

Consumption behavior identifies boy-girl gender discrimination in Chinese households

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Yufei Zhang, Ph.D. Credit: University of Alabama at Birmingham

Gender-based discrimination is not new. Gender-based research continues to show the many disparities between genders in all areas of life, whether it is workplaces or homes. A widely held belief is that boys and girls are treated differently in their households, but the question is: Is the idea empirically supported by research?

A researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Collat School of Business, Yufei Zhang, Ph.D., conducted the first large-scale empirical work to verify the phenomenon of boy-girl discrimination, taking advantage of e-commerce marketing data. Her [research](#) "Do 'Little Emperors' Get More Than 'Little Empresses'? Boy-Girl Gender Discrimination as Evidenced by Consumption Behavior of Chinese Households," was published in *Marketing Science*.

"In this study, we examine boy-girl [gender](#) discrimination in China as manifested in parents' purchase decisions on behalf of their children across different markets," Zhang said. "Specifically, we compare the clothing expenditures on boys versus girls using a rich, household-specific data set obtained from two online retailers."

Zhang's research finds that the patterns of gender inequality vary systematically across different geographic markets, as the relative expenditure difference on boys versus on girls is bigger in less developed areas as compared with metropolitan areas. This relative expenditure difference is closely tied with socioeconomic conditions, education levels and birth rates of a district.

"I believe this research demonstrates a significant social issue of gender [discrimination](#), and firms can actually leverage their sales/marketing data

to identify these issues and design socially responsive campaigns to make a difference in society at large," Zhang said.

Zhang says her research aims to demonstrate that the abundant marketing data companies are using to explore new business opportunities can be an equally fertile source for uncovering an undesirable social attitude or behavior that may be relevant to firms' business.

"Companies may benefit from this knowledge when developing innovative new programs that aim to benefit society, such as corporate social responsibility initiatives," Zhang said.

More information: Chen Lin et al, Do "Little Emperors" Get More Than "Little Empresses"? Boy-Girl Gender Discrimination as Evidenced by Consumption Behavior of Chinese Households, *Marketing Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1287/mksc.2021.1302](https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2021.1302)

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