

The Behavioral Logic and Drivers of Young People's "Check-In Consumption" in the Experience Economy

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Abstract. As the experience economy continues to deepen and social media becomes closely integrated into everyday life, young consumers' offline consumption choices no longer revolve only around product functions, price, and convenience. They increasingly attach importance to whether a consumption scene can be recorded, displayed, and circulated. Taking young people's check-in consumption as its research object, this paper analyzes the relationship between photo-worthiness and consumption decision-making from the perspective of the experience economy. The study uses semi-structured interviews with young consumers aged 18 to 30 who use social media frequently. It focuses on their pre-consumption information search, photo-taking and experience adjustment during consumption, and post-consumption content posting and social sharing behavior. The findings show that check-in consumption is not simply herd behavior; rather, it results from the joint influence of experiential value and platform feedback. This paper constructs a behavioral logic model of "perceived photo-worthiness - willingness to share socially - consumption decision-making - social sharing behavior - diffusion of consumption scenes," and proposes that brands in the experience economy should balance the real value of products, spatial narratives, and consumers' sense of participation.

Keywords: Experience Economy, Check-In Consumption, Young Consumers, Social Media, Experiential Marketing

1. Introduction

With the rise of the experience economy, consumers' decision-making behavior has shifted from the traditional functional value of products or services toward a stronger emphasis on experiential value [1]. Young consumers in particular, under the influence of social media, are more inclined to combine self-presentation and social interaction with consumption behavior, a phenomenon referred to here as check-in consumption. This means that before purchasing or experiencing a product, consumers first consider how to take photos, record the experience, and share it on social platforms.

Experience economy theory suggests that the core of business competition has moved beyond providing products and services toward creating experiences that consumers can remember, participate in, and narrate [1]. In traditional consumption logic, consumers tend to compare price, quality, and function; in experiential consumption, however, they pay more attention to whether the consumption process can bring pleasure, relaxation, commemorative meaning, and social

expression. In this context, what consumers purchase is not only the commodity itself but also the spatial atmosphere, emotional triggers, interactive process, and post-event memories. Experiential marketing research further proposes that brands need to organize consumer experiences through sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and relational pathways [2]. These theories provide an important basis for understanding contemporary young people's check-in consumption.

This paper first uses literature analysis to review research on the experience economy, experiential marketing, customer experience, social media marketing, and electronic word of mouth. Through this literature review, the relationship between this phenomenon and the experience economy, social media communication, and young consumer behavior can be clarified, providing a theoretical foundation for the subsequent interviews and discussion.

The significance of this study lies in showing how the experience economy and digital platforms jointly shape consumption logic. On the one hand, consumers obtain emotional satisfaction through check-in activities. On the other hand, businesses achieve low-cost diffusion by leveraging spatial design, visual storytelling, and user-generated content. Existing studies show that digital word of mouth and social media are affecting consumers' information search paths [3]. However, a more systematic analysis is still needed to explain why young consumers prioritize whether a place is suitable for photography before consumption, why they adjust their behavior during consumption to serve sharing purposes, and how social feedback in turn affects subsequent consumption.

2. Literature review and theoretical foundation

The experience economy emphasizes that experience is a form of economic value that can be designed, organized, and exchanged. Compared with the traditional product economy, consumers in the experience economy value participation, immersion, and memory more strongly [1]. The experience economy stresses that consumers purchase not only commodities but also experiences jointly constituted by products, services, spaces, and interactions [1], a view that is highly relevant to experiential marketing. For young people's check-in consumption, store decoration, lighting, music, scent, plating, queue atmosphere, and visual presentation on social platforms all influence their expectations of a consumption scene.

