

Purchasing Under Expectations: How do Adolescents Consume Pink-Colored Products in Different Consumption Contexts?

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ABSTRACT

Pink bias is a type of consumer behavior that avoids consuming, pink-colored products. This study expands the definition of pink bias from male adults to both male and female adolescents and examines whether, and how, different consumption contexts influence adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior. Speculating the motives as affected by surrounding people's expectations due to adolescent egocentrism and desire to receive affirmation in identity formation, the study used a set of questionnaires to collect the tendency of pink-biased consumer behavior under different consumption contexts from 59 participants and found the variation of contexts affects that of adolescents. Moreover, both male and female adolescents have demonstrated pink-biased consumer behavior, while male adolescents showed a higher inclination to pink bias than female adolescents did. The pink-biased consumer behavior was increased in the parent-presented context, such as home, due to the preference for traditional wooden colors in home-placed products, instead of the desire to meet expectations.

Keywords: Pink Bias; Consumer Behavior; Adolescents; Color Psychology; Color Stereotypes

INTRODUCTION

Pink bias, defined as the avoidance of purchasing pink-colored products due to gendered stereotypes (1), represents an intersection of color psychology, consumer behavior, and social expectations. This phenomenon has implications not only for individual purchasing decisions but also for broader marketing strategies, as it can reduce the marketability of pink-colored products and influence profitability for producers.

However, existing research has largely focused on adult male consumers, leaving a gap in understanding

how this bias is manifest in adolescents, who are situated in a distinct developmental stage characterized by heightened sensitivity to social evaluation (such as imaginary audience) (2), compared with adults. Therefore, studying pink bias among adolescents provides a valuable opportunity to understand how color stereotypes interact with developmental psychology and consumer contexts.

Furthermore, prior research has primarily conceptualized consumption context in simplified terms, such as private versus public settings. Yet, for adolescents, the identity of social contacts (e.g., parents versus peers) may alter expectations and behaviors differently, highlighting the need for a more nuanced approach to understanding adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates pink bias among both male and female adolescents

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and examines how more nuanced differentiation on consumption contexts influences adolescents' pink-biased behavior. This study advances understanding of color stereotypes in consumer behavior and informs youth-oriented marketing strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Stereotypes and Color Preferences

The pink color of products affects consumer behavior through its corresponding cultural stereotypes, since it is recognized to be highly charged with a feminine gender stereotype (3), thus tends to induce pink bias (1). Mileti and colleagues have substantiated the existence of pink bias among the male consumer group (1), resulting in pink-biased consumer behavior. However, avoidance to pink-biased consumer behavior is likely to exist in the female group.

The female group might tend to consume the pink-colored product to emphasize their feminine traits to others, as it is suggested that female consumers have a notable preference for pink-colored and women-targeted items, including cosmetics and daily necessities (4). Hence, in this study, the definition of pink bias extended from the approach of males meeting corresponding gender stereotypes to attaining social expectations for both males and females.

Consumption Context and Social Expectations

Consumption context is the place in which products are typically consumed, either in shared and community environments (i.e. at work) or in personal and intimate places (i.e. at home). Mileti and colleagues have identified consumption context as one factor that evokes pink bias: Males feel compelled to show a masculine self-representation (image) to meet societal expectations of masculinity from others in public consumption contexts than in the private consumption context (1).

Thus, it can be inferred that, using pink a symbol that delineates and conveys the image to others (1), consumers manage to fulfill or interact with others' expectations of masculinity or femininity by altering their purchasing decisions on pink-colored products in different consumption contexts.

Pink Bias Among Adolescents

Among all consumers who value expectations from surrounding people, adolescent consumers should be emphasized because they consider surrounding people's evaluations to a greater extent compared with

that of average adults, which could be explained by the imaginary audience in adolescent egocentrism, which is defined by Elkind (2), adolescents' belief that others are preoccupied with their appearance and behavior (2). As a consequence, in product purchasing, adolescents may anticipate the reactions of other presented people and react to them through consumer behavior.

Further, the identity formation process during adolescence also plays a part. Adolescents attempt to answer the question "Who am I?" and seek confirmation to their own opinions and abilities (5) from surrounding people's feedback, such as peers and teachers (6). Hence, in order to delve deeper into their identity and receive affirmation from others for a more idealized identity, adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior may be altered to attain varied expectations from different people.

