

Study on the Internationalization Path of China's Sportswear Brands in the Post-Olympic Era—Taking ANTA as an Example

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Keywords: Post-Olympic Era; Sportswear Brands; Brand Internalisation; ANTA

Abstract: After years of development, China's sportswear brands have progressively grown, with the intensification of market competition and the enhancement of brand strength, China's sportswear brands have begun to seek international development. This paper will take Anta as an example to discuss the internationalization path of China's sportswear brands in the post-Olympic context. The specific ideas are: from the discussion of the characteristics of sportswear brands, analyze the basis and current situation of the internationalization development of Anta brand, so as to put forward a feasible plan for the next stage of internationalization strategy layout for Anta brand.

Sports clothing is a significant segment of the clothing market, and Chinese sports clothing brands have gradually grown over the years. The leading brands in this sector include ANTA and LI-NING, followed closely by ERKE, XTEP, 361°, and QIAODAN. With increased market competition and stronger brand presence, Chinese sports clothing brands are now seeking international development. LI-NING and ANTA have made more efforts to expand globally compared to other brands, especially by leveraging the opportunity presented by the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. This has led to a significant increase in their brand value and enhanced brand awareness both domestically and internationally. However, it is important to note that the impact of the Olympics is short-term and eventful, and establishing brand value worldwide requires sustained efforts from these brands. Based on this, this article takes ANTA as an example to explore its international development path in the post-Olympic era, aiming to provide guidance for the internationalization strategies of Chinese sports clothing brands.

In the study of sportswear brands in China, Chen Juan (2023) [1] pointed out that Chinese sporting goods enterprises have many problems such as serious dependence on the domestic market, barriers to entry in the international market. By analysing the characteristics and development trend of sportswear, Dai Juan (2023)[2]proposes that the important breakthroughs in the development of China's sportswear industry lie in improving fashionability, satisfying different age groups, and adopting more environmentally friendly processes.

In the choice of research methods, Xu Yang (2017) [3]selected Anta as the research object, and

used empirical research methods to analyse the influence factors and countermeasures of Anta in brand internationalisation. Zhang Hexue (2023) [4] analyses the conditions of brand internationalization of Anta from multiple angles and mathematical models through PEST analysis and 4P marketing theory.

For the research on the internationalisation path, Vanessa Ratten (2011) [5] points out that sportswear enterprises need to achieve internationalisation more through inter-firm partnerships in future competition. Zou Yuxiang (2013) [6] suggests that Chinese sports brands can internationalise through measures such as integrating resources, overseas mergers and acquisitions, and focusing on technology and culture. Xiao Biyan (2018) [7] suggests that if China's local sportswear brands want to go abroad, they must focus on the implantation of brand culture, highlight the differentiation and characteristics of Chinese brands. Lu Xinyi (2021) [8] also believes that with the increasing convergence of sportswear products, brand differences are more important. Wang Jian (2021) [9] points out that the internationalisation of domestic sportswear brands needs to be recognised first in terms of product quality, and suggests that enterprises should actively participate in the layout of "Made in China 2025", carry out independent innovation.

1. Characteristics of internationalization of sportswear brands

1.1 Characteristics of sportswear products

1.1.1 Functionality of sportswear products

Sportswear is designed to help regulate body temperature during physical exercise by promoting moisture absorption and perspiration. This is achieved through the use of lightweight, breathable fabrics that improve clothing performance. Compared to general clothing, sportswear typically has a larger surface area in contact with the skin, leading to a greater demand for fabric softness and skin contact. In sports, athletes are prone to physical contact, such as bumping and friction, which can cause wear and tear on their sportswear. As a result, sportswear fabrics require good abrasion and tear resistance for regular sports activities. In professional sports, sportswear with tear and cut-resistant properties is crucial to protecting athletes from potential injuries, making it imperative for sports apparel to prioritize safety measures. Additionally, in professional speed sports, even a one-second difference can determine the winner. Sportswear designed for drag reduction could aid athletes in enhancing their sports performance and boosting their confidence during the game.

1.1.2 Diversity in Sportswear

Furthermore, the constant evolution of fabric science and technology and the improvement of sportswear silhouettes drive the diversity of sportswear products. On the other hand, as people's lifestyles change, the groups of consumers interested in sportswear continue to expand. Sportswear products are gaining popularity due to their unique design styles, in addition to meeting the basic needs of sports. To cater to the diverse aesthetic needs of consumers, the styles of sportswear products are becoming increasingly varied. Clothing items are designed with consideration given to age appropriateness, physical traits, exercise habits, and preferences. As such, sportswear for various age groups varies.

