

The Journey from Niche Styles to the Mainstream Trend

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Abstract: Over the past few decades, niche styles have gradually become part of mainstream trends and have achieved great success in the market. Changes in consumer behavior and technological advances have enabled niche styles to better meet the needs of consumers and become integrated into their lives. At the same time, brand culture has played an important role in connecting niche styles with consumers by creating unique brand images and values. This paper explores the transition from niche styles to mainstream trends and examines the reasons for this, concluding that the main reasons are Changes in consumer demand from material needs to spiritual pursuits and the desire for simpler times in the context of rapid technological advancement. Based on this, this study makes relevant recommendations for the development of niche brands, including Enriching Brand Culture and Philosophy for Meeting Consumer Demands and Assisting Consumers in Adapting to the Fast-Paced Era.

Keywords: niche styles, consumer behavior, technological progress, brand culture, consumer demands.

1. Introduction

The fashion world embodies a dynamic landscape characterized by perpetual change, constantly weaving new trends that capture the collective imagination. Within this diverse tapestry of trends, "Niche Styles" have emerged as a captivating subset, lauded for their distinctive allure and profound embodiment of individuality. Investigating the factors influencing the niche status of these styles and the mechanisms that facilitate their transformation into mainstream trends while preserving their unique identity holds paramount importance in comprehending the contemporary dynamics of the fashion industry.

The popularity of minority styles stands as a prevailing direction in the social fashion trends of the modern era. As society progresses, fashion enthusiasts have shown increasing interest in exploring unconventional and niche aesthetics, moving beyond the confines of conventional mainstream styles. These niche styles not only serve as a mode of self-expression but also reflect a significant shift in consumer preferences, indicating a growing inclination towards embracing diversity and celebrating individuality. However, despite the increasing prominence of niche styles, comprehensive investigations into the underlying reasons behind their niche status and the subsequent pathways leading to their mainstream acceptance remain relatively scarce in the existing literature.

In the current body of literature, several scholarly works have shed light on different aspects of niche style development. For instance, a notable study focused on the brand Comme des Garçons, led by Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, delving into the significance of design styles in the

evolution of niche brands, which aimed to investigate the impact of design aesthetics on the acceptance of niche fashion by the target audience [1]. Another study examined niche styles like JK uniforms and Lolita fashion, analyzing how characteristics of youth subcultures manifest in these niche garments. This research sought to explore the interplay between youth subcultures and niche fashion expressions [2]. Furthermore, the influence of new media technologies and communication channels on the breakthrough and innovation of niche cultures within mainstream environments has also been emphasized in another study. This research highlighted how new media platforms have facilitated the equilibrium development of niche cultures, aiding their dissemination to a broader audience [3].

The significance of this study lies in bridging existing research gaps, particularly in understanding the trajectory of niche styles' evolution towards mainstream acceptance. By exploring the mechanisms underpinning the transformation of niche styles, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how niche aesthetics gain popularity in the broader fashion landscape. Moreover, the examination of niche style dynamics can offer valuable insights for fashion practitioners, designers, and industry stakeholders, enabling them to navigate the balance between niche distinctiveness and mass appeal in their creative endeavors.

2. Case Description

Niche Styles embody a realm within the realm of fashion, catering to individuals yearning for profound self-expression and a departure from conventional norms. Characterized by their inventive and unconventional design elements, non-traditional color palettes, unique patterns, and offbeat materials, these styles effortlessly attract fashion enthusiasts seeking to blaze their trails and unfurl their distinctive personalities.

To vividly illustrate the remarkable evolution of Niche Styles into mainstream trends, this paper delves into the realm of two prominent case studies: China Chic and Y2K.

2.1. China Chic: A Panoramic Celebration of Culture and Artistry

In recent years, the emergence of the "China Chic" trend has experienced a gradual yet remarkable surge in popularity. This shift is evidenced not only by the upward trajectory of its search index but also by the concurrent increase in market consumption, as meticulously documented in the comprehensive reports by CBN Data. The "China Chic" dataset, a collaborative effort between Baidu and the People's Daily Online Research Institute, further sheds light on a significant transition that occurred between 2016 and 2021. During this time frame, the attention directed towards Chinese brands skyrocketed from a mere 45% to an impressive 75% [4].

This transformation from a niche style to a mainstream trend transcends the mere ascension of Chinese manufacturing and brands. Instead, it encapsulates a profound manifestation of Chinese sentiments and cultural confidence. The roots of the "China Chic" phenomenon can be traced back to the convergence of two distinct layers of semantic significance. On one hand, "China" embodies the essence of traditional Chinese culture, offering a deep reservoir of cultural richness that resonates profoundly with consumers seeking products infused with authenticity and cultural depth. Simultaneously, the term "Chic" signifies the fusion of entrenched traditional cultural elements with contemporary trends, resulting in stylish and fashionable products that cater to modern preferences [5].

2.2. Y2K: A Bold Embrace of Nostalgia and Futurism

The popularity of niche styles like China Chic isn't just happening in China, and it is not just styles with Chinese characteristics. For example, the Y2K style, which has recently come back into the limelight, is also a very representative example.

