriotic, family, and societal value. They choose three product types, a personal product (banquet dress), a social product (donation to a youth foundation), and a family product (refrigerator). Chinese consumers (respondents) are segmented into three groups of individualists, traditionalists, and pro-societalists by the cluster analysis according to their role perception. They were expected to directly compare the relationship between role orientation and consumption values, but they switch five role orientations to three consumer styles.

That role orientation, the original construct, is deleted from the final analysis and discussion is a shortcoming of their paper, though reducing the number of construct from five to three contributes to easier understanding of Chinese female consumer behavior. It is quite curious and unexpected that of the three female consumer styles pro-societalists occupy the highest portion in China where socialist-dominated market economy prevails. They propose the validity of dimensions of female role orientation be examined in other cultural contexts. Comparing the six consumption values with five consumption behaviors of this research, aesthetic value is similar to fashion expression, social value to achievement expression, family value to family use, but the other three values are not linked to the remaining two behaviors in this research framework.

Yang, Zhou, & Chen (2005) analyze older Chinese consumers aged 55 or over brand choice of 397 brands of eight categories of fast-moving consumer products relative to younger consumers aged 18-35 years. They examine four major aspects of brand choice behavior, that is, market presence, brand diversity, purchasing frequency, and foreign versus domestic preference. Survey areas are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Xi'an. Their study, however, deals with the frequency difference of each of the four brand choice behavior between the older and the younger Chinese consumers. The only aspect of brand choice behavior seemingly to give practical implication to

foreign companies that have already been operating or are planning to enter Chinese market is the frequency differential of foreign versus domestic brand between the older and the younger. It is unclear why correlation analysis is done only between buying frequency and number of brands purchased, but between no other aspects. Those variables seem to be lacking in disclosing in-depth information of Chinese consumer behavior.

Tam & Tai (1998) figured psychographic dimensions of female consumers in Greater China by cluster analysis with samples of 558 working females aged between 18 and 35 in Hong Kong, Taipei, and Guangzhou. A four cluster solution was developed and labeled as conventional females, contemporary females, searching singles, and followers who are different from each other in terms of demographics and life style. The conventional females adhere strongly to the traditional values of filial piety and value their family life more than their work. The contemporary females are trying to combine family and work while gaining steadily in terms of financial independence and employment status. The searching singles have more time to spend with their friends and to shop. The followers do not hold strong opinions regarding family, work or their surroundings, nor active in social or cultural activities. Their study can be recommended as an outstanding intra-cultural comparative study with three regions of differential developmental stages and life styles.

Dou, Wang, & Zhou (2006) seek to examine the influence of generational gap on the media usage preferences of Chinese young consumers. They adopted generational cohort theory and uses/gratification theory for ascertaining the influence of generational gap. Chinese young consumers tended to watch much less television news and less interested in reading information-based content than the older consumers. In addition, young consumers were more interested in entertainment-oriented program on television, in newspaper, and on the radio. Though not directly tackling consumer self-concept and consumption behavior, their study suggests effective marketing communication tools that can trigger consumptions behavior connected with brand choice. In that sense, their study may function as an introduction to my research.

### **3. Methodology**

According to Yang (2003), the five model concept is defined as follows. The self-concept of Chinese women has five Fs, the definitions of which are; F1 (family-self): Those females who focus their attention on their family and wish to be a wonderful wife and mother. F2 (feeling-self): Those females who are in pursuit of the satisfaction of her own feeling. F3 (freedom-self): Those females who seek the mental peace and freedom. F4 (fashion-self): Those females who always want to be the top of fashion and are fond of making friends and joining social activities. F5 (fervor-self): Those females who make great effort to achieve success in her career. Next, the consumption behavior of Chinese women has five Fs which whose definitions are; F1 (family use): Women give priority to the purchase of products and services which are useful for their family,

and that kind of consumption behavior reflects the role of wonderful wife and mother.

F2 (feeling expression): Women enjoy buying the products and services which can cater to her emotional fulfillment. F3 (mind comfort<sup>1</sup>): Women are attracted by the products and services which can contribute to her balance of mind, spiritual peace and comfort. F4 (fashion expression): Women spend much money on the products and services which can show her sense of beauty and heightens mutual communication with peers. F5 (achievement expression): Women take into first consideration the products and services which reflect her image of successful business woman. The brand loyalty is based on Malaval (2001) who set five levels of loyalty; one-brand customer, emotionally loyal customer, calculating customer, conservative customer, and indifferent customer. This study tries to explore the conceptual, behavioral and brand loyalty differences between Chinese married women and single women with the following research questions.

