

The Highest Hierarchy of Consumption: A Literature Review of Consumer Well-Being

Congcong Zhao¹, Haiying Wei^{1,2}

¹School of Management, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China

²Enterprise Development Institute, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China

Email: 18317853027@163.com

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Abstract

Well-being is the universal goal that human beings pursue, especially in the consumption area. Consumer well-being refers to an emotional and cognitive response that consumers generate in consumer experience, including three characteristics, which are consumer satisfaction, positive emotion, and perceived quality of life. The purpose of this article is to clarify the different definitions of consumer well-being, to sort out its measurement methods, and to summarize its influencing factors and path. Consumer well-being can be influenced by personal values, social and cultural factors, brand factors, product and service factors and behavioral factors. And it can also lead to physical and psychological health, consumer loyalty and word-of-mouth. Furthermore, we indicated that scholars could draw more attention to the definition of Chinese consumer well-being, measurement tools, related theories and the relationship with community well-being.

Keywords

Well-Being, Consumer Well-Being, Subjective Well-Being

1. Introduction

Well-being has been the ultimate goal of human pursuit since ancient times. Whether it is the “Five Blessings and Six Poles” elaborated in Shangshu Hong Fan or the “Continue to meet the growing need for a better life” put forward by the Nineteenth National Congress, it represents people’s yearning for a happier and better life. However, in the past, there were unqualified long-lived biological vaccines and malignant injuries caused by drip-drip taxis. Frequent safety accidents have greatly damaged the well-being of consumers. Therefore, how to make the enterprise to establish a correct concept of operations and how to help

consumers get a greater degree of happiness are the urgent need of the development of the times, and also the focus of attention of the theoretical circles.

Discussion about the connotation of consumer well-being began in Suranyi-Unger's distinction between consumer behavior and consumer well-being through economic paradigm [1]. Since then, consumer well-being has been separated from consumer behavior, forming a unique theoretical basis and research areas. So far, the research of consumer well-being has gradually become a grand concept. Scholars have found that consumers' physical and mental well-being can promote personal health [2] [3] [4], consumer loyalty [5] [6], word of mouth [7] and so on. Although there is a consensus on the importance of consumer well-being in academic circles [2] [4] [8], there are divergences in the definition and measurement of consumer well-being, and the research scenarios are extremely different. Although in 2012, scholars have carried out a systematic review of consumer well-being [9] [10] [11], in the past five years, a large number of studies on consumer well-being have emerged, and the concept definition and research perspective have changed greatly, so it is necessary to update and supplement in time. For example, 1) in the definition of concept, previous review does not deviate from the subjective sense of happiness, and this article makes a clear distinction between them; 2) in the measurement, the predecessors briefly introduced the existing model, without considering whether they are suitable for specific research situations; 3) on the influencing factors, predecessors did not systematically sort out; 4) on the mechanism of action, the previous main lists. The research perspective of consumer happiness does not involve the discussion of internal mechanism.

In view of the above shortcomings, this article combs the theoretical and empirical studies in the past five years from the perspective of consumer emotion and cognition, and evaluates the concept definition, measurement methods, influencing factors, impact results and future research directions of consumer well-being. This article tries to comprehensively present the current research progress of consumer well-being, expands the research ideas of domestic scholars in this field, and discusses the future research direction on this basis.

2. The Definition and Connotation of Consumer Well-Being

2.1. Definition and Connotation of Concept

At present, the definition of consumer well-being has not been unified in academic circles, which can be roughly divided into three categories: the first category refines the satisfaction degree of consumers in specific consumption areas [12], the second category adds emotional and mood considerations to the measurement of satisfaction [13], the third category breaks through the perspective of individual hedonism, and puts psychological well-being and social well-being into consideration [8]. In general, researchers generally believe that consumer well-being is a state of satisfaction and pleasure that individuals achieve through consumption [14] [15].

