

Media Enjoyment and Body Symbols: An Overview of Fashion Trends in Chinese Sportswear Consumption

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of fashion trends in China's sports apparel industry and how this impact has a ripple effect on the global sports industry. China's sports apparel market has grown at a CAGR of 7.6% since 2016 to 2020 and is expected to continue to grow at a CAGR of 6.4% from 2021 to 2028. Research has shown that fashion is not only related to clothing, but also to broader cultural and social phenomena. Body perception, especially in the digital environment, has become a key driver of sports apparel selection and purchase. At the same time, short-form video marketing has become an effective means of communication. It is rich in cultural, historical and social symbolism. The results of the study show that sports apparel with fashionable features not only enhances individual confidence and motivation, but also enables a more diverse and complex symbolic expression of the body in social media. Understanding and keeping up with the latest fashion trends is crucial for sportswear brands, especially in China, the world's largest consumer market. This study provides brands, designers, and market analysts with valuable insights that will help them more effectively capitalize on market trends and consumer demand.

Keywords

Media enjoyment, Body symbols, Sportswear, Consumer trends.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion trends have never been an important consideration in the development of the sports apparel industry. In recent years, with the rapid development of the global sports industry, the upgrading of sports consumption, and the consumers' demand for fashionable, specialized and segmented sportswear, the global sportswear industry has shown a trend of steady increase in concentration. The concentration of China's sportswear industry is higher than that of the global market, and the concentration is growing steadily. With the support of national policies, supply chain efficiency of leading brands, channel market expansion and sinking, as well as the development of niche sports popularity, China's sports apparel industry has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.6% from 2016 to 2020, and is expected to continue to grow at a CAGR of 6.4% from 2021 to 2028 (Mordor Intelligence. 2021), Chinese consumer demand for fashionable and functional sportswear will continue to increase as the market continues to grow. This increased demand is important not only for the Chinese sports industry, but also for the sports industry on a global scale. China is a key player in the global sportswear industry and the growth and development of its market has a knock-on effect on the global industry. Therefore, it is crucial for both local and international sports brands to understand the latest trends in Chinese sportswear in order to meet the changing needs of Chinese consumers and capitalize on the growth potential of the market.

2. DEFINITION OF FASHION

Fashion accounts for a large portion of consumption. Over the past centuries, it has developed as the main business of modern society. Fashion encompasses more than just clothing; it can be interpreted as a broad cultural phenomenon and identified with musical issues, home décor, painting, literature, and even business practices to name a few (Solomon 2006: 589, Aspers & Godart 2013). However, fashion today is primarily associated with clothing and less so with other types of tangible or intangible objects (Crane & Beauvone 2006). Nonetheless, although fashion is closely associated with clothing, this does not necessarily mean that clothing is fashion. Powell and Gilbert (2009:1-2) define clothing as "the empirical reality of the clothed body". According to anthropological and sociological traditions, clothing is a form of material culture, part of one's lived experience. People do not necessarily follow fashion or incorporate it into their clothing, however, they still have a choice in what they wear and what they would like to wear. (Powell & Gilbert 2009: 1-2.) When people dress according to their own preferences, they can identify as their own style. Style is more of a more enduring phenomenon than fashion, for example, it can represent a permanent part of a cultural reference. In clothing, a style is a certain combination of details, fabrics, and construction of an existing style that can wear out over time. (Aspas & Godart 2013.) Of course, style can be influenced by fashion, however, fashion will not be the key to a person having their own personal style. In academia, fashion has been devalued, especially in the past when it was not taken seriously. Although fashion theories have been developed, fashion as a sociology is seen to be incompletely studied. (Crane & Bovone 2006, Aspers & Godart 2013.) Even if Aspers and Godart (2013) consider fashion as a sociological subject, they point out that fashion can also be identified to other disciplines such as history, economics, cultural studies and philosophy, on the other hand, having an impact on sociology. As fashion plays a role in many aspects of life, theorists can study it in several sciences to gain knowledge from multiple aspects of the subject (Miller et al. 1993, Hemphill & Suk 2009). From the economic point of view, fashion is from the point of view of consumption, on the other hand, social theorists can consider this topic from the aspect of social class and social change. Cultural studies perspective fashion, for example, as a creator of symbolic meaning and value. (Hemphill & Suk 2009.) Fashion is a broad phenomenon that is reflected in social influences and through these provides insights into consumer behavior (Miller et al. 1993). The definition of fashion remains unclear and as a concept it has several meanings. Fashion is difficult to define as the word itself has two different meanings; fashion can mean change or dress (Aspers & Godart 2013). Change suggests that fashion needs to evolve further, which explains new creations replacing old ones.

