

Research on the Renewal Strategies of Traditional Chinese Brands in the New Era

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Abstract: Amid rapid technological progress and the rise of social media, many traditional Chinese brands have been phased out for failing to adapt quickly to changing market demands and consumer spending patterns. Therefore, it is quite significant for them to fully understand the changes in consumer behavior and psychological needs to develop suitable strategies for their revitalization. Traditional Chinese brands have their own unique brand features and culture heritage. Therefore, it is particularly important to retain its own cultural characteristics. Meanwhile, the life cycle of brand is limited. They should seize the opportunity to renew themselves to survive in fierce competition. This article starts from the background and urgency of traditional Chinese brands renewal. It focuses on the three strategies for traditional brands revitalization such as product innovation, marketing innovation, and sales channel innovation according to self-determination theory (SDT) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. It could provide traditional Chinese brand revitalization with theoretical support and practical guidance.

Keywords: Brand revitalization, Traditional Chinese brands, Products innovation, Marketing innovation, Sales modes innovation

1. Introduction

With the change of marketing demands and consumers' behaviors, the traditional brands are facing fierce competition and challenge. Traditional brands face the problem of brand aging and declining brand awareness. They are unable to detect changes in consumer needs in a timely manner and coupled with outdated sales channels and marketing methods [1]. The expression "Chinese time-honored brand" denotes an established historic Chinese brand. It is widely regarded as a quintessential emblem of the continuity and conservation of the unique Chinese cultural heritage. According to the investigation by the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, it could be observed that an approximate moiety of the China time-honored brand are progressively incurring huge losses. The increasing disappearance of old brands and the decline in sales have fully demonstrated that traditional Chinese brands lack competitiveness and innovation in the market, and are unable to keep up with the needs of modern consumers, thus being marginalized by the market. Therefore, it is quite urgent for traditional Chinese brands to conduct brand revitalization to adapt the new marketing environment. Brands can choose suitable media platforms such as Weibo to release content and engage in comments and interactions. The fact that 496 of the Fortune 500 businesses have embraced social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to engage customers further demonstrates the

practical importance of customer engagement in the business sphere [2]. Furthermore, traditional brands can also choose to send emails to maintain relationships with customers. Email marketing is actually an effective strategy in the market, not only aimed at short-term promotional activities, but also at managing customer relationships. To obtain a competitive edge, a brand might proactively analyze consumer feedback and uncover insights about new features and functionality that the market anticipates by mining product innovation ideas. Depending on the unique characteristics of the product, product innovation can take the form of service innovation, technological innovation, or user experience innovation.

Technological advancements have introduced new platforms and techniques, driving the growth of social media. Data analytics enable brands to monitor consumer behavior and trends, refining products and services to meet consumer needs [3]. Social media marketing allows brands to build digital presence through videos, comments, and messages, enhancing engagement with consumers [4]. However, the influx of information has also made the market more complex and posed challenges for traditional brands that rely on offline sales [5]. With the rise of social media, consumers now have more online shopping options, but social platforms also offer opportunities for direct consumer contact and expanded sales channels. For example, online retail sales of tangible goods in China grew by 7.9% in 2024's first three quarters, with new media users exceeding one billion, or 70% of the population. This shift to online consumption impacts both daily life and business operations, with businesses needing both physical and online presences to meet consumer expectations [3]. Traditional brands could not maintain energization all the time because of limited life cycle of brand with time fading and social environmental change. If the customer has established an emotional bond with the brand, it will be able to reappear on the market even if the product is no longer accessible [6]. Due to the established customer base and brand loyalty associated with traditional brands, it could yield substantial time and financial savings by reviving consumer awareness. Traditional brands could allocate additional resources towards product innovation and promotional initiatives, among other strategic endeavors [7]. Businesses deploy the channel integration services to give customers a smooth experience. In contrast to conventional offline or online commerce, where various channels function separately, channel integration services necessitate that retailers simultaneously coordinate and synergize all channels [8]. They are technology-based solutions that let users carry out various interactive tasks across offline and online channels. These services boost a channel's salience and raises consumers' purchase intentions by making a channel easier to access. For instance, consumers can use the search function on online stores to learn about the location and merchandise assortment of offline stores [9]. They have more autonomy, and they can choose their preferred purchasing methods by comparing the different merits of online and offline. Therefore, traditional brand revitalization could utilize channel integration to attract new consumers and expand into new markets. It is a sensible and profitable way for them to survive and keep sustainability under fierce competition.

