



Research article

Social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption: An empirical analysis of Chinese wedding ceremonies

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformative impact of a digital platform integrating social media platforms like WeChat and Weibo with social e-commerce applications such as RED on individuals' consumption behaviours. It examines how this influence reshapes personal image, builds social identity, and engages in various behaviours, particularly focusing on the social visibility of consumption during Chinese wedding celebrations. Through an online survey of 570 respondents who have hosted or plan to host wedding celebrations, we investigate whether the use of social media increases the likelihood of the social visibility of individual consumption. Our findings reveal a significant relationship between social media use and the social visibility of respondents' consumption. Moreover, a continual rise in the social visibility of respondents' consumption is associated with increased conspicuous consumption behaviour and display. While self-expression enhances the social visibility of consumption and its impact on brand awareness, this study does not identify a moderating effect of self-expression on the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption behaviour and display. These results give insight into the evolving role of digital platforms in shaping consumption patterns, particularly in the context of significant life events like weddings in China.

1. Introduction

The advent of 5G and intelligent personal assistants, through social media, has significantly increased the accessibility of information technology. This increased usage has empowered individuals to express opinions and access information on a greater scale. Social media is not only for interacting with others individually or through groups but also for showcasing one's 'existence' [1,2]. According to the Digital 2022 Global Preview Report, the global internet user count has reached 7.91 billion, with 5.31 billion accessing the internet through mobile phones. Additionally, 4.62 billion users engage with social media, spending an average of 2 h and 27 min per day on these platforms [3].

The widespread use of social media has significantly influenced lifestyles and consumption behaviours. People now share fragments of their lives and adopt behaviours on social media to consciously manage their self-identity, personal image, and popularity [4]. The social visibility of consumption has expanded considerably as individuals express themselves through these platforms, for example, by purchasing luxury goods or brands [5,6]. Social visibility plays a crucial role in influencing consumers' purchasing habits and perceptions of social status [7], acting as a prerequisite for conspicuous consumption [8]. Conspicuous consumption is commonly

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associated with social media users, who engage in herd behaviours to increase their social status amongst their peers/others. These users often compare themselves with influencers and peers, a phenomenon frequently analyzed through the theoretical lens of social comparison theory [9,10]. As social media is deeply integrated into everyday life, serving as a platform for communication, interaction, sharing consumption habits, and self-validation, it becomes essential to investigate the impact of the escalating social visibility of consumption on individuals' conspicuous consumption behaviour.

As the second-largest consumer market and the world's largest online retail market, China not only boasts the highest number of internet users globally but has also undergone significant shifts in citizens' consumption concepts and behaviours [11]. There is a notable rise in development-oriented and enjoyment-oriented consumption, with consumers increasingly seeking customized and personalized products and services while placing a greater emphasis on personal experience. This trend is particularly pronounced in the wedding consumption market. In 2020, the average cost of a wedding celebration for each newlywed couple in China reached 174,000 yuan, 8.8 times the average combined monthly income of both parties. Notably, 42% of newlyweds exceeded their initial budget, allocating more funds to wedding banquets, jewelry, diamond rings, wedding products, and wedding photos [12]. Furthermore, there is a growing trend towards high-end wedding photography, costing over 10,000 yuan, as well as ever more personalized and unique wedding ceremonies [12].

Conspicuous consumption theory and empirical research have traditionally centered around durable goods, such as cars or watches, as indicators of wealth, income, and status [13]. Conspicuous consumption, characterized by the tendency to purchase visible material goods, manifests itself in three forms—ostentation and signalling, uniqueness, and social conformity [14]. Luxury and branded products are fundamental manifestations of these forms, with the prevalence of social media usage further increasing this behaviour [15]. However, individuals now engage in specific consumption behaviours not solely to showcase status and wealth but also to express their personalities, leading to a growing interest in non-material experiences [16]. The self-presentation of consumers through social media and co-consumption as part of the reflexive construction of self-identity highlights this evolving trend. Thus, conspicuous display emerges as a crucial dimension in the study of conspicuous consumption, a facet often overlooked in existing research.

Moreover, social media facilitates the purchase of experiences, which are generally less observable than material goods, offering new avenues for the conspicuous display of experiential shopping [8,17]. Research indicates that 94% of newlyweds in China primarily gather information related to the entire marriage process through online channels, transforming the stages of 'browsing, watching, comparing, buying, sharing, and loving' into a new paradigm for wedding consumption [12]. Social media has further facilitated the expression and circulation of 'emerging weddings', where individuals seek to convey the uniqueness of their wedding experience, reflecting their desired social image and status. The wedding ceremony, once primarily a religious ritual, has transformed into a modern, cultural, and largely secular spectacle. Here, consumers aim to create a customized and memorable experience, intertwining traditional romantic ideals with contemporary consumer desires [18]. Chinese wedding ceremonies, as both a display of material consumption and non-material experiences, not only garner attention and appreciation on social media but also serve as platforms for showcasing one's personality and unique experiences. Consequently, this study focuses on the social visibility of consumption in Chinese wedding ceremonies, exploring the impact mechanism of social visibility on conspicuous consumption behaviour and display.

