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Trendsetting, Cultural Awareness, Cultural Receptivity, and Future Orientation among the Young Generation of Chinese College Students: Trendsetters Critically Matter

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Abstract: Current Chinese college students will become future consumers and fashion leaders. We examined, relying on a survey of 572 Chinese college students, which college students are trendsetters and followers. MANOVA results found four different innovation groups from trendsetters, to early adopters, to late adopters, and to reluctant adopters. ANOVA and regression results also found significant differences in cultural receptivity, cultural awareness, and future orientation between trendsetters and followers. The regression with the quadratic forms illustrated that the impact of trendsetting is not linear and becomes much larger for trendsetters but is almost none for the three follower groups. The piecewise regression revealed that the slope of the followers is flat, implying no relationship between the followers and cultural receptivity, awareness, and future orientation. However, the slope of the trendsetters is steep, implying a strong positive relationship between trendsetters and cultural attitudes such as cultural receptivity, cultural awareness, and future orientation.

Keywords: trendsetting; cultural awareness; cultural receptivity; future orientation; Chinese college students

1. Introduction

In the past decade, the global fashion industry has been significantly impacted by the growing Chinese consumer market. The impact of the Chinese market on the global luxury and fashion industry, in particular, has been rapidly growing [1]. The Chinese market is a diverse market segment of both trendsetting consumers and trend-following consumers. “Trendsetting refers to individuals who are among the first to adopt an innovation and then communicate this effectively to others” [2] (p. 88). An important role of the trendsetters is to discover the potential of an innovation at the beginning of the life cycle and inform others of this potential. Trendsetters play an important role in the adoption–diffusion process for new products (i.e., innovations). Trendsetters influence decisions of later adopters; thus, trendsetters can make a difference in the global fashion industry by fulfilling their traditional role of promoting new fashion styles. Also, they are in a position to take on a new role of endorsing the industry’s mission to be more sustainable [3]. The trendsetters are the consumer segment mainly responsible for the critical impact of the Chinese market. While recent Chinese consumption trends reflect both rational and national preferences, noteworthy features represent pursuit of the integration of beauty and functionality, digital transformation (e.g., ecommerce, mobile payments, and information partnerships), social media connection, and healthy or environmentally friendly tastes [4,5]. Chinese

trendsetters are expected to facilitate the acceptance of notable trends in the Chinese market. It appears that Chinese consumers are fashion-conscious, increasingly open-minded, and more likely to learn and adapt than Western consumers [1]. Chinese innovative consumers have been a crucial group to lead fashion trends in China; Chinese trendsetters also play a critical role in shaping global fashion trends. The future Chinese consumers and fashion trendsetters mainly come from the current college students. Research about cultural attitudes of Chinese college students can allow us to identify who are potential innovative trendsetters and followers. The research can also provide an important insight about critical differences between innovation leaders and followers in terms of cultural values and time preference.

The diffusion theory of innovation has identified heterogeneous groups in terms of innovation adoption [6]. One key finding from the theory is that trendsetters are crucial to lead and shape the characteristics of the diffusion of innovation, but followers are not. Various differences in cultural attitudes emerge from the distinction between trendsetters and followers. Trendsetters are an influential group for new values and ideas, but imitators are not. We tested which Chinese college students are trendsetters and how they are different from followers in terms of cultural values and time preference. It may be possible to speed up adoption and diffusion of new products, thereby increasing sales, by identifying and targeting trendsetters. Previous research has studied trendsetter characteristics such as creative traits, future orientation, and pro-environmental behavior [7] but has not looked at the cultural values of cultural awareness or cultural receptivity. Because of the global reach of business today, it is important to understand how cultural values influence consumer decision making, particularly for trendsetters. Consumer research in various cultures takes on new importance as businesses expand their sales territory to other countries. Thus, this paper explores the degree of trendsetting for Chinese college students and how cultural values or attitudes are related to the trendsetters and trend followers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine relationships among trendsetting, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation among Chinese college students.

2. Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Framework and Theories

Three theories were used as the theoretical framework for this study of how values are related to consumer behavior: Rogers [6] diffusion of innovations theory, Sheth, Newman, and Gross's [8] theory of consumption values, and Hofstede's [9] theory of cultural dimensions. These three theories were chosen because they represent three levels: Individual (diffusion of innovations theory), consumer choice behavior in general (consumption values theory), and culture (cultural dimensions theory) within which the individual consumer operates.

Rogers [6] diffusion of innovations theory has identified heterogeneous groups in terms of innovation adoption. One key finding from research based on the theory is that trendsetters are crucial to lead and shape the characteristics of the diffusion of innovation. Fashion trendsetters, the focus of this research, are also trendsetters in other domains. For example, fashion trendsetters have been found to endorse pro-environmental behaviors [7] and sustainable practices in fashion production [10]. Because trendsetters influence decisions of later adopters, trendsetters can make a difference in the fashion industry's mission to be more sustainable [11].

According to Sheth, Newman, and Gross [8], five consumption values influence consumer choice behavior: Functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional. Functional value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance" (p. 160). If a product possesses salient functional, utilitarian, or physical attributes, then it has functional value. Functional value is recognized as a primary motivator of consumer choice.

Social value is defined as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's association with one or more specific social groups" (p. 161). If a product is positively or negatively associated with stereotyped demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural-ethnic groups, then it has social value. Purchase

of highly visible products such as apparel and accessories (e.g., handbags, jewelry, sunglasses) is often motivated by the social value of such products.