1.2 Characteristics of Sportswear Brands

Uniqueness of Brand Style. Sportswear brands aim to leave a lasting impression on consumers by showcasing their unique clothing style. For instance, New Balance's Retro fashion, Vans' exploration of street trends, and Chums' focus on interesting outdoor apparel are all examples of

sportswear brands with remarkable clothing style.

Market segmentation of sportswear brands is maturing. In terms of product settings, sportswear brands tend to base their product design on a specialized sports field. For example, Yonex specializes in the badminton market, Asics in running, and lululemon in yoga.

Diversity of the brand's service groups. The sportswear consumer market can be broadly categorized into two groups: the general public and athletes. As a result, sportswear is typically categorized as either leisure or professional. Leisure sportswear for non-competitive sports is designed to be comfortable, fashionable, and suitable for daily activities. In contrast, professional sportswear for competitive sports prioritizes athlete safety and enhances sports performance functionality.

1.3 Characteristics of Internationalization of Sportswear Brands

Due to the variations across countries and regions in the international market, there may be cultural cognitive biases that result in communication difficulties. The suitability of the product plays a crucial role in the internationalization of a brand. Based on the distinctive characteristics of sportswear brands and products, their internationalization displays the following features:

Product performance reflects the core competitiveness of a brand. Product performance is an important indicator for consumers in the choice of sportswear brands, sportswear brands are often based on the professional sports field to set products. Restricted by the stereotype of low quality of China's clothing brands for many years, China's independent sportswear brands have not yet established a good degree of recognition among international consumers. The advantage of Chinese products in the international arena is still dominated by cost. However, in the context of consumer upgrading, consumer demand for added value of the product has increased, which means that China's brand "low-cost" advantage in the relative shrinkage. Therefore, it is imperative for domestic sportswear brands with an interest in international expansion to enhance their research and development efforts and product quality.

Tournament sponsorship is a crucial way to establish global brand recognition. Sportswear brands usually provide athletes with clothing, apparel, accessories and equipment sponsorship, which on the one hand helps to increase brand awareness, and on the other hand can create a professional and reliable brand impression. At the same time, participation in sports events is also an important way for brands to improve their R&D level.

Improve product suitability with differentiation strategies. Demand varies across regions based on distinct levels of interest in sports. Meanwhile, customers' concerns regarding the fashionable aspect of sportswear make it a crucial point for R&D and innovation efforts. And the definition of fashion often varies depending on the region, season, and other factors. Sportswear brands need to collect and transform a large amount of domestic and international fashion information, and familiarize themselves with regional and global fashion trends in sportswear, so as to grasp domestic and international market trends and improve product suitability.

2. The Internationalization Process and Base of ANTA

2.1 The Internationalization Process of ANTA

At present, domestic sports brands are led by ANTA, LI-NING, XTEP, 361°, PEAK and ERKE. Their internationalization strategies can be broadly classified into: (1) Enhancing the competitiveness of their own brands; (2) Optimizing their brand matrices through the M&A strategy. The former, represented by LI-NING, has attracted consumers through optimized design, appearances at fashion weeks, social media marketing and other means to make the brand concept

deeply rooted in people's heart. The latter, represented by ANTA, has acquired FILA, AMER and other international sports brands to increase market share. Influenced by the weak growth of the domestic market in recent years, domestic sports brands have become more and more willing to enter the international market.

Since ANTA Group put forward the strategy of "Single Focus, Multi-brand, Globalization", ANTA has further deepened its development layout on the basis of the original foundation, aiming to realize the globalization of market position, brand layout, value chain layout and governance structure. At this stage, its biggest goal is to transform ANTA from a Chinese enterprise to a global enterprise. Through literature research and analysis of ANTA's annual report, the author believes that ANTA's internationalization process can be divided into three stages.

2.1.1 Transformation and Listing, Acquisition of FILA

In 2007, ANTA Group achieved 266% profit growth, and was successfully listed in the same year, making a qualitative leap to become a company with modernized governance structure, marking ANTA's entry into the internationalization preparation stage.

In 2009, ANTA acquired the right to use and franchise the Italian brand FILA in China, positioning it as a high-end sports fashion brand and creating a fully directly-managed business model.

