Research Article

Study on the Relationship between Conspicuous Need and Group Cultural Identity of Fashion Cultural Consumption

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The consumption of sports and leisure apparel has distinct historical characteristics. It is linked to social fashion and fashion trends, which is an internal expression of college students’ perceptions of sports connotation, aesthetic taste, and community affiliation. Furthermore, it serves as a vital link and conduit for college students’ perceptions of sports fashion. This research includes fieldwork in a sportswear briefing and a thorough interview with 15 interviewees. This research builds an analytical framework for the relationship between sports, leisure clothes, and college students’ consumption behavior based on the conspicuous consumption theory. This article examines the relationship and influence between college students’ consumption behavior and sports and leisure clothing consumption in three categories of community affiliation, perceived value, and consumption behavior. According to the findings, college students’ consuming activity shows off their affluence to a certain extent. But, at its core, college students’ consumption is about understanding society and constructing their self-image. As a result, it reflects the changing value orientation of today’s Chinese college students’ purchasing habits. According to the research, it shows the importance of sports leisure apparel consuming behavior is rooted not only in the clothing but also in community identity.

1. Introduction

Sports clothing culture is a branch of sports culture. Sports clothing can be divided into professional sports clothing, leisure sports clothing, and sports leisure clothing. The characteristics of sports and leisure clothing are as follows: comfortable for daily leisure sports, simple and convenient for daily life leisure fitness and design, etc. It is found that sports account for 73.3% of leisure activities and sports leisure is becoming more and more popular in the current leisure industry. In recent years, sports and fitness have continued to become the most respected fashion trend in many countries and even in the world. The emergence of sports as a way of leisure is the product of social civilization. It promotes the development of related industries, produces related consumption forms, and cultivates the development of related disciplines. As an important part of the relevant industrial chain, the garment industry has huge market potential.

China’s fully open three-child policy will effectively promote the growth of the sportswear market. According to Euromonitor, a market research company, China’s sportswear market will surpass the luxury market by 2022 and have a double-digit growth per year until 280.8 billion yuan. In the same period, the luxury market will only grow by single digits until 192.4 billion yuan per year. In contrast, the size of the European sportswear market will reach US $64 billion by 2020. The group of college students in China continues to
expands with university enrollment expansion. By 2021, the number of college students has exceeded 40 million. The retail industry for college students is emerging one after another, and the fixed groups also provide many opportunities for the development of sportswear. On the other hand, the consumption power of college students is stable, and the market share has exceeded 200 billion yuan. Therefore, most of the development of Chinese national clothing brands are inseparable from the communication of college students. As a huge consumer group, college students are rising rapidly. Their preferences, psychological personality, consumption habits, and characteristics will affect the trend and development of our times.

2. Literature Review

Sports is an increasingly remarkable activity with the development of human civilization, abundant substance, and spirit development [1]. Clothing is the product of behavior development through dress, shoes, hats, and self-dress. Since its birth, sports and leisure clothing is a kind of interpersonal communication, nonverbal message transmission symbol, which has a special significance [2, 3]. Sports and leisure clothing is the art carrier that organically integrates sports and leisure culture with clothing culture, which has practicability and fashion.

The concept of “sportswear” first appeared in the eighteenth century. The industrial revolution promoted the development of the western economy. As a result, the aristocracy was richer and had more time and money to spend on sports, so they paid more and more attention to sports. The rise of sports promoted the generation and development of sports clothing. In 1711, Queen Anne built the racecourse, so hunting and racing became adventurous sports. At the time, the social class regarded such activities are participated by the upper class. This prompted Westerners to ritualize sports events and treat sports venues as social occasion [4]. During this period, "sportswear" was a single functional garment created for upper-class popular sports. These sports include tennis, golf, cycling, swimming, skating, yachts, and hunting. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Western societies experienced a golden age of great development and prosperity of competitive and outdoor sports [5]. In the late nineteenth century, with the further development and innovation of industry, more and more dangerous athletic activities were also included in sports. In the West, special attention was paid to the credibility of the contestants because participants were mainly aristocracies. The noble gentleman style is popular in the west, which has an extremely sacred position in the hearts of the British [6].

Fashion media earlier noticed the birth of a new fashion, and they created an elegant title "Audience Sports Style" in 1928 [7]. In the 1930s, the clothing industry officially named it "Sportswear" and produced the clothing in great amounts as a new category of fashion. Entering the twentieth century, images of female gymnasts training in black cotton satin or navy serge knickers are forever fixed in historical moments. After the twenty-first century, sportswear has some changes because the organizing committee gradually reduced the body cover rate of sportswear from 39% in the 1960s to 31% at the end of the 1970s. By the 1980s, the bikini made the body cover rate of sportswear reduce to 9% [8]. Therefore, it gave a wide space for fashion design and a large number of designers responded. American Ingenuity: Sportswear 1930–1970, published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art [7], holds that sports suits, “mix-and-match” style, large pockets, and sportswear referencing from men’s clothing have the original contribution on clothing culture and fashion culture.