Traditional Chinese brands have a unique cultural heritage rooted in Chinese culture, which sets them apart from foreign brands. Cultural symbols imbue brands with distinct personalities and associations, linking them to cultural values and desires. For example, Moutai evokes the Chinese tradition of hospitality and social bonding through drinks. When revitalizing traditional brands, it's essential to consider the influence of cultural heritage. However, existing studies often focus on a single aspect of revitalization and neglect the integration of various factors. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) can help identify consumer motivations, which are often overlooked in marketing research [10]. SDT suggests that intrinsically motivated consumers engage more deeply with brands [11], which traditional Chinese brands can use to better meet consumer needs. Additionally, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory can offer insights into consumer behavior by addressing their basic, social, psychological, self-esteem, and cognitive needs, which influence purchasing decisions

[12]. Combining SDT and Maslow's theory provides a comprehensive approach for guiding the revitalization of traditional brands.

2. The Innovation of product

Based on the Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, human needs basically start from the psychological needs that ensure the fulfillment of the fundamental subsistence requirements of consumers. For instance, Wufangzhai as a traditional Chinese food brand primarily specializes in rice dumplings before progressively branching out into glutinous rice dishes. Therefore, how to innovate in terms of ingredient flavors and product variety is the key to attracting customers. In the recent years, the assortment of Wufangzhai's rice dumplings has expanded to over thirty varieties. The production lines have released categories including rice, cakes, moon cakes, and rice items one after the other. The brand has regained its vitality through product innovation and enjoys a significant advantage and strong competitiveness in the glutinous rice market. Moreover, Maslow posits that human needs can be arranged in a hierarchy with the goal of self-actualization at the top [13]. Consumers are driven to prioritize meeting their needs, and they won't advance to more complex requirements until their basic needs have been satisfied. Self-actualization can be attained when all other wants have been satisfied. Therefore, marketers usually take advantage of this desire to satisfy demands by providing goods that enable consumers to achieve these objectives [14]. As a matter of fact, it is quite significant to understand the self-actualization aspirations of the target audience during the process of product innovation. When brands make development projects, they should not ignore meeting the demands for love and belongingness. Since they have a great influence on increased life satisfaction and purchase behaviors [13]. For instance, the products of Big White Rabbit Milk Candy could be referred to satisfy the need of consumers' love and belongingness. Candy can be classified as a type of food, but most of the time, Chinese consumers purchase the White Rabbit Milk Candy for its emotional appeal, stemming from their love and memory for the traditional brand. However, the popular Big White Rabbit Milk Candy as a traditional brand used to face the problem of limited product varieties and tastes and insufficient investment in technological innovation. After identifying the consumer's psychological demand for the Big White Rabbit Milk Candy products, the brand upgraded its products on the basis of preserving the unique features of the product. It is no longer limited to traditional vanilla flavor, and its flavors are now diverse, including red bean flavor and chocolate flavor, etc. Moreover, it has attracted the attention of more and more young consumers. With the changing times, consumers have new demands for the taste, health, and packaging of the product. For health-conscious consumers, Big White Rabbit Milk Candy could launch low-sugar or sugar-free versions and reduce sugar intake while maintaining the original milk flavor. From the perspective of nutritional additives, the product could add vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients to the candy to enable consumers to enjoy delicious flavors while also benefiting from health benefits.

