



SAVONIA

THESIS – BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAMME

SOCIAL SCIENCES, BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION

A STUDY OF CONSUMERS' BEHAVIOR IN FEMALE INTIMATE CARE ON CHINESE E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS

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Field of Study Social Sciences, Business and Administration	
Degree Programme Degree Programme in Business and Administration	
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Title of Thesis A study of consumers' behavior in female intimate care on Chinese E-commerce platforms	
Date 16.11.2021	Pages/Appendices 33/9
Client Organisation /Partners	
<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of the study was to understand consumer behavior regarding female intimate care products on Chinese e-commerce platforms. The study aimed to discover the factors Chinese consumers consider important and affect their decision-making process while making the purchase. Most popular online shopping platforms and the reason for buying this product online were also the objectives of the study. The goal was to figure out the consumer preferences and at the same time to study whether different factors influence consumer behavior.</p> <p>The theoretical part of the study discusses consumer behavior and e-commerce in China. Consumer behavior theories review factors influencing consumer behavior, consumer motivations, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, consumer decision-making process and briefly about online consumer behavior. The topic e-commerce in China discusses Chinese e-commerce platforms, Chinese online consumers and segments of Chinese female online consumers.</p> <p>Methodology chosen for the study is quantitative research. The research was conducted as an online questionnaire which was distributed among female consumers in China. The questionnaire was designed to answer the research questions and collect data about consumer behavior in female intimate care products especially targeting the female consumer group.</p> <p>The results of the research showed that cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors influence consumer behavior. The results indicated that quality, reputation of products, and suitability are the factors that customers consider important and influence their decision-making process. In this survey, most common e-commerce platforms were Taobao, Tmall, and JD.com. The study revealed that the reason for purchasing female intimate care online was that it saved time and increased efficiency. The preference varies among different consumers.</p>	
<p>Keywords</p> <p>Consumer behavior, E-commerce, E-commerce platform, China, Female intimate product.</p>	

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the thesis is to study the consumer behavior of the female intimate care product on Chinese e-commerce platforms. The following questions will be studied according to the questionnaire in the thesis which are the object of the thesis:

Which factors that drives the purchase of this product category, and what are the preference of customers. What factors consumers consider important and affect their decision-making process when buying this product? How often do customers purchase female intimate product online? Which platform do they use to purchase online? Why would they choose to purchase this product online? Whether different factors will influence consumer behavior.

The thesis concentrates on three main parts which are consumer behavior, e-commerce in China and the last part is the analyzed study findings according to the questionnaire. Conclusion will give review about results from the theoretical views.

E-commerce platform has gradually become the main purchase platform for Chinese customers since 2010. Female intimate care is considered as niche product, it would be more specific with the customer category, and especially in China, the products are not so paid attention to. Meanwhile, e-commerce platforms are important platform where the Chinese customer purchase products from, such as Tmall, Taobao, Vipshop, and JD.

The results of the thesis will not only be useful for the Chinese intimate care product companies to market on e-commerce platform to understand the consumer behavior, but also will be beneficial for international brand or pharmaceutical companies get an overview before enter the market through Chinese e-commerce platforms.

2 FEMALE INTIMATE CARE PRODUCT

The reason why female intimate care product is a niche product is firstly because of the traditional concept of women, they think that intimate care is a shameful thing, even if they encounter some private issues, they will not take the initiative to mention it to their relatives and friends. Secondly, some females do not have basic knowledge of physiology because of education issues. (Tencent 2021)

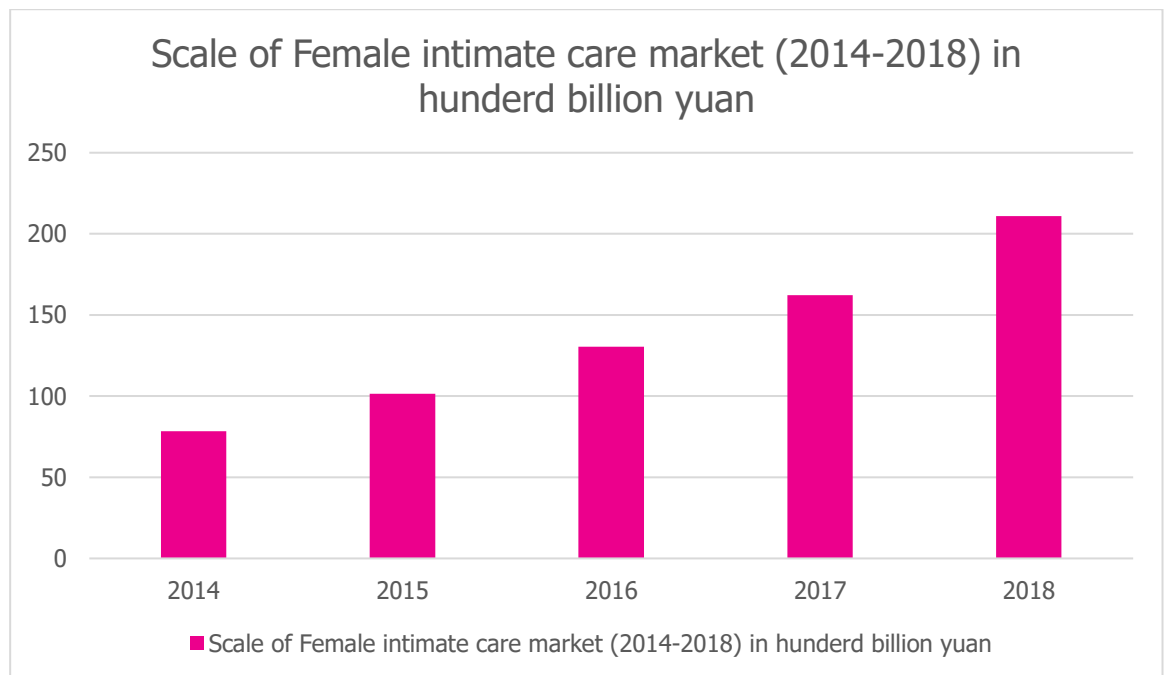


FIGURE 1. Scale of Chinese female intimate care market (Cction 2021)

However, according to the figure about scale of Chinese female intimate care market from cction, the market of this product in China experienced a rise during five years' time.

The intimate care for women discussed in this study is a product that addresses basic cleansing and antibacterial needs.

The most common female intimate care products are cleansing wipes, cleansing or moisturizing gel, intimate wash and intimate gel. The most common female intimate care product brand in China is ABC, Fuyanjie, Jolly (Jiaoyan), Jie'eryin, and Hushubao (Chinapp 2021)

Female wipes are moist cleansing cloths for cleaning the intimate area. They are used during female's period or in daily use to reduce the risk of getting bacterial infection (Benton 2021). The cleansing wash and gel are solution formulated for women to clean the intimate area. The moisturizing or cleansing gel are for caring the intimate area.

3 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Definition of consumer behavior was introduced according to different authors and give the idea of what is consumer behavior. The factors influencing consumer behavior and decision-making process will be presented in this chapter of thesis in order to provide the literature background for conducting the research. Meanwhile, the consumer motivation indicated the force that drive consumer to purchase and the process of how the motivation is conducted. Maslow's hierarchy of needs showed the pyramid of needs of consumers, the purchase of product was generated from the different level of needs. Decision-making process was the essential part of purchase because it showed how consumers choose and decide which product and brand to buy. Finally, the online consumer behavior theory was demonstrated since the study is about e-commerce platforms.

3.1 Definition of consumer behavior

According to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015, 30), consumer behavior refers to a study of how individuals, groups, and organizations choose, purchase, and dispose of products or services to meet their needs and desires. Consumer behavior also explains how individuals and group customers decide on whether to spend their money, time, or effort on the products that the market provided. The study of consumer behavior also explains the reason and how, where, when customers purchase the product and how satisfied they are that they would be the repeated customers after the purchase.

Consumer behavior is also illustrated as the dynamic interaction of emotion and cognition, behavior, and the environment through which, people communicate in life. Dynamic of the consumer behavior is due to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and performance of individual customers and customer groups are steadily changing. Consumer behavior involves interactions and exchanges at the same time. People give up something and get something that has the same value as what people abandoned (Peter & Olson, 2010)

Solomon (2017, 29) indicated that consumer behavior was defined as *buying behavior* during 1960 to 1970, which researchers put emphasis on the interaction of customers and producer while they made the purchase. However, in the 21st century, marketers found out that consumer behavior is actually an ongoing process instead of only the moment of trading and purchasing.

As Kumra (2006, 2) sited, consumer behavior is given the explanation as a study of how people and groups behave when getting, using and disposing of goods or services.

3.2 Factors influencing the consumer behaviors

Kotler and Armstrong (2012, 153) state the four factors that influence the consumer buying behavior the most are cultural, social, personal, and psychological characteristics.

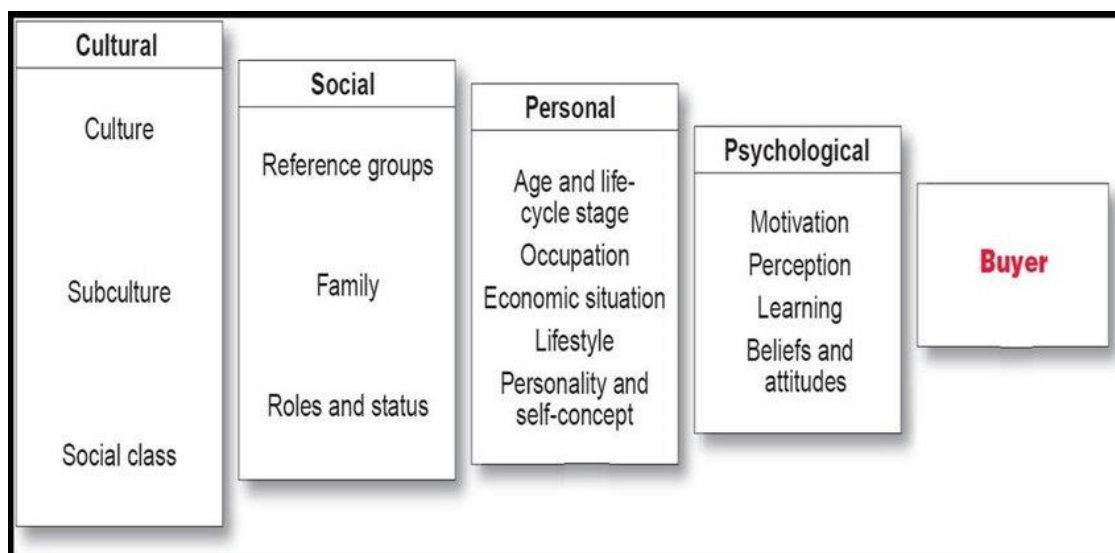


FIGURE 2. Factors influencing consumer behavior (Kotler and Armstrong 2012.)

According to the figure shown above, the factors affecting consumer behavior includes cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors.

Cultural factors consist of culture, sub-culture, and social class, which affect consumers' purchasing behavior from the very beginning. Culture is the most fundamental and essential reason of a person's desire and behavior. (Ramya and Mohamed 2016.) The value, wants, and behavior that achieved by a person, are mainly from a family and the society. The belief of the culture and the influences that cultural factors have on buying behavior will pass on from generation to generation. Each culture has its smaller subcultures. The subcultures refer to a group of human beings sharing a set of values that different from the majority (study.com.) As Rani (2014) mentioned, the subculture includes nationalities, geographic regions, religions, and racial groups etc. The social class factor is defined as a measure of combination of income, education, wealth, and occupation. Meanwhile, consumer from the same social class tend to have related purchasing behavior.

