



IP image design of the time-honored herbal tea "Xinglinchun"

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Abstract. Former well-established brands that were once popular are gradually declining in today's technological advancements, require innovative thinking for development. Through the case study of "Xinglinchun" herbal tea, brand elements are extracted, brand personality is imbued, an IP image is designed, and the brand story is told. Transformation is carried out around the IP image, resulting in the creation of emojis, posters, herbal tea shops, and other new application scenarios, strengthening the brand's visual identity and expanding its influence. The use of the IP image is to communicate the brand's value, allowing the traditional brand to merge with contemporary trends and to rebirth.

Keywords: Traditional brands, "Xinglinchun" herbal tea, IP image design.

1 Introduction

Many conventional brands have a relatively conservative and traditional style. However, under the impact of new media and internet culture, they have failed to keep up with the changing taste of the buyers. As a result, they gradually fade out by time. Through Social Media (SM), consumers are able to connect and interact with their favorite brands and share messages with friends, peers, and acquaintances.^[1]

Brand innovation starts from the IP Image. With a cute visual image and a diverse communication, these approaches intend to convey the brand's inner values. Via certain market researches, analyzing the brand label of Guangdong herbal tea "Xinglinchun" and selecting herbal ingredients, a cute and stylized design, the "XiaoNuan" IP image is employed and created. In the advanced development and transformation, a series of derivatives, including emojis and posters, is designed, along with the exploration of the new user scenarios to reinforce the user's brand loyalty.

Research has shown that often these warranties provide little value to the customer from an economic perspective.^[2] By integrating traditional brand names with innovative design and modernized communication, this approach aims to guide consumers to rediscover the brand's value. This enhancing the connection between traditional brands and the public revives and resurrects the brand to giving a new vivid life for it.

2 Development status

2.1 "Xinglinchun" herbal tea

"Xinglinchun" is one of the well-established chain brands in Dongguan, and its name is derived from the allusion "Xinglinchunnuan". The legend has it that during the Three Kingdoms period of the Eastern Han Dynasty, there was a physician named Dong Feng, who was regarded as one of the "Three Divine Healers of Jian'an" alongside Hua Tuo and Zhang Zhongjing. Dong Feng traveled to provide medical care throughout Lu Shan in Jiangxi and treated patients without asking for payment. Instead, he requested them to plant apricot trees, with five trees for those with severe illnesses and one tree for those with minor ailments. Many years later, Dong Feng's residence was filled with apricot trees, and when the apricots ripened, they were exchanged for grains to continue providing relief to the poor. Hence, "Xinglinchun" embodies the compassionate and virtuous character of a doctor who aims to heal and help others.

"Xinglinchun" herbal tea represents a cultural symbol of Dongguan and aims to promote the Lingnan herbal tea culture, serving as a window for people to get acquainted with this culture^[3]. However, in today's highly competitive market, the brand's influence has been on the decline, and it lacks the recognition of brands such as "Deng Lao LiangCha," "Nian Ci An," and "Huang Zhenlong". In terms of taste, "Xinglinchun" herbal tea is characterized by bitterness and spiciness and features dated packaging, which is less diversified and modern compared to the popular milk tea brands available in the market. As for the consumer groups, brands like "Wang Lao Ji," "Jiaduobao," and "Heqizheng" reach to a wider range of age groups. In terms of marketing, the development of social media has transformed the current market environment and marketing strategy. Traditional herbal teas like "Xinglinchun" are no longer in popular, resulting in the decaying brand loyalty, and consumers are gradually distancing themselves from old-brand products.

Therefore, traditional brands need to adapt to the popular trends and evolve their brand development strategies.

2.2 IP image

Leveraging IP to enhance the probability in the information age, in this "new" cultural era, the IP character design is utilized to embody brand culture. In the help of social media, brand promotion tends to be more entertaining.^[4] To design a distinctive IP character that aligns with the brand's tone, the first step is to extract keywords by considering brand characteristics and unique selling points. Then, choose common elements that resonate with the brand and use methods like deformation, color changes, headgear, or assembling to refine the character's appearance. This process establishes a stronger and more accurate connection between the IP design and the brand itself. Consumers gradually understand the brand via the carefully designed visual elements presented in the brand's IP.^[5]

For example, the brand IP character of "Milk Snow Ice City" is a snowman holding an ice cream scepter and wearing a crown. It combines the sweet and joyful brand philosophy and uses the assembling method to refine the character's features, constructing the Snow King character. In the case of JD.com, the brand character is a white dog with an electronic and technological touch. The dog, in general, symbolizes loyalty, and the modification of its proportions aligns with JD.com's brand philosophy of "Customer First." This IP character has an obvious recognition.

Hence, considering customer emotional needs, it's becoming increasingly important for brand to be emotionally rich and more approachable. For this reason, IP character design is playing a vital important role.

