

Research Article

A Study on Motivation and Factors That Influence Chinese Consumers' Patronage of Cheongsam

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Abstract

Understanding the consumption behavior of customers for specific products is crucial to the success of businesses. The cheongsam, a traditional costume for Chinese women, acts as a representative symbol of China and often appears on the international stage. The fashion trend of the cheongsam has been shaped by the cultural preferences, awareness, and lifestyles of people during specific historical periods. Therefore, by analyzing consumer purchasing behaviors, needs, and desires, a plan for the innovative design of the cheongsam can be developed. This study thus aims to explore the motivations and factors that influence the purchasing decisions of Chinese cheongsam consumers. Electronic questionnaires were distributed, and 50 responses with the necessary coverage and details were collected. Data analysis indicates that most respondents were aged 18-25, commonly referred to as Generation Z. Among the motivational factors considered, the beauty of Cheongsam emerged as the dominant factor followed by culture, celebrity influence, individuality, pursuit of fashion and as workplace requirement in that order. Regarding preferred patterns or design elements, customers tend to favor traditional patterns with auspicious meanings. This study thence recommends that cheongsam fashion designers can incorporate innovative design concepts, such as other Chinese cultural art forms (like paper cutting art and bamboo carving), to enhance the design and increase the acceptability of cheongsam products.

Keywords: Qipao, Generation Z, Chinese Culture, Paper Cutting art, Consumer Motivation, Consumer Behavior, Purchase Decision

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Introduction

Motivation and consumer engagement are crucial elements in the decision-making process for purchasing goods. A consumer's decision to buy is influenced by various internal and external factors. Therefore, exploring motivation and relevant theories can significantly clarify their role in consumer engagement. Motivation is the reason, be it conscious or non-conscious, for behaving a particular way in a certain situation. Consumer research stipulates two types of motives namely rational motives and irrational (emotional) motives (Weiner, 2012).

Consumer behavior can be explained as the analysis of the how, when, what and why people buy, use and dispose of products, services, ideas, and practices. According to (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016) there are four factors that influence consumer's purchase decisions and they include cultural factors, social factors, personal factors and psychological factors. Other aspects of consumer behaviour also deals with issues such as purchase preference being primarily determined by price rather than quality during pre-purchase evaluation (Kumar, John, & Senith, 2014). The factors are expansive - various factors like quality, brand, price, advertisement and packaging have tremendous influences on consumer purchasing behaviour and several studies have dealt with them.

The buying decision is the selection of two or more alternative choices (Schiffman, Thelen, & Sherman, 2010). Conventionally, the consumer purchase decision is known to involve five processes namely need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation. The qipao, a Chinese dress dates back to the Han Dynasty. "Qipao" (Mandarin) and "Cheongsam" (Cantonese) are used to describe the same Chinese dress worn by women. A myriad of literature and previous research studies about qipao's history and transition processes have been studied (Ryu, Jang, & Lee, 2011). Qipao has been seen as the National Costume throughout the 20th Century up till now.

The modern qipao can be described as imbibing a combination of traditional culture and modern civilization and for that matter a product of Chinese and Western cultures (Guo, 2014). Generally Chinese traditional clothing is expressive of the rich culture of the people (Guan & Pan, 2020). Over the years, Cheongsam has been a favourite clothing of Chinese women, due to its evolution into a national dress of unique style, replete with flavour of the times, and integrating the advantages of Chinese and Western clothing (Wei, 2017). The fashion trend of cheongsam is known to have been influenced by the cultural taste, consciousness and life style of the people within in a certain historical period (Wei, 2017). Therefore just like any other form of fashion good; innovation is needed to sustain its market position and appeal. By analyzing consumer purchasing behaviours, requirements and aspirations, a scheme can be proposed for innovative design of cheongsam.

The academic researches on cheongsam over the period tend to focus mainly on the aspects regarding the history, culture and style of cheongsam (X.-L. Huang, 2017). This study therefore seeks to fill the knowledge gap with regards to consumer motivation. The succeeding discussion is partitioned into objectives of the study, a number of hypothesis, methodology, consumer analysis, results and discussions.

Objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate motivation and factors that influence the buying decisions of Chinese cheongsam consumers.

1. To explore how consumer buying behavioral factors impact purchasing decisions for cheongsam.
2. To study the influence of dynamics such as design elements on consumer purchase decisions
3. To study the extent to which these motivational factors impact consumer's purchase behaviour.

