

Fashion, Gender, and Media

Analysis of the History and Current Popularity of Mary Jane Shoes

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ABSTRACT

Fashion communication is inseparable from people's ideas in a specific era and closely related to the media. Taking Mary Jane shoes' historical popularity and modern communication as an example, this paper focuses on two aspects: fashion and gender, fashion and media. Historically, the cyclical popularity of Mary Jane shoes can reflect the status of women in different times, the social attitude towards women, and women's self-awareness and pursuit. To fully understand the popularity of Mary Jane shoes and their communication channels, this paper also conducted a thorough questionnaire survey. The questionnaire participants are mainly women. Most of them accept Mary Jane shoes more because of the current new media communication and fashion guidance. They do not deliberately pay attention to the history of Mary Jane shoes and the cultural trend closely combined with feminism in history. At the same time, we also take the *Xiaohongshu* app as an example to discuss the relationship between fashion and media. The article finally found that the more dominant factor in the current popularity is the rapid development of new media. Internet celebrity economy, opinion leaders, and community economy have become the key to the popularity of Mary Jane shoes.

Keywords: *Mary Jane shoes, fashion communication, feminism, new media.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Countless fashion items and creations spring out from different places, bands, and designers in today's fashion world. They catch the eyeballs of the fashion icons and the people who follow the latest trend closely. Sometimes these fashion trends will be spread and distributed into the whole community and lead to a wide and massive fashion style. All of these are due to the development of modern social media. Everything we see and hear today cannot leave the media's broadcast, like the Internet, TV, and advertisements. They played an essential role in the transmission of fashion trends and styles. Fashion also develops itself as a cycle. Many items, which have already been loved and prevalent before, maybe 10 years or even 50 to 100 years, come into a trend again these days. During this process, the history and the origin are discovered and studied.

"Mary Jane shoes", a type of high heels, is a general name for low-heeled, rounded, and buckled ankle shoes.

Speaking of the origin of Mary Jane shoes, we can trace back to 1902, a popular comic series called "Buster Brown" in the United States. Mary Jane, the heroine in the movie, often wore these shoes. There is also another version of the origin, and it came from a movie called "Buster Brown". Nowadays, it has become a globally popular fashion trend again.

This paper mainly discusses the relationship between fashion, gender, and communication, taking Mary Jane's shoes as an example. We have chosen the Mary Jane shoes as our research project to study intensively, because, in recent years, there is a strong fashion trend of wearing Mary Jane shoes all over the world. The most interesting thing is that, as a type of high heels, Mary Jane's shoes also can be seen as a symbol of women's rights and feminism. According to Qi Ming [1], women use garments to express their emotions, and the garments have the function to express the mood, emotion, and characteristics.

2. A BASIC SURVEY ON POPULAR ACCEPTANCE OF MARY JANE SHOES

To fully understand the popularity and popular acceptance of Mary Jane shoes, We did research mainly using a quantitative method by giving out questionnaires. This survey was released on social platforms, including WeChat and Weibo. The participants who participate in this questionnaire are voluntary.

This research receives 263 valid answers. It has ten questions in total, which consist mainly of three parts: basic information, personal aspect of Mary Jane shoes, and general expression of Mary Jane shoes.

The majority of participants are female, which has a proportion of 93.16 percent. There is still 6.84 percent of males who answered this question.

Table 1. Basic information of survey subjects

Variables	Sample Sizes /percentages
Gender	
Male	18 / 6.84%
Female	245 / 93.16%
Age	
18 and below	8 / 3.04%
18-25	102 / 38.78%
25-35	71 / 27%
35-45	62 / 23.57%
45 and above	20 / 7.6%

However, men's participation in this series of issues is low, mainly due to their low understanding of Mary Jane's shoes. For example, the date of the question "Have you ever seen or heard about the concept of Mary Jane shoes" showed that participants who choose the options male in previous questions all choose No in this question. 18 participants choose male. Of these 18 people, 100 percent of them choose No. Therefore, Male participants are less likely to know the concept of Mary Jane shoes than female participants.

The important related problems and their analysis will be elaborated on in the following article.

3. FASHION AND GENDER: ANALYSIS FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Mary Jane's shoes are a typical kind of high heels. The origin and the embryonic form of the Mary Jane shoes are also the same as the high heels. Interestingly, the development history of high heels is consistent with changing women's status in society over hundreds of years.