One definition of brand revitalization is giving a dying brand new life. According to the Life cycle of the brand theory, a brand will go through stages from introduction to growth to maturity, and then to decline or rebranding. Brands must stay in the growth phase of their life cycles because if they do not live up to user or consumer expectations, they will enter the decline phase. The goal of rebranding is to provide a company a distinct identity in the marketplace from that of its rivals [15]. Creating creative items that appeal to today's new customers rather than yesterday's is the first step in revitalizing a brand. A brand with diligently sustained has the capacity to persist over a lifetime, whereas a product is subject to a typical lifecycle, traversing through phases of introduction, growth, maturity, and eventual decline [16]. Therefore, only by constantly injecting fresh elements into products can they remain vibrant and avoid being eliminated from the market. The product innovation emphasizes on exploring the application of new technique and new materials and increasing the investment on product innovation and upgrading to satisfy the customers' needs and market change.

Except, the product innovation is not limited in products but also could be expanded to the product lines. To accommodate specific market segments, product line extension fundamentally involves the introduction of fresh offerings under established brand names or the modification of the product configuration within an existing product category [17]. By carefully selecting cultural symbols, a brand can create an image and a product that conform to the aesthetic standards and values of the target market, thus standing out in the competition. The packaging and trademark design of Maotai liquor reflect its cultural symbol characteristics. The bottles of Maotai liquor are usually made of exquisite ceramic or glass materials, with unique patterns and text logos printed on them. These designs not only highlight the noble quality of Maotai liquor but also make it an art piece. Meanwhile, the trademark of Maotai liquor has undergone multiple evolutions and upgrades, but it has always maintained its unique style and recognizability. Maotai is a traditional Chinese alcohol brand with a rich cultural heritage, and its originally target consumer group is the middle-aged group with economic standing and social experience [18]. To be honest, the development of China's traditional liquor brand Maotai cannot be separated from the inheritance of Chinese alcohol culture. The culture of alcohol in China has lasted for 4000 years [17]. Most Chinese consumers regard drinking Maotai as a symbol of status, which could be understood and analyzed from the perspective of esteem need according to the Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Maotai has captured this kind of psychological needs of consumers and has maintained a high-quality production line. However, in recent years, while maintaining its focus on the existing consumer groups, the question of how to increase the receptivity of younger customer segments has emerged as a significant issue and area of focus for Maotai's rejuvenation efforts. It could be an effective way for Maotai to engage in brand revitalization and increase sales including expanding product offerings and lines, crafting novel offerings that acclimate to the consumer demand. For instance, Moutai Prince Wine as one of the series of Moutai has won the love of many consumers with its unique taste and quality. In 2020, Maotai Prince wine achieved a revenue of nearly 5 billion yuan, making it a major product. On February 3, 2021, the 500ml Moutai Prince Wine (Xin Chou Year of the Ox) was launched online and became a bestseller. On that day, the page views were nearly 50,000 and the number of people who made reservations to purchase the wine was close to 13,000. It inherits the brewing process and excellent quality of Moutai wine, innovating in taste to better meet the taste preferences of modern consumers with affordable price [18]. Therefore, the innovation of product and product lines could be an effective strategy to increase the brand market share and satisfy the consumers' needs, which makes traditional brands more competitive and energized.

3. The marketing innovation for revitalizing traditional brands

The competitive landscape has becoming fiercer and altering the operating modes of traditional brands because of the emergence of new technology, the extraordinary growth and expansion of social networks, the availability of vast amounts of information to consumers [5]. When considering marketing innovation, it could not ignore the importance of consumer behaviors which plays a vital role in marketing research. The Self-determination theory (SDT) emphasizes the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic incentives, and the results lend credence to the claim that SDT effectively forecasts consumer attitudes and behaviors [19]. When consumers choose to join online brand community, they will use brand communities to share their consumption experiences and participate in brand activities, establishing connections with other consumers. As a matter of fact, the formation of such brand communities enhances consumers' sense of belonging to and loyalty to the brand. In the context of branding, individuals are more likely to develop a stronger attachment to a brand if it increases their sense of autonomy and relatedness [5]. During marketing innovation, brands should focus on building their own brand communities and hosting events like fan meetings or user conferences to encourage interaction and relationship-building among consumers. The Basic

