

## RESEARCH ON BRAND IMAGE POSITIONING OF SPORTS SHOES FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the image positioning of the six best-selling sports shoes brands in the Chinese market in consumers' minds. By comparing the differences of various brands images, the study aims at understanding the ideal brand image in consumers' minds. In this study, 480 questionnaires were distributed to students in colleges and universities through purposive sampling, and 480 questionnaires were returned, with 468 valid questionnaires with an effective rate of 97.5%. The findings of this study suggest that the most significant difference in the performance of each brand image is the functional image: Nike's functional image, symbolic image, and experiential image are the best, while Adidas is the second best, and Anta is slightly ahead of Puma in its functional image, but not as good as Puma in its symbolic image. Sketchers is the best among all three images. The implications of the findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** Sports shoes brand; Brand image positioning; University students; Multi-scale

### INTRODUCTION

With the formation and development of global economic integration, competition across national borders has stepped into a new pattern. As a result, the marketing field has also undergone a drastic change, and the product dominance that provided the leading competitive position of enterprises will be transformed into brand dominance (Sheth, Sisodia, & Sharma, 2000, Humphrey, & Mandel, 2020). Larry Light famously said, "The marketing war of the future will be a war of brands against brands, a competition for brand superiority" (Yu, 2001). Therefore, a good brand image will be highly valued (Chang, 2011). While it has a certain level of awareness, it also establishes a deep relationship with consumers so that they can get intangible benefits in return. Then, they will call for more active investing and give this brand loyalty (Xin, 2007).

A sports shoes brand is the perception and feeling of the sports shoes obtained by consumers who have personally used or have seen the advertising information about the brand and listened to the opinions of others (Benmiled-Cherif, 2016). Therefore, the composition of the sports shoes brand image is not only obtained by selling sports shoes, but also through intangible or tangible methods and services to improve the image of the sports shoes brand in order to gain the favour of consumers.

With the rise of national fitness heatwave, sports have become another major hotspot for the

general public. Sports consumption has also become agitated, with many domestic and foreign enterprises having entered the sports industry market (Jiang, 2011). The six best-selling sports shoes brands include Nike, Adidas, Puma, Sketchers, Anta, and Asics, etc. (hereinafter referred to as the six brands) (Zhang, 2019), showing that this industry has a high degree of concentration (Park, Jaworski & MacInnis, 1986). With the rise of the national fitness frenzy in recent years, the overall consumption of sports shoes has shown double-digit growth trend (Schramm, & Taube, 2007; Borts, 2018), rising from 60.280 billion yuan in 2011 to 92.993 billion yuan in 2015 (Mak, 2013). With the overall development of the economy, the family spending power and living conditions have gradually increased and the quality of life of the university student population has been improved. The consumption momentum of the student consumer group in the sports shoes sales market cannot be ignored. Thus, it is of paramount importance to study the purchase intention of university students toward sports shoes brands so as to obtain the positioning of the brand image of sports shoes.

With the development of society and economy, the continuous improvement of material and economic resources, and the continuous improvement of people's consumption standards, the consumer groups of contemporary university students are becoming increasingly diversified, and the consumption standards still tend to be beneficial and quality-oriented (Chen, 2015). In the future consumer groups, university students will inevitably occupy a dominant position (Zhou, 2007).

The purpose of this research is to explore the sports shoes brand image of the six brands in the minds of university students. According to the specific characteristics of sports shoes, comparing the differences in the brand images of the six sports shoes will help enterprises to understand the purchase intention and needs of students' consumer groups, thereby doing an excellent job of market segmentation to draw up an image plan that will be helpful to the development of the enterprise and assist in developing a product image plan. Based on the sales of sports shoes of major brands among students, this study develops the following three research questions: (1) What is the background information of this research sample? (2) What is the performance and importance of the brand image of the six major brands of sports shoes? (3) What are the differences between the brand images of the six major brands of sports shoes?

A sports shoes brand is the sum of some intricately symbolic and intangible services such as attributes, names, prices, reputation, functions, etc. It is how buyers give a pair of sneakers a feeling, and it represents the buyer's experience of this pair of sneakers in life, the sum of trust and meaning generated (Qiu, 2009). At the same time, it is also the definition obtained by the vast number of consumers after experience. It is also a means to identify certain sellers' sales tactics and services and differentiate the products and services offered by competitors (Yu, 2004).

