

The Method of Creating a Genderless and Environmentally Friendly Clothing Brand and Spreading Unisex and Environmentalism in China

Youjia Hao

Shanghai Australian International School, Shanghai, China
evanlu122hyj@outlook.com

Abstract: Three marketing strategy including segmentation, positioning, and data analysis applied in this article gives some suggestions for creating a clothing brand selling neutral products made of eco-friendly materials. Building such a brand not only has commercial value but also has a far-reaching social impact in protecting the environment and promoting social equality.

Keywords: social equality, environmentalism, clothing industry, business analysis, start-up market

1. Introduction

1.1. Topic

In contemporary society, there is a growing acceptance of diverse perspectives, prominently observed in the increasing visibility of LGBT communities and the advocacy for gender equality online. In response to these societal shifts, many clothing brands have embraced gender-neutral designs either to capitalize on commercial opportunities or to support these communities, thereby enhancing their well-being and contributing positively to society. However, despite the popularity of this approach, there remains ample room for innovation, particularly in incorporating eco-friendly materials to promote environmental stewardship. This article aims to examine the essential aspects of launching and marketing a unisex and environmentally conscious brand in China, focusing on segmentation, positioning, and feature analysis involving price, style, and length.

1.2. Literature review

In an American weekly magazine (1883-1972) the term unisex was first used on paper. The unisex trend in the West gained momentum in the 1960s as it became bid on the Paris runways... The burning of Bras (a symbolic representation) by women in the U.S. created a wave of liberation and the emergence of unisex sections in departmental stores. These events though small had a ripple effect on fashion trends even decades later [1]. Consequently, the idea of unisex and spreading it to reach gender equality has already appeared for a long history. Nonetheless, historically, the clothes involving this concept were mostly used as artistic and social propaganda objects, lacking the practicality of daily wear. In addition, much of the early movement took place in regions such as Europe and the Americas, and China's adoption of unisex is relatively recent, leaving significant

market potential unexplored. Furthermore, there is a dearth of a comprehensive analysis and definition of this situation with sexual minorities which tends to be another group who need social assistance to break stereotypes of gender and specific groups.

The American psychologist Bem(1974) divided gender into two dimensions through the results of the gender role test, biological gender and social gender. Asexual culture is very different from the traditional binary biological gender, which is defined from the perspective of social gender. In 1971, Ann Oakley published the book 'Biological Sex and Social Gender', in which gender was not given a single physiological perspective, but explained the social roles, social division of labor, and social responsibilities of men and women from the perspective of social composition. Gender does not affect the physiological basis of differences between men and women, but is a social construction. Gender cannot be equated with physical differences between men and women... The so-called concept of social gender is based on the construction of culture and society and is generated and decided by the acquired and artificial action. Unisex takes the initiative to break the shackles of binary gender and emphasizes the equality of everyone based on the cultural environment, rather than the simple equality of men and women [2]. Based on these, people can better understand the intention of asexuality by understanding the two different gender constructs. With the development of the times, more and more women began to have the same social rights as men, such as education, and the abilities of the two started to approach. Therefore, many women in today's society will assume the responsibility that once belonged to men alone, and this process has led to a series of social phenomena such as more women seeking gender equality and the surge of LGBT groups because of fewer single-social gender being than before. Whatever the case, once we develop a gender identity we communicate and demonstrate it in several ways. A common way is to appropriate consumption practices and props that reflect our gender identity [3]. So many people purchase clothes and accessories that match their social gender. Often people's gender formation affects their entire lives, so gender-specific marketing is very sustainable and profitable in the long run. As mentioned earlier, few people in the market are currently aware of the complex feelings of LGBT people because their gender perceptions are so diverse. So a lot of sexual minority needs are not being met. But lately, gendered brands have stalled, so marketers are constantly raising the gender spectrum, bringing women and men into each other's brand space. Most of the products are gender-bending which means the brand for one gender displays the features of another gender. According to Namrata Sandhu's article, many men, and some women, object to this trend because they find it offensive to wear clothes that reflect the opposite sex, and they may even abandon the brand. One manner to solve this problem by marketers is creating a new meaning for the brand to keep the original customer, that is, add creativity based on practicality. Or, if the gender distinction itself is not a characteristic of the brand, perhaps people will not care too much about gendered products.

