

Analysis of the Motivations and Characteristics of Young People Obtaining Emotional Value through Consumption Behavior in the Context of the Rise of the "Healing Economy"

Jingheng Zhan

Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming, Yunnan, China

Abstract: In the era of the booming "healing economy", young people's recognition of "emotional value" is increasing, and they express their willingness to pay for it. Young people in different eras express their consumption intentions in their own ways. In the contemporary era, young people are burdened by academic and workplace pressures, social anxiety, and uncertainty about the future, which makes them yearn for emotional connection and understanding. Unlike middle-aged and elderly people, the consumption behavior of young people is rich and diverse. Among them, emotional frequency modulation and understanding and identification are the core motivation. In terms of consumption characteristics, it shows seeking spiritual healing and stress release through purchasing healing products or experiencing services and making up for personal emotional deficiencies or enriching personal experiences through virtual emotional experiences. Transforming collectibles, 2D merchandise, etc. into social currency and identity tags, and achieving emotional sustenance in subcultural circles.

Keywords: Youth Consumption; Emotional Value; Motivation; Characteristics; Healing Economy

1. Introduction

When "internal competition" and "internal consumption" become the buzzwords of contemporary youth, when academic competition pressure, workplace survival anxiety and social estrangement intertwine, emotional counseling and spiritual comfort gradually become a need that cannot be ignored. With the intensification of social competition, the acceleration of life pace, and the sense of loneliness in the digital age, negative emotions such as anxiety and stress have become a common psychological state among young

people [6]. In this context, the "healing economy" has risen rapidly as a new type of economy centered on fulfilling emotional values [3]. From healing tea drinks and stress-relieving toys to meditation and pet companionship, related scenarios and business forms have been continuously enriched and gradually permeated into all aspects of young people's daily lives. According to the "2025Z Generation Emotional Consumption Report" released by Shanghai Youth Research Center and Soul App, most young people recognize that "emotional value" plays an important role in their lives, and more than half of them are willing to consume goods that can provide emotional value [1]. It is not difficult to see the strong demand of young consumers for emotional value provision. It also shows that it has become an indispensable way of life for young people to relieve emotional stress and obtain emotional value through consumption [7]. From an academic research perspective, there is some research on consumption motive and behavioral characteristics in fields such as consumer behavior and psychology [2]. However, in the emerging context of the "healing economy", there are still deficiencies in in-depth research on youth obtaining emotional value through consumption [8]. Existing research mostly focuses on macro-market analysis, lacking detailed and systematic analysis of the complex and subtle psychological motives behind youth consumption behavior, how to achieve self-identity through consumption, alleviate loneliness, and the differences in behavioral characteristics in different consumption scenarios [4].

This study, in combination with relevant research data and typical cases, dissects the deep motivations of young consumers for obtaining emotional value through consumption, including stress relief, emotional compensation, self-identity construction, and specific behavioral characteristics such as

contextualization, lightweighting, and personalization tendencies, in order to provide a new perspective for understanding how young consumers obtain emotional value through consumption, and to offer useful references for the healthy development and market regulation of industries related to the "healing economy". This study defines "emotional value" as a series of positive psychological experiences such as psychological satisfaction, emotional comfort, self-identity and social connection obtained by individuals through consumption behavior [3], and "healing economy" refers to an emerging economic form centered on meeting people's mental health needs and emotional value, which is a series of industries and services formed around individual emotional management and physical and mental healing [5].

2. Literature Review and Research Methods

China is undergoing a transformation in consumer psychology, mindset and concepts. Big data predicts that Generation Z (represented by post-95s and post-00s), an indispensable participant in this transformation, account for less than 20% of the Chinese population, but their consumption scale has reached 40% [5]. In the next 10 years, 73% of the "Generation Z" will become new entrants to the workplace, and the youth group is gradually becoming the "main force" of consumption in China [1]. Against this backdrop, the "healing economy" is booming, an emerging economic form that centers on meeting people's mental health needs and emotional values and is a series of industries and services formed around individual emotional management and physical and mental healing [3]. Through a variety of products and services, it helps consumers relieve stress, regulate emotions, enrich their minds to enhance their sense of happiness in life, and achieve a balance of body and mind, in areas such as pet companionship and healing cultural and creative products [7]. The "healing economy" is a consumption trend that emerges during economic downturns [8].