2.1.2 Hand in Hand with the Olympic Games

Since 2009, ANTA has been a partner of the Chinese Olympic Committee for 16 consecutive years, providing competition and training equipment for 28 national teams, and investing more than 3 billion RMB in research and development.

In September 2017, ANTA officially became the official sports apparel partner of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games; in October 2019, the International Olympic Committee announced that ANTA became the official sports apparel supplier of the IOC; in 2022, ANTA took over the supply of most of the equipment of the Chinese national team for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games and showed the brand to the international community. At the end of 2022, ANTA became the first domestic sports brand authorized to use the national flag label and the first Chinese sports brand to cooperate with the International Olympic Committee, revitalizing its unique sports assets. The "Going Global" strategy has been implemented since then.

2.1.3 Acquisition of Amer Sports, the Start of Globalization

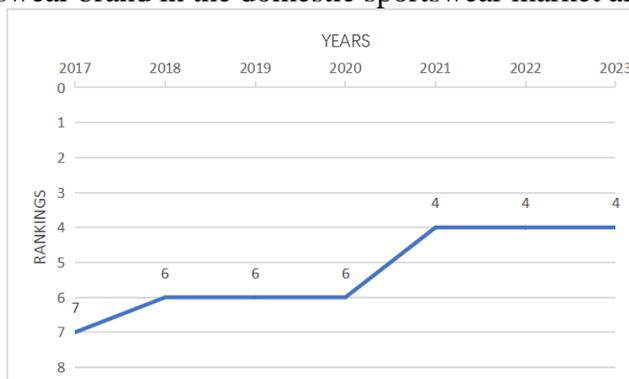
In 2019, ANTA Group formally established the strategic goal of globalization and put forward the concept of "synergistic incubation, value retailing and internationalization", in which each brand cooperates with each other and empowers each other. In March of the same year, a consortium of investors formed by ANTA completed the acquisition of Amer sports, a Finnish high-end sporting goods company. Since then, the multi-brand matrix development mode has been formally formed, realizing full coverage of consumers and sports scenes, with strong brand synergy. In 2020, ANTA Group announced its vision for the new decade as "to become a respected world-class multi-brand sporting goods group", to integrate the sports spirit of "transcending oneself" into people's lives, and to continue to adhere to the new decade's strategy of "single-focused, multi-brand and globalization".

2.2 The Base of Internationalization of ANTA

In recent years, ANTA has maintained good business performance. The market capitalization of

ANTA grows as much as 155% from 2019 to 2021, reflecting its operational capabilities and increased brand awareness and influence.

Since 2017, when ANTA Group became the official partner of the Chinese Olympic Committee and the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, ANTA's brand power has been steadily rising (as shown in Figure 1). In the China Brand Power Index (C-BPI) ranking in the sportswear sector, ANTA has risen from seventh to fourth place in the five-year period. The brand first overtook Italian brand KAPPA in 2018 and then overtook the domestic brands 361 ° and QIAODAN, while also making significant progress in four segmentation metrics (as shown in Figure 2), gradually becoming the head sportswear brand in the domestic sportswear market alongside LI-NING.



Data source: Organized by the author based on data released by China Brand Power Index platform

Figure 1: 2017-2023 ANTA C-BPI Ranking



Data source: Organized by the author based on data released by China Brand Power Index platform

Figure 2: Distribution of various data of ANTA C-BPI 2017-2023

In 2022, Nike, LI-NING and ADIDAS are in the top three of the C-BPI rankings, and ANTA is ranked fourth. In terms of brand awareness, ANTA's first mention rate increased by 2.8%; the unprompted first mention rate (unprompted rate) increased by 12.4%, while it was higher than ADIDAS in terms of brand association (see Table 1).

This shows that ANTA is steadily building up its brand influence and reputation. From the ratio of operating expenses, it can be seen that ANTA's advertising and publicity expenses have been accounting for more than 10% of its operating expenses in recent years. At the same time, ANTA has gradually built up the brand's international influence through the acquisition of international brands and the signing of internationally renowned athletes. It can be said that ANTA has the potential to compete with global sportswear brands. With the ANTA Group's continuous strategic

investments, international expansion as well as its commitment to innovation and brand building, ANTA will further enhance its position in the international arena.