Psychological Need Theory (BPNT), part of SDT, helps analyze consumer behavior based on intrinsic needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness [10]. From an autonomy perspective, consumers are drawn to brands that make them feel valued and empowered. Competence needs relate to trust in one's ability to accomplish tasks and control their environment [20]. Consumers may form an emotional attachment to a brand that fosters a sense of success and efficacy. Lastly, relatedness needs focus on the emotional bond consumers form with brands that offer acceptance and warmth [10]. Therefore, it is quite significant for traditional Chinese brands to consider the psychological needs based on SDT theory to conduct marketing innovation. A unique type of brand marketing called as "brand-IP co-branding" entails a commercial brand working along with another well-known intellectual property [21]. The White Rabbit Creamy Candy uses this strategy as a key marketing strategy to grow its product line, draw in customers, and achieve brand revitalization. For example, White Rabbit Creamy Candy partnered with Bright Daily to introduce innovative goods like Creamy Candy Ice Cream and White Rabbit Creamy Candy Flavored Milk. A co-branded flash mob with the theme "Happiness without Boundaries" was also introduced. Its successful scenario-based marketing evoked sentimental responses in customers and encouraged many of them to visit the location. Meanwhile, the new products developed through IP collaboration often have limited edition features, which can stimulate consumer purchasing desire and boost sales volume. Consumers could be easily attracted to this kind of limited products, since they may feel valued and have more choices when it comes to products from the angle of autonomy needs. Moreover, it contributes to resonate with youthful consumers by cooperating with young brands, thereby enhancing the brand's appeal. For instance, in 2022, the iconic 60-year-old brand White Rabbit Creamy Candy embarked on a collaborative venture with the contemporary 10-year-old brand Scent Library. From a relatedness perspective, the collaborative branding initiative with Big White Rabbit enhances emotional resonance, strengthening the bond consumers feel towards the products. By leveraging "Children's Day" as a marketing opportunity, an exclusive product range—such as perfumes and lotions infused with the White Rabbit Creamy Candy scent—was introduced. Nostalgia, a powerful emotional cue, can strengthen brand connections by evoking past experiences or cultural heritage. Ads that reference nostalgic elements can resonate deeply, especially with consumers tied to specific cultural eras [22]. This nostalgia strategy evokes feelings of purity and fun, closely tied to childhood memories, and strengthens the brand's sensory impression. This kind of marketing innovation tactic endows traditional brands with renewed vigor, while simultaneously extending the horizons of consumer perception. It reinvigorates consumer interest in the brand and facilitates the augmentation of the consumer groups. The White Rabbit Creamy Candy could offer some online courses and workshops to help consumers learn knowledge related to the brand history based on the aspect of competence needs. In this way, it allows them to have a deeper understanding of the brand culture and feel confident when using products.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of demands theory, consumers' demands have evolved from the basic material level to a higher spiritual level as the globe enters the age of consuming. Most brands are continuously updating their marketing techniques in response to the consumer experience that consumers seek. By introducing co-branded series, they have aggressively responded to the market trend in addition to raising the caliber of their own products [23]. Based on the research, there is a growing trend to consider the innovation potential. It is provided by the creation of new distribution channels, branding strategies, communication types or pricing mechanisms. Even though marketing innovation is frequently combined with the predominately technological focus supporting product or service innovation [24]. In the current market context, marketing innovation manifests that traditional brands need to change their marketing strategies from the aspects of sales channels and models, promotion strategies, and cross-border marketing to cater to the new market trends. It is necessary to completely restructure development strategies and make the shift to digitalization of their operations

to survive and attain high economic outcomes and competitiveness. To be honest, an essential component in the digital business transformation process is the integration of digital marketing strategies. It encompasses innovative information and communication technology-based approaches.