The second group of factors influencing consumer behavior is the social aspect. Social factors are the most crucial and influential factors for the consumer behavior (Sheikh, 2020). The three factors include in the social factor is family, groups and social networking (reference groups), and social roles and status. Family may influence the buying in different ways. The purchasing habits may various from a family that does not have child to a family that has many children (Kotler and Armstrong

2021, 159.) For example, families with young kids prefer to buy more healthy food, while families with older kids tend to spend more money on junk food (Solomon 2017, 32). The reference groups are a group of people that one individual is socializing with, such as friends, neighbors, and colleges. It has a significant effect towards a person's buying behavior. Meanwhile, people will behave variously according to their status and roles.

The third group is the personal factors which indicates the unique factors of each consumer (Stavkova, Stejskal & Toufarova, 2008). It includes such as buyers' occupation, economic situation, age and stage, personality and self-concept, and lifestyle. The factors mentioned above shows that characteristics influences consumers' buying behavior. These would explain why people's preferences change constantly as their situation changes (Rani, 2014)

The last group is the psychological factors, which are perception, learning, motivation, and beliefs and attitudes respectively. Every person has their basic need, which is defined as the basic human motivation. Maslow's theory of needs explained why people are driven by their need at a certain time (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 91). Perception is the action of motivation, and learning is a process in which human beings react at a certain condition. After learning, people achieved knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes.

3.3 Consumer motivation

The internal force that drives an individual to act is motivation. It describes the reason why people behave in a short period of time or for longer time (Souza, 2008). Motivation exists when a need is aroused by internal tension caused by the consumer's incomplete wishes (Solomon 2017, 173). In a word, consumer motivation is an internal state that causes people to buy products or services to satisfy themselves. (Wilson, 2019)

Consumers' purchase motivation includes three aspects: Firstly, personal factors which includes need, understanding, learning, and buying attitude. Secondly, environmental factors which is the family's influence, family income, income and property level and buys goods trying to be in line with the surroundings; consumer movement and consumption atmosphere. Finally, corporate factors. Such as new development, advertising, services, and prices. Personal factor is the core issue in the study of consumer motivation. For example, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Murray's list of Psychogenic needs explain consumer motivation from different perspectives. (Han & Ma, 1993)

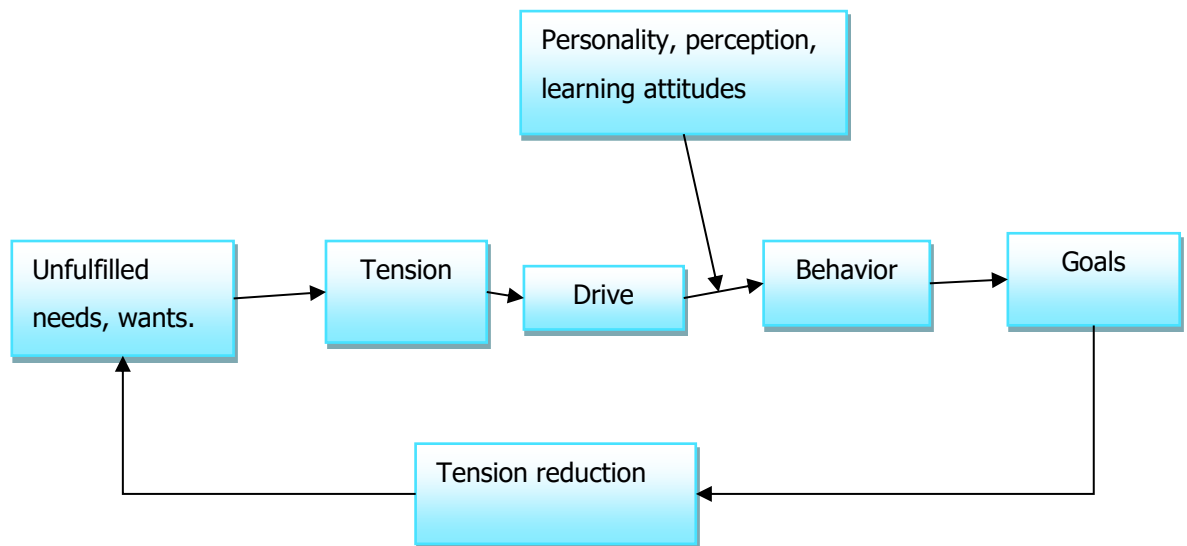


FIGURE 3. The motivation process (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2017)

As shown in the figure 3, the motivation process started with the unfulfilled needs from the consumers, which arouse pressure. The tension is the trigger that drives consumer would like to do purchase. Meanwhile, the personality reflects the thoughts of consumer and the learning attitudes give the consumer knowledge background. Those above result in the behavior of consumer. The desired end condition is the goals. After achieving the goals, the tension will be reduced. While the tension is decreased, new desires occur again. Thus, the motivation process works as a circle which started from the unfulfilled needs, with the intervention of consumers' personality and learning attitudes, the goals of purchasing will be achieved and the intensity is reduced.

3.4 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is related to the consumer motivation because it reveals consumer behavior towards consumers' needs. (Wilson,2019). The pyramid shows how the needs are being prioritized from physiological needs to the upper-level needs of self- actualization. It clearly illustrated the process of accomplishing the needs.

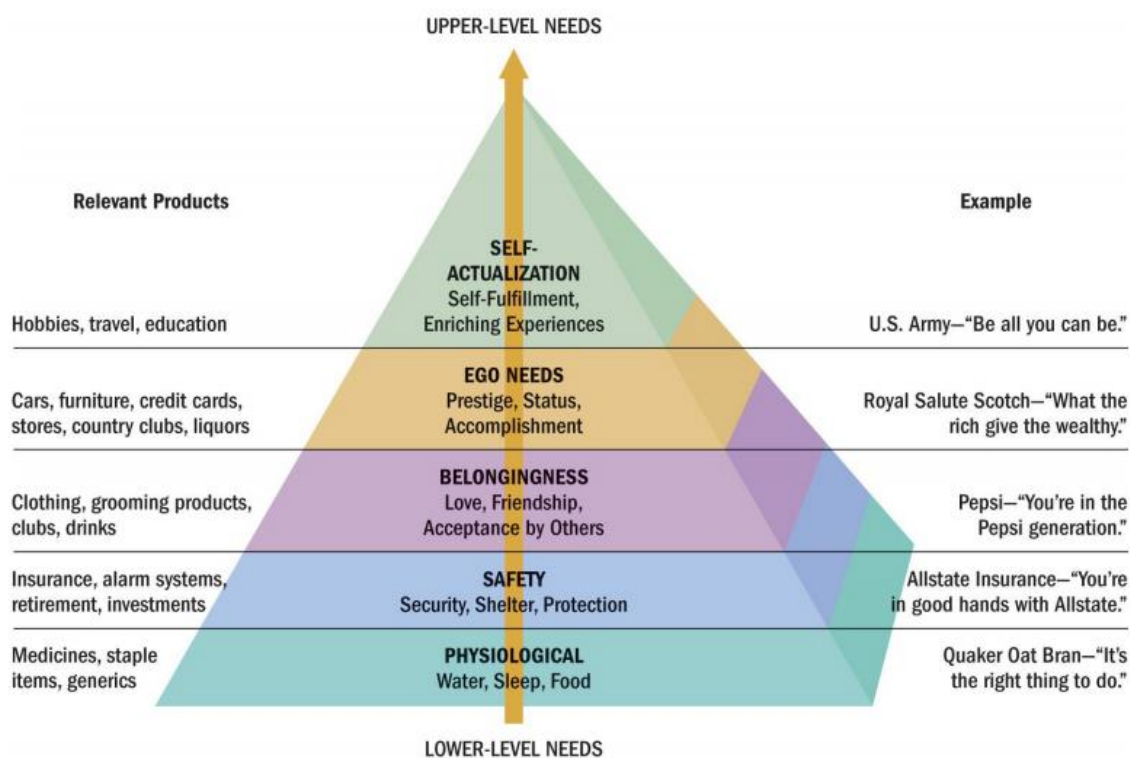


FIGURE 4. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Solomon 2017)

Physiological

Physiological needs are the initial and the most basic level of human needs (Schiffman & Wisenbirt 2015, 90-91). It includes water, sleeping, food, and sex. According to Maslow, the physiological needs are dominant when human beings are unsatisfied and they cannot think of higher needs while their basic needs are not fulfilled.

Safety

Safety and security needs are the second concerning factors coming after the physiological needs. The needs are not only about physical safety, but also the saving accounts, insurance companies, family, and health.

Belongingness

Third part is the belongingness, which is also the social needs. For example, relationship with people, affection, family, and belonging to a group. Once this level of needs is satisfied, the ego needs become operative.

Ego needs

The ego needs include inwardly directed ego needs and outwardly directed needs. Inwardly directed needs reflect human beings' need for self-esteem, independence, and more personal satisfaction. While outwardly directed needs represents needs for reputation, status, and appreciation from other people (Schiffman & Wisenbirt 2015, 91)

Self-actualization

Once an individual is satisfied with all the needs mentioned above, he can achieve the self-actualization. This need explains that people desire to fulfill his abilities and potentials.

Although Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a marvelous study theory that has been used for decades and is one of the essential elements for consumer study, there is still shortcoming point that occurs while applying the pyramid of needs. As Kurma (2006,62) mentioned, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is only applicable to the western culture. For example, Asian cultures put more emphasis on the belongingness needs than the esteem needs (Solomon 2017, 179).

3.5 Consumer decision-making process

Kotler and Armstrong (2013, 176) mentioned that the consumer decision making process consists of five steps. Obviously, the decision-making process starts before the actual purchase, so more focus should be put on the process instead of the purchase decision only. Figure 4 shows how the process of decision-making is created.



FIGURE 5. Stages in consumer decision-making process (Kotler & Armstrong 2013)

According to Stankevich (2017, 10), a need will be created when the imbalance between consumers' current status and their imaginary status. The need can be generated from either an external stimuli or an internal stimuli (Kotler & Armstrong 2013, 176). This will enable the consumers to realize and recognize their needs, which is called need recognition. It is the initial step of the decision-making process and is essential for the whole process since it gives consumers a clear picture of what they desire so that they could achieve their goals by purchasing products or services.

After recognizing the need for buying products, the consumer starts to estimate the environment for figuring out the proper solution and data to make reasonable decisions. The information consumers get is from different sources such as commercial sources (advertisements, websites, and displays), personal sources (friend or family), public sources (newspapers, magazines and TV, social media), and experiences from other customers (Shaw, 2016).

When a consumer has figured out the potential answer for the need, evaluation of the alternatives will be carried out by seeking for the best option available. At this stage, the consumer compares different brands with the same product that they would like to purchase to see if they meet their satisfactions. The comparing criteria can be price, style, and quality (Kotler & Armstrong 2013, 177)

During the stage of evaluation, consumers have certain rankings of the products and eventually made up their mind to make purchase decisions. However, according to Kotler (2013, 177), other people's attitude and unexpected situational factors will affect whether the customers would make the decision to purchase.

