

# **Analysis of Symbolic Meaning and Behavior Characteristics of Fashion Consumption**

Yi-Jing SONG<sup>1,a,\*</sup>, Yu-Ling BAI<sup>2,b</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Cherry East Street, Chaoyang District,  
 Beijing, 100000, China

<sup>a</sup>18519233627@163.com, <sup>b</sup>sxybyl@bift.edu.cn

\*Yi-Jing Song

**Keywords:** fashion consumption, symbolic meaning, behavioral characteristics

**Abstract.** Under the background of upgraded consumption in China, fashion consumption deserves attention. This paper holds the point that the main demands of consumers in fashion consumption activities are not limited to the usage value of commodities, but the symbolic meaning of commodities is more obvious. Taking the young people who always try to pursue the fashion trend as the research target, this paper analyses their fashion consumption performance and behavior characteristics. Finally, it is concluded that the symbolic commodities have become the main force to promote fashion consumption and suggestions for relevant enterprises are put forward.

## **1. Fashion and Fashion Consumption**

### **1.1 The Concept of Fashion**

The study of fashion originated from the field of social psychology. In his *Philosophy of Fashion*, Georg Simmel defined fashion as "Fashion is an established imitation that satisfies the needs of social adjustment; it directs individuals to the path of everyone's journey, and it provides a universal principle of turning individual behavior into a model. At the same time, it also satisfies the requirements for difference, change and individuality"[1]. It is the product of class division. Simmer believes that fashion is hierarchical. The higher strata of society distinguish themselves from the lower strata by fashion. When the lower strata begin to imitate the fashion of the higher strata, the higher strata will abandon this fashion and make another fashion.

### **1.2 The Meaning of Fashion Consumption**

The definition of the concept of fashion consumption is still controversial, mainly because that fashion consumption involves many fields, such as design, manufacturing, sociology, marketing and so on. Different disciplines have different views on the interpretation of fashion consumption.

In the discussion of fashion by many scholars, the sociologist Simmel's view on fashion issues is a classic cited by scholars from all walks of life. German sociologist Simmel believes that f Fashion consumption is the combination of "Seeking the same" and "Showing the difference"[1]. "Seeking the same" means that people get a sense of

belonging to a certain social class by consuming the same goods or services with others. "Showing the difference" means that individuals are distinguished from other social classes by fashion consumption. Fashion consumption can make individuals get a sense of belonging and identify themselves with a certain social class, and at the same time show differences by distinguish from other social classes.

Bi Wenfen defines fashion consumption as: an individual's consumption behavior by pursuing fashion in dressing, electronics, diet, behavior, culture and ideas, to obtain a sense of group ownership or self-personalization. It is a kind of lifestyle and consumer culture."[2]. Tian Chaojie proved the existence of four values of fashion consumption: image value, social value, cool value and pleasure value through empirical research. Fashion consumption has been integrated into our daily life. It is not only a popular way of life, but also a consumption culture[3]. With the development of economy and the improvement of people's living standard, people begin to pay more attention to the value behind the usage value of commodities in daily consumption.

*Chinese fashion consumption trend red book in 2018*, which was jointly studied by the Anthropology Fashion Laboratory and ZhiMeng Consulting Agency, points out the changes of Chinese fashion consumption: fashion is not only a synonym of luxury and high-end, but also fashion has become an attitude towards life; young people love street fashion, more and more original brands are loved and sought after by young people; light luxury, it finds a balance between price and quality for young people. Young people have become the main force of fashion consumption, which has an important impact on the trend and change of fashion consumption in China. Therefore, this paper takes fashion consumer groups as an example to explore their main characteristics in fashion consumption activities.

Fashion consumption products cover a wide range, clothing and apparel, electronic products, drinks and food and even shared bicycle can be regarded as the target products of fashion consumption. Taking fashion clothing as an example, this study explores the characteristics of fashion consumption behavior of fashion consumer groups in order to provide supporting materials for enterprises and businesses to develop the fashion consumption market.

## **2. Symbolic Meaning of Fashion Consumption**

### **2.1 Correspondence Theory**

It is generally believed that there are two sources of semiotic, one is the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and the other is the American mathematical logician and pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce.

Saussure and Pierce founded semiotics respectively from different perspectives. This article mainly introduces Pierce's semiotic theory. From the view of the overall theoretical development of semiotic, Pierce's semiotic theory mainly refers to two major components: symbol theory and symbol classification theory.

According to Peirce's semiotics theory that symbols consist of three parts: the "Representaman", the "Object" and the "Interpretant"[4]. The representaman means that the medium can be the impression or thought obtained by the real thing or the Sensory; the object can be the real object, or the imagination existing in the mind; the

interpretant is Interpretation is the meaning of a symbol. It refers to the cognition, the psychological effect or thought generated by the symbol in the human brain, and it is also a symbol. They form a trinity relationship, and the three are indispensable.

