

A Study on the Consumption Psychology of Chinese College Students Towards the Clothing Brand Brandy Melville

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Abstract: This study examines the consumption psychology of Chinese college students towards Brandy Melville, an Italian fast-fashion brand with a "one size fits most" policy, known for its California girl aesthetic and social media-driven marketing. The research is crucial for understanding how social media influences youth fashion choices and aiding Brandy Melville in strategizing for the Chinese market. Through a quantitative survey distributed on social platforms, 48 valid responses focusing on purchasing behavior, psychological motivations, and consumer feedback were collected. Key findings indicate that social media significantly shapes brand perception and purchase intent among students, with the brand's unique sizing strategy sparking mixed reactions. While the brand faces criticism for potentially promoting body anxiety, it also appeals to students seeking trendy and affordable fashion. The study concludes that catering to the diverse needs of this demographic could bolster Brandy Melville's market presence and consumer satisfaction, offering valuable insights for fashion brands to connect with the elusive youth market.

Keywords: Brandy Melville, Chinese College Students, Social Media, Marketing Strategy

1. Introduction

Brandy Melville is a fast fashion brand that originated in Italy and was founded in 1970 by Silvio Marsan and his son Stephan Marsan. The brand's name is inspired by a love story: Brandy is an American girl and Melville is an English boy who fell in love in Rome. Brandy Melville's style has a Californian girly vibe, which is related to the founder's American lifestyle. The brand is known for its one-size-fits-all sizing strategy, which means that most of the clothes come in a single size to fit most smaller girls. This approach breaks down the traditional sizing diversity of the apparel industry and provides a more uniform and easy-to-choose-from shopping experience [1]. Brandy Melville's line includes loose-fitting t-shirts, long cardigans, summer dresses, and jeans at affordable prices, usually between \$20 and \$40. Additionally, the brand is attracting young consumers through social media marketing strategies and word-of-mouth, especially through the Instagram platform to showcase its products.

Brandy Melville has successfully attracted a large number of young consumers through a series of innovative and effective social media marketing strategies. Brandy Melville never conducts traditional advertising campaigns but relies on word-of-mouth marketing on social media such as Instagram, Xiaohongshu and other social media quickly became popular. After entering the Chinese market, the

brand has invited celebrities such as Yang Mi, Nana Ouyang, and Kary Soong to endorse the brand, and the influence of these celebrities has greatly increased the brand's popularity and attractiveness. The brand's "one-size-fits-all" clothing design, in which all products are uniformly sized, not only adds to the brand's uniqueness but also makes the girls who wear the brand look more fashionable and consistent. This strategy has made Brandy Melville the social currency of the S-size girl, which has further contributed to the spread of the brand. Brandy Melville has adopted a very interesting marketing strategy - "Catch" sales clerks all over the Internet. Those who were "caught" working part-time would share their experiences on social media, further expanding the brand's reach and visibility.

In terms of sales, Brandy Melville reached annual sales of \$125 million in 2014, with an annual sales growth rate of 20% to 25%. And the data as of 2020, the brand has opened about 154 offline stores worldwide, 96 of which are located in the United States and only one in China. By 2024, four stores have been opened in China. In addition to this, Brandy Melville has been able to grow its sales by partnering with large retailers.

However, the response to Brandy Melville has not been entirely positive. The brand has been criticized for its one-size-fits-all small sizing strategy, which many consumers believe excludes women of all sizes. Additionally, Brandy Melville only hires thin white models, which makes some non-white or fatter women feel excluded. These controversies have led to a decline in brand loyalty among some consumers and calls for the brand to offer a wider selection of clothing sizes.

Upon its inception in the mainland Chinese market, Brandy Melville has gained substantial consumer interest. This study seeks to clarify the factors driving the affinity of Chinese youth towards a brand that embodies a distinct foreign culture and to explore the underlying motivations for their purchasing behaviors. By dissecting the rationale behind these market phenomena, the research aims to enhance the comprehension of Brandy Melville's market success and provide actionable insights to relevant industries on brand development strategies. Such insights can be instrumental in fostering the growth and prosperity of domestic brands within the competitive landscape of the fashion retail sector.