Research Proposition 1: There may be differences between married women and single women in their self concept and consumption behavior.

Research Proposition 2: There may be differences between married women and single women in their determinants of brand loyalty.

The survey was carried out during the summer vacation of 2007 in Shanghai. Total samples of fifty three were collected on the street around popular fashion town and office areas. The second author, as a native Chinese, performed the distribution and collection of the questionnaire while approaching the female pedestrians. The introductory statistical analysis adopted is factor analysis for shortening and grouping lots of variables. For the comparison of the two cohorts in terms of their self concept and consumption behavior student t test is adopted. Regression analysis is the tool for the differences test with regard to the determining factors of respective brand loyalty. All these statistical analysis are based on SPSS 10.0 version. Of the fifty three respondents 34.0 per cent are married women, and the other 66.0% are single women. The age range is that 23.1 per cent is 20-24, 50.0 per cent 25-29, thus occupying about three out of four. Of the married women two out of three have their children.

#### **4. Findings**

Factor analysis classified the original five Fs of self concept and consumption behavior somewhat differently from the original design made by Yang (2003). For instance, 'Happiness lies in peace of mind' was originally a sub factor of freedom self-concept, but turned out to belong to family self-concept. In this way a total of five components of self concept and seven of consumption behavior were switched to new categories. The result of comparing self concept and consumption behavior of married women and single women are shown in <Table 1>.

&lt; Table 1&gt; Self Concept &amp; Consumption Behavior of Married &amp; Single Women

	Married women	Single women	t
Family self concept	3.62	3.03	2.89**
Fashion self concept	3.96	4.43	-2.54*
Feeling self concept	3.36	3.54	-0.71
Freedom self concept	4.09	4.00	0.45
Fervor self concept	3.58	3.59	-0.02
Fashion consumption	3.35	3.48	-0.53
Achievement consumption	3.28	2.90	1.83
Mind comfort consumption	2.80	2.95	-0.68
Family consumption	3.74	3.95	0.10
Feeling consumption	3.81	3.79	-0.53

No statistically significant differences are to be seen between married women and single women in terms of consumption behavior, but some distinctions can be observed with regard to self concept. Married women show stronger family self-concept but lower fashion self-concept than single women. Married women particularly esteem the idea that happiness lies in peace of mind. It seems that sustaining marriage life contributes to women's mental maturity. The lower emphasis on fashion self-concept reflects married women's family bindings that are not favorable to make-up and keeping fit. Single women, on the contrary, are not restrained by such family bindings, thus putting much stress on make-up and keeping fit in order to look charming.

Next, regression analysis in <Table 2> reveals the contrasts between married women and single women of their respective brand loyalty determinants. As for the lowest level brand loyalty, indifferent consumer, single women show distinguished contrasts with married women in their self concepts. None of the self concepts affect married women's indifferent brand loyalty, while all of the self concepts are exerting influences on their indifferent brand loyalty. Family self-concept has negative effect on single women's indifferent brand loyalty, but the other four self concepts have positive influence on theirs.

Regarding the second lowest brand loyalty, conservative calculator, the influences of self concept and consumption behavior are meager. Besides, the regression model itself does not have statistical significance for its validity. Calculating consumer, the level three brand loyalty, is negatively influenced by self concept, but both positively and negatively by consumption behavior. Family self-concept and fashion self-concept are negatively affecting calculating consumer of married women and single women, respectively. On the contrary, family consumption-behavior and mind comfort consumption-behavior are positively contributing to calculating consumer, respectively. Married women and single women are showing their similarity in feeling consumption-behavior which has negative influence on calculating consumer. The higher level brand loyalty, emotionally loyal consumer, is consistently getting positive effect from consumption behavior, but mixed effect from self