The final stage of the process is postpurchase behavior. In this stage, the consumer analyzes whether the product is practical for them or not. If customers find that products meet or exceed their need and satisfaction, they will become repeat customers for this brand. Nevertheless, if the product failed the promised made by the company, customers will be disappointed (Stankevich 2017, 11). It is important to delight the customers since customer satisfaction is the key to keep more loyalty from customers and gain profits (Kotler 2013, 178).

In this thesis, within consumer decision making dimension, the researcher puts the focus mainly on the Evaluation of alternatives and Product choice steps within the decision-making process, as of the reason that they have a strong ability to answer of how female intimate care product's position stand among its alternatives in consumers' mind.

3.6 Online consumer behavior

The theory of consumer behavior is also suitable for the online consumer behavior, except when making purchase decisions, the use of technology is involved (Sunany & Baljinder 2017, 2). According to the research carried out by Rao M.M, Hymavathi, and Rao M.B, the factors that attracted and influence female consumer online behavior were convenience, time effectiveness, and feedback. Meanwhile, trust and perceived risks such as scams and fraud, play an important part in affecting the online consumer behavior ((Javadi, Dolatabadi, Nourbakhsh, Poursaeedi & Asadollahi, 2012). Hovsepyan (2020, 7) cited that the benefit for customers to shop online is the cheap price and the convenience.

4 E-COMMERCE IN CHINA

As stated by Laudon and Traver (2016, 50), e-commerce is the transactions between individuals and institutions with the use of internet and the mobile apps. The commerce occurs with the value exchange made by transactions. The transaction includes purchasing and selling the products or services. The categories of different types of e-commerce transactions are business-to business(B2B), business-to-customer(B2C), customer-to-business(C2B), and customer-to-customer(C2C) (Chai, Holak & Cole, 2019). In this thesis, the models will refer to the business-to-customer and customer-to-customer.

According to the national Bureau of Statistics of China (2021), online retail sales in 2020 hit 11760.1 billion yuan, which is around 1.84 trillion USD. The share of e-commerce in total sales is still growing steadily and accounts for 25% in 2020. The total revenue of e-commerce in China in 2020 reached 2.164 trillion USD and it is estimated to have the growth of 18.5% in 2021 (Cramer-Flood, 2021).

4.1 Chinese E-commerce Platforms

The variety of Chinese e-commerce platform enable customers to choose different one as they wanted. In this chapter, five main dominant e-commerce platforms will be illustrated including Taobao, Tmall, JD.com, Vipshop, and Pinduoduo.

Taobao

Launched by Alibaba group in 2003, Taobao is the largest and the most popular online shopping platform in China. Taobao is a customer-to-customer retail platform which provides a stage for entrepreneurs to have their online shops and sell to online customers (Alibaba group, 2021). Taobao has more than 500 million users and over 800 million listed goods (ABN newswire, 2021). According to Chevalier (2021), Taobao was the world's most trendy online shopping platform with the gross merchandise value of around 609 billion USD.

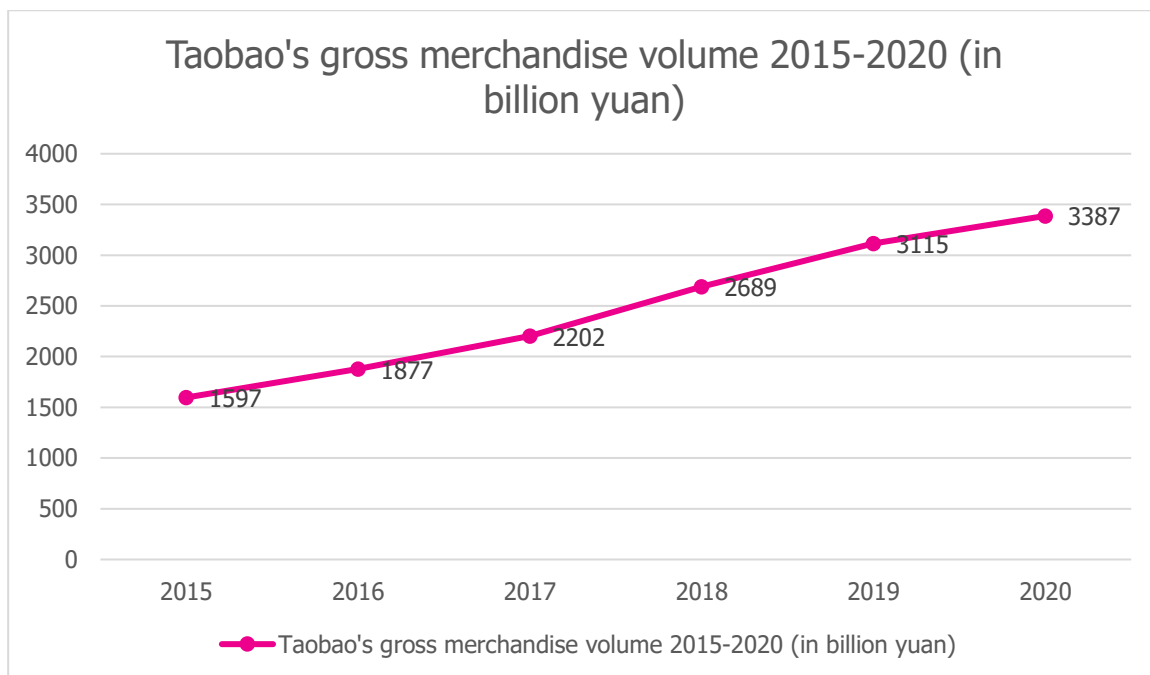


FIGURE 6. Alibaba's Taobao's gross merchandise volume from financial year 2015 to 2020 (Statista 2021)

As shown in the figure 6, the gross merchandise volume is increasing annually from 1597 billion yuan in 2015 to 3387 billion yuan in 2020, which doubled the volume in six years' time.

Tmall

Tmall is a subsidiary of e-commerce platform Taobao, which founded in 2008 by Alibaba group. It aimed at leading Chinese consumers to discover and experience a globalized and better lifestyle. Tmall is business to customer e-commerce platform which integrates various brands and manufacturers to offer a one-stop solution between customers and merchants. The strict standard of quality enables Tmall to emerge among all of its competitors. The Single's Day event, hold on 11.11, is able to achieve 74.10 billion USD within only one day (Ecommerce China, 2021)

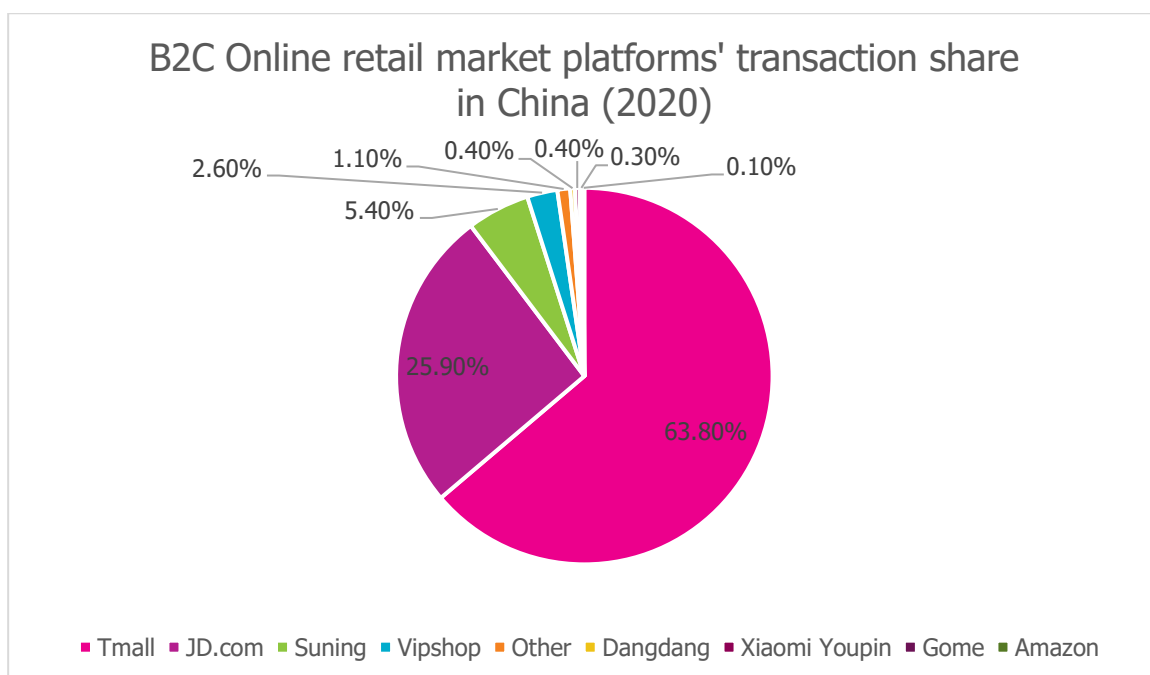


FIGURE. B2C online retail market platforms' transaction share in China 2020 (Ecommerce China 2021)

As is shown in the illustration, Tmall accounts occupies a large proportion in the B2C platforms which accounts for 63.8% in 2020. On the other hand, Chevalier (2021) claimed that Tmall has the second largest gross merchandise volume of 593 billion USD in 2020 as the B2C e-commerce platform.

JD.com

JD.com or Jingdong is a B2C Chinese electronic commerce company. It is the major competitor to Tmall and one of the great B2C online retailer with gross volume merchandises. The vision of JD is to become the most trustworthy company worldwide (JD.com 2021)

Vipshop

Founded in 2008, Vipshop is now the third largest e-commerce company in China. It is the popular and profitable online discount retailer for different brands. Vipshop cooperates with famous domestic and foreign brands to offer Chinese customers with low price and significant discounts but good quality products (China internet watch 2021)

Pinduoduo

Within only six years' time, Pinduoduo has become one of the biggest Chinese e-commerce platforms. Founded in September 2015, Pinduoduo is a third-party social e-commerce platform that focuses on C2B group joining purchase. Customers can create group joining with friends, family, and neighbors to get discount price, and can buy high-quality goods at lower prices. Among them, the social concept formed through communication and sharing has formed Pinduoduo's unique new social e-commerce concept (Pinduoduo Inc)

4.2 Chinese online consumers

As reported by Bu, Wang, Wang.W and Zipser (2019), China has 855 million online consumers and the online retail market of China is bigger than the combination of 10 markets including USA, UK, Korea, Japan, and other big digital markets. The statistics from national Bureau (2021) showed the number of online shopping user across the country raised by 100 million comparing to last year. As a result, Chinese consumers are becoming more active users of online marketplaces and social media (MacCharles & Gao 2013, 15).



FIGURE 8 Number of online shoppers in China from 2009 to 2020 (Statista 2021)

According to the figure 8, the proportions of online shoppers in China grew significantly from 2009 to 2020. The number has experienced approximately eightfold in eleven years' time. The increasing number of online shoppers indicates that Chinese consumers are more willing to use online shopping instead of grocery shopping's. The reason for purchasing online can be it saves time and effort to buy online, products are cheaper than in the grocery stores, more product options to choose from, etc.

MacCharles and Gao (2013,15) mentioned that brand is slowing becoming a conclusive factor for acquisition. Quality of product, price, sales services and reputation are seen as the factors that Chinese consumer will value while making purchase decisions online (Santander 2021).