By reviewing the existing literature, this article argues that consumer well-being refers to a comprehensive emotional and cognitive response generated by consumers in the process of consumption, including three characteristics: consumer satisfaction, positive emotions and perceived quality of life [16]. First, consumer well-being perception should include consumer satisfaction. Self-determination theory points out that the satisfaction of individual needs can enhance happiness. Consumers can meet their personal needs through products or services, such as physical needs, material needs, social needs and emotional needs, and then experience happiness. Many definitions of consumer well-being also support this point, such as Sirgy, Lee and Kressmann take transportation as an example, pointing out that consumer well-being is the general satisfaction of consumers with various experiences of acquisition, ownership, consumption, maintenance and processing of products [6]; Hedhli, Chebat and Silgy believe that consumer well-being refers to consumers' satisfaction with various consumer fields and their sub-fields. Its sub-fields include product acquisition, product mix, product ownership, product consumption, product maintenance and product disposal [17]. In addition, some empirical studies have confirmed the need for satisfaction [6] [18]. Secondly, the happiness of consumers brought by products or services also includes positive emotions. For example, Lee believes that consumer well-being is not only reflected in functional value, but also emotional value [19], Apaolaz, Hartmann and D'Souza have found that the reason why food makes people happy is that delicious food causes positive emotions of consumers [20]. In addition, the study found that emotional changes can bring about individual well-being, which shows that positive emotions are an indispensable part of consumer well-being. Thirdly, the uniqueness of consumer well-being lies in that it includes not only subjective psychological feelings, but also consumers's perception of quality of life [3]. For example, Grzeskowiak and sirgy point out that consumer well-being means that consumers feel the improvement of quality of life from products or services [21]. Empirical research also finds that convenience of stores makes consumers feel happy by improving their perceived quality of life [22] [23], which indicates that perceived quality of life is an indispensable element of consumer well-being.

2.2. Distinction from Related Concepts

Consumer well-being, subjective well-being and individual psychological well-being have some common characteristics: firstly, the individual is the subject of consciousness; secondly, it can drive similar effects, such as pleasure; thirdly, the development of three kinds of concepts comes from basic feelings, so they are similar in structure and content. In essence, however, they have unique connotations and clear theoretical boundaries.

1) Consumer Well-being and Individual Subjective Well-being

Subjective well-being is an individual subjectivity and emotional reactions to the overall field, including family and work [24]. It generally includes three di-

mensions: positive emotions (such as pleasure), negative emotions (such as depression) [25] and overall quality of life assessment. The differences between the two are as follows: a) for different objects, subjective well-being for the overall life of the individual, consumer well-being for personal consumption life [15]; b) generated from different sources, subjective well-being for the overall life of various information and events; consumer well-being for consumption-related stimuli and consumer behavior. The relationship between them is that consumer well-being is an important part of subjective well-being [12], and the bottom-up spillover effect influences individual well-being in other fields [17], thus forming individual subjective well-being.

2) Consumer Well-being and Individual Psychological Well-being

Individual psychological well-being emphasizes the self-realization of individual potential, which includes six dimensions: self-acceptance, good social relations, autonomy, environmental control, life purpose and personal growth [26]. The difference lies in the different theoretical basis. Psychological well-being comes from eudemonia, which includes not only happiness, but also personal experience to achieve the meaning of life by giving full play to their potential. Consumer well-being comes from hedonic theory [8]. Consumer well-being focuses on the satisfaction, pleasure and quality of life perceived by consumers through consumption activities [27].

3. Measurement of Consumer Well-Being

Although there are different opinions on the connotation and dimension of consumer well-being in academic circles, it is generally accepted that consumer well-being is a multi-dimensional concept. Some researchers use the life satisfaction scale to measure consumers' happiness [28], which may show the characteristics of happiness, but does not really point to consumers' happiness. Based on the literature review, this article finds that Consumer Life Cycle Model, Demand Satisfaction Model and Asian Consumer Well-being Scale are the most popular tools to measure consumer well-being. In addition, some scholars focus on the measurement of consumer well-being in service situations.

3.1. Consumption Cycle Scale

The consumption cycle model assumes that consumer well-being consists of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the acquisition, possession, consumption, maintenance, and disposal of goods and services. Lee, Sirgy and Larsen compiled and validated the scale with 298 college students as samples [12]. Scale consists of four items constitute a problem, using 7-point scoring scale consists of five dimensions: satisfaction (7 items, such as satisfaction of purchasing products and experience), satisfaction with ownership (6 items, such as satisfaction of product ownership), satisfaction with consumption (11 items, such as satisfaction of using products and services), satisfaction with maintenance (17 items, such as satisfaction of maintenance experience) and satisfaction with disposal (7

items, such as processing convenience product satisfaction). The internal consistency coefficient is 0.792. However, this scale only considers the basic role of consumer satisfaction in consumer well-being, and does not consider the consumption satisfaction alone, which cannot cover the full content of consumer well-being.