Hypothesis

1. Age has an influence on the consumption of cultural products (cheongsam)
2. Pattern element content has an influence on consumer's purchase choice of cheongsam
3. Personal dimension has influence on consumer's purchase choice of cheongsam
4. Pursuit of fashion dimensions has influence on consumer's purchase choice of cheongsam
5. Cultural dimension has influence on consumer's purchase choice of cheongsam
6. Workplace requirement dimension has influence on consumer's purchase choice of cheongsam

Method

Sample and Instrumentation

The questionnaires were electronically sent out to consumers via social medial platforms who are all residents within the enclave of Huizhou, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in the People's Republic of China. 50 questionnaires were received with required coverage and details. The instruments of the study involved two sections: the first part of the instrument consisted of forced choice scale question about demographic characteristics: gender, age, occupation. The second segment featured variables chosen for this study in order to measure the influence of consumer buying behaviour of cheongsam contained 40 items and characterized into four sub scales: (a) Cheongsam aesthetics (items 1 to 5), (b) culture (items 6 to 13), (c) Celebrity influence (items 14 to 18), (d) Pursuit of fashion, (items 19 to 26) (e) Individuality (items 27 to 33) (f) Workplace requirement and others (items 34 to 40). The 40 items are appraised are grounded on a five-point Likert scale within the ranges of 1-5, applying the anchors "5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1= strongly disagree".

Consumer Analysis

As shown in Figure 1, consumers below 18years of age constituted 5.42%, 18-25years were 55.32%, Followed by 35-45years, below 18year and above 45years respectively. It can be seen from this that most cheongsam lovers studied were within the age of 18-25, that is, the "post-95" and "Post-00". This result can partly be attributed to the methodology-dispatching questionnaires via electronic means.

These groups of young people are collectively referred to as "generation Z". Consumers labeled as Generation Z have been distinguished as unique since they make up the first generation of "digital natives" who are born within the digital era. They spend approximately a quarter of their time online, but are known to selectively filter this digital information first, before making the purchase decision (Kahawandala & Peter, 2019). With the development of China's economy and the enhancement of national self-confidence, young people now pay more and more attention to the national traditional culture.

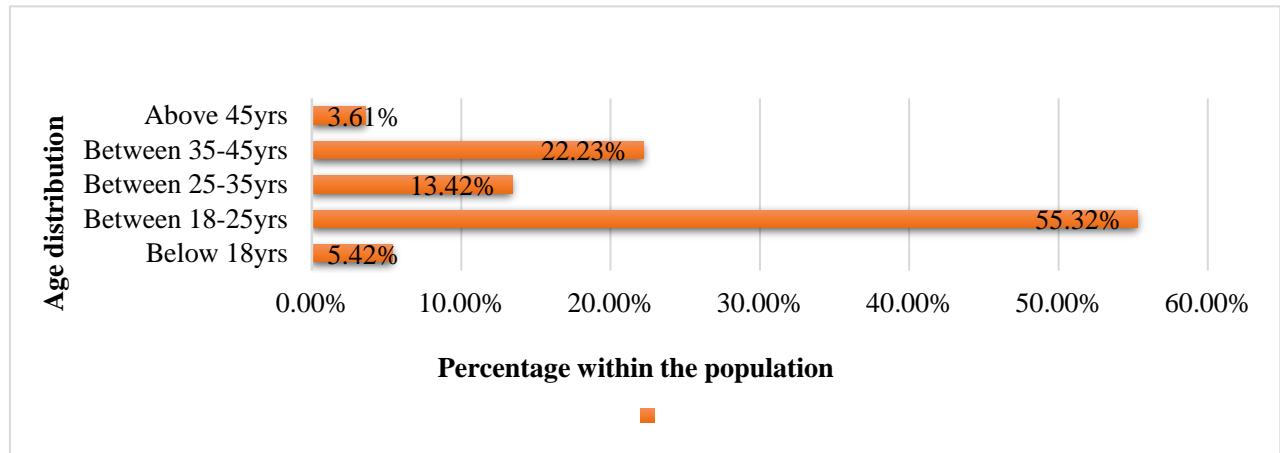


Figure 1 Age distribution of studied respondents
source: Authors

According to T-mall's consumer insight, 180million people searched for cheongsam on T-mall from January to May, and 120million placed orders. Among them, the post-90s are the main force to buy cheongsam, followed by the post-80s, and the post-95s and post-00s have the fastest growth rate.