After examining female costume in mid- and late nineteenth century, Vanbrren noted that the wife’s costume is like a display window, through which husband’s authority and wealth can be reflected [9]. Veblen, who found connections between sportswear and upper society, proposed in 1899 that people could deliver the signal of property and consumers would build self-concepts (e.g., focus on opinions and reactions) from the relationship. Based on this social drive, buying luxury goods for displaying to others is known as conspicuous consumer [9].

Since then, conspicuous consumption has become another way of expression of luxury consumption. When special luxury goods are branded as “show status” and “isolate class” [10], scholars believe that the biggest reason for consumers to buy luxury goods is to show off [11]. But then some scholars questioned the conformity, uniqueness, and ostentation of luxury consumption, [12], which once again appeared in academia. Some scholars try to divide consumers into two types: shower and follower [13]. They argue that conspicuous consumption has three obvious characteristics, namely, “visibility,” “wealth,” and “status proof” [14]. Consumers with a low sense of power will tend to consume [15] based on the psychology of conspicuous consumption. College students are the typical group [16] with a low sense of power, who are more likely to have conspicuous consumption behavior based on conspicuous consumption psychology. O’Cass and McEwen, researchers of the theory believe that consumers prefer to gain prestige from products and brands representing status. However, conspicuous consumption focuses on the visual display of products or using products in public”.

3. Research and Design

3.1. Root Theoretical Research Method. Glaser and Strauss pioneered the root theory, which is a way of building theory. It usually requires constant abstraction from the original empirical material to build the way [17]. It not only maintains a close connection with the fresh original data but also can reflect the abstract degree of the theory. Therefore, it is an effective research strategy and analysis program. Glaser notes that the root theory is to study abstract problems and their processes and focuses on social process analysis [18]. Glaser and Strauss’s theory derived the following versions: Glaser’s classical root theory, the programmed root theory of Strauss and Corbin, and Charmaz’s constructivism root theory. Classical root theory is based on objectivism epistemology and focuses on conducting study and discovering theory from the perspective of positivism. But the
programmed root theory tends to build theory. The constructivism root theory is based on the development of constructivism, and the researchers believe that local people also constitute the theory and improve its development.

By using the root theory, the purpose of this paper is to construct the theory of sports and leisure clothing consumption based on the objectivism epistemology and the college students’ cases of sports and leisure clothing consumption. So the programmed root theory is adopted. It will directly start from practical observation by using the root theory and collect the consumption-related data of college students’ sports and leisure clothing for continuously analyzing and comparing. Then it will incorporate new genera and conceptualized themes into the theory until the theory saturation is reached and build the theoretical framework of consumption motivation on the basis of the connections between these concepts.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis. This study tries to collect firsthand data by using methods such as the observation method, interview method, and conference method and supplements secondhand data by using various data such as field observation. During the process of data collection, the researchers paid great attention to the triangular cross verification, whose purpose is to improve the reliability and validity of the overall analysis.

Among them, the observation method is to investigate links before or after blockchain fashion enterprise managers. The research team participates in shopping as consumers to experience different blockchain fashion products consumption and record each field observation and participation observation in the form of a written memorandum. The observation before the interview promotes the in-depth interview of the respondents, and the observation after the interview repeatedly compares the interview content and supplements the research data.

The consumption motivation and scenes of college students are complex and changeable. This study adopts a theoretical sampling method, including open sampling, relationship and differential sampling, and distinguished sampling. There are 30 respondents including sports and related majors and nonsports college students. Ensure that respondents can put forward their own views and opinions under the background of sports and leisure clothing consumption.

The snowball sampling method is more suitable in this study; when investigating different college students, let them introduce their professional situation first. The study was continuously analyzed and interviewed until the data are constantly repeated. When no new genera and dimensions are generated, the information saturation is reached; data collection was terminated.

The interview method, based on the in-depth interview, pays attention to the quality of the interview, so we need to explore the data of the research interview in detail and in depth. Based on this, the researcher team conducted more-to-one interviews as the basis of the interview. In terms of the interview content, the outline of the formal interview needs to be constantly modified for different objects, and the outline is only targeted. The conspicuous consumption in this study is a very obscure and sensitive topic. So we need to give the interviewees thinking space according to the specific interview dialogue, which is conducive to deep and real expression.

