



A Study on the Acceptance of Maison Margiela Tabi Shoes Advertisement by China's Generation Z

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Abstract. With China increasing in world financial status and influence, it is becoming a purchasing powerhouse for luxury goods. Generation Z, as the big part of luxury consumer, is raising a new wave by virtue of their increasing strong purchasing power. Compared to mainstream luxury fashion brand, Maison Margiela is more classical inner-personal which attracts Generation Z consumer by its distinguished design and captivating style. Thereby, analysing the effectiveness of Msison Maegiela's advertising to Generation Z and their consuming expectation is far more significant. This study will use a questionnaire to investigate the Chinese Generation Z acceptance to Tabi of Maison Margiela advertising, in order to inform the brand's marketing strategy and future brand development. And this study may fill a gap in comprehensive analysis of consuming expectation in Generation Z to luxury fashion brand. The results of the study show that the acceptance of Tabi advertising by Generation Z is influenced by the product, the promotion platform, the advertising format and the advertising content, which show a certain regularity and uniqueness.

Keywords: Tabi shoes · Advertising · Generation Z · Consumer expectation

1 Introduction

The high fashion brand Maison Margiela, originally named as Maison Martin Margiela, was founded in 1988 in Paris, by Belgian designer Martin Margiela. The French luxury fashion house is well-known for its deconstructed aesthetic and highly innovative designs. Maison Margiela's label of equality, environmentalism, and gender-neutralism has been controversial in terms of the style and design of its items, especially the Tabi, a most classic one. With its Dadaist and anti-fashion characteristics, the tabi was once labelled as an "ugly shoe" by the public. Despite this, there are still a small number of people who are ardent fans of Tabi and the brand fascinated by Margiela's quirky, unique and mysterious fashion credo.

Margiela likes to collect old things and create new fashion items by deconstructing and reconstructing them, and Tabi was created during his travels in Japan, inspired by Japanese footbags. The first truly fashionable pair of tabi boots was created in Maergiela's Spring/Summer 1988 show. Taking the tabi's split-toe element and adding a pioneering

cylindrical chunky heel to create a pair of nude tabi boots, Margiela made the models catwalk in red paint on a white cloth, leaving behind the split-toe red print that brought the tabi into the public eye [1]. Since then, the tabi style has played a key role in the brand, being repeatedly interpreted in each season's new shoe collection. This distinctive element of the tabi shoe shape is seen in styles ranging from clogs to sneakers, thigh-high boots, ballet flats and leather shoes.

Like other niche high-luxury items, Tabi is non-mainstream, alternative and highlights individual tastes and aesthetics. It goes beyond some of the existing social styles and mass aesthetics, targeting a small group of people whose basic dressing needs have been adequately met thus are looking for individual symbols that distinguish them from the masses [2]. In contrast to the mass brand marketing approach, it is clear that Maison Margiela has adopted a series of more targeted marketing strategies. Maison Margiela uses a combination of online and offline advertising for Tabi's commercials. The online advertising locations are generally in city centres. For example, large posters in front of shops as well as smaller hanging type posters in shops and brand brochures and magazines on display. Margiela's online advertising for tabi is more unique. The style of some of the images and videos placed online shows a preference for a quirky, abstract, mysterious and bizarre style of filming, highlighting the overall style and attitude of the tabi wearer, as opposed to emphasizing the wearability of tabi as a shoe, such as comfort and functionality, in order to express the brand's unique and niche fashion tone.

In addition, tabi's marketing team has a unique approach towards brand ambassadors and the choice of platforms for social media placement in China. Last year, Maison Margiela chose Li Yuchun as its ambassador in China and invited Fan Chengcheng, Chen Linong and Cheng Xiao as well as some influential fashion bloggers and models in the younger generation to promote each single product. Besides, Maison Margiela chose Xiaohongshu as the major platform to do online advertising in April 2021 and began promoting the new season's items on it. Apparently, It is clear that these choices are closely associated with Maison Margiela's marketing strategy. The choice of brand promoters as well as the main promotional platforms shows that Maison Margiela has targeted its consumers at younger consumers, especially those born between 1996 and 2010. The Z generation, which makes up fifteen percent of China's population, prefers brands with new and unique styles that express their own attitudes. It is clear that Margiela's commercial campaign for tabi has focused on this.

