

# The Awakening of Gender Consciousness Significantly Influences the Brand Selection Behavior of Female Consumers

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**Abstract.** This study, grounded in the context of women's heightened gender consciousness within the new media environment, investigates the mechanisms through which this consciousness influences women consumers' brand selection behavior. Through a literature review and comparative analysis of multiple cases, this paper identifies three key dimensions of gender consciousness awakening in female consumer behavior: a shift in brand choice preferences from function-oriented to value-driven; a dual nature of brand loyalty characterized by high identification and high criticism; and a more autonomous and research-driven decision-making process. The research further proposes a theoretical model of "gender consciousness awakening – brand perception reconfiguration – consumption behavior change," which elucidates the underlying psychological pathway through which heightened awareness translates into changes in consumption behavior. The research results indicate that female consumers with heightened gender consciousness place significant emphasis on value alignment when selecting brands, particularly regarding the authentic expression and implementation of gender equality and social responsibility initiatives. Furthermore, awakened female consumers exhibit caution toward "feminist marketing" and actively oppose the misuse of concepts and the propagation of false narratives. This article recommends that brands move beyond superficial "she marketing" and instead embed gender consciousness throughout the entire process of product design and communication. By fostering authentic narratives, value co-creation, and ethical practices, brands can establish deep resonance with gender-conscious female consumers. This research not only enriches the theoretical understanding of feminist consumer behavior but also provides practical guidance for brands seeking to develop effective marketing strategies in the era of the "she economy."

**Keywords:** New media; gender consciousness awakening; female consumer behavior; brand selection; feminist marketing.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the rise of the third wave of feminism has facilitated the gradual penetration of "gender consciousness awakening" into the realm of consumption, emerging as a critical psychological mechanism that influences women's purchasing decisions and reshapes the underlying logic of their consumer behaviors. Within this context, the interplay between "feminist narrative" and the burgeoning "her economy" has propelled the ongoing evolution of brand marketing strategies. Notably, market practices targeting "awakened female consumers" have garnered widespread attention, reflecting the shifting priorities and values in contemporary consumer culture.

Currently, the interaction between female consumers' gender consciousness and traditional consumption motivations—such as the shift from function-oriented selection to value resonance—during the brand selection process remains insufficiently explored, revealing a significant theoretical gap. Meanwhile, products marketed with "female consciousness" as their core have become increasingly diverse, yet questions persist regarding the sustainability of such strategies for long-term brand development. Specifically, there is concern that excessive reliance on conceptual narratives may obscure the intrinsic value of products and potentially provoke consumer aversion. Systematic research and critical evaluation are urgently needed. Furthermore, when the target consumer group encounters marketing centered on "female consciousness," the relative weight they assign to brand philosophy versus perceived product value—and how this balance influences brand pricing strategies, such as acceptance of premium pricing and sensitivity to price changes—warrants in-depth analysis.

Based on the above background, this study aims to explore the following core issues: the specific manifestations of gender consciousness awakening in female consumer behavior, including brand selection preferences (such as the expansion from traditional product categories to female-oriented technology products), changes in brand loyalty (characterized by the coexistence of high loyalty and diverse experimentation), and the consumption decision-making process (for example, an increased reliance on independent research). The core considerations for awakened female consumers during brand selection encompass factors such as the degree of value alignment (including a brand's commitment to social responsibility and gender equality advocacy), the practicality of product functions, and the brand's social image (as reflected in public opinion and industry status), with attention to their priority ranking. Furthermore, this study investigates whether current brand marketing strategies (such as narrative authenticity and channel compatibility) and product adaptations (including functional design and scenario creation) effectively address the needs arising from the awakening of female gender consciousness, as well as identifying existing supply gaps and opportunities for innovation.

The present study holds significant theoretical value in that it contributes to the field of feminist consumer studies by providing a theoretical perspective on the correlation between gender consciousness awakening and female consumer behaviour. In addition, it serves as a valuable source of reference for brand marketing practices. This approach assists enterprises in comprehending female consumer demands with greater precision, optimising their product, marketing and pricing strategies, and consequently fostering the growth of the female consumer market in a direction that is healthier and more value-relevant.

## 2. Literature Review

In the domain of consumer research focused on female consumers, three predominant approaches have been identified.