In this study, the brand image of sports shoes involved in the research is the perception and feeling of the sports shoes obtained by consumers who have personally used the sports shoes or have seen advertisements and information about the sports shoes brands and listened to the opinions of others. Therefore, the different values and benefits provided by sports shoes brands to users are the factors that constitute the brand image of sports shoes (Qiu, 2009). And this

study borrows the method of literature analysis and factor analysis to extract the following three factors representing the image of sports shoes brand: "functional image", "symbolic image", "and experiential image". This study uses a questionnaire method to conduct research on Lingnan Normal University (LNNU)'s students.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we describe a brief review of the literature. In section 3, we develop the research methods. Section 4 presents the results and discussion of the study. Section 5 provides conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Brand image

Many scholars define brand image as consumers' association and perception of a brand. It is often defined as the association of a brand in consumers' minds, the perception of the brand by consumers, and the associations of consumers with the brand (Jiang, 2011). It is the consumer's intrinsic perception of the products, the overall perception of the brand that the consumer has acquired through a series of channels (Zhang, 2011). For buyers and consumers' perception and overall view of the brand, it affects consumers' purchase desire and consumption behaviour of this brand (Qin, Qiu, & Wu, 2011). Brand image is a collection of consumers' associations with a brand (Jiao, Lu, & Chen, 2004).

Aaker (1991), Luo (2001), and Qiu (2009) pointed out that the components of brand image should include brand awareness, brand association, and brand recognition. According to Qiu (2009), the elements of a brand image should also include multiple indicators such as corporate dimension, product dimension, human dimension, and symbolic dimension. The brand loyalty dimension is not mentioned (Qiu, 2009). Furthermore, Qiu (2009) and Fan and Chen (2002)'s works refer to corporate dimension, human dimension, and symbolic dimension which are basically similar. They fully express the factors of product attributes, such as product category, etc. (Qiu, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2022). Jiao (2018) showed that brand image factors could be defined as a comprehensive reflection of the elements that constitute the goods in the potential perception and comprehensive association of consumers. This is similar to Park et al. (1986), who proposed that the components of brand image are the meaning in the product's functionality, the product's symbolism, and the meaning in the experience of the product (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). They argued that the composition of the brand image should include a comprehensive reflection of satisfying consumers' desire for use (i.e., functionality), consumers' potential perceptions (i.e., experientiality), and consumers' comprehensive associations (i.e., symbolism).

The components of brand image in this study are product functionality, product symbolism and product experience. The definition of brand image should be that consumers purchase or use a brand for a long time in the state of association and perception, so as to generate trust and dependence on the brand's products, and it is the buyer's recognition of the brand to form the brand image. To make consumers recognize a brand, it is not only about brand associations,

but also for brands to show strong functionality that satisfies consumers, as well as a symbol to satisfy consumers' psychological needs and an experience that makes customers feel comfortable (De Chernatony, 1993; Berry, Wall, & Carbone, 2006; Ghodeswar, 2008; Vázquez, Del Rio, & Iglesias, 2002). In this way, consumers can rely on and trust the product, and the brand image will take root in the hearts of consumers.

### **Research on sports shoes brand image**

With the continuous progress and development of the social economy, China's sports shoes industry has gradually emerged, and there are growing studies on the brand image of sports shoes. The following is a list of studies related to the brand image of sports shoes in China during the past ten years. First, Jiao (2018) studied the influence of sports shoes brand image on the purchase intention of post-90's consumers based on the Bell model. The dimension of sports shoes brand image is set as the independent variable, consumer purchase intention is set as the dependent variable, and perceived value as the mediating variable. In addition, Jiao (2018) highlighted the relationship between the dimensions of sports shoes brand image and their purchase intention. Similarly, Zhang (2011) established the Bell model with the support of domestic and foreign literature in the empirical research on the influence of sports shoes brand image on the purchase intention of Hangzhou university students, thereby obtaining the relationship between the sports shoes brand image and the purchase intention of students. Furthermore, Mai (2013) established a research model based on the dimension of sports shoes brand image in the research on the influence of sports shoes brand image on consumers' purchase intention so as to obtain the relationship between them. Jiang (2011) studied the relationship between the dimensions of brand image and brand loyalty so as to give suggestions for the construction of domestic sports shoes brand image. On the other hand, Qin, Qiu, and Wu (2009) used literature review and qualitative research methods to establish a mechanism model for the brand image of sports shoes to explore the relationship between brand image and its relationship.

