

# The National Identity of Adolescents and Its Impact on Consumption Tendency

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**Abstract:** Adolescence is a critical period of self-identity formation. This study aims to examine the current situation of adolescents' national identity and its influence on the tendency of consumption behavior. Participants and Methods: A total of 711 students from middle schools, high schools and colleges participated in the survey. Participants answered questionnaires assessing their national identity and consumption tendency. Statistical methods were used for data analysis. Results: The results indicate that adolescents have positive national identity, and the identity level of college and junior high school students was significantly higher than that of senior high school students. In the consumption of mobile phones, trainers and bottled water, they are more likely to choose domestic brands, while for computers, they prefer overseas brands. National identity has a significant positive correlation with and a stable predictive effect on adolescents' domestic consumption tendency. Conclusion: This study suggests that adolescents' national identity positively predicts their preference for domestic products in consumption. At the same time, the market share and brand popularity of China's hightech products need to be further increased, which will contribute to the further improvement of adolescents' national identity.

**Keywords:** National identity; Consumption tendency; Adolescents; Consumer goods

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## 1. Introduction

Identity refers to the psychological process of recognizing and imitating the attitudes and behaviors of others or groups to make them a part of individual personality. It reflects a consistent psychological and behavioral response of people, who, as social animals, seek a sense of belonging, intimacy, identity and love<sup>[1]</sup>. With the further development of research on individual identity and social identity, its connotation has undergone sublimation from ethnic or social identity to national identity<sup>[2,3,4]</sup>. National identity is the spiritual activity of “a person confirms that he belongs to that country and what the country is”<sup>[5]</sup>. It is a complex psychological structure system with many components, which can be relatively divided into cognitive component system and affective component system<sup>[6]</sup>.

As a sense of belonging to the political community, national identity is the source of power to enhance

national cohesiveness. However, the construction of national identity is not a fixed state, but a dynamic process embodied in all aspects of people's daily life. It has always been researchers' focus that when individuals begin to realize their national identity, how to build such national identity and what factors make a difference in the construction process<sup>[4]</sup>. National identity has a great impact on individual decision-making<sup>[7]</sup>, and there are significant differences in the level of national identity among people from different countries<sup>[8]</sup>. This difference further explains why Americans "buy American" and Japanese "have a high preference for Japanese goods"<sup>[9]</sup>. Marketing research finds that national image is positively correlated with consumers' purchasing behaviors, and consumers' recognition of national image positively enhances their purchasing intention<sup>[10]</sup>. National identity, to some extent, also counterbalances the influence of world consumerism on the consumption tendency of domestic brands<sup>[11]</sup>. When choosing goods, consumers with high ethnocentrism tend to buy domestic brands, and are biased against foreign brands. They believe that buying foreign products will go against national enterprise and harm their interests, and furthermore, consider it to be immoral, leading to moral conflicts in their mind<sup>[12]</sup>. This tendency is most prominent in the situation that they are under external threat or their country is very strong.

With the development of China's economy and the spread of global consumer culture in China, consumers are changing their attitudes towards goods. Symbol consumption has become an important part in current social and cultural life. The fashion, trendiness and individuality it conveys and creates are widely recognized and pursued by adolescents, these elements constitute a realistic path to know themselves and seek meaning<sup>[13]</sup>. It is worth noting that symbol consumption cannot provide a solid fulcrum for individuals to form a stable, coherent and independent sense of self-identity<sup>[14]</sup>. Adolescence is a critical period for the establishment of self-identity. Adolescents are the future of a country and the hope of a nation, and it is therefore crucial to strengthen their national identity for the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Based on the the "national identity questionnaire" and the "consumption tendency questionnaire", this study investigates the current situation of adolescents' national identity and consumption tendency and the impact of national identity on consumer behavior. Also, it further clarifies the influence of national identity on modeling adolescents' behavior to give a reference for patriotism education in the new era.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

A total of 732 questionnaires were sent out to students from Grade 1 in middle school to Grade 3 in college in Guangzhou and Shenzhen via stratified cluster sampling, and 711 valid questionnaires were collected, including 342 males and 369 females. In terms of grade, there were 80 students (39 males and 41 females) in the first grade of middle school, 77 students (37 males and 40 females) in the second grade; 79 students (35 males and 44 females) in the third grade ; 74 students (36 males and 38 females) in the first grade of high school; 99 students (52 males and 47 females) in the second grade; 98 students (48 males and 50 females) in the third grade; 82 freshmen (38 males and 44 females) in college; 85 sophomores (39 males and 46 females) and 37 juniors (18 males and 19 females).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. National Identity