Customer experience research emphasizes that the relationship between consumers and brands is not a one-time purchase but a continuous process. Lemon and Verhoef [4] point out that customer experience runs through different stages of the consumer journey, including pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase. Check-in consumption precisely reflects this process: before consumption, young people search for images, guides, and reviews through social media; during consumption, they observe the space, take photographs, and experience products and services; after consumption, they may publish content, receive likes and comments, and form a final impression of the brand accordingly. Therefore, check-in consumption is not a single behavior but a complete process composed of information collection, in-store experience, and social feedback. Social media enables consumers to transform personal experiences into content addressed to others. Recent research on digital word of mouth further points out that consumers switch among face-to-face information, online opinion sites, and social media, and use these contents for consumption judgments [3]; non-sponsored user-generated content related to brands also affects consumer engagement [5]. In check-in consumption, the photos, locations, short videos, and reviews posted by young people are both personal life records and potential consumption references for others. In other words, check-in content has a dual attribute: on the one hand, it belongs to consumers' self-expression; on the other hand, it becomes part of brand communication and word-of-mouth diffusion.

Existing research rarely uses the concept of photo-worthiness directly, but related studies have already revealed its theoretical roots. Kemper et al. [6] discuss the relationship between social media sharing and consumption type in the context of the digital experience economy, indicating that online sharing has become an important component of brand relationships and consumption value. Thus, photo-worthiness may enhance the attractiveness of a consumption scene, but it may also shift consumers' attention from the experience itself to the effect of display. This study therefore defines photo-worthiness as consumers' integrated perception of the visual expression, platform circulation, and identity-presentation value of a consumption scene.

3. Research method

This paper uses interviews as its primary research method. The interviewees were set as young consumers aged 18 to 30 who use social media frequently and who had check-in experiences at coffee shops, restaurants, exhibitions, commercial districts, or cultural tourism spaces within the previous six months. The interviews were organized around three stages: before consumption, during consumption, and after consumption. The questions included: "Through what channels do you usually learn about a store or exhibition you want to check in at?" "When deciding whether to go, do you pay more attention to the image effect, the environmental atmosphere, the product itself, or friends' recommendations?" "After arriving at the scene, do you choose your seat, order, outfit, or length of stay for the purpose of taking photos?" "Do likes, comments, or friends' inquiries affect your feelings about this consumption experience?" and "Would you consume again or recommend the place to others because of one check-in experience?"

In addition to interviews, this paper combines typical scene observation to analyze check-in behavior in coffee shops, dessert shops, exhibition spaces, commercial districts, and urban cultural tourism spaces. The focus of observation is not to count the number of people, but to record how consumers use space: whether they take photos first, whether they stop in front of certain installations or backgrounds, whether they choose locations more suitable for taking photos, and whether businesses set up obvious visual symbols and sharing prompts. Scene observation can help researchers understand the relationship between interview content and actual behavior.

4. Research findings

4.1. Interview findings

The interview data further reveal three stages of check-in consumption. The first is the pre-consumption information search stage. Respondents usually form expectations of a space through platform images and regard other people's check-in content as a kind of visualized recommendation. Compared with written reviews, images and short videos make it easier for consumers to judge whether the atmosphere of a scene suits them. The second is the recording and photo-taking stage during consumption. Some respondents change their consumption mode for the sake of taking photos, such as choosing seats more suitable for photography, ordering drinks with stronger visual effects, or waiting until there are fewer people before shooting. The third is the post-consumption feedback stage. Receiving likes, comments, or private-message inquiries after posting content gives respondents a sense of being recognized and may reinforce their positive evaluation of the consumption scene.

Interviews and scene observations show that before choosing a check-in scene, young consumers often first obtain information through social platforms. Compared with purely textual reviews,

images, short videos, and other people's real experiences more easily shape their first impression. Many consumers judge from photos whether a store is distinctive, whether it is suitable for photography, and whether it matches their own aesthetic preferences. They also learn about queueing conditions, product prices, and actual experiences through comment sections. It can therefore be seen that in the experience economy, pre-consumption imagination has already become part of the consumption experience. The visual content presented on social media shapes consumers' expectations of a scene in advance.