When the economy is unstable and people face life pressure and challenges, consumers tend to make small, emotionally satisfying purchases for "guilt-free happiness" [6]. For example, during economic downturns, the sales of goods and services such as lipstick and concert tickets increase. At the same time, the popularity of mobile Internet and the development of digital

technology are shaping the consumption scenarios and performance of the youth group [2]. The consumption forms of the youth are diverse. The consumption of Chinese youth is in the stage of transition from consumption centered on personal material needs, pursuing brands, high-end and customization, to a more rational consumption stage that focuses more on sharing, comfort and satisfying the inner needs of the individual [5]. In such a transitional period, young people pursue both the status symbols brought by material consumption and the meaning derived from consumption [4]. In the diverse and dynamic landscape of youth cultural consumption, the consumption pattern of "subculture" plays an important role [8]. Subculture refers to the small cultural forms formed by specific groups (such as stage, occupation, interest group) in the context of mainstream culture, which have unique values, behavioral pattern systems, and are connected to the mainstream culture, while showing differences in some respects and not completely departing from the mainstream culture [1]. Common subcultures include: 2D culture, streetwear culture, outdoor culture such as camping and hiking, pet companionship, etc. They often evolve dynamically in response to changes in social demands. Some subcultures gradually integrate into mainstream culture during their development, such as "e-sports culture" gradually becoming a widely recognized form of sports competition in subcultures [4].

This study examines the motivation and characteristics of young people in obtaining emotional value through consumption through literature review and qualitative analysis. The research relies on two core survey reports for data support, with detailed sample descriptions as follows:

2024 China Youth Consumption Trends Report released by The Beijing News et al.: The sample covers 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government in China, with a total of 1,016 respondents under the age of 35. Among them, males account for 48.7% and females account for 51.3%, covering students, workplace newcomers, enterprise employees and other groups, and the survey time is from March to April 2024.

Healing Economy User Report (2024) released by Yudao Research Institute: The sample size is

2,000, with respondents aged 18-45 years old. Young people aged 21-30 account for 51.36% of the total respondents. The occupational distribution of the sample is mainly in the Internet, education, finance, and other industries, covering first-tier, new first-tier, and second- and third-tier cities, and the survey time is from May to June 2024.

According to the survey results, nearly one-third of young people consume for emotional value to heal their body and mind, and young people aged 21-30 have become the main consumer group of healing economy products [6].

3. The Motivation of Young Consumers to Obtain Emotional Value

3.1 Endogenous Consumption Momentum among Young Consumers

From buying an item to buying a mood, the youth consumer group has made the "healing economy" grow by consuming to relieve psychological stress and satisfy emotional needs [7]. The intrinsic motivation of youth consumption stems from the pursuit of emotional value, including self-pleasure needs, stress release, emotional companionship, and social identity [3]. "Self-pleasing" consumption is becoming the norm. "Self-pleasing consumption" refers to consumption behavior centered on enhancing personal quality of life and personal well-being and satisfying spiritual needs [5]. The younger generation places more emphasis on personal happiness and self-actualization. "Self-pleasing" has become an important keyword in consumption. According to the 2024 Report on the Consumption Behavior of Chinese College Students, the proportion of "pleasing oneself" among the current consumption categories of Chinese youth is 46.28% [1]. To satisfy their preferences, they purchase niche products such as scented candles and cultural and creative planners to show their individuality and gain a sense of satisfaction through consumption [8]. Fashion is the forte of young people. Young people have an instinctive sensitivity and an innate love for fashion, a strong desire to follow the crowd and express their individuality [2]. They have an active mind, are full of vitality, and can view everything around them from a unique perspective. Through "self-pleasing consumption", young people increasingly pursue fashion and uniqueness to show their

individuality, abilities and values in a distinctive way [4].

