

The Research on the Underlying Causes of Clunky Sneaker's Revival

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Abstract: With the development of society and internet, more and more people from different age group tends to pursue fashion trend, and the publishing of clunky sneaker totally satisfies people's demands and becoming one of the most popular, famous fashion item. For the fashion industry, this represents not only the aesthetic standards of the times, but also the immense influence of the internet, while insinuating the pros and cons of brand values and the many issues that extend from this. This paper takes Clunky Sneaker as the research object, and explores the development history of Clunky Sneaker and the reasons for its revival, including its aesthetic characteristics. Through the results of the research, it's find that the reasons for the revival of Clunky Sneaker include its fashion and media promotion, and its aesthetic has unique characteristics and needs to continue to innovate. Also, the author have discovered the relationship between aesthetic standard of The Times and clunky sneaker, also the underlying value which haven't been directly shown by the helm of the fashion industry. To be more objective, there are also some extended thoughts on the prevalence of fake goods and the psychology of flaunting wealth.

Keywords: clunky sneaker, fashion trend, aesthetic standards, brand value.

1. Introduction

In September 2017, Demna Gvasalia, creative director of Balenciaga, unveiled the Triple S, a retro shoe, for the men's autumn/winter collection that year. Since then, most brands in the shoe market have started to design and release different styles of dad shoes [1]. Not only luxury brands such as Gucci, LV and Dior, but also world-famous sports brands such as Nike and Puma have rushed to join the ranks. At the beginning, the shoe design was largely unaccepted, with dismissive comments on social media, but just a few months later, he completely reversed his attitude toward Dad shoes, sparking a worldwide craze for dad shoes and selling out brand stores. With more celebrities and fashionistas taking to them, height enhancement and skinny looks are gradually becoming synonymous with clunky sneaker. At the same time, due to the popularity of the style, each brand's clunky sneakers have each become one of the most recognizable products of the brand. For those who are looking for brand value and a sense of luxury identity, buying a pair of clunky sneaker is certainly a multi-tasker. In a short period of time, the clunky sneaker became a classic hit for each brand, with demand outstripping supply in the market. Although bulky, the large shape of the shoe contrasts with the leg, creating a slimming visual effect when compared to the other [2]. At the same time, the average heel height of 4-5cm also draws the proportions of the mid-leg into the person, creating an

extremely obvious optimization of proportions and enabling many people who are unsatisfied with their net height to realize their desire of being taller. The combination of the two has seen men, women, adults, teenagers around the world feverishly pursuing the clunky sneaker craze and choosing to acquire a pair of clunky sneaker for themselves.

Fashion should never be a single standard, and aesthetics need to be more diverse, but clunky sneakers, like oversize, obvious logos, super short skirts and leggings, are a fashion product that is designed to reach infinitely closer to popular aesthetic standards and become a hit. While there are a few consumers who really do order because they appreciate the design of the product, many consumers are looking for these garments to show off their financial power (being instantly recognizable because they are popping luxury brand products) or to come close to the standard aesthetic (showing off thinness, leg length, optimizing body proportions and creating slim, long legs like a bamboo pole). Everyone's body shape is different, and height is genetically determined, so going overboard with stereotypical aesthetic values only makes people lose their own identity, and many people torture themselves to meet that standard, leading to very bad consequences [3]. At the same time, luxury brands have a high price tag for their shoes, making them difficult to afford for the average income group. As a result, a large number of counterfeit products were introduced into the market. The proliferation of fakes led to the design of the clunky sneaker being perceived as 'rotten' (too many people wearing the same outfit, making the design lose its original value and charm). Not only does this have a negative impact on the brand, but the act of buying fakes has also had a serious impact on young people, who have developed the wrong values and consumer attitudes in order to satisfy their childish vanity. These pros and cons are the social issues hidden behind the clunky sneaker design and should be taken seriously.