Angelica et al. (2017) studied the promotion activities carried out in the store, using the consumer's purchase data traces to study the influence of their purchasing behavior and the image of the product brand so as to obtain the influence of the type of product and the type of consumer purchase. It increases the purchase of goods and improves the image of the brand. Similarly, Johanudin et al. (2016)'s study focuses on the importance of image satisfaction with a brand in the minds of consumers. It also explains the impact of brand image on customer satisfaction. Moreover, Abdulalem et al. (2018) studied the relationship between corporate responsibility in society, brand image and customer satisfaction with the brand as the object of explanation and proposed to establish a conceptual model to explore the dimensions of corporate social responsibility in terms of satisfaction. Finally, it is concluded that this relationship may be positive, and this relationship is mediated by brand image. At the same time, Takumi, et al. (2018)'s research mainly focused on verifying the image factors that form a quality brand to make the concept no longer ambiguous and intricate so as to find effective countermeasures. As a result, it is more conducive to enterprises to obtain the elements required by the brand.

Most domestic and foreign researchers analyzed brand image-related research and found relevant strategies, which have provided substantial help for enterprises. However, there are very few studies on brand image positioning on the student consumer groups (Yang., & Li, 2019), lack of statements on the performance and importance of brand image, and lack of understanding between the brand image of many existing competing brands. Therefore, this research is very existential, and addresses these issues by studying the brand image positioning of sports shoes in view of these problems, aiming at the advantages and strategies between brands in order to better understand the positioning of consumers on the brand image.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research instruments

This research questionnaire is divided into three parts (see Table 1), the first part is the performance of the six major brands. After referring to Qin, Qiu, and Wu (2011) and Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986) related research, a self-made scale was formed according to three dimensions including functional image, experiential image, and symbolic image. Functional image means is used to meet the functional needs of consumers, that is, the needs related to consumers. It refers to the utility and benefits brought to consumers by using the product with seven questions in total. The experiential image refers to the experiential brand image used to satisfy the experiential needs of consumers with four questions; the symbolic image was used to satisfy needs for role enhancement, group membership or self-identity, with five questions. The symbolic image is used to meet role promotion needs, group membership or self-identification, a total of 5 items. Questionnaire items use a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, representing 5 to 1 point, respectively. Furthermore, an additional item, "never used," was given a score of 0 and was set as a missing value.

The second part is the evaluation of the six major brand image importance attributes, which also represent the ideal evaluation in the minds of sports shoe users. All the 16 items are ranked according to the importance of each item based on the importance of each item from "very important" to "very unimportant". This section includes the respondents' demographic information and exercise behaviour, including gender, age, university, monthly disposable allowance, favourite brand of shoes, brand of shoes worn, favourite promotions when shoes brands hold promotions, average time spent choosing shoes at sports shoes stores, the average amount of money spent on each pair of shoes, the average frequency of exercise per week, and average time spent per exercise. The third part is the basic information of the respondents.

**Table 1: Sports Shoes Brand Image Scale**

Variables	Structure	Items
		I will choose this brand of sports shoes because (of its)
Brand image	Functional image	Good grip (FI1)
		Good anti-seismic effect (FI2)
		Good elasticity (FI3)
		Good softness (FI4)
		Good wear resistance (FI5)
		Lightweight (FI6)
		Good antioxidant performance (FI7)
	Experiential image	It can meet the needs of self-exercise (EI1)
		It can motivate me to exercise (EI2)
		It can provide a good sports experience (EI3)
		It can provide me with a comfortable feeling (EI4)
	Symbolic image	It can satisfy your own psychological needs (SI1)
		It can improve personal temperament (SI2)
		It can improve the sense of self-identity (SI3)
		It allows me to be recognized in the group (SI4)
		It can show your personality (SI5)

**Pre-test questionnaire analysis**

Item Analysis: This study adopts item analysis to analyze the data of the research items to evaluate the quality of the items and achieve the purpose of screening the items. The good items were selected for retention and the bad items were deleted (Wu, 2019). The questionnaire used in this study has three dimensions: "functional image"(7 items), "symbolic image"(5 items), and "experiential image"(4 items). In this study, the scale was divided into 5 subscales with 1 being "Strongly disagree", 2 being "Disagree", 3 being "Neutral", 4 being "Agree", and 5 being "Strongly agree". At this point, the item with a higher score in the research has a better brand image in this aspect, and the higher the score obtained after all the scores are superimposed, the more positive its brand image is.