Emotional value is defined as “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity to arouse feelings or affective states” (p. 161). If a product precipitates or perpetuates specific feelings (e.g., sports team apparel such as St. Louis Blues Stanley Cup t-shirts and caps), then it has emotional value. Purchase of such products is often motivated by the product’s emotional value.

Epistemic value is defined as “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty, and/or satisfy a desire for knowledge” (p. 162). If a product is perceived as innovative, novel, or creative, it has epistemic value. Purchase of products that will alleviate boredom with the current product or that will engage a desire to learn (e.g., products designed and produced in another culture), may be motivated by a product’s epistemic value.

Conditional value is defined as “the perceived utility acquired by an alternative as the result of the specific situation or set of circumstances facing the choice maker” (p. 162). If a product’s use is contingent of a situation, it has conditional value. Purchase of seasonal products (e.g., swimming suits, prom dresses), products worn only once (e.g., bridesmaid dresses), or products worn because of a particular condition (e.g., maternity wear) may be considered to have conditional value.

All functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional values are affected by the culture in which a consumer has grown up because he or she has been socialized to have different values (e.g., individualism or collectivism [12]). Hofstede, among others, has conducted cross-cultural consumer behavior research and has found that consumer behavior is significantly affected by cultural values. According to Hofstede’s theory of cultural dimensions [9], there are six cultural values: Individualism, indulgence, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, power distance, and masculinity.

China scores low on individualism (20/100), indulgence (24/100), and uncertainty avoidance (30/100), and high in long-term orientation (87/100), power distance (80/100), and masculinity (66/100). Low scores on individualism point to a collectivist culture in which consumers value conformity and tradition [13]. Low scores on indulgence indicate that China is a restrained society where consumers are constrained by social norms, tend to delay gratification, and emphasize relatively strong control over their desires and impulses [9,14,15]. Low scores on uncertainty avoidance indicate that consumers who have been socialized in these cultures are comfortable with uncertainty, and therefore, are likely to respond positively to new ideas and innovative products. High scores on long-term orientation indicate cultures in which consumers are likely to consider the future in their decisions. High scores on the power distance dimension shows attitudes towards inequality among members of a culture in which inequalities among people are expected and considered acceptable [9,14,15]. A high score on masculinity reflects a society motivated by achievement, competition, and success [9,14,15]. According to Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov [14], and Sheth, Newman, and Gross [8], these values affect consumers’ purchase decisions.

Individual consumer choices are intertwined with cultural values and consumption values. For example, China is a collectivist culture; social consumer values would be consistent with what is best for the group versus the individual. Consumers may submit to pressure to purchase certain fashion objects as evidence of their group’s social status [16]. Although China is a society where consumers are inhibited by social norms and are apt to delay gratification, China’s one-child policy may arouse parents’ emotional value and lead to indulgence of their one child. China’s score on uncertainty avoidance points to consumers who are likely to be motivated by emotional and epistemic values, that is, receptive to novel, creative, and innovative products. China’s score on long-term orientation indicates a culture in which individual consumer decisions are likely to involve functional, emotional, and conditional values as they consider the future in terms of issues such as sustainability and ecological concerns. China’s score on power distance indicates that consumers may be motivated by social values; that is, individual consumer decisions will reflect inequality in social status. China’s score on masculinity also points to social values as consumers decide how best to announce their individual achievements to others.

Individual differences in consumers such as differences in fashion trendsetting, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, future orientation, and gender affect the adoption–diffusion process. Each of these constructs will be defined, and research related to each construct will be presented in the next section.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Fashion Trendsetting

As mentioned in the introduction, trendsetters are the first consumers to adopt a new product and then tell others about it [2]. Fashion trendsetting refers to a specific domain in which the general trait of trendsetting may be manifested. Workman, Lee, and Jung [7] found that Chinese fashion trendsetters scored higher on future time orientation than later adopters. Shen, Qian, and Jiang [17] discovered that Chinese consumers who purchased luxury goods compared with those who did not showed differences in cultural orientation. That is, luxury goods purchasers had greater short-term orientation, were more individualistic, and were more focused on power/status than consumers who did not purchase luxury goods who had greater long-term orientation, were more collectivistic, and were less focused on power/status. Innovative clothing design can be created by transforming intangible cultural values, attitudes, beliefs, traditions, and perceptions into tangible fashion products. Because trendsetters persistently search for new products, are forward-thinking, and eager to purchase innovative products, it is almost certain that innovative designs will attract their attention [18,19]. The successful introduction and promotion of new and innovative products requires an understanding of the culture's impact on consumer adoption or rejection. Therefore, it seems likely that cultural awareness and cultural receptivity might be traits associated with trendsetters.

3.2. Fashion Trendsetting and Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness refers to attentiveness to the values, attitudes, beliefs, traditions, and perceptions within other cultures [20]. According to Cardona, Rico, and Sarmiento [21], cultural awareness refers not only to sensitivity to internal beliefs, values, attitudes, and feelings, but also sensitivity to such external factors as dress. Cultural awareness also includes awareness of the impact of culture on one's own values, attitudes, beliefs, traditions, and perceptions. Individuals with cultural awareness are characterized by traits such as interest in and attention to other cultures. Becoming aware of cultural differences is challenging because culture is embedded in the subconscious. "Since we are born we have learned to see and do things at an unconscious level. Our experiences, our values and our cultural background lead us to see and do things in a certain way" [22] (p. 1). Individuals with cultural awareness view cultural differences as merely differences, not as flaws or problems, and are also aware of cultural similarities.

