



The Influence of Industrial Role Positioning Strategy in Place Brand Internationalization on the Purchase Intention of Host Country Consumers from the Perspective of Moral Legitimacy

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Abstract. The transnational place brands often have difficulty in gaining role identification from host country consumers due to trade barriers and regulatory differences. Based on a moral legitimacy perspective, this study proposes a research model of how internationalized place brands implement industrial role positioning strategy to drive host country consumers' trust and purchase intention. This study argues that place brands can promote host country consumers' trust and purchase intention by adopting a three-dimensional industrial role positioning strategy of cluster normalization, technology specialization, and product welfare. These research findings have management implications for place brands to develop internationalization strategies based on industrial role positioning.

Keywords: Place Brand Internationalization · Industrial Role Positioning · Brand Trust · Purchase Intention · Moral Legitimacy

1 Introduction

The internationalization process of place brands is challenged by the overlapping effects of anti-globalization, the COVID-19 epidemic, and geopolitical conflicts, which have created many obstacles between regional economies. However, differentiated regional industrial roles can create a unique and powerful local image that provides a boost to enhance regional identity and promote the internationalization of place brands [3]. Place brands such as France with the reputation of “Wine Kingdom”, and Yiwu with the reputation of “World Supermarket” have shaped strong brand associations in the minds of host country consumers through distinctive industrial roles. However, there are also many place brands that have difficulty in gaining competitive advantage in the international market due to the lack of appropriate industrial role positioning. For example, although the same as Vietnam coffee in the world's prime growing areas, Yunnan coffee is difficult to get out of the domestic market because of the lack of industrial characteristics. Xi'an Bailuyuan culture village became the top flow of the

market, but due to homogeneous industrial layout, it was eventually deserted by tourists. Therefore, how to develop effective regional industrial role positioning strategies in international business is a realistic issue for place brands to obtain consumer equity in host country.

The existing literature mainly investigates the positioning mechanism of different roles within the region (e.g., government, leader) [4, 11] and their effects on the audience (e.g., cognitive structure, behavioral intention) [5, 10]. However, the industrial role positioning of place brands and its social acceptance have rarely been considered from the perspective of consumer, especially lacking the excavation of manipulative strategies. In essence, the key to the overall regional competitiveness lies in the social acceptance of regional industry [13]. The moral legitimacy derived from institutional theory expresses a pro-social value orientation [14], which enhances perceptions of justification and trust [6] and leads to consumers' willingness to purchase [12]. Thus, moral legitimacy theory can provide a new research perspective for exploring regional industrial role positioning strategies aimed at obtaining host country consumers' purchase intention.

Based on the above considerations, this study will systematically explore how transnational place brands implement the industrial role positioning strategy to promote host country consumers' trust and purchase intention from the perspective of moral legitimacy. Specifically, the following three research questions are discussed: (1) Based on the theory of moral legitimacy, what industrial role positioning strategies can be developed for place brand internationalization? (2) How do these strategies drive host country consumers' trust and purchase intention in place brands? (3) How to build a regional industrial role positioning strategy system to promote host country consumers' purchase intention? What is its management logic? This study is innovative in terms of both research perspective and research content, with a view to providing theoretical explanations and management inspiration for place brand internationalization.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1 Regional Industrial Role Positioning

The existing literature has abundant insights in regional brand and role research. A place brand is a common brand with high popularity and reputation in the market developed from the agglomeration and synergy effect of specific industries in the region [7]. And the place here refers to a community of areas with common special attributes, including cities, regions, and countries [9]. Role positioning, on the other hand, refers to that role individuals clarifying and meeting the expectations of social public for role norms, capabilities and responsibilities generated by certain relationship nodes [2]. In place brand internationalization, this study defines regional industrial role positioning as the process by which a place brand based on a specific industrial cluster anchors unique and positive regional brand associations in the minds of host country consumers by meeting the norms, capabilities, and responsibilities expectations of social public.

2.2 Regional Industrial Role Positioning Strategy Based on Moral Legitimacy Theory

In institutional theory, moral legitimacy reflects a positive evaluation of organizations and their activities at the normative level, which enhances the perception of the organization's trustworthiness [6, 14]. Role positioning constructed by organizations at the moral level can promote the acceptability of target audiences [12]. Moral legitimacy can be obtained through the manipulation of structural, procedural and outcome legitimation [14]. Organizations that regulate internal structures and enhance the ability to collaborate can achieve structural recognition [16]; Organizations make sincere efforts to adopt professional technologies that meet social expectations to achieve valuable goals, which can acquire procedural identification [1]; Organizations demonstrate mission commitment by meeting the quality and value concerns of audiences through well-being-oriented products can gain outcome recognition [8]. Therefore, from the perspective of moral legitimacy, this study conceptualizes regional industrial role positioning strategy as cluster normalization, technology specialization, and product welfare. These strategies based on moral legitimacy will facilitate place brands to obtain positive brand associations from consumers, so as to gain consumer equity in host country market.

2.3 Regional Industrial Role Positioning Strategy and Place Brand Trust

Role positioning constructed at the moral level can produce social effects and help to gain positive evaluations and recognition. In place brand internationalization, place brand trust is consumers' confidence and willingness to recognize the brand in a specific region, which stems from consumers' perception of brand legitimacy [17]. Therefore, the regional industrial role positioning strategy based on moral legitimacy theory can drive place brand trust of consumers in the host country.

2.4 Place Brand Trust and Host Country Consumers' Purchase Intention

For transnational brands, trust is an important condition to gain competitive advantage in international markets. The acquisition of legitimacy perception can enhance host country consumers' trust and dependence on brands, which in turn affects consumers' behavioral intention [15]. Accordingly, when host country consumers perceive a place brand to be trustworthy in terms of moral legitimacy, they will have a positive evaluation and purchase intention towards the place brand.

3 Research Model

Based on the above theoretical basis, in place brand internationalization, this study proposes a conceptual model that regional industrial role positioning strategy drives host country consumers' place brand trust and purchase intention (see Fig. 1).

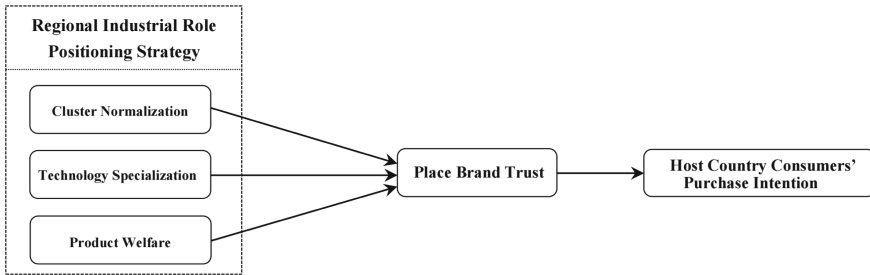


Fig. 1. Research Model

4 Conclusions

Influenced by anti-globalization, the COVID-19 epidemic and geopolitical conflicts, the place brand internationalization process has suffered. In order to address this practical challenge, this study explicitly constructs a conceptual model of regional industrial role positioning strategy based on moral legitimacy theory, and systematically explores the path mechanism of industrial role positioning strategies such as cluster standardization, technology specialization, and product welfare driving host country consumers' trust and purchase intention. These research findings may provide theoretical explanations for revealing the laws of regional industrial role positioning, and offer management inspiration for the construction of place brand internationalization.

Acknowledgements. The author sincerely thanks for the financial support of the 2021 Postgraduate Innovation Foundation Project (YJS2021062) offered by Jiangxi Normal University.

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