At the same time, by purchasing goods with specific symbolic values, this type of consumption is an effective way for young people to express their individuality and gain attention [6]. Through this, young people can relieve stress and pursue independence. As French sociologist Baudrillard puts it, in societies where material wealth is abundant, people in modern society face pressure such as academic competition and workplace rivalry, and spiritual healing becomes an important need for them [3]. They tend to achieve "emotional pause" and "self-care" by purchasing healing goods or experiencing related services, such as buying specific goods and services like "ugly and cute cultural and creative products" and "emotional tree holes" to give themselves a moment of relaxation in the fast-paced life [7]. Obtaining emotional companionship: The accelerated urbanization process has led to the weakening of traditional connections and the rising cost of interpersonal trust among young people, and real social interaction is difficult to provide stable emotional companionship [5]. They achieve emotional companionship by keeping pets, buying "millet" and other peripheral products, etc. [1]. To achieve social identity: Consumption is also a form of social expression in the digital media age [8]. When young people purchase popular products such as "first cup of milk tea of autumn", they can use it as social currency, as an "entry ticket" to participate in collective emotional rituals, share it on platforms like Xiaohongshu, gain group resonance, meet social needs, and move from "enjoying alone" to "enjoying together" [4].

3.2 Youth External-Driven Consumption Momentum

First, some young people bind their consumption behavior to social value, making consumption itself a means of accumulating social capital. As a result, social monetization consumption is prevalent [2]. Social monetization refers to consumers converting the purchase of goods or services with social attributes into "capital" for gaining attention, recognition, and influence in social scenarios [6]. Due to the need for circle integration, young people consume "goods with social currency attributes" to obtain "entry tickets" for their characteristic interest circles and avoid being

excluded because of "lack of common consumption symbols" [4]. For example, young people who purchase a certain brand collaboration sneaker can generate topic resonance with like-minded groups more quickly and strengthen self-awareness and identity construction [1]. Social monetization makes "emotional reward" more significant. The "sense of being recognized" and "superiority" that young people obtain through purchase will strengthen their willingness to consume and even "pay" for the consumption premium [3].

Second, the rapid development of new media, the increasingly expanding and transparent communication space, short videos, live-streaming sales, etc., the continuous emergence of multicultural scenarios, the continuous upgrading of commercial advertising and marketing methods have an increasingly significant impact on the consumption concept of young people [8]. At the same time, commercial marketing has seized the characteristic that young people hope to gain group recognition, combining young people's consumption with young people's social interaction [5]. Advertising is disseminated through social networks, and precise marketing is carried out through online channels. Meanwhile, the consumption tendencies, value orientations, and choice criteria of others in the group have become important bases for some young people's consumption [2]. Young netizens who have been immersed in it for a long time may have more consumption desire when watching or producing content [6].

Third, in the healing economy, social scene-driven is a key external driving factor for youth consumption [7]. Essentially, youth use healing consumption as a social medium and relationship maintenance tool to achieve social connection, emotional transmission and relationship enhancement. The core can be summarized in the following three aspects: In terms of scene types, it covers intimate relationships and general social occasions. The former includes emotional healing exhibitions for couples and healing afternoon tea for close friends, where consumption needs to match the function of emotional transmission; The latter, such as Valentine's Day, Christmas, or colleagues' stress-relieving team-building activities, require both social adaptability and symbolic meaning to meet the need for a scene of ritual or softening of workplace relationships

[4]. In terms of behavioral logic, form a closed loop of "scenario trigger-demand clarification-consumption landing". For specific occasions, there is an essential need for consumption; if there is a lack of interaction, the relationship may become alienated [1]. At the same time, young people, influenced by relationship pressure, choose healing consumption to avoid estrangement and maintain relationship equality [3]. In terms of value orientation, the core of consumption is relationship value-added, which means that the mild attributes of healing goods and services strengthen emotional connections, and that consumption establishes social relationship bonds, such as team-building consumption establishes teamwork relationships [8].

Fourth, group behavior demonstration. In the healing economy, group behavior demonstration is centered on peers and supplemented by popular trends [5]. Through "behavior transmission-psychological suggestion-decision imitation", it forms the external-driven mechanism of youth consumption [2]. Essentially, young people internalize group healing consumption as personal behavior to meet the need for belonging and simplify decision-making [6]. The demonstration subjects are stratified as "core-diffusion": strongly associated peers are the primary source of imitation through "close-range, high-credibility" consumption behavior; weakly associated groups form trend symbols through "traffic aggregation" to achieve the diffusion of the demonstration effect [4]. The logic of action stems from a dual psychological drive: one is a sense of belonging—young people actively follow consumption to avoid social disconnection and strengthen identity [1]; the second is cognitive simplification—using group choice as a "safe option" to reduce decision-making risks and costs [3]. Behavioral traits reflect "transformation and addition": young people shift from passive following to active dissemination, and consumption upgrades to circle symbols or collective rituals, amplifying emotional value [7].