3.1. Designed for men only

Everyone knew that the high heels were made particularly for the men, especially the royal and noble men. To make himself look taller and mighty, more confident and authoritative, King Louis XIV of France asked the shoemaker to put 4-inch high heels on his shoes and paint the bottoms red to show his noble status. Then high heels became popular in the French court. Later, the nobles of European countries followed this trend. At that time, high heels were forbidden for women. However, this historical fact had undergone some changes in the concept of contemporary people. According to the results of our questionnaire, only a small proportion, less than 10%, of interviewees agreed with the idea that the high heels, to be specific, the Mary Jane shoes, were designed for men. 44.87% of the interviewees thought that they were designed for women. The number of people who thought the shoes were invented for both women and men was extremely higher than we predicted before, possessing 44.49%.

3.2. Female expression under the patriarchal system

As time goes by, after Catherine de Medici wore the high heels at the wedding, the high heels became very popular among women, since then the high heels became a garment, which women can also take [2]. Actually, Medici wore high heels did not aim to be charming subjectively. His husband, the king, had an affair, and his inamorata would also attend the wedding. Medici wore high heels to defeat the woman and defend her marriage. All of these, due to the excessive authority of the king and the noble class, possess everything, even the women, who are highly materialized, all of these lead to inequality between the men and women. Medici had no choice but to use the material and woman's beauty to please the king. Similarly, in the same ancient period in China, the situation was quite the same. Being impacted by the imperial authority, the power of the male was extremely higher than the women. Even more sadly, the Chinese women at that time must use bandages to bind their feet and then wear high heels to be more elegant and petite, but it was quite inconvenient to move and take action. What is ridiculous is that this will satisfy the men's desire to control the movement of women, which is completely a corrupt custom nowadays. This custom spread and lasted for hundreds of years until the end of the feudal dynasty [3]. Unfortunately, because of the development of the porn industry and the brothel, the girls wore high heels as a signal of sex and were seduced, to attract more customers. The women in the brothel are at the bottom of society. Due to this, some negative meanings are attached to the high heels [4].

3.3. The symbol of women rights and feminism

As the time came to the 1920s, Mary Jane shoes came to the world. In this period, women have been liberated from the iron restrictions, which set up by men. Jazz music was quite popular at that time. European and American women gave rise to a new style called "flappy girls". They used this to express their pursuit of freedom and feminism. The shoes they wore at that time were Mary Jane shoes. Another cause for this is that with the advance of industrialization, women attended to the manufacture in the factory, they have their own income and hold their fate in their own hands, the status of them are promoted gradually. Wearing high heels at this time is not only a following to the fashion trend but also an expression of women's rights, that they have the liberty in choosing the garments.

In the 1960s, with the rise and spread of feminism, high heels were seen as a symbol of pleasing men and objectifying women from the perspective of some supporters of extreme feminism. Mary Jane's shoes were thickened. In those days, "the lost generation" in the west promoted hippie culture and vigorously promoted flat shoes [5]. Until the 1980s, the feminist's view of fashion style was no longer accepted by women. The public believes that high-heeled shoes are sexy, not oppressive but bring happiness to women, making women taller, more confident, and more authoritative [6]. It can be seen in the questionnaire that Nowadays, women do not need to use material items to please men. They can choose whatever they want to wear and do not need to care about what others will judge. They dress for themselves and live for themselves as well. In history, there were a few waves of popularity of Mary Jane shoes. As we can see in the survey, most of the interviewees (77.19%) thought the fashion of Mary Jane shoes is a cycle, which has already been repeated many times.

4. FASHION AND MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF FASHION COMMUNICATION

4.1. Mary Jane shoes popular on the Xiaohongshu app

Xiaohongshu, as a social cross-border e-commerce platform that deeply cultivates UGC (User Created Content), was formally established in June 2013. When Xiaohongshu was first listed, it was advertised as a shopping sharing platform for users and an entry point for consumer decision-making. Users built a very practical lifestyle community through recording and sharing, with social functions and online shopping functions in parallel. In just a few years of development, Xiaohongshu was selected into the "Forbes China's Most Innovative Companies List". As of July 2019, the number of users of Xiaohongshu has exceeded 300

million [7]. As of October 2019, the number of monthly active users of Xiaohongshu has exceeded 100 million, of which 70% of new users are born in the 90s. In the Xiaohongshu community, users record the positive energy and good life of young people in this era by sharing text, pictures, and video notes.