Reliability analysis: This study employs Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ( $\alpha$ ) reliability coefficient method to measure the stability and internal consistency. In this study, the "functional" reliability statistic  $\alpha$  was .834, the "symbolic" reliability statistic  $\alpha$  was .92, and the "experiential" reliability statistic  $\alpha$  was .847. The data shows that the  $\alpha$  coefficient values of the items in the questionnaire of this study are all greater than .800, indicating that the scale has good internal consistency and stability (Wu Song, 2019). The item analysis and reliability analysis are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Item Analysis and Reliability Analysis Scales**

Dimensions	Items	$\alpha$	Corrected items total correlation	C.R. value
Functional image	FI1	.834	.704	-8.473*
	FI2		.711	-8.560*
	FI3		.799	-8.830*
	FI4		.730	-8.360*
	FI5		.717	-7.860*
	FI6		.748	-10.626*
	FI7		.708	-8.629*
Symbolic image	SI1	.929	.723	-11.644*
	SI2		.845	-10.793*
	SI3		.855	-11.144*
	SI4		.829	-9.883*
	SI5		.818	-10.060*
Experiential image	EI1	.847	.770	-7.803*
	EI2		.580	-12.058*
	EI3		.766	-7.161*
	EI4		.601	-7.217*

### Research subjects

The questionnaires adopted in this study were distributed according to the proportion of the number of subjects in the 17 universities as the research subjects. 480 questionnaires were distributed with a recovery rate of 100%. After excluding 12 invalid questionnaires and 468 valid questionnaires, the effective questionnaire rate was 97.5%.

### Data analysis methods

After collecting the questionnaires, SPSS 22.0 software was employed to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic background information, brand image performance, and importance attribute evaluation to understand the various data of the questionnaire. Multi-scale analysis has been conducted to indicate the differences between the brand images and the distance from the ideal points between the brand images.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Background information analysis

The data of this study showed that most respondents to the questionnaire were female university students accounting for 69.9%, and males accounting for 30.1% (the ratio of males to females in the original school was 7:3). Questionnaire respondents aged 21 or above accounting for 53.4%, followed by 20-years old with 25.0%, 19-years old with 17.3%, and under 18-year-old with 4.3% of the lowest.

The largest number of subjects were from the School of Arts and Communication (20.1%), followed by the School of Physical Education (15.0%) (the School of Arts and Communication has a larger number of subjects, and the School of Physical Education has a higher number of subjects because of its athletic needs. So, the proportion of the two is higher), the School of Education (7.1%), the School of Business (6.4%), the School of Law and Politics (6.0%), the School of Physics (5.8%), the School of Engineering (5.6%), the School of Mathematics (5.6%), the School of Foreign Languages (5.1%), the School of Chemical Engineering (4.5%), the School of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering (3.8%), the School of Life Sciences (3.8%), the School of Teacher Training & Education (3.4%), the School of Fine Arts (3.0%), the School of Music (3.0%), and the School of Marxism (1.9%) was the lowest.

Disposable pocket money: The subjects have the highest monthly allowance of 701-900 yuan (accounting for 37.2%), followed by below 3000 yuan (25%), 301-500 yuan (23.9%), and 501-700 yuan (13.9%).

The highest percentage of subjects spent less than one hour in the store (72.2%), followed by one to two hours (19.4%), two to three hours (4.5%), and more than three hours (3.8%). Subjects spent the most money on sports shoes (41.9%) in the range of \$201-400, followed by less than \$200 (23.1%); \$401-600 (19.4%), \$601-800 (10.0%), and \$801 or more (5.6%) were the lowest. The average weekly exercise time of the subjects was: less than two times (40%), followed by three times (29.7%), four times (12.8%), more than six times (11.1%), and five times (6.2%) was the lowest. Subjects exercised for up to 30 minutes per session (44.7%), followed by 31-60 minutes (42.5%), 61-90 minutes (8.8%), and 91 minutes or more (4.1%) as the lowest, followed by three times (29.7%), four times (12.8%), more than six times (11.1%), and five times (6.2%) was the lowest. Subjects exercised for up to 30 minutes per session (44.7%), followed by 31-60 minutes (42.5%), 61-90 minutes (8.8%), and 91 minutes or more (4.1%) as the lowest.