This study explores conspicuous consumption in social media environments, examining how it interacts with social visibility, brand awareness, self-expression, and other aspects of consumption. As a result, social media acts as proof of one's presence in a digital society, enhancing the visibility of consumption across various dimensions and becoming a crucial factor influencing conspicuous consumption. Additionally, in the era of digital information, the changing features of wedding ceremonies also reflect the increasing demand for conspicuous consumption within the social media environment to some extent.

This study focuses on the Chinese wedding ceremony as its primary research subject. It initiates by examining the social visibility resulting from the use of social media and consumption to investigate their impact on conspicuous consumption and display. The paper's structure is organized as follows: the subsequent sections provide an introduction to the conceptual background of the study, encompassing a literature review and research hypotheses. In the Materials and Methods section, we present our research model, elaborate on the sample, detail variable measurements, and outline the statistical analysis. Moving to the Data Analysis and Results section, we report on the sample and test the research hypotheses. The Discussion section elucidates the conclusions, contributions, implications, and limitations of this study.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. *The self-concept and social comparison theories*

This study heavily draws upon the theories of self-concept and social comparison. The foundation of the social visibility of consumption is rooted in self-concept theory [19], where consumers strive for coherence between their actual and ideal selves. Self-concept, encompassing a person's attitudes and views towards themselves, naturally leads to the external expression of one's self, such as through conspicuous consumption. Seeking consistency in beliefs and behaviour fosters increased self-awareness and a clearer understanding of personal aspirations [20].

According to social comparison theory, individuals engage in comparisons with others to attain accurate self-evaluations [21]. Social media not only amplifies the social visibility of consumption but also serves as a platform for selectively sharing life, contributing to continuous identity shaping [22]. When individuals identify their social and reference groups on social media, they tend to establish evaluation standards for their ideal selves, aiming to fulfill these standards through consumption.

For example, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, along with social e-commerce applications such as RED, feature an

abundance of wedding-related information, comprising both advertising and personal self-disclosure. This information not only sets benchmarks for an ideal bride and wedding but also compels individuals to conform to these standards. Consequently, these standards drive individuals to display such behaviours to a greater extent.

The use of social media and the visibility of consumption have significantly promoted conspicuous consumption. Purchasing and showcasing luxury goods have become vital methods for individuals to attain social status and shape their image, especially evident in China's wedding celebrations.

Conspicuous consumption during these celebrations is evident in the purchasing of wedding dresses and diamond rings, along with experiential consumption behaviours like attending receptions. Moreover, distinctive wedding ceremonies, such as private weddings, seaside weddings, travel weddings, and those incorporating homemade costumes or traditional attire like xiuhe, represent forms of conspicuous consumption. These unconventional choices highlight the couple's pursuit of symbolic value and unique experiences. These symbolic elements can profoundly influence others, garnering additional recognition or appreciation.

2.2. Social media use and social visibility of consumption

When integrated into individuals' daily lives, social media broadens opportunities for consumers to share their purchasing behaviours and experiences. Consumers disclose their consumption behaviours through social media, which increases the social visibility of consumption and urges individuals to buy and display products that can showcase their social identity and status [5,23]. The term 'social visibility of consumption' (SVC) describes the phenomenon where consumers exhibit their social status by buying products from well-known brands and sharing images of these products on social media [24].

Social media is frequently used by individuals to seek advice, opinions, and generate social capital [25]. In this process, they also disclose their consumption choices. For example, sharing travel experiences through social media allows individuals to easily showcase their connections to tourism brands and their consumption experiences, defining the concept of social visibility of consumption within the context of tourism [5]. Research indicates that social media, serving as a potent tool for information exposure, is often employed by consumers to engage with others and share their product or brand experiences [26].

Jashari and Rrustemi [27] assert that every photo, video, comment, and other content posted on social media that consumers come into contact with plays a stimulating (motivating) role in identifying new needs. Athira [28] argues that social media has created a romanticised image of weddings and marriage, while digital media spaces such as Instagram have promoted 'aspirational Indian brides' and integrated bridal identity into consumption. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1. Social media use is positively related to the social visibility of consumption.

2.3. Social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption

Conspicuous consumption involves purchasing and displaying expensive and luxurious goods or services [29], with individuals aiming to enhance their social status by acquiring eye-catching products that signify wealth and status in the social hierarchy [30]. In essence, conspicuous consumption is when individuals consume goods and services to improve their image and social status. Research has verified that showcasing expensive products serves as an indicator of hegemony and class, allowing individuals to display their social and economic status to impress others [31].

Recent studies indicate that conspicuous consumption may also be driven by the desire to showcase social status through symbolic conspicuous consumption through social media posts [32]. For instance, individuals frequently showcase their status, culture, contacts, and tastes on platforms like WeChat moments to fulfill their needs for self-expression [33]. Conspicuous consumption is divided into two categories. The first is the behavioural tendency to purchase products based on functional demand, use value and intrinsic quality. The second category is the public display of purchased products or consumer experiences, to exhibit the symbolic value of products and unique experiences.