"Y2K", derived from the abbreviation for "Year 2000 problem," also known as the "Y2K bug," gained significant attention during its time, despite causing only a limited impact on a small scale.

The emergence of the "Y2K" aesthetic can be attributed to the prevailing sense of optimism and anticipation for the future, fueled by the rapid advancements in high-performance computers, space exploration technology, robotics, and science fiction films. These developments deeply influenced the design domain during this period, resulting in a distinctive design style characterized by elements such as reflective metallic surfaces, transparent PVC textures, integration of technological components, and the use of vibrant and saturated colors. This period-specific aesthetic was marked by the incorporation of design elements inspired by science and technology, and thus, the term "Y2K," associated with the global attention-grabbing "Y2K problem," was adopted to describe this era's technologically-driven and refreshingly artistic design style [6].

In the early months of 2020, the emergence of Covid-19 transformed social and online entertainment into the sole means for people to alleviate the stay-at-home atmosphere. The explosion of social networks and mainstream entertainment gave rise to a plethora of new trends, bringing back into the public eye the "Y2K aesthetic," an artistic design style that had appeared around the turn of the millennium. This resurgence had a significant impact on the art and design domains for the past two years, becoming a focal point of design for the current season and garnering substantial engagement and discussion across major social networks.

3. Analysis of the reasons for the transition from niche styles to mainstream trends

3.1. Changing Consumer Demand: From Material Needs to Spiritual Pursuits

The metamorphosis of the "China Chic" trend from a niche style to a widespread cultural phenomenon is deeply intertwined with a profound transformation in consumer purchasing preferences. This shift transcends the realm of mere materialism, signifying a shift towards embracing spiritual and cultural aspirations in the realm of fashion and consumption. This nuanced alteration has not only redefined the fashion landscape but also mirrors a broader societal evolution, underpinned by generational shifts and a reimagining of personal values.

The trajectory of the "China Chic" trend, as previously examined, highlights a distinctive change in consumer behavior. Traditionally, the allure of consumer products rested heavily on their practical and utilitarian attributes. However, as the trend gained momentum, it became increasingly evident that a new generation of consumers, predominantly comprised of post-90s, post-2000s, Z-generation, and millennials, was seeking something deeper than mere functionality [5]. The transition from a focus on materialistic needs to spiritual pursuits underscores the intricate interplay of cultural, emotional, and personal elements in modern consumption patterns.

This shift is exemplified by the growing inclination towards embracing Chinese traditional culture and expressing patriotic sentiments through consumption choices. The surge in attention towards Chinese brands, meticulously documented in the "China Chic" dataset, signifies a rising cultural confidence among consumers [4]. In this context, Chic can be defined as a behavior or fashion that is expressed in a way that is elegant in a compromise and does not require physical or mental effort. It not only represents the current trend but also contains the demand of young people today to combine traditional culture with fashion trends.

Chic is classic, stylish, genderless, and a compromise between glamour and simplicity. Unconventional, yet convenient, functional, elegant and soft. The aggressive use of manageable fabrics and the use of design pieces that can be made in multiple shapes, regardless of the season, shows that fashion is receiving a strong focus.

Enhance the international influence of Chinese brands, expand the international vision of local design forces, with the help of brand stories, brand products elaborate China's story, help build a modern textile and clothing industry system, Chic actively expand overseas fashion resources, help Chinese clothing brands plan the path to the sea. Chic with the most direct, the most pragmatic action to actively promote the Chinese clothing industry to achieve high-quality development, to show the world the Chinese fashion vanguard of the mighty power and enhance the Chinese clothing brand of international fashion discourse.

3.2. A revival of previous trends

With the rapid development of technology, people's nostalgia is another important reason for the popularity of niche styles. The rise and spread of the Y2K nostalgia aesthetic provides a fascinating contrast to a rapidly changing society. It is both a nostalgia for a simpler life and a way of coping with modern society's dependence on technology.

Computer technology has been widely used in lives, and the Internet and the Internet of Things in particular have redefined the way people live, work, and interact. Undoubtedly, these technologies have permeated people's lives, and various industries cannot function without computers. However, over-reliance on technology can also give rise to complex feelings of uncertainty about the future. Individuals grapple with questions about the implications of this digital omnipresence, the rapid pace of innovation, and the impact on personal identity in an increasingly digital society [7].

Amidst these concerns, things like "Y2K" invoke memories of the turn of the millennium, a time when technology was rapidly transitioning, promising new possibilities but not yet engulfing every facet of life. This nostalgic longing for simpler times offers a counterbalance to the anxieties related to the fast-paced transformation of contemporary society. The Y2K aesthetic acts as a bridge between the past and the present, providing individuals with a reassuring reminder of an era when technology was exciting and full of potential, yet not all-encompassing.