## **Descriptive statistics**

### **Statistical analysis to ideal point estimates**

There are three ideal points in these research items (see Table 3), and the minimum score for each ideal point is 1 point, and the maximum is 5 points. The data in this study show that in the average score of 468 valid questionnaires, functional image (4.154), standard deviation (.586); experiential image (4.108), standard deviation (.648); symbolic image scored the lowest (3.692), standard deviation (.765).



**Table 3: Statistical Analysis to Ideal Point Estimates**

Structure	Number	Average	Standard deviation
Functional image	468	4.154	.586
Symbolic image	468	3.692	.765
Experiential image	468	4.108	.648

**Analysis of the functional image data:**

According to the functional image data of the brand in this study (see Table 4), Nike has the highest score (3.952), with a standard deviation of .580; followed by Adidas (3.894), with a standard deviation of .583; Asics (3.723), with a standard deviation of .623, Puma (3.71, 1) had a standard deviation of .596, Anta (3.692 had a standard deviation of .585), and Sketchers had the lowest (3.675), with a standard deviation of .609. Research has shown that none of the six major brands has reached the ideal point. Nike has the highest average score and is closest to ideal point.

**Table 4: Functional Image Statistics**

Variable items	Number	Average	Standard deviation
Nike	360	3.952	.580
Adidas	352	3.894	.583
Puma	290	3.711	.596
Sketchers	266	3.675	.609
Anta	412	3.692	.585
Asics	258	3.723	.623

**Statistical analysis of brand symbolic image**

According to the symbolic image data of this study (see Table 5), Nike has the highest average score (3.83) and the fifth standard deviation (.719); then the average score is followed by Adidas second (3.825) with a standard deviation (.685). Then Puma third (3.759) with a Standard Deviation (.699), ASICS fourth (3.635), with a standard deviation (.699), Sketchers second (3.619), with a standard deviation (.689), Anta sixth (3.432), with a standard deviation (.729). Research has shown that among the symbolic images of the six major brands, Nike, Adidas, and Puma have all reached the ideal point of symbolic image, while the other three have not reached the ideal point. The symbolic image of Nike brand scored the highest.

**Table 5: Statistics of Symbolic Image**

Variable items	Number	Average	Standard deviation
Nike	374	3.833	.719
Adidas	362	3.825	.685
Puma	310	3.759	.699
Sketchers	288	3.619	.689
Anta	418	3.432	.729
Asics	276	3.635	.699

**Statistical analysis of experiential image**

According to the data (see Table 6), Nike has the highest score of 3.998, and a standard deviation of .661 ranks first; followed by Adidas (3.960) with a standard deviation of .672 ranks second; Asics (3.788) with a standard deviation of .68170 ranks sixth, Anta (3.761) with a standard deviation of .681 ranks fifth, Puma (3.750) with a standard deviation of .681 ranks fourth, Sketchers (3.725) with a standard deviation of .675 ranks third. According to the data, the experiential image of the six major brands has not reached the ideal point. And Nike has the highest score and is closest to the ideal point. Thus, Nike has a better experiential image among the six major brands.

**Table 6: Statistics of Experiential Image**

Variable items	Number	Average	Standard deviation
Nike	381	3.998	.661
Adidas	372	3.960	.672
Puma	318	3.750	.681
Sketchers	293	3.725	.675
Anta	424	3.761	.681
Asics	284	3.788	.682

**Results of the Statistical Analysis**

The data of this study indicates that among the six brands, Nike scored 4.154, closest to the ideal point of the functional image, and the average score of the available image 3.952 ranked first closest to the ideal point. Adidas (3.894) and Asics (3.723) are the next in line. These three brands occupy the top three in the average score of functional images. The average score of the symbolic image is 3.692. Nike ranks first with an average score of 3.833, followed by Adidas (3.825), which is above the ideal point and occupies the top two positions of the symbolic image score. The average score of the functional image was 4.175, Nike ranked first (3.998), and Adidas ranked second (3.960).