The social visibility of consumption forms reference groups for individuals, allowing them to express themselves, influencing conspicuous consumption behaviour and display. Users browsing social media information form self-evaluation criteria, make spontaneous social comparisons, and are subsequently influenced in their consumption decisions [34]. The visible consumers and their behaviours on social media encourage others to express themselves through conspicuous consumption. Social comparison theorists argue that individuals have a basic desire to assess their beliefs and abilities by comparing them with others [21]. Individuals often compare themselves to influential figures, idealized versions of themselves, to observe behaviour [35].

In general, the idealized self is related to an individual's financial resources and experience [9]. Fang and Podoshen [36] state that young Chinese consumers are increasingly susceptible to the impact of social media. Consumers build and spread their ideal self-images on social media, for example, by choosing luxury destinations that signify wealth [8,13] to reflect a certain identity [37]. The social visibility of consumption on social media enables individuals to convey their identity and status by pursuing unique and idealized experiences [38]. For example, white wedding dresses with diamond rings, influenced by media representation, have become standard for Chinese weddings, while Indian Americans showcase traditional cultural customs at wedding ceremonies to enhance their sense of belonging [39,40]. As social media and digital society develop, the visibility of wedding celebrations increases, making them a universally observed and celebrated activity. People increasingly opt to consume expensive goods or showcase unique experiences to express their distinct weddings and selves. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

H2a. The social visibility of consumption is positively related to conspicuous consumption behaviour.

H2b. The social visibility of consumption is positively related to conspicuous consumption display.

2.4. *The mediating role of brand awareness*

The visibility of consumers’ buying behaviour plays a crucial role in predicting and influencing the formation and maintenance of consumer-brand relationships. Studies indicate that when consumers are aware that their decisions will be observed by others, they may heavily rely on external cues. For example, when individuals assess airlines for holiday destinations, the impact of the airline brand is closely linked to the societal visibility of holidays [5]. Brand reputation demonstrates a positive correlation with consumer-brand identity [41]. The social visibility of consumption accentuates the brand’s status through the perspectives of other consumers. This positive social attention reinforces and enhances consumers’ self-awareness, motivating them to opt for well-known brands to showcase their wealth and status [42].

Furthermore, social media serves as a platform for businesses to create brand awareness for their products or services. After purchasing a product, consumers can showcase and discuss it on social media, and if satisfied, they may endorse or support the company on these platforms [43]. Currently, individuals garner more recognition through conspicuous consumption on social media. When purchasing products from renowned luxury brands for marriage-related purposes, individuals are inclined to display them on social media. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H3a. Brand awareness mediates the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption behaviour.

H3b. Brand awareness mediates the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption display.

2.5. *The moderating effect of self-expression*

As social media is an integral part of individuals’ daily lives and greatly impacts their consumer behaviour, possessions, and unique experiences have evolved into means that consumers use to build and maintain their self-image. According to Kim and Jang [44], Generation Y members perceive patronage of a luxury restaurant or café as a symbol of their desired lifestyle, contributing to self-expression.

The wedding ceremony is widely recognized as a significant milestone in an individual’s life. The manifestation of aspirations for a better future through the ceremony also shapes a personal image aligned with the ideal self. Based on this understanding, we propose the following hypotheses.

H4a. Self-expression moderates the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption behaviour.

H4b. Self-expression moderates the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption display.

As discussed, when consumption becomes a highly visible form of public expression, individuals tend to favour branded products. Previous research has indicated that consumers’ motivation related to identity, especially self-expression, significantly influences their connection with companies and brands [45]. Through communication, consumers articulate their self-concept and attract attention to themselves by sharing their consumption activities [46]. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H5. Self-expression moderates the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and brand awareness.

3. **Materials and methods**

We aim to explore how social media use, the visibility of consumption, brand awareness, and self-expression collectively influence conspicuous consumption in the context of Chinese wedding ceremonies. The framework presented in Fig. 1 is specifically designed to

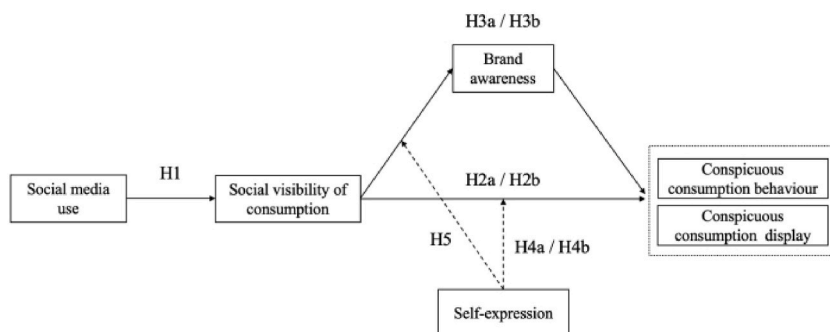


Fig. 1. Research model.

Note: the dotted line indicates the moderating effect.

assess the interplay between the social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption within the social media landscape.