The report from Tmall (2021) about female power indicated that women consumer accounted for 70% in the population, contributing approximately 50% of the gross merchandise value for new brands. The consuming power of per female on Tmall has increased 8%.

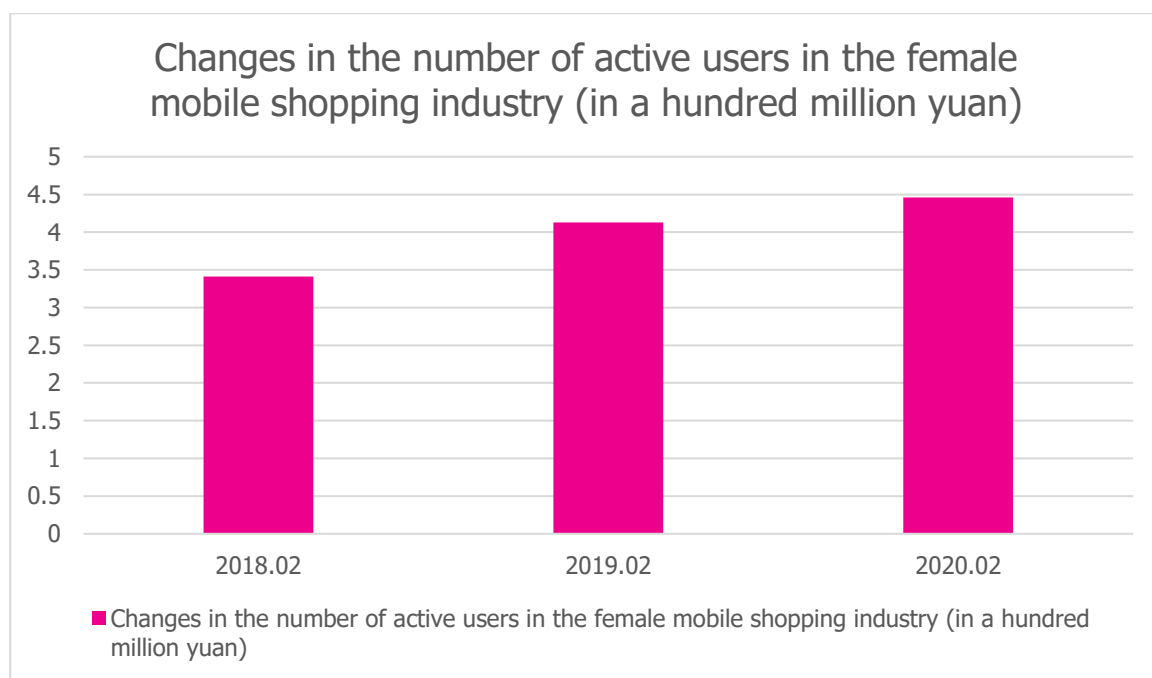


FIGURE 9. Changes in number of active users in female mobile shopping (Questmobile 2020)

As shown in the chart, the number of active female online shopping users has experienced 21.2% increase from 2018 to 2019 and 8% increase in the next year. Female online users account for a large proportion of the total Chinese online consumers. Major e-commerce platforms will carry out various promotional activities to arouse female consumers attention on important festivals. Alibaba has launched the 'Tmall Queens day' for several years and JD initiated the Women's Day and 'Besties' Day (Zhidaao 2021). It is obvious that female a dominate group among the Chinese online consumers.

4.3 Segments of Chinese female online consumers

According to Ding, Lannes, and Deng (2019), the Chinese online consumers are divided into three groups: Backbone consumers, new power consumers, and Blue Ocean consumers.

Backbone consumers group is composed of various of such as rookie white collars consumers, wealthy middle class and Supermoms. The first consumer group consist of people around 30, living in the first-tier cities who are well-educated. The second consumer group is those who are relatively older than the previous group and have stable income. While they purchase online, quality is the most important factor that drives them to decide on buying. The last group of this party is the supermoms who has the most powerful spending ability among the three groups. They represent as women who are pregnant or their kids are not older than 12 years old. What the three groups have in common is that they all live in the first to third tier cities and they live a modern lifestyle.

New power consumers group is made up of small-town youth who are around 20 years old living in smaller cities and Gen Z, which consumers are students or non-students who were given birth after 1995, living in 1-3 Tier cities. They speak for the fast and high rate of growth in the consumption and transactions.

The last group is the urban blue collars, small-town mature, and urban gray hairs. Those three segments represent people whose age are older than 35 and living in Tier 1-3 cities or smaller cities. This group has a larger population but has lower online purchase rate (Ding, Lannes & Deng 2019, 6)

However, in accordance to Questmobile Yanjiu yuan (2020), women account for 57.6% in the online shopping. Due to the differences in their growth environment, age, and income factors, women in different groups have various consumption power depending on their needs for self-improvement or family needs. Women have always been the backbone of the consumer market. They have a huge base, rich emotions, and prefer all things related to beauty, pursuing fashion and trends. The continuous increase in income levels and the continuous rise of social status enable women to be increasingly enthusiastic about consumption and purchase goods according to their own personalities. This impeccable combination has contributed to the growth of the female market. Subsequently, the female consumer groups will be more focused on and also due to the fact that the product category is for female.

They can be divided into four consumer groups. The first female consumer group is the young women in small town. They are those who are under 30 years old and live in the third-tier cities or smaller cities. They live a slower pace of life and have more time to enjoy lifetime.

The second female consumer group is the novice users. They are defined as the group who are under 24 years old with no more than 1000yuan (around 156 USD) online spending budget. Students and people who just started to work are the main components of this group. Their consumption power is not as high as others but they are willing to purchase online and have more time to discover online products.

The third group is supermoms, same as in the general consumer group in China. They are married women and have kids with rather vast age span. They are the main consumers for their families and have the most active spending power according to their shopping frequency and the amount they spend in the grocery.

The last group is the light mature women group. This group is women whose age range is from 25 to 35 years old and have the online shopping ability of over 2000yuan. They are generally women at work with rather high income and do online shopping frequently.

Hereinbefore, the four main consumer groups represent the overall female customers in general.

5 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of study is to study the female consumer behavior of female intimate care products on Chinese online platforms. In this chapter of thesis, the research method and data collection through an online questionnaire will be discussed.

5.1 Research Method

The collection and analysis of data can be researched by both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative research method will be implemented in this research. Quantitative research deals with information about quantities such as numbers. Collecting the data and analyzing with the help of diagrams and statistics, the quantitative research will show results base on the information. Mono method is a research method which combines a single quantitative data gathering technique with the relevant analysis measurement (Sanders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007,145)

The quantitative data of this research is collected by an online questionnaire. Questionnaires are suitable and usually used in descriptive research and explanatory research. They enable researchers to obtain information about attitude and opinions and define the variability in different occasions (Sanders et al. 2007, 356). The questionnaire was created in Wenjuanxing in Wechat and was posted in Wechat moments. The questionnaire was spread to people also on social media.

5.2 Research design

The research consisted of 17 questions, which purpose was to discover female consumer attitude towards female intimate care product. The language of the survey was originally in Chinese but the translated version will be attached.

The questionnaire starts with background of the respondents, followed by knowledge about female intimate care products. The reason for buying the product online and the desire for the product will be asked. In the end, factors that affect consumer decision-making process will be presented.

The questions were designed according to the theories studied in the thesis. The questions about backgrounds of consumers are generated from the cultural factor theory of factors affecting consumer behaviors. The question about desire for the product was based on consumer motivation and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Consumer decision-making process theory supported the question about factors affecting consumer decision-making process and mainly about evaluation of alternatives. Questions relating to Chinese e-commerce platforms are based on the theory in e-commerce in China. The questions relating to female intimate care products are from the internet.

5.3 Research Sample group

The target population is identified as the group of people from which the samples are collected. Sample group refers to the population that will be analyzed (Sanders et al. 2007, 205). For this research, the target population was all female whereas the sample group is the 150 respondents who participate in the questionnaire. The data for this research was collected from primary sources by conducting a questionnaire online. The aim was to reach people from different age groups to gain as disparate responses as possible.

5.4 Reliability and Validity

Reliability means that the collected data or the process of analysis will result in same findings and the findings are logical. Threats to reliability are composed of subject or participant bias and errors and observer bias and error. On the other hand, validity refers to whether the measurement and findings are accurate and reflect to the real world. The unclear direction of cause and effect, rate of the quitting participants, the unreliable measurement method, and the changes in situation could be the threats to validity (Sanders et al. 2007, 149-151)

The reliability and validity of the study is relevantly high. The questionnaire was posted on the social media platform, which will reach out to the most public. The questionnaire is also designed in a good shape to avoid bias and errors.

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

The research results from the questionnaire will be illustrated in this section of thesis. In this section of the report, the results of the questionnaire are presented and analyzed. The results are structured according to the different topics. There were 150 participants who volunteered to answer the survey. The result of the questionnaire was collected within two days which was rather short. The questionnaire was disseminated on Wechat Moments. The reason for choosing this dissemination methods was that people can choose to answer the questionnaire instead of sending directly to them so that they are forced to answer it. Meanwhile, the research was meant for Chinese female consumers and Wechat is a platform that most Chinese use. There was possibility that the questionnaire was sent to people's friends when they see the questionnaire on Wechat Moments.

6.1 Background of the respondents

Age distribution

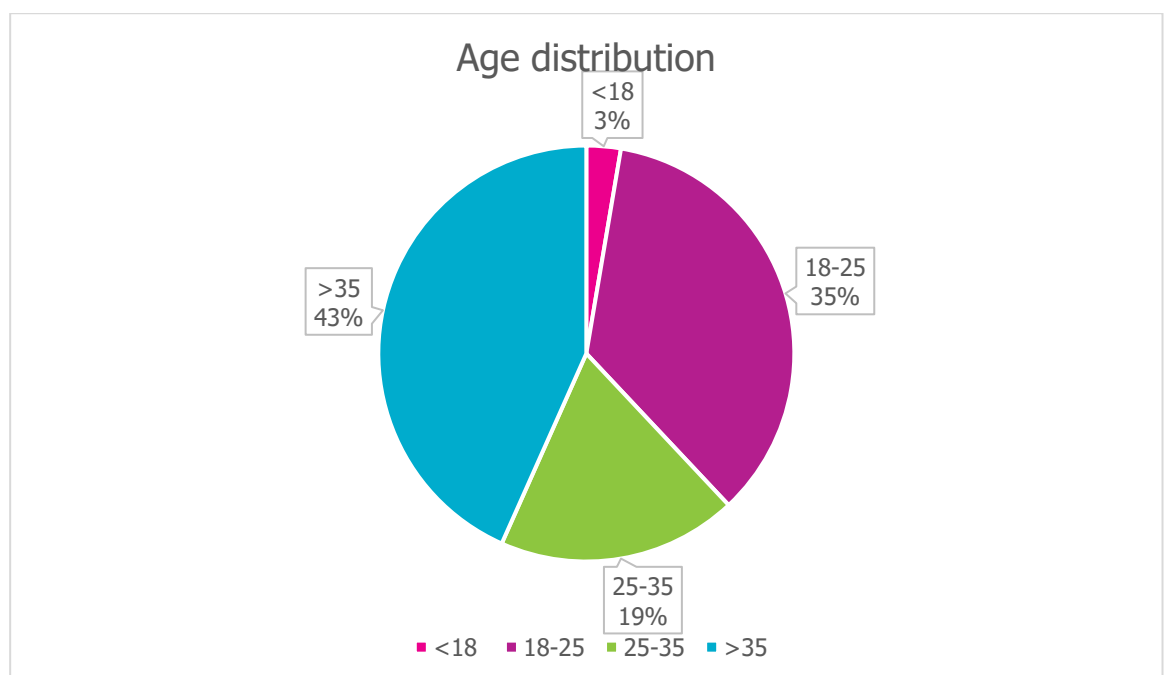


FIGURE 10. Age distribution of the respondents

Figure 10 exhibits the age distribution of respondents. The propose of the first question was to figure out the age of respondents. The questionnaire was published to female of all ages. The results show that 35.33% of the respondents are 18-25 years old and 43.33% of the participants are over 35 years old. The 18.67% of respondents are 25-35 years old. In addition, only 2.67% of the respondents are under 18 years old.