4.2. Findings on consumption scenes

Photo-worthiness affects on-site behavior. After entering a consumption scene, young consumers' behavior is often influenced by the need to take photographs. Some consumers choose seats near windows, positions with clean backgrounds, or locations with obvious decoration. They also choose drinks, desserts, or exhibition routes that look better visually. Some consumers believe that taking photos helps them observe the environment more carefully and record life, while others state that excessive pursuit of photo effects can instead affect the relaxed feeling of chatting, dining, or viewing an exhibition. This shows that photo-worthiness does affect consumption behavior, but stronger photo-worthiness is not always better. Moderate visual appeal can enhance the experience, whereas excessive display pressure may weaken it [7].

After consumption, some young consumers post photos, locations, and reviews on social platforms. Their motivation for posting is not entirely to show off; more often, it is to record life, share discoveries, express aesthetic preferences, or provide references for friends. When content receives likes, comments, saves, or private-message inquiries, consumers tend to form more positive memories of the experience. Digital word-of-mouth research shows that consumers' opinion expression on social media and online opinion platforms affects others' information search and judgment [3]. In check-in consumption, consumers are both experiencers and communicators. The study also finds that although photo-worthiness attracts young consumers to visit for the first time, it cannot independently determine long-term consumption. If a store's environment is visually appealing but the product taste, service attitude, price reasonableness, or spatial comfort does not meet expectations, consumers may regard it only as a one-time check-in. Conversely, if a scene is distinctive and the products and services are also satisfactory, consumers are more likely to visit again or actively recommend it to friends. Therefore, the marketing value of check-in consumption should not be understood merely as traffic, but as a continuous process of "visual attraction - real experience - word-of-mouth diffusion."

5. Discussion

In the context of the experience economy, consumption spaces are re-understood as stages for experience. Young consumers do not passively receive products; instead, they search within spaces for experiential cues that can be photographed, narrated, and circulated. Window seats in coffee shops, interactive installations at exhibitions, dish presentation in restaurants, and art displays in shopping malls may all become bases for consumers to judge experiential value. For brands, photo-worthiness should not be simply understood as internet-famous decoration; rather, it should be viewed as a medium through which consumers participate in experience, organize memories, and express identity.

Photo-worthiness first acts on pre-consumption scene imagination and expectations of social return, and is then transformed into willingness to share. This willingness to share enters

consumption decision-making in advance, leading consumers to include visual expression in their judgments when choosing stores, exhibitions, or seats. After arrival, consumers transform personal experience into social sharing behavior through photography, posting, and interaction, thereby promoting the repeated visibility, saving, and reposting of consumption scenes on platforms [8, 9]. The findings show that platform feedback such as likes, comments, saves, and reposts occurs not only after consumption but also affects consumers' memory and evaluation of the experience. When consumers publish content and receive positive responses, the consumption experience is re-valued: what was originally an ordinary act of consumption may become an experience worth remembering and spreading again because of others' recognition. For businesses, user-generated content is not merely promotional material but a process in which consumers co-create experiential value. This link corresponds to the model's "social sharing behavior -> diffusion of consumption scenes": after individual sharing receives interaction, it not only extends personal experience but also transforms the scene into market information that can be searched and referenced by others [5].

Young consumers display aesthetic preferences, lifestyles, and social positioning through check-in content. The store a person chooses, the angle they photograph, the caption they write, and the platform on which they post all convey a certain self-image. Belk's theory of the extended self in a digital world [10] can explain this phenomenon: digital content becomes part of consumers' self-identity. Research on social media sharing disposition also suggests that information sharing is not only about transmitting content, but is also related to individuals' needs for social interaction and self-presentation [9]. Check-in consumption is therefore not only a consumption choice but also an identity narrative. First, brands should design spatial symbols that are recognizable but not excessively templated, enabling consumers to develop a desire to record naturally. Second, brands should incorporate photo-taking convenience into service processes, such as optimizing lighting, movement routes, queue order, and interactive installations, rather than merely setting up isolated photo walls. Third, brands should encourage consumers to express real experiences and avoid relying too heavily on homogeneous content recommending. Fourth, brands can enhance the extended value of user-generated content through topic hashtags, user selections, community activities, and secondary interactions. Fifth, brands must maintain product and service quality; otherwise, check-in behavior can only bring short-term traffic and will be difficult to convert into long-term loyalty.