Trendsetters have been found to have a number of traits that are related to cultural awareness, for example, openness to new experiences, a greater need for variety, experience seeking, less susceptibility to boredom, innovativeness [23–26], ability to cope with change [27], and enthusiastic interest in unusual things [23]. Therefore, it seems likely that trendsetters will be higher in cultural awareness than later adopters.

3.3. Fashion Trendsetting and Cultural Receptivity

Cultural receptivity refers to openness to, and appreciation of, new ideas or different opinions existing in other cultures [28]. Corral-Verdugo et al. [28] (p. 34) conceptualized affinity towards diversity as an "individual predisposition to appreciate the dynamic variety of human–nature interactions in everyday life situations." Cultural receptivity, along with other psychological variables (e.g., future orientation), can reflect an appreciation of variety, which can be a motivation for adopting products that display cultural novelty. Thus, consumers' receptivity to cultural novelty, that is, an individual susceptibility to new products, might inspire innovation.

Trendsetters have been found to have a number of characteristics that are related to cultural receptivity, for example, creative traits and behaviors [7], future orientation, and creative attitudes [29]. Trendsetters' creative attitudes include open-mindedness, flexibility, ability to cope with change, and willingness to tolerate ambiguity—attitudes also associated with cultural receptivity. Thus, it seems likely that trendsetters will be higher in cultural receptivity than later adopters.

3.4. Fashion Trendsetting and Future Orientation

The concept of time is subjective both collectively and individually [30]. For example, individual perceptions of time are affected by an individual's age, culture, and gender role [31–33]. Time orientation, that is, a projection along a linear representation of past, present, and future, is an individually, socially, and culturally created trait. Future orientation is understood as a focus on time to come (e.g., “I think a lot about what my life will be some day”) [30] (p. 365). A future orientation is related to many personal behaviors and outcomes [34,35]. Future orientation is associated with individual traits such as pro-environmental attitudes [36,37], openness to innovation [38,39], ability to cope with change [40,41], sensible risk-taking [42], and tolerance for ambiguity [43]—all traits associated with trendsetters. Cross-cultural differences in future orientation have been found in such countries as China, Germany, Tunisia, and Vietnam. Time orientation has potential to affect consumption behavior; for example, future time orientation increased the emphasis on design as a purchasing criterion [44]. A future time orientation may be especially central to adoption of fashion products that have a limited period during which they may be considered fashionable. Thus, it seems likely that trendsetters will be higher in future time orientation than later adopters.

3.5. Gender Differences in Fashion Trendsetting and Cultural Values

Gender is a socially and culturally created concept that denotes norms, roles, relationships, and characteristics of women and men rather than biological ones. Gender matters in many aspects of risk preferences, trust, and altruism [45,46]. There are still debates on gender differences in justice [47], and other cultural inclinations [48]. For instance, Batinic et al. [2] found no gender differences in trendsetting, but others [2] found that women showed greater fashion trendsetting than men. Women have been found to be significantly more past-oriented than men [30,49]. In addition, research has reported gender differences in extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness [50].

Modern China has improved the empowerment of women's lives in areas of education and work [51,52]. For instance, the communist reforms in China since the 1950s has expanded women's role, especially women's freedom for their family lives with high autonomy. It appears that currently Chinese women enjoy high status and independence compared with past centuries of female subordination. Thus, it seems likely that women will be higher in trendsetting, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation than men.

Little empirical research has examined how gender matters to cultural warmth and distinctiveness. More research is needed because currently, clear knowledge and a definite opinion is lacking about relationships between gender and cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, future orientation, and trendsetting.

4. Research Hypotheses

Trendsetting, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, future orientation, gender, and consumer behavior are linked. That is, the first consumers to adopt innovative products (i.e., trendsetters) are attuned to the emergence of new products and make a purchase intention presumably influenced by cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, future orientation, and gender.

The review of literature revealed that: (a) Gender differences in trendsetting have been found; (b) research has documented the importance of trendsetting, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation to consumer behavior; but (c) research has not examined relationships among these variables. There can be various non-linear relationships between trendsetting and other cultural

values (see Figure 1). The overall picture of diffusion process from trendsetting to early adoption, late adoption, and to reluctant adoption is like a bell curve with several non-linear patterns across different adoption groups. Such nonlinearity is often depicted as a family of S-curves [53]. However, the diffusion process emerges suddenly just after a long process with silence. This appears to be quadratic or piece-wise forms rather than the S-curve. For instance, there may be a distinctive pattern between trendsetters and the followers in terms of the impact of trendsetting on various cultural outcomes. The impact of trendsetting might be much stronger in the group of trendsetters than in the groups of followers [54]. The trendsetters are expected to make the shape and evolution of an S-curve with various potential forms depending on the diffusion characteristics of innovation [54]. They can play a critical role of whether or not new products and ideas can easily or reluctantly be diffused and can have a huge impact on the speed or scope of diffusion process. Figure 1 presents the relationships between trendsetting and cultural attitudes. Based on the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, and review of related literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1a–d: Chinese women will differ from Chinese men in (a) trendsetting, (b) cultural awareness, (c) cultural receptivity, and (d) future orientation.

H2a–c: Chinese trendsetters will differ from later adopters in (a) cultural awareness (b), cultural receptivity, and (c) future orientation.

H3ab: The relationship between trendsetting and cultural awareness might be (a) non-linear with quadratic and piecewise forms and (b) much stronger in trendsetters than in followers including early, late, and reluctant adopters.

H4ab: The relationship between trendsetting and cultural receptivity might be (a) non-linear with quadratic and piecewise forms and (b) much stronger in trendsetters than in followers including early, late, and reluctant adopters.