In this paper, a random survey will be used for primary research and the questionnaire will contain both objective and subjective questions to explore people's thoughts on issues related to the clunky sneaker from multiple perspectives. Firstly, the author will ask the participants if they are aware of the clunky sneaker, in order to find out if the style is widely known in society. The questionnaire will also focus on people's perceptions and thoughts about clunky sneakers, such as their favorite style, characteristics of the style and related brands. The questionnaire will end with the questions "What do you think of the clunky sneaker" and "Have you ever bought any brand of clunky sneaker? Questionnaires are the most objective and intuitive way to conduct research, and information gathered in person is more reliable than information from unknown sources on the internet. Therefore, this study chose to randomly interview users of all ages, occupations, countries and genders by means of a questionnaire, in order to obtain more comprehensive, valid and objective results.

The Chunky Sneakers began as a collaboration between Raf Simons and Adidas with the launch of the Ozweego, which was actually a reinterpretation of vintage when he designed it [4]. Luxury brands don't just make functional sneakers after all, they more or less focus on fashion, and so the "Clunky sneaker" emerged as a global phenomenon. The most popular is Balenciaga's Triple S, which is really one of the best-selling and worst-selling shoes of the past few years, and it has become one of the most popular Clunky sneaker in the second half of 2017, thanks to its gorgeous and meaningless decoration and its complete abandonment of comfort and practicality. Following this trend of explosive sales, the major luxury brands could not resist their desire to make money and launched their own sneakers.

2. The Development and History of Clunky Sneaker

Founded in California in 1986, ETNIES is a pioneer of chunky skate sneakers. In 1987 ETNIES launched the NATAS 1 skate sneaker, which was inspired by the vintage basketball shoe THE ASSIST by the old Italian sports brand ELLESSE, the shoe gained attention [5]. Born in 1986, American skateboarding brand AIRWALK launched its iconic thick silhouette in 1988 with the

PROTOTYPE, which was designed with elongated sidewalls and plastic and rubber accents to create a 'fat and bulky' visual design. The legendary American skateboarder and singer, MIKE VALLELY, gained attention for his influential work, PUBLIC DOMAIN, by wearing these shoes. Another American skateboarding giant, ES, launched the SCHEME skateboarding shoe in the late 90s, also following the wide, chunky shape that had been prevalent since the late 80s, and with the launch of this collection, the retro silhouette was no longer just for extreme sports such as skateboarding, but also for everyday street wear. The 624 trainer from the American sports brand NEW BALANCE was one of the most iconic shoes of the 1990s [5]. The shoe became the most iconic and recognizable 'Clunky sneaker' sports running shoe at the time, and its biggest claim to fame was its comfort, which was important to fathers. The NEW BALANCE 624 is a market favorite for casual activities. Another iconic brand of daddy sneakers is the Japanese professional running brand ASICS, whose GEL KAYANO 5 OG series was launched in 1999 with a wide outsole and a smooth, rounded shape, making it very popular among fathers who need some exercise and walking. The GEL 1090 model, launched in 2003, further reinforced ASICS' retro daddy tone.

At the beginning of 2017, DEMNA GVASALIA, the newly appointed design director of the BALENCIAGA fashion house, presented her second menswear collection for the brand, the Autumn/Winter 2017 collection [5]. For the collection, the TRIPLE S trainer with a chunky outsole was introduced to reflect the sporty tone of the retro silhouette, and the launch of the collection officially kicked off the popularity of the 'popsicle' in mainstream fashion.

The following year, DEMNA took advantage of the popularity of its autumn/winter 2018 collection to launch the TRACK collection of outdoor-inspired trainers, still with a tough and geometric look, and the brand has since become the most prestigious style leader in high fashion for daddy footwear, and continues to be so today. For this year's autumn collection and the spring 2022 collection released a few days ago, the brand launched the RUNNER trainer, a retro running shoe inspired collection, making it one of the most noteworthy dad shoes this autumn/winter.

Nowadays, the concept of the clunky sneaker is everywhere in high fashion houses, and many brands have created their own versions of the clunky sneaker, such as GUCCI's RHYTON trainer, PRADA's CLOUDBUST THUNDER trainer and VALENTINO's CLIMBERS trainer [6].

The widespread popularity of the "Clunky sneaker" category has also inspired many sports brands, and many domestic brands who are eager to reinvent their brand image and give it a trendier fashion vision have taken this opportunity to create their own brand-specific silhouette sports shoes, further promoting the "Clunky sneaker s" concept in the global mass market. The concept of "Clunky sneaker" is gaining popularity in the global bulk footwear market.