Young groups more focused on innovation and dare to innovate and try, which plays an important role in promoting the resurgence of traditional costumes such as *Hanfu* and cheongsam. The traditional culture endowed by cheongsam has far exceeded the significance of other cultural clothing thus how to truly publicize and further develop cheongsam culture is the key. They are highly fashion conscious demands for high-end and quality clothing. In the choice of clothing types, they pursue the comfort and innovation of clothing and the trend spirit of more freedom and self-confidence (Zeng Qian & Wen, 2022)

Result/Finding

Motivation and Factors that influence the buying of cheongsam

The survey conducted unearthed factors influencing the purchase decision of cheongsam consumers'. The survey result is shown in Figure 5. Six main factors including the beauty of cheongsam, ability to carry forward traditional culture, influence by celebrities, individual preference, pursuit of fashion and workplace needs accounted for most important factors influencing consumer purchase decision among the young cheongsam patrons interviewed.

The beauty of cheongsam accounted for 34.63%, the ability of cheongsam to propagate traditional culture and influence by celebrities are the most important factors affecting consumers' purchase, accounting 25.79% and 19.08% respectively. The only rational motive- workplace requirement accounted for only 2.48%.

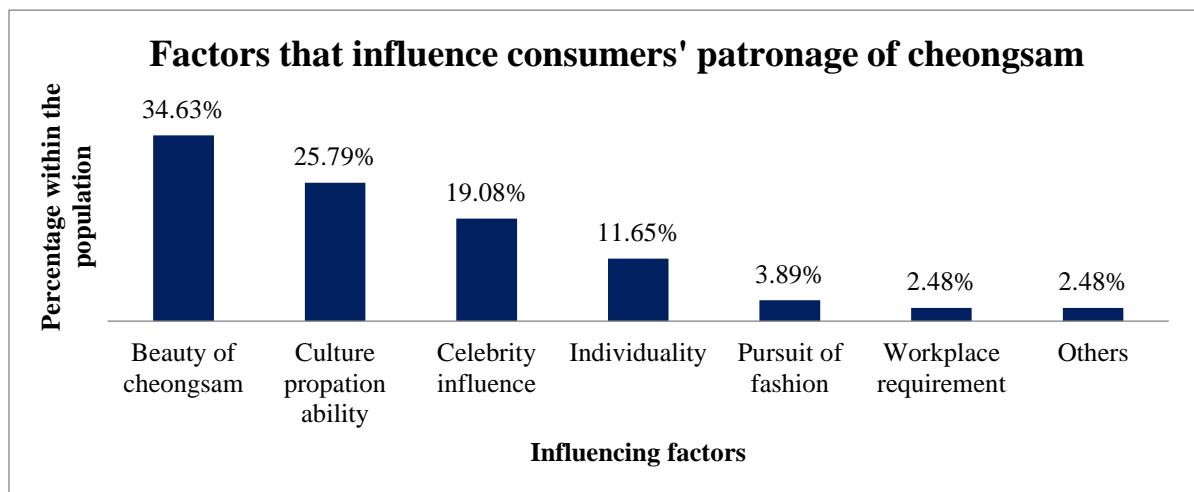


Figure 2 Factors that influence consumers' purchase of cheongsam.
source: Authors

These influencing factors mainly reflect the social needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs of spiritual value needs espoused by Maslow's theory of needs. The purchase motivation is dominated by emotional factors, which includes the motivation of seeking beauty, hobby and compliance with public opinion.

These demands by cheongsam consumers are informed by purchase motivation based on an internal driving force that directly drives consumers to carry out certain purchase activities, The motives reflects consumers' psychological, spiritual and emotional needs, and is essentially the promoter of consumers' purchase behaviour to meet their needs (Huiming, 2021).

Beauty of cheongsam

Seeking beauty is the primary factor for women to buy clothes (Grant & Stephen, 2005). Elegant and smooth lines, soft fabrics, chic and small stand collars, and a wide range of styles all interpret women's style. Cheongsam is not only the most suitable temperament and beauty clothing for Chinese women, but also contains Chinese traditional culture. In the fashion industry, retro style has always been respected (Corner, 2014). In today's society, the innovative and fashionable cheongsam and the improved cheongsam tends to be more suitable for daily occasions and are favoured by young people (Wang, Colbert, & Legoux, 2020), which are different from the rigorous design of traditional cheongsam.

Culture propagation

Cultural factors consist of set of values and ideologies of a particular community or group of individuals (Juneja, 2022). The culture of a person has a big impact on their thought processes and behaviours. Because culture has a huge influence on how people perceive the world around them, their place in it, and how they make decisions, it tends to play an important role in determining how and why they patronize goods and services (Juneja, 2022).