H5ab: The relationship between trendsetting and future orientation might be (a) non-linear with quadratic and piecewise forms and (b) much stronger in trendsetters than in followers including early, late, and reluctant adopters.

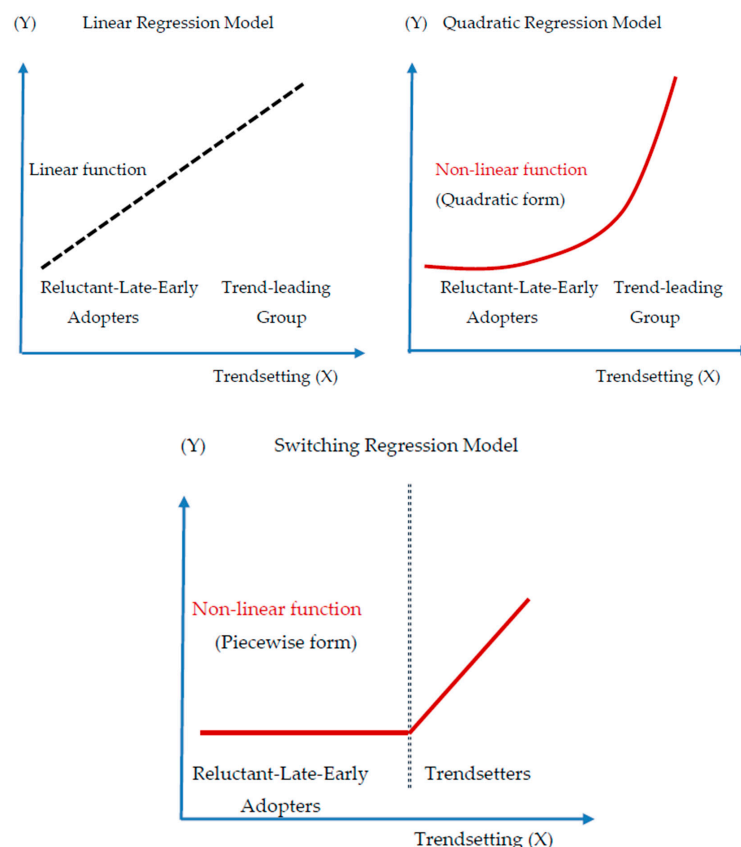


Figure 1. Relationships between trendsetting and cultural attitudes.

5. Research Method and Empirical Models

5.1. Participants

There were more than 26 million college students in China in 2015 (51% female, 49% male) [55]. Therefore, Chinese university students are an important sample for understanding the Chinese market. “Changes in Chinese consumers’ lifestyles and values have a strong impact in the Chinese market” and “globally minded young consumers are exerting disproportionate influence in the market” [56] (pp. v, vi). The consumer decisions they make are influenced by their beliefs and values.

5.2. Materials

A survey questionnaire was chosen as an appropriate method to collect data because no other research method can allow description of the characteristics of a large population and ensure a more accurate sample from which to draw conclusions. The questionnaire contained demographic items and scales measuring trendsetting [2], cultural awareness [20], cultural receptivity [28], and future orientation [30]. The questionnaire was pretested after being translated into Chinese by the widely used back translation method [57]. The trendsetting questionnaire has nine items (e.g., “I often read detailed articles about the latest ideas, trends, and developments in fashion”). Each item was accompanied by a 5-point Likert-type scale. Batinic et al. [2] performed a multiple group confirmatory factor analyses that supported the scale’s unidimensionality and reported acceptable reliability from four samples (85,87,88,91). The cultural awareness scale has two items (e.g., “I am aware of how cultural beliefs, values and sensibilities affect the way others think and behave”). The cultural receptivity scale has two items (e.g., “I enjoy getting together with people of diverse ethnic backgrounds”). Each item was accompanied by a 5-point scale. Future time orientation has four items (e.g., “I think a lot about what my life will be some day”). Each item was accompanied by a 5-point Likert-type scale. For each scale, items were summed to create a continuous variable.

5.3. Analytical Procedure and Models

Chinese university students were surveyed in large lecture classes during May 2018. Participants in the study were a purposive sample of 572 Chinese university students with a mean age of 19.72 (309 females; 258 males; 5 missing data). There were 180 freshmen, 173 sophomores, 108 juniors, and 11 seniors. Among the 572 students, there were 223 students in science and engineering majors, 258 students in business, economics, and law majors, 42 students in other social sciences majors, and 49 students in a humanities major. The students took about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach’s alpha, MANOVA/ANOVA, followed by Student–Newman–Keuls (SNK) posthoc test where appropriate. Cronbach’s alpha for each scale ranged from 0.713 to 0.950, indicating that reliability of the scales was acceptable. Various regression analyses attempted to identify the effect of the degree of the trendsetting on cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation, after controlling for gender, major, and grade in Chinese college students. More specifically, in order to test a non-linear relationship between trendsetting and cultural attitudes, we used regression models with (1) quadratic terms, and (2) piecewise regression. For the quadratic model, we introduced Equation (1). The slope is not constant across different values of the trendsetting variable. If the slope of the quadratic term is positive, it becomes more positive as the degree of trendsetting increases.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 Trend + \beta_2 Trend^2 + \theta_k X_k + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Y = Cultural attitudes (receptivity, awareness, and future orientation);

$Trend$ = The variable of trendsetting measured by trendsetting score;

$Trend^2$ = The square term of Trend (Trend \times Trend);

X_k = Control variables including gender, college major, and grade;

ε = Residual values of the regression equation.

