

The Relationship Between Slogan Prints on Apparel and Consumer Self-Expression

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ABSTRACT

Besides serving a purpose as clothing, slogan apparel is also a form of communication for self-expression. This paper researches consumers' awareness and intention of self-expression through slogan apparel and consumers' comfort levels with various types of slogans written on the apparel they wear. This research was conducted with a quantitative methodology which includes an online survey on Gen Z and millennials who wear slogan apparel from several countries. The result shows that consumers who wear slogan apparel are aware of self-expression through slogan apparel, but contradictingly their intention of self-expression through slogan apparel is low. Moreover, consumers' comfort level with wearing slogan apparel varies on the type of slogan written on the apparel.

Keywords: slogan apparel, self-expression, self-identity

INTRODUCTION

Deciding what to wear is not a random decision. Even though it looks like a simple everyday thing to do, there are many factors to think about when choosing clothes. One of which is whether the clothes or apparel worn expresses one's self-identity, also known as self-expression. Self-expression can be conveyed through everyday choices, one of which is clothing choices or the apparel people wear because it represents certain meanings or values of the wearer to other people (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014, O'Cass, 2001).

Today, slogan apparel such as slogan t-shirts is a popular trend among Gen Z (Jackson, 2023). Consequently, designers are trying to fulfill this need and there

were some studies conducted on slogan t-shirts that found some characteristics of likable slogans on apparel (Tong & Su, 2022). As insightful as it is, the implications of previous studies could be explored further especially in understanding consumers' consideration of slogan print apparel as their self-expression and understanding how consumers are willing to deliver their identity to the society. This paper is seizing those exploration opportunities by looking into consumers' motivation for wearing slogan apparel, consumers' awareness and intention of self-expression through slogan apparel, and consumers' comfort levels on various types of slogans written on the apparel they wear.

Slogan Prints on Apparel

According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary (n.d.), a slogan is defined as "a word or phrase used to express a characteristic position or stand or a goal to be achieved". Slogans are usually found in marketing materials, social campaigns, and branding. In branding, a slogan may be used as a short-term promotional tool and also as a part of a long-term brand identity that bridges a brand's name, logo, and brand image (Kohli et al., 2007).

To have an effective brand slogan, these three factors need to be considered, which are (1) the nature of the audience, which means a slogan should point out the advantage of the brand and respond to its consumer needs; (2) the slogan design, which means a slogan should be likable, creative, clear, simple, meaningful, motivating, and memorable; (3) the context in how the slogan is received, which means a slogan must reflect the brand identity so that consumers can receive its message (Dimofte & Yalch, 2007; Tong & Su, 2022).

Some brands put their slogans on their products. This can be seen mostly in fashion products. Having slogans on apparel, especially on t-shirts, was a trend during the 2000s among teenagers. Currently, this trend is gaining interest from Gen Z and putting slogan t-shirts back on trend (Jackson, 2023). For example, the brand Anti Social Social Club, which was trending in 2015, has slogans on most of its products, which are hats, t-shirts, and sweaters (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Anti Social Social Club sweater
Source: Anti Social Social Club Instagram

The slogans that appear on the apparel are not limited to just the short-term promotional slogan or the long-term brand identity but also slogans that reflect the brands' personality, for example, the "We All Should be Feminists" slogan on a t-shirt by Dior (Mower, 2016). According to prior research by Tong & Su (2022), here are the characteristics of a likable slogan on apparel: (1) simple and clear messages, (2) creative or unique messages, (3) meaningful or inspiring messages, (4) building an emotional connection, (5) including brand names, (6) reflecting brand identity, (7) has wordplay, and (8) has an effective graphic design.

Having slogans on apparel serves some purposes, which are to express consumer identity, give consumers a voice, and build emotional connections with others who read them. It also serves as a socio-political medium that contributes to popular culture, which means that consumers can express their values through their clothing (Tong & Su, 2022).

Self-expression through Apparel

Morgan and Townsend (2022) defined self-expression as externalizing or displaying one's unobservable self-identity, including personality traits, preferences, values, beliefs, opinions, or attitudes. One of the ways to express

oneself is through everyday choices one makes as a consumer, such as which products and brands one purchases and uses (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014). This is possible because products and brands have symbolic values that consumers can use to express not just their self-identity, but also who they want to be by projecting their ideal self when they use the products (Morgan & Townsend, 2022; Szczepaniak, 2015).