3.1. Samples

Our study focused on individuals who either had already held weddings or were planning to do so. In November 2023, we used the Wenjuanxing platform to conduct a formal online survey. As one of the largest online survey data collection platforms in China, Wenjuanxing offers a structured method that overcomes time and space constraints, particularly valuable when evaluating samples with limited field effects [47]. Respondents were randomly selected through the paid sampling service provided by the platform and received compensation upon completing the online survey. At the survey's outset, participants were assured of anonymity and informed that it was solely for academic purposes. They were then asked if they had held a wedding or had plans to do so; those answering affirmatively proceeded with the survey, while others concluded their participation. After filtering out questionnaires with non-qualifying responses and imprecise answers, we obtained 570 valid questionnaires (refer to Table 1).

The average age of the 570 respondents was 26.3 years, with a relatively balanced gender ratio of approximately 2:3 (male to female). Educational backgrounds varied, with 17.2% holding a high school diploma or a lower qualification, 11.6% having a higher vocational diploma, 48.8% possessing a bachelor's degree, and 21.8% holding a master's degree or higher qualification. A majority (81.1%) reported an average monthly income of less than 7000 yuan. We also collected information on respondents' ethnic background and political persuasion, revealing that 84% were of Han ethnicity, while 16% belonged to ethnic minority groups.

3.2. Variable measurement

All measurement questions in this study were drawn from established and well-reviewed research literature to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurements. To enhance the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire, we sought input from five doctoral students who assessed the semantics and appropriateness of the items. Following their suggestions, we revised the content, summarized, and modified the questionnaire to align with the research objectives. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). We used SPSS 26.0 and Mplus 8.3 as statistical software.

Social media use derives from Gupta and Vohra [48] and contains four items that measure the intensity and dependence of personal social media use. We measured the social visibility of consumption using two items based on the definition of the concept. The variable of conspicuous consumption behaviour was adapted from the study by Mann and Sahni [14], and it includes five items. Conspicuous consumption display originates from the study by Taylor and Strutton et al. [49] and includes four items. Brand awareness was adapted from the study of Hoang et al. and Leo et al. [50,51], and it includes five items. Self-expression originates from the study of Bolino and Turnley [52] and contains three items that measure an individual's desire to display personal achievements, talents and a superior lifestyle. All measurement items can be found in Appendix A at the end of the paper.

3.3. Statistical analysis

We used SPSS 26.0 and Mplus 8.3 to analyse the data. First, we performed a descriptive statistical analysis to understand the demographics of the respondents. We used multinomial logistic regression to clarify the correlation between social media use, the social visibility of consumption, conspicuous consumption behaviour and conspicuous consumption display. To determine whether brand awareness plays a mediating role in the relationship between the social visibility of consumption, conspicuous consumption behaviour and conspicuous consumption display, we conducted a mediating analysis using the PROCESS macro. To this end, we employed a path analysis framework to estimate the ordinary least squares regression coefficients for each model path and to calculate direct, indirect and total effects. To test the indirect effects, we applied bootstrapping techniques (5000 samples) to ensure that our estimates would be more robust than those of Sobel's method by resampling subsets of data from a given dataset and then summarising

Table 1
Demographic data of the participants (N = 570).

Variable		Sample	Percentage (%)	Variable		Sample	Percentage (%)
Item	Classification			Item	Classification		
Monthly income	1000 yuan and below	111	19.5	Educational level	Middle school and lower	40	6.3
	1001–3000 yuan	108	18.9		High school/technical secondary school	62	10.9
	3001–5000 yuan	138	24.2		Vocational and technical college	66	11.6
	5001–7000 yuan	105	18.4		Undergraduate degree	278	48.8
	7001–10,000 yuan	47	8.2		Postgraduate degree and higher	124	21.8
	10,001–15,000 yuan	39	6.8		Gender	Male	228
15,001–30,000 yuan	13	2.3	Female	342		60.0	
Nationality	30,000 yuan and above	9	1.6	Age	18–25	238	41.8
	Minority ethnicity	91	16.0		26–30	248	49.6
	Han ethnicity	479	84.0		31–45	84	8.6

Note: 1 USD = 7.1256 RMB (as of November 20, 2022).

the final results of the statistical tests of those subsets [53]. Bootstrapping has considerable power and minimises the incidence of Type-I errors [54]. We performed all statistical analyses using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 and the PROCESS macros Model 4 and Model 8 for SPSS.

4. Results

4.1. Estimation of the measurement model: confirmatory factor analysis

We utilized SPSS 26.0 to conduct a principal component factor analysis of 570 sample data points. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.917, and the significance value from Bartlett’s test was 0.000, confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The Cronbach’s α value of social visibility of consumption was 0.690, which was still within the acceptable range. The other five variables’ Cronbach’s α values were all greater than 0.8, indicating high reliability.