In addition, we applied the piecewise regression mode for the non-linear impact of the trendsetting variable in Equation (2). In the switching regression models, we assume that variables of follower and trendsetter have linear effects within a certain range of their values, but a different linear effect at a different range. The piecewise regression model allows for changes in slope with a structural break. After the point of the structural break, the slope becomes steeper but still flat before the break point (see the switching regression model of Figure 2).

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Follower} + \beta_2 \text{Leader} + \theta_k X_k + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

Follower = The continuous variable of trendsetting including early, late, and reluctant adopters with score range between 9 and 31;

Leader = The continuous variable of trendsetting only including trendsetters with score range between 32 and 45.

6. Empirical Results

6.1. Descriptive Statistics

Participants in this study were a purposive sample of 572 Chinese university students with a mean age of 19.72 (309 females; 258 males; 5 missing data). There were 180 freshmen, 173 sophomores, 108 juniors, and 11 seniors. Among the 572 students, 223 majored in science and engineering, 258 in business, economics, and law, 42 in other social sciences majors, and 49 in humanities. Descriptive statistics of key dependent and independent variables are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and reliability for measures

	Mean	SD	Observed Range Score	Reliability Cronbach's
Trendsetting questionnaire (9 items)	23.29	8.36	9–45	0.950
Cultural awareness (2 items)	8.25	1.46	3–10	0.756
Cultural receptivity (2 items)	7.03	1.58	2–10	0.713
Future orientation (6 items)	21.24	4.59	4–28	0.914

Notes: All the questionnaire items in this table are based on a five-point Likert scale. Principal component analysis shows that both the trendsetting measure and future orientation measure contain only one factor.

We classified four different groups in terms of trendsetting. As recommended by Workman and Lee [49], four fashion trendsetting groups were formed based on the mean and standard deviation (trendsetters $n = 92$; early adopters $n = 184$; late adopters $n = 189$; reluctant adopters $n = 100$). The average scores of the trendsetting group varied from the degree of the trendsetting inclination (see Table 2). The mean value of the highest trendsetting group was 36.24 and of the following groups 27.56, 19.04, and 11.64 (see Table 2). Figure 2 displays the distribution shape of the four groups that is different from the normal distribution. In addition, we divided two groups in terms of the trendsetters and followers (early, late, and reluctant adopters). We assumed that these two groups are different in the degree of cultural attitudes (see the switching regression model at Figure 1).

Table 2. Distribution of trendsetting scores by groups.

Trendsetting Group		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Leader	Trendsetter	92	36.24	3.91	32	45
	Early adopter	185	27.56	2.13	24	31
Follower	Late adopter	189	19.04	2.41	15	23
	Reluctant adopter	101	11.64	1.79	9	14

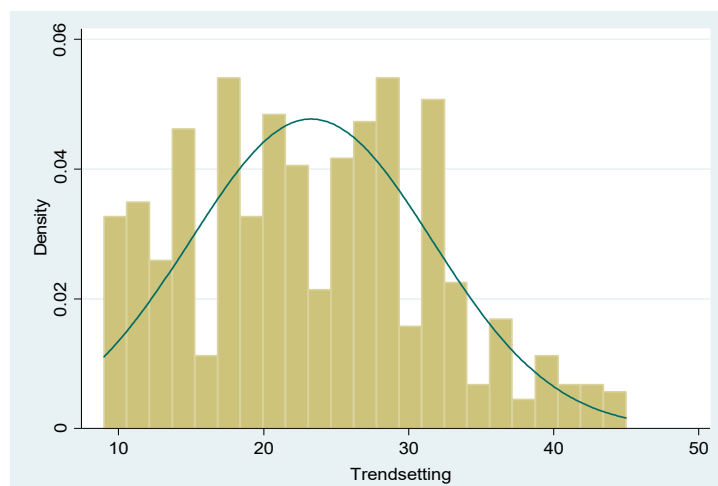


Figure 2. Distribution of trendsetting from reluctant and leading groups.

6.2. ANOVA and Regression Results

ANOVA with gender as the independent variable and trendsetting, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation as dependent variables was significant only for trendsetting. Women ($M = 24.37$) scored higher on trendsetting than men ($M = 21.97$). Chinese men and women did not differ in cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, or future orientation (see Table 3). H1a was supported; H1b–d were not supported.

Table 3. ANOVA results of gender with scores on trendsetting, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation.

Scale	Mean (SD)	Mean Square	F	P-Value
Trendsetting		793.79	11.57	0.001
Men	21.99 (8.59)			
Women	24.37 (8.02)			
Cultural receptivity		0.02	0.009	0.923
Men	7.09 (1.57)			
Women	7.08 (1.56)			
Cultural awareness		3.375	1.66	0.199
Men	8.05 (1.44)			
Women	8.22 (1.49)			
Future orientation		0.25	0.012	0.913
Men	21.34 (4.77)			
Women	21.39 (4.45)			

Notes: Degrees of freedom were 1564 for all variables; 258 men; 309 women. SD is standard deviation.

MANOVA was conducted with trendsetter group as the independent variable and scores on cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation as dependent variables. MANOVA was significant for trendsetter group [$F(9, 51683) = 7.86, p < 0.000$].

ANOVA revealed that Chinese trendsetter groups differed significantly in all three dependent variables (see Table 4): Cultural receptivity, cultural awareness, and future orientation. SNK post hoc test for cultural receptivity revealed that trendsetters scored significantly higher than the other three groups who did not differ from each other. SNK post hoc test for cultural awareness revealed that trendsetters differed significantly from early adopters but did not differ significantly from late and reluctant adopters. SNK post hoc test for future orientation revealed that trendsetters scored higher than early adopters but did not differ significantly from late and reluctant adopters. H2abc received some support in MANOVA/ANOVA results.

