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The Influence of Brand's Aesthetics of Living Alone Narrative on the Sense of Belonging of Young Chinese Consumers in the Context of the One-Person Economy

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Abstract. The rapid growth of urban single families has promoted the rise of China 's " living alone economy. " Although existing research often interprets this trend as a new consumption opportunity, this study believes that brands play a deeper role in reshaping the cultural significance of living alone. Through the narrative of loneliness aesthetics, the brand transforms loneliness from a symbol of social alienation to an ideal lifestyle linked to self-care, personality expression and emotional satisfaction. This study uses qualitative research methods, combined with case analysis and social media text analysis. Based on 1200 user-generated comments collected from Xiaohongshu and Weibo, this study explores how brands construct emotional value through three narrative dimensions: emotional expression, lifestyle shaping and brand evaluation. Taking Bear Appliance and RIO as examples, the study reveals two different ways of attribution reconstruction: product-based lifestyle construction and emotional-based symbolic consumption. The results show that the brand not only responds to the emotional needs of young consumers, but also participates in redefining the ideal of living alone. However, this process involves a dual logic: while providing emotional compensation and identity, brands may also commercialize loneliness by transforming emotional uneasiness into consumer demand. This study helps to understand the phenomenon of emotional branding and the commercialization of loneliness in contemporary China.

Keywords: One-person economy, aesthetics of living alone, youth

1. Introduction

In recent years, the change of family structure, the enhancement of urban mobility and the change of people 's attitude towards marriage and social relations have promoted the rapid growth of the urban population living alone in China. Research indicates that young people living independently are likely to experience multiple issues of independence and emotional vulnerabilities simultaneously. While on one hand there is increased independence and personal freedom to live alone, on the other

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hand there may be an increased feeling of isolation, emotional discomfort and a reduced social network.

In this context of the social, the single economy is now an important phenomenon of consumption. To keep up with the individual's lifestyle, enterprises have started designing products and services such as small home appliances, dining alone and customised consumption scenarios. At the same time, social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu have further promoted the new cultural narrative of ' living alone ', emphasizing self-care, personal growth and aesthetic lifestyle. Therefore, solitude is gradually changing from a negative social state to a personal lifestyle related to independence and self-realization. However, the current discussion on the single economy mainly focuses on its market potential and consumption patterns, and less attention is paid to how brands participate in redefining the meaning of being alone. Brand does not only respond to the actual needs of consumers, but also actively constructs symbolic meaning through advertising narrative, product design and lifestyle scenes. With these strategies, the brand transforms the solitary life from a passive social alienation to a positive self-expression choice.

Therefore, this study investigates how brands use solitude aesthetics narratives to reshape young consumers' sense of belonging in the context of China's one-person economy. Specifically, it explores three questions: (1) How do brands construct the meaning of solitary lifestyles through emotional, product and scenario-based narratives? (2) Through what mechanisms do these narratives provide emotional compensation and identity recognition? (3) What does the interaction of emotional support and the commerce of loneliness imply?

To answer these questions, this study combines case studies and social media text analysis. Based on the analysis of two representative sample cases, Xiaoxiong Appliances and RIO, this paper examines how brands can convert the emotional needs of solitude to commercial values and what's the limitation of commercialization of solitude.

2. Literature review

The literature that has investigated the lives of urban young people living alone to date tends to concentrate on social circumstances, psychological experiences and emotional problems. The number of young people living alone has continued to grow as a result of urbanisation, changing family patterns and attitudes to marriage. Past studies indicate that this group is frequently at risk of social disconnections, emotional insecurity and less forms of traditional belonging [1-3]. At the same time, research on "empty-nest youth" indicates that family relationships and social support still play a significant role in determining their welfare, and that there are other emotional networks that can partially replace the traditional family support [4, 5].

But sometimes being alone isn't considered a bad thing. Recent research suggests that, young consumers are actively looking for emotional support, self-expression and personal identity in everyday acts and consumption decisions. In terms of consumer psychology, people can buy products and services not only to solve the problem, but also to psychologically compensate and satisfy themselves [6]. This will give a background to the growth of the one person economy in recent times.