Prior to testing the proposed model, preliminary assessments for normality and multicollinearity were performed (see Table 2), and the results showed that the absolute value of skewness of each variable ranged from 0.055 to 1.059 (<2) and the absolute value of kurtosis ranged from 0.052 to 1.776 (<7). All values were within the threshold value [55], which confirms the normality of the data. The variance of the inflation factor value for all cases was less than 3 [56]. Thus, we could conclude that multicollinearity was not present. A confirmatory factor analysis was then performed with Mplus 8.3 to assess the conformity of the data to the proposed theoretical model and to check the validity and reliability of the measured structure. The reliability and construct validity of the measurement model were evaluated by checking composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and Cronbach’s α values. The results showed that the AVE values of the six variables were all greater than 0.5, and the CR values were also greater than 0.7, indicating that the six variables had adequate convergent and construct validity [57]. Moreover, the square root of the AVE of all variables in this study was greater than the correlation coefficient between the factors, indicating that the factors had good discriminative validity [58].

The model fitting results showed that, $\chi^2/df = 4.161$, RMSEA = 0.075, SRMR = 0.058, GFI = 0.869, CFI = 0.921, TLI = 0.907, IFI = 0.921. A favorable or acceptable model fit is indicated when the ratio of χ^2/df is equivalent to 1.0–3.0 or 3.0–5.0, the GFI is above 0.90 or 0.80, the CFI and IFI were both above 0.95 or 0.90, and the SRMR and RMSEA were both below 0.05 or 0.08 [59]. Consequently, the measurement model in this study demonstrated a good fit with the sample data.

Given potential issues such as participants’ anonymity, content bias, and the nature of topics in online questionnaires, common method variance (CMV) can introduce deviations affecting measurement validity. To ensure the accuracy of our conclusions, we implemented several strategies to address potential CMV. Firstly, we employed anonymous questionnaires to enhance respondent objectivity and encourage candid responses. Secondly, data collection occurred in two stages to mitigate respondents’ inclination to associate variables in the study. Thirdly, we conducted a multicollinearity test utilizing the variance inflation factor (VIF), recommended as a comprehensive procedure for assessing the presence of CMV [60]. If the VIF is below 3.3, it indicates that common method variance is not detected as a concern in the data [60].

4.2. Direct effect test

The ordinary least squares regression results (Table 3) demonstrated that social media use has a significant positive impact on the social visibility of consumption ($\beta = 0.196, p < 0.001$), indicating that H1 is supported. Furthermore, the social visibility of consumption has a significant impact on conspicuous consumption behaviour ($\beta = 0.196, p < 0.01$) and conspicuous consumption display ($\beta = 0.171, p < 0.01$). Therefore, H2a and H2b are supported.

Table 2
Reliability, validity and correlations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Social media use	0.738					
2. Social visibility of consumption	0.151**	0.800				
3. Brand awareness	0.196**	0.147**	0.776			
4. Self-expression	0.395**	0.109**	0.433**	0.893		
5. Conspicuous consumption behaviour	0.345**	0.111**	0.625**	0.603**	0.822	
6. Conspicuous consumption display	0.278**	0.050**	0.564**	0.560**	0.784**	0.803
AVE	0.544	0.639	0.602	0.797	0.676	0.645
Skewness	-0.335	-1.059	0.097	-0.055	0.140	0.079
Kurtosis	0.285	1.776	0.311	0.084	0.429	0.052
VIF	1.202	1.038	1.247	1.403	-	-
CR	0.826	0.707	0.879	0.881	0.912	0.879
Mean	5.047	4.884	3.695	4.246	3.856	3.854
Standard deviation	1.089	1.267	1.206	1.258	1.188	1.281
Cronbach’s α	0.820	0.690	0.880	0.919	0.913	0.877

Note: the diagonal value is the square root of AVE. $p^* < 0.05$, $p^{**} < 0.01$; AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor; SD = Standard deviation; Square roots of AVE) in the diagonal.

Table 3
Regression analysis results.

Predictors	Social visibility of consumption	Conspicuous consumption behaviour	Conspicuous consumption display
	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)
Gender	-0.030 (0.113)	0.279** (0.101)	0.242* (0.109)
Age	0.012 (0.014)	0.006 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.015)
Educational level	-0.125** (0.045)	-0.046 (0.044)	-0.075 (0.049)
Personal monthly income	0.038 (0.032)	0.125*** (0.027)	0.126** (0.031)
Nationality	-0.255* (0.100)	0.280* (0.112)	0.374** (0.127)
Social media use	0.196*** (0.059)		
Social visibility of consumption		0.196** (0.039)	0.171** (0.040)
R ²	0.039	0.078	0.059

Notes: $p^* < 0.05$, $p^{**} < 0.01$, $p^{***} < 0.001$; S. E is standard error.

4.3. Mediating effect test

We employed Model 4 from the PROCESS v4.0 program in SPSS 26.0 to examine the mediating effect of brand awareness on the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption behaviour, as well as between conspicuous consumption behaviour and conspicuous consumption display. The number of bootstrap repeat samples was set to 5000. As indicated in Table 4, the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for the indirect effect of the social visibility of consumption on both conspicuous consumption behaviour and conspicuous consumption display are 0.022–0.126 and 0.023–0.124, respectively. Given that these intervals do not include 0, it suggests that brand awareness serves as a mediator. Hence, both H3a and H3b are supported.