According to the analysis of interviews and open questionnaires, and referring to existing research documents on national identity and relevant assessment tools, 35 questions of the preliminary questionnaire are comprehensively

compiled. With all items determined, the RAND function in Excel was used to randomize the order of all items. Participants are asked to rate these items using a 7-point Likert scale according to “agree” or “disagree”, fully agree with 7 points, most agree with 6 points, partly agree with 5 points, uncertainty with 4 points, partly disagree with 3 points, quite disagree with 2 points and completely disagree with 1 point. The higher the score was, the higher the participants’ level of national identity. On this basis, a small sample of 100 adolescents was selected for the test, and preliminary exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the results. Unsuitable items in the questionnaire were deleted according to the following statistical indicators<sup>[15]</sup> : (1) Factor loadings were less than 0.40 or exhibited cross-loading; (2) Communality was lower than 0.30; (3) The correlation between project and total score was lower than 0.40. Finally, a questionnaire of national identity for adolescents composed of 12 items was formed, which was of a single dimension.

### **2.2.2. Consumption Preference**

In order to choose suitable consumer goods, the researchers conducted a small sample pre-survey before the formal one, asking a group of adolescents to talk about their opinions on some commonly-used consumer goods. These consumer goods covered four categories: mobile phones, trainers, bottled water and computers. These products were selected because they were the main purchase items for high school students. At that time, there were a number of domestic and foreign brands competing in the Chinese market in all these items.

The brands of each consumer product were selected through the following steps<sup>[16,17]</sup>: (1) Department stores and shopping malls were visited, and the names of all brands of each selected consumer good were recorded; (2) A list of consumer brands was provided to the manager, who helped identify the most or relatively popular brands. A total of 32 brands were selected, with 8 brands (4 domestic and 4 foreign) in each category of consumer goods. Among them, mobile phone brands included Apple, Samsung, Huawei, and Xiaomi, etc; Trainers brands included Nike, Adidas, Li Ning, 361, etc.; Bottled water brands covered Evian, Master Kong, Nongfu Spring and C'est bon, etc.; Computer brands included Apple, HP, Lenovo, Haier and so on. Respondents were asked to evaluate each brand in the above 4 categories of 32 brands using a 7-point Likert scale, scoring them according to their affection from “1= very low” to “7= very high”.

### **2.3. Testing Procedure and Data Analysis**

The formal test lasts about 15 minutes on-site. All data are input, processed and analyzed with SPSS 21.0 and AMOS 18.0 statistical software.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. QualityAnalysis of the National Identity Questionnaire forAdolescents**

#### **3.1.1. Project Analysis**

The correlation between each item and the total score of the national identity questionnaire was defined as the item-total correlation. The item-total correlation coefficients of all items were greater than 0.40, and all reached a significant level ( $r= 0.63\sim 0.90$ ,  $p<0.01$ ; see **Table 1** for details). Therefore, all items are retained. According to the total score of the questionnaire, two groups with high and low scores of 27% are divided, and an independent-samples t-test (to examine item discrimination) was conducted. The results showed that there were significant differences between high and low groups for each item ( $p<0.001$ ), indicating that each item had a high degree of differentiation.

**Table 1.** The Analysis of the Correlation between Each Item and the Total Score of the National Identity Questionnaire

Question	r	Question	r	Question	r	Question	r
1	0.86**	4	0.77**	7	0.90**	10	0.63**
2	0.78**	5	0.85**	8	0.66**	11	0.82**
3	0.77**	6	0.79**	9	0.88**	12	0.87**

Note:\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , the same below.

### 3.1.2. Structure of the Questionnaire

The valid dataset was randomly split into two subsets. The first sample was used for exploratory factor analysis to construct the structural model of adolescent national identity. The second subset was used for confirmatory factor analysis to verify the structural model of adolescent national identity and determine the final structure of the questionnaire.

(1) Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on sample 1 by SPSS 21.0. The  $\chi^2$  value of Bartlett spherical test is 4498.285, reaching the significant level ( $p < 0.001$ ). The KMO value of sampling suitability was 0.961, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. With no limit to factors, the principal component method and the maximal variance orthogonal rotation method were used to get the final factor loading matrix. As shown in **Table 2**, national identity was composed of a single dimension, and 12 items accounting for 71.518% of the total variance.