With the advent of the one-person economy, brands have been setting out to enter into the area of solitary life, developing products and scenarios for consumption for just one person. Existing studies reveal that small household appliances and individual consumption spaces are not only intended to enhance convenience, but also to build up individual life worlds and feelings [7-9]. Such as the research on Xiaoxiong Appliances, it is found that through differentiated product design and lifestyle

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positioning, the ordinary household products can be transformed into the symbol of independent and refined life [7].

Emotional narratives and symbolic meanings are also tools used by brands to help consumers redefine their understanding of solitude, in addition to product strategies. Social media also support this process by promoting idealized messages about living alone, taking care of oneself and personal development [10]. With the help of emotional branding, brands can make products become the carriers of identity and belonging so that people can say that consuming a product is consuming their identity and lifestyle values [6].

However, there are some gaps in the current studies. First, earlier research primarily has been viewed from psychological, sociological and consumption standpoints, and only a little research has been done on how brands actively create the meaning of solitude. Second, although emotional consumption has been widely discussed, few studies explain how brands transform loneliness from a negative social perception into an attractive lifestyle through narratives, products, and scenarios. Third, the potential tension between emotional support and the commercialization of loneliness remains insufficiently explored.

Therefore, this study examines how brands reshape young consumers' sense of belonging through "solitude aesthetics" narratives in the context of China's one-person economy. By analyzing Xiaoxiong Appliances and RIO, this research explores how brands create emotional value while also reflecting on the commercial logic behind the transformation of loneliness into consumption.

3. Research methods

This study mainly uses case analysis and network text analysis to explore how the brand living alone narrative aesthetics reshapes the sense of belonging of young people living alone and the feasibility of the project. Under the background of urban youth lifestyle, emotional needs and consumer culture changes, the study examines the phenomenon of living alone, and reveals the emotional construction mechanism behind the consumption of living alone through brand practice, emotional expression, lifestyle and user feedback.

3.1. Case analysis

This study explores how brands build the aesthetics of solitude in practice through case analysis. Take Xiaoxiong appliances and RIO as an example for comparison. Xiaoxiong appliances represents a product-oriented strategy, which integrates small household appliances into personalized life scenes; RIO uses an emotion-oriented approach to connect solitude with relaxation and self-care through advertising narratives and consumption scenarios. Comparing these two brands will help to reveal the different paths of brand reconstruction of the meaning of living alone. Through the comparison of business performance, gross profit margin and brand premium, the research highlights the commercial competitive advantage brought by the subdivided emotional path and differentiated aesthetic narrative, thus enhancing the credibility of the research conclusion.

3.2. Network text collection and text analysis

The network text analysis method takes the text spontaneously produced by Internet platform users as the research material and excavates the real attitude and value cognition of Internet users through screening, coding and emotional statistics, which belongs to the research method combining qualitative and a small amount of quantification. A total of 1,200 user-generated comments and posts

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were collected from Xiaohongshu and Weibo, including 600 texts related to Xiaoxiong Appliances and 600 texts related to RIO. The data were collected through keyword searches related to brand names, product experiences, and emotional expressions. To enhance the reliability of the data, irrelevant content, duplicate comments and only promotional material were filtered out. First level code is to extract concept, 2nd level code is to extract core dimension, 3rd level is to combine mechanism. The texts collected were analyzed according to three-level coding process. First, open coding was performed to determine all the repeated emotional expressions, lifestyles and brand appraisals. Second, some of the concepts were clustered into the more general ones as can be seen in Table 1, such as emotional expression, lifestyle construction, brand evaluation, etc. Lastly, core dimensions were put together to explain how brands offer emotional compensation, create identity symbols and impact on consumers' sense of belonging. NVivo software was used to aid in the coding process and to help organize qualitative data.