The interview mainly centered on the following problems: (1) the connotation of sports and leisure clothing, including its contents and characteristics; (2) the background of sports and leisure clothing consumption, which can be explained by specific cases; and (3) the current existing problems of China’s sports and leisure clothing brands, and the domestic and external causes of these problems. Second, the research team conducted research on college students of different majors from May 2021 to July 2021, and each interview is about 0.5 to 1 hour. Mostly, group discussion is used, and the duration of the group meeting is 1 to 2 hours. After the interview, the sound recording will be written, and the text will be delivered to the interviewees for confirmation after being modified. We need to pay attention to maintaining communication with the team members to ensure the effectiveness of each interview. More than 60,000 documents were compiled and coded using the root theory. Basic information of the interview is shown in Table 1.

4. Study of the Encoding Process

4.1. Open Encoding. Open coding requires researchers to adhere to the original data and code the data information word by word, sentence by sentence, or paragraph by paragraph. The data is continuously compared, kneaded, and recombined with the conceptualized and categorized categories in the coding analysis. It can be taken in two steps.

The first step is pasting labels on the sorted data and preliminary conceptualization. The concept is selected from the interviewed contents or academic literature or created, which can fully reflect the essential connotation of the data. This paper used the recommended gerund in the open coding, such as “lack of female design elements,” and further data collection “what are female design elements? Why do you think it lacks?” The second is to classify and refine the concept drawn and classify repeated concepts, similar concepts, or concepts reflecting similar events. A higher, deeper abstract concept is produced to contain the initial concepts and form a category, such as “community attention” and “enlarge friends circle.” This paper will use the original data, concepts, and categories to continuously explore the relationship between categories. Through open coding, this study obtained 66 concepts and 8 categories, as shown in Table 2.

4.2. Code. Open encoding is an abstract and generalized way and can reveal the truth behind the information. But the relationship between information still needs specific research and comparison after classification. Among them, the purpose of spindle coding is to find the main category, so as to successfully seek the connection between the concept with its relationship. Through spindle coding, the study analyzes four main categories, namely, construction evolution,
perceived value, community identification, and consumption behavior of sports and leisure clothing. The connotation is confirmed by the main category, as shown in Table 3.

Through interviews and spindle coding, the categories and their relationships are shown in Figure 1. Among them, the selective coding is used due to its integration of data, living category, and relationship theory. Then the core content of the theory is sorted out through the relationship line in Figure 1, and the framework of the theory is gradually developed. Finally, the relationship between college
students’ consumption behavior in sports and leisure brands is sorted out.

The storyline of the main category: sports and leisure clothing consumption market consists of three dimensions of perceived value, community identification, and consumption behavior of sports and leisure clothing. Among them, perceived value is the basis. Sports and leisure clothing includes two perceptions, namely, emotional value (beauty and pride) and cost (cost performance). Community identification is the core environment formed by the sports and leisure clothing consumption market. The opinion of community leaders, personal consumption evaluation, and national consciousness are three intermediary variables of community identification. Consumption behavior is the last link of cultivating the formation of sports and leisure clothing consumption market and is based on interpersonal interaction and self-image. The above three dimensions constitute a dynamic relationship under the sports and leisure clothing consumption market, which revolves around consumption behavior.

5. Research Results

5.1. Sports and Leisure Clothing Consumption and Community Identification for College Students. From a psychological perspective, there is a “mirror relationship” between reality and imagination. It means that the subject recognizes some kind of visual image and views this image as an ideal pursuit for consumption imitation [19]. This subjective recognition will make members produce “community participation” and “community pressure” two reactions, and the former makes members tend to retain membership, recommend to others, and actively participate in group activities [20]. College students are a typical community and are more susceptible to this factor. Interviewee FN06 mentioned:

My friend Xiao Li is rich, beautiful, and fashionable. Her clothes are not deliberately naked but always fill with the youth breath. She has prestige among friends, and I love her. She always pays attention to fashion news at home and abroad and keeps up with the latest style of sports and leisure clothes. Moreover, she is also familiar with the history of
Those brands. When we meet, she will talk about the trend, and we always listen with relish. I used to know nothing about the trend. To join her party and have common topics with her, I also started to buy sports and leisure clothes and also imitate her consumption (FN06-PV-II-CI).

