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Story

Consumers Embrace American Fashion Brands

Sarah Mahoney, May 12, 2009 09:37 AM



The recession may be pummeling America's ability to indulge its fashion fantasies, but Brand Keys' latest ranking shows that people are becoming increasingly brand-conscious.

Five years ago, the New York-based brand and customer loyalty research consultancy says, less than 3% of U.S. fashion consumers said that brands and logos were "more" or "much more" important in clothing purchases. These days? That number has jumped to

14%.

That marks the second year where both men and women say they care *more* about brand names, reversing a seven-year slide. In his analysis, Robert Passikoff, Brand Keys founder and president, notes that the change has more to do with look-alike clothing than the economy.

"Over the past decade, fashion providers went through their satisfaction and quality stages and, by now, most of the clothing produced is pretty undifferentiated," he writes. "Most products on offer to American consumers are pretty much the same."

As a result, that puts more pressure on brands: "Brand meaning has become a surrogate for product differentiation."

The survey included 7,500 men and women, and overall, found that a favorite sports team got the most unaided mentions, followed by Ralph Lauren, J. Crew, Armani, Levi's, Chanel, Nike, Dockers, Donna Karan and Tommy Hilfiger.

For men, the Top 10, naturally, was led by the sports team he loves best, followed by Levi's, Ralph Lauren, J. Crew, Dockers, Tommy Hilfiger, Armani, Brooks Brothers and Club Room.

For women, Chanel came in as the most-mentioned brand, followed by *their* favorite sports team, Ralph Lauren, J. Crew, Armani, Donna Karan, Liz Claiborne, Calvin Klein, Dolce & Gabbana and Levi's.

Passikoff predicts that with so many brands competing with essentially undifferentiated products, some brands will just disappear: "When the only difference is the label, consumers don't need every retailer offering up the same black tee shirt."