Further, this research has included the brand performance data to complement the qualitative interpretation. To assess if emotional and lifestyle-oriented narratives were reflected in actual business indicators, such as revenue growth and market performance, were examined. This study tries to bring together and merge both social media analysis and business data to get a more complete picture of how to take solitude and make it a commercial value for brands.

Table 1. Brand narrative and user feedback coding dimension table

First-order Coding	Second-order Coding	Third-order Coding	Detailed description
Negative Emotional Dissolution: Eliminating emptiness and social detachment; Reinterpreting the label of "struggling solo living" Positive Psychological Compensation: Sense of healing and relaxation; Low-obligation companionship and self-reconciliation	Emotional Expression	Emotional Compensation and Psychological Reframing: Transforming "passive loneliness" into an emotional reconstruction pathway of "active self-consistency"	Measures emotional release and psychological compensation reflected in brand narratives and user feedback.
Ritual Creation: Sense of atmosphere and exclusive moments of happiness; Subtle aesthetic transformation of personal spaces Identity Construction: Symbol of the "refined solo dweller"; Self-care orientation and sense of life control	Lifestyle Construction	Aesthetic Symbols and Spatial Rituals: Constructing individualized identities through consumption symbols	Measures how brands integrate products into everyday life scenarios and reconstruct young consumers' meanings of life.
Positive Value Recognition: Emotional resonance and aesthetic alignment; Strong psychological attachment Negative Criticism and Reflection: Excessive pricing and lack of practicality; Creation of lifestyle anxiety and consumerism traps	Brand Evaluation	Capital Logic and Commercial Reflection: Evaluating the dual attributes of aesthetic narratives: commercial transformation and capital-driven anxiety creation	Measures users' genuine acceptance of brand aesthetic marketing and their social critical perspectives.

4. Research results and discussion

4.1. One-person economy ' trend under the research and analysis of XiaoXiong appliances

Xiaoxiong Appliances represents a product-based approach to reshaping the meaning of solitary living. The brand avoids positioning life without the presence of people as a situation of social

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isolation and instead embeds small household appliances in individual lifestyle contexts, presenting the value proposition of people being able to build up a comfortable and refined lifestyle without the presence of others.

Emotionally, Xiaoxiong Appliances adopts a lifestyle communication to change the negative impression of living alone. There are traditional social stories that are linked to loneliness, inconvenience or a lack of family connection with solo living. But with the philosophy of "enjoying life alone" and "creating personal moments, " the brand makes solitude an active lifestyle choice. This story helps ease the stigma of living alone and offers consumers emotional recognition.

Not only emotional communication, Xiaoxiong Appliances also builds up the identity of lifestyle through product design. The brand concentrates on smaller, personalized and esthetically designed products that meet the living conditions of young urban consumers, as compared to the traditional family-consumer-oriented household appliances. In addition to being functional products, these items also represent the symbol of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. The brand enables consumers to discover their identities, like "refined solo dwellers" who prioritise self-care and the quality of life, by incorporating appliances into everyday routines.

This process of establishing identity is further reflected in the feedback that users provide on social media. Xiaoxiong Appliances have been called by many consumers a comfort, companionship and emotional satisfaction to their daily life. These responses are an indicator that people are not just buying products that offer useful functionality, but also a brand with emotional content. In this process, the simple act of everyday living becomes individualized and consumption becomes a means to build an 'us'.

The success of Xiaoxiong Appliances is also an indicator of the viability of this lifestyle story. In terms of revenue growth, Xiaoxiong Appliances' growth was relatively strong in recent years, which in turn indicates that Xiaoxiong Appliances' positioning has been relatively successful, and its products are clearly differentiated from those of major competitors Supor and Joyoung. But these achievements cannot be defined solely as simply the fruits of product innovation. Rather, it's an example of how lifestyle storytelling can turn emerging emotional needs into commercial opportunities for brands.