6. Conclusions

This study finds that under the joint influence of the experience economy and social media, the consumption decision-making logic of young consumers is undergoing clear changes.

First, young consumers' focus on consumption scenes is changing. Compared with the single focus on product function, price, or practicality in traditional consumption, some young consumers have begun to attach clear importance to the social communication value of consumption scenes in the decision-making process. Consumers are more inclined to first evaluate whether a consumption scene has a strong visual expression effect, namely its level of photo-worthiness. Consumption is not only a process of satisfying needs but also a social behavior that can be displayed and circulated. Second, photo-worthiness is becoming an important factor affecting young consumers' consumption choices, and the feedback mechanisms of social media platforms significantly influence consumers' willingness to consume. Especially in experiential consumption fields such as coffee shops, dessert shops, exhibitions, and shopping malls, consumers actively search for relevant images before making a purchase, form expectations based on the photographic appeal, and then decide whether to visit and consume. This shows that whether a consumption scene has a strong visual presentation

effect has already influenced consumers' initial interest and willingness to visit to a certain extent. Finally, photo-worthiness is becoming an important factor affecting consumption experience and brand communication. In case observations, the first behavior of many consumers after entering a consumption space is not actual consumption, but taking photos, looking for a suitable shooting position, or recording the environment. Some respondents also mentioned that posting consumption content can bring a certain level of emotional satisfaction and social interaction. This indicates that in the context of the experience economy, consumption behavior is forming a closer relationship with social media expression. As a new scene-perception factor, photo-worthiness is affecting consumers' interest in consumption spaces, their experience process, and their sharing behavior. This means that when brands design offline spaces, they need to pay attention not only to the product itself, but also to scene atmosphere, visual expression, and consumers' sharing experience, thereby enhancing consumers' sense of participation and willingness to communicate.

Based on the above interviews and scene observations, this paper understands check-in consumption as a continuous experience-communication process rather than an isolated in-store visit. In other words, consumers first form a perception of whether the scene is photo-worthy before consumption, then transform this perception into sharing expectations and willingness to visit, subsequently take photographs, post them on social media, and engage with other users, and finally promote the continued dissemination of the relevant scene on social platforms. Based on this logic, the discussion section of this paper further summarizes an analytical model of "perceived photo-worthiness -> willingness to share socially -> consumption decision-making -> social sharing behavior -> diffusion of consumption scenes." This model emphasizes that consumers' decision-making in the context of the experience economy is no longer driven solely by functional value, but is significantly influenced by photo-worthiness. Commercial spaces use visual design and contextual construction to enhance consumers' perception of photo-worthiness. This perception further strengthens their expectations of potential social returns, such as likes, comments, and follows, thereby influencing their consumption decisions and behavioral investment. After consumption is completed, social sharing behavior both reinforces consumers' future consumption preferences and helps consumption scenes spread further.

Future research can continue in three directions. First, the sample size can be expanded, and structural equation modeling can be used to test the relationships among photo-worthiness, expectations of social return, experience satisfaction, and repurchase intention. Second, differences among platforms can be compared, such as the different roles of Xiaohongshu, Douyin, Instagram, and WeChat Moments in check-in motivations. Third, attention can be paid to the negative effects of check-in consumption, such as homogenized spaces, excessive display pressure, hollowed-out experiences, and young consumers' consumption burdens. Overall, check-in consumption is not a short-lived online buzzword, but a concrete manifestation of the experience economy in the digital media environment.

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