**Table 2.** The Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis of Adolescent National Identity Questionnaire

Question	Load	Communality	Question	Load	Communality
1	0.938	0.806	7	0.845	0.879
2	0.924	0.683	8	0.827	0.652
3	0.918	0.679	9	0.824	0.843
4	0.898	0.654	10	0.809	0.617
5	0.897	0.797	11	0.672	0.804
6	0.893	0.714	12	0.646	0.854
Characteristic Value				8.582	
Contribution Rate				71.518%	

(2) Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on sample 2 by AMOS 18.0. The results show that the model fit indices were  $\chi^2=235.12$ ,  $df=103$ ,  $\chi^2/df=2.28$ , GFI=0.93, AGFI=0.90, IFI=0.95, TLI=0.94, CFI=0.92, RMSEA=0.05. It can be seen that the main model fit indices of the formal questionnaire met the requirements of psychological measurement, and the standardized factor load of each item was greater than 0.5, reaching a significant level, which indicated that the formal questionnaire of national identity of adolescents has good structural validity.

### 3.1.3. Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient and split-half reliability coefficient of the formal questionnaire were examined. The results show that the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of the questionnaire is 0.94, which indicates that the questionnaire has high internal consistency. The split-half reliability coefficient of the questionnaire is 0.93, demonstrating good equivalence of

the scale. In general, the National Identity Questionnaire for Adolescents has high reliability.

### 3.2. Analysis on the Status Quo of Adolescents' National Identity

There were 12 questions in the National Identity Questionnaire, each with a maximum of 7 points and a minimum of 1 point. The highest score was 84, and the lowest was 12, and the midpoint was 48. In order to understand the national identity preference of adolescents, a paired-samples t-test was conducted between the average and the midpoint 48. The average score was 74.03, which was significantly higher than 48 ( $t=57.31$ ,  $df=710$ ,  $p <0.01$ ), showing that adolescents held a positive attitude toward national identity.

The differences in national identity of adolescents in different learning periods (middle schools, high schools and colleges) are compared, with the results presented in Table 3. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in national identity across the three groups( $F (2, 708) =8.14$ ,  $p <0.01$ ). Post-hoc multiple comparisons (see **Table 4**) indicated no significant difference in national identity between college students and junior high school students. By contrast, a remarkable difference was found in the total national identity score between college students and senior high school students( $I-J=5.30$ ,  $p <0.01$ ). Similarly, a significant difference was observed between junior high school students and senior high school students ( $I-J=5.35$ ,  $p <0.01$ ). Notably, both college students and junior high school students demonstrated significantly higher levels of national identity than senior high school students, which is also illustrated in **Table 3**).

**Table 3.** Comparison of National Identity of Adolescents in Different Learning Periods

Learning Periods		M	SD	F	Comparison
National Identity	Middle School(236)	80.62	12.43	8.14**	College>High School Middle School>High School
	High School(271)	65.12	11.90		
	College(204)	78.35	12.36		

### 3.3. Analysis of the Status Quo of Adolescents' Consumption Tendency

The average score for each brand was calculated and ranked from highest to lowest for each category (shown in **Table 4**). Among them, the top three preferred brands for mobile phones were: Huawei, Apple and Xiaomi; The top three preferences for trainers were: Nike, Adidas and Li Ning; The top three preferences for bottled water were: Nongfu Spring, Snow Mountains and Watsons. The top three preferences for computers were: Apple, Lenovo and HP.

**Table 4.** Adolescents' Consumption Tendency

Mobile Phone			Trainers			Bottled Water			Computer		
Brand	Preference	Ranking	Brand	Preference	Ranking	Brand	Preference	Ranking	Brand	Preference	Ranking
SONY <sup>f</sup>	3.30	7	Li Ning	4.59	3	Master Kong <sup>f</sup>	4.14	8	Lenovo	4.82	2
OPPO	3.18	8	ANTA	4.45	5	Nestle <sup>f</sup>	4.35	5	Haier	4.11	6
Xiaomi	4.46	3	New balance <sup>f</sup>	4.52	4	Wahaha	4.17	7	Apple <sup>f</sup>	4.99	1
Huawei	5.71	1	Adidas <sup>f</sup>	5.05	2	Nongfu Spring	5.52	1	HP <sup>f</sup>	4.52	3
Motorola <sup>f</sup>	3.51	6	ERKE	3.83	7	Watsons <sup>f</sup>	4.41	3	ACER <sup>f</sup>	4.21	5
Vivo	3.95	4	PEAK <sup>f</sup>	3.72	8	Evian <sup>f</sup>	4.23	6	Founder	4.07	8
Samsung <sup>f</sup>	3.76	5	NIKE <sup>f</sup>	5.21	1	Snow Mountains	4.52	2	Samsung <sup>f</sup>	4.10	7
Apple <sup>f</sup>	4.95	2	361	4.42	6	C'estbon	4.40	4	Huawei	4.39	4

Note: The brands marked f are foreign or overseas brands(Hong Kong and Taiwan region). Others are local brands.

