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INVESTIGATIVE STUDY TO ANALYZE MARKET CONDITIONS TO LAUNCH A SURF WEAR BRAND WITH SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SRI LANKA

Gayathri Madubhani Ranathunga¹. and Hashani Fernando²

*^{1,2}Fashion Design and Product Development, Department of Textile and Clothing
Technology, Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Katubedda, 10400,
Sri Lanka*

Email address: ¹gayathrir@uom.lk, ²hashanifdo1996@gmail.com

Abstract

Surfing or the act of riding waves has become an ecumenical inclination where the population follows it as a sport as well as a relaxing leisure time activity. The market for surf equipment and surf wear has grown immensely giving large profits to businesses worldwide where businesses create a need for surfing today. Sri Lanka possesses one of the best surfing locations, which has become the center of attention by surfers worldwide. In-line with the prevailing market opportunity, the research analyzed market conditions to launch a surf wear brand with specific requirements in the context of Sri Lanka in terms of environmental and weather, culture, performance, and durability aspects. The survey used questionnaire-based methods and personal interviews. Close-ended questionnaires were selected. Personal interviews were conducted to obtain details on surf wear requirements under the aspects of technical,

cultural, and design. Survey findings show that there is a growing surfing culture in Sri Lanka which is more towards entertainment than a professional water sport in Sri Lanka which comprises both local and foreign populations. The research showed that there is a demand for value-added surf wear and for cultural visual representation on surf wear.

Keywords- Surfing, Surf wear, value addition, culture, Sri Lanka.

1. Introduction

Surf wear is a specifically designed outfit for a specific act of sport, surfing, which is known as riding waves. The movements and techniques are significantly different from other sports, with talent depending on the body balance over waves (Schmidt, 2008). It is proved that surf wear matters to a great extent on the performance of this sport. Surf wear is a body-skimming outfit to protect the body and skin from the salty water and the sun (Orams and Towner 2012). The warmer the weather, the better the performance of the surfer, thus surfing is more prominent in tropical countries. Sri Lanka being an island in the tropical region gives great opportunities for surfers to engage in their sport. Mirissa, Arugambay, Weligama, Unawatuna are world-famous surfing resorts in Sri Lanka (Robinson and Jarvie 2008, Kumar, Silva, and Madusanka 2018). On the grounds of natural beauty and the location of the country, Sri Lanka attracts growing foreign travellers each year, where the country has become a center of tourist attraction in which surfing is a prominent reason. Not only among foreigners, but surfing is also popular among locals. Surfing has become a lifestyle trend and Sri Lanka owns a growing surf culture at present. In-line with the prevailing market opportunity, the research objective was to analyze market conditions to launch a surf wear brand with specific requirements in the context of Sri Lanka in terms of environmental and weather, culture, performance, and the durability aspects.

2. Literature Review

Surfing as a Professional and Lifestyle Sport:

Being an extreme sport, surfing shows the correlation between the rider and the wave. It is the rider's skill the performance depends on (Booth, 2004). According to Orams and Towner (2012), "surfing is the act of actively riding waves and responding to their changing contours. A surfer is a person who possesses sufficient skill and knowledge to utilize the power of a wave of momentum, track at an angle across the face of a wave and anticipate and respond to its changing contours". According to Edwards, Skinner and Gilbert (2003), "riding waves were increasing towards the present and today it has become a world popular water sport. It has developed from a minority pastime, practiced in a handful of countries, to a professional sport".

As of 2002, it was estimated there were 10 million surfers globally (SurfToday.com, 2019) and it is a passion among teens and has become a lifestyle trend (Anderson, 2016). "Surfing, with its inherent risks, lack of tangible reward and drain on purposeful time held little appeal to the older generation but was enthusiastically taken up by young people in the right locations with the time and the resources to enjoy it" (Ripley, 2018). As Ripley (2018) states, surf lovers are mostly the youngsters, where the Annual Surf league, the world's biggest surf competition, gives evidence where the contestants are pure youth.

Surf wear: the Fashion Market:

The sport of surfing now represents a multi-billion-dollar industry, especially in clothing and fashion markets (Lamarca, Sresnewsy and Barreto 2014). According to Lanagan (2002), surfing images are used in marketing campaigns for a wide range of products that are unrelated to surfing. Further, he explains that "Surfing has been embraced by many diverse groups who have no connection with the act of surfing as this has been achieved because of the image that surfing elicits, of a pleasurable and playful lifestyle". Currently, most active surfers are male, but the number of female surfers is increasing, particularly in younger age groups (Buckley, (2003).