Fashion clothing, or apparel, is one commodity that clearly reflects consumer self-expression as it is able to communicate extensive and complex information about the wearer just by visual observation (Howlett et al., 2013). Fashion clothing can be used as a tool to deliver an image of one's self-identity to other people as it represents a symbolic meaning of the status of the wearer and what the wearer is like (O'Cass, 2001). It is also a tool that bridges the gap between the wearer and the society and indicates their social status in society (Holman, 1980). Hence, fashion clothing is a very powerful communication tool for self-expression.

On that account, this study hypothesis is if one is wearing apparel with slogans, then it should mean that one is deliberately expressing their self-identity that resonates with the slogan. This study wants to find out whether consumers are considering the slogan apparel they wear as their self-expression and know what kind of slogan they are comfortable with written on their apparel.

RESEARCH METHOD

To test the hypothesis in the previous chapter, an online survey was conducted on Google Forms, with 94 participants whose ages are categorized as Gen Z and millennials (17-40 years old) from several countries, which are Indonesia, South Korea, Philippines, Dominican Republic, Russia, Brunei Darussalam, Germany, Taiwan, China, and Tajikistan. The online survey link was shared in an online messenger group (Hongik University IDAS student Kakaotalk group) and on social media postings (Instagram stories) with members and viewers that matched the targeted demographic category.

The two major objectives of the survey were to understand consumers' motivation, intention, and awareness toward self-expression through slogan apparel and to learn consumers' slogan preferences regarding the slogan apparel they are wearing and want to wear. Therefore, this survey was split into four sections.

The first section included some demographic questions regarding the participants' age and nationality. It also included a question about their frequency of wearing slogan apparel with five multiple-choice answers based on 5-point Likert scale, which were "always", "usually", "sometimes", "rarely", and "never". If the answer "never" is selected, then the participant would not continue to the next section, since their experience is not relevant to the survey. 10 participants answered "never", therefore 84 participants continued to the next section.

The second section asked the participants to share their favorite slogan apparel and what slogan is written on it with open-ended questions. By asking this, it is expected to know what kind of slogan apparel is preferred among the participants. This section also asked what their motivations are for wearing it with answer choices as follows:

1. "Because I need something to wear"
2. "Because I want to look fashionable"
3. "Because I want to join the trend"
4. "Because I agree with the slogan or text written on it"
5. "Because I want other people to read the slogan or the text written on it"
6. "Because I want other people to know that I agree with the slogan or text written on it"
7. "None of the above"

The third section wanted to measure the participants' awareness and intention towards self-expression through slogan apparel. This was done with statements assessed through the 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree/strongly disagree). The statements were as follows:

1. "I consider the slogan or text written on my apparel as my own personality, identity, or opinion."

2. "Other people can get an idea of my personality, identity, or opinion from reading the slogan or text on the apparel I am wearing."
3. "I want other people to know my personality, identity, or opinion from the text or slogans on the apparel I am wearing."

The fourth section wanted to understand the participants's comfort level with various types of slogans that can be found in slogan apparel, which was measured with the 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree/strongly disagree) on these statements:

1. "I am comfortable expressing my personality traits through the text or slogan on the apparel I am wearing. (eg. "I am friendly", "I am calm")"
2. "I am comfortable expressing my preferences (what I like and dislike) through the text or slogan on the apparel I am wearing. (eg. "I love coffee", "I hate traffic")"
3. "I am comfortable expressing my values through the text or slogan on the apparel I am wearing. (eg. "Time is money", "Family is everything")"
4. "I am comfortable expressing my opinions through the text or slogan on the apparel I am wearing. (eg. "I think coffee is great", "I think nature is beautiful")"
5. "I am comfortable expressing my beliefs or religious views through the text or slogan on the apparel I am wearing. (eg. "I believe in God")"
6. "I am comfortable expressing my nationality or race through the text or slogan on the apparel I am wearing. (eg. "I am Korean", "I am a foreigner")"

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Favorite Slogan Apparel and Motivation for Wearing One

Most participants answered that their favorite apparel to have slogans on are t-shirts and bags. Nike, Gentle Woman, Acme De La Vie are the most popular brands mentioned as their favorite slogan apparel. Some of the participant, which is 37.5%, answered that their favorite slogan apparel has the brand name, instead of slogans, written on it. While the rest 62.5% answered that their favorite slogan apparel has slogans, such as "Just do it", "Bad hair day", "Girl PWR", "Smile more",

“Laugh out loud”, “Eat dance sleep repeat”, “Human made”, “More self-love”, “Join earthing”, “Empowered woman empower woman”, “Allergic to boring people”, song lyrics, or jokes.

