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# *Research on the Dissemination Mechanism and Influencing Factors of Consumerism in the Context of Social Media -- Taking the REDnote as an Example*

**Kexin Yang**

*International College, Hebei University, Baoding, China*
*yangkexincam241@163.com*

***Abstract:*** Against the backdrop of the western capitalist influence and the rapid development of China's market economy, consumerism has become increasingly prevalent. Driven by advancements in Internet technology, it subtly reshapes the public consumption concept, which is shifting from the possession and consumption of "objects" to the pursuit of the symbolic value of commodities. REDnote, as a highly influential social media platform, has laid a solid foundation for the spread of consumerism. This paper employs Baudrillard's theory of Consumer Society to explore its dissemination mechanism(e.g., content marketing, anxiety marketing, credit system) and influencing factors, proposing guiding strategies. The aim is to fill the research gap in this field and improve the research system, offering theoretical references and implications for subsequent studies. Additionally, this research is motivated by the aim to get rid of the influence of consumerist thought, promote a healthy media environment and guide the public toward reclaiming their subjectivity and engaging in rational consumption.

***Keywords:*** social media, consumerism, REDnote, dissemination mechanism

## 1. Introduction

The Industrial Revolution in Western countries replaced household handicrafts with mass production. Therefore, the material resources were abundant leading to a prosperous commodity economy. With capital concentration and monopoly formation, a supply-demand imbalance emerged[1]. In response, capitalists began to promote a new idea of consumption that gives goods symbolic value in order to dump all their stocks and stimulate the public's desire to consume with unique, personalized and highly sensory symbolic value of goods. This is manifested in the public's willingness to purchase "symbolized" goods that are several times more expensive than their use value to achieve spiritual satisfaction and shape their personal image and identity.

The rise of social media has created a breeding ground for the fermentation of consumerism in interpersonal and group communication. A new generation of Internet influencers and opinion leaders has started to change the perception, attitude and behavior of their fans by posting videos characterized by consumerism. Utilizing their fan base and influential discursive power, they disseminate consumerist values within digital communities. Due to public's inherent sense of

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community, the information they post influences and infects their fans. Over time, these shared values become normalized [2], resulting in the widespread internalization of consumerist ideology. As a consequence, many individuals become entrenched in the logic of consumerism, gradually losing their capacity for rational consumption.However, through reading a large amount of literature, the author found that there is a lack of research on the dissemination mechanism and influencing factors of consumerism on social media. To address this gap, this article seeks to explore the mechanisms and influencing factors of the spread of consumerism on social media, find solutions and further improve the theoretical research content of the spread and influencing factors of consumerism on social media, guiding the public out of the consumerism trap and reshaping a sound consumerist value system.

## 2. Consumer society theory

In The Consumer Society, Baudrillard mentions that " there is an astonishing phenomenon of consumption and abundance composed of ever-increasing services and material wealth around us,"[3] revealing one of the major characteristics of the consumer society, that is, the great abundance of materials. However, under the manipulation of capital logic, what people consume is no longer the material itself, but the symbolic value it carries. The main purpose of consumption is no longer to satisfy basic survival needs but to express individuality and gain identity.

In order to expand the reproduction of capital, capitalism constantly creates imaginary needs through various publicity means to stimulate the desire of the masses to consume. Yet, the desire that has been aroused can never be fulfilled in principle. Simultaneously, manufacturers stimulate the growth of the consumer mentality by exaggerating subtle differences among products to accelerate the iteration of goods and trap the public in a "never enough" negative consumption cycle.

Moreover, the proliferation of brands enables consumers to craft self-images based on symbolic associations rather than economic reality. People seek the symbolic meaning of different brands and try to briefly shape the image of successful people through the symbolic meaning of brands and the consumption that is not aligned with their economic status[2]. Nevertheless, this symbolic meaning is superficial. Therefore, the manifestation of individual identity is also shallow[4], which has nothing to do with an individual's true social class and character. As a result, consumerist ideology begins to be integrated into people's daily lives.

## 3. The dissemination mechanism of consumerism on social media

### 3.1. Opinion leaders create a hyperreality world

In his book The People's Choice, American scholar Lazarsfeld proposes "opinion leaders", proposing a two-step flow model of communication: mass media → opinion leaders → general audience [5]. As an "intermediary" for filtering and screening media information, opinion leaders have an undeniable influence on the public's cognitive and behavioral levels.

