

# Image-conscious males step up

Rise of the Urban Chinese Man willing to spend on grooming represents a big, influential market

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Unprecedented changes are sweeping the Chinese male consumer products market. The Urban Chinese Man is now acutely conscious of his appearance and is spending big money on grooming. In the process, he has spawned a multibillion-dollar industry of various cosmetic products and services.

Appearance matters more now than before because there are simply far too many careers for males that are directly linked to looks, industry insiders said.

Wu Kai, 28, a branding specialist based in Hangzhou, East China's Zhejiang province, could not agree more. Every day, his office building fills with software programmers wearing plaid shirts, sportswear and dark-colored outdoor jackets. But it is Wu and his team who stand out among them for their neat hairstyles and tailor-made clothes made of top-quality fabrics.

Wu has been known for his neat and natty clothing since college, when he was already well organized, cultivating clean, tidy habits as part of his overall attitude toward life.

But Wu is not an overly tidy or picky person. Yes, he hates being dirty, but he is generous, easygoing and extroverted.

There are many Chinese men of his ilk these days. Wu usually spends around 2,000 yuan (\$310) on a regular coat or shirt, and will happily part with more than 10,000 yuan for a quality business suit.

"In a working environment and even for some important occasions, professionals need to know how to dress, as it may have a big bearing on how others perceive you," Wu said. "Being well turned out will allow one to stand out, as it portrays a positive and professional image as well as showing the person is prepared. And it also shows one's respect for others."

Awareness of what is appropriate dressing and grooming has brought Wu several key opportunities. He was chosen as host for his employer's annual gala. He was also invited to higher-level business meetings.

"I feel more confident when I am dressed properly," Wu said.

Millennials such as Wu are unlike their parents. They are more comfortable with the concept of spending time and money on grooming and pampering themselves.

According to a survey report earlier in January by China UnionPay, China's bankcard association, 23 percent of people born in the 1990s will spend more than 5,000 yuan a month on online shopping, topping

all other age groups. And 23 percent of male consumers, and 15 percent of women consumers, will spend more than 5,000 yuan a month on online shopping. However, there are no clear figures for the actual number of male and female consumers in China.

A joint report by The Boston Consulting Group and AliResearch, the research arm of Alibaba, said China's consumer market, the world's second-largest, is projected to reach \$6.1 trillion by 2021.

The future consumer market growth would be particularly driven by China's emerging upper middle-class and affluent households. The younger generation's purchasing habits and their increasing role in omnichannel e-commerce are key. Males' spending on skin-care products surged by 24 percent from 2014 to 2015, compared with the 11 percent growth in overall skin-care product spending.

Zong Ning, a Beijing-based e-commerce analyst, said in a column on iResearch website that as tech-savvy young males, especially those born in the 1990s, gradually become the influential force in the consumer world, the erupting demographic is creating new momentum in the market for male products and services.

Chinese men are no longer shy of setting foot in, say, a beauty and grooming salon or fashion stores.

China's male skin-care market saw sales of more than 10 billion yuan last year, and it is expected to hit 15.4 billion yuan by 2019, according to a report by CTR Market Research.

Seeing the new trend, major cosmetic brands are now adjusting strategies to better cater to the booming male market. For brands, young men are as key to success as female consumers.

Beiersdorf China, an affiliate of Germany's Beiersdorf, said with the increasingly changing male behaviors, it now sees huge potential in its Nivea Men brand's online sales in China.

Nivea Men has become the company's largest business in the country. Online sales now account for one-third of overall Nivea Men sales in China, according to Simon Cao, marketing director of Beiersdorf China.

"With the booming mobile Internet and e-commerce development, now more tech-savvy males will prefer to buy cosmetic products from online stores," he said. "We estimate the proportion of online sales will hit 50 percent by 2020."

Cao said the scene has changed a lot in the last five years. Today, e-commerce is more than just a supplementary channel for offline sales. It is the main marketplace to further develop brands.

10,025  
yuan/year

Average amount a Chinese urban male consumer spends online, which is more than what a Chinese female consumer spends

## Men's Choice: Top 10 categories



1 Menswear



2 Household electric appliances



3 Wine



4 Computer accessories



5 Smart devices



6 Photography and video recording



7 Audio and video entertainment



8 Watches



9 Personal care



10 Sports shoes and bags

Sources: The Boston Consulting Group, AliResearch and JD Research Institute

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Using big data, the online platform of Nivea is able to analyze consumer behavior and develop new products to better target specific consumer needs.

According to Cao, consumption upgrade is also key as young males spend more money on grooming,

prefer to buy more skin-care products, and even would like to try makeup. So, at the beginning of last year, Nivea Men introduced more categories of cosmetics.

Having been in China for more than 10 years, Nivea Men ranks as a leading male cosmetic brand. Its

top rival is L'Oreal.

"The competition in the industry is really fierce," Cao said. "The key is to keep pace with the young consumers and the new trend, and retain loyalty of existing consumers as well as attract potential consumers."