In the fashion industry, there are countless shoes popular every year. However, Mary Jane's shoes, which can still occupy the forefront of fashion after a hundred years, are certainly classics. In recent years, due to the development of the Internet and active social media, Mary Jane shoes have become popular on the Internet. In our questionnaire, a question asked where the interviewee had heard or seen Mary Jane's shoes. 52.63% of the people chose to go online (such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, etc.).

As a matter of fact, On the Xiaohongshu platform, the content about "Mary Jane Shoes" was first released in January 2015. An ordinary Xiaohongshu user published it. The content was mainly about sharing a pair of discounts purchased from a certain brand of Mary Jane shoes. The following year, the platform released only three pieces of content about Mary Jane shoes, all of which were personally shared by users. From 2016 to 2017, there were 6 pieces of content about Mary Jane shoes on the entire platform, 23 pieces of related content from 2017 to 2018, 155 pieces of related content from 2018 to 2019, and 479 pieces of related content from 2019 to 2020 Content, 1735 pieces of related content have been published since 2020, and 4129 pieces of related content have been published since 2021. From the data, we can see that from 2020 to the present. There has been explosive growth in the content of Mary Jane shoes on the Xiaohongshu. This shows the widespread influence of Mary Jane shoes. As of July 27, 2021, search for "Mary Jane Shoes" on Xiaohongshu, and we can get 6491 related notes. Under the topic of "Mary Jane Shoes", the total amount of relevant content in the past six months showed an upward trend, and the number of new notes per month reached nearly 1,000. The total interaction volume of nearly 10,000 notes related to Mary Jane shoes had reached 8.9037 million. Among them, the note with the highest number of likes had 16,200 likes, 7,328 favorites, and 23,800 interactions.

In addition, there were 1,000 Weibo about "Mary Jane Shoes" in the past month and 17 related topics on Weibo. Among them, the topic of "Mary Jane Shoes" alone had 6.171 million views, and the total number of readings reached 97.703 million. By searching Mary Jane shoes on major Internet platforms, we could see that the fashion information of Mary Jane shoes had experienced rapid growth and diffusion in the past six months, so that many people could get Mary by brushing this software information about rare shoes.

4.2. Three factors caused the explosion of Mary Jane shoes on new media platforms

With the rapid advancement of network technology, the development of social media has become the general trend. Ten years ago, paper, radio, Internet, and mobile media each had a quarter of the market share. Still, currently, traditional media only accounted for about one-fifth of the entire media market. With the development of digital technology and the popularity of personalized services, traditional media is also actively promoting digital transformation, obtaining Internet information dissemination channels and traffic through the Internet and social media [8].

The Internet and social media have become new carriers of fashion communication. Under the impact of new media, the development of print media, radio and television, and other traditional media continue to decline. In the era of all-media, traditional paper media has become the most severely impacted media due to its single information dissemination channel, simple form of expression, and lagging response to fashion events. In this context, traditional paper media is accelerating its transformation and development. For example, as early as 2010, the Fashion Media Group began its omni-media transformation and promoted the development of the Group toward the full construction of digital platforms, full coverage of digital distribution channels, and full digital content resources. Based on the overall marketing solution combining online and offline, various profit models, including brand extension profitability, market activity profitability, and new media profitability, have been constructed.

When fashion is placed under the scope of communication, many communication media and channels are needed to deliver fashion content to consumers. This kind of commercial communication of fashion products is fashion communication [9]. Segmented by media forms and functions, the fashion communication market can cover newspapers, magazines, radio, television, film, entertainment, portals, search engines, online games, fashion performing arts, social media, self-media, and other fields. At present, although traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, various advertisements, movie entertainment are still important carriers for the dissemination of fashion information in our country, now this form has quietly changed. With the rapid development of the digital economy, the digital development of the fashion communication industry is gaining momentum. New media represented by mobile fashion apps, social media, self-media, and short videos are becoming the mainstay of fashion communication.