Table 1: Ranking of Sportswear Brands on C-BPI Index, 2022

2022 Ranking	Ranking changes	Brand	Brand origins	Brand Perception			Brand Relationships		
				1st Reference (%)	Unprompted (%)	Prompted (%)	Brand Association (%)	Brand Loyalty (%)	Brand Preferences (%)
1st	--	Nike	America	42.8	91.3	96.1	81.8	50.4	39.3
2nd	+1	Li-Ning	Guangdong	18.5	82.5	92.4	86.3	52.8	17.7
3rd	-1	ADIDAS	German	13.9	83.4	92.4	70.3	46.9	14.1
4th	--	ANTA	Fujian	8.0	69.1	84.9	73.6	59.3	6.3
5th	+8	Erke	Fujian	4.7	57.7	76.9	79.0	56.1	5.5
6th	+1	Xtep	Fujian	2.1	61.1	80.9	63.8	46.2	2.5
7th	-1	361°	Fujian	1.1	58.7	79.7	62.8	48.5	1.4
8th	-3	Qiao Dan	Fujian	1.6	59.1	80.8	58.1	44.3	1.2
9th	+2	Puma	German	0.4	49.9	67.2	60.3	47.9	1.4
10th	-2	Converse	America	0.4	48.5	69.8	49.5	50.3	2.7

Data source: Organized by the author based on data released by China Brand Power Index platform

3. Path of Internationalization of ANTA in the Post-Olympics Era

As one of the head brands in China's sportswear industry, ANTA has made certain achievements in internationalization. Based on this, this paper uses SWOT analysis (see Table 2) to discuss how ANTA can be built into a truly international brand by absorbing and utilizing Olympic assets after the Winter Olympics.

3.1 SWOT Analysis of the Internationalization of ANTA

3.1.1 Advantage Analysis

1) ANTA Sports Brand is backed by ANTA Group, one of the top 500 private enterprises in China, and as the mother brand, it has high brand status and brand value. The brand has strong integration ability, and has a better advantage of group resources in product research and development and brand promotion.

2) Through its overseas M&A strategy, ANTA Group has acquired overseas brands such as FILA and Amer Sports, and has a good international foundation and international experience.

3) ANTA Group's vertically integrated business model is well developed, with in-depth involvement in upstream, midstream and downstream of the industry. It has a diversified product system, realises brand restructuring and transformation and upgrading through M&A strategy, and has a stable market share.

4) Significant capital management advantages, the brand has strong revenue capacity while maintaining a low overall debt ratio, indicating that the Group has good risk tolerance and high stress resistance.

5) With a comprehensive product distribution network, ANTA Group has now established a spider web of sales channels in various regions at home and abroad, which is conducive to rapid feedback of consumer demand in the international market, reduction of service costs, and realization of strict and effective monitoring of the entire value chain.

6) ANTA Group is transforming itself into a "smart manufacturer", exploring the road of automation transformation across industries, breaking the "information silo" dilemma of equipment,

realising data interoperability, and promoting the integration of the whole process.

3.1.2 Disadvantageous Analysis

1) Compared with NIKE, ADIDAS and other international famous brands, ANTA still lacks in brand culture construction, independent originality and manufacturing level, which limits the development of high-end products of the brand; on the other hand, consumers have a long-standing stereotypical impression of the brand as a middle- and low-end brand, which is also a major obstacle to the brand's entry into the international high-end market.

2) The international development of ANTA Group relies excessively on the internationalisation mode of "buying and selling" by acquiring brands. It relies on the acquisition of foreign brands' trademark operation rights to expand overseas markets, while its own brands focus more on the domestic market and lack active practice in the international market.

3) The enterprise management mode and system can restrict brand creativity and innovation. Complex personnel organisational structure, family management business model brings a certain degree of difficulty to the management of corporate organisation and culture. For example, the lack of design talents in management and the low discourse power of designers are important factors restricting brand innovation.

3.1.3 Market Opportunity

1) ANTA has been sponsoring the Olympic Games for more than ten years, serving a total of 28 national teams, accumulating a wealth of experience in the supply of professional sportswear, and gaining a lot of exposure in international events. Borrowing the Olympic platform, ANTA has not only improved its national popularity, but also opened the door to the international market.

2) Broad industry outlook. Influenced by the change of social fashion and the change of people's lifestyle in the post epidemic era, outdoor sports have become an important way of leisure and relaxation for contemporary young people, according to public data, China's outdoor products market scale has reached 315 billion in 2020, and is expected to reach 599 billion in 2025. Under the background of expanding demand for outdoor sports and the youthfulness of outdoor sports participants, many sportswear brands have begun to develop outdoor sports products in line with the consumer trend.