4.4. Moderating effect test

We utilized Model 8 from the PROCESS v4.0 program in SPSS 26.0 to assess the tenability of the moderating effect of self-expression under the mediating influence of brand awareness. Subsequently, we conducted a bootstrap test by utilizing the average value for ‘self-expression’ and adjusting it by adding or subtracting one standard deviation. The results in Table 5 reveal that the combination of social visibility of consumption and self-expression has a significantly positive impact on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.104$; CI: [0.050, 0.159], excluding 0). However, the influence of social visibility of consumption and self-expression on both conspicuous consumption behaviour ($\beta = -0.004$; CI: [-0.046, 0.039], including 0) and conspicuous consumption display ($\beta = -0.006$; CI: [-0.056, 0.044], including 0) is not statistically significant. Consequently, H5 is supported, while H4a and H4b are not.

To further test the moderating effect, we divided ‘self-expression’ into ‘high self-expression’ (M + SD) and ‘low self-expression’ (M – SD) before drawing an interaction effect diagram (Fig. 2). The slope of the straight line in Fig. 2 reflects the impact of social visibility and consumption on brand awareness. According to a simple efficiency analysis, for individuals with high self-expression, individual brand awareness follows a significant upwards trend when the social visibility of consumption increases (simple slope = 1.414; $p < 0.001$). For those with low self-expression, individual brand awareness also follows a significant upwards trend (simple slope = 0.842; $p < 0.05$). In contrast, the impact of the social visibility of consumption on brand awareness is stronger among those with high self-expression.

5. Discussion

This study focuses on the social visibility of consumption during wedding celebrations, exploring the link between social media use and social visibility concerning conspicuous consumption and display. It investigates whether social media use amplifies the social visibility of individual consumption and elucidates the mechanisms through which the social visibility of consumption, brand awareness, and self-expression impact conspicuous consumption behaviour and display. The findings suggest that in a digital society integrated with social media, the social visibility of consumption influences conspicuous consumption. The widespread use of social media draws attention to experiential shopping and unique experiences, emphasizing them over ostentatious material consumption. Analyzing 570 valid questionnaires supports several arguments, revealing a potential pathway from social media use to conspicuous consumption behaviour and display.

Firstly, social media use positively correlates with social visibility of consumption. Frequent use of social media heightens the social

Table 4
Test of the mediating effect of brand awareness.

Mediation path	Effect size	SE	95% Bootstrap CI	
			Lower limit	Upper limit
X → M → Y ₁	0.073	0.026	0.022	0.126
X → M → Y ₂	0.071	0.026	0.023	0.124

Notes: X = social visibility of consumption; M = brand awareness; Y₁ = conspicuous consumption behaviour; Y₂ = conspicuous consumption display; SE is standard error; CI is the confidence interval; LL is the lower limit, UL is the upper limit.

Table 5
Test of the moderating effect of self-expression.

	Brand awareness			Conspicuous consumption behaviour			Conspicuous consumption display		
	β	SE	95%CI	β	SE	95%CI	β	SE	95%CI
A	0.076	0.035	[0.007,0.146]	0.003	0.027	[-0.051,0.057]	-0.048	0.032	[-0.111,0.015]
B	0.364	0.037	[0.292,0.436]	0.378	0.031	[0.318,0.438]	0.391	0.036	[0.320,0.461]
A*B	0.104***	0.028	[0.050,0.159]	-0.004	0.022	[-0.046,0.039]	-0.006	0.025	[-0.056,0.044]
R ²	0.501			0.736			0.676		

Notes: SE is standard error; CI is the confidence interval; LL is the lower limit, UL is the upper limit. A represents the social visibility of consumption, B represents self-expression; p*** < 0.001.

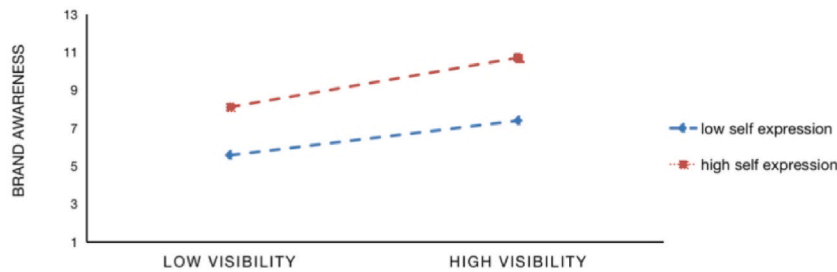


Fig. 2. Moderation of Self-expression.

Note: The vertical axis represents brand awareness, the horizontal axis represents the social visibility of consumption, and the dashed lines represent high and low self-expression.

visibility of wedding consumption, aligning with previous studies that emphasized the ease of sharing experiences on the internet [61]. Social media platforms like WeChat and microblogs are deeply embedded in daily life, eliminating geographical barriers in information exchange and transforming interpersonal relationships. This phenomenon explains the thriving nature of social media marketing [62]. Previous studies have suggested that consumers can use social media to view new products, understand their uses, share information and recommend products and brands [63].