With the result that, when creating a genderless brand where the boundaries between men and women are not clear, we may be able to take that advice and add new concepts. It is not hard to consider the idea of environmentalism since clothing is one of the most polluting industries in the globe. As Sarif stated in 2020, the challenges of producing environmentally friendly clothes include a lack of conscious consumption and designer engagement [4]. The initial challenge is somewhat alleviated in China owing to its robust environmental-protecting heritage in culture and a well-established network for disseminating messages, facilitated by popular apps such as TikTok and Weibo. The latter challenge presents an opportunity to establish a new brand upon securing a designer, or to involve consumers in the design process—for instance, incorporating distinctive patterns by themselves. This approach not only mitigates the challenge of designer recruitment but also fosters consumer attachment to the product and brand, enhancing consumer resonance through added social elements.

In conclusion, numerous factors indicate favorable conditions for clothing brands advocating unisex and environmentalism to thrive in China. Primarily, China's current underdevelopment in non-sexism presents a significant market void. Secondly, with the gradual opening of China's internet environment and deep cultural heritage, brands embodying both social elements can be effectively promoted. Thirdly, the complementary roles of these two attributes in innovation hold unprecedented potential.

1.3. Value proposition

This article holds significant implications for both brand creators and society to a large extent.

For brand creators intending to establish non-sexist and eco-friendly clothing brands, it offers strategic insights. These include segmentation of consumer groups into five distinct categories, a perceptual map delineating competitors and identifying market gaps, and a detailed data analysis elucidating the impact of three attributes—price, style, and length—on sales and profitability. Such information is invaluable to businesses embarking on the launch of such brands, potentially saving them considerable trial and error during starting.

On a broader societal scale, the founding principles of this brand underscore its profound social significance. By promoting unisex fashion in China, the brand aims to foster awareness of equality, challenge gender stereotypes, elevate the social standing of sexual minorities, and meet their specific needs. Furthermore, by adopting environmentally friendly production practices, the brand takes concrete steps towards environmental preservation, thereby propagating environmentalism over the long term. These combined impacts promise both spiritual and material advancements for society, addressing aspirations for equality on a spiritual level and confronting environmental challenges with practical measures. This dual commitment not only enhances societal well-being but also aligns with evolving societal values, contributing to a more equitable and sustainable future.

2. Methodology

2.1. Segmentation

To do the start-up market and spread the concept of our brand which would called NeutroEco later, the products should have good cost performance. To spread unisex and environmentalism, the clothes are genderless design and made up of environmentally friendly raw materials. The brand has three 3 attributes, good cost performance, genderless design, and environmentally friendly material. We divide the total market into several smaller segments. Each segment consists of customers who share similar characteristics. The following 5 groups tend to be the main sales targets. (see Table 1)

Table 1: Segmentation

Value seekers	This group of people values the cost performance of products. The clothes are all at good cost performance. Individuals who attach importance to the feature ought to purchase it.
Sexual Minority and their supporters	Sexual Minorities are the group that differs from the majority of the population in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual identity, or sexual behavior. The clothes are genderless style. It also spreads the idea of unisex and breaking gender stereotypes, so sexual minority and their supporters would like this brand.
Environmentalists	An environmentalist is someone who has environmentalism as a code of conduct. The brand produces clothes with environmentally friendly materials while propagating greenism. This is sure to appeal to environmentalists.
Supporter of gender equality	These people appreciate breaking gender stereotypes and may act on them. That's why they buy unisex clothes from us to take real action.
Normal clothing buyers	The clothes sold have no special display like some artwork, customers who only need practical clothes can also buy them.

According to an unofficial survey, value seekers in shopping contribute to 59.04% in China. Among them, 65.6% were born in the 1990s and will become the major groups of society in the coming decades [5]. Refer to the data in 2024, only 5% of the Chinese are in the LGBT group [6]. However, 53% of Chinese support these people and may react by buying related products [7]. According to a 2014 Reuters report, 64% of Chinese call themselves environmentalists [8]. Based on these data, it is obvious audience of this brand is still relatively broad while normal clothing buyers and supporters of gender equality are also one massive group of people due to basic needs and the trends.