Expanding Conceptualizations of Consumption Context

Previous research on consumption context has primarily relied on broad distinctions between public and private settings, typically operationalized by the presence or absence of other individuals in the environment. In such frameworks, public contexts are often defined by the visibility of consumption behavior to others, whereas private contexts involve minimal social observation. While this approach has been useful for understanding adult consumer behavior, it may be insufficient for capturing the social complexity of adolescent consumption environments.

For adolescents, social expectations are shaped not only by whether others are present but also by the identity of those individuals. Parents and peers represent distinct social agents who convey different norms and evaluative standards. Parental influence is often associated with preferences for tradition, practicality, and appropriateness, whereas peer influence is more closely tied to social belonging, fashionability, and identity signaling. Treating public consumption contexts as homogeneous therefore risks obscuring meaningful variation in the types of expectations adolescents perceive and respond to.

Moreover, adolescents occupy a unique developmental stage characterized by heightened sensitivity to social evaluation, which may amplify the influence of contextual cues during consumption decisions. Existing studies rarely differentiate consumption contexts based on the social roles of surrounding individuals, limiting their ability to explain how adolescents navigate competing

expectations from parents and peers. Addressing this limitation requires a more nuanced conceptualization of consumption context that incorporates the identity of social contacts rather than relying solely on the number of people present.

Building on this theoretical gap, the present research examines whether adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior varies across distinct social contexts and whether such variation differs between male and female adolescents. Drawing on prior findings regarding gendered color stereotypes, fashion signaling, and parental influence on adolescent decision-making, three hypotheses are proposed to test how consumption context and social expectations interact to shape adolescents' avoidance of pink-colored products.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Attempting to measure the effect of the consumption contexts on the tendency of both female and male adolescents' pink bias consuming behavior, a 2 (sex: female, male) × 5 (five consumption contexts: no consumption context, private consumption context, parent-presented consumption context, peers-presented consumption context 1, peers-presented consumption context

2) experimental design was used (Table 1). In order to reestablish a real-life teen-targeted market environment for participants to make purchasing decisions on products, preliminary research on stimuli selection was conducted in two steps, (i) product type selection and (ii) color selection, before the implementation of the experiment.

Product Type Selection

Adapting from Mileti and colleagues' method (1), the choice set for each consumption context was composed of three products. Products selected as the stimuli were considered first by interviewing and discussing with two male and one female adolescent selected from a high school student population in Beijing, China, to obtain a common purchasing list of adolescents (such as pens and toothbrushes) under all consumption contexts to ensure ecological validity. Verifying and supplementing with the product choices in former studies of Chinese children's consumer behavior, which is summarized by the research of Rahman and colleagues (13), and external internet search results of "2024-2025 teenager trends" by the author afterward. Table 2 demonstrates all the final product choices after these processes for this study (see Appendix for detailed demonstration).

Table 1. Consumption Context Consisted of Corresponding Social Expectations from People

| Consumption Context | Expectation possessed by people |
|--|---|
| No consumption context (simply choosing the preferred color in blocks) | |
| Private consumption context | |
| Parent-presented consumption context | Expecting to choose the traditional color. |
| Peers-presented consumption context 1 | Expecting to choose the gender-neutral color. |
| Peers-presented consumption context 2 | Expecting to choose the pink color. |

Table 2. Product Selection and Classification Under Each Consumption Context

| Consumption Context | Products selection |
|--|--|
| No consumption context (simply choosing the preferred color in blocks) | |
| Private consumption context | Bookmark, toothbrush, pens (Low price, personal-used, and inconspicuous) |
| Parent-presented consumption context | The piano, wardrobe, desk (High price and placed at home) |
| Peers-presented consumption context 1 | Bags, glasses, hats (teen-targeted, easy-noticed, and trendy) |
| Peers-presented consumption context 2 | Bags, glasses, hats |

In the no consumption context, as a test of participants' original preferences towards color and an initial tendency of pink bias, the baseline of attractiveness of products was tested through choosing the preferred color in blocks of equal size. This function serves as a control group, providing participants' initial attitude towards the colors selected in the survey for comparison with other contexts. In the private context, products chosen are considered to be low-priced, personal-used, and inconspicuous. The final product choices are toothbrushes, pens, and bookmarks (13). Fitting the parent-presented consumption context, products chosen are considered to possess the characteristics of high price and placed at home, which is expensive and conspicuous enough to make parents consider with discretion, then induced the expectations. Products that fit this category mainly include large instruments, home-used electronics, and teen-used furniture, verified by the product choice of "television", "consumer electronics" and "cassette player" (13). The final choices are the piano, wardrobe, and desk. In the context presented with peers, the products are considered to be teen-targeted, easy-noticed, and trendy in the meantime. The teen-targeted products mainly included clothing, shoes, personal self-care products, computer sets, etc. (13). Referencing the 2024 to 2025 teenager consumption trends (14), the final product choice sets for the peers-presented context included school bags (Jansport Backpack), glasses (Bayonetta glasses), and hats (the New York Yankees Baseball Caps).