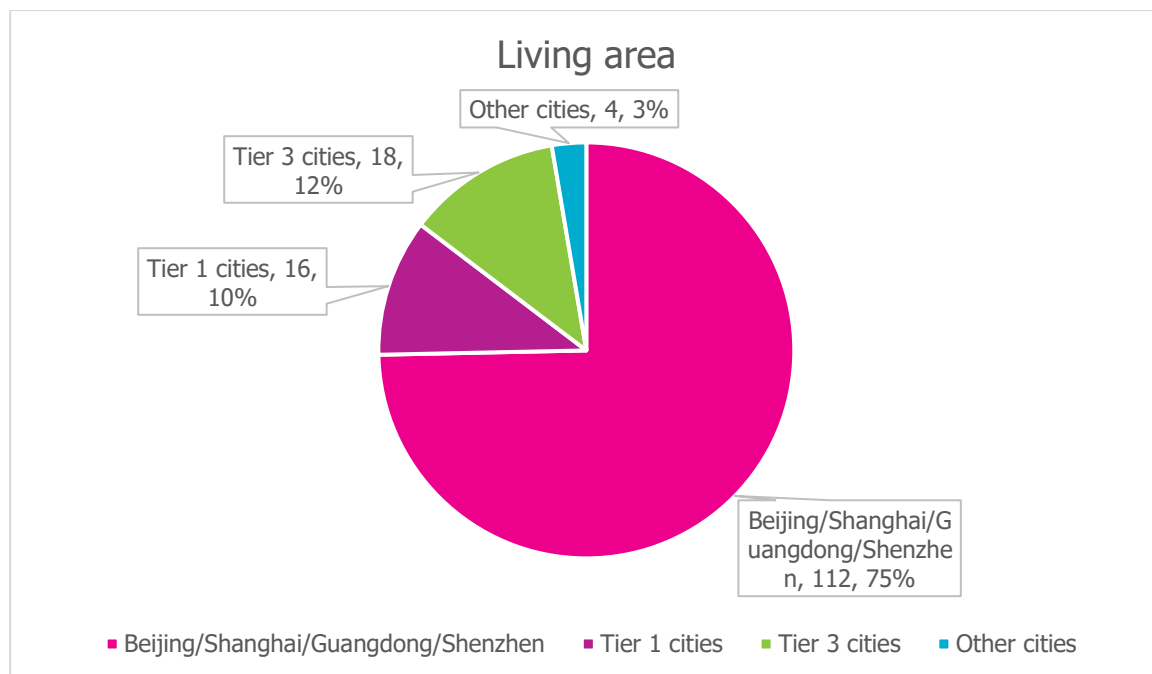


FIGURE 11. Living area distribution of the respondents.

Among 150 respondents, 112 or 75% are from Beijing/ Shanghai/ Guangdong/Shenzhen cities. 16 of females who answered the questionnaire are from tier 1 cities, which is equal to 10% of total respondents. The rest of respondents are divided into two parts, which is 18 or 12% from tier 3 cities and 4 or 3% from other cities smaller than tier cities. As can be seen from the chart that the majority of participants are from big cities.

Education of respondents

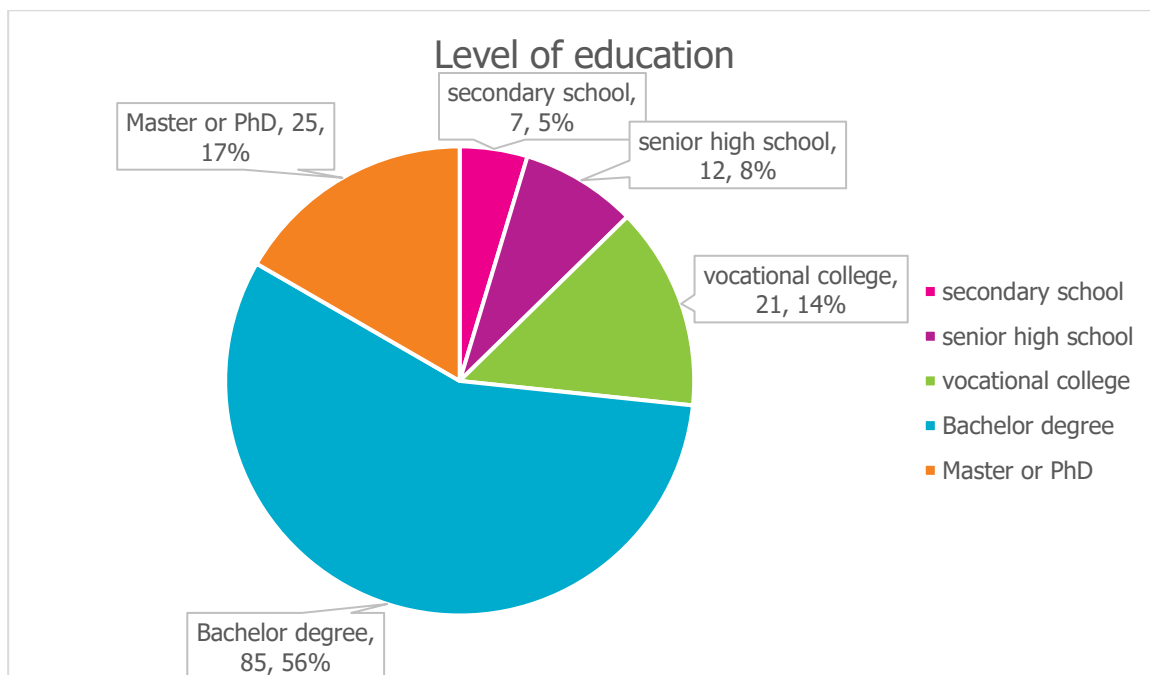


FIGURE 12. Level of education of the respondents.

According to the obtained data, 56% of the respondent hold the bachelor degree while 17% or 25 respondents hold the Master or PhD diploma. Meanwhile, female respondent who have vocational college degree takes up 14%. Besides, the rest 13% are divided respectively into 5% holds secondary school degree and 8% have senior high school degree. The main respondents hold bachelor degree in the survey.

Current occupation

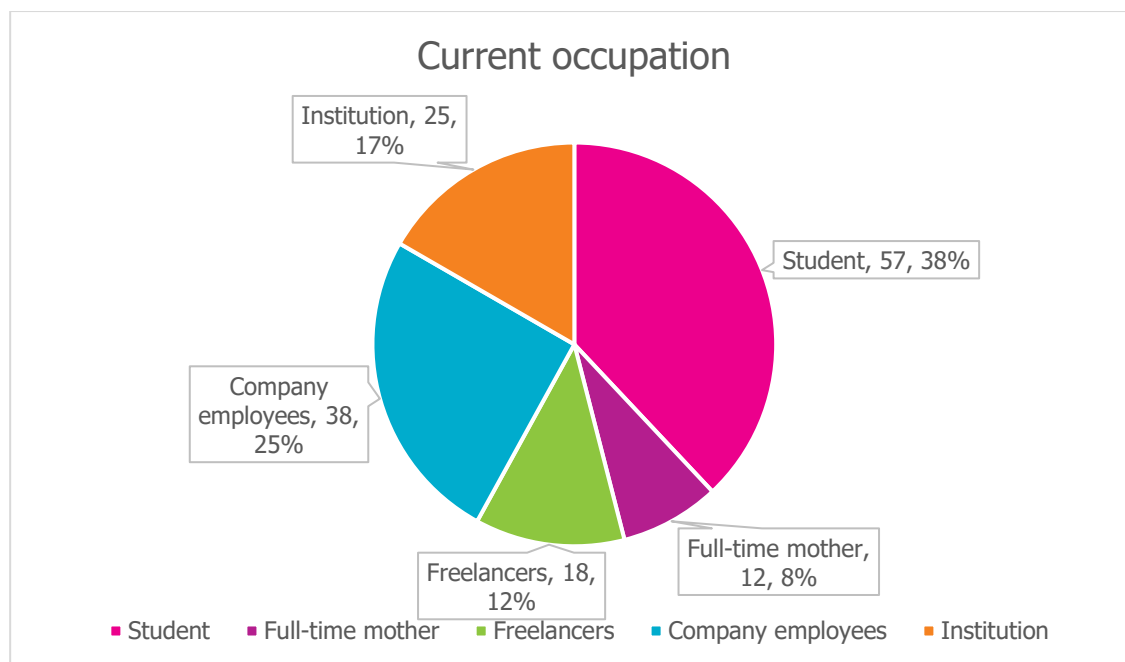


FIGURE 13. Current occupation of respondents

The collected data indicated that 38% of the respondents are students at school, 38 out of 150 respondents are company employees. Full-time mother accounts for 8% while freelancers take up 12% of the total number. The others are from institution which are 25 or 17% of the respondents.

Income level

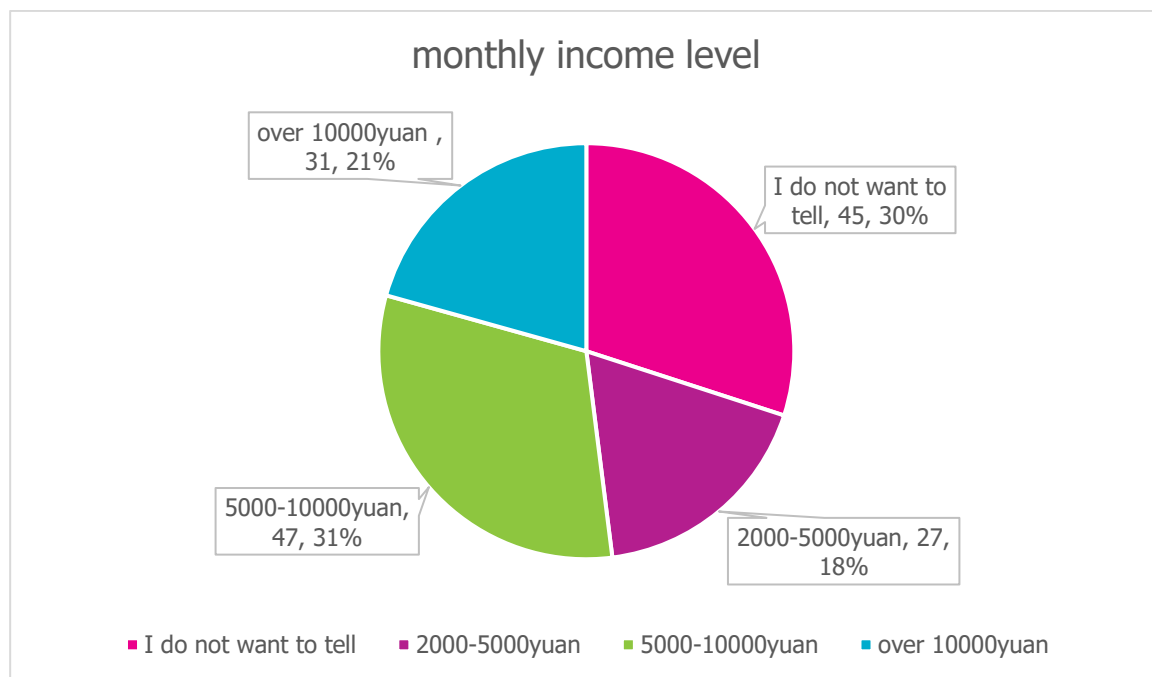


FIGURE 14. Monthly income level

When it comes to monthly income level, 30% of the respondents refuse to disclose their income. Around 31% of the respondents have an income of 5000-10000 yuan every month and 31 out of 150 participants earns over 10000 yuan per month. At the same time, only 18% of the respondents have income of 2000-5000 yuan monthly.