2.2. Positioning

To better form a unique perception of a brand in the customer's mind, the perceptual map below displays the image of some famous clothing brands relating to the attributes of sexuality and pricing, assisting us in finding market vacancies and competitors. (see figure 1) Price has always been an important factor for a brand to consider, gender-neutral design is the main selling point of our clothing, environmentalism is more of an additional attribute, and it is difficult to quantify at present, so we chose these two attributes for analysis. The vertical axis represents the degree of gender orientation from the height to the end, that is to say, the closer to the origin, the clothes are more genderless. The horizontal axis from left to right symbolizes the product from cheap to luxury. The indicators are positioned based on the average price of their representative products, gender orientation, and major consumer groups. For instance, Chanel mainly sells cosmetics, perfumes, and other products popular with female consumers. At the same time, the price of their clothes is relatively high. Generally, the price is haute couture, which can be as high as hundreds of thousands of yuan.

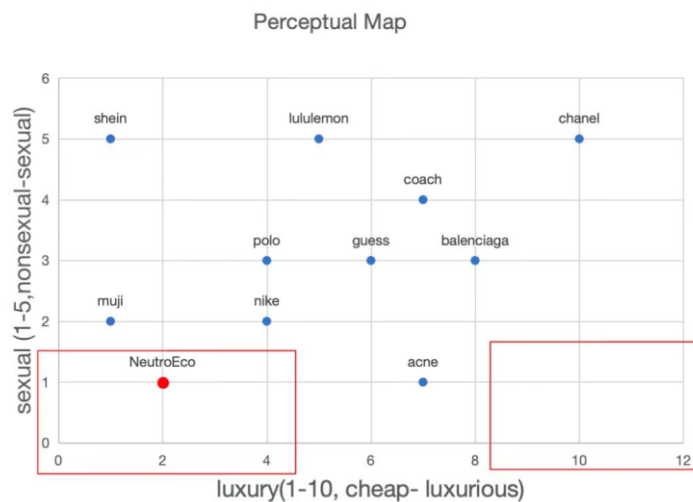


Figure 1: Perceptual map

NeutroEco is a neutral brand, it should be in the lower part, where the red box is the market vacancy. We ended up going to the left side because the right side was too expensive for too many people to afford. The figure of gender tolerance and more affordable prices also lead to more consumers. Moreover, Nike and Muji are the 2 brands closest to our brand so they are the major competitors. According to the data from Investing (2024), the stock price of Nike has been decreasing in recent years. Many non-professional reports online claim that the Muji in China is on the decline since their business philosophy is not consistent with this country [9]. This phenomenon means it is a good opportunity to start up a new brand.

2.3. Data analysis

A competitive comparison of Muji and Nike coats is conducted through conjoint analysis. (see Table 2) The coat is chosen since this fabric of clothing doesn't show a gender orientation like some perfume, it could better spread the idea of unisex and attract more consumers [10].

We mainly chose three dimensions, price, length, and style. A total of 15 prices, three styles, and three lengths are used to conduct 10 questionnaires and obtain about 1350 pieces of data from local Chinese to see the circumstances for consumers to buy our goods. Two specific products are chosen for comparison. The length is divided into long, medium, and short are quantified as 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The style atmosphere is formal, casual, and sporty, which are quantified as 3 2 1 respectively.

All the p-values listed are smaller than 0.05, so the data is credible. Purchase and price have a negative relation since the coefficient is negative which is -0.0004. However, the absolute value for the coefficient is small, so the demand is inelastic, the brand could raise the price to earn profit. The cause of the result is one report shows that 89% of customers are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products [11]. The R-squared and F-statistics listed are both big, showing price could explain why customers buy to large extent. The relation between length and purchase is also negative, showing -0.0402, so customers reveal a preference for short pattern. The relation between style and purchase is positive which is 0.0347, so customers are keen on formal clothes introduced from NeutroEco. Although the latter two indicators can account for part of the customer's buying tendency, their R-squared and F-statistics are small compared to price.

By combining three variables, a relationship formula is obtained:

$$\text{buy} = 0.6207 - 0.0004 \times \text{Price} + 0.0322 \times \text{style} - 0.0374 \times \text{length}.$$

Table 2: Conjoint analysis

Regression between 'Buy' and	R-squared	F-statistic	Coefficient of constant	Coefficient of variable	P-value of constant	P-value of variable
Price	0.038	52.42	0.6108	-0.0004	0.000	0.000
Style	0.004	4.968	0.2630	0.0347	0.000	0.026
length	0.005	6.290	0.4133	-0.0402	0.000	0.012

3. Conclusion

Increasing calls for gender equality worldwide have led to a rise in gender-neutral products, a trend mirrored in China. However, due to less development and publicity of gender neutrality in China, such products may face resistance from both genders. To address this, we propose innovatively combining a singular concept with environmentally friendly elements, such as the integration of degradable fibers. This dual approach allows for more effective online marketing and consumer engagement through empathetic strategies. Furthermore, China boasts a longstanding cultural tradition of environmental stewardship. In recent years, the growing visibility of LGBT groups on social media reflects an increasingly open stance towards challenging gender norms. Therefore, the fusion of enduring environmental consciousness with gender-neutral innovation holds promise for opening new markets in China.