2 Literature Review

Due to the advent of the commodity society, advertising plays an indispensable role in people's consumer behaviour. According to Huang Zilong's study, he mentioned that with the rapid development of China's market economy system, whether a brand has a market advantage has become an important factor in whether or not it can win in fierce competition. And if a brand wants to occupy a favourable position, it must fully understand the market (consumer) needs and build a suitable marketing strategy [3]. As an important part of marketing, advertising plays a vital role in communicating specific products, promoting brand style and building brand image. Good advertising can increase the consumer's perception of a brand and increase the desire to buy it. More importantly,

advertising has a time-delayed effect on a brand and plays an important role in building its own image.

In previous studies, it is easy to find research on the acceptance of clothing and apparel advertisements. In Gong Chuchu's research on clothing brand advertising strategies, she found through her survey that 90.84% of young consumers would be influenced by advertising on their consumption behaviour, with 12.5% of them having a strong influence from hand advertising [4]. However, her study still has some limitations. For example, while she recognizes that advertising has a facilitating effect on clothing choice, she does not specifically analyse whether emotional orientation factors play a role in this. More difficult is the fact that studies on the acceptance of niche footwear advertising are rare. In Cao Hui's survey of several major shoe factories in China, she concluded from an analysis of the advertising styles created by different shoe brands that the effectiveness of advertising was crucial in the absence of good after-sales service and a well-developed distribution network, given the comparable technical level of shoe production and similar styles across factories [5]. However, there are limitations to her study. Her research is limited by the fact that her subjects are local footwear brands, which tend to meet the basic needs of consumers, with styles that satisfy popular tastes and aesthetics that are in line with social conventions. This is not a reference point for niche footwear like Tabi, which has an alternative style. It is clear that tabi is much more fashionable than it is wearable, and therefore advertising limited to the product itself is clearly not enough to achieve the purpose of publicity.

The cross label of 'casual, comfortable and fun' has been the sole criterion for the brand's DNA and the guidance for expansion, carving out a niche for itself in a number of unique niche footwear, enabling it to generate a 27% revenue growth rate in 2011 despite the European debt crisis [6]. It shows that brand style and image building is important for niche footwear to create a market. In Wang Xiaomei's research, she studied the impact of consumer brand attitudes on purchase intentions. The results showed that consumers' brand attitudes had a significant positive effect on customers' purchase intention [7]. Therefore, conclusion can be made that for niche footwear promotions, advertisements with abstract meaning and brand values are more likely to bring about positive emotional feedback from young consumers. In a study on the influence of brand story type on consumer attitudes, Shen Mingyu et made an conclusion. They considered that the key to the influence of brand story type on consumer attitudes lies in the narrative transmission mechanism, and that meaningful stories are more likely to generate a strong emotional response from consumers than happy stories, and have a stronger narrative transmission effect, thus more likely to increase consumers' brand preference and willingness to spread word-of-mouth [8].

In addition, the factors that influence young people's acceptance of Tabi advertisements are not only limited to the advertisements themselves but are also related to the platforms through which they are exposed to them. In You Yue and Zhang Shunai's study, they found that the combination of promotion and sales has become a major feature of online shopping, with WeChat tweets plus micro-mall/small apps allowing users to buy instantly, and Xiaohongshu tweets plus mall allowing users to place orders easily [9]. In terms of the analysis of the users of Xiaohongshu App, research shows that the overall age of the user group is low, with users aged 25–35 accounting for 62.3% of the total user

group, and the proportion of people with medium consumption and above in the user group of Xiaohongshu App is as high as 90%, which means that the platform users have the ability and willingness to spend more and have a certain demand for the quality of clothing. Price has less influence on purchasing behaviour [10]. It can be seen that most of the users who use Xiaohongshu to get fashion information and find consumption targets belong to the Z Generation group. The choice of platform for advertising not only directly affects the cost of investment, but also potentially influences the consumer's acceptance of the ad they see, and largely determines whether for an ad, the consumer will receive it in its entirety, or even, say, whether they will get more information that is beneficial to the brand.

Additionally, in order to better conduct a study on the acceptance of Maison Margiela Tabi footwear advertising in the Z Generation, the definition and basic characteristics of the Z Generation should be the top priority. In its broadest sense, the Z Generation refers to people born between 1996 and 2010. They are keen to express their individuality and find self-satisfaction. And they show their open mind to new things and accept them in a short time. Having a strong tolerance for innovative styles is another feature. Meanwhile, they are confused, depressed, anxious and have a tendency to escape from reality amid the modern society. For this reason, the Generation Z was hailed by Zhang Tianchi as "the most rebellious generation" [11].