In addition, after controlling for gender, college major, and grade, regression analyses also confirmed these results except for the dependent variable of cultural awareness (see Table 5). This

regression model tested the differences from four trendsetting groups based on the reference group of trendsetter. The average scores of cultural receptivity and future orientation were higher in trendsetters than those in the three follower groups ($p < 0.05$). While the average score of cultural awareness was still significantly higher in trendsetters than that in early adopters, the average score of the awareness was not significantly different between trendsetter and the late and reluctant adopters (see Table 5).

Table 4. ANOVA results of trendsetting for scores on cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation.

Scale	Mean * (SD)	Mean Square	F	P-Value
Cultural receptivity		17.99	7.65	0.000
Trendsetters ^a	M = 7.74 (SD = 1.54)			
Early adopters ^b	M = 7.03 (SD = 1.67)			
Late adopters ^b	M = 6.86 (SD = 1.59)			
Reluctant adopters ^b	M = 6.71 (SD = 1.68)			
Cultural awareness		24.45	11.99	0.000
Trendsetters ^{b,c}	M = 8.28 (SD = 1.30)			
Early adopters ^a	M = 7.59 (SD = 1.65)			
Late adopters ^b	M = 8.09 (SD = 1.32)			
Reluctant adopters ^c	M = 8.56 (SD = 1.30)			
Future orientation		70.45	3.37	0.018
Trendsetters ^b	M = 22.46 (SD = 4.24)			
Early adopters ^a	M = 20.59 (SD = 4.34)			
Late adopters ^{a,b}	M = 21.25 (SD = 4.47)			
Reluctant adopters ^{a,b}	M = 21.19 (SD = 5.36)			

Notes: Degrees of freedom were 3561 for all variables. * shows that means sharing the same superscript did not differ significantly from each other. SD is standard deviation.

Table 5. Regression analyses: Testing group difference of trendsetting.

		Dependent Variables					
		Cultural Receptivity		Cultural Awareness		Future Orientation	
		Coefficients	SE	Coefficients	SE	Coefficients	SE
Trend-setting	Early adopters	−0.645 ***	0.197	−0.631 ***	0.181	−1.585 ***	0.580
	Late adopters	−0.830 ***	0.197	−0.205	0.181	−1.190* *	0.579
	Reluctant adopters	−0.975 ***	0.225	0.224	0.207	−1.336 **	0.660
Gender	Male	0.068	0.137	−0.175	0.126	−0.241	0.402
Major	Business & law	−0.057	0.172	−0.239	0.158	−0.709	0.508
	Social Science	0.334	0.275	−0.361	0.252	−0.574	0.807
	Humanities	−0.311	0.246	−1.068 ***	0.225	−3.838 ***	0.722
Grade	Sophomore	0.321	0.197	−0.221	0.180	−0.369	0.580
	Junior	−0.149	0.196	−0.069	0.180	0.196	0.575
	Senior	−0.029	0.200	0.136	0.183	−0.108	0.588
	Intercept	7.624 ***	0.221	8.638 ***	0.203	23.280 ***	0.650
		F (10,556) = 3.71 ***		F (10,555) = 6.42 ***		F (10,555) = 4.08 ***	
		R-squared = 0.063		R-squared = 0.104		R-squared = 0.069	
		N = 567		N = 566		N = 566	

Notes: * for $p < 0.10$, ** for $p < 0.05$, *** for $p < 0.01$. SE = Standard errors of the coefficients. The reference group for the Trendsetting variable is trendsetters. The reference group of Major dummy variables is science and engineering. The reference group of Grade dummy variables is freshman.

6.3. The Non-Linear Effects of Trendsetting and Piecewise Regression Results

We tested whether or not the effects of the four different trendsetting groups were significantly different through introducing regression model with the quadratic term and piecewise regression. First, we confirmed the non-linear effect of trendsetting on cultural receptivity, cultural awareness, and future orientation. Table 6 shows that all the regression coefficients of the quadratic form were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), after controlling for gender, collage major, and grade. This implies

that the effect of trendsetting is increasingly higher as the degree of trendsetting increases, but does not exist before a certain point of trendsetting. This non-linear effect was found in all three dependent variables (see Table 6). We tested whether or not there is a significant difference between the trendsetter group and the other three groups of early, late, and reluctant adopters. After controlling for gender, college major, and grade, we examined two different slopes from the trendsetter group (Leader) and the other group (Follower). Table 7 shows that the slopes (i.e., marginal effects) of the Leader variable were positively significant ($p < 0.001$). On other hand, the slopes of the Follower variable were not significant for the dependent variables of cultural receptivity and future orientation, but negatively significant for the dependent variable of cultural awareness. Overall, the piecewise regression analyses suggest that the effect of trendsetting strongly emerges for the trendsetter group, but not for the other groups of early, late, and reluctant adopters.

Table 6. Regression analyses of Equation (1): Testing the non-linear effects of trendsetting.