3) The government's increased investment in sports public infrastructure is conducive to meeting the daily sports needs of the public and stimulating the consumption vitality of the sportswear market. At the same time, as an important part of the sports industry, ANTA Enterprises are also subject to such as financing support, tax incentives and other related policies.

3.1.4 Market Threat

(1) With the acquisition of Amer Sports, ANTA Group has expanded its business territory to Europe, the United States and other major markets in the world. In its "2025 Double 100 Billion" plan, ANTA Group points out that its future target overseas market share is 40%, which shows that the group intends to reduce the brand's dependence on the local market and vigorously promote its global business. However, due to the short history of ANTA's internationalisation, the main share of the international market has been occupied by foreign brands that started earlier, such as NIKE, ADIDAS, Puma, etc. Domestic sportswear brands such as LI-NING, XTEP and Peak, which were founded at the same time and also put forward the goal of internationalisation, have also developed strongly in recent years. This shows that it is further difficult for ANTA's brand to enter and develop in the international market.

(2) With the increase of global economic instability and uncertainty, the international situation is

complex and volatile, cross-border production, transport, sales costs increase, profit margins are compressed.

(3) China's clothing market as a whole, there is a phenomenon of imitation and copying behaviour is widespread, easy to make the brand mark out of the debilitating. And ANTA enterprise started in OEM factories, design and manufacturing is the weak link of the enterprise. Internal and external influences, ANTA Brand lack of outstanding brand style, is to enter the international market is a major weakness.

Table 2: SWOT analysis of the internationalisation of the ANTA brand

		Advantages S	Disadvantageous W
		S1:Higher brand status S2:Brand acquisitions lay the foundation for internationalisation S3:Diversified Product System S4:Financial Advantage S5:Well-established product distribution network S6: Strong digital capabilities	W1:Brand characteristics are not prominent, lack of core competitiveness W2:Over-reliance on sub-brand growth W3:Complex organisational structure and familial management model
Chances O	O1:Olympic Games bring development opportunities O2:Strong consumer demand O3:Good policy environment	SO Strategic	WO Strategic
		SO1:Strengthening the Brand-Olympic Connection SO2:Catering to today's consumer interest in the outdoors. Expanding Market Segments	WO1:Brand positioning clarity WO2:Proper placement of post-Olympic assets, technology flow and assimilation of research results WO3:Increased investment in R&D for parent brands
Threat T	T1:Strong competitiveness of international brands T2:Deterioration of the global economic environment T3:Clothing product styles, patterns, trademarks, etc. are small intellectual property rights that can be easily imitated.	ST Strategic	WT Strategic
		ST1:Strengthening international cooperation and promoting brand internationalisation through partnerships that complement each other's strengths ST2:Learning from the strengths of benchmark brands and focusing on the lack of brand power	WT1:Tapping into emerging international markets in line with ANTA's brand positioning WT2:Raise awareness of intellectual property protection and cultivate good soil for product innovation

3.2 Suggestions on the Internationalization Path of ANTA in the Post-Olympics Era

3.2.1 SO—Maximise the Advantages

Take the opportunity of the Olympic Games to increase brand exposure and enhance brand awareness and reputation in the international arena. The brand should take the Olympic Games, an

international sports event, as a brand endorsement, sign athletes and Olympic national teams, and take advantage of the situation to launch limited series of products related to the Olympic Games to strengthen the brand's professional sports image. At the same time, ANTA should also focus on collecting feedback from athletes to further improve the professionalism of our products, and apply Winter Olympics technology to mass merchandise, empowering product upgrades from the technical end.

Expanding the growing outdoor sports market. As the heat of lightweight outdoor sports climbs, the development of sportswear brands ushers in new opportunities. Brands can take full advantage of the economies of scale brought about by mergers and acquisitions, tap into star products loved by consumers, integrate multi-brand resources, and develop high-quality, fashionable outdoor sports product lines to embrace the wave of outdoor sports.

3.2.2 WO—Reverse the Disadvantage

The brand should be positioned more clearly from an international perspective and carry out the line of specialization to avoid blurring the brand image due to multiple claims. On the basis of the Olympic Games, ANTA can formulate a strategy around professional sports and adhere to it for a long period of time, and build the core competitiveness of its products with the support of technological innovation to enhance the added value of the brand, and avoid engaging in too much low-priced competition in the homogenous market.