4. Analysis of Characteristics

Today, the consumption behavior of young people is undergoing profound changes, and emotional consumption has become an important feature that cannot be ignored [8]. This phenomenon not only reflects the

psychological demands and life attitude of the youth group but also has a profound impact on the consumer market [5].

The consumer goods category is rich and diverse. For instance, trendy toys and cultural and creative products, blind boxes, figurines, and cute cultural and creative products have a huge market among the youth [4]. Pop Mart's blind box collection is a typical example. Through its unique "blind draw" mode, it uses the sense of surprise brought by uncertainty to stimulate the purchasing desire of young people [1]. Many young people are keen to collect different styles and even buy repeatedly just to get a hidden one. These collectibles are not just toys; they have become social currency for young people to showcase their individuality and fit into their specific interest circles [6]. Ugly and cute cultural and creative products, with unconventional esthetics and fun designs, such as peculiar-shaped dolls and stationery with funny slogans, satisfy young people's desire for uniqueness, allowing them to express their unique attitudes by using or displaying these products [3]. Emotional services such as "companionship", "lullaby", "stress relief", and "emotional tree hole" provide emotional support and psychological comfort to young people [7]. When young people are facing setbacks, stress or loneliness in life, emotional tree hole listeners can provide them with a space to listen and help release negative emotions; young people traveling alone can make their trips more enjoyable and make new friends through the "companion" service [2]. Some professional young people, after working under high pressure, choose to go to professional stress relief centers to relieve the tension and anxiety brought by work through methods such as hitting venting props and experiencing immersive relaxation classes [8]. These emotional services meet the emotional needs of young people in different scenarios in a personalized and customized way [5].

Virtual and smart products: Virtual wishing items, AI companions, virtual idols, digital collectibles and other digital products play a significant role in the emotional consumption of young people [4]. Virtual goods such as "Einstein's Brain", priced at 0.5 yuan, humorously meet the psychological expectations of young people in terms of studies, careers, etc., giving them psychological hints and comfort [1]. The AI companion, by constantly learning the

user's chat style and mood changes, provides long-term, intimate emotional companionship and becomes a "close friend" that young people can communicate with at any time [3]. Fifty-seven percent of young people have spent money on virtual idols [6]. Virtual idols, with their perfect personalities, unique talents and fan interaction, satisfy young people's yearning for a good image and emotional projection [7]. More than 40 percent of young people believe that the emotional value of digital collectibles is greater than that of physical objects [8]. The scarcity, uniqueness and cultural connotation behind digital collectibles make them a new option for young people to show their identity and express interests [5].

Immediate consumption decision-making: When it comes to consumption, young people tend to make decisions quickly and promptly, with a greater emphasis on immediate pleasure and satisfaction [4]. They oppose "overworking" and hold the attitude of "not torturing themselves in a hard life" [1]. When they see their favorite "emotional gadgets", such as the cute "pinch toys", phone cases with motivational quotes, or interesting cultural and creative products, they don't compare, analyze and weigh them for a long time as they do when buying traditional goods. Instead, they make an immediate purchase based on the emotional impulse of the moment [3]. This consumption habit stems from young people's immediate need to relieve life's stress and the consumption stimulus brought by the rapid spread of social media [2]. On social media, a new "mood gadget" may become popular in a short time, triggering a rush of young people to buy it, hoping to gain emotional satisfaction through quick consumption, relieve daily stress and enjoy the present moment [6].