Online platforms for purchasing

This multi choice question meant to get the information of which online platforms that consumers will usually while buying products. As shown in the chart, the mostly used is Taobao which 132 people chose and takes up 88% in the result. It is followed by JD.com with 47.33% and Tmall with 34%. The least popular e-commerce platforms are Pinduoduo with 23.33% and Vipshop with 15.33%.

	Taobao	JD.com	Tmall	Vipshop	Pinduoduo
Proportion	88%	47.33%	34%	15.33%	23.33%

TABLE 1. Most used e-commerce platforms

6.2 Research findings

Frequency of purchasing

The result of question 6 shows that 137 female consumers buy the intimate care product. Among the number of 137, 18.67% or 28 people buy the product monthly, 32.67% purchase every two months, while the rest 58 people buy it half a year. It can be concluded that more than one third of those who purchase female intimate care once every six months and every two months.

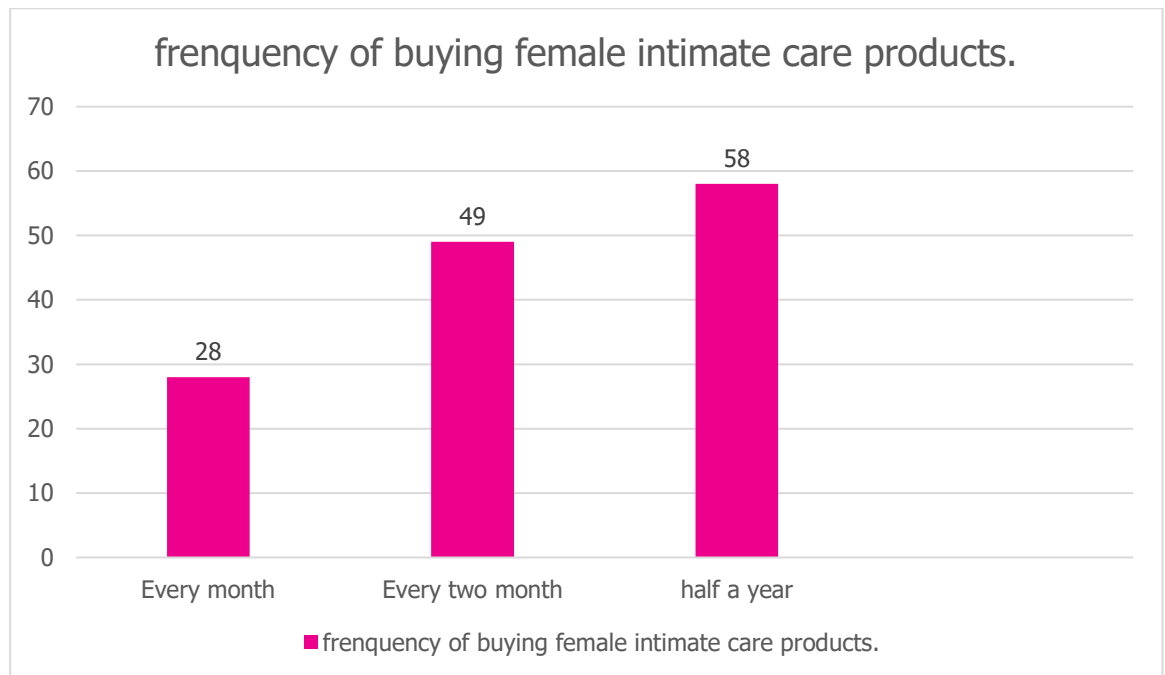


FIGURE 15. Frequency of buying female intimate care products

Question 7 is also a multi choice question which indicates the sources of getting knowledge about female intimate care. As shown in the figure 16, 10.67% of the respondents answered that they got the information from doctors and 30% from TV advertisements or newspapers. The majority of information comes from the social media platforms and family and friends, which take up 56.67% and 44.67%. Only 5 of the whole number obtained the knowledge from their education.

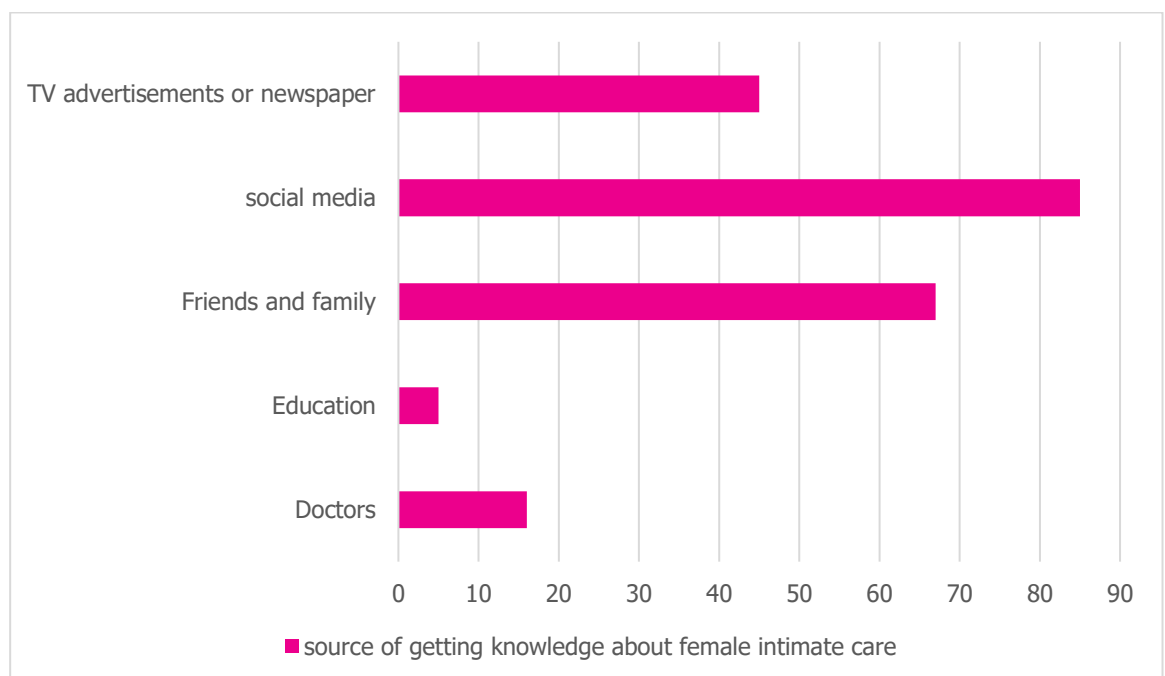


FIGURE 16. Source of getting knowledge about female intimate care

One of the topics in the theories is that the reference groups, which is the social factors, have influence on consumer behavior. Figure 17 illustrates the results in the questionnaire that the influence of the reference group highly affects females' purchasing behavior. 85 or 56.67% of female admitted that their purchase will be affected by their friends' or family members' recommendations. 38%

or 57 of women agree that their purchase will sometimes be changed due to their friends' opinions. Only 8 females deny that they are not affected by friends' opinions.

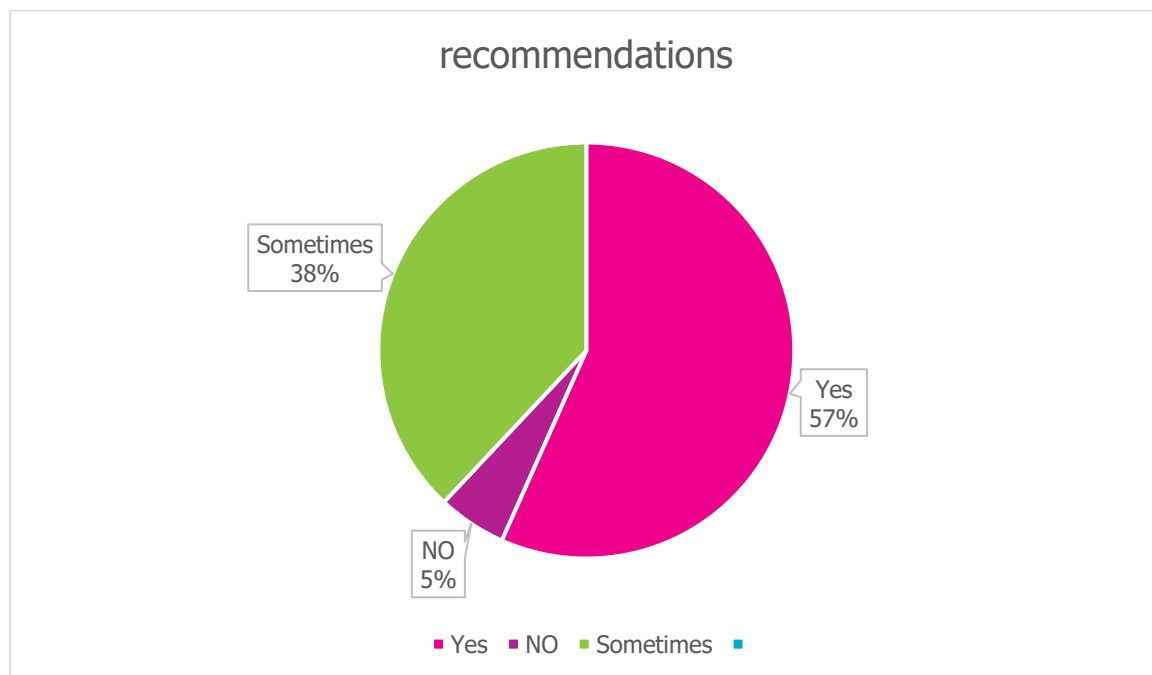


FIGURE 17. Recommendations

Question 9 is why would respondents need/ purchase female intimate care product. This question reflects the theory part of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. 40% of the participants indicates that they need the female intimate care product for personal uses. This category demonstrates the physiological needs. 56 out of 150 respondents chose the answer 'I heard from the public/ society that women should use it so I buy it'. By choosing this answer, it shows that the respondents have the needs of belonging. They eager to belong to the group not being maverick. So, when people around them showing that they use intimate care product, they will have the need for belongingness. 34 respondents expressed that they believe the female intimate care product will prevents them from gynecological diseases. This showed the belief and attitude aspect from psychological factors that influence consumer behavior.