2. Literature Review

As fast fashion consumption continues to flourish globally, a number of fast fashion brands are competing for market share in today's youthful consumer landscape by virtue of their varied brand identities. From a business perspective, there is a wealth of literature on the success of fast fashion in terms of profitability from a branding perspective. However, from a psychological perspective, there is a lack of literature that explores the psychological changes and characteristics of the new generation of young consumers from a consumer perspective and with brands as the entry point.

Research has shown that social media plays an important role in shaping the consumer identity of young consumers. Young people, especially the student group, will construct and express their consumption identity through the consumption style on social media [2]. This means that social media is not only a platform for information acquisition but also a place for young consumers to display their personal identity and social status. The formation of Brandy Melville's brand image among Chinese college students is mainly due to its unique marketing strategy and brand personality shaping. Brandy Melville adopts social media as the main marketing and promotion channel and uses this method to quickly gain widespread attention and popularity among young women [3]. In addition, by creating concepts such as "BM girl" and "BM style", it successfully positioned itself as a representative of American-style clothing, which is especially popular among Generation Z girls [4]. And, by collaborating with key opinion leaders (KOLs) and posting content related to trending topics, Brandy Melville succeeded in attracting a lot of attention and creating traffic by influencing the public's psychology and emotions through these platforms [5]. This strategy capitalizes on the speed

of communication and influence of social media, allowing the brand's message to spread quickly, especially in large markets such as China.

Second, research has shown that consumers' purchase decisions are often influenced by the opinions of others [6]. This means that Chinese college students are more likely to choose Brandy Melville's clothing or accessories if they believe that these products can enhance their image among their peers. This effect happens to be greatly strengthened by Brandy Melville's strategy of heavily using social media for promotion. In addition, another study pointed out that Chinese students are adapting beauty ideals and consumption behaviors in a multicultural environment [7]. This suggests that with globalization, Chinese millennials are increasingly inclined to accept and imitate international trends, including Brandy Melville's aesthetic standards. This cross-cultural aesthetic identity may lead them to be more inclined to buy products that conform to Brandy Melville's style in order to express their fashion attitude and identity.

At the same time, although the fact that Brandy Melville's clothes are only available in one size may have triggered women's body anxiety to a certain extent, this strategy has also made wearing Brandy Melville's clothes a way to show off a "good figure". This strategy cleverly exploits the vanity of young consumers, and even in the face of criticism, Brandy Melville still managed to gain popularity in the Chinese market [8]. Therefore, psychological driving forces that motivate consumers to keep buying the brand's products need to be explored and clarified.

These studies and theories help provide background information on the motivations behind youth purchasing behavior. However, there are still some gaps in the research. While there is a wealth of literature on the marketing strategies that contributed to Brandy Melville's success, there is little research on the psychological motivations of consumers to purchase Brandy Melville products. There is also little research on mainland Chinese consumers, who have enjoyed great success and have sparked an impressive social media phenomenon. They need to be given more attention. The purpose of this study is to study the Brandy Melville consumption psychology process of Chinese students so that marketers can better understand the psychology of young consumers and develop better marketing strategies for their customers. In order to achieve this objective and put the significance of this study into practice, this paper will study the Brandy Melville consumption psychology of Chinese college students through a questionnaire survey.

3. Methodology

This study used a quantitative survey method and used self-developed questionnaire. The questionnaire contains four survey perspectives: demographic information collection, purchasing behavior, psychological factors, and opinions and feedback, with a total of 13 questions. The respondents were Chinese college students between the ages of 18 and 24 years old who were familiar with Brandy Melville. The questionnaire was created using the Chinese questionnaire website "Questionnaire Star", and was distributed on Weibo and WeChat Moment. The questionnaire distribution period was 3 days, 48 questionnaires were returned, and the total number of valid questionnaires was 48.