Color selection

The color choices for the stimuli are a conventional/gender-neutral color, blue as a masculine color, and pink as a feminine color (3). These colors coordinate with pink to measure the tendency of choosing a color based on cultural gender stereotypes and expectations. Traditional color offers a choice to fulfill parents' expectations and gender-neutral color offers a choice between gendered colors.

According to a standardized system of color samples and stimuli (15), the Munsell color system, color is visually described in three measurements: hue, saturation, and brightness. Although products' colors are hugely varied in these three measurements (i.e. there are different types of pink colors) in the real-life market, which this study intends to simulate, any variables besides the expectations from people should be excluded.

Thus, to exclude the variation in saturation and brightness, the color choices include a uniform pink

color (Hex Code with #FF97CF), a uniform blue color (Hex Code with #0000FF), a uniform black color (Hex Code with #000000) as a conventional color. A uniform wooden color (Hex Code with #A1662F) is chosen as a conventional color for the parent-presented consumption context to mimic the real market choices for furniture and home-placed products. These colors were modified by the photo editing website AIEASE to be featured on each product.

Participants

A total of 59 high school students, 24 males and 35 females (age range from 16 to 18) from Beijing, China, participated in a within-subjects questionnaire study. Participants volunteered to participate through the advertisement by the researcher. Since this research focuses on adolescents in the field of developmental psychology, ages are collected from the participants to ensure an appropriate age range. No names, contact details, or other personally identifiable information were collected; hence, this survey involved minimal risk and gathered only non-identifiable data. This survey qualifies for the exemption from ethics committee approval.

Procedure

Participants completed a questionnaire set composed of four sub-questionnaires through a link to Tencent Survey software. The first questionnaire collected preferences in the private consumption context, the second and third collected preferences in the parent-presented consumption context and two peers-presented consumption contexts, and the fourth collected the preferences for color blocks. The first questionnaire additionally requested participants to fill out the consent forms to know their rights to quit, and their confidentiality would be preserved as anonymous. And, the fourth questionnaire also additionally required participants to select a rating from 1 to 5 on "How much do you consider parents' and peers' expectations", where 1 indicates not considering expectations and 5 indicates fully considering expectations. At last, participants' socio-demographic data (age, gender) were collected.

For each consumption context, expectations were conveyed through standardized prompts presented in the questionnaire. Participants received a context-specific prompt for each product, such as: "You decide to purchase a piano to place at home. You visit a piano store with your parents, who indicate a preference for a wooden-colored piano. Which of the following pianos would you choose to purchase?" The prompts varied systematically

by consumption setting (e.g., private, home, or school), the identity of surrounding individuals (e.g., alone, parents, or peers), and product type. Following each prompt, participants selected their preferred option from product images displayed in different color versions. This procedure was repeated for each product across all consumption contexts.

In order to avoid order-induced effects, the order of the second and the third questionnaires, the order of the product types under a single consumption context, and the order of colored versions of each product are all randomized by the Tencent Survey's randomized algorithms. Each participant will either receive these three phases of questionnaires in the order of first-second-third-fourth (private, parent-presented, peers-presented, no consumption context) or first-third-second-fourth (private, peers-presented, parent-presented, no consumption context), decided through the randomized algorithms. Within each context, the order of product types is randomized, such as participants are likely to receive in the order of "bookmark, toothbrush, pens", "bookmark, pens, toothbrush", or "toothbrush, pens, bookmark", etc. Further, under each product, the order of varied colored-products options is randomized from left to right, such as "pink, black, blue", or "black, pink, blue", etc.