The cultural history, inheritance and development, technological process, aesthetic taste and other aspects of cheongsam have attracted much attention, and are endowed with the important value of interpreting history, inheriting culture and restoring life (Chunming, 2022). Therefore, on the basis of preserving the original cheongsam culture, appropriate modifications and improvements can be made on cheongsam by integrating modern elements to make it more suitable for today's people's work and life needs.

Therefore, to meet the needs of different levels of consumer groups, it is necessary to combine tradition and fashion, and truly present the beauty of China's cheongsam to the world at large (Weida, 2012). Therefore, when for example paper-cut elements are integrated into the design of cheongsam, it is important to pay attention to the traditional culture behind cheongsam, so that cheongsam can become a cultural symbol and convey a cultural spiritual force to consumers.

Autonomy motive / Individuality

Looking back on the history of cheongsam, it is not difficult for us to find that with the changes of the times, the connotation of cheongsam has become more and more profound. The birth of cheongsam reflected women's pursuit of freedom and equality, inclusiveness between China and the west, and equal rights for men and women (Yican & Shangshui, 2022). All of us want to feel a sense of freedom, the feeling of being able to act independently and without restraints. Cheongsam has a high status in the hearts of Chinese people, and thus designated as a national dress (Liu, 2018). The hundred year evolution, rise and fall of cheongsam bears the profound brand of the times in China.

Herd motivation / Celebrity influence

Herd motivation refers to the purchase motivation formed by consumers' conscious or unconscious imitation of others' purchase behaviour when buying goods. The dressing of public Figures is one of the most effective ways to spread the national costume culture (Qinghua, 2016). Driven by social factors, through film and television culture and important occasions, it has aroused the interest of many female audiences in cheongsam, making cheongsam popular again and brilliant again.

Every year at the Spring Festival Gala, female hosts usually wear cheongsam to set off the joy of the festival. Cheongsam is widely used in movies (S. Huang, 2016), which shows the changes of the identity and status of female subjects and awakening of female self-cognition and it has become a cultural symbol for national characteristics. Maggie Cheung, who appeared in cheongsam in the year 2001 film "In the mood for love", (Teo, 2001) shows the beauty of the East, which makes Chinese style garment enchanting both local and international audiences. Celebrity effect not only makes cheongsam popular, but also increases consumers' desire to buy (Gao, 2012).

Pursuit of fashion

The cheongsam has become fashionable in films, fashion shows, TV Shows, and more types of formal occasions. Many famous western fashion designers have been inspired by the cheongsam (Liu, 2018). Many female diplomatic agents and members of government wore it to formal meetings. Cheongsams worn for weddings are modernized to fit the latest fashion trends.

Workplace requirement

Apart from airlines, Cheongsam is commonly worn as a uniform for hostesses in Chinese restaurants or serving staff at luxury hotels. Some primary schools and secondary schools in Hong Kong, especially older schools established by Christian missionaries used it as school uniform. Thus workplace requirement thus accounts for one of the least motivational factors of consumers studied.

Factors that influence preferences of pattern element types

Cheongsam lovers pay great attention to personality and aesthetics when buying products (Guo, 2014), so the design of a cheongsam is very important in influencing the patronage. Chinese art is to a very large extent influenced by the nation's rich spiritual and mystical history. Numerous art forms including sculptures and paintings depict spiritual Figures of Buddhism (Dehejia, 2007).

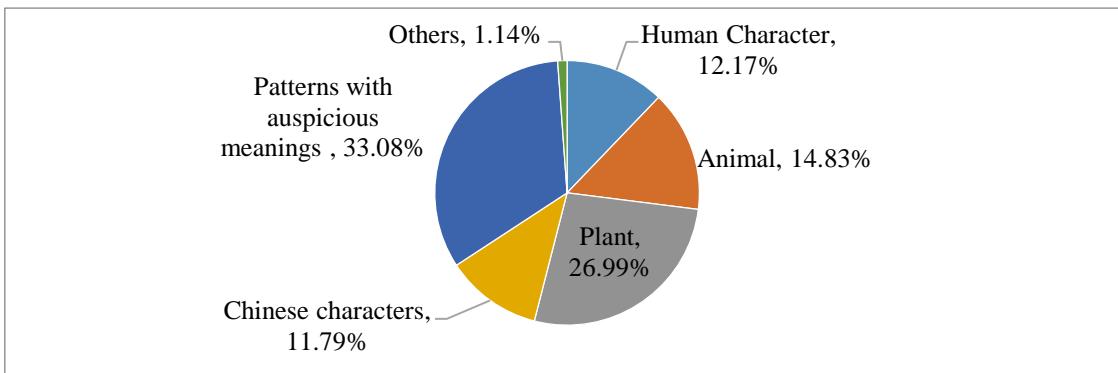


Figure 3 Influence of pattern elements Consumers' choice cheongsam garment.
source: Authors