Firstly, the focus is on the role of women as the subjects of control, surveillance and objectification in the consumption context. Bratky asserts in her work *The Pedagogy of Shame* that women universally experience a form of systemic socialisation that is characterised by the formation of an internalised conception of 'otherness' and a concomitant acceptance of their perceived inferior status in society and their bodies" [1]. This standpoint has been further elaborated by Beauvoir. The well-known "women are shaped tomorrow" theory emphasises that women's subjectivity is shaped by various social mechanisms, such as schools, families and the media. The purpose of this theory is to place women in a position of service and entertainment, which reveals the cultural and institutional origins of gender construction and makes a significant contribution to the study of women's movements. However, the theory has certain limitations in its application. While it effectively reveals the oppressive mechanisms, it does not adequately address women's capacity to act as active agents, resist, negotiate and self-empower. Additionally, in her article *Empowerment/sexism: Figuring female sexual agency in contemporary advertising*, Gill analysed the covert oppression exerted by consumer culture on women. It has been asserted that, in contemporary society, women are no longer merely passive objects of male gaze; rather, they are often depicted as active, independent individuals with a strong sense of sexual subjectivity [2]. Utilising the theoretical framework of structural feminism, this research elucidates the evolution of "sexual autonomy" into a novel disciplinary mechanism, thereby offering substantial theoretical insights for feminist media studies and advertising criticism.

Secondly, the empowerment path emphasises the female subjectivity and focuses on the process by which women achieve choices and resistance through consumption. As Scott noted in *Only paradoxes to offer: French feminists and the rights of man* that "On the one hand, it is essential for them to assert that gender differences have no bearing on citizenship and to strive for universal equal rights; On the other hand, however, by representing the "female" group, it inevitably introduces and reinforces the very notion of differences that it aims to eliminate [3]. This structural contradiction constitutes the fundamental tension in the history of the struggle for civil rights of women. The present

paper employs the analytical framework of "the paradox of gender differences" in order to reinterpret the historical evolution of French feminist thought and practice. It reveals the inherent tension between the discourse of free democratic life and the gender order, providing a valuable contribution to feminist research. However, it may underestimate the theoretical aspect of the binary opposition and the reconstruction of the concepts of subject and citizen that occurred in certain historical contexts in the process of feminist breakthroughs. In *Marketing and feminism in historic perspective*, Maclaran evaluated the core debate regarding whether marketing activities are "exploitative" or "empowering" towards women [4]. He provided a systematic historical perspective on marketing's treatment of female consumer groups. By situating the feminist critique and acceptance of the market within a dynamic ideological evolution, he proposed a preliminary framework for understanding the evolution of gender discourse in marketing activities.

The cultural practice approach is predicated on the premise that consumption can be regarded as a domain for female cultural expression and self-construction. In his work *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: commodification, consumption, and cleanliness in modern Zimbabwe*, conducted a study on post-World War I Zimbabwe, delving deeply into the formation mechanism of commodity culture in the colonial context [5]. This research, employing a cross-disciplinary approach integrating history, anthropology and political economy, examined the intricate intertwinement of the process of commodification with hygiene concepts, racial structures, gender order and family life. The study emphasised the pivotal role of advertising and shifts in consumption patterns in shaping the social structure of modern Zimbabwe. Simultaneously, Üstüner and Holt published their research in the academic journal *Dominated consumer acculturation: The social construction of poor migrant women's consumer identity projects in a Turkish squatter* has highlighted that "women encounter a complex situation when they are confronted by a consumer culture that is dominated by patriarchal mainstream ideologies, particularly in contexts where resources are scarce and in direct conflict with their own cultural values" [6]. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its departure from the traditional cultural adaptation theory's dualistic framework. It reveals that in contexts where power and resources are significantly imbalanced, consumer cultural adaptation is not merely a process of assimilation or resistance. Instead, it is a complex, dynamic and multifaceted process characterised by intricacy, strategy and tragedy. The study incorporates a range of factors, including social class, gender and regional differences, into the consumer research paradigm, thereby enriching the theoretical framework of consumer culture. The theoretical framework of Culture Theory offers significant insights into the practice of understanding the identities of marginalised groups, particularly in the context of immigration studies, the study of consumption in contexts of poverty, and the application of cross-cultural marketing strategies.