To assist companies in effectively creating their brands, this article comprehensively analyzes consumer segments in the market, including environmentalists, supporters of LGBT rights, advocates for gender equality, value-conscious consumers, and general apparel buyers, who collectively constitute a significant proportion in China. For positioning strategies, identifying market gaps and assessing key competitors such as Muji and Nike are crucial steps. Data analysis, facilitated through

surveys, elucidates how factors like price, style, and length influence consumer preferences toward our brand. Findings indicate that our consumers exhibit a preference for our products irrespective of price sensitivity, allowing NeutroEco potential leeway to adjust pricing strategies for sustainable profitability. Additionally, there is a preference for shorter yet formal attire among consumers, a seemingly paradoxical combination that presents an opportunity for innovative fashion trends to emerge. In addition to these aspects, marketers can also work with many minority influencers to attract a lot of attention through platforms such as Douyin.

Finally, when embarking upon the establishment of a gender-neutral apparel brand, it is paramount to authentically embrace and embody the principles of gender neutrality. This endeavor extends beyond mere considerations of design and marketing strategies to actively contribute to societal transformation. Brands possess significant influence in shaping social norms by championing inclusivity and equity, and by challenging conventional gender stereotypes through innovative design and advocacy efforts. Furthermore, given the substantial environmental footprint of the fashion industry, adopting sustainable and eco-conscious production practices becomes imperative. Such measures not only uphold ethical standards but also align with prevailing market dynamics. In today's consumer milieu, transparency, and corporate social responsibility play increasingly pivotal roles in appealing to a discerning clientele that prioritizes ethical and sustainable practices. Consequently, these principles not only delineate brand positioning but also foster profound consumer connections, thereby advancing societal progress

References

- [1] Chetna Dikkar (2021) *Unisex Clothing, A Sustainable Way of Self Expression*, *International Journal of Textile and Fashion Technology* · January 2021 DOI: 10.24247/ijftapr20212
- [2] Li Yuejiao, Li Jiayi (2023) *Boundary and Breakthrough: Research on display design of non-sexist fashion culture*, *Art Science and Technology*, No.3, 2023, 34-36
- [3] Namrata Sandhu (2017) *Consumer Response to Brand Gender Bending: An Integrated Review and Future Research Agenda*, *Business Perspectives and Research* 5(2) 151-166 © 2017 K.J. Somaiya Institute of Management Studies and Research SAGE Publications sagepub. in/home.nav DOI: 10.1177/2278533717692917
- [4] Sarif PATWARY (2020) *Clothing and Textile Sustainability: Current State of Environmental Challenges and the Ways Forward*, scientific review UDC 687:677:502.131.1 DOI: 10.31881/TLR.2020.16
- [5] Wang Xiaoran, Zhao Shuping (2019) *Nearly 70% of the "post-90s" pay attention to the cost performance of goods* https://m.sohu.com/a/320395950_115865
- [6] National Health Network (2024) *How many thousands of homosexuals are there in this country? How many gay people make up the total population in our country?* <https://www.qm120.com/zt/bake/786723.html>
- [7] NetEase News (2024) *New research shows that nearly half of Chinese people approve of LGBT people, and family acceptance and openness are key* <https://m.163.com/dy/article/J907CA1O052880KM.html>
- [8] Wu Heqing (2014) *Two-thirds of Chinese consider themselves environmentalists, twice as many as in Europe and the United States* <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gj/2014/05-09/6151228.shtml>
- [9] Yu Erhu (2024) *Muji, abandoned by the middle class, is still frantically expanding its stores* <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1802996863975367578&wfr=spider&for=pc>
- [10] Hyojung Kim, Inho Cho and Minjung Park*, *Analyzing genderless fashion trends of consumers' perceptions on social media: using unstructured big data analysis through Latent Dirichlet Allocation - based topic modeling*
- [11] Elsa Levinson (2010) *"Green Clothes"- A survey of people's willingness to pay for environmentally friendly clothes*, Master Thesis 30 credits, Spring 2010