The conceptualization of cross-border marketing could be defined that brands leverage the qualities and benefits of their own brands, refine the core components, and work with "partners" of the core components to fit from multiple perspectives of a shared user experience [18]. Furthermore, the cross-border marketing extends beyond mere collaboration with diverse brands, it also encompasses engagement with various platforms, including Weibo and TikTok, as well as distinct cultural and traditional media. For instance, from the aspect of cooperation with various platforms, Fenghua as a typical traditional Chinese brand entered a strategic partnership with Weibo and resulted in the conception of the widely acclaimed topic "Fenghua Business War" in the 2023. This topic swiftly ascended to the pinnacle of the trending agenda, accumulating over 170 million views and 4.4 million user engagements on Weibo. Such remarkable metrics significantly enhanced Fenghua's sphere of influence and augmented its popularity. In 2021, Fenghua began to cooperate with TikTok. The topic "bankruptcy turmoil" brought a huge amount of traffic, and the sales volume on that day reached 20,000 orders, equivalent to the sales volume of the previous month.

Maotai has demonstrated exceptional success in cross-border marketing through collaborations with various brands. A prime example is its partnership with Luckin Coffee in 2023, which introduced the "sauce-flavored latte." The launch was a massive success, generating one million yuan in sales on the first day and selling 5.42 million cups [25]. Social media data reveals that on September 4th, 2023, topics related to the collaboration and the "sauce-flavored latte" trended on Weibo, with "Luckin's response to whether drinking liquor-themed coffee is advisable" gaining over 210 million views. On Tiktok, "Wow, I saw Luckin and Moutai collaborating!" also became a trending topic. In the third quarter of 2023, the average monthly trading client count surpassed 58 million, while the total number of consumer customers surpassed 200 million [25]. This co-branding initiative went viral on social media platforms like WeChat Moments, creating a phenomenon in digital marketing. The cross-border between Maotai and Luckin Coffee has adeptly captured the psyche of the youth demographic, successfully addressing the issue of its erstwhile elevated pricing and narrow target market, thereby igniting a surge of interest within the youthful consumer segment.

4. The innovation of sales channel

The internet plays a crucial role in people's daily lives. In particular, the internet is regarded as a location where customer interactions may be built to improve communication and information gathering [26]. A recent study highlights that the internet helps satisfy both autonomy and relatedness needs, according to self-determination theory [27]. Consumers can freely choose content, products, and services, satisfying their autonomy, while also sharing information and building community connections, fulfilling their relatedness needs. Traditionally, many Chinese brands relied on offline sales. However, with the rapid growth of e-commerce and social media, consumer behavior has shifted online. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, China's e-commerce transaction volume surpassed 40 trillion yuan in 2021, and online retail sales reached a record high in 2022. In the first three quarters of 2023, online retail sales totaled 10.8 trillion yuan, an 11.6% increase from the previous year [28]. Moreover, based on the data analysis, the digital commerce segment constitutes 25.7 percent of the total retail sales of consumer goods within the societal framework. Live streaming e-commerce and instant retail, among other new e-commerce models, have seen rapid development and driving significant growth in online consumption. According to the self-determination theory, consumers' behaviors of online consumption could be understood from the perspective of the autonomy need. It means that they have more autonomy and choice in deciding what products and service to purchase. In addition, compared with traditional offline sales, online

sales usually have lower costs, but still face some issues like reputation damage [29]. In contrast to conventional offline or online commerce, where various channels function separately, omnichannel business necessitates that retailers simultaneously coordinate and synergize all channels [8]. The merits of channel integration are that customers can purchase in a unified and self-controlled manner. It gives customers more options, such selecting the best channel based on their buying preferences and product attributes [30]. Moreover, channel integration helps brands adjust their channel strategies flexibly based on market demand and resource conditions, thereby optimizing resource allocation. By analyzing the performance of each channel, brands can identify efficient channels and increase their investment, while reducing investment in inefficient channels. For instance, traditional brands could reduce fixed costs such as rent, decoration, and personnel for physical storefronts and allocate more resources to product development and sales channel innovation. Meanwhile, traditional Chinese brands can focus on investing in digital technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things to enhance the efficiency of channel operations and market competitiveness. At the same time, they should build digital marketing platforms to achieve precise marketing and personalized services.