Coding system

Within a single product selection, choosing pink is coded as 0 and not choosing pink (choosing blue, black, or wooden color) is coded as 1. The score under a single

consumption context is varied from 0 to 3. Higher scores represent a higher tendency of pink-biased consumer behavior. For instance, if a participant chooses a pink piano, a blue wardrobe, and a wooden-color desk, then his/her score for parent-presented consumption context is $0+1+1=2$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One analysis was conducted by SPSS Repeated measures ANOVA to address the effect of different contexts on adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior (the tendency of avoiding pink-colored products, coded as above) and whether there are differences between that of male and female groups. Another analysis also implemented SPSS Bivariate Correlations to test the correlation between the rating on the motives of their decisions given by participants (from 1 to 5, demonstrated in the method), which further indicates how much did adolescents consider expectations from their peers and parents.

According to the mean score for the tendency of pink-bias behavior under each context (0=pink, 1=black, 1=blue, three choices in one decision, three decisions for each context, 0 indicated no pink bias, 3 indicated completely pink bias by choosing other colors over pink in all three decisions), both male and female groups have mean scores above 2.40 under all contexts (Table 3 and Figure 1), which indicates having pink-biased consumer behavior recognizably under private conditions and any public expectations from other people. Hence, this result

Table 3. *The Descriptive Statistics for the Tendency of Pink-Biased Consumer Behavior*

| Sex | Consumption context | Mean | Standard deviation |
|--------|--------------------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Male | No consumption context | 3.000 | .181 |
| | Private consumption context | 2.750 | .165 |
| | Parent-presented consumption context | 2.917 | .097 |
| | Peers-presented context 1 | 2.958 | .105 |
| | Peers-presented context 2 | 2.875 | .122 |
| Female | No consumption context | 2.486 | .150 |
| | Private consumption context | 2.429 | .136 |
| | Parent-presented consumption context | 2.829 | .080 |
| | Peers-presented context 1 | 2.629 | .087 |
| | Peers-presented context 2 | 2.657 | .101 |

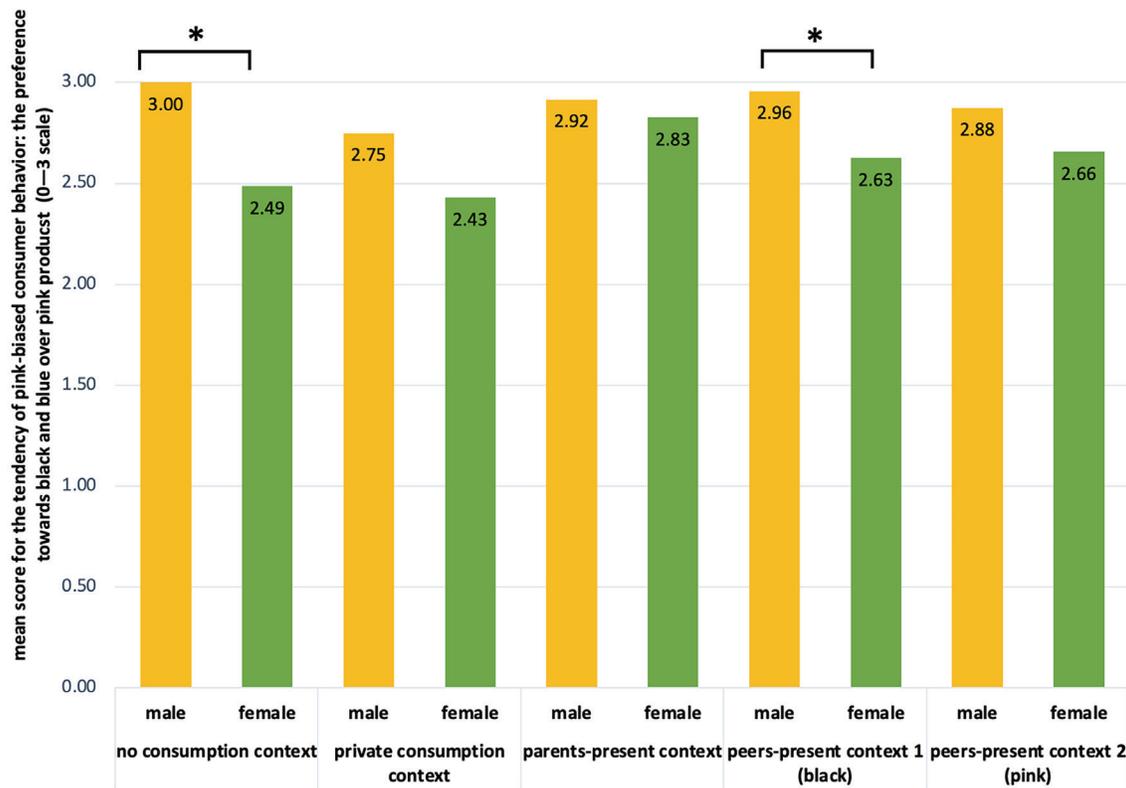


Figure 1. The Mean Score of Males and Females on Pink-Biased Consumer Behavior in Different Consumption Contexts. Note. * indicates $p < 0.1$.