The majority of extant studies concentrate on domains such as political actions, public participation, and educational choices, exploring the manifestation of gender consciousness awakening at the macro level of society. However, there is a paucity of empirical research on consumption behaviour based on "gender consciousness awakening", which makes it difficult to accurately ascertain the dynamic relationship between consciousness awakening and consumption decisions. Furthermore, there is a lack of attention to the response mechanism of the feminist perspective in brand selection, and it is unclear how brands should adapt from concept to practice to meet the demands of the awakening of women's gender consciousness. This article will fully incorporate cross-dimensional factors such as class and age. In the field of consumption, the present study will conduct more in-depth research on the systematic measurement of the "gender consciousness" variable (for example, constructing a quantitative evaluation model) and behaviour-oriented research (for example, how to drive consumption decisions), thereby filling the gaps in existing research. Meanwhile, previous studies have mainly analysed women's preferences from dimensions such as gender stereotypes and social expectations, but have overlooked the profound influence of women's active consciousness and identity politics on the underlying logic of their choices. The exploration of the transformation in women's preferences for brands that break

stereotypes and align with their own value propositions after the awakening of gender consciousness has not been fully realised, leaving room for further deepening.

### **3. The Process of Case Reconstruction and Analysis**

#### **3.1. The Allure and Tension of a Narrative Characterised by a Pronounced Female Subjectivity**

It is evident that consumers who are highly alert to such issues regard the purchase of Ubras as a means of expressing their conviction in the "no-size/no-steel-ring" concept. The consumption behaviour of these individuals transcends the functionality of the product, metamorphosing into a symbolic gesture of "body autonomy" and "breaking free from constraints". The brand has been successful in elevating the product features to a social declaration, thereby triggering strong emotional resonance and generating word-of-mouth promotion. It is possible to regard Ubras' marketing strategy as a form of "commercialized empowerment". As has been demonstrated, consumers are able to identify with the brand's narrative of breaking the body's discipline [1]. However, the brand is also critical of the notion that it has transformed feminist concepts into mere marketing tools, thus falling into the typical contradiction of "post-feminism" – advocating empowerment while being constrained by commercial logic [2]. The high repeat purchase rate is driven by shared beliefs, while the criticism of "excessive marketing" reflects consumers' ongoing scrutiny of the authenticity of the narrative. The integration of consumers into a brand-specific value community is a pivotal aspect of this phenomenon. The "small pink logo" design and charitable actions of the organisation profoundly reflect the "special attention to women's health" and the "gentle yet firm" characteristics of feminist design at the local level [7]. This enables it to transcend its role as a mere functional product, thereby becoming a medium for consumers to express their values. The present study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding the criticism of traditional female body norms. This serves to illustrate the potent function of consumption as a "cultural expression" [8].

#### **3.2. Uniqlo — 'Neutral Expression' and the Space for Negotiation**

Uniqlo's appeal lies in its ability to attract consumers who espouse a "genderless" ideology and who are averse to overly feminine narratives, a demographic that the brand caters to through its basic designs and gender-neutral approach. The appeal of the Bauhaus movement lies in its indirect conveyance of values such as equality and freedom, achieved through the principles of "simplicity" and "functionality".

The strategy employed by Uniqlo does not explicitly proclaim feminism; rather, it implicitly embeds the concept of equality in its product design. In order to comprehend this narrative, consumers must possess the relevant cultural capital, a concept which is in alignment with the definition of the cultural practice approach regarding consumption as a field for meaning construction. The criticism that the narrative is "too obscure" can be attributed to the fact that consumers with varying degrees of "awakening" possess different abilities to interpret brand codes. The appeal of the female brand is rooted in the indirect transmission of values of equality and freedom through the concepts of "simplicity" and "functionality". Following the paradigm shift, the selection logic of female brands has undergone a transition from the traditional "appearance level - cost-effectiveness - quality" to "values - expression - resonance". Brand values such as "respect for women", "refusal of gaze", and "advocacy of equality" have become key variables in decision-making processes. In this process, consumers engage in a typical "negotiation" with the brand [3]. They may not be completely satisfied with the brand's silence on gender issues, but they purchase its products because they recognise the "de-labeling" substantive value it embodies. Concurrently, the brand is being called upon to articulate its position in a more explicit manner via social media and other such channels. This is a multifaceted phenomenon involving a dynamic interplay of "voting with consumption and supervising with voices".