The social visibility of consumption has improved considerably with the development and widespread adoption of social media, which has also affected the circulation and performance of wedding consumption on social media; however, this development has been neglected in the literature. Research on wedding ceremonies focuses more extensively on social norms and their connotations and issues such as stereotypes and the marginalisation of minorities [18]. More committed social media users tend to obtain information about wedding celebrations in the form of content such as images, videos and advertisements, which stimulates their desire to share their wedding-related consumption. They use the editability of social media to change their self-presentation in an online space, or they change the visible range by adjusting functional settings, thus improving the social visibility of individuals' wedding-related consumption and providing a reference point for the commercialisation of the Chinese wedding market.

Secondly, the social visibility of consumption is positively linked to conspicuous consumption behaviour and display. Wedding consumption, reflecting economic power, status, and family prestige, becomes a means of displaying these attributes. User's images, videos and blogs on social media serve as reminders of their weddings to friends. The deeply ingrained face culture in China amplifies users' desire to perform within their social circles, magnifying conspicuous consumption behaviour and display, and shaping their situational self-image.

In a digital society, conspicuous consumption is no longer limited to communication within a network of acquaintances but also involves global communication through the posting of attractions, schedules and locations on social media. These pieces of information also constitute evaluation criteria for the ideal self, subtly affecting the publisher and the receiver of the information. Results from past studies have also indicated that social media provides consumers with a platform for publicising information about personal items and product evaluations. This availability enhances the influence that users exert on friends and peers and the intersection of ideas in peer groups, all of which promote materialism [64]. Moreover, other content, such as likes, comments, hashtags and shares on social media can have an impact on users' selection of content for self-presentation, which may lead to idealized self-presentation [65]. The cameras that roll continuously in cyberspace are ubiquitous, and they considerably expand the visibility of individuals. Compared with a real presence, an online virtual presence can easily change individual behaviour through social norms and group pressure. This supports the main hypothesis that the social visibility of consumption in social media environments is related to conspicuous consumption and that the constantly increasing social visibility of consumption constructs and changes standards of self-comparison, thus reshaping self-concepts. However, contemporary research has focused on luxury consumption, neglecting the relationship between the social visibility of consumption at wedding celebrations and conspicuous consumption. To some extent, this study has expanded the theoretical understanding of the social visibility of consumption and the scope of application of the concept of conspicuous consumption.

Thirdly, brand awareness acts as a positive mediator in the influence of the social visibility of consumption on conspicuous

consumption behaviour and display. The visibility of wedding consumption enhances conspicuous behaviour and display by shaping individuals' brand awareness. Products and brands are the most direct and effective means by which consumers can express their self-image. According to the theory of self-improvement, individuals are assumed to be motivated to seek information that can improve their self-esteem [66]. This motivation prompts individuals to achieve their goals in various ways to actuate their ideal selves as soon as possible [67]. Previous studies have also found that the visibility of consumption can affect the relationship between consumers and brands [22]. Especially on wedding occasions, individuals try to showcase their achievements and social status to friends and relatives by conspicuously consuming branded products [14].

Lastly, self-expression positively moderates the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and brand awareness. Individuals, influenced by the increasing visibility of consumption, are more likely to purchase high-visibility brands for weddings, viewing these brands as extensions of themselves [68]. The selection and consumption of brands become a form of self-expression, strengthening the individual's brand awareness. However, self-expression does not significantly moderate the relationship between the social visibility of consumption and conspicuous consumption, possibly due to the influence of traditional Confucian culture, where modest behaviour is encouraged, and excessive flaunting of personal achievements is discouraged.

In conclusion, this study expands theoretical understanding and application of the social visibility of consumption, shedding light on its impact on wedding celebrations and conspicuous consumption behaviour. It highlights the changing landscape of consumption in the digital era and the role of social media in reshaping consumer behaviours and perceptions.

5.1. Research contributions

5.1.1. Theoretical contributions and implications

This study assesses the correlation between social media usage and the social visibility of consumption, positing a significant influence on conspicuous consumption behaviour and display. The theory of conspicuous consumption is multifaceted, often categorized into three or four dimensions based on contextual needs [8,13,14]. Here, we delineate these dimensions as material (involving luxury goods, branded products, services, etc.) and non-material (encompassing purchase experiences, symbolic value, etc.).

Our focus lies in scrutinizing how the evolution of the internet and social media has prompted changes in conspicuous consumption theory. While individuals persist in enhancing social status through the acquisition of high-end items like luxury goods and branded products, there is a growing recognition of non-material or symbolic forms of conspicuous consumption [32]. This shift caters to personal expressions and the flaunting of social status. This progression, to some degree, broadens the theoretical implications of conspicuous consumption, contributing to the expanding body of research in this domain.