On REDnote, the mass media has constructed a hyperreality world through opinion leaders, which is an ideal world teeming with various alluring symbols. This hyperreality ignites people's non-essential desire, thereby triggering imaginary demands. For example, on the REDnote, the buzzword "aesthetic food" refers to a highly artistic dish with an exquisite presentation. Internet celebrities or opinion leaders create a hyper-real consumption scene by visiting restaurants and posting a large number of visually appealing dining scenes and dish images on the platform, which attracts consumers to visit these "Internet celebrity restaurants" one after another. In this context, the

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act of consumption transcends the food itself. Consumers are no longer purchasing meals for nourishment but are instead consuming symbolic meanings—such as a refined lifestyle, cultural capital, or elite taste—as constructed and displayed through social media. The dining experience becomes a performance, an expression of identity in the hyperreal space, further reinforcing consumerist ideology through symbolic consumption.

### 3.2. Topics create the differential consumption logic

Mass media trap people in an endless consumption cycle by highlighting the nuances of products. This strategy is vividly exemplified in the promotion of lipsticks on REDnote. Bloggers use exquisite sample pictures and vivid video to amplify the differences among different shades of lipstick and put up the slogan “Different lipsticks go with different outfits”, associating each lipstick with a unique style attribute [6]. For instance, a red bean paste shade may be labeled as essential for a "gentle girl," while bright red is positioned as the choice for a "strong, charismatic woman." With the unboxing and recommendation videos of influencers, many female consumers have been buying more than they actually need even though they already have a large stock of lipsticks at home.

Apart from enhancing the lips and improving the complexion, there is no need for lipstick to be broken down into hundreds of shades. Merchants’ product planning transforms lipstick into “symbols of different shades” for the purpose of seeking self-identity through its differentiated influence. The REDnote is gradually evolving into an important venue for the dissemination of consumerist ideology by building diverse consumption scenarios through various narrative methods such as text, images, and short videos.

### 3.3. Brand disciplining the consumer

In a consumer society, a commodity is not a pure material existence; it contains rich spiritual material. Modern commercial advertising gives a new image to a commodity by associating a certain meaning with a certain characteristic of the commodity[1]. By purchasing "symbolized" goods, the public makes their lives artistic and establishes an equivalent or acceptable connection between their own value and the symbolic value of the goods, viewing it as a way to define themselves and express their personality. It seems to be a free choice, but in fact it is manipulated by capital. For example, brands define different social classes to some extent. If you search for "middle class" on the REDnote, the search results, like “Lululemon”, “Ralph Lauren” and other brands all define the image of the middle class in the media. The masses purchase such brands with the aim of equating their own value with the symbolic value of the "middle class", losing themselves in the pursuit of self-image construction, leading to irrational consumption behavior and becoming a "lamb" to be slaughtered under the manipulation of capital[7]. People have become puppets of consumption. Consumption becomes an activity without a subject[8].

The hashtags such as "immersive homecoming", "living alone vlog", and "a day of a sophisticated girl" frequently dominate the hot list of the REDnote. Bloggers in the videos have elaborately crafted ideal life clips. The entries for such videos are "brave, self-disciplined, strong" topping the list. These words are not only synonymous with the videos but also have an inseparable connection with potential consumption. While consumers are drawn to the positive attitude towards life conveyed by the video, they are unconsciously drawn into the whirlpool of consumerism. The blogger's clothing and skincare products in the video have contributed to the construction of an ideal lifestyle. It’s very likely that consumers will follow the trend and purchase the products shown in the

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video to imitate the consumerist lifestyle and gain social recognition in order to achieve the ideal lifestyle.

## 4. Factors influencing the spread of consumerism on social media

### 4.1. Content marketing

“Seeding” content marketing is a new type of marketing approach that helps consumers solve related problems by providing professional content and holistic analysis of specific products, thereby increasing their willingness to purchase[9]. With the development of social media, “seeding” plays a pivotal role in influencing consumers’ purchasing decisions. Platform users guide consumers to purchase specific products by posting their consumption experiences and sharing usage insights. In traditional marketing, brand owners often invest heavily to deliberately showcase their advantages and reach out to as many people as possible. Compared with traditional marketing, “seeding” gives priority to the pursuit of real experiences, thereby building trust between brand owners and consumers, attracting specific groups and enhancing user stickiness. The REDnote, as an e-commerce platform that focuses on sharing shopping experiences, uses big data to build a content ecosystem and vertical communities, precisely delivering content to target groups and potential users. In this ecosystem, users can share their experiences and exchange shopping experiences with each other. During the process, consumption behavior gradually evolves from an individual activity to a group one, finally into a social activity. The desire to consume is often stimulated through group interaction[9]. Bloggers’ seeding notes typically introduce products truthfully and effectively, attracting consumers to "pull out", that is, complete the "purchase" process. When the buyers’ desire is quenched, they will actively advertise the products to other users, forming a positive cycle of "seeding--putting out--seeding". Meanwhile, buyers thumb up under the seeding notes, forward and back to review, which will also accelerate the exposure of the note. Finally, the positive feedback mechanism shortens the decision-making time in conjunction with efficient seeding.

