

Could creative design break through the bottlenecks of development in knitwear brands

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Abstract

Chinese knitwear brands have been losing market share over the past decades. Their traditional market share is shrinking, and the consumer base is aging. There is also homogenization in products and brands across the Chinese knitwear industry, so that brands lose their distinct identify. This paper argues that a lack of a creative design culture is a contributing factor to the challenges Chinese knitwear brands face; and proposes solutions how to improve their competitiveness.

The paper is based on studies conducted between 2014 to 2017; that included 46 face-to-face interviews with business and academic stakeholders, 2 online consumer surveys with 883 people, an industrial case study and design practice research, where a knitwear collection was created in cooperation with a Chinese knitwear brand. This paper concentrates on design practice as a means of developing brands' competitiveness in their fashion business and attracting younger generations to become their new consumers. Therefore, the paper also addresses the behaviour of knitwear customers in China through literature studies and observation; and argues that homogenisation of designs across brands and a lack of awareness of international fashion alienates younger customers, in spite of consistent quality

The results of the design practice research indicate creative design and distinguished brand characters can attract different aged consumers, including younger generations. Many surveyed people preferred high quality knitwear with unique design styles. The conclusions suggest that knitwear companies need to develop creative design and brand culture by re-building brand positioning and market segmentation and re-designing their products. This can help build a brand's distinguished character and design style. Furthermore, it should meet their targeted consumers real needs, which is an essential condition for the success of knitwear brands in the future.

Keywords: knitwear industry, Chinese markets, design creativity, design culture, branding

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