Pierce's symbol is a triadic unity. Through the interpreter's interpretation, it establishes a certain connection between the symbol and the object. Symbol acts as a medium of thought and reality. Symbol itself has no reference or expression. It is human beings who endow the symbol with life, interpret and stipulate it, and develop human themselves with the symbol as a tool.

## **2.2 Fashion Consumption Is Essentially Symbolic Consumption**

French philosopher Jean Baudrillard[5] was the first person to put forward the idea of symbolic consumption. He believed that products have two sides: the quality, function and performance of products with material value and the design, color, brand and advertisement of products with symbolic value. Because of these product images, consumers are no longer only using the function of the item itself, but satisfying their psychological needs with perceptual consumption. Therefore, as Baudrillard said, in the era of symbolic consumption, the symbol has gradually become the center of capitalist consumption logic. The core idea that runs through the theory of Baudrillard's symbolic consumption theory is that in contemporary capitalist society, people consume not the value of usage but the symbolic value of it.

Fashion consumption is a kind of imitation consumption of popular fashion products. In many cases, consumers themselves are not pursuing the actual usage value of commodity, but the symbolic value brought by fashion consumption, such as outlook value, social value and so on. Through fashion consumption, consumers can make themselves belong to a certain group, or show their unique personality, and get the sense of belonging or express their personality, which belongs to the symbolic meaning of fashion consumption.

## **3. Behavior Characteristics of Fashion Consumption**

In this paper, Beijing residents are selected as the research object. The survey time is July 2019. Questionnaires are distributed through internet, and some sample personnel are randomly selected for in-depth interviews. The sample age ranges from 20 to 35 years. A total of 304 questionnaires were received by 121 males and 166 females. After careful screening, 287 valid questionnaires were obtained and the recovery rate of effective questionnaire was 94.4%.

### **3.1 Pay Equal Attention to Product Quality and Design Style**

Taking fashion clothing as an example, this paper explores the most important factors that consumers value when shopping. As we can see in Fig.1, 48.98% of consumers choose "product quality", 48.64% choose "design style" of clothing, and 41.84% choose "price". The choice of design style depends on the individual preferences of consumers. The quality of the products can be guaranteed to give consumers peace of mind. When consumers buy fashion clothes, they not only value the design style of the clothing, but also the quality of the products. The price is second only to the product quality and design style. The services provided by the product spokesperson/advertising model and merchants accounted for 7.14% and 12.59% respectively, indicating that in the consumption of fashion clothing, it can still

maintain a certain rationality, focusing on product quality and personal preference, and has certain ability to distinguish the subsidiary value provided by products.

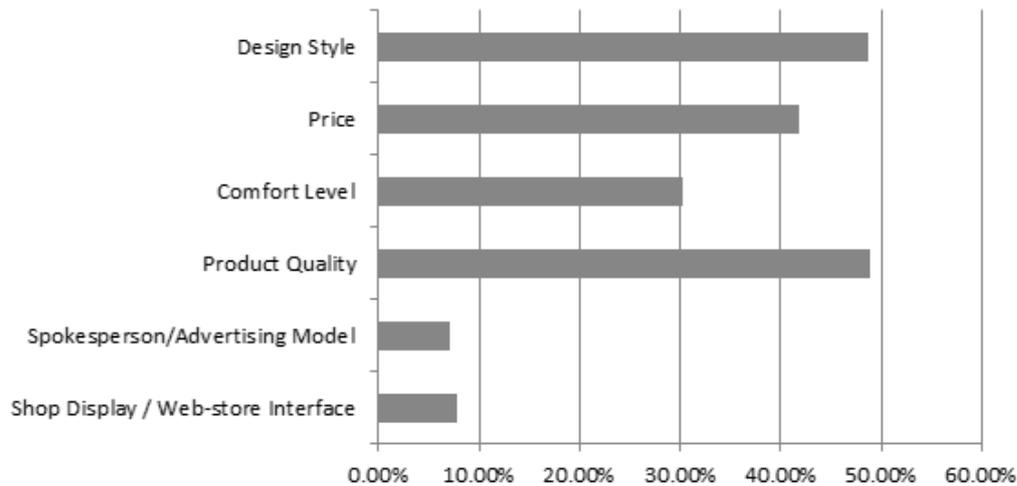


Fig. 1 Different influencing factors

### 3.2 Social Software Is An Important Channel for Fashion Information

Nowadays, people have various channels to get information. According to the *White Paper on Post-95 Mobile Phone Use Psychology and Behavior* published by the School of Psychology and Cognitive Sciences of Peking University, the daily usage time of mobile phone of post-95 is 8.33 hours, and the social application usage time is the longest, nearly 2 hours. As Fig.2 shows, 72.45% of consumers will get fashion information through mobile phone software, of which 50.68% are social software such as Weibo and Wechat, 21.77% are video software such as TikTok; fashion magazines (25.85%) are also an important channel for obtaining fashion information; TV advertising and plane billboards account for 10.54% and 16.67% respectively. Social software has become an important channel for fashion consumer groups to get fashion information.