5.1.2. Practical contributions and marketing implications

First, this research introduces a novel perspective to the examination of conspicuous consumption. We empirically investigate the interplay between brand awareness, self-expression, the social visibility of consumption, and conspicuous consumption. Unlike previous studies that predominantly concentrate on probing the direct influence of social media use intensity on conspicuous consumption [50,69], this study pioneers in providing empirical evidence to assess the relationship between self-expression, the social visibility of consumption, and brand awareness in the digital realm. The outcomes suggest that self-expression modulates the connection between the social visibility of consumption and brand awareness, with the increased social visibility of consumption fostering conspicuous consumption and display through heightened brand awareness. These findings offer valuable guidance for future research endeavors in this field.

Second, this study furnishes fresh insights for companies and marketers aiming to formulate marketing plans and communication strategies, particularly those involved in wedding products and services. Understanding consumer demands for diverse and unique wedding styles is imperative, but equally crucial is grasping the intricate behavioural motivations driving the purchase of wedding products and services. Quality remains fundamental, but companies should also appreciate how to inspire consumers to showcase and share their wedding scenes, details, and unique experiences, thus incorporating the company's products and services into the wedding process.

The study aligns with prior research findings that underscore the transformative impact of digital technology on social life and space [70]. Individuals now navigate a novel imagined space where they vie for visibility, shape identities based on followers' interests, and embody a personality composed of the content they create, both in production and consumption. This highlights that, in the future market, luxury will no longer be the sole determinant in shaping product brand image. Instead, enterprises should focus on creating imagined spaces for consumers and enhancing the visibility of products designed for this market. Given the specific social context and wedding-related issues in China, the established direct impact mechanism of social visibility on conspicuous consumption behaviour and display may need further empirical research to ascertain its applicability to wedding-related issues in diverse social contexts.

5.2. Research limitations and future studies

This research has some limitations that need consideration. Firstly, the use of one-shot survey data, while effective in establishing the model's fit and significance, may benefit from alternative survey methods providing multipoint data for a more comprehensive understanding of the suggested causal relationships. Experimental manipulations or longitudinal studies could further corroborate the robustness of the identified causal links. Secondly, the challenge of measuring social media use intensity persists. While our measurement items attempt to gauge the degree of use, future research should explore additional dimensions of social media engagement.

Thirdly, the absence of a moderating effect of self-expression on the social visibility of consumption could be influenced by cultural factors. The measurement items, originally designed by U.S. scholars, may not align perfectly with traditional Chinese values that emphasize understatement and introversion. Future studies should adapt items to reflect specific cultural nuances and strive for larger, more diverse samples to enhance generalizability. Lastly, researchers are encouraged to refine the measurement and application of the social visibility of consumption concept within the framework of media technology and environmental theory. Such refinement could lead to the identification of additional mediators or moderators influencing conspicuous consumption behaviour and display, ultimately expanding upon the model presented in this paper.

Data availability

All data analyzed are included in the paper.

Data will be made available on request.

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ongoing research and analysis, but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethical approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants followed the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

This study was designed in accordance with the regulations of all the authors’ institutions (Huazhong university of science and technology) and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The study was not medical research nor regarded human experimentation as stated in the Declaration of Helsinki. Moreover, all the respondents were 18 years old and over and agreed to answer our research questionnaire. The gathered information is strictly confidential and anonymous and is only used for research purposes.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Respondents’ participation was completely consensual, anonymous, and voluntary.

Participants were informed about the aim of the study, confidentiality of information, voluntary participation, and ability to opt out of the study if needed. Participants were informed through the question “Do you accept participation in this survey”. If they chose to “I accept to participate”, they could proceed the next page of the measures. All participants gave their agreement to participate in the study and consented to processing of their data.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Yangjin Shamu: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Zhenwu You:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Meng Wang:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Survey questionnaires and measurement items

Constructs	Measurement Items
Intensity of social media use	Using social media is a part of my daily activities. I usually enjoy using social media very much. If I don’t log in to any social media, I feel disconnected from the world. I respond to content shared by others on social media.
Social visibility of consumption	When hosting a wedding celebration, I am willing to use products that most people are familiar with. When hosting a wedding celebration, I believe that choosing which products to use is a personal matter and does not require too many people to know.
Brand awareness	I understand the brands of wedding-related products. I can identify the brand logo of wedding-related products. When it comes to wedding celebrations, some related products quickly come to mind.

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Constructs	Measurement Items
Self-expression	I usually choose more expensive branded wedding products. The higher the price of wedding-related products, the better the quality. I want people to know about my achievements. I want to showcase my achievements. I want to show people my talents.
Conspicuous consumption behaviour	I enjoy using branded products at weddings. When I pay for a wedding, I am willing to pay more for branded products. I am willing to purchase special branded products for weddings to create a unique personal image for me. Using branded products at weddings can earn me social recognition. Buying branded products for weddings helps me leave a good impression on others.
Conspicuous consumption display	If the wedding products purchased are expensive, I would be more willing to show them off to everyone. If I have some high-end and unique wedding items, I would be more willing to share them on social media. Buying internet celebrity wedding products and displaying them can showcase my social status. Sharing unique wedding experiences on social media can highlight my social status.

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