vindicates the stance of H_1 that pink-biased consumer behavior exists not only in the male group but also in the female group.

The result demonstrated a significant main effect of sex ($p = .027$), suggesting that the male group's tendency of pink-biased consumer behavior was distinct from that of the female group. It was identified that the average score of the tendency of males' pink-biased consumer behavior is higher than females' under all contexts, which indicates that males have a significantly higher tendency of pink-biased consumer behavior (avoiding purchasing pink-colored products) than females.

The result also indicated a marginally significant effect of consumption context ($p = .082$, Sidak-adjusted p), showing that consumers have minimal different tendencies of pink-biased consumer behavior among the consumption contexts. But the role of consumption contexts should be interpreted with caution.

To further discuss differences induced by the alternation of consumption context, it was identified that a marginally significant main effect between private

consumption context and parent-presented context ($p = .074$), indicating that adolescents were likely more inclined to avoid purchasing pink-colored products in parent-presented consumption context than in private consumption context. This suggests a possible consistency with hypothesis two's speculation of finding the tendency of pink-bias consumer behavior to increase in the parent-presented consumption context.

Moreover, the interaction effect analysis between no consumption context and parent-presented consumption context demonstrated that the consumption context \times sex interaction was marginally significant ($p = .059$). In the no-consumption context condition, the factor of sex's simple main effect on the tendency of pink-bias consumer behavior was significant.

This could be embodied as having a significant difference between the tendency mean score of the male group and the female group in the no consumption context ($p = .012$); In contrast, in the parent-presented context, there was no significant difference between these two average scores ($p = .486$). This was mainly

attributed to the female adolescents' increasing pink bias in the parent-presented context. Thus, this indicates that the male group had a much stronger pink bias than the female group when choosing their favorite color, but both the male and female groups had pink bias when purchasing products under the parent-presented consumption context.

The interaction effect was also induced by a significant difference between sex in peers-presented context 1 ($p=.007$) and a non-significant difference between sex in peers-presented context 2 ($p=.128$). However, Pairwise Comparisons showed that the difference in males' pink bias between peers-presented consumption context 1 and peers-presented consumption context 2 was not significant ($p>.05$). The difference in females' pink bias appeared with the same conclusion of non-significance ($p>.05$). Hence, the relationship between adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior and peers-presented consumption context can't be concluded firmly.

Meanwhile, according to the Bivariate Correlations analysis, there was no correlation between the rating of considering expectations from parents (the rating from 1 to 5) with the tendency of pink bias in the parent-presented context ($r=.062$, $p=.643$); Also, there was no correlation between the rating of considering expectations from peers with the tendency of pink bias in peers-presented context 1 ($r=.108$, $p=.414$) and 2 ($r=-.169$, $p=.201$). These results indicate that adolescents don't consider their parents' and peers' expectations, which contradicts the motives of pink-biased consumer behavior speculated in hypotheses two and three. These findings might also indicate that expectations, as operationalized in this study, are not empirically validated and may have limited explanatory power in predicting pink-biased behavior within the present contexts.

Evaluation of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis stated that male consumers tend to show pink-biased consumer behavior and female consumers tend to avoid pink-biased consumer behavior to fulfill others' corresponding societal expectations under the public consumption context. The results refuted this hypothesis by showing that both male and female adolescents have pink bias under all types of consumption contexts, and adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior is not influenced by either parents' expectations or peers' expectations. Consumers didn't show pink bias due to the attempt to attain interactions or expectations, but simply because of their own preferences for color in certain locations. This study's

theoretical assumptions regarding adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior would be altered because of imaginary audience in adolescent egocentrism and identity formation process was not supported. This is further explained in the refutation of hypothesis three.