FN06 comes from a wealthy family in Shanghai and has her own car in college. She looks very youthful and beautiful in Y3 new coproducts of Adidas with Sanyo and coconut running shoes. Her friend FN07 wears a similar style as she wears. FN07’s clothes have no international brand trademark but are more colorful. F07 is a college student from a small town. She went to college by taking the physical education exam and majored in physical education. Her family was not rich and can’t afford luxury goods, so she chooses similar styles of sports and leisure clothes.

They and I are friends. We often go out, sing, and have dinner, so the style of clothes cannot be fully different. Although I don’t have much money, I brush my credit card and pay for a credit card by teaching kids to play balls. Wearing similar clothes allows me to join their group, so the hard work is worthy. I won’t be treated differently because my clothes are imitations. Sometimes, I wear cheap Chinese brands; they will mimic my clothes (FN07-PV-II-CI).

Sportswear first appeared as a style of clothing and gradually began to form a specific culture, that is, the huge consumption layer brought by people who love sports. Among them, young people’s recognition of national culture often evolves with the improvement of the country and its national consciousness. About this point, respondent MS05’s assistant teacher, a graduate student and national secondary athlete, expressed his views on the consumption of sports and leisure clothing.

We used to wear professional sportswear during training, mainly because the previous sports and leisure clothes were too ugly. Now, sports and leisure clothes have more kinds and are cheap, some of which are more comfortable than professional sportswear. So, in class, I will choose sports and leisure clothes. On the one hand, it has high-cost performance. On the other hand, it can also narrow the distance between me and students and let me look younger. I observe students wear a lot of kinds of clothes, especially when a star endorsed a national brand (e.g., Olympic champion Gong Lijiao endorses Xtep) or a news induced the consumption of a national brand (e.g., HongXing Erke donates for Henan); these news will particularly increase the enthusiasm of students to buy (MF09-CBCB).

The consumption of sports and leisure clothing is closely related to community identification, and this association will view the evaluation of the product itself and the opinions of community leaders as active variables. And national consciousness is viewed as an important intermediary variable. It can be seen that the marketing of sports and leisure clothing should be rooted in the community culture of college students and follow up the current affairs for experiential marketing publicity.

5.2. Consumption and Perceived Value of College Students’ Sports and Leisure Clothing. Sports and leisure clothing is closely related to physical sports, which means the conflict, attempt, reconciliation, and balance between sports and fabric. This relationship surpasses other relationships and forms a new popularity and aesthetic. This aesthetic experience is closely linked to consumer perception. The “perceived emotional value” contains four aspects, namely, pleasure, stimulation, novelty, and relaxation [21]. In the theoretical framework of perceived value, “perceived cost value” has an obvious influence on college students. Zuo Wenjin concluded that consumption contains the actual cost and risk perception. Perceived cost value refers to the benefits that consumers enjoy when buying sports and leisure clothing. It is also the perceived actual cost of goods and a psychological relationship. In my opinion, the functional difference between sports and leisure clothing and professional sportswear is not very obvious, but the difference between prices is very big. My major is table tennis, and our professional sportswear has functions such as sweat evaporation from the skin and keeping warm. But its price is higher. So cleaning every day will accelerate depreciation, which will put pressure on me. I usually wear professional sportswear when I go out to compete. In daily classes and training, I will wear sports and leisure clothes bought in Taobao. The price is very cheap, so I don’t have the pressure. My teacher doesn’t comment on my dress, and as for the training effect, “good mood, good training” (MS05-PVC-PEV).

In the interview, we found that most girls would follow the trend and wear a similar style of sportswear. In addition, we found that many professional athletes will also wear sports and leisure clothes in training. Walking in the sports venues on campus, I found that most professional athletes also wear sports and leisure clothes when training. With the development of times, the trend changes rapidly. Consumers’ demands for the function of sportswear are also in change. Consumers often have higher requirements for cost performance and hope that sports and leisure clothes can achieve the same functions as professional sportswear. Only in this way can help them daily exercise more comfortably. We hope it can have the advantages of “killing birds with one stone,” such as controlling the moisture absorption to a certain extent, adjusting temperature, resisting the tensile and friction, and preventing from wind and rain. Therefore, the difference between professional sportswear and sports and leisure clothes began to get smaller and smaller, which is also a manifestation of the mass production and standardized production relationship under the market economy. In addition, the relationship between consumption and the perceived value of sports and leisure clothing continues to increase. For example, respondent MS07 said that sports and leisure clothes made him more relaxed than professional sportswear.

My height does not get the advantage and my sports performance can only reach above average. In the future, I may not be able to become a professional athlete, which often makes me in a bad mood at school. At first, I wear loose clothes and raised shoes just to cover up my shortcomings. But then I found that my dress was often the object of imitation, which brought me confidence. Now, I start to
consider using my sports knowledge to work in sports and leisure clothing sales after graduation (MS07-PEV).