### 3.3. Longines - The Diversification and Challenges of the "Traditional Elegance" Positioning

Longines, a traditional luxury brand, has a narrative of "classicism and elegance" that is deeply linked to specific gender traits. A schism has emerged among awakened consumers. On one side are those who continue to align with the brand's conventional aesthetic values and product standards. On the other are those who have gravitated towards competing brands, citing the brand's role in perpetuating traditional gender roles as a key factor in their decision-making. The brand equity of Longines is founded on traditional social order and gender norms [1]. The Awakening trend has transformed this component of brand equity into a "liability" in the eyes of some consumers, resulting in the fragmentation of the consumer identity project [6]. The fundamental challenge faced by traditional brands is how to "re-code" their narratives while preserving their core heritage, in order to respond to new gender concepts and avoid being labelled as "outdated" or "conservative".

It is imperative to recognise that consumers have the capacity to identify and resist gender inequality marketing, such as the refusal to purchase products from brands that utilise "objectifying female" advertisements (where women are portrayed as objects of the male gaze). This criticism is expressed through the consumer's choices. However, complex behavioural patterns have also been observed. It has been observed that some women may, on occasion, make a temporary "compromise" in their gender narrative in order to align with a brand's prevailing values, such as its emphasis on technological capabilities. This alignment may be achieved through the utilisation of social media platforms as a means to advocate for the enhancement of the brand, thereby fostering a symbiotic relationship characterised by both consumption and supervision.

## 4. Theoretical Refinement

Utilising the aforementioned case study, this article proposes a model framework of "Gender Consciousness Awakening → Brand Cognitive Reconstruction → Consumption Behavior Change", and conducts an analysis according to the case

Firstly, taking Ubras as a case study, its awakening-driven cognitive reconfiguration prompts consumers to re-interpret the brand meaning of Ubras, driven by the awakening of high gender consciousness. Its functional perception of the "no steel ring" design is no longer merely "comfortable", but is interpreted as a "political statement and value cognition" that "opposes physical discipline" and "pursues physical autonomy" [1]. Concurrently, this cognitive reconfiguration engenders behavioural changes, and, consequently, consumption behaviours are also modified in accordance with this novel cognition. The act of purchasing has evolved beyond the realm of mere product exchange; it has metamorphosed into a medium of value endorsement and an identity project.

Secondly, taking Uniqlo as an example, awakening-driven cognitive reconfiguration has heightened consumer awareness, enabling a deeper understanding of the brand's implicit values. Its gender-neutral designs, use of eco-friendly materials, and RE. UNIQLO workshops are interpreted as ethical practices reflecting principles of "equality," "sustainability," and "responsible consumption" [9]. Concurrently, cognitive restructuring engenders behavioural changes, which in turn give rise to a transformation of the logic of consumption decisions. Consumer awareness of environmental issues has led to a marked increase in the demand for recycled products, and there is growing evidence of a willingness to participate in the transformation of old clothes. The consumption behaviour of consumers can be viewed as a means of constructing their ethical identity (or "ethical selfhood", as defined by Crockett). This shift in decision-making from "practicality" to "ethics" is indicative of a growing emphasis on moral values in consumer behaviour.

In conclusion, it is evident that the prevailing marketing context of Longines necessitates a cognitive reconfiguration. The elevated level of arousal experienced by consumers has prompted a critical re-evaluation of the brand identity of Longines. The narrative's purported "elegance" is no longer regarded as representing aspiration; rather, it is now commonly decoded as a symbol that reinforces traditional gender roles and restricts feminine qualities. The negative cognition resulting

from the cognitive reconfiguration may directly lead to consumption divestment. For instance, some consumers elect not to purchase and instead turn to brands that better align with their gender identities.

This article categorizes female consumers into three distinct consciousness paths: the compliant type (internalization of traditional gender expectations), the contradictory type (identification with feminist ideals but with constrained behavior), and the awakening type (active demonstration of gender stance through consumption practices). It provides a separate analysis of the characteristics of each of these three paths.