Some of the above related previous studies, investigations and theories have served as background and inspiration for my research. However, there are still some gaps in these studies. A reading of the relevant domestic and international literature reveals that there is a scarcity of research on the acceptance of niche footwear advertising by scholars both at home and abroad. To some extent, this suggests that consumers' emotional attitudes are under-focused compared to objective, commercial factors. And as more and more fashion items such as shoes and even apparel with unique styles are becoming more and more available, the effectiveness of their advertising needs to be given attention. Moreover, the Z-Generation group is increasingly becoming a fashion leader and a major consumer of fashion brands, and their consumer needs are being met by niche brands with some tonalities, so it is essential to focus on Z-Generation consumer behaviour. Thereby, this research is to analyse consumers' thoughts and emotional needs through a study on the acceptance of Tabi footwear advertisements by Chinese Z-Generation consumers, and to provide reference research texts for marketers of niche brands to enhance their marketing strategies. In addition, the study provides a glimpse into future shoe style trends and provides inspiration for brands' new product development. In order to make the study more intuitive and informative, the study will be conducted in the form of questionnaire placement and data analysis.

3 Methodology

The questionnaire for this study was targeted to young people born in China between 1996 and 2010 and consisted of 15 questions. 360 valid questionnaires were distributed and collected through WeChat and Weibo platforms. The questionnaires were screened according to the matching principle and the non-default principle to eliminate invalid questionnaires. Invalid questionnaires mainly included those with all the same answers

as well as those with incomplete answers. Answers given within too short time are also considered as invalid ones. In addition, according to Berstein's principle of sample size, the number of valid samples collected was more than five times the number of questions in the questionnaire, satisfying the sample size requirement.

4 Result

In the final sample of valid questionnaires identified in this study, the age of the respondents was concentrated between 18 and 26 years old, with the proportion of males and females being 26.39% and 73.61% respectively. There is a large difference, with the proportion of females being significantly higher than that of males. Apart from the bias arising from the randomness of the questionnaire distribution, it is speculated that this may be due to the fact that women in the Generation Z group are more interested and concerned with fashion and clothing than their male contemporaries. The results will be presented separately according to the focus, divided into attitudes based on the Tabi shoes themselves and the acceptance of the Tabi advertisements. The former is an essential element for the study of advertising acceptance as an advertising product.

The number of people who know about the luxury brand Maison Margiela is 56.94%, slightly more than half of the population, which shows that Maison Margiela is a lesser known, more niche and lower profile brand than the more familiar luxury brands. However, the brand's classic fashion design Tabi is relatively well known, with 73.61% of the total number of people aware of the footwear. Therefore, the awareness of the single item is much higher than that of its brand. In the valid sample, the results of the survey on the level of preference of Tabi shoes show that the number of people who show their welcome, neutral and positive attitudes towards the product share the close proportion, with slightly more people expressing a welcome attitude than the other two categories. The words "avant-garde", "fashionable", "bold" and "unique" are more than 50% of the words used in the specific description of Tabi, with 22% people said they considered Tabi shoes were "uncomfortable", much higher than the percentage who said they were "comfortable" (5.56%). As an observer of what others are wearing, around 30% of people are also concerned about the comfort of Tabi. As for the gender orientation of Tabi footwear, the results of the survey show that the gender information of clothing is becoming less important in the mindset of Generation Z, with almost 70% of people believing that Tabi can be worn by both men and women.

The results of the survey based on current Tabi's advertising show that the majority of the sample has been exposed to Tabi's advertising. Among the sample, "Xiaohongshu App", "Weibo" and "fashion magazines" are the platforms and channels where people are more exposed to Tabi's advertisements, accounting for 65.28%, 41.67% and 36.11% respectively. The smallest number of people who learned about Tabi through offline activities is presumed to be due to the little number of offline shops, the small scope of the brand's activities and the lack of widespread dissemination of information about the show. Among the online channels, the highest percentage of people were attracted by "eye-catching images or video covers" and entered the ad page, accounting for 70.83%, followed by the ad copy and the product itself, while the number of people who chose to enter the ad because of the "spokesperson or blogger" was lower. The attraction of

price-linked offers and benefits was relatively weak according to the survey. For specific images, people prefer images that include the whole outfit and creative, footwear-themed images, and are less likely to be attracted to monotonous footwear shots. And over 70% of people prefer graphic ads to the more time-consuming video text ads, while videos that show how the shoes look and how they are worn are more likely to further their attention and interest. Even after learning about Tabi, more than half of people still don't consider buying a Tabi because of price, design, difficulty in matching and comfort.