The second hypothesis predicted the tendency of adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior would be suppressed under the peers-presented consumption context because of the drive to establish a fashionable image. This is refuted because there are no significant differences found between the private consumption context and the peers-presented consumption context, suggesting adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior is not affected by the peers-presented consumption context. In addition, because no correlation was found between expectation ratings and the tendency of pink bias, it could be inferred that adolescent consumers don't value their peers' expectations of fashion trends. This also contradicts the idea of the imaginary audience in adolescent egocentrism and adolescents' drive to attain expectations in the identity formation process mentioned in the introduction. Another possible explanation for this misalignment is that the potential expectation mentioned in the prompt of the questionnaire is not enough to raise real personal and social consequences in reality, thus failing to induce an alteration in adolescents' behavior (16).

The third hypothesis suggested adolescents are apt to have increased pink-biased consumer behavior under the parent-presented consumption context. This hypothesis is partially affirmed because adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior increases in the parent-presented context compared to the private consumption context. However, as stated in the refutation for hypothesis one, a suggested higher tendency of pink bias under the parent-presented consumption context wasn't induced by their discretion or high recognition of parents' expectations of traditional colors, considering the non-correlated relationship between ratings of considering expectations and the tendency of pink bias. It lies more in the reason that they think traditional colors, such as wooden color, instead of pink, should be used in places like home. This speculation on the motives of pink bias could also be additionally affirmed by the sudden alignment between males' and females' pink bias tendency in the parent-presented context, as these two groups have very different color preferences when simply choosing their preferred color. Adolescents' preference for wooden colors for home-use products in the parent-presented consumption context coincides with the findings that

natural wood color and achromatic color were the most preferred colors for home furniture among people aged from 20's to 60's (17). This offers a potential explanation for the accordance in preference towards the wooden color for products used at home between adolescents and adults in this study.

Contribution to Theoretical Field and Market Practice

This study contributes to the theoretical field of pink bias by affirming that variation in consumption contexts has effects on adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior. This study also showed that pink bias not only exists in the male group but also exists in the female group. Unlike the initial suspect that adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior would be affected by expectations due to the imaginary audience and the desire to reach affirmation from others in identity formation, it was identified that the different tendencies of pink-biased consumer behavior in adolescents were due to their own preferences and opinions on the color suited for certain places, like selecting wooden color for home environment. Meanwhile, this study also contributes to market strategy by pointing out that products used at home should avoid pink as the surface color and choose traditional colors like wooden color instead. In general, product designers and advertisers should decrease the application of pink color for the teen-targeted market as a whole, especially for male-specialized products.

CONCLUSION

This study is conducted to analyze how different consumption contexts increase or suppress male and female adolescents' tendency to show pink-biased consumer behavior and to speculate motives behind adolescents' pink-biased consumer behavior. It is identified that, in all five consumption contexts, both male and female adolescents have pink-biased consumer behavior, with a stronger tendency in the male group; pink bias was found to be most evident in the parent-presented consumption context, meanwhile noting an increasing tendency of pink bias in the female group. Rather than due to external expectations, the apparent avoidance of pink color in the parent-presented context is an embodiment of adolescents' preferences for traditional colors in home-related products, implying the crucial role of their own free will for decision-making, like shopping, outweighing other people's opinions under social contexts. These findings also suggest that

marketers should apply the pink color cautiously on adolescent-targeted products, especially those for home-related settings and particular male customers.

However, the present study features some limitations due to a single-color selection for stimuli and a limited sample size. After interviewing two participants who had a relatively high score in the tendency of pink-biased consumer behavior about whether they avoid purchasing pink-colored products in real life, it was found that they purchase certain types of pink-colored products, such as products in millennial pink. They showed high tendencies of pink bias in this study because of their bias towards the specific pink color chosen for the stimuli. Future studies on pink bias could consider implementing stimuli featured in various types of pink colors to acquire more accurate results on the tendency of pink-biased consumer behavior. Moreover, to receive a more definite conclusion on the tendency of pink bias in the peers-presented consumption context and a more comprehensive confirmation on the accordance of wooden color for furniture between adolescents and adults, an expansion of the sample size is required.

Overall, by expanding the concept of pink bias to both male and female sexes, and the younger population other than adults, this study provides a preliminary understanding of modern adolescent consumers' attitudes towards pink under various consumption contexts with social expectations of stereotypical images.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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APPENDIX

| Stimuli Used in the Experiment | | |
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