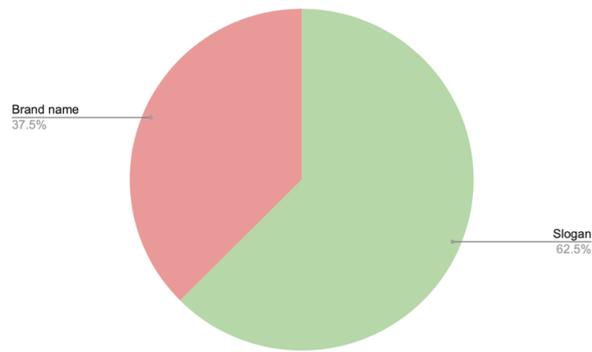


Figure 2. Type of slogan or text written on favorite slogan apparel
Source: author's documentation

As for their motivation for wearing slogan apparel, needing something to wear is answered the most with 33 answers, followed by agreeing with the slogan or text written on it with 27 answers, wanting to look fashionable with 26 answers, wanting to join the trend with 19 answers, wanting other people to read the slogan or the text written on it 14 answers, wanting other people to know that they agree with the slogan or text written on it with 11 answers and other reasons with 15 answers.

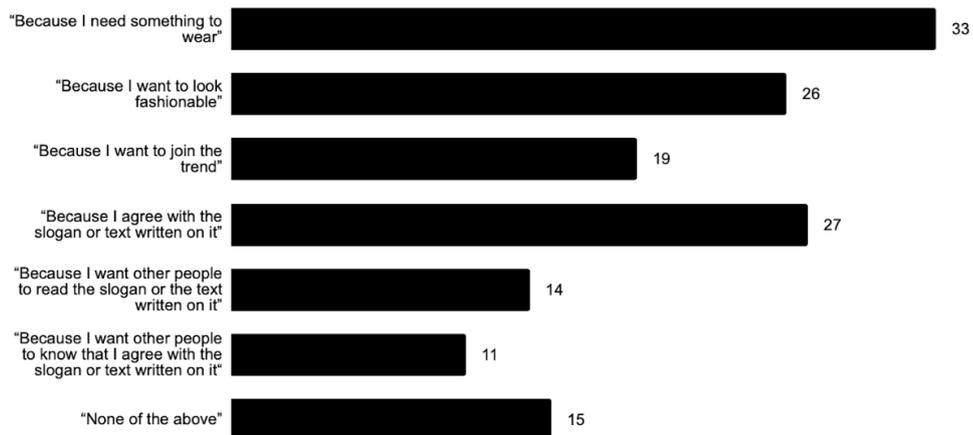


Figure 3. Motivations for wearing slogan apparel
Source: author's documentation

From this answer, it is evident that consumers, while needing something to wear, care about agreeing with the slogan or text written on their apparel, wanting to look fashionable, and wanting to join the trend. On the other hand, wanting other people to read the slogan or text, or wanting other people to know that they agree with the slogan or text written on the apparel is not the main concern of the majority of consumers. This indicates that consumers wearing slogan apparel are more for themselves rather than for other people to read or acknowledge.

Awareness & Intention of Self-expression Through Slogan Apparel

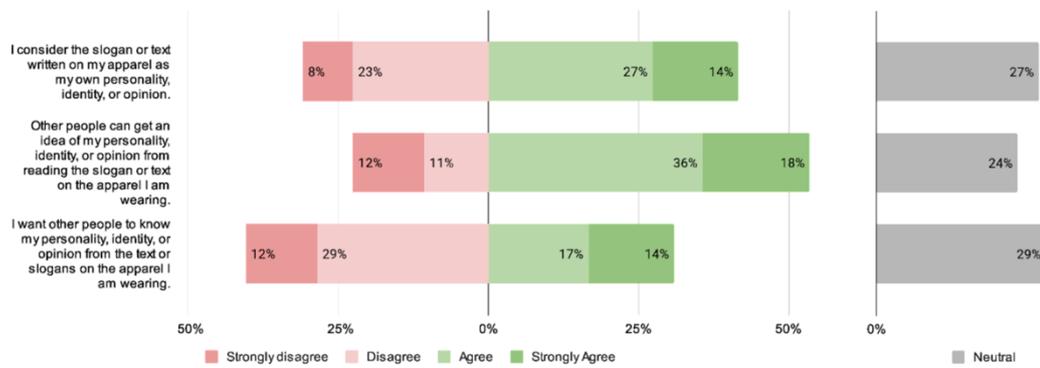


Figure 4. Consumer awareness and intention of self-expression through slogan apparel
 Source: author's documentation

Most of the participants, which are 41%, consider the slogan or text written on the apparel they wear as their self-expression, while 31% do not consider so, and 27% are neutral about it. This indicates that most consumers wear slogan apparel which has slogans that are reflective of their personality, identity, or opinion. They do not pick and use random slogan apparel just for needing something to wear.