		Dependent Variables					
		Cultural Receptivity		Cultural Awareness		Future Orientation	
		Coefficients	SE	Coefficients	SE	Coefficients	SE
Trend-setting	Trend	−0.119 **	0.050	−0.198 ***	0.049	−0.251 **	0.116
	Trend ²	0.003 ***	0.001	0.004 ***	0.001	0.006 **	0.002
Gender	Male	0.082	0.175	−0.118	0.169	−0.312	0.403
Major	Business/law	−0.013	0.219	−0.331	0.212	−0.689	0.506
	Social Science	0.297	0.349	−0.600 *	0.337	−0.658	0.803
	Humanities	−0.722 **	0.312	−1.678 ***	0.301	−3.911 ***	0.719
Grade	Sophomore	0.280	0.250	−0.307	0.241	−0.448	0.578
	Junior	−0.148	0.248	−0.245	0.240	0.192	0.572
	Senior	0.008	0.254	−0.164	0.245	−0.134	0.586
Intercept		11.463 ***	0.619	13.937 ***	0.599	24.359	1.426
		F (9,557) = 5.40 ***		F (9,556) = 6.16 ***		F (9,566) = 4.80 ***	
		R-squared = 0.08		R-squared = 0.076		R-squared = 0.072	
		N = 567		N = 566		N = 566	

Notes: * for $p < 0.10$, ** for $p < 0.05$, *** for $p < 0.01$. SE = Standard errors of the coefficients. Trend is a continuous variable to measure the degree of trend leading from reluctant adopters to trend leading adopters. The reference group of Major dummy variables is science and engineering. The reference group of Grade dummy variables is freshman.

Table 7. Piecewise regression analyses of Equation (2).

		Dependent Variables					
		Cultural Receptivity		Cultural Awareness		Future Orientation	
		Coefficients	SE	Coefficients	SE	Coefficients	SE
Trendsetting	Follower	0.014	0.013	−0.036 ***	0.013	−0.018	0.030
	Leader	0.163 ***	0.044	0.205 ***	0.042	0.307 ***	0.100
Gender	Male	0.089	0.174	−0.111	0.168	−0.306	0.402
Major	Business/law	0.003	0.218	−0.311	0.210	−0.661	0.504
	Social Science	0.295	0.348	−0.605 *	0.335	−0.669	0.801
	Humanities	−0.676 **	0.312	−1.616 ***	0.301	−3.812 ***	0.720
Grade	Sophomore	0.256	0.249	−0.338	0.240	−0.493	0.577
	Junior	−0.156	0.248	−0.257	0.239	0.175	0.571
	Senior	−0.011	0.253	−0.189	0.244	−0.171	0.585
Intercept		10.288 ***	0.346	12.525 ***	0.334	22.342 ***	0.798
		F (9,557) = 5.72 ***		F (9,556) = 6.87 ***		F (9,556) = 5.12 ***	
		R-squared = 0.085		R-squared = 0.100		R-squared = 0.077	
		N = 567		N = 566		N = 566	

Notes: * for $p < 0.10$, ** for $p < 0.05$, *** for $p < 0.01$. SE = Standard errors of the coefficients. Follower includes three groups from early, later, and reluctant adopters. Leader means a group of trendsetters. The reference group of Major dummy variables is science and engineering. The reference group of Grade dummy variables is freshman.

7. Discussion and Implications

Our empirical results revealed that Chinese men and women differed in trendsetting but not in cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, or future orientation. Chinese trendsetter groups differed in cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation. Our findings from this sample of the young generation of Chinese college students identify a strong relationship between trendsetting inclination and cultural awareness, receptivity, and future orientation. Only trendsetters, compared with the other following groups, show their strong preferences in cultural awareness, receptivity, and future orientation.

There is a difference in being attentive to the values, attitudes, beliefs, traditions, and perceptions within other cultures and openness to new ideas or different opinions existing in other cultures. In keeping with their role as the first to adopt a novel product and transmit information about the new product to others, fashion trendsetters were not only oriented toward the future, but were culturally aware and receptive to new ideas from other cultures. These results may reflect the bipolar coexistence of Chinese consumers [51]; that is, globalization has generated a mix of modern (e.g., trendsetters and early adopters) and traditional (e.g., late and reluctant adopters) consumers in the young generation.

7.1. Theoretical Implications

Results of this research supported the notion that the cultural values identified by Hofstede [12] are appropriate as a theoretical foundation for examining differences in future orientation, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and fashion trendsetting among consumers from a low uncertainty-avoidance, collectivist culture. Low scores on uncertainty avoidance indicate that consumers who have been socialized in these cultures are comfortable with uncertainty, and therefore, likely to respond positively to fashion change. However, the value of collectivism (which endorses conformity and tradition) may favor delayed adoption of new fashion products. Results showed that among Chinese young consumers, the proportion of fashion trendsetters was consistent with, and predicted by, Workman and Lee's model of fashion adoption [49]. The model predicted 20% trendsetters, 30% early adopters, 30% late adopters, and 20% reluctant adopters. Among this sample, there were 16% trendsetters, 32% early adopters, 33% late adopters, and 17.5% reluctant adopters. When the model was applied to four sets of data from US college students, Workman and Lee [49] found a slight deviation from the predicted distribution. That is, there was a larger percentage of early adopters than late adopters—a distribution that was skewed slightly to the right. The data from the Chinese sample approximated the normal distribution, which can be explained by Hofstede's theory of individualism/collectivism [12]. That is, in an individualist culture, it might be expected that a greater interest in fashion adoption as a reflection of individual traits would be more likely. However, in a collectivist culture, conformity and tradition would be powerful forces restraining early adoption.

An individual tendency toward trendsetting may be more significant for trendsetters than the cultural value of collectivism. Even in collectivist cultures, consumers can be classified as fashion trendsetters, early adopters, late adopters, and reluctant adopters. One assumption underlying this research was that, through the power of Chinese socialization, participants had low uncertainty-avoidance, collectivist values. In future research, researchers may want to measure the strength of cultural values among individuals by using the collectivism scale [58]. Likewise, the strength of uncertainty avoidance among individuals might be measured by using a risk-taking scale [59].