3.2. Demand Satisfaction Scale

Demand Satisfaction Scale (DSS) considers that products that satisfy people's overall development needs are more likely to arouse consumer happiness than products that satisfy only one demand [29]. Based on self-determination theory, Sirgy, Lee and Kressmann developed a demand satisfaction scale through 300 questionnaires in the field of transportation [6]. The scale consists of 24 items with 5 points. The scale consists of 4 dimensions: design features (11 items, such as good braking), insurance and agency services (6 items, such as good insurance to protect me from car accidents), maintenance and maintenance services (4 items, such as good car performance for my safety), processing and financial services (3 items, such as those who believe in selling to my car, I believe in the safety of my car). The internal consistency coefficient is 0.76.

3.3. Asian Consumer Well-Being Scale

Leong, Ang and Cate think that the well-being in Asian culture is more special and they pay more attention to the consumption environment [13], so they put forward the Asian Consumer Well-being Scale. From the perspective of Asian culture, they divide the dimensions of consumer well-being, and propose that the three dimensions of Asian consumers well-being are consumer emotion and cognition, consumer behavior and consumer environment. This scale is put forward through the tests of China, India, Japan, Korea and Singapore, but it has not been verified. The scale includes three dimensions: emotion and cognition (9 items, such as I shop because shopping makes me happy), consumer behavior (6 items, I tend to do a lot of preparation before buying), and consumption environment (2 items, such as I think the preferences of people around me are important for my purchase).

3.4. Consumer Well-Being Scale in Service Context

The above measurement of consumer well-being focuses on the traditional consumption situation. Zhang, Ma and Yang distinguish this for the first time [30]. The research object is transformed into China's service industry, and the scale of consumer well-being in service situation is put forward. The scale consists of 11 items with 5 points. The scale contains two dimensions: satisfaction (6 items, such as "buying a favorite product or service") and positive emotion (5 items, such as "pleasure"). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.89. An overview of the scale studies on consumer well-being is shown in **Table 1**.

Overall, there are some deficiencies in the structure and measurement tools of

Table 1. Survey of measurement research on consumer well-being.

Researcher	Year	Structural dimension	
		Main dimensions	Item of measurement
Lee, Sirgy and Larsen, etc. [12]	2002	Get satisfaction	7 Items, such as satisfaction with purchasing products and experience
		Satisfied with	6 Items, such as satisfaction from product ownership
		Consumption Satisfaction	11 Items, such as Satisfaction in the Use of Products and Services
		Maintenance satisfaction	17 Items, such as Satisfaction of Maintenance Experience
		Satisfactory disposal	7 Items, such as satisfaction with product convenience
Sirgy, Lee and Kressmann [6]	2006	Design Requirements Satisfaction	11 Items, such as good braking
		Insurance Demand Satisfaction	6 Items, like having good insurance saves me from car accidents
		Maintaining Demand Satisfaction	4 Items, such as cars, have a good guarantee for my safety.
		Handling demand satisfaction	3 Items, like Believing in the Employees who Sell Me Cars
Leong, Ang and Note, etc. [13]	2016	Emotion and Cognition	9 Items, such as brand, quality
		consumer behavior	6 Items, such as price, value
		Consumer environment	2 Items, such as vulnerability
Zhang Yuexian, Ma Qin Hai and Yang Yong [30]	2017	Gratification	6 Items, such as “Buy a favorite product or service”
		Positive emotions	5 Items, such as “Happy”

consumer well-being: firstly, the structure of consumer well-being is too complex in dimension division, which hinders the development of the concept to a certain extent; secondly, in content universality, due to the complexity of the structure of well-being, different cultures and different subdivisions lead to the content and focus of consumer well-being. In terms of measurement methods, the current research mainly uses questionnaires to let consumers report their happiness subjectively. This method has defects. Whether consumers can accurately perceive happiness remains to be discussed.