The influence of the Internet celebrity economy and KOL helps it spread quickly. The Internet

celebrity economy in Xiaohongshu is to create an atmosphere of "owners" based on the so-called "truth", and use persuasion among "owners" as a way of spreading. Xiaohongshu's partner Zeng Xiulian once said, "In fact, letting users talk about the brand is the most effective effect. Popularity is word-of-mouth." [10]

Internet celebrities act as an "information processor" at the level of fashion communication. Function, information is collected, sorted, and then diffused to the audience, forming secondary dissemination of information transmission. This means that, on the one hand, "net celebrities" are "owners" in the "Xiaohongshu" community, and everyone agrees with each other emotionally and trusts each other rationally. On the other hand, "Internet celebrities" are also "Key Opinion Leaders" (KOL) with extremely high influence and authority. Their "word of mouth" is the guarantee of their intimacy and credibility of a fashion trend.

"Mary Jane Shoes", which is now in the fashion industry, is a living example. Mary Jane's shoes are propagated and disseminated by Internet celebrities through "Zhongcao (recommend)" and "Daihuo (commerc)" on Xiaohongshu. At the same time, it spreads a fashion to young people through the network and new media environment.

Media changes have promoted the development of the fashion communication industry. Economic promotion is indispensable for the development of an industry. Mary Jane, as a trend, is also the clothing of great economic value. In recent years, the development of e-commerce has also been an important part of the media revolution. In online media like Xiaohongshu, which has both social and e-commerce functions, Internet celebrities, especially those with high weight in social networks, can use their powerful voice and influence to be able to use their powerful voice and influence. In the form of book notes, the product image is implanted in the impression of fans. The brand and the product obtain a considerable amount of popularity and search volume from the social network, thereby completing product recommendations and helping the brand increase the conversion rate. As the sales of fashion products increase, their popularity will naturally increase, and it will also promote the development of the fashion communication industry.

In the era of new media after the media revolution, Internet celebrities, as communicators, use new media skillfully to quickly shorten the distance between brands and consumers to quickly participate in the discussion of fashion topics and follow trends. In terms of dissemination content, ordinary people can also convey personalized fashion information through text, images, audio and video, and even personal behavior. As a result, the spread of fashion has become greater. In terms of the dissemination of the audience, only some

groups who are particularly interested and fascinated by fashion will continue to track and follow all kinds of fashion information. Still, in the social media environment, more ordinary people also unknowingly disseminate fashion information. And affected objects. Before the media change, the original communication method will only enable fashion audiences to further strengthen the follow-up of fashion. Still, the current communication method makes ordinary people more fashionable and innovates on the diffusion and communication of fashion.

5. CONCLUSION

From a historical perspective, Mary Jane shoes have gone through hundreds of years of development in the spread of history, and they have different meanings in different historical stages. From a period of rising to a period of decline, it often takes decades of evolution. Nowadays, Mary Jane shoes have rapidly developed into a fashion trend on Xiaohongshu new media platforms in just a few months. Behind this is the boost of the power of the Internet and new media. In addition, Mary Jane shoes as a fashion trend, its dissemination is one cycle after another in the historical dimension, and can have an impact on society at a historical stage; under the current stage of new media communication, its transmission cycle has been greatly shortened, but its influence has also become smaller. From this, we can see that the characteristics of fashion communication under new media are fast speed and short cycle. Although it can become a trend in a short period of time, it is also easy to be forgotten.

In conclusion, compared with the past situation, due to social media and various transmission methods, the fashion trend spread much faster and wider. Moreover, the media can bring up the trend by itself, even form a brand new trend or revive some vintage style. When some items become popular, the big data will collect the information immediately and spread the latest trend to everyone who surfs the Internet. We can say that fashion nowadays is controlled by the media to a certain extent. Besides, the influence of celebrities is quite significant as well. People prefer to follow the trend brought up by some fashion icons so that they can be more in.

In the context of new media, any fashion trend should seize the opportunity and adapt to it. Through the use of new media to spread the speed, low cost, and innovative features, spread fashion to the audience, and use this to develop the fashion industry. However, the new media also has the disadvantage of fragmented information dissemination and lack of authority. Therefore, the dissemination of fashion is often not deeply rooted in the people's hearts, and it is easy to cause information deviation in the dissemination. To sum up, under the premise of high-speed

communication, effective fashion communication should be an inspiration to society and the times, and to a certain extent, can affect the social history process.

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