There are some specific strategies on how traditional Chinese brands can achieve online and offline integration. Traditional brands can join major e-commerce platforms such as Tmall, JD.com, and Pinduoduo to leverage their traffic advantage and quickly reach more consumers. Brands can boost awareness and sales through platform promotions, discount coupons, and limited time offers. They can also develop an official website or app for direct online sales, improving channel control, user experience, and data collection for precision marketing. For example, Moutai's digital marketing portal, "i Moutai", marks a key shift in its sales strategy, transitioning from a single storefront to a dual-channel model, combining traditional stores with the "i Moutai" platform. The "i Moutai" predominantly adopts an online subscription coupled with an in-store self-service pickup model for sales transactions. On the day the program was launched, over 24 million people had subscriptions overall, and 3,162 million people had appointments [18]. Then, it is an effective way to utilize social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, TikTok, and RED to conduct content marketing, live streaming sales, and collaborations with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) to increase brand visibility and engagement and improve communication and relationship with customers. For example, in August 2021, Fenghua as Chinese domestic personal care brands embarked on a live streaming initiative and initiated product sales via TikTok. By November of the same annum, the company's sales volume on TikTok had surged to a total of 15 million yuan, marking a sevenfold increase compared to the preceding month, October 2021. In 2023, TikTok began promoting the official flagship store of Fenghua on its platform. On that day, the platform showed that the store had 2.641 million followers and achieved sales of 4.035 million. The Fenghua brand capitalized on this wave of traffic and continued to generate buzz, resulting in a sharp increase in sales. In 2023, Fenghua was named a Shanghai Time-honored Brand by the commerce department and regained its vitality. While traditional brands are focusing on expanding their online sales channels, they could not ignore the development of offline sales. They should develop marketing strategies that are tailored to different types of sales locations. For example, when selling Big White Rabbit Milk Candy in a mall, larger packages and original flavors can be sold together to increase sales through thin profit margins, especially targeting middle-aged and older consumers who prefer offline shopping. In conclusion, online channels offer convenience and product information, while offline channels enhance participation and satisfaction through physical displays and interactions. Integration of both allows for a seamless, personalized shopping experience across channels. By analyzing the innovation of sales channels of above traditional brands, it could be identified that channel integration and multi-dimensional sales model could better promote brand revitalization. The integration of future sales channels can leverage artificial intelligence and big data technologies to achieve the intelligence and

automation of the sales process. For instance, the purchase conversion rate can be enhanced when brands use intelligent recommendation systems to offer personalized shopping suggestions to consumers.

5. Conclusion

Brand rejuvenation faces challenges from rapid technological advancements, which shorten product lifespans and require traditional brands to refresh products to stay relevant [7]. However, revitalization is a lengthy and costly process. Traditional brands must adapt to changing consumer needs and market trends, yet many focus too narrowly on the brand itself, neglecting evolving demands. This can lead to products being rejected by consumers and eventually phased out. Furthermore, internal organizational stagnation, lacking innovation across departments like marketing, R&D, and production, hinders brand synergy. Additionally, expanding sales channels, such as livestreaming, intensifies competition, with price wars and cost-effectiveness dominating. However, the focus on price often compromises product quality, damaging brand reputation [27]. Traditional brands, with their rich history and cultural heritage, must strike a balance during revitalization by preserving traditions while introducing innovation. Over-innovation risks diluting the brand's core values, while inaction may lead to aging and loss of competitiveness.

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