4. Antecedent Factors of Consumer Well-Being

Based on the relevant research on consumer well-being, this paper concludes that the main antecedent factors of consumer well-being are personal values, social and cultural factors, brand factors, product and service factors, and personal behavior factors, as follows:

4.1. Individual Value Factors

Consumer well-being, as a subjective feeling of individuals, is influenced by their own orientated values. It is found that materialism, an externally oriented value, has a negative impact on the improvement of consumers well-being. Materialism refers to a persistent value system in which individuals perceive the importance of material and property. Highly materialistic consumers tend to overvalue property and consume it more easily, so they are more unhappy. Burroughs and Rindfleisch surveyed 373 U.S. citizens and found that highly materialistic con-

sumers are more likely to have values that conflict with other life values, such as collective-oriented values, thus causing greater psychological pressure and weakening consumer well-being [25]. On the contrary, anti-consumption, an internally oriented value, can actively promote consumer well-being [31]. Anti-consumerism is a kind of value that advocates stopping excessive consumption and returning to green and simple consumption mode. Lee and John found that anti-consumerism enhances consumer perceived self-determination and self-realization by enhancing their sense of control, reducing material desire and returning to their inner world, thus enhancing their happiness [15].

In addition, the relationship between hedonistic values and consumer well-being has also been explored by researchers. Hedonism refers to the pursuit of a happy and pleasant lifestyle. Opponents argue that hedonism leads to excessive consumption and low self-control, which is not conducive to consumer well-being [14]; supporters argue that pursuing happiness itself will bring happiness, and that hedonism promotes prosocial behavior, self-expression [32] and mental health of individuals [14], so it is conducive to consumer well-being.

4.2. Social and Cultural Factors

Social culture regulates the relationship between consumer experience and consumer well-being. For example, Markus and Schwartz found that good interpersonal relationships in the process of consumption are an important basis for evaluating happiness for consumers of group culture; for consumers of individual culture, they pay more attention to the number of commodity choices. More choices mean more freedom and autonomy, and consumers feel happier [33]. Leong, Ang and Cate found that even in a group culture, consumers in different societies depend on different factors to generate happiness [13]. Through a large sample of questionnaires, they found that for Chinese consumers, word-of-mouth and brand factors have a more significant impact on consumer well-being; for Indian consumers, quality and store image factors have a more significant impact on consumers well-being; for Korean consumers, social interaction has a more significant impact on consumer well-being.

4.3. Brand Factors

Brand factors also affect consumers well-being. An excellent brand can reduce the pressure and other adverse effects in the process of consumers' experience [34]. Grzeskowiak and Silgy extend this concept by allowing consumers to recall a recent trip to the coffee shop experience and measuring their perceived quality of life, they find that brand community ownership positively affects consumers well-being [21]. This effect is positively moderated by the proximity of consumption. That is, the closer the last purchase is, the happier the brand brings. In addition, as a symbol of consumers' identity and taste, when consumers perceive that the brand is identical with themselves, they will buy the brand [17], and the brand will be more smoothly transmitted to consumers happiness [35],

and consumer well-being will rise [8] [23]. For customers with high loyalty, the above effect is more significant [21].

4.4. Service and Product Factors

Service factors also affect consumers well-being. Sheng, Sigauw and Simpson classify service attributes into three categories according to the degree of impact of service attributes on passenger well-being: service factors with high impact (including weather, friendliness of local residents and interpersonal interaction); service factors with moderate impact (including cost); and low impact factors (including degree of natural protection) [36]. Other studies have found that service quality affects consumers well-being through the intermediary of consumers' overall satisfaction and consumer-enterprise identity [23].

In addition to service factors, some studies have found that product types also affect consumers well-being. For example, Bastos and Brucks have found that experiential products are more conducive to interpersonal communication than material products [37], which leads to higher conversational value, thereby enhancing consumer well-being. Lee divides the product into two types according to its function: hedonic and practical [19]. Through four experiments, he proves that customers adapt to hedonic products faster than practical products, and regret for hedonic products is significantly higher than practical products. Therefore, compared with hedonic products, practical products bring more lasting happiness to consumers. In addition to the different types of products, product anthropomorphization also affects consumers well-being. Product anthropomorphization refers to the process of endowing the uniqueness of human beings with products [38]. The anthropomorphic products enhance consumers well-being by satisfying consumers' need for social attribution [39]. Some studies have pointed out that the "smiling face" of anthropomorphic products improves consumers well-being and attitudes towards products [5].