According to the score data of the three scores, Nike and Adidas have the highest brand image scores, and both brands are in the top two in terms of functionality, symbolism, and experience. Among the six brands, the ideal point of functional image standard deviation is .586, and the closest to the ideal point is Anta (.585); followed by Adidas (.583), while Nike (.580) has the most symbolic image standard deviation ideal point of .765, and the closest to the ideal point

is Anta standard deviation of .729; followed by Nike (.719); and Adidas (.685). Adidas (.685) is the lowest.

In terms of the standard deviation of the experiential image, the ideal point is .648, with Nike (.661) closest to the ideal point; followed by Adidas (.672), Sketchers (.675), Puma (.681), Anta (.681), and Asics (.682) is the lowest.

4.3.1 Brand Image Perceptual Positioning Map Analysis: This study uses a multi-scale perceptual map of brand image to understand the competitive advantages of each brand, and at the same time better understand what the ideal point of the brand is in the university students' minds. In addition, it helps position the image of each sports shoes brand.

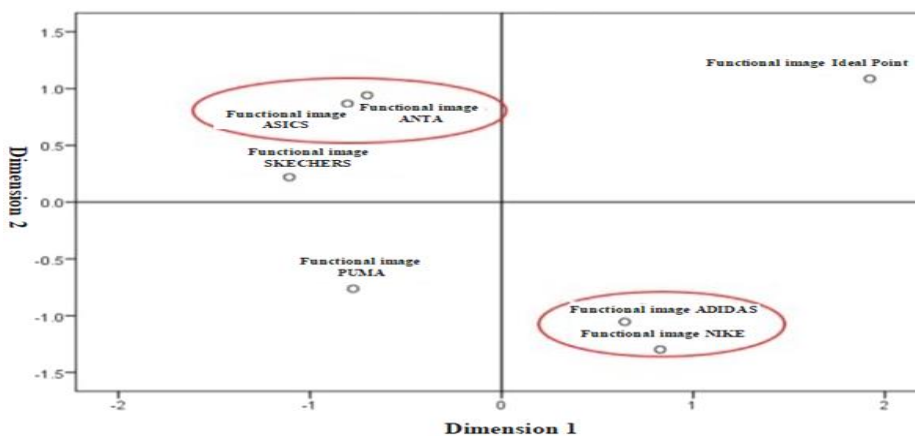
### Functional Image Diversification Scale Analysis

It can be seen from Table 7 that after the multi-scale analysis of the functional image, its RSQ value is .809 and the stress coefficient value is .272, indicating that the functional image perception map has a good correlation with the questionnaire data. Furthermore, the perceptual map indicated that the functional image and ideal point were divided into five groups in the consumers' minds: the ideal point of the functional image; Nike and Adidas; Sketchers and Asics; Anta; and Puma.

**Table 7: Functional Image Diversification Scale Analysis**

Functional image	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Stress coefficient	RSQ Value
Nike	.827	-1.298	.272	.809
Adidas	.643	-1.054		
Puma	-.775	-.763		
Sketchers	-1.108	.220		
Anta	-.702	.941		
Asics	-.805	.867		
Ideal Point	1.921	1.087		

It can be seen from Figure 1 that among the six major brands, Asics and Anta form a competitive group; Nike and Adidas form a competitive group, while Sketchers and Puma each has its own functional image characteristics. However, the functional image of all brands is far from the ideal point. Even the Nike brand image with the best functional image is still far from the ideal point in the consumers' minds. The order in terms of ideal point is as follows → Nike → Adidas → Anta → Puma → Asics → Sketchers.