In preparation for the Olympic Games, ANTA Enterprises has developed a series of event-level advanced sports equipment through co-operation with professional colleges and research institutes, and has the conditions to fully realise product upgrading. ANTA can absorb and transform the technology and talent assets accumulated in the Olympics to achieve a higher level of independent research and development of science and technology.

In recent years, the ANTA Group has relied heavily on brand acquisitions for its growth, while the development of its parent brands has been poor. From the brand in the product design into the Chinese culture elements, the launch of the national tide series and other initiatives can be seen, the brand intends to follow the trend of national tide, for the brand to give new connotation of national characteristics. However, it can be seen from the annual report of the enterprise that in recent years, the proportion of the enterprise's R&D investment has remained at around 2.5% of the total operating expenditure, which is still insufficient to match the number of its many additional product lines despite the trend of year-on-year increase. Based on this, there is an urgent need for the Group to increase its R&D investment in its parent brand to provide strong financial support for product upgrades.

3.2.3 WT -- Threat Avoidance

International sportswear market competition is fierce, the brand in the market development should intentionally avoid such as the United States, Germany and other international sports brand birthplace, these areas of the market is relatively saturated, the competitive brand is too strong. The brand can through in-depth market research, with professional sports image, and international brands compared with the higher cost-effective, such as ice and snow sports culture prevails in Russia, hockey powerhouse India and other emerging international markets in line with the brand positioning of ANTA.

In view of the existence of a large number of illegal imitation of original products by local garment enterprises, in order to avoid unnecessary economic losses caused by infringement, and to dampen the enthusiasm of enterprise innovation, the brand should raise the awareness of intellectual property rights protection, and increase the intensity of product intellectual property rights

protection. Brands can protect original design works by registering copyrights, signing confidentiality agreements, strengthening internal management and other measures, and at the same time make reasonable use of litigation measures to take timely legal action against counterfeit products, so as to provide a good soil for the cultivation of brand innovativeness, in order to safeguard the independence of the brand and make the brand characteristics more prominent.

3.2.4 ST -- Threat Transformation

On the one hand, brands can strengthen their cooperation with national teams, large-scale sports events and international IP, so as to promote the internationalisation of the brand in a partnership with complementary advantages and increase the market share of the brand. On the other hand, learning from the successful experience of other brands to enhance brand power. In recent years, ANTA focuses on strengthening its strength through mergers and acquisitions, and the tilting of the enterprise's focus makes ANTA slightly insufficient in the shaping and maintenance of its own brand compared with the competing brand LI-NING. Therefore, ANTA enterprises in the capitalisation of the development to a certain extent, should also adjust the strategic deployment, such as through the development of the brand branch, promote brand transformation, mining brand more than thirty years since the accumulation of spiritual and cultural assets, to create a differentiated brand culture symbols, improve brand recognition, so as to make the brand in the mind of the consumer to occupy a place.

4. Conclusions

The Olympic Games have provided unprecedented exposure for Chinese sports brands, and brands have used the international stage of the Games to push their influence and reputation globally.

Following the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, Chinese sporting goods company ANTA Group gained global recognition, enhancing its international reputation and influence. As China's number one sports brand at present, its internationalized operation has been effective, and its share in the international market has been increasing year by year, which is of great reference value for the internationalized development of other sportswear brands in China in the post-Olympic era.

Chinese sportswear brands need to analyze their advantages and limitations seriously. China has rich sports resources and huge market potential, robust support for international development. In the internationalization process, brands must also overcome corresponding challenges, such as cultural differences, intellectual property issues, and the pressure of competition in the international market. Only with an in-depth understanding of the target market conditions can an internationalization strategy be formulated in a targeted manner.

By learning from the successful experience of ANTA and other enterprises, brand internationalization cannot be achieved overnight and requires long-term investment and patience. Specific behaviors include establishing a global supply chain and sales network to ensure the production and marketing of products, cooperating with athletes and celebrities to build a global brand image, setting up a reasonable merchandise plan according to regional differences, and actively participating in the sponsorship of international sports events and sports and cultural activities, and so on.

The post-Olympic era was a golden period for Chinese sportswear brands to develop internationally, but it was also full of challenges. Through in-depth case studies and practice and the formulation of practical internationalization strategies, Chinese sportswear brands can achieve tremendous success in the international arena and realize comprehensive development.

Acknowledgements

Project Information: Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology 2023 Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Programme for Undergraduates (Project No. NHFZ20230047)

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