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## Getting to know the Chinese marathoners: Segmentation based on running shoe brands

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### Synopsis:

This study segments 7180 participants of a major marathon event in China based on the brands of running shoes they own. And it describes and compares these segments.

### Abstract:

Objectives. Running has become a popular participation sport in China and its popularity continues to climb. Number of Chinese marathon runners reached 80,000 in 2014 compared to 40,000 in 2011 (Yang, 2014). Understanding who the typical Chinese marathoners are and the shoe brands they choose has valuable marketing implications. This study segments 7180 participants of a major marathon event in China based on the brands of running shoes they own. And it describes and compares these segments.

Theoretical background. The country of origin effect reveals consumers associate their negative stereotype of less developed countries with brands originated from these countries (Schooler, 1965). As a result, consumers from developed countries prefer brands of their own country whereas consumers from developing countries prefer brands from developed countries. Empirical work found mainland Chinese consumers prefer foreign brands. They perceived foreign sport apparel and shoe brands outperform domestic brands in reputation, quality and communications whereas domestic brands were evaluated better in terms of value for money (Zhang, 2006). Market research found compared to consumers owning domestic brands, foreign brand buyers in mainland China tend to be younger with higher income and better education, and reside in first tier cities (An, 2008; Zhao, 2009). It is reasonable to expect Chinese marathoners who own foreign running shoes tend to be younger, earn more money, receive better education, and live in big cities.

Consumers choose brands because brands express and enhance self-identity

(Schau & Russell, 2005). An individual's self can be framed as a collection of roles in relation to the person's social network (Stryker, 1980). Being a marathoner is a type of leisure identity. The level of identification, and in turn its effect on role-consistent behavior can be traced to identity salience (Callero, 1985; Shamir, 1992). In sport, leisure identity affects participation level (Yair, 1990) and related consumption (Xing, Chalip & Green, 2014). The type of shoes a person wears to run, to a great extent, symbolizes the type of runners he/she is. There are mainstream athletic shoe brands and specialized running shoe brands on the market. Comparing to mainstream brands, wearing specialized running shoes is more consistent with the role of being a marathoner. It is expected that Chinese marathoners who wear specialized running shoes tend to be more committed runners.

**Methodology.** An online survey was sent to runners registered for the 2014 Beijing Marathon after the event. 7180 useful questionnaires were collected. Participants were asked to check all brands of running shoes they wear for running. Shamir's leisure identity scale was used to measure participant's identity of being a runner. Participants also reported their demographics, participation and consumption in running.

Running shoe brands were used as the segmentation variable. Based on brand utility and market share in the mainland market, two dimensions were used to categorize the brands. Foreign brands include Nike, Adidas, New Balance, Asics, and Mizuno. Domestic brands include Anta, Li-Ning, Do-Win, and Xtep. Mainstream brands include Nike, Adidas, New Balance, Anta, and Li-Ning. Specialized running brands include Asics, Mizuno, Do-Win, and Xtep. The software used is SPSS17.0. K-Means analysis was used to obtain the clusters. Crosstab, chi-square, and ANOVA analyses were performed to compare differences between the clusters.

**Results.** Five segments were obtained via K-Means analysis and named respectively as foreign mainstream (FM, 30%), Foreign Specialized (FS, 27%), Foreign Specialized and Diversified (FSD, 13%), Domestic Mainstream (DM, 20%), and Domestic Specialized (DS, 10%). Members of FM tend to wear Nike and Adidas. Every FS owns Asics and typically do not use other shoe brands for running. Almost every FSD wear Mizuno and Asics. In addition, some FSD tend wear New Balance, Adidas, and Nike. Compared to the sample average, DMs tender to wear Li-Ning, Anta, and Xtep. Finally, every DS wears Do-Win.

Similar to the general Chinese market, foreign brand segments (FM, FS, FSD) tend to live in first-tier cities, better educated and with high household income and social classes (based on employment types and job positions). Different from the general Chinese consumers, Chinese marathoners with foreign brand running shoes tend to peak in the 30 to 40 age bracket. On the other hand, the younger and older Chinese marathoners tend to wear domestic running shoes, with DM tends to be young people and DS older marathoners.

Consistent with the leisure identity theory, the specialized segments (FSD, DS) tend to have a level of identification with running compared to their counterpart (FM, DM). In addition, members of FSD and DS have higher training levels, and better performance results.

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Discussion. Theoretical and practical implications will be discussed in the presentation.

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