**Figure 1: Perceptual map of functional image of sports shoes brand**

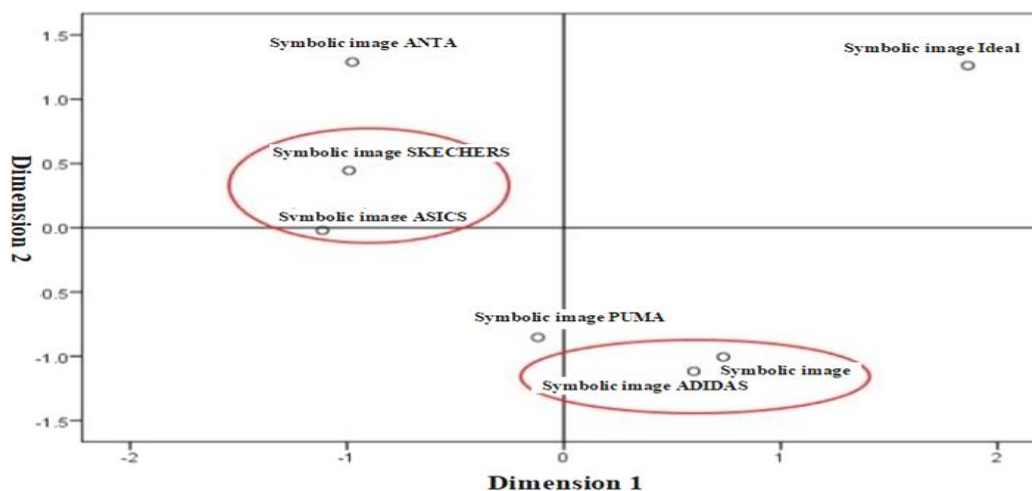
**Symbolic Image Diversification Scale Analysis**

As can be seen from Table 8, the brand symbolic image stress coefficient is .247 and RSQ value—891, indicating that the perceptual map fits well with the questionnaire data. Furthermore, the perceptual map indicated that in the consumers' minds, the symbolic image and the ideal point were divided into five groups: the ideal point, Nike and Adidas; Sketchers and Asics; Anta; and Puma.

**Table 8: Brand symbolic image diversification scale analysis**

Symbolic image	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Stress coefficient	RSQ Value
Nike	.735	-1.006	.247	.891
Adidas	.600	-1.117		
Puma	-.120	-.853		
Sketchers	-.991	.446		
Anta	-.976	1.290		
Asics	-1.112	-.021		
Ideal Point	1.863	1.262		

We can see that among the six brands, Nike and Adidas form the same competitive group; Sketchers and Asics also form the same competitive group, while Anta and Puma have their symbolic image characteristics. However, all the brands' symbolic images are far from the ideal point (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: The symbolic image perception of sports shoes brands**

Even the best-performing Nike image is still far from the ideal point in consumers' minds. In the order of strengths and weaknesses: ideal point → Nike → Adidas → Puma → Anta → Asics → Sketchers.

**Brand experiential image diversification scale analysis**

As shown in Table 9, the stress coefficient of the brand experiential image is .255, and the RSQ value of .827 indicates that the symbolic image perception map graph is well adapted to the questionnaire data. Furthermore, the perceptual map indicated that in the minds of consumers, the experiential image and ideal point are divided into five groups, respectively: symbolic image ideal point, Nike and Adidas; Sketchers and Anta; Asics; and Puma.

**Table 9: Scale Analysis of Experiential Image Diversification**

Experiential image	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Stress coefficient	RSQ Value
NIKE	1.302	-.836	.255	.827
ADIDAS	1.067	-.822		
PUMA	-.704	-.838		
SKECHERS	-1.383	.081		
ANTA	-1.257	-.086		
ASICS	-.356	1.083		
Ideal Point	1.332	1.419		

We can see that Nike and Adidas form the same competitive group; Sketchers and Anta also form the same competitive group, while Asics and Puma have their experiential image characteristics. Even though Nike, the best performer, only has a difference of .03, there is still a gap between the ideal brand image and the ideal experiential brand image in the consumers' minds. In terms of strengths and weaknesses, the order of performance in terms of ideal point

is the following: → Nike → Adidas → Asics → Puma → Anta → Sketchers (See Figure 3).