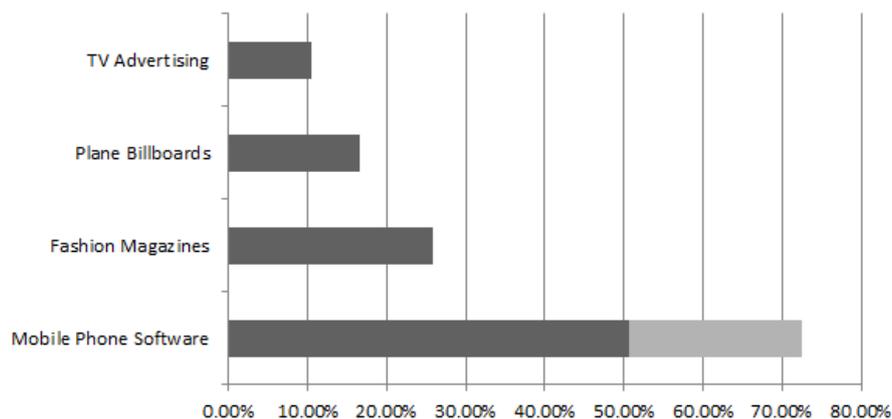


Fig. 2 Information access channel

### 3.3 “Seeking the Same” and “Showing the Differences” Is the Fundamental Motivation

"Seeking the same" refers to the need of consumers to belong to groups, and "showing the differences" refers to the need of consumers to express their individuality. One of the characteristics of fashion is imitation and conformity. The

fundamental motive of people's pursuit of fashion is to satisfy the needs of individual expression and group belonging at the same time. 63.7% of consumers think that "fashion consumption is an important way to express their personality"; 54.9% and 51.57% of consumers think that "fashionable and popular products help me to integrate into the group". People buy goods with the same fashion attributes can form a fashion pursuit group, so that meet the needs of "seeking the same". At the same time, consumers can express their individuality through the different expressions of fashion.

### **3.4 Brand Choice Tends to Be Rational**

Only 18.9% of fashion consumers value brand factors while 23.47% think that "buying luxury goods" belongs to the scope of fashion consumption. It can be seen that in the minds of most consumers, luxury is no longer a representative of fashion. As long as the goods are satisfactory, consumers will not overvalue brand factors. When choosing clothing brand, 22.96% of consumers value the brand awareness. In the case of similar products, consumers prefer to choose the brand they are familiar with. They will pursue fashion and novelty within their ability and express themselves in a more rational and reasonable way.

### **3.5 Great Influence of Network Marketing.**

As long as there is consumption, it is difficult to escape from the marketing of businessmen. With the commercial application of the Internet, online marketing has come into being. Consumers can have 24-hour access to Weibo, Wechat, online advertising, video marketing and so on. In our daily life, we are no longer sensitive to some marketing activities, or even not aware of its existence. 53.31% of consumers can clearly feel that online marketing has an impact on their fashion consumption behavior. Businesses will launch a variety of marketing methods for the changing fashion. Fashion consumer groups face too much information, are susceptible to online marketing, and even produce follow-up consumption, impulsive consumption and other behaviors.

## **4. Conclusions and Suggestions**

### **4.1 Hold the Bottom Line of Quality and Create Unique Style**

Today's fashion consumer groups not only value the style of clothing products, but also the quality of products. Enterprises should have certain standards for the quality of their products, so that they can survive in the fierce market competition. But if they want to stand out in the market, they must have their own characteristics and form a representative of a certain style.

### **4.2 Focusing on the Fundamental Motivation**

"Seeking the same" and "Showing the differences" is the fundamental motivation for people to pursue fashion. By satisfying consumers' needs for group belonging and personality expression, they can win consumers. Group ownership can be the atmosphere created by the merchants. Businessmen should be good at catching consumer psychology and focus on the source of demand.

### **4.3 Unblock Key Channels and Follow the Trend of Marketing**

In order to make consumption activities more effective for fashion consumer groups, it is necessary to occupation the channels of information reception for fashion

consumer groups. At the same time, businessmen should put forward different marketing plans for the characteristics of different fashions, timely capture consumer preferences. Most of the people's fashion information is obtained from the network channels. The trend of the Internet is changing rapidly. Businessmen should always be vigilant and try to maintain a favorable situation.

### **Acknowledgment**

This study is supported by The Key Project of Social Science Program of Beijing Education Commission (NO.SZ201910012005), Project of Open Research Fund of Capital Circulation Industry Research Base(NO. JD-KFKT-2019-YB-05) and the Project of Graduate Research and Innovation(120301990122/007).

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