From a theoretical perspective, results indicated that Sheth, Newman, and Gross's [8] theory of consumption values was useful in explaining consumer behavior, specifically regarding fashion products, among young Chinese consumers. The theory proposes five consumption values that influence consumer choice behavior: Functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional. These five consumption values in combination with cultural values provided explanations for differences between trendsetting groups in future orientation, cultural awareness, and cultural receptivity.

Results also extend the model of adoption and diffusion by finding differences among Chinese trendsetter groups in the theoretical constructs of future orientation, cultural awareness, and cultural receptivity. The trendsetting model of adoption and diffusion has been effective for predicting attitudes and behavior in the applied domains of consumer behavior in cultures such as the US, Korea, and China. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to use the trendsetting model for testing an array of attitudinal and behavioral constructs among consumers from other cultures. Batinic, Wolff, and Haupt's trendsetting scale [2] demonstrated discriminant validity. That is, the scale successfully differentiated Chinese consumers into four fashion trendsetting groups that differed in future orientation, cultural awareness, and cultural receptivity. That is, in China, fashion trendsetters scored higher than groups of later adopters on future orientation, cultural awareness, and cultural receptivity. These characteristics can be listed among the traits that distinguish fashion trendsetters from fashion followers. In every culture, gender, future orientation, cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and fashion trendsetting have relevancy for fashion choices and consumer decision-making.

7.2. Practical Implications

Results of this study confirm that Chinese consumers' values and attitudes can facilitate or impede adoption and diffusion of new products. In particular, identifying and targeting Chinese trendsetters is likely to yield notable results in marketing innovative products. These results might help international corporations or marketers better understand Chinese young consumers within a cultural context. Identifying and targeting trendsetters may allow international marketers to more precisely target this influential segment of the consumer population and develop culture-specific marketing strategies. It is expected that trendsetting in China will have an increasingly substantial impact on global markets. Future Chinese trendsetters are likely to seek innovative products that reflect cultural awareness from a long-term perspective. Chinese trendsetters are also likely to demonstrate social responsibility toward the future generation. Socially responsible marketing with empathy and future vision may attract the attention of Chinese trendsetters.

Results of this research suggest that, among Chinese college students, trendsetters are likely to be culturally aware, culturally receptive, and have a future orientation. These traits of Chinese trendsetters are likely to create new disruptive open innovation from interactions among different cultural and ethnic identities. Recent Chinese innovative digital giants illustrate this performance. For instance, Alibaba, Baidu, and Tencent are rising innovation stars as technological giants in the world. Sustainability is a strong value associated with a future orientation suggesting that trendsetters among Chinese college students will be interested in designs for a sustainable economy and society. Environmental policies reflecting sustainable trends are likely to gain the support of Chinese trendsetters. Trendsetters among the young generation can be counted on to support inclusive social policies against class conflicts and inequality in future China.

7.3. Limitations

This research has several limitations. The sample was a non-probabilistic, purposive, convenience sample and not representative of all Chinese college students; thus, the results cannot be generalized. More specifically, longitudinal data about trendsetting may provide a better validity of causal mechanism between trendsetting and cultural factors. A large-scale comparative survey across countries will allow researchers to identify differences in trendsetting due to national identity.

This study has limitations related to measuring cultural awareness and receptivity. Improving the construct validity still matters to comparative behavioral research on trendsetting and cultural factors across countries. Despite various cultural orientations across countries, there might be common cultural values and beliefs. This study used only two items for cultural awareness and receptivity respectively. Further research is required to improve the degree of validity of measurements such as cultural awareness and receptivity through developing relevant constructs and conducting confirmatory factor analysis across countries.

7.4. Suggestions for Further Research

Further research can develop more theoretically the finding supporting the strong effect of Chinese trendsetters compared with trend followers. Because trendsetting is a social product that modifies meanings, identities, and social interactions, it can be used as a means of exploring various theories of social and economic life [60,61]. Exploring the nature of the trendsetting process as social distinction and imitation mechanisms can expand the theoretical scope of cultural capital and social capital. Further research can also examine how the mechanism of trend formation and diffusion can vary from gender and ethnicity around the world [62]. Much heterogeneity between trendsetters and trend followers might be examined in terms of social status and cultural identity. The relationships between trendsetting and cultural awareness, cultural receptivity, and future orientation are not linear. Research in Asian countries remains relatively sparse concerning identification of trendsetters and their characteristics [63].

The concept of trendsetting can be used to explore its relationship with variables including risk taking, public motivation, and community grassroots movements [64–66]. The desire for distinction resulting from adoption of new trends applies to areas other than fashion, for example, profit aspirations and disruptive innovation [67–69], community innovation [66,70], public service motivation [65], and cultural identity [71]. Further research is needed to explore how trendsetting contributes to risk taking for entrepreneurial opportunities, public motivation for social change, and community innovation of grassroots support for social needs.

Finally, a longitudinal research design can improve internal and external validity of empirical trendsetting research. For instance, a large set of nationally representative survey in Asian countries can test competing hypotheses about trendsetting and cultural values. Longitudinal data for trendsetters and trend followers can provide an opportunity to identify how a causal mechanism of trendsetting characteristics vary from trendsetters and trend followers across countries over time. In addition, cross national research can help illuminate how the impact of trendsetting on cultural values varies from country to country. The comparative approach can contribute to identifying the complicated relationships among values, culture, and trends in a global market.

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