The first type, Conformity, aims to deeply internalise the traditional gender roles and aesthetic expectations of society, regarding them as "natural" and "true". The consumption behaviour of these individuals is orientated towards conforming to the standards of female qualities as perceived by mainstream masculinity (e.g. being fair-skinned, slender, gentle and elegant). Through their consumption, these individuals seek a sense of security and identity within the prevailing gender order. For instance, compliant consumers, in collusion with Longines, select Longines because they aspire to confirm and showcase their affiliation with a specific social class and gender role that conforms to traditional expectations by wearing this symbol. This phenomenon cannot be regarded as a mere passive acceptance of the prevailing norms; rather, it can be understood as a deliberate strategy of leveraging the brand to fortify their position within the established gender hierarchy.

Secondly, the contradictory type (Contradiction) has partially accepted the equality concepts of feminism at the cognitive level, but is still constrained by real-life pressures (such as the workplace environment, family expectations, social circles) at the behavioural level, and thus cannot fully implement its ideas. The consumption behaviours of consumers can be characterised by contradictions, compromises and negotiations. A pertinent example of this is the "negotiation" between ambivalent consumers and Uniqlo. The ambivalent consumer constitutes the core target audience of Uniqlo. The concepts of "equality" and "simplicity" embodied by the brand's products are acknowledged, yet there is a subtle sense of regret regarding the brand's apparent reluctance to adopt a definitive stance on gender issues. They may "compromise" and make a purchase due to the product's exceptional practicality and cost-effectiveness, temporarily setting aside the idea of "hoping the brand to be more aggressive". A concomitant phenomenon will be the emergence of consumers "negotiating" via channels such as social media to articulate their expectations for brands to adopt more explicit support for feminism, thereby establishing a pattern of "consuming while criticising".

Finally, the "Awakening Type" (Consciousness) refers to a situation where the group has a clear awareness of gender discrimination, and actively uses consumption behaviours as a cultural practice to express gender positions and challenge the unequal order. The selection of brands by consumers is heavily influenced by the concept of value resonance, with consumption becoming a form of "political voting". For instance, consumers are engaging in a process of "co-creation" with Ubras. The purchase of Ubras can be considered an active and declarative behaviour. The purpose of consumption is not merely to obtain the product, but also to use one's financial resources to express support for the brand's values and thereby declare one's gender to the outside world. These individuals are the "preachers" of the brand philosophy, yet concurrently, they also serve as the most stringent overseers, meticulously scrutinising whether the brand is "over-marketed", "lacks innovation" or engages in "greenwashing" behaviour.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the awakening of gender consciousness has significantly restructured the consumption logic of some women, shifting their decision-making criteria from being based on functionality and appearance to being oriented towards value resonance and self-expression. Consequently, consumption behaviour has evolved into a significant manifestation of gender consciousness. This finding is further supported by the study's conclusion that the effectiveness of brand responses is closely related to the degree of consumer value resonance. It is evident that brands

that can precisely convey concepts aligned with awakening consciousness and provide suitable product experiences are more likely to gain favor. The consumption process has been shown to extend beyond the confines of basic functional satisfaction, metamorphosing into a pivotal medium through which women articulate political assertions concerning identity and partake in the formation of gender discourse. This study addresses a significant gap in the "behavior transformation" chain in feminist consumer research by proposing a theoretical model of "gender consciousness awakening - brand cognition reconstruction - consumption behavior change". The model offers a comprehensive explanation of the internal mechanism through which psychological awareness is transmitted to consumption behavior, thereby enhancing the explanatory power of gender consciousness variables in brand preference research and providing a novel perspective for the expansion of consumption behavior theory. Concurrently, the extant research findings indicate that brands must transcend the superficial expression of "consumer feminism" and attain a profound comprehension of the authentic gender issues. It is imperative that gender awareness be integrated into the entirety of the product development and marketing communication process, thereby ensuring that there is no separation of theory and practice. Specifically, through strategies such as the promotion of conversational marketing, the facilitation of participatory brand building by women, and the implementation of gender-sensitive product design, it is possible to effectively enhance the interactional appeal and value resonance between the brand and the awakening female audience. It is recommended that future research efforts concentrate on conducting cross-group comparative studies. In addition, it is advised that researchers explore the differences in interaction patterns between gender consciousness and consumption behaviour in different cultural contexts. This will serve to further improve the theoretical research framework of gender and consumption behaviour.

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