4. Results

In the results of this study, it was found that 98% of the subjects who completed the questionnaire were female and 58% were in the age group of 21-23 years. When asked about the channels through which they learned about Brandy Melville, 46 subjects answered that they learned about the brand through online social media, while 31%, 48%, and 38% of the subjects, respectively, learned about the brand through "recommendations from friends or family", "offline stores", and "online advertisements". When asked about the frequency of purchase, 31 subjects indicated that they had

consumed Brandy Melville products, while 15 subjects indicated that they had not purchased but were “interested”.

Among the objective purchase reasons, more than 35 subjects believed that Brandy Melville's “fashion trend” and “brand popularity” were the main reasons that prompted them to consume the products. In terms of subjective reasons, “personal aesthetic preference” topped the list of 43 respondents. The least influential factor is the “shopping experience”.

More than half of the respondents accepted Brandy Melville's slogan “One size fits most”, but also expressed the hope that the brand would develop more size options. In terms of consumer acceptance of the brand's pricing, 40 respondents found the brand's pricing to be acceptable, with 18 respondents finding it to be relatively cost-effective and 3 respondents finding it to be very cost-effective.

Social media campaigns, as the main way of Brandy Melville's promotion, have also been successful in China, with 65% of the respondents believing that Brandy Melville's image on social media has a certain influence on the purchase decision. 29 respondents believe that some bloggers' postings on social media have a corresponding effect on the purchase decision.

Finally, when consumers were surveyed using theories related to brand personality, “chic,” “imaginative,” “pleasant,” “classy, and stylish” were identified as the most important. “Classy and stylish”, ‘Popular’ and ‘Sincere’ were chosen by more than 20% of the consumers respectively. The word “size” was mentioned more than five times in consumers' suggestions for Brandy Melville, with some consumers calling on Brandy Melville to make its products more accepting of customers' sizes and to stop indirectly creating body anxiety.

5. Discussion

In this study, the results reveal Brandy Melville's influence and market performance among its target consumer groups, and these data results provide valuable references for the brand's future market insights, as well as presenting the consumer attitudes of China's young consumer groups.

First, in terms of gender and age distribution, the survey results show that Brandy Melville's brand appeal is mainly focused on young women aged 21-23. This result is in line with the brand's positioning of “California girl style”, which shows that Brandy Melville has successfully attracted the main force of its target market, and the market insight is accurate. This also reveals that in the current era of many consumer channels and advanced Internet information, refining the product target group may be more effective in achieving business success.

In terms of channels to learn about the brand, online social media has become the most important source of information, which is in line with the current media usage habits of consumers; at the same time, the majority of consumers indicate that the brand image in social media and the recommendations of KOLs will have an impact on their consumption decisions; and the data on purchasing frequency shows that even though 18 respondents have not purchased Brandy Melville's products before, but they showed interest in purchasing. This shows that due to the wide coverage and fast-spreading nature of social media, the brand is able to reach potential consumers quickly, solidifying its high appeal in the market. Meanwhile, recommendations from friends or family, offline store experiences, and online advertisements are also important ways for consumers to learn about the brand. This finding emphasizes the importance of a multi-channel marketing strategy and the vital role of word-of-mouth marketing in the new era of the Chinese market. In the current Chinese market, the “recommend economy” is in full swing, with Xiaohongshu, Dianping, and various self-publishing media bloggers becoming key triggers for consumers before shopping. Therefore, Brandy Melville should continue to take advantage of the combination of online social media triggers and the experience economy of offline physical stores to enhance brand exposure and awareness. At the same time, however, some of the negative messages that appear on social media are also more destructive in this trend. Therefore, Brandy Melville needs to pay more attention to the customer shopping

experience and after-sales service and provide positive emotional value, which can be transformed into positive word-of-mouth produced by the users themselves, maximizing the positive effect of social media.