Moreover, the global upheaval wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic—marked by unprecedented disruptions and uncertainties—exacerbated the challenges posed by accelerated technological progress. The pandemic, with its attendant shifts such as remote work, social isolation, and disruptions to familiar routines, amplified the desire for familiarity and stability. The vibrant colors, futuristic motifs, and digital nostalgia of these aesthetics resonated profoundly with this desire, tapping into an innate yearning for simpler times when the world seemed less tumultuous and more predictable.

The nostalgic journey facilitated by this aesthetics provides a much-needed escape from the intricate complexities and uncertainties of the digital age. It enables individuals to momentarily rekindle an era when technology was a promising accomplice rather than an overpowering force. Furthermore, the integration of these aesthetics into daily life empowers individuals to reclaim a measure of control and agency in the face of ongoing technological evolution.

To conclude, the resurgence of nostalgia-driven aesthetics serves as a compelling response to the challenges of a technologically dominated era. It addresses the apprehensions that stem from heightened technological dependency, furnishing a sense of solace within a swiftly evolving world. Furthermore, this resurgence stands as a tenacious reaction to the uncertainties magnified by the pandemic, offering a nostalgic refuge that resonates deeply with the innate yearning for simpler, more familiar times. As individuals continue to navigate the intricate intersection of technology and

everyday existence, this trend stands as a testament to the enduring significance of equilibrium and reconnection with the past—factors pivotal in fostering stability and well-being in the present.

4. Suggestions for niche brand development

4.1. Enriching Brand Culture and Philosophy for Meeting Consumer Demands

On the way to the popularisation of niche brands, an essential strategy is the enrichment of the brand's own culture and philosophy to meet consumer demands [8]. This concept goes beyond the tangible aspects of product design and functionality. It also encompasses the intangible dimensions of brand ethos and corporate culture, which play a key role in attracting discerning consumers.

A niche brand is often something that is rooted in a subculture derived from a subculture. They resonate with users who share a similar aesthetic [9]. Niche consumers have a strong fascination with the iconic symbols of a subculture, so they are very likely to buy goods as long as that subculture's symbols are present in the goods. This is a quality that mass merchandisers do not have. For consumers, subculture goods have unique personalities and are hard to replace. In this case, subculture-related goods not only provide practical value but also satisfy consumers' spiritual needs, especially providing a sense of identity. Their loyalty is naturally strengthened by their deep identification with the brand's ethos, a quality that creates lasting attachments [10].

Brands should endeavor to link niche culture with popular entertainment so that the product can expand its audience and attract consumers from different circles. Niche brands are facing huge challenges in the market competition. With the increasing demand of consumers for personalization and quality, niche brands are becoming more and more popular and becoming an important force in the market. It is precisely because of the characteristics of niche brands that they have the opportunity to survive and develop strongly in the market, and if they scale up in the later stage, they are likely to become industry leaders.

4.2. Assisting Consumers in Adapting to the Fast-Paced Era

With some changes in people's life concepts and ways, more and more people are willing to pay for brands that have views and attitudes and can always stick to and practice. Market trends are changing, consumer groups are changing, and individual selection factors are also changing, whether the brand can always withstand changes and considerations, only depends on the brand itself.

Niche brands can lead people by combining niche culture with current trends. Integrate the spirit of consumers into the communication content of niche brands and narrow the distance with users' questions. Niche brands do unique small but beautiful brand tonality, with clear recognition, memory points, differences, and other advantages.

A proven way to do this is to incorporate both classic elements and modern functionality into the design. Such a fusion does not only fulfill the customer's need for intimacy, it also empowers them to use modern technology more judiciously and carefully. Furthermore, niche brands can curate experiences that encourage mindfulness in using technology. Individuals can take a break from the relentless pace of innovation through workshops, events, or digital detox initiatives that encourage temporary disconnection from the digital realm.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey from niche style to mainstream trend is a multifaceted phenomenon. It is deeply embedded in the complex fabric of contemporary culture and society. These case studies show how these niche styles developed, each driven by unique dynamics, but sharing commonalities in cultural appeal, emotional attachment, and nostalgia, underscoring the profound shift in consumer

behavior and values. The shift from materialism to cultural depth and from superficial trends to meaningful stories goes beyond fashion preferences. It manifests itself as a broader societal movement towards authenticity and embracing heritage in an increasingly globalized world. Similarly, it responds to the emotional complexities of the digital age and provides an escape from the uncertainty and complexity of modern life. Furthermore, while this study addresses the evolution of niche styles into mainstream trends, it also highlights the potential risks of losing authenticity in the pursuit of mass appeal.

This research serves as a foundation for further studies unraveling fashion's evolving dynamics and complex relationship with culture, technology, and consumer behavior.

In terms of future research direction, two areas are not considered in this paper that are worthy of further discussion. First, this paper does not study the interaction between consumer psychology and niche style. Understanding how consumer values and aspirations intersect with niche aesthetics can provide insights into the broader societal changes that are influencing fashion trends. Secondly, this paper has not considered the role of technology and social media platforms in bringing niche styles into the consciousness of the mainstream. Future research could build on this and could reveal the mechanisms behind their transformative journey.

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