More than half of the participants, which are 54%, are aware that other people can get an idea of their self-expression through the slogan apparel they wear, while 24% are neutral, and 23% are not aware of it. This indicates that a large number of consumers have an awareness of self-expression through slogan apparel. They know that other people can receive a message from the slogan apparel they wear and that slogan apparel could be a sort of communication between themselves and society just by visual observation (Howlett et al., 2013).

Contradicting the findings above, almost half of the participants, which are 41%, do not want other people to know about their self-expression from the slogan apparel they wear, while 31% want to, and 29% are neutral. This indicates that, though consumers are aware of the self-expression capability of slogan apparel, some of them do not have the intention to let other people know their personality, identity, or opinion through the slogan apparel they wear.

Comfort Level on Various Slogan Types for Self-expression through Slogan Apparel

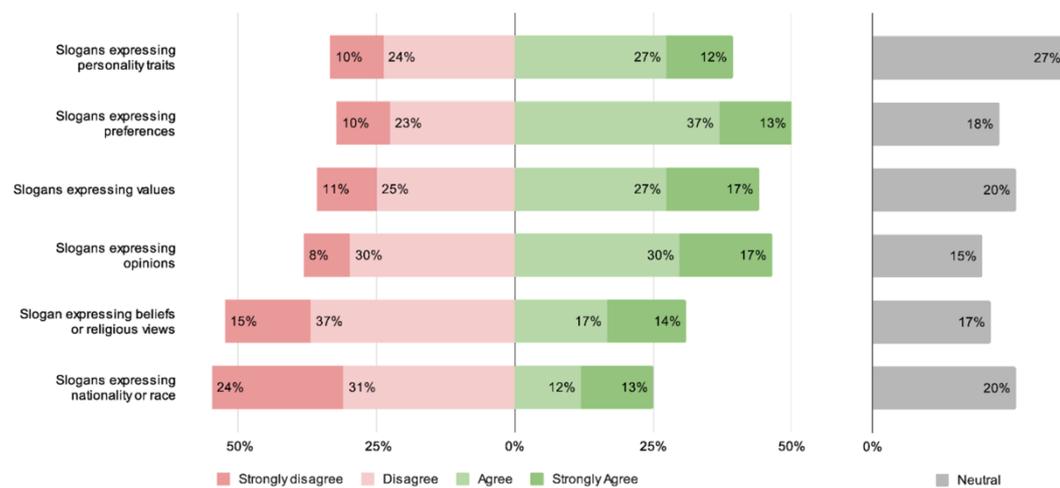


Figure 5. Consumer comfort level with various types of slogans for self-expression
Source: author's documentation

As seen in Figure 5, consumers' comfort levels are different for various types of slogans for self-expression through slogan apparel. Consumers are most comfortable with slogans that express their preferences (their likes and dislikes), followed by slogans that express their opinions, slogans that express their values, and slogans that express their personality traits. The ones that consumers are most uncomfortable with are slogans expressing their nationality or race and slogans expressing their beliefs or religious views. This indicates that the type of the slogan and what kind of message it carries highly affect consumers' preference for self-expression through slogan apparel.

CONCLUSION

Consumer self-expression is reflected in their everyday choices, one of which is apparel or clothing. The clothing trend these days brings back a trend from the 2000s which is slogan apparel. Different from other clothing, slogan apparel is not worn just for its basic needs, but it also serves some other purposes as a communication tool for self-expression. To understand the relationship between slogan prints on apparel and consumer self-expression, a survey was conducted and this study established that consumers wear slogan print apparel because of agreeing with the slogan or the message, in addition to needing something to wear. This study also found that consumers consider the slogan written on the apparel they wear as their self-expression and are aware that other people who read the slogan apparel they wear can get an idea of their self-expression, however, their intention to express themselves through slogan apparel is mostly low. Consumers also have preferences on what kind of slogan they are comfortable with having on their apparel. This study found that consumers are more comfortable expressing their preferences, opinions, values, and personality traits rather than expressing their beliefs and nationalities or race on their slogan apparel.

However, this study is subject to limitations in that while the study encompassed respondents from various countries, it is important to recognize that 97% of the participants are from Asian countries, therefore the study may hold biases towards Asian countries due to cultural differences. Future research can perhaps study this case with a larger sample or with a more specific geographic and demographic sample to have a more accurate result.

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