A t-test was carried out after classifying domestic and foreign brands in each category of consumer goods. The results show that the preferences of the four types of domestic brands and foreign brands were significantly different (shown in **Table 5**). Among them, adolescents were more inclined to consume domestic brands in mobile phones, trainers and bottled water( $t=9.09, p < 0.001$ ;  $t=10.80, p < 0.001$ ;  $t=41.49, p < 0.001$ ), while they preferred to buy computers of foreign brands ( $t=-4.53, p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 5.** Comparison of Domestic and Foreign Consumption Tendency of Adolescents

Consumer Goods		M	SD	T	Consumer Goods		M	SD	T
Mobile Phone	Domestic Brand	17.30	5.31	9.09***	Bottled Water	Domestic Brand	22.75	6.84	41.49***
	Foreign Brand	15.52	5.58			Foreign Brand	17.68	5.86	
Trainers	Domestic Brand	21.01	7.61	10.80***	Computer	Domestic Brand	17.20	5.77	-4.53***
	Foreign Brand	18.50	5.68			Foreign Brand	18.00	5.93	

### 3.4. The Impact of Adolescents' National Identity on Consumption Tendency

The correlation analysis between national identity and consumption tendency of domestic brands in each category shows that: Domestic mobile phones ( $r=0.327, p < 0.01$ ), domestic trainers ( $r=0.311, p < 0.01$ ), domestic bottled water ( $r=0.317, p < 0.01$ ), domestic computers ( $r=0.313, p < 0.01$ ) and the total score of domestic products consumption tendency ( $r=0.371, p < 0.01$ ) all showed a significant positive correlation with national identity.

In order to further study the relationship between the national identity of adolescents and the consumption tendency of domestic products, a univariate regression analysis was performed one by one (shown in **Table 6**) with the total score of the consumption tendency of domestic mobile phones, trainers, bottled water, computers and all four brands as dependent variables, with national identity as a predictor variable. At the same time, gender and grade were selected as control variables, which, in previous studies, have been proved to have an impact on consumption tendency<sup>[18]</sup>. The results showed that national identity significantly positively predicted adolescents' domestic consumption tendency, indicating that the higher the degree of national identity was, the more likely adolescents were to choose domestic brands.

**Table 6.** The Impact of National Identity on Adolescents' Consumption Tendency

	Domestic Mobile Phone( $\beta$ )		Domestic Trainers( $\beta$ )		Domestic Bottled Water( $\beta$ )		Domestic Computer( $\beta$ )		Consumption Tendency of Domestic Products( $\beta$ )	
	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Demographic Variable										
Gender	0.68	0.62	0.06	-0.03	-0.12	-0.20	0.12	0.05	0.74	.446
Period	0.11	0.39	-0.60	-0.23	-0.24	0.09	-0.36	-0.08	-1.09	0.162
Independent Variable										
National Identity			0.14***		0.19***		0.17***		0.14***	0.64***
F Value	1.47	25.18***	1.16	21.90***	0.25	21.42***	0.75	20.36***	0.57	31.251**
$R^2$	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.09	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.12
$\Delta R^2$	0.00	0.09	0.00	0.08	-0.00	0.08	-0.00	0.08	-0.00	0.12

## 4. Discussion

Nowadays, transnational social activities in the areas of economic, political and cultural fields are increasingly frequent, under the background of economic globalization, world multi-polarization and cultural diversification. Countries are closely connected, which makes the national identity representing the legitimacy of the nationstate and its construction face enormous challenges<sup>[19,20]</sup>. The basic values formed in adolescence shape the value orientation of a person's whole life<sup>[21]</sup>. As students grow older, their national identity declines<sup>[22]</sup>. The study found that the national identity of college students and middle school students was significantly higher than that of high school students. The reason for this change may be the heavy study pressure and the short-sighted utilitarian mechanism of higher education. In high school, with the pressure of college entrance examination, students spend more time in textbook learning and little time in participating in the national political life. Their understanding of the relationship between individuals and the country, as well as national politics, economy, culture and social life are often confined to book knowledge and perceptual understanding<sup>[23]</sup>. Therefore, in the process of multicultural identity, it is urgent to promote mainstream cultural identity education with national culture as the core<sup>[24]</sup>.