The professionalism and authenticity of the seeding content have a direct impact on the success or failure of content marketing. In the marketing process, brands usually choose the key opinion leader (KOL to create and disseminate promotional content to target specific markets and people[10]. KOLs influence consumers and influence their purchasing intentions by taking advantage of their traffic and powerful discourse right. They usually have outstanding insights and perspectives in a certain professional field, thus providing product usage experiences more succinctly and writing convincing notes. Secondly, KOLs should prioritize authenticity. Notes without any promotion traces are more likely to build trust with consumers and facilitate purchase decisions.

### 4.2. Anxiety marketing

Anxiety marketing refers to a marketing tactic by which an enterprise activates a certain anxiety of potential audience and provides solutions to alleviate that anxiety to emphasize the value of the product in order to facilitate sales[11]. In a consumer society, symbols are supreme. According to Bourdieu's theory of segregation, people’s consumption choices reflect their social status and personal taste. For consumers who have not been endowed with the “identity” by symbolic values, they are more likely to relieve anxiety through consumption.

“Anxiety marketing” on the REDnote is the main commercialized strategy. By creating a sense of anxiety about a specific problem and then packaging the product as a solution, it attracts consumers

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to make purchases. The most common form of appearance marketing is that opinion leaders create anti-aging anxiety by popularizing skincare concepts and then recommend related products. Based on algorithmic mechanisms, the REDnote constantly exposes users to similar anxiety content, forming information cocoons and exacerbating people's anxiety.

### 4.3. Credit system

The market economy system of “credit purchase” is a transaction method in which goods or money are obtained first by credit and payment is deferred. It provides the material basis for the formation of a consumerist society, which is featured by early consumption. Internet e-commerce platforms, such as Huabei and JD Credit, are chosen by consumers by embedding lending services in consumption scenarios to lower the threshold of consumption. Many people who do not have sufficient financial budget to support decent consumption have to “rob Peter to pay Paul” among multiple lending platforms[2]. In a productive society, labor is for consumption; In a consumption-oriented society, people tend to consume first and then work to fill loan loopholes. The purpose of labor has changed fundamentally.

### 4.4. Guiding advice

As the subject of consumption, people need to clearly recognize that the rational consumption concept is the value necessary for reclaiming their subjectivity and getting rid of the enslavement and shackles of consumerism. The purpose of consumption is not to satisfy one’s own imaginary needs, but to satisfy the indispensable material and spiritual needs for human development, to serve the comprehensive development of human beings[4] as well as to restrain the desires of self-identification brought about by blind consumption and ostentatious consumption. The study also notes that the manifestation of individuality brought about by symbolic consumption is gradually being homogenized in the chain of symbolic representations. Behind the pursuit of individuality is “being individualized” and “having no individuality”. However, the solution is to prioritize the spiritual abundance and wealth over other things while satisfying one's basic survival needs. Secondly, mass media, acting as a medium for the dissemination of symbols and a bridge for the connection between consumers and the value of symbols, bears the heavy responsibility of information dissemination and public opinion guidance. Hence, it must perform its public functions, abandoning consumerism, presenting real consumption information to the public, grasping the correct orientation of public opinion and guiding the public to establish a correct consumption view. The media should not connect online consumption symbolism with consumers, but rational consumption culture with consumers[4].

## 5. Conclusion

Consumerism spreads on the REDnote through hyperreality world, differentiated consumption and brand discipline. These processes are influenced by a combination of factors such as content marketing, anxiety marketing and the credit system. In terms of significance. On the one hand, it has driven economic growth. On the other hand, the negative effects should not be underestimated. The public indulges themselves in symbols and drifts with the current through dazzling display windows, ultimately eroding individuals’ spiritual well-being.

In order to build a correct social consumption ideology, greater emphasis should be placed on spiritual and value-oriented consumption. Moreover, the media are expected to spread the correct

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consumption values and take the responsibility of market supervision. Based on the theory of the Consumer Society, this paper elucidates the dissemination mechanism and influencing factors of consumerism in social media. It enriches the theoretical system of consumerism in the context of social media and provides practical guidance for reshaping the media environment, business norms, cultivating a rational consumer ecosystem.

However, there are still certain limitations. Firstly, this study does not employ empirical research, which makes the conclusions lacking in universality. Secondly, the number of references in this study is limited, affecting the width and depth of the research. Based on this, future research can be enhanced in two ways. On the empirical level, a questionnaire can be used to explore the influencing factors of consumerism, an experimental method to investigate the effect of marketing methods, etc., so as to deeply explore the dissemination patterns and effects of consumerism. On the theoretical level, incorporating a wider range of literature and interdisciplinary perspectives would enable a more comprehensive analysis and provide stronger theoretical support for building a more balanced and reflective consumer culture.

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