4.5. Personal Behavioral Factors

Traditional research focuses on individual factors and marketing strategy factors, while in recent years, some studies have gradually found the important role of consumer behavior in changing cognition. For example, Devezer, Sprott and Spagenberg have shown through goal system theory that the failure of sub-goals can significantly reduce the motivation and behavior of happiness acquisition [40] when consumers think that the overall goal related to happiness acquisition is not important or the consequences of sub-goals failure are serious. Consumers can achieve the overall goal by guaranteeing [40] and self-disciplined behavior of sub-goals [16], thus promoting consumer well-being. Tang, Guo and Gopinath validated this view through longitudinal surveys, when consumers participate in activities to maintain health, they often maintain self-discipline by fulfilling sub-goals in the subarea, thus maintaining a higher level of consumer well-being [41].

In addition, the researchers found that the diversity of consumer activities can affect consumers well-being. Etkin and Mobilner conducted eight experiments to show that the impact of activity diversity on consumers well-being depends on the duration of perception [18]. For long cycles (such as a day), activity diversity increases happiness by making people feel more stimulated; for short cycles (such as an hour), activity diversity reduces happiness by making people feel less productive. Brown, Kasser and Ryan explained the effect, they found that mindfulness mediated the effect. Low activity diversity led consumers to pay more attention to their inner feelings and experiences and to accept themselves, resulting in a sense of adequacy, which improved their happiness [42].

5. The Result Factors of Consumer Well-Being

As well-being is the ultimate ideal state for consumers to obtain, there are few studies on its further result factors. The existing research mainly focuses on the individual level and the enterprise level. At the individual level, consumer well-being promotes individual physical and mental health; at the enterprise level, consumer well-being can strengthen consumer loyalty and promote positive word-of-mouth.

5.1. Impact on Individuals

Consumer well-being is conducive to personal physical and mental health, which can not only cause health, but also inhibit unhealthy state. For health status, clinical trials have found that happiness therapy can produce more positive outcomes than drug therapy, such as higher creativity, energy [18], more social relationships and prosocial behavior [43]. Consumer well-being has a similar impact. Lee and Silgy found that the improvement of consumer well-being can increase consumer pleasure, reduce disease and promote social welfare from the perspective of personal transportation [2]. Other studies have found that consumer well-being has an indirect impact on health. Consumers with high happiness tend to focus on long-term goals, thus exhibiting greater self-discipline and choosing healthier foods [44]. For unhealthy factors, Chida and Steptoe found that consumer well-being can reduce mortality through meta-analysis, and this effect is significant for both healthy and sick consumers [45].

5.2. The Impact on Enterprises

After consumers feel happy, they will be more loyal to the enterprise. Consumer loyalty refers to a series of good attitudes towards stores and repeated purchases [12]. When consumers experience happiness, they will like the brand better, the perceived value of the brand increases, and the perceived risk decreases [5]. So consumers will keep repeating purchases. Consumers's overall satisfaction with the brand will increase their trust in the brand, which will also lead to brand loyalty [12]. Hedhli, Chebat and Silgy re-validated the above view by surveying 831 customers in two supermarkets [17]. In addition, studies have shown that

consumer well-being can lead to positive attitudes and word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth refers to the evaluation of stores in informal interpersonal communication [46]. Consumers experience happiness and will have a positive attitude, strong interest and positive word-of-mouth to enterprises [7].

6. Future Research Directions

In recent years, researchers have made a lot of achievements in the definition, measurement, influencing factors and result factors of consumer well-being, but there is still much room for improvement. Due to the differences in understanding consumer concepts, some conclusions may not be universal. The definition dimensions of various consumer well-being are somewhat out of line with subsequent measurement, and the cognitive neural mechanism of consumer well-being is almost blank. Most of the influencing factors of consumer well-being remain at the relevant level and cannot be well applied to practice. Therefore, future research can be improved from the following aspects:

6.1. Localized Definition of Consumer Well-Being

At present, the research on consumer well-being is mostly concentrated in the West. The deviation of samples leads to the lack of cross-cultural definition of consumer well-being. Because of cultural differences, Chinese and Western views of happiness are different. Confucius said that “those who are not benevolent can not live for a long time and enjoy their strengths” (The Analects of Confucius Liren) and “those who are benevolent are not worried” (The Analects of Confucius Zihan), which means that only those who are benevolent can obtain happiness and happiness; moreover, “those who are in harmony with heaven, so-called Tianyue” (Chuang Tzu Tiandao) thought that happiness is not pleasure, but the inherent detachment and then release [46], in addition, “getting the best in the world and educating” (“Menciusdedication · Chapters on”) implies contributing to the moral and social development is an important source of well-being. It can be seen that Chinese consumers well-being not only reflects the individual emotional happiness brought by consumption, but also reflects the positive, lasting and lofty happiness and interests brought by consumption to individuals and even to society. Based on this, in order to better interpret consumer well-being, future scholars can put it in the context of Chinese culture, combined with the characteristics of China’s transitional society to understand and interpret consumer well-being.

6.2. Innovation in the Measurement of Consumer Well-Being

Previous studies have mostly measured well-being through “you feel” and “you recall” and other ways of feeling again, in this way, consumer well-being is considered as a kind of introspective perception. Introspective law is a re-examination of the content of experience by an individual as the first person, which means extreme individuality and subjectivity, and easily leads to methodological devia-

tion. In addition, people have memory bias [47], which leads to the correctness of subjective reports to be questioned. Future research should introduce some more accurate measurement indicators.

Firstly, neuroscience and technology provide a basis for the measurement of consumer well-being. Researchers have begun to use electroencephalogram (EEG) and neuroimaging (fMRI) to study the physiological mechanism of well-being. Previous studies have shown that frontal cortex, cingulate gyrus, amygdala, insula, striatum, hippocampus and gray matter can predict changes in well-being. For example, Lewis, Kanai and Rees found that the volume of gray matter in the right insular cortex was positively correlated with personal growth, positive relationships and life goals through the analysis of the morphological measurement (VBM) of individual brain imaging data, which positively affected personal well-being [48]. Therefore, they suggest that the volume of gray matter in the right insula cortex can predict consumers well-being; secondly, with the expanding scope of happiness research, genetic studies have found that the heritability of well-being depends on the interaction between itself and the environment, with heritability ranging from 50% to 80% [49]. Future studies can explore Gemini studies, using identical twins as samples, to compare different growth rings. Gemini of the environment improves the way of measuring happiness in adulthood. Finally, previous studies mostly use cross-sectional data to measure instantaneous consumer well-being. In the future, they can also conduct long-term follow-up studies on consumer well-being, such as Skhjrvi, Hell N and Desmet found that consumer recommendation on experience only affects short-term well-being, but not long-term well-being [50]. In the future, we can measure consumers well-being one day, one week or one month after the consumption experience, and explore the long-term and short-term differences in the dimensions of consumers well-being.

6.3. Deep Research on the Mechanism of Consumers Well-Being

Although many studies have explored the influencing factors of consumers well-being, the theoretical basis of the generation of consumers well-being is still weak, and the internal generation mechanism and its development path are not clear. Throughout the existing studies, scholars focus on positive experiences and perceptions of consumer well-being. Do negative perceptions also have a positive impact on consumer well-being? Yang, Gu and Galak found that when faced with uncertainty, participants produced counterfactual thoughts, *i.e.* imagining that they would experience negative outcomes, and hedonic adaptation slowed down, thus maintaining a longer sense of happiness [51].

6.4. Differences in Consumer Well-Being and Group Well-Being

Future research should also pay attention to the differences between consumer well-being and group happiness. Sirgy, Widgery and Lee proposed community well-being based on community residents' perception of quality of life [52]. Con-

sumer well-being and community well-being belong to the category of personal perception. The difference lies in that the former refers to individual well-being, which arises from consumption-related areas [15], while the latter refers to the general well-being of groups, which arises from comprehensive areas (such as personal health). In the dimension division of group well-being, researchers have not highlighted the relationship between individuals and groups, but consumer well-being and group well-being are inextricably linked. For example, Sharma and Alter found that the impact of groups on consumer well-being is that consumers perceive happiness by comparing their own quality of life with the average quality of life of groups [24]. Especially in the Chinese context, “I am happy when others are happy” and “family happiness” all reflect the premise of personal happiness is group happiness. Based on this, we conclude that group well-being will affect consumer well-being. Future research needs to validate these hypotheses and further explore the relationship between consumer well-being and community happiness.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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