In the aspect of economic significance, the target consumer group is recognized as "experienced surfers who travel to surf, low-budget surf safaris, surf school population" (Lanagan, 2002). The surfing outfit matters to a great extent because surf-wear affects the performance of

the act of surfing (Schmidt 2008). Surf-wear or swimwear is described as a modern invention that emerged in the last 150 years and was not initially a fashion garment. They are functional mainly focused on performance. Speedo, Quiksilver, and Billabong are some recognized surf-wear brands worldwide (Schmidt, 2008). "Specifically about the surf wear, a report developed by SGI (Sporting Goods Intelligence) indicated that in 2011 its billing was of \$2 billion, and retailers are betting on the growth of between 5% and 10% a year, which signals a great challenge having in view the other rates of market growth." (Lamarca, Sresnewsy, and Barreto 2014). It is clear with the emergence of the surfing trend, a fine market opportunity is created for surf wear. With the youth geared towards surfing, it paves the way for the rise of a fashion movement with regards to surf wear. The performance-driven concept of surf-wear has appeared as a "fashionholic" twist where fashion forecasters like WGSN (Worth Global Style Network) set trends with on-going global concepts.

Sri Lanka, referred to as the pearl of the Indian ocean, has embraced the globe surf trend subject to her cultural and environmental influences. The country was rewarded as the best travel destination over several years and surf has become one prominent reason. "Endless beaches, timeless ruins, welcoming people, oodles of elephants, killer surf, cheap prices, fun trains, famous tea, flavorful food. Sri Lanka's attributes are many. Few places have as many UNESCO World Heritage Sites (eight) packed into such a small area that stroll past colonial gems in Colombo and then hit some epic surf. Sri Lanka is spectacular, it's affordable and it's still mostly uncrowded. Now is the best time to discover it!" (Lonely Planet, Tourists Guide book, 2013).

Native surfing is now growing comparatively with the foreign surf within the country (Jayawardena and Teare 2013). "The highest proportion of surveyed tourists (86 percent) have visited Sri Lanka with the purpose of surfing. Also, it was revealed that 81 percent of all the tourists who visited because of surfing can surf, whereas 19 percent of them cannot do surfing. They were either accompanying their surfing partners, husbands, or friends. Also, it was discovered that 46 percent of tourists were expert surfers, 34 percent were average

surfers and 20 percent were beginners who seek surfing classes in Arugambay” (Pathirana, and Samarathunga 2018). Surfing is an adventure sports trend that improves the country’s gross domestic product through the tourist sector as well as from native surfing consumption (Iatarola 2011). Surfing as an adventurous sport is an important aspect of the tourism industry worldwide and Sri Lanka. It is discussed as a lifestyle in a wide socio-cultural context.

3. Methodology

The research uses a qualitative and quantitative mixed approach. Data were gathered from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources or direct information were gathered from questionnaires, telephone conversations, and personal interviews. A pilot questionnaire was distributed to a sample set of 100 people, including locals and foreigners through social media networks. This consisted of 15 multiple choice questions, including general information such as age, gender, nationality, and other questions about the surf market and surf wear. The questionnaire helped to identify professional and leisure surfers then developed questionnaires to derive descriptive data.

The second questionnaire was constructed to identify the buying behavior of surf wear in the Sri Lankan market. This was distributed among a selected set of nearly 50 people, who were found from the pilot questionnaire. It comprised 10 multiple choice questions, including the customer’s income, and buying preferences on surf wear. The target market was identified with their buying decisions, preferences, and buying behavior. The descriptive questionnaire was focused on extracting the features of surf-wear such as performance features, design features, and cultural features. The questionnaire was taken to hold personal interviews with professional surfers, product developers, and designers to evaluate their comments and ideas on surf-wear.