There is no one precise definition of fad or fashion, according to Crane and Bovone (2006) consumers and academics view fashion differently. The term fashion can be implicit in music, literature, art, business practices, etc. However, usually when discussed, it is seen as clothing (Aspers & Godart 2013, Solomon 2006, 589; Crane and Bovone 2006). Even so, the ideology behind fashion is more than just a piece of clothing; it is a sociological phenomenon. Fashion has changed radically over the last few centuries, even in the span of a few decades, from slowly changing dresses to fast stage clothing. One of the major recent developers of fashion is digitization. Information and telecommunication started to change the world in the 1970s (Perez 2007), it created an important foundation for the internet and in the long run it has become such an important part of the society that people don't know how to live without it. Technological improvements and digitization made online shopping possible and changed the attitude of its part of the consumer towards retail. Changes just started to occur before the turn of the century (Chiang & Dholakia 2003) and developed consumer behavior also occurred in the fashion industry. The steady increase in e-commerce since the turn of the millennium has created new ways for consumers to access information, as well as purchase goods and services.

Digitalization has brought the market closer to the consumer. By going online it is possible to follow fashion around the world in real time and order the latest trends with just a few clicks. It goes without saying that digitization has changed the way consumers think and act when consuming their needs and wants, comparing alternatives and making decisions about actually buying products and services. It has also changed the way consumers observe the environment they are in and how they share their views on fashion by introducing different people to digital solutions such as social media. Moreover, the changes continue to grow.

3. BODY PERCEPTION

In recent years, as brands have diversified their marketing strategies away from traditional media (e.g., television, radio, and newspapers) and towards personalization, consumers are using smartphones and other devices to search, share, and even create fashion trends in real time (Jennings 2019). Social networking services (SNS)-based "short video" marketing is gaining popularity among sportswear brands and is expected to become a new means of communicating messages related to corporate sustainability strategies. In addition, the isolation of individuals due to the COVID-19 pandemic caused by embargoes, social alienation, and quarantine has contributed to the rapid growth of short-form media. Considering these negative changes in the apparel market, the use of short-video media to promote sustainable business strategies could be a very effective approach for sportswear brands. While there are many studies that use consumer-driven data approaches to analyze fashion consumer preferences through text mining methods (Camiciottoli et al., 2012; Kulmala et al., 2013), with the popularity of diverse social software and the explosive production of information, the short video model has received a lot of attention, and the use of highly popular videos with high response rates to identify the development of fashion design has not yet been discussed. Meanwhile, as competition in the Chinese sportswear consumer market intensifies, it has become crucial for sportswear brands to develop innovative fashion products that meet the preferences and needs of Chinese consumers. Therefore, understanding the latest fashion trends and consumer preferences has become a major challenge for brands to address in order to remain competitive. In addition, the choice and purchase of fashionable sportswear by both men and women are not only symbolic, but also an expression of their own aesthetic taste, lifestyle and style. Previously, both sport economics and sport sociology have done a lot of research on consumption practices in sports and consumers in the sports arena, but there is a lack of sociological analysis of fashion trends. Indeed, "individual consumption is an expression of the cultural and social values that are prevalent at a particular time and place, charting both the trajectory of the rise and fall in demand for a good in relation to social change, as well as the consumer's concern with the object of consumption itself and the impact of the object on the individual's psyche".