5 Discussion

A comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire results reveals that due to the niche nature of Tabi shoes, the attitude of the Generation Z group is scarcely influenced by mainstream thinking or popular attitudes. Compared to popular high luxury brands such as Chanel and LV, Tabi is less social and commercial while carrying more fashionable and artistic features. In addition, due to the characteristics of the Generation Z, the acceptance of Tabi advertising by this group is also influenced by the product, promotion platform, advertising format and advertising content, whose uniqueness and regularity are also concluded. The results are analysed in the following section.

The questionnaire was distributed randomly on social networking platforms, but more than two-thirds of the sample were female. This result is likely to be influenced by gender differences between men and women. As productivity developed, clothing gradually moved away from the function of sheltering and keeping warm and took on a more informative role. Since the birth of patriarchal societies, the social division of labour and the roles played by women have gradually been defined. In contemporary society, women are more interested in dressing up and open to clothing and fashion information. At present, luxury brands offer much more high fashion for women than for men, and women's fashion has a wider range of design styles and elements. However, as the sense of gender boundaries of the Generation Z have become very blurred. Thereby, men's needs in fashion should be taken into consideration, Maison Margiela can respond to the trend of the times and cater to the fashion needs of men.

A comparative analysis of the questionnaire results shows that Tabi is far more recognizable than Maison Margiela as a brand. This indicates that Margiela focuses on the communication of the design concept and the product itself, compared with other top luxury brands with high visibility, commercialism and social attributes. As the Generation Z pursues opportunities for self-expressive and prefers to be unique, Tabi thus attracts those people with its unique split-toe design. At the same time, as a result of changing consumer habits, some people from Generation Z show less interest to the social recognition bonding with brands and take the meaning of the design itself into consideration. This is one of the reasons why Majella is gaining more and more followers, as it maintains its focus on design in an environment where many luxury brands are stagnant and lacking in innovation.

While Tabi has received mixed reviews due to aesthetic differences, its comfort gain relatively more worries alongside its "avant-garde, fashionable, daring and unique" comments. And the majority of Generation Z are at school or at work, for which practicality has become very important. At the moment, comfort has taken a back seat to design as

so many other meanings have been added to shoes. Therefore, brands can add an appropriate interpretation of Tabi's comfort to their promotional campaigns. Try-on activities can also be added to offline campaigns to increase the customer experience and convey more information about the product itself.

In addition, it can be concluded that the online advertising app Xiaohongshu App, Weibo and Bilibili, as the platforms with the largest proportion of users from the Generation Z, are more effective in advertising Tabi commercially. Advertising images that are eye-catching, innovative and highlight differences of conducts are more likely to promote consumption. It is speculated that this is due to the fact that the consumer mindset of Generation Z has changed compared to other generations, and that the psychological need that being unique and pursuing distinction has led to a preference for visually striking promotional images that showcase the uniqueness of a product. In addition, people are most attracted to the overall outfit. Their passion for the overall style will be an important reason for them to further learn about and buy Tabi shoes. Although footwear has an important role to play in carrying design ideas and expressing personal thoughts, it still just plays a similar role to accessories in unifying the overall style and adding the finishing touch to the outfit, as it is at the lower point of people's vision. Therefore, the Tabi campaign needs to be expanded with more interesting images. Brands should also encourage spokespeople and bloggers to share more quality inspiration to drive invisible purchases.

In terms of the format of the campaign, the majority of people prefer to view the graphic format of the ads than the video ads which are more time-consuming. Firstly, this may be attributed to that those people have more freedom to understand the product and brand information in this way; Moreover, the graphic format saves them time to a certain extent. Brands can respond to consumers' psychological needs and choose a targeted format to get better communication results at a lower cost.

6 Conclusion

Nowadays, the Generation Z group has taken up an increasingly large scale of luxury consumers as well as numerous potential consumers. The promotion and advertising of luxury brands among this generation has both immediate and long-term implications. In the current brand development, Maison Margiela should maintain its independent and distinctive design and take into account the psychological needs of Generation Z consumers in the promotion process, choosing the right promotion platform and advertising format to enrich the brand's promotion content and connotation. Although in the general environment of the fashion world where the social and commodity attributes of luxury brands far outweigh their design and artistic values, it is rare to retain the importance of design and the persistence of style. In a situation where consumerism is prevalent and luxury prices continue to increase, good fashion brands should escape from the shackles of fame and fortune and continue to give their clothes a soul and make great designs on the basis of a solid market. To create a spiritual support and emotional outlet for the independent but struggling Generation Z, who are in the grip of the epidemic and are seeking freedom but are deeply confused, giving them a medium for self-expression, leading them to break through the fog and find self-identity and value in life.

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