Gender differences in consumption motivation: Happiness and relaxation, as primary needs, account for 52.6% of women, higher than 42.1% of men [7]. Women are more inclined to "self-reward" and "indulgent consumption" [8]. They purchase flowers, aromatherapy, beauty products, fashion clothing, etc., to enhance the quality of life, create a warm and comfortable living atmosphere, and gain satisfaction and happiness from the improvement of external appearance and beautification of the living environment [5]. Men, on the other hand, are more eager to be "understood and recognized" [4]. They usually show off their skills, taste and uniqueness by buying items that symbolize their

status, such as limited-edition collectibles, high-end electronics, brand-name sports equipment, or by participating in competitive entertainment activities, such as e-sports competitions, to gain recognition and appreciation from others in social interaction and achieve identity expression to gain social topics [1].

Young people have distinct emotional value behavior characteristics that not only shape their lifestyles but also bring new development opportunities and challenges to the consumer market, promoting continuous innovation to meet the increasingly diverse emotional consumption demands of young people [3].

5. Conclusion

Amid the intensification of "rivalry" and "internal consumption", and the interwoven academic pressure, workplace anxiety and digital loneliness, the "healing economy" has emerged as an important vehicle for contemporary youth to relieve their emotions, and consumption has become the core path for them to obtain emotional value [6]. The emotional consumption of young people is centered on the pursuit of "self-pleasure" [5]. They break away from the traditional consumption's single focus on practical value and are more willing to pay for things that bring emotional satisfaction, using this consumption to build a platform for self-expression and create their own comfort and relaxation in the fast-paced life [7]. At the same time, consumption is also a means for young people to cope with stress and fill emotional gaps [8]. In the face of academic and workplace pressure, they choose healing products or services such as "ugly and cute cultural and creative products" to briefly break away from the tense state and achieve "emotional pause"[1]; In the process of urban development, social connections are weakened, and consumption such as keeping pets and buying peripheral products can fill the emotional void for them and bring a sense of stable companionship [3].

In addition, consumption also carries the social needs and identity of young people [2]. They buy popular products like "the first cup of milk tea of autumn" as social currency and share them on social platforms to gain group resonance [4]; They will also strengthen their self-awareness by purchasing items with circle attributes, such as brand-name collaborative

shoes and trendy toys, and further consolidate the emotional value brought by consumption in the process of gaining "being recognized"[6]. It can be said that youth consumption in the healing economy is not only an active choice for them to cope with current life predicaments, but also reflects their deep desire for emotional satisfaction and self-identity, and further promotes the continuous innovation of the healing economy to meet the diverse emotional needs of young people [5]. This consumption pattern is no longer a mere material exchange, but a special way for young people to build warm connections with themselves, with others, and with the world, injecting a soft emotional buffer into high-pressure life [7]. From the support of virtual idols to the immersive experience of stress relief centers, from the intimate companionship of AI companions to the unique collection of digital collectibles, the emotional consumption scenarios of young people continue to expand [8]. Behind every choice lies a simple yearning for "living well" and a vivid footnote to the continuous growth of the healing economy driven by the needs of the times [1].

References

- [1] Le Jing, Wang Zhaoming. Youth: new consumerism "millet economic development and cultural mechanism [J]. *Journal of China Youth Research*, 2025, (9): 5-14.
- [2] Zheng Wen, Qi Xinyuan. The deep logic of Consumption behavior and psychology of young netizens [J]. *People's Forum*, 2025, (08): 26-31.
- [3] Zhao Yufeng. Paying for 'Emotional Value': An Analysis of New Trends in Youth Consumption [J]. *China Trade Guide*, 2025, (11): 66-67.
- [4] Hu Xiaopeng. Decoding New Consumption Patterns of Young People and Optimizing Interest Circles [J]. *People's Forum*, 2025, (09): 84-87.
- [5] Zeng Yanbo. The Era Characteristics of Changes in Youth Consumption Views [J]. *People's Forum*, 2024, (08): 38-42.
- [6] Hou Yi. Contemporary youth consumption present situation and countermeasure research [J]. *Journal of China Youth Research*, 2019, (11): 107-112 + 99.
- [7] Li Danyang, Ma Jiayi. From "buy an item" to "buy a mood" [N]. *Guangming Daily*, 2025-03-25 (012).

- [8] Zheng Wen, Qi Xinyuan. The deep logic of Consumption behavior and psychology of young netizens [J]. People's Forum, 2025, (08): 26-31.