

Consumption-based Partnerships: Beyond Friends and Dates

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Abstract

Digital platforms in China are reshaping how consumers form and manage interpersonal ties. This research examines dazi, which is an activity-bounded companionship in which individuals seek companions for specific pursuits such as dining, travel, coffee, gaming, or exercise. Using a longitudinal corpus of 11,515 public Xiaohongshu (RED) posts from 2021 to 2025, we identify and argue that dazi is primarily framed as companionship rather than romance or obligation, closely tied to everyday chatting and shared activities. Moreover, dazi is described as practical, low-pressure, and situational which is different from friendship as emotionally close and supportive and situationship as intimate but ambiguous and emotionally unstable. These findings introduce dazi as a distinct, activity-based relationship form that supports flexible social connection in digitally mediated life and offer actionable insights for platforms designing companionship and matching services.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media