When Chinese sports brand Li Ning travelled to New York in 2018 to launch its enlightenment-themed Autumn/Winter 2018 collection, it presented a collection of Clunky sneaker shoes that incorporated this in-time concept, which greatly invigorated the power of original Chinese footwear design with a more contemporary youth culture aesthetic. The collection was well received by the market and has become a staple of the brand's collection to this day.

Since then, the Clunky sneaker shoe has been a strong addition to many brands' footwear catalogues as an early and up-and-coming footwear category, with fashion brands responding to this unstoppable trend by launching collections to capture market share, and it is easy to predict that this trend will continue to influence global sports footwear trends for a long time.

3. The Causes of Clunky Sneaker's Revival

3.1. Sneaker or a Commercial Fashion Product?

The clunky sneaker craze has been going strong for five years now, since 2017, it's a long time coming for any fashion item. The clunky sneaker is characterized by its intricate design, orderly layers and a

somewhat clunky, heavy, non-technical but vintage look. They have a rounded toe, padded air cushion and a super striking brand logo.

As the retro trend continues to burn, these 80s-inspired items are also on the rise, they not go out of fashion, and have become one of the most commonly worn items in the fashion world. Whereas in the past, consumers liked chic and sophisticated pieces, today they want something more dramatic and eye-catching. Fashion's obsession with the ultimate in sneakers has quickly evolved from a fantastic emerging trend into a powerful luxury sales driver, and at the moment, chunky silhouette trainers have become a new norm in the footwear trend.

The Parisian house's Triple S and Track series, Gucci's Rhyton series, Louis Vuitton's Archlight series, the brands have launched shoes that sell like hot cakes as long as they are clunky sneakers. Despite the high price tag of over 5,000 RMB, there are still many fans who are willing to pay for them. In ancient times, "shoes were created by people to protect their feet from hard, prickly objects"[7]. In this way, luxury brands have gone retro with their sneakers, forgoing functionality and comfort while adding a lot of burden to the shoes. Compared to traditional products such as clothing and bags, the cost of raw materials and production costs for sneakers are much lower. Unlike the shoes of professional sports brands, luxury sports shoes do not emphasize too much on functionality and comfort, but rather on fashion ability, so the development costs of the shoes are also reduced. It may look chic, even though it says it's a sneaker, can it really be use for exercising? Who have ever actually running in Balenciaga's Triple S, or who would go to the gym in Gucci Rhyton?

On the other hand, there are some negatives that people need to be concerned about. Due to its high price tag, the clunky sneaker is not affordable for most people. This has therefore led to two extremely serious social problems. Firstly, people overspending and secondly, the proliferation of fake products. Many consumers will sacrifice their spending in other areas to maximize their savings in order to save money for shoes. This can seriously reduce and compromise their quality of life, but many consumers often choose to do so due to the desire for luxury and fashion. In the survey, many consumers with modest incomes claimed to have also purchased luxury brand clunky sneakers, while even more would choose to buy the fake ones outright. Being able to wear the most fashionable pair of luxury clunky sneakers can provide a short period of vanity and gain the attention of those around people. However, the expensive, unaffordable price tag puts them off. As a result there are a large number of consumers who choose to buy fakes outright at prices that are dozens of times cheaper. The quality of the fakes varies, and it is impossible to reproduce them exactly. The brand has been criticized for this, and even more so for the poor quality and detail.

3.2. The Influence of Social Media in the Clunky Sneaker Boom

Firstly, why do social media trends matter? The answer is that trends have a huge impact on buyer decisions. People buy things to a large extent by following trends. As certain fashions mature, brands need to know how they fashion trends to their advantage. Millennials dominate social media. In addition, social media trends are almost led by young people. Increasing exposure for branded products is one of the most significant uses of social media. To get their message out, brands need to find the right audience. With social media, it is possible to first learn more about the people who are on a particular trend and then provide brands with a way to contact them directly. An example is the targeted push function of big data. Based on the user's interest distribution (e.g. past views and like comment data) and identity verification, social media intelligently pushes out content of interest to the user. For brands, it is difficult for any fashion product to reach a wide range of consumers if only official information is available. It is only with the added benefit of online publicity that more consumers will be able to find out about the product and buy it. The Clunky sneaker is one of the most iconic examples of this. Every year, the House of Paris launches thousands of new products in a wide range of categories such as clothing, bags, shoes and jewelry. Within each category, the brand