The study of perceived value has been fully developed in psychology and sociology. For the retailer, perceived value is the result that they must pursue. The basic perception and psychological activities of customers also induce psychological activities of other consumption.

Even if their perception is sometimes greatly different from the actual situation, it may have positive or negative deviation, but it does not hinder that perception has guidance [22] for customer’s behavior. Customer perception value theory provides a certain new chance for the improvement of core competitiveness. By studying college students’ perceived value of sports and leisure clothing, it can be found that emotional value and cost value are often important internal driving forces for college students, which will even influence product evaluation in community identification.

5.3. Sports and Leisure Clothing Consumption and Conspicuous Consumption Behavior of College Students. Luxury consumption motivated by external factors may lead to more public consumption and conspicuous consumption [23]. Consumers who have primarily external consumption motivation pay more attention to the “visibility” [24] of the product than those who have mainly internal consumption motivation. “Visibility” characteristics include LOGO in sports and leisure clothing, fashionable styles, and classic patterns. With a strong “visibility,” it is more likely to induce college students to conduct conspicuous consumption. Many students in the interview expressed similar ideas.

I am very yearning for the high-grade luxury goods in sports and leisure brands, such as limited edition shoes of Converse, presale coats, and dad shoes of Nick. Although I cannot afford these consumption, I sometimes buy secondhand and high imitation products to maintain a delicate image in the circle of friends. If it is a secondhand product, I will choose that with an obvious logo. After all, the secondhand product is not cheap. If it is a high imitation product, I will choose an unusual style to avoid producing embarrassment for wearing the same outfit (MS09-PV).

Conspicuous consumption is a very common psychological phenomenon in the growth of college students. American costume psychologist Mary Linhorn believes that clothing is the second layer of skin, which can mark people’s social attributes such as skin color. The claim that clothing has a close relationship to human psychology has a high degree of recognition [25]. In an era when sports and leisure clothing did not rise, college students were keener on conspicuous consumption through mobile phones, computers, and other ways. The difference is that the change of the era has quietly changed the demand and motivation for sports and leisure clothes. In contemporary times, mobile phones and computers have been popularized, so the psychological implication of famous brands of sports and leisure clothes can arouse more resonance of college students.

I will subjectively think that students dressed in famous brands of sports and leisure clothes are rich. Although I don’t know the brand culture, I will envy them wearing the common logo. Some people may wear high imitation luxury goods, but I will also subconsciously think that it is authentic because of lack of professional discrimination ability. And I tend to think that people with high status should also wear luxury sportswear, which is a symbol of identity (FN11-PV).

The self-definition theory is proposed by Georg Simmel in 1890, which is based on the special perspective of social psychology. She believes that society has different symbols, which have a psychological implication on people’s identity and status. People in the upper class wear sports and leisure clothing for horse riding, archery, sword, and other sports, which is to show class characteristics of wealthy and leisurely pace and also to show their identities. The clothing fabrics and sewing skills of clothes they wear on social occasions are the external display of rights, which is silent but shocking and conforms to the expression of the upper class. Sportswear can be said to be basically self-acquired roles, namely, helping players obtain roles through sportswear [26, 27]. Therefore, sportswear naturally is a symbol and conspicuous characteristic hidden behind the subconscious of consumers. With the change of times, it still has deep meaning between it and consumers’ consumption behavior.

6. Conclusion

The design of sports and leisure clothing is the concentrated embodiment of leisure and fashion. The current design integrates more and more trend elements, younger, fashionable, and trendy. People pay more attention to the fashion sense of sportswear in their choice of sportswear.

The development of fashionable sportswear combines comfort and fashion. And most of the prices are moderate, so college students have the strongest demand for them. Moreover, by strengthening the role of perceived value, sports and leisure clothing can bring more objective improvement to college students’ community recognition. On the surface, college students’ consumption of sports and leisure clothing is invested in the product itself. The cost of sports and leisure clothing is often lower than that of other categories of clothing, but this does not hinder its advantages of high-cost performance, loose, and comfortable and is more suitable for the majority of college students. On the other hand, the consumption of college students also affects urban white-collar workers, especially those middle-aged and young people who are eager to look younger. They will obtain the emotional value of a product from the consumption of sportswear, so as to form the construction of self-image [28–40].

Data Availability

The data underlying the results presented in the study are available within the manuscript.

Disclosure

The content of the manuscript has not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere.
Conflicts of Interest

There are no potential conflicts of interest in our paper.

Authors’ Contributions

The authors have seen the manuscript and approved to submit it.

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