	ABC	Fuyanjie	Jolly	Jie'eryin	Hushubao	Other brands
Pro- por- tion	31.33%	8.67%	4.67%	10%	62.67%	29.33%

TABLE 2. Frequently used brand

Question 11 and 12 are about female intimate care brands. The results illustrate that Chinese consumers prefer more domestic brands than foreign brands. The brand of frequent use distribution is shown in the chart. The most used brand is Hushubao and ABC, respectively accounts for 62.67% and 31.33%. Other brands such as Kao corporation and Sofy are listed by respondents.

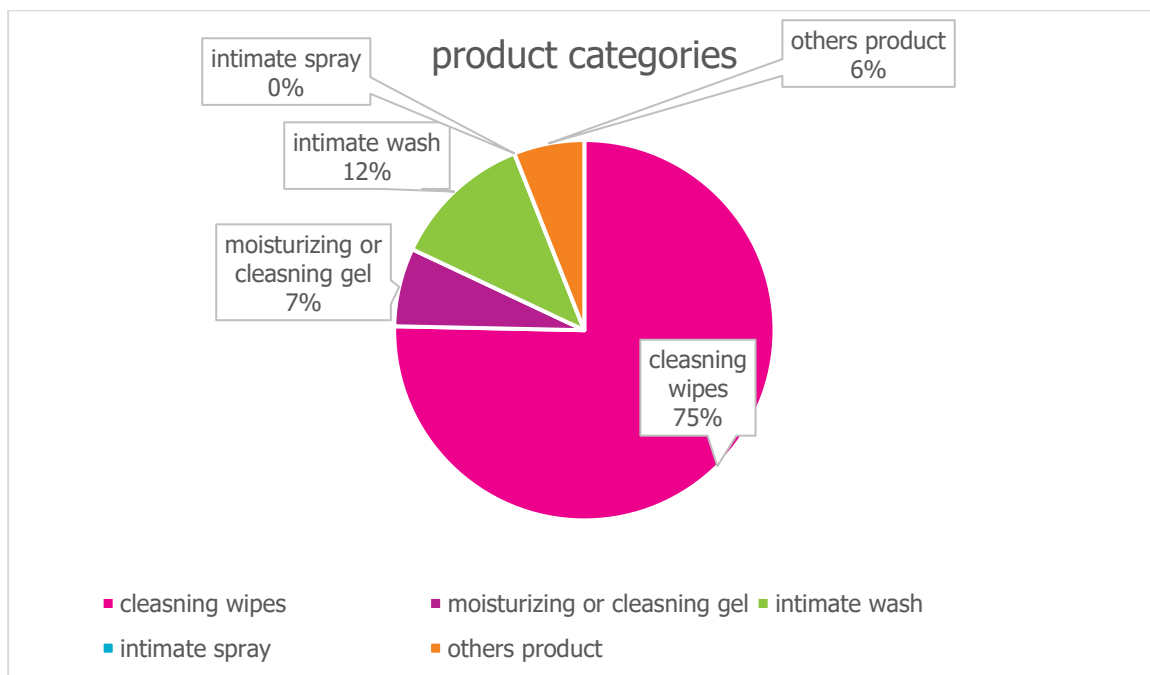


FIGURE 18. Product categories.

According to figure 18, the most used female intimate care product is the cleansing wipes which takes up a large proportion as 75%. The rest 25% are made up of four categories, which are moisturizing or cleansing gel, intimate wash, intimate spray, and other products. The percentage of four categories are respectively 7%, 12%, 0%, and 6%. The percentage of intimate spray surprisingly turned out to be 0%.

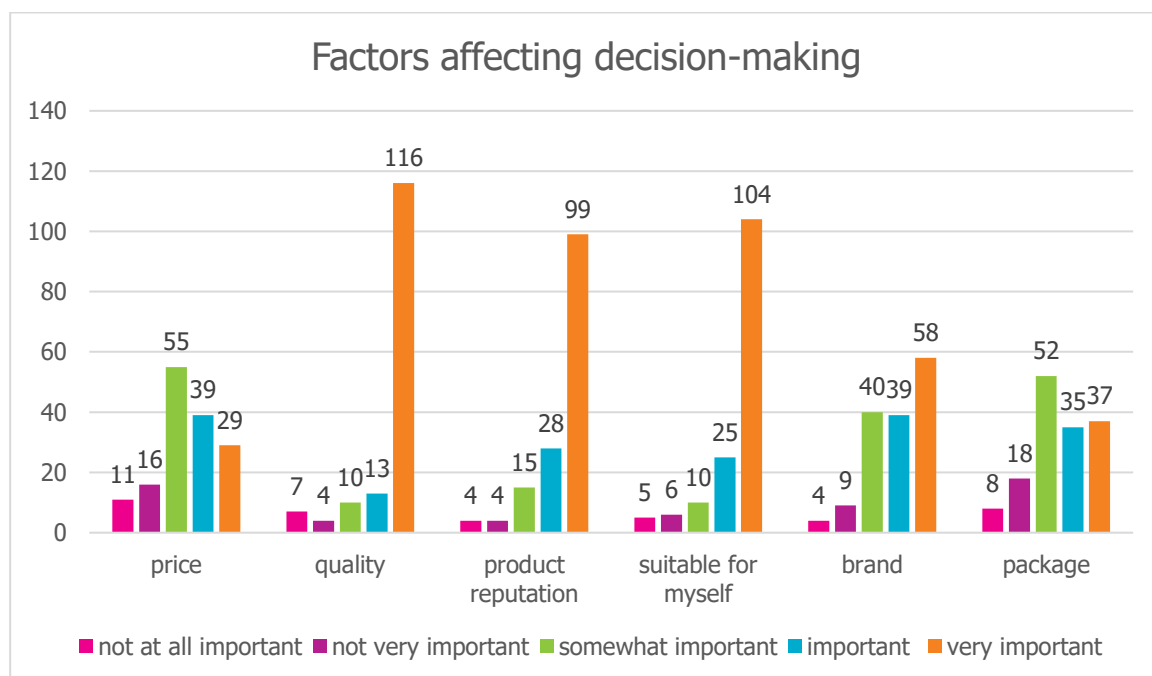


FIGURE 19. Factors affecting decision-making.

Question 14 asked about how important are the factors including price, quality, product reputation, suitable for customers, brand, and package when purchasing the female intimate care products. As can be seen in the figure 19, 116 out of 150 respondents, which is 77.3%, consider that quality is the most important factors. 66% of female will check product reputation before purchasing the

product. Another crucial factor is that whether the product is suitable for themselves. 104 respondents voted for this factor. Brand is also another very important factor with 58 people's answer. However, price and package factors are expected to be somewhat important with 55 and 52 participants voted and are not the top-rated important factors.

Generally speaking, the most important factors affecting the decision-making of respondents are the quality, product reputation, and suitable for themselves. Second important is the brand and the least important factors are package and price.

Since the majority assume that quality, product and suitability, the research focus on how people with different occupation think of importance about price, brand, and packages.

	price					
occupation	not at all in	not very impo	somewhat in	important	very impo	total
student	2	3	19	20	10	54
Institution	2	4	12	4	6	28
Company employees	5	4	13	10	6	38
Freelancers and full-time	2	5	11	5	7	30
total	11	16	55	39	29	150

TABLE 3. Price and Occupation

For the 40.4% of the student consider that price is important factor while deciding to buy the female intimate product and 34% of company employees regard price is a somewhat important factor that influence their purchase decision. Meanwhile 36% of freelancers and full-time mother and 36% of people work in institution consider price slightly affect their purchase decision.

	Brand					
occupation	not at all in	not very impo	somewhat in	important	very impo	total
student	0	4	12	15	26	57
Institution	1	1	6	8	9	25
Company employees	1	3	14	7	13	38
Freelancers and full-time	2	1	8	9	10	30
total	4	9	40	39	58	150

TABLE 4. Brand and Occupation

Brand is another factor that influence consumer behavior. The majority of respondents share the opinion that brand is one of the important factors that influence them while evaluating the product. As shown in the chart, 45.6% students take brand as a very important factor that determine their purchase. Meanwhile 36% of people from institution take brand as a very important factor and so does 33.3% if freelancers and full-time mother. However, company employs mostly consider price is relevantly somewhat important factor.

	package					
occupation	not at all in	not very impo	somewhat in	important	very impo	total
student	3	5	23	12	14	57
Institution	2	5	7	4	7	25
Company employees	3	7	13	7	8	38
Freelancers and full-time	0	1	9	12	8	30
total	8	18	52	35	37	150

TABLE 5. Package and Occupation

Package is a factor that most of respondent believed that somewhat important. Students with 38.5% and company employees with 34.2% take it as a somewhat important factor. Freelancers and fulltime mother think it is an important factor with 36.7%. however, institution workers consider package is a very essential factor.

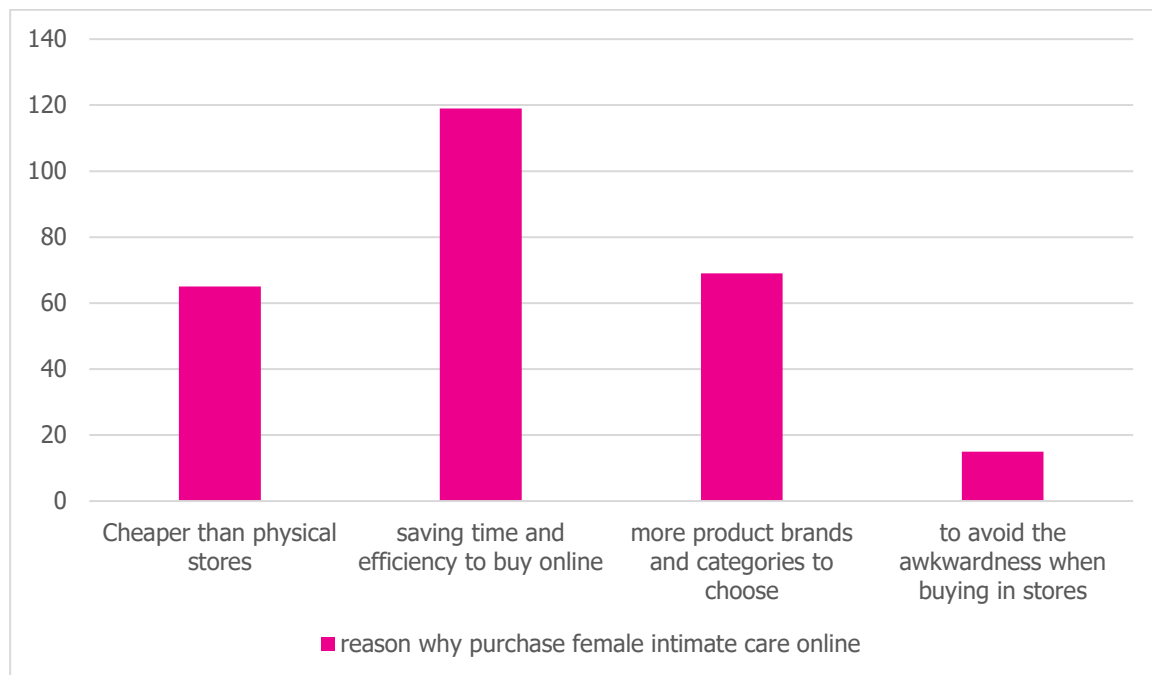


FIGURE 20. Reason why purchase female intimate care online.