Meanwhile, the digital environment has profoundly influenced identity-based consumption and consumption patterns (Su, 2019). The substitutability of virtual identities in social media motivates individuals to engage in activities that strategically serve their goals (Dodoo, 2018). Particularly with the popularity of social media, individuals are empowered to create, display, and advertise the identities they want online to fulfill their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Therefore, the lack of research on the relationship between fashion elements and the meanings consumers attribute to them and their role in socializing their own bodies has to be regarded as a deficiency, therefore, this study aims to identify fashion trends with fashionable characteristics and provide consumer-driven trends through the use of text mining and semantics focusing on Douyin that reflect consumer needs, official short TikTok mainstream branded videos and consumer-driven comments about sportswear.

4. DRESS PRACTICE

Through reading and thinking about the theoretical literature, this paper takes "media enjoyment and body symbols" as a framework for exploring the fashion trend of sportswear in China. Today, sportswear is no longer simply defined as clothing used for sports; in addition to its functionality, it also needs to be fashionable, and can break down spatial barriers, appearing in many occasions in life, and its symbolic meaning has far exceeded its own functional intent. Unlike many other consumer products, sportswear is not essential for fitness, and can often be replaced by a simple and comfortable set of ordinary clothing, but research confirms (Sara, 2020; Angel-ique, 2014) that when wearing a set of professional fashionable sportswear with a sense of design and good materials that can emphasize their strong or slim body, they will be more confident and motivated to participate in the exercise, and live a life that is not only functional but also fashionable. motivated to take part in exercise, and life is spiced up as a result. Not only do people want to show off their bodies better in social media, but they also want to express their body symbols in a more complex and varied way. With the rapid development of the media and entertainment industry, our bodies have gradually become one of the objects of entertainment consumption.

The human body is a clothed body, the social world is a clothed body world, and clothing or accessories are a means of socializing the body and giving it meaning and identity", so "the act of dressing is a matter of how one thinks about the body and how one presents one's body and involves different levels of consciousness". The choice of dress is both a private experience of the body and a public expression of identity; dress expresses the body and provides a discourse about it. Therefore, by placing body symbols at the center of the conceptualization of the study of sportswear consumption, and by considering the relationship between body symbols and social media, it is possible to examine how one develops one's own body and assigns symbolic value to specific body forms through clothing choices, thus generating body capital from living, real-life experiences.

As media continues to evolve, people have begun to utilize body symbols as a way of conveying information and meaning. The theory of media enjoyment has thus attracted widespread attention, and body symbols, as an important embodiment thereof, have become a hot research topic. At present, there is not much research on body symbols at home and abroad, but in some interdisciplinary fields, research has begun to progress. This paper summarizes the current research status of body symbols in the perspective of media enjoyment theory. Firstly, it introduces the relevant concepts and theories, including the relevant contents of media enjoyment theory, the concept and connotation of body symbols and so on. Secondly, the current status and progress of research on body symbols from the perspective of media enjoyment theory in domestic and international academic circles are described. Finally, the existing problems and urgent problems are summarized, and the future research direction and focus are proposed. Japanese scholar Eito Tomamichi puts forward the theory of body symbolism, that is, the body serves as a medium of information and communication, conveying a message that contains elements of culture, history, society and other aspects, thus forming a non-verbalized symbolic expression. Then, the "mental schema" put forward by American scholar Derrin Jaxon is introduced, who believes that people's experiences form a mental structure in the brain, and people's reception and expression of information are realized through mental schema, in which body symbols play an important functional role. In addition, this paper also composes and synthesizes the research on body symbols by other scholars at home and abroad, with a view to providing certain references and inspirations, as well as providing the necessary theoretical support for the research of this paper.

5. CONCLUSION

Given the speed of information technology and the social media environment, fashion week runway images are publicly available and searchable in real time. Fashion merchants and designers subscribe to social media around the world, but consumers are also on the runway checking out styles, patterns and colors and discussing the performance and design of fashion products (Laurell 2017). Thus, while fashion collections determine the next season's high-end fashion trends (Ræbild and Bang 2017), most fashion researchers, academics and designers would agree that the ultimate goal of fashion trend forecasting is to rate selected actual fashion trends by consumers (Beheshti-Kashi et al. 2015).

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