According to (Geng, 2014), the most typical representative of these folk elements are the paper cutting art, an art form that reflects the real life condition of the Chinese people, and also imbites the cultural and spiritual orientations of different regions of the country. As such consumers were interviewed about their most preferred cultural pattern elements relative to paper cutting art that if embedded into cheongsam design will influence their purchase decision. As shown in Figure 3, in the survey, 33.08% of respondents chose cultural patterns with auspicious meanings in terms of the selection of Cheongsam based on pattern elements.

Therefore, in the design of cheongsam, design elements of traditional art forms can be considered. An example could be folk paper-cut art, a cultural phenomenon and an artistic expression of people's dual pursuit of spirit and material in the long history (Yiying, 2016).

Pattern layout and placement

Pattern elements layout is equally important in the design of cheongsam. To a large extent, whether a cheongsam is exquisite or not depends on the layout of the pattern (Liu, 2018). According to the study, pattern placement at the sides slits, on the collar and the oblique lapel of cheongsam are all favoured by cheongsam lovers, followed by patterns on the main front and back areas, cuffs and so on as shown in Fig.4

It shows that most consumers prefer to choose the location of graphic elements in conspicuous places with exquisite layout.

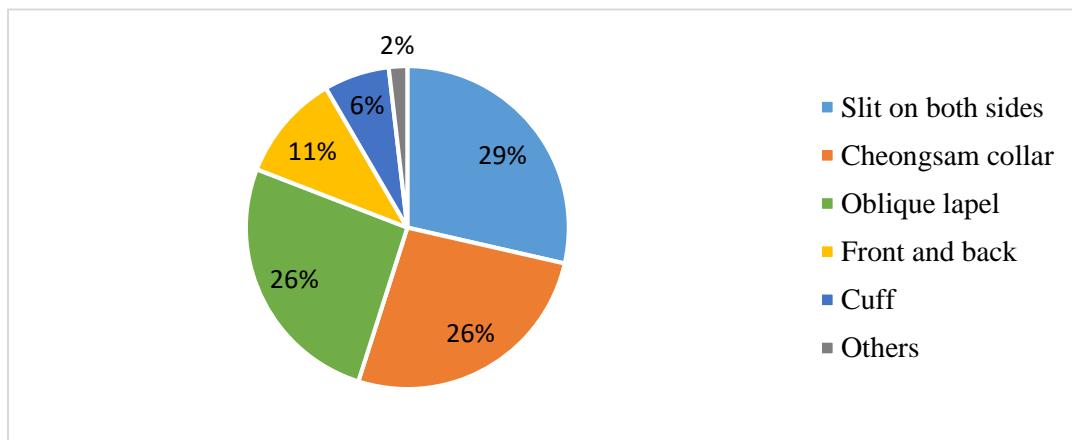


Figure 4 Consumers' choice of cheongsam based on design aesthetics.
source: Authors

In this regard, different styles can be created in the shape of the original cheongsam through the layout of different pattern elements. The patterns of cheongsam can be different, and the implications would also different. Different patterns of different styles play different roles in the recognition of cheongsam (Ma Yuru & Shuting, 2014), the effect varies with the position of the pattern.

Conclusion

This research studied factors that impact the consumption of a Chinese cultural product. The study suggests that cheongsam resonates with China's generation Z, a phenomenon which the authors find interesting and spell well for the propagation of culture. This further strengthens the notion that investments made and continue to be made by various stakeholders about cultural propagation is yielding good results. This result can also be as a result of the methodology – dispatching questionnaires via electronic means.

Among the motivational factors considered, the beauty of Cheongsam held sway over other factors considered. This is an indication that cheongsam design has stood the test of time. A situation that cannot be likened to many cultural fashion products, for example the Hanfu and others.

In terms of the impact of pattern elements on the patronage of cheongsam, respondents hinted of preference for cultural patterns with auspicious meanings in terms of the selection of Cheongsam based on pattern elements.

This study thus portends to provide more opportunities for cheongsam fashion designers with innovative design concepts to enhance the design and subsequent acceptability of cheongsam goods. Thus by analyzing consumer purchasing behaviors, a scheme can be proposed for innovative design of cheongsam.

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