launches a number of different collections, even offering multiple colorways for the same item [8]. In such a situation, clunky sneaker stands out from the crowd thanks to the huge influence of social media. Proactive users, for example, type "which shoe makes you taller and slimmer?" into search engines, allowing social media to output clunky sneakers. Passive users will also receive recommendations: for example, big data will unify the content for young people and fashion-conscious people, and users who have searched for clunky sneaker-related products in any consumer software will also see the product on their own social media pages.

4. Clunky Sneaker and Aesthetic Standards

The aesthetic standards of the era were crucial to the major success of the Pops shoe in the market. In the days without social media, aesthetics were only broad concepts with no actual standards of detail, but as the times have evolved, social media has connected the globe and integrated fashion information from around the world. Whereas previously each country would have had a unique standard of aesthetics, with the prevalence of social media, definitions of fashion are becoming uniform across the world. In ancient China, during the Tang Dynasty, fat was prized as beauty and a plump, round body was sought after. It was considered to be a sign of wealth and good fortune, while those who were too thin were considered poor and unlucky. However, in medieval Europe, the extremely thin waist was the fashion sought after by the aristocracy. In order to obtain a slender and attractive waist, women endured pain and were confined to a corset every day. To obtain this ideal body shape, they were girded with corsets day and night from the time they were soft and immature girls. European women of the time believed that a slimmer waist was the only way to sway when they walked and to enhance the beauty of their breasts and hips. Catrine, the queen of King Henry II of France, wore an iron corset made by a make-up artist in order to defeat her mistress, Diana, and her waist reached a staggering 40 cm, eventually giving birth to Henry II's first prince and securing her place as queen of the French court. This shows that in the past, there was a lack of communication between the various countries and so a unique aesthetic would be established based on different cultures and values. Today, despite the fact that the clunky sneaker was originally made famous because of the Parisian house, the shoe has gone beyond its borders and achieved a long-standing global popularity, which could not have been achieved without the unification of aesthetic standards [9]. Although there are differences of opinion between countries in terms of skin color, facial features and some body characteristics, the aesthetic standards that are recognized by fashionistas all over the world must include long and slender legs. The design of the Pops shoes perfectly fits this demand, not only by visually maximizing the thinness of the legs through the wide body of the shoe, but also by actually increasing the height of the wearer, increasing the proportion of the legs in the overall figure, while subtly revealing the slimmest ankles of the legs, doubling the overall effect of thinness and height. In the past, shoes were not an item that received much attention in dressing, and more people did not care about the lines and shape of their legs. However, with the high exposure of supermodels and artists, body shape is becoming the most important aesthetic criterion in the minds of more people.

Of course, people can not deny that the subtle design of the clunky sneaker is one of its strengths, but the aesthetic fatigue and the so-called "bad taste" that comes with it has become a major problem. The design has lost its soul and charm, and the culture of the brand has lost its unique value [10]. A set formula is used to understand the designer's work, and the clunky sneaker loses its original splendor, making it a popular fashion item that eventually becomes a derogatory term.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the vigorous success of clunky sneaker isn't just a simple coincidence, there are so many underlying reasonable causes have also been covered in this case. Not only is it a revival of vintage style, but it is also a sign of global aesthetic unity. It is an extremely iconic case for the fashion industry and a five-year pinnacle that can not be replicated again. To achieve such breakthrough sales and popularity is a triumph. While there are always mixed feelings about the clunky sneaker, no one can deny the impact the design has had on the fashion industry and global business. Also, social media engagement and consumer psychology were crucial in this paper and have extraordinary significance in the overall conversation. Through a lot of news searches and online opinion, a lot of negative content has also surfaced, and these issues are not only present in the clunky sneaker, but in society as a whole, and need to be looked at and fixed. If future scholars want to study this field, they can pay more attention to the solution to the negative impact. Overall, this research is necessary and meaningful. From various perspective people can always receive diverse discussion and answer. Any of the boom in fashion or even the society won't be just a coincidence, people should always explore deeper and think in a more objective way.

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