



## Motivational Drivers of Chinese Consumers' Brand Avoidance Behaviors: A Perspective of Sportswear

Lu Lin, North Carolina State University, USA  
Yingjiao Xu, North Carolina State University, USA  
Qiong (Sarah) Tao, North Carolina State University, USA

Key words: brand avoidance, consumer perception, motivational driver, sportswear

With increasing purchasing power of the Chinese middle class, the sportswear market in China experienced a 12% increase in 2017 and was projected to have an 8% increase to CNY318 billion in 2022 (Weinswig, 2018). The Chinese sportswear market has been segmented into high-end versus low-end markets. The high-end market focuses on the first and second-tier cities, occupied by global brands. The low-end segment is occupied by Chinese domestic sportswear brands focusing on the third and fourth-tier cities. Recently, the Chinese sportswear market structure has changed drastically and the marketing programs carried out by both domestic and global brands are ever evolving. Specifically, Chinese domestic sportswear brands have increased their up marketing efforts (e.g. sponsoring major sports events) (ECO Sports, 2018). On the other hand, global brands have started paying attention to lower-tiered (e.g. third-tier and fourth-tier cities) markets (Euromonitor International, 2017).

The Chinese sportswear market has become increasingly competitive in the last few years. Additionally, Chinese domestic brands' up marketing and global brands' down marketing initiatives may generate confusion in consumers' minds regarding the position and image of the brands. Therefore, it is vital to investigate not only Chinese consumers' positive purchase behaviors, but also their negative avoidance toward sportswear brands. Previous research have pointed out that the understanding of what consumers do not want is just as valuable as knowing what they do want (Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009a; Ogilvie, 1987). Lee et al. (2009a) defined brand avoidance as a phenomenon in which consumers intentionally stay away from or refuse a brand due to negative impact or meaning associated with the brand. Five types of brand avoidance behaviors were discovered from Lee et al. (2009a & 2009b) research, including experiential avoidance, identity avoidance, moral avoidance, deficit value avoidance and advertising avoidance. Country of origin (COO) is an essential factor in influencing consumer behaviors when both domestic and foreign brands are available in the same marketplace (Jiménez & Martín, 2010). Over the years, Chinese consumers have developed a negative perception toward domestic brands, such as poor quality, lack of product innovation, and lack of

design originality (Numa Sports, 2016). In this study, an investigation was also conducted to determine if consumers' avoidance behavior was contingent upon brands' country of origin.

The purpose of this study was to examine consumers' brand avoidance behaviors due to their negative perceptions toward sportswear brands in the Chinese sportswear market based on brand avoidance framework suggested by Lee et al. (2009a & 2009b) and extended by Knittel, Beurer, and Berndt (2016). Specifically, from the negative motivation perspective, as depicted in Figure 1, this study intended to address the following research questions.

RQ1: Do Chinese consumers demonstrate brand avoidance behaviors toward sportswear brands?

RQ2: What are the driving factors of Chinese consumers' sportswear brand avoidance behaviors?

RQ3: Will the country of origin of a brand influence Chinese consumers' avoidance behaviors toward the brand?