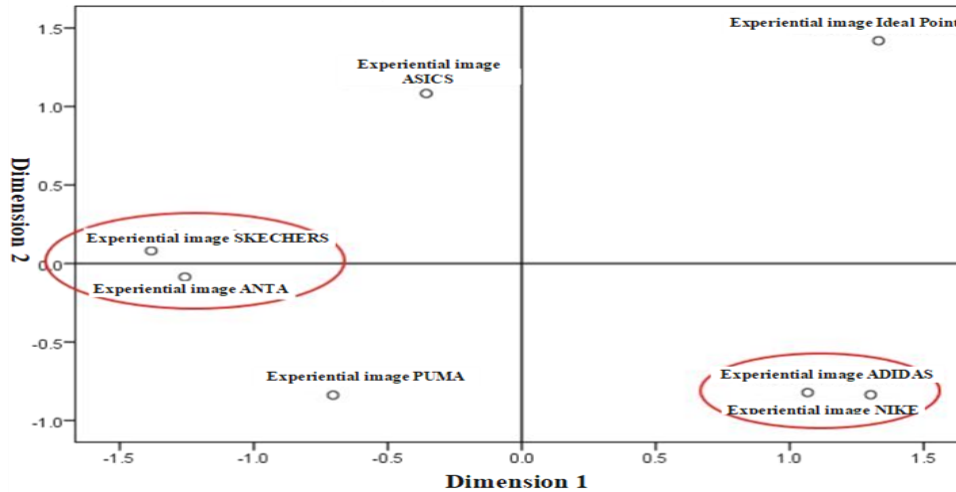


Figure 3: Experiential image perception of sports shoes brands

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study based on the above analysis led to specific conclusions.

The current situation of background information on students' consumer groups: In the demographic background statistics, female students aged 21 or older, with disposable pocket money of 701-900 yuan, spending less than one hour in the store, and spending 201-400 yuan on a pair of sports shoes were the most popular. Therefore, it is concluded that the consumption group of students, in this case, is mainly female, the disposable pocket money is also relatively high, and the consumption efficiency has reached the middle to the upper level. Therefore, it is easy to see that the spending power of university students cannot be ignored. The current status of the image of the six significant sports shoes brand image: In the functional image, Nike has the highest score (3.952), followed by Adidas (3.894), Asics, Puma, and Anta are 3, 4, and 5, respectively, while Sketchers has the lowest score and needs to be improved in its functional image. In the symbolic image, Nike ranked first (3.833), followed by Adidas (3.825), Puma, Asics, Sketchers, and Anta ranked last, which needs to be improved. Finally, in terms of experiential image, Nike ranked first (3.998), followed by Adidas (3.960), Asics, Anta, Puma, and Sketchers ranked last with poor performance.

Analysis of the importance of the six brand images: The study reveals that the essential attributes of the six brands are assessed as the highest functional image (4.154), the goodness of each functional variable such as good grip, good shock resistance, good transport flexibility, good softness, good wear resistance, lightweight, good antioxidant performance affects its high or low score; followed by the experiential image (4.1075) with the ability to: meet the psychological needs of the self, improve personal. The next one is the experiential image (4.1075), which affects the symbolic image with several variables related to symbolic image such as: satisfying my psychological needs, improving my temperament, improving my self-

identity, making me recognized in the group, and showing my personality and the next one is the experiential image which performs poorly. This shows that the subjects care more about the functional image of the brand rather than the sense of identity or status, etc.

Image attribute assessment and variance analysis results: The six brands failed to reach the ideal point of brand image in the minds of consumer groups in each image attribute. Overall, Nike and Adidas are better in each performance, followed by Puma, Anta, and Asics, while Sketchers is worse. The outstanding functional variables such as good grip, good anti-shock effect, good elasticity, good softness, and good wear resistance of sports shoes also made Nike top the score, followed by Adidas. Other brands are poorer. Moreover, the symbolic and experiential images are different, and the difference between them and the ideal point is also significant. As stated by Griffiths (1998; p.97) "there is no hope of doing perfect research", and every study has its flaws and limitations. The following three limitations should be considered within this study:

Firstly, this study only focuses on functional image, symbolic image, and experiential image in investigating the motivation of students to choose their sports shoes brands. It is suggested that future researchers should try to include variables such as "social support" and "consumer herd mentality" to analyse the positioning of the brand image of the best-selling sports shoes in China.

Secondly, this research basically compares six major sports shoes brands in China. Future studies should try to compare more sports shoes brands to see whether the findings are going to be similar or different.

Thirdly and finally, the present research data concern only students in Guangdong Province, China. Therefore, the generalizability and transferability of the findings of this study to different provinces in China or regions abroad should be done with caution. The researchers suggest that future studies should focus on other groups of population in other industries to better understand the differences in terms of the image positioning of the six best-selling sports shoes brands in the Chinese market in consumers' minds.

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