The last multi choice question from the survey is why would female consumers purchase the female intimate care online. 79.33% of respondents agrees that it is more efficient and time-saving way to buy the intimate care online. Consider that there are more product categories and different brands to choose from online platforms, 69 respondents voted for this reason. 43.% agreed that buying female intimate care online is cheaper than physical stores and 10% admitted that buying female intimate care online is for avoiding awkwardness when purchasing at stores.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the thesis was to study the consumer behavior of the female intimate care product on Chinese e-commerce platform. The goal was to figure out the what drives the purchase of female intimate care products and the preference of customers. Meanwhile the factors consumers assume important and affect their decision-making process before purchasing the product will be discussed. Moreover, the reason for buying this product online will be figured out during the research. Finally, the most frequently used online platforms for purchasing will be measured in the study.

The research is based on the general consumer behavior theory and e-commerce in China. Factors affecting consumer behavior, influence of reference group, maslow's hierarchy needs, and consumer decision-making process are explained in the research base on the different consumer behavior theories. The factors affecting decision-making process are created based on the female intimate products including price, quality, brand, and package etc. Another topic which was discussed in the study is the Chinese online platforms and female online consumers.

The observational part of the research was carried out by the quantitative research. The reason for choosing this method is to present consumer behavior and attitude online about the female intimate care products. An online questionnaire generated on Wenjuanxing was implemented to collect data. 150 females answered the questionnaire and the results were analyzed.

The results showed that the four factors do influence consumer behavior. Results firstly explained the background of the respondents, which gave a brief introduction regarding to the information of respondents. The background information indicates the cultural and personal factors that influence the consumer purchasing behavior. The question about whether opinions and recommendations from reference would influence consumers' behavior showed that nearly all the respondents were influenced by their reference groups. This demonstrated that the social factor has affected one's consumer behavior. Another question pointed out that psychological factor influences consumer behavior by their thoughts. Their belief of female intimate care would inhibit the gynecological diseases lead them to do the purchase. As cited by Maslow's hierarchy needs, the basic physiological needs are presented in the research results. The society made the female to have the feeling of belonging if they use the female intimate product, otherwise, they will have the affection of being left out when having conversation with their peer friends.

Factors influencing the online purchasing decision-making towards the female intimate care products were discussed in the study. The information search phrase indicated that the respondents acquire the product information mainly from social media and family and friend, the next is from TV advertisement and newspaper. The majority of respondents share the common opinion that three factors including quality, reputation of the product, and suitability are the most essential factors that will affect their decision before buying the product. The following are price, brand, and package. According to the distribution of results, the choice of importance varies occupation of respondents. Students pay more attention to the price of product because they have no income or they get support from their family while company employees do not care too much about the price. At the same

time, students and freelancers & fulltime mother tend to see brand as a crucial factor. Package is considering a rather important factor that influence decision-making process by the fulltime mother.

As a result, the mostly used online shopping platforms by the female consumers are Taobao, Tmall, and JD.com. According to the background of respondents, the female online consumer groups in the study are novice users and light mature women groups. According to the research results, the reason for purchase this product online varies, but the fact that it saves time and efficiency to buy product online stands out.

The Chinese online female groups show more interests in the cleansing wipes. The most preferred brand by the respondents is ABC and Hushubao, and the results turned out that the consumers would rather go for domestic brands than foreign brands. At the same time, the frequency of purchasing female intimate product turned out that half of the respondents buy it half a year.

The research successfully presented female online consumer behavior on Chinese e-commerce platforms. The goal of thesis was achieved.

8 DISCUSSION

The limitation of the thesis was that not enough samples were taken while the questionnaire was posted.

The research turns out to be useful when analyzing consumer behavior. The results of the thesis will be useful not only for the Chinese intimate care product companies to do market on e-commerce platform to understand the consumer behavior, but also will be beneficial for international brand or pharmaceutical companies to enter the market through Chinese e-commerce platforms.

Since the data was insufficient, the recommendation for the follow up research could be to gather enough amount of data. On the other hand, more details about Chinese online consumers could be studied in the follow up research. Further studies could be made to discover deeper in different views to understand consumer behavior and more specifically how cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors may affect consumer behavior could be studied.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE IN ORIGINAL LANGUAGE (CHINESE)

关于女性私护用品的调查问卷

您好，我正在进行一个关于中国女性网上私护用品消费的调查。女性私护用品包括护理液，护理直纸巾和凝胶等产品。此问卷以匿名的方式进行。调查结果仅仅用于学术报告分析研究。填写问卷仅会用不超过五分钟时间完成，您的回答对于我的研究十分重要！非常感谢您的帮助！

* 1. 您的年龄是

<input type="radio"/> <18
<input type="radio"/> 18-25
<input type="radio"/> 25-35
<input type="radio"/> >35

* 2. 您的国内常居地是

<input type="radio"/> 北上广深
<input type="radio"/> 一线城市
<input type="radio"/> 三线城市
<input type="radio"/> 其他城市

*** 3. 您的受教育程度**

<input type="radio"/> 初中
<input type="radio"/> 高中
<input type="radio"/> 大专
<input type="radio"/> 大学本科
<input type="radio"/> 研究生或博士

*** 4. 您的职业是**

<input type="radio"/> 学生
<input type="radio"/> 全职妈妈
<input type="radio"/> 自由职业者
<input type="radio"/> 公司职员
<input type="radio"/> 机关单位职员

*** 5. 您的月收入是**

<input type="radio"/> 不便透露/未有收入来源
<input type="radio"/> 2000-5000元
<input type="radio"/> 5000-10000元
<input type="radio"/> 大于10000元

* 6. 您经常会购买私护产品吗

<input type="radio"/> 是
<input type="radio"/> 否

* 7. 在购买私护产品前，您从哪个渠道了解到私护产品的【多选题】

<input type="checkbox"/> 医生
<input type="checkbox"/> 家人朋友
<input type="checkbox"/> 社交平台
<input type="checkbox"/> 新闻电视广告

* 8. 当您选择购买私护产品时候，您会受到您身边的人（家人朋友邻居）的建议或者想法影响吗

<input type="radio"/> 是
<input type="radio"/> 否
<input type="radio"/> 有时候会

* 9. 您购买私护产品的理由是

<input type="radio"/> 从社会大众听说女性需要用私护产品
<input type="radio"/> 我个人需要私护产品清洁
<input type="radio"/> 我相信私护产品能保证女性不受妇科病影响

* 10. 如果您购买女性私护产品，您多久会购买一次

<input type="radio"/> 不买
<input type="radio"/> 每个月
<input type="radio"/> 每两个月买一次
<input type="radio"/> 半年买一次

* 11. 您经常购买哪个品牌 【多选题】

<input type="checkbox"/> ABC
<input type="checkbox"/> 妇炎洁
<input type="checkbox"/> Jolly娇妍
<input type="checkbox"/> 洁尔阴
<input type="checkbox"/> 护舒宝
<input type="checkbox"/> 其他品牌

* 12. 您更倾向于买国内还是国外私护品牌

<input type="radio"/> 国内品牌
<input type="radio"/> 国外品牌

* 13. 您经常购买哪种类型私护产品 【多选题】

<input type="checkbox"/> 女性清洁纸巾
<input type="checkbox"/> 清洁或滋润凝胶
<input type="checkbox"/> 护理液
<input type="checkbox"/> 私护喷雾
<input type="checkbox"/> 其他

* 14. 以下因素对您选择在网上购买私护用品时有多重要 请根据您的实际情况选择最符合的项:
1-->5表示非常不重要-->非常重要

	1	2	3	4	5
价格	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
质量	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
产品口碑	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
产品属性适合本人	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
品牌	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
包装	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 15. 您每次会在私护产品上花多少钱?

<input type="radio"/> 0-50元
<input type="radio"/> 50-100元
<input type="radio"/> 100-150元
<input type="radio"/> 150-200元
<input type="radio"/> 大于200元

* 16. 您经常使用哪个购物平台消费 【多选题】

<input type="checkbox"/> 淘宝
<input type="checkbox"/> 京东
<input type="checkbox"/> 天猫
<input type="checkbox"/> 唯品会
<input type="checkbox"/> 拼多多

* 17. 您选择网上购买私护产品的原因有哪些 【多选题】

<input type="checkbox"/> 比到超市购买价格便宜
<input type="checkbox"/> 网上购买省时省力
<input type="checkbox"/> 有更多商品种类和不同品牌选择
<input type="checkbox"/> 为了避免实体店购买的尴尬

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH

Hello,

This questionnaire is to investigate the Chinese female consumers' online behavior of female intimate care product. Female intimate care product includes intimate wash, cleansing wipes, and gels. The questionnaire will be conducted anonymously. The survey results are only used for academic report analysis. It will only take less than five minutes to complete the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your help!

1. How old are you?

- <18
- 18-25

- 25-35
 - Over 35
2. Your living place in China is,
- Beijing/Shanghai/Guangzhou/Shenzhen
 - Tier 1 cities
 - Tier 3 cities
 - Other cities
3. Your education backgrounds
- Secondary school
 - High school
 - Vocational college
 - University
 - Master or PhD
4. Your current occupation is
- Student
 - Full-time mother
 - Freelancers
 - Company employees
 - Institution
5. Your income levels
- I do not want to tell
 - 2000-5000yuan
 - 5000-10,000 yuan
 - Over 10,000 yuan
6. Do you usually buy female intimate care product?
- Yes
 - No
7. From which sources do you get information about the female intimate care product before buying it?
- Doctors
 - Education
 - Friends
 - Social media
 - TV advertisements or newspaper
8. Do the opinions or recommendations from people around you (family members, friends, neighbors) affect your choice when buying female intimate care products?
- Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
9. Why would you need/ purchase female intimate care product?
- I heard from other people/ society that female should use it
 - I need it for personal cleansing
 - I believe that the female intimate care prevents women from gynecological diseases.

10. If you buy the female intimate care, how often do you purchase the product online?

- Never
- Every month
- Once every two months
- Half a year

11. Which brand do you frequently buy?

- ABC
- Fuyanjie
- Jolly
- Jie'eryin
- Hushubao

12. Do you prefer domestic brands or foreign brands?

- Domestic brands
- Foreign brands

13. Which kind of the female intimate care product do you usually buy?

- Cleansing wipes
- Cleansing or moisturizing gel
- Intimate spray
- Intimate wash

14. How important are the below factors when you purchase a female intimate product?

Rate the following factors from 1-5 as not at all important, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important.

- Price
- Good quality
- Reputation of the product
- Suitable for you
- Brand
- Package

15. How much do you spend on the product every time you buy the product?

- 0-50yuan
- 50-100 yuan
- 100-150 yuan
- 150-200yuan
- Above 200yuan

16. Which online shopping platform do you usually use to do purchase?

- Taobao
- JD.com
- Tmall
- Vipshop
- Pinduoduo

17. Why would you choose to buy female intimate care online?

- Cheaper than physical stores
- Saving time and efficiency to buy it online
- More product brands and categories to choose
- To avoid the awkwardness when buying at stores.