Fashion trends and brand awareness are the two main factors that drive consumer purchases. This shows that Brandy Melville has successfully built its fashion brand image and established good brand awareness in the minds of consumers. This may be attributed to the management's insight and understanding of the avant-garde female market. At the same time, the distinctive style of apparel caters to Gen Z's strong need to express their uniqueness, which in turn helps consumers who buy Brandy Melville products to form a social circle of identity, providing a fashionable social currency for the younger generation. However, personal aesthetic preference is one of the key factors influencing consumers' purchasing decisions, which suggests that brands need to gradually make some new openings in their original style comfort zones, expand product styles, and incorporate new aesthetic spirits into their existing apparel designs in order to adapt to the ever-changing individual and even group aesthetic preferences in their product design and marketing activities.

Regarding Brandy Melville's most controversial slogan, "One size fits most," while more than half of the respondents accepted it, they also wished the brand would offer more size options. This feedback suggests that although the brand's unique positioning has a certain degree of appeal in the market, the emotional experience it brings to some consumers is relatively negative, which can make some consumers feel that their own body size is not accepted by the brand's product design, and is more likely to generate anxiety and frustration in social comparison. In order to meet the needs of a wider range of consumers, brands need to consider offering a wider variety of product options. This will not only expand sales but also help enhance brand reputation and increase the likelihood of brand sustainability.

Finally, consumer perceptions of Brandy Melville's brand image focus on various positive attributes. These positive brand image perceptions indicate that Brandy Melville's brand personality is exciting, sophisticated, and competent. These perceptions help to enhance consumers' goodwill and trust in the brand, which in turn promotes purchasing behavior.

In sum, Brandy Melville has established a strong brand presence and appeal among its target consumers. The brand's success lies in its precise market positioning, effective social media marketing strategy, and product design to counteract fashion trends. However, in order to further increase market share and consumer satisfaction, the brand needs to consider offering more size options, optimizing the inclusiveness of individual aesthetics, and continuing to utilize multi-channel marketing and KOL marketing to enhance interaction and communication with consumers. Through these strategies, Brandy Melville is expected to maintain its leading position in the highly competitive fashion market and utilize its sustainable development to attract more loyal consumers.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals the influence of the Brandy Melville brand among the Chinese college student consumer base. The study focuses on young women between the ages of 21 and 23, with this age group making up the majority of the survey respondents. Online social media is the most important channel for brand promotion, but recommendations from friends and family, physical store experiences, and online advertisements also play a significant role in influencing consumers' shopping decisions. In addition, some respondents had not yet purchased Brandy Melville products, but they showed a strong interest in the brand. In terms of purchase motivation, the brand's influence and fashion elements are the main drivers, while personal aesthetic preference is also an important consideration. It is worth noting that the shopping experience has relatively little impact on purchase decisions. Most respondents accept Brandy Melville's controversial "one size fits most" concept but

also expect the brand to provide more diversified size options. In addition, the majority of respondents believe the brand's pricing is reasonable, and some believe the brand offers good value for money.

Social media, as Brandy Melville's main promotional channel, has been very successful in penetrating the Chinese market. Most respondents believe that brand image on social media has a significant impact on purchasing decisions, while bloggers' recommendations also play a role in purchasing behavior. Utilizing a brand personality lens, respondents generally viewed Brandy Melville as having positive attributes such as fashion, innovation, pleasure, taste, and sincerity. However, some respondents suggested that the brand should be more inclusive of different body sizes to avoid creating size anxiety among consumers.

Generally speaking, Brandy Melville is successful. It has captured the attention of its target market and established a brand presence through social media marketing and fashionable and trendy product designs. To further enhance its marketability and consumer satisfaction, Brandy Melville needs to consider offering more diverse product options, optimizing aesthetic insights, and continuing to strengthen its consumer engagement for sustainability and ultimately expand its business footprint.

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