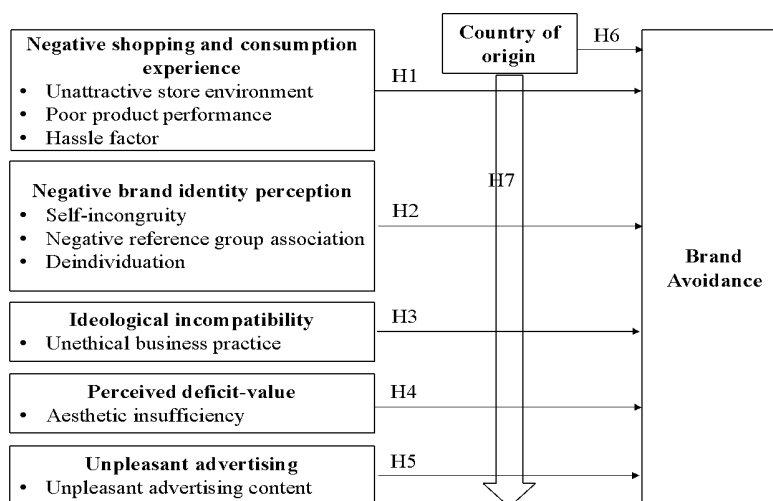


Figure 1 Theoretical framework

A focus group study was first conducted in order to identify and develop items to measure the proposed motivational drivers for brand avoidance in the sportswear market. A web-based survey was then used to collect data to test the relationships proposed in the theoretical framework. A total of 268 complete questionnaires were collected for data analysis. Reliability analyses were conducted on each of the multi-item variables. The Cronbach's alphas of all brand

avoidance drivers were larger than 0.78, indicating good scale reliability. Stepwise regression was employed to test H1-H5, independent sample T-test was conducted to test H6 and stepwise regression was used on each of the sub-samples (Chinese brands vs. global brands) to test H7.

The results suggested that Chinese consumers have shown avoidance toward sportswear brands, including both domestic and global brands. The following motivational factors were revealed as having significant influences on Chinese consumers' avoidance behaviors toward sportswear brands: negative shopping and consumption experience (poor product performance), negative brand identity (self-incongruity), and unpleasant advertisement, hence supporting H1, H2, and H5. Consumer avoidance levels for sportswear brands were much higher toward Chinese domestic brands when compared to global brands. Additionally, the relationships between brand avoidance drivers and brand avoidance were moderated by brands' country of origin. For global brands, Chinese consumers' avoidance was mainly due to poor product performance. In contrast, for Chinese brands, the avoidance was mainly due to negative reference association and unpleasant advertising.

The results of this provides empirical evidence for the successful application of the brand avoidance model proposed by Lee et al. (2009a & 2009b) and Knittel et al. (2016) in the context of the sportswear market. At the same time, the moderating effect of country of origin was proven to be significant, which provided a great annotation to the results based on the brand avoidance model (Lee et al., 2009a & 2009 b; Knittel et al., 2016). This study also provides great insights for thought for the sportswear industry in China. For example, product performance and image are the bottom lines for Chinese consumers' behaviors toward purchasing sportswear products. Any unmet expectations within these two areas will likely lead to consumers' avoidance behavior toward the brand.

## References:

- ECO Sports. (2018). Why do so many people do not like the domestic sportswear brand? Retrieved from <https://www.zhihu.com/question/49493096/answer/302609780>
- Euromonitor International. (2017). Sportswear in China. Retrieved from <http://www.portal.euromonitor.com/portal/analysis/tab>
- Jiménez, N. H., & Martín, S. S. (2010). The role of country-of-origin, ethnocentrism and animosity in promoting consumer trust. *International Business Review*, 19(1), 34-45.
- Knittel, Z., Beurer, K., & Berndt, A. (2016). Brand avoidance among generation Y consumers. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 19(1), 27-43.
- Lee, M. S. W., Conroy, D., & Motion, J. (2009b). Brand avoidance: A negative promises perspective. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 36, 421.
- Lee, M. S. W., Motion, J., & Conroy, D. (2009a). Anti-consumption and brand avoidance. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 169-180.
- Numa Sports. (2016). In addition to plagiarism and imitation, what are the other problems domestic sports brands have? Retrieved from [http://www.sohu.com/a/106946443\\_384146](http://www.sohu.com/a/106946443_384146)
- Ogilvie, D. M. (1987). The undesired self: A neglected variable in personality research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(2), 379-385.
- Weinswig, D. (2018). Millennials, a pro-sports government and big sports events drive the China sportswear market. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahweinswig/2018/09/17/millennials-a-pro-sports-government-and-large-sports-events-drive-the-china-sportswear-market/#67b72c4f796c>