As an important link for maintaining a country's existence and development, national identity does not form through a spontaneous process of self-awakening; instead, it requires education, especially the promotion of civic awareness education in schools<sup>[25]</sup>. For example, the United States has set up social study courses in K-12 period, which integrate American spirit and multiculturalism, and helps students develop American values, identify with and love America<sup>[26]</sup>. Russia pays attention to integrating national identity education into language, history and other courses. In the new history textbook Russia launched in 2016, the will and authority of the state are clarified, and the achievements of national history and culture are affirmed, so as to promote students' national identity<sup>[27]</sup>. In educational practices, it is necessary to design a set of scientific and effective educational methods, such as national culture identity education, historical identification education, patriotism education, etc., to cultivate adolescents' common sense of national identity<sup>[28,29]</sup>. With national identity education, adolescents should be guided to form common values, consciously overcome the centrifugal force of cultural diversity on political identity, further enhance their confidence in the path, theory, system and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and establish a strong sense of mission, responsibility and belonging to the country.

It is worth noting that in the context of globalization global consumerism has made consumption become the external symbol of "self-identity", and self-identity has become the internal basis of consumption<sup>[30]</sup>. The result is that people consciously or unconsciously weaken or replace social and collective identity of the nation with self-identity<sup>[31]</sup>. To this end, this study aims to reveal the stability and effectiveness of adolescents' national identity by examining the potential impact of their national identity on their consumption tendency. The research outcome presents that, no matter low-priced bottled water or high-priced mobile phones, adolescents tended to buy domestic brand products, and the national identity was significantly positively correlated with the consumption tendency of domestic brand products. Further analysis found that adolescents' national identity can effectively predict domestic consumption tendencies. National identity is a set of meanings contained in a particular culture that distinguishes it from other cultures<sup>[9]</sup>, and the products and brands of a country are also carriers of national culture communication. The connotation contained in the purchase and use of domestic products and brands is embodied by consumers, which can give them a sense of national identity. In particular, when these products and brands are sold nationwide rather than just in a single place, the purchase and use

of these same products can give consumers a sense of connection with national culture rather than a local subculture.

However, in the case of computers, the study found that adolescents tend to purchase foreign brands. After analysis, it is clear that the reason why adolescents choose western brands is that these brands have clear global brand status, and are world-famous brands. Not only do these western brands have higher quality and are technically superior to domestic brands in technique, but they have been in the Chinese market for a long time and even have a greater impact in market than their domestic counterparts. As a consumer group, adolescents' choices are not always rational. Quality and popularity have important impacts on their consumption tendency. For this reason, we need to emphasize the cultural "difference" rather than the sense of identity attributed to international brands by public voice, education and other measures<sup>[32]</sup>. At the same time, it is necessary to further improve the market share and brand awareness of domestic high-tech products, which are obviously helpful to further enhance the national identity of adolescents.

As one of the most important daily behaviors of individuals, consumer behavior undoubtedly has a subtle influence on forming national identity. Some studies have shown that consumers' national identity means that they will consume products related to their national identity<sup>[33]</sup>. Domestic brands often benefit from consumers' high level of national identity<sup>[34]</sup>. Most Chinese companies focus more on providing consumers with costeffective products and less on building brand equity. In the era of globalization, enterprises should consciously create and produce brand products linked with national identity, and embed or emphasize the concept of national culture in the marketing strategies, so as to enhance consumers' preference and choice of the brand. Of course, in real life, consumers' preference for domestic brands will be affected by multiple factors, such as consumer personality (demographic characteristics, value characteristics) and brand characteristics, and national identity may be only one of the value characteristics of consumers. When other factors, such as the brand awareness of mobile phones, play a stronger role in some products, it is not surprising that consumers have preferences for domestic brands, which are affected by multiple factors.

## 5. Conclusion

The reliability and validity indices of the national identity questionnaire meets the requirements of psychometrics and can be used as a short and reliable measurement tool for the study of national identity among adolescents. On the whole, the national identity of adolescents shows a positive growing trend. In the assessment of national identity, college students and middle school students were significantly more positive than high school students. Adolescents were more likely to buy mobile phones, trainers and bottled water of domestic brands, while they tended to choose computers of foreign brands. National identity has a stable predictive effect on adolescents' domestic consumption tendency.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of the study include the following three points: first, the questionnaires in this paper were all filled out by adolescents, which may have the issue of common method variance. Future research could address this issue by incorporating experimental designs. Second, this study only examines the direct impact of national identity on adolescents' domestic consumption tendencies. Future studies could explore the underlying mechanisms of this relationship to enrich the existing literature. Finally, it should be noted that national identity

questionnaire should expand test and establish a more extensive and representative norm although it has good reliability and validity indicators.

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## Ethical Statement

The Ethics Committee at School of Innovation and Creation Design, Shenzhen Polytechnic University supports the practice of protection of human participants in this research. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Before the survey, all participants were explicitly told that they would be asked to fill out questionnaires and answer some questions. Participation was solicited on a strictly voluntary basis.

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