World surf wear trends, consumer perception of surf-wear in different environmental contexts, surf-wear market behavior, surf-wear locations, technological advancement achieved throughout the history of surf-wear, the demand factors affecting surf wear, as well as the Sri Lankan approach to the surf sport, its market in the coastal belt as well

as Colombo and Southern areas, Sri Lankan surfers and their preferences, were observed, compared and studied through a variety of journal publications, books, tourists magazines, and newspaper articles. Reports from the Department of the Census were also used to collect data regarding the emigration and tourist details. The validity of the research was confirmed by using a wide variety of data and by cross-referring data together

4. Analysis and Discussion

Surf Culture in Sri Lanka – Surfing is widely popular among the age group of 20-30 and the second highest surf interested age group is 30-40. Most of the Sri Lankan respondents are in the age group of 20-30, and the 30-40 age group represents more foreign respondents. Data coincide with the social trend of the youth surfing lifestyle. Also, it was revealed that within the Sri Lankan coastal belt, surfing is done as a leisure activity more than a professional sport, which proves by the 4% respondents of professional surfers over 65% of respondents who surf for fun.

The need for surf wear - 83% of the respondents who were surf lovers within the Sri Lankan coastal belt state that surfing requires a professional surf-wear even to surf leisurely. So, the most significant and agreeable factor for surfing is affected by the surf-wear. The 20% of respondents who worried about sunburn can be also taken to the target customer group by allowing them to surf using full body covered surf wear.

Target market behaviors - It was revealed that the spending power on the specific product of the target customer group is in between Rs. 2000-6000. The buying behavior showed that 35.7% of respondents prefer buying whenever they see attractive surf-wear and that their buying decisions can be influenced by a new launch. The target market comprises both locals and foreign customers. Mostly the foreign respondents prefer buying attractive surf wear. It can be suggested that, as the literature showed, surfing is a leisure sport developed into a lifestyle sport in Sri Lanka.

4.1 Suggested Features

It can be suggested to have a full body, covered silhouette due to the warm and bright sun. Surfers' suggestions state, to have guards over knees and shoulders, which are often subjected to injuries as Sri Lankan beaches comprise with rocky sands while most of the surfers are not professionally trained for the protection because Sri Lankan surfing is for entertainment (Monis S, Personal Interview, November 2019). From the construction aspects, bonded zippers were suggested to add more comfort, while silicon-coated hems were suggested as a new interpretation that seals the body avoiding saltwater coming into contact with the body. Anti UV coated fabrication was one major suggestion by product developers (Gunarathna, R, Personal Interview, November 2019). It was suggested to attempt surf-wear with Sri Lankan traditional murals and motifs, masks and batiks as fashion forecasts of WGSN also set print ideas on floral tie-dye and shaded prints (Rodrigo, C, Personal Interview, October 2019). For the print ideas, as surface decorations, it can be suggested to attempt a rubber or silicon print technique which resists with salt water (Rodrigo, C, Personal Interview, October 2019).

The view of a surfer suggests the silhouette be fitted with more technically advanced facilities, such as a camera button on the outfit to videograph the surf, waterproof mp3 player connected to the outfit (Dissanayake, K. and Perera, S, Personal Interview, November 2019). This suggests that Sri Lankan surfing culture needs more entertaining features than professional features, which coincides with the data analyzed previously. Sri Lanka is a country that has cultural concerns with regards to clothing since historically, revealing the body is culturally appropriate. But through the research, it was revealed that the growing surfing culture excuses the above matter to an extent (Perera, O. O, Personal Interview, November 2019). Two types of surf categories can be suggested: mainly, the full body covered silhouettes and bikini type silhouettes. Foreign or local people with attractive figures wear bikinis as Sri Lankan surfing culture is more towards entertainment. Therefore, the addition of a wraparound for a bikini suit was suggested.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Sri Lankan surfing culture consists of more beginners than professional surfers. Most of the surf-interested crowd in the Sri Lankan surfing context is youth. Also, some elderly population can be seen among tourists which prove that it is an enjoyable leisure time activity. There is a market opportunity for specially designed surf wear which can include more features on the safety and entertaining aspects, according to customer preferences and requirements. There is an identified customer group with a willingness to purchase such surf-wear. This topic can be further surveyed to customize the product in terms of experimenting with durable printing techniques, as well as to add more features on entertainment and safety. Also, this concept can be further developed to set a Sri Lankan surf trend that attracts tourists to the country.



Figure 1 - Featured Wetsuit design by author: Hashani Fernando

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