&lt; Table 2&gt; Determinants of Brand Loyalty with Married vs. Single Women

	Indifferent	Conservative	Calculative	Emotional	One-brand
SF1	-0.07 / <b>-0.68**</b>	0.15/-0.53	<b>-0.35**</b> / 0.06	-0.26/0.02	-0.18/0.19
SF2	0.45/ <b>0.65**</b>	-0.13/ <b>-1.21*</b>	0.12/ <b>-0.41*</b>	0.13/ <b>-0.22*</b>	0.26/-0.45
SF3	-0.14 / <b>0.73***</b>	0.40/-0.12	-0.02/-0.07	0.16/ <b>-0.18*</b>	-0.23/0.42
SF4	-0.04/ <b>0.42*</b>	0.08/0.68	0.06/0.001	<b>0.35*/0.32**</b>	<b>0.37*/0.39</b>
SF5	-0.19 / <b>1.41***</b>	-0.17/-0.05	-0.01/-0.29	0.04/ <b>0.22*</b>	<b>0.33*/-0.28</b>
CB1	0.07/ <b>-0.76*</b>	-0.14/0.86	<b>0.26*/-0.11</b>	0.35/ <b>0.37***</b>	0.42/0.61
CB2	<b>-0.55*</b> / <b>-0.86*</b>	0.14/-0.34	0.08/-0.07	0.31/-0.08	<b>0.47*/-0.32</b>
CB3	-0.26/-0.03	-0.23/0.21	<b>-0.23*</b> / <b>-0.44**</b>	-0.09/ <b>0.15*</b>	-0.01/0.29
CB4	<b>-0.58*</b> / <b>-1.35***</b>	0.09/0.58	0.22/ <b>0.71**</b>	<b>0.52**/-0.07</b>	0.30/0.69
CB5	0.32/0.27	-0.18/-0.33	<b>0.21*/-0.26</b>	<b>0.36**/0.13</b>	0.17/0.04
F	3.04*/12.1**	2.26 / 3.38	3.00*/ 7.8**	4.71**/24.9**	3.42**/5.13*
R <sup>2</sup>	.603 / .953	.531 / .849	.600 / .929	.702 / .976	.631 / .895

+SF: Self Concept 1: family, 2: fashion, 3: feeling, 4: freedom, 5: fervor

+CB: Consumption Behavior 1: fashion, 2: achievement, 3: mind comfort, 4: family, 5: feeling

+ Numbers before parenthesis are those of married women, and after parenthesis are those of single women.

\* : p<0.05, \*\* : p<0.01, \*\*\* : p<0.001

concept in case of single women. Emotionally loyal consumer of married women expresses positive attachment to mind comfort and achievement consumption-behavior, while that of single women to family and feeling consumption-behavior. Fashion and feeling self-concept are exerting negative effect, but freedom and fervor self-concept positive effect on emotionally loyal consumer of single women. The utmost ideal type brand loyalty is one-brand consumer that has nothing to do with self concept and consumption behavior in case of single women. Some of the self concept–freedom and fervor type–and consumption behavior–fashion type–are positively affecting one-brand consumers in case of married women.

## 5. Summary And Conclusion

Chinese married women who show strong freedom self-concept are emotionally loyal to a specific brand (i.e. brand loyalty level 4 & 5). Freedom self concept represents the following features; real beauty lies not in flowery clothes nor specious cosmetics; keeping harmony with nature is the most beautiful; women must have career to guarantee their life. Married women with freedom self-concept are not bound by popular trends, but instead emphasize eco-friendly thinking style. Single women with freedom self-concept and fervor self-concept,

however, have contradictory attitude to brand loyalty. They are both indifferent consumers and emotionally loyal consumers. At the beginning they may not care about which brand they purchase, but when a brand image is formed in their mind, they come to like that brand not only by its external features but also by internal attributes related to a product like in-depth customer service. Chinese single women with fashion self-concept have consistently adverse attitude to conservative calculator, calculating consumer, and emotionally loyal consumer. They show indifferent attitude to brand preference. This type of single women consumers seem to be fickle and not to stick to any specific brand.

Two of the findings related with female consumption behavior attract our attention. Single women with consumption behavior of feeling expression disdain calculating consumer, but support emotionally loyal consumer. These women are target customers for a company seeking higher loyal consumers. The other finding is that married women with consumption behavior of achievement expression are both calculating consumers and emotionally loyal consumers. They go up to higher level brand loyalty, the emotionally loyal consumer, only subject to the fulfillment of their comparing a brand with other competing ones. Thus they belong to a critical segment that has the potential and willingness to step forward to higher brand loyalty.

This study contributed to the further advancement of research horizon of Yang (2003) to the level of linking self concept and consumption behavior with brand loyalty as well as of classifying the target into detailed segment by marital status, thus providing both academics and business with more accurate information of Chinese female consumers. Based on that kind of implication, corporate marketing strategy can decide on targeting consumers of certain self concept for a specific product/service and building customer loyalty to a level where it can enjoy sustainable competitive advantage.

#### Note

1. Spirit comfort coined by Yang (2003) is replaced by mind comfort in this article, because the term 'spirit' seems to me to be biased toward religion or philosophy rather than academics.

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