However, this process comes with some drawbacks too. All this happiness and self-worth achieved through beautifully-designed consumer products could unwittingly set a new benchmark of "ideal solitary being", and thus trigger new pressures for consumption in those who cannot afford this kind of lifestyle. Thus, in the case of Xiaoxiong Appliances, the emotional value and identity recognition are paralleled by a tension between authentic emotional support and the marketization of lifestyle anxiety. Table 2 confirms that the commercialization ability of living alone scene and emotional value narrative is quite good compared with the same industry.

Table 2. The growth rate of total operating income of Xiaoxiong Electric Appliance compared with that of the same industry

Company	2022	2023	2024	2025
1 XiaoXiong Appliances	14.18%	14.13%	0.98%	9.92%
2 Supor	4.68%	2.33%	1.54%	1.65%
3 Joyoung Co.,Ltd	-9.11%	-9.66%	-7.22%	-9.41%

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4.2. Research and analysis of RIO brand under the trend of one-person economy

As a result of the one-person economy, the needs of young consumers have turned to match the emotional value satisfaction need. While Xiaoxiong Appliances mainly uses product and lifestyle construction, RIO emotional symbolism and consumption scenes are used to break up the lonely experiences. The brand does not focus on the functional aspects of drinking, but rather a sense of relaxation, self care and emotional release.

Advertising stories at RIO help make drinking a positive action for an individual's personal ritual instead of a negative social behaviour. But the brand isn't suggesting that people who drink alone are alone or a failure; they are showing that it's time for them to take some time to reflect, enjoy, and emotionally heal. This narrative fits in with the general pattern of 'solitude aesthetics' in which solitude is increasingly presented as a choice and less of a social failure.

These interactions in the social sphere which surround RIO also highlight consumers' involvement in the creation of this meaning. Many users are linked to using the product during private moments like when watching films on their own, after work or during relaxation time. RIO is a symbolic object that facilitates emotional expression and self-connections in these contexts.

But RIO's emotional marketing approach also shows doubt in its brand positioning for long-term use as compared to Xiaoxiong Appliances. Due to the strong emotional connotations and lifestyle stories that it enjoys, extending the brand's product/service offerings to other consumption situations could dilute the brand's identity. If emotional labels are the only types used to differentiate, then brands might be in danger of using emotional needs as a one-off marketing theme and not a long-term consumer relationship.

So, RIO is a perfect example of the emotional branding, a two in one. In part, it manages to recast isolation as a "good thing" or even a life experience to be desired. At the same time, it shows how emotional consumption can be a commercial tool which creates loneliness and offers symbolic solutions to emotional uncertainty.

5. Conclusion

The development of urbanization and the weakening of social relations make the young people living alone in cities generally have emotional vacancies. Based on the one-person economy situation of China, this study focuses on the "solitude aesthetics" discourse of brands to discuss the redetermination of youth consumers' sense of belonging. This paper shows that brands are not merely reacting to the rise of solo consumption, but are actively involved in redefining the cultural understanding of living alone by using social media text analysis and combining it with case studies and business data.

The results showed two predominant pathways of reconstruction of belonging. Xiaoxiong Appliances primarily leverages product narratives based on lifestyle: their products become symbols that represent independence, self-care and personalisation. The brand helps people connect with the idea of living alone, through product design and everyday situations, offering comfort and satisfaction to the user. Conversely, RIO is an emotion-oriented symbolic method, which links isolated moments with relaxation, expression of emotions and selfacceptance. Brands can convert the negative perception of solitude into an appealing identification of lifestyle, as shown in these instances.

But this is also a double edged sword when it comes to emotional branding. Brand narratives can offer emotional rewards and aid consumers' positive identification, but might also commercialise

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emotional insecurity by associating positive emotions with consumption. This ideal of solitude brands can thus implicate new pressures and anxieties of consumption.

This research not only adds to the current literature, but also moves the focus from the market potential of the one-person economy to the cultural and emotional mechanisms. It focuses on the way brands are involved in the process of rebuilding 'belonging' in today's urban life and on the need to be more critical in understanding the connection between consumption, identity and emotional needs. Interviews or a long-term study could be used to further explore consumers' experiences, and to investigate the emotional connection that is created by the brand with consumers over time.

Author contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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