3 Design analysis

3.1 Audience analysis

With the rapid pace of modern life and the increasingly working stress and frequent weather changes in Guangdong, various suboptimal health conditions are on the rise. Symptoms like suboptimal health, dry mouth, sore throat after indulging in various foods, and more are becoming prevalent. This has resulted in a significant demand for herbal tea in Guangdong. The targeting consumer base for "Xinglinchun" herbal tea is quite extensive, covering a wide range from young people to middle-aged and elderly individuals. For instance, balanced herbal teas are suitable for adults who experience overwork, insomnia, or excessive alcohol and tobacco consumption. Herbal teas with specific therapeutic properties are fitting for individuals with symptoms like coughs, sore throats, lung heat, and gastric bloating. In addition, leisure herbal teas cater to children with heatiness, eye strain, and similar conditions as well. Therefore, the IP character design for "Xinglinchun" herbal tea brand should be universally appealing to cater to its diverse consumer base.

3.2 Element extraction

Because the herbal tea carries a profound cultural heritage, its design should encompass an understanding of the herbal tea culture. In the case of "Xinglinchun," the character "Xing" (apricot) represents the spiritual essence of traditional Chinese medicine culture, embodying the concept of "Great Medicine Requires Great Sincerity." It is also known for its traditional effectiveness, freshness, and variety. Incorporating apricot elements into the design makes it easily recognizable and creates a distinct identity. The phrase "Xing Lin Chun Nuan" has historical significance, originating from the late Eastern Han Dynasty and Three Kingdoms period. "Qu Ju" was a prominent style of clothing during the Eastern Han period. Because of this, it is considered as an apt choice for the IP character's costume design.

The character's personality draws inspiration from the salespeople of "Xinglinchun" herbal tea—patient, professional, and enthusiastic. Herbal teas come in various flavors and are composed of different combinations of Chinese herbs, ranging from five to more than ten different types of herbs. The herbal teas commonly used herbs such as

the Suye, Yuzhu, Fuling, and Gegen that were extracted as ingredients. Then, they were boiled and refined. This process is used to as an analogy for the character design, which evolves in the different phases.

4 Design Practice

4.1 IP image design

The design process involved extracting key elements such as the apricot, a product-related herb-boiling pot, the packaging of herbal tea, and the product's Chenpi Plum. Various design concepts were explored, resulting to this final version, a cute herb harvester character (as shown in Figure 1).



Fig. 1. IP image preliminary design plan

The character's appearance was designed in an even cuter cartoon style, using a cute exterior as a carrier to promote "Xinglinchun" herbal tea, which is a well-established brand. This approach creates a strong contrast and changes the public's perception of traditional brands as serious and formal. Because the cute cartoon style aligns with the preferences of the general publics, it reaches to the broader audience. [6] The character's head-to-body ratio was designed as 1:1, with an increased emphasis on the eyes and a reduction in the prominence of the nose. The external appearance is shaped with multiple curves and rounded edges to reinforce the cuteness in the visual characteristics of the IP character. The "Yin-Yang Eyes" in green and brown correspond to the clothing and hair colors, increasing the recognition of the brand's IP design.

The IP character is named "XiaoNuan". It takes on the form of various medicinal herbs to her design. Despite a young appearance, "XiaoNuan" is attentive, warm, professional, and well-versed in the effects of different medicinal herbs. The character has a passion for the tea making, the chess playing, stand-up comedy, and travel, and is always curious about exploring and collecting rare herbs and treasures in the deep forests. A gradient blush on the cheeks accentuates the character's healthy and vibrant complexion, embodying qualities like being warm-hearted, enthusiastic, and considerate (as shown in Figure 2).

The two-dimensional IP character was subjected to a pseudo-3D rendering process, adding bright and dark areas, as well as reflective shadows to each local color block. This enhancement gives the character a more striking visual impact (as shown in Figure 3).



Fig. 2. Three views of IP image



Fig. 3. IP 2.5D image rendering

The costume and accessory design draws inspiration from clothing in the Eastern Han Dynasty and the evolution of traditional Chinese herbs. The design elements for the IP character's attire incorporate herbs such as Su Ye, Yu Zhu, Fu Ling, and Ge Gen. The "Qu Ju" (rounded-corner robe) garment is combined with the herb Ge Gen leaves. The Ge Gen leaves have a distinctive three-lobed, wavy outline, and their leaf shape is rhombic and circular. In the design, two Ge Gen leaves are used as the left and right panels of the "Qu Ju" robe, modernizing the traditional attire to align with the concept of innovating the time-honored brand and merging tradition with modernity. A long, pale brown Yu Zhu strip is used as a belt, complemented by several white Fu Ling pieces suspended from a red cord as a waist accessory. The curled and wrinkled Su Ye is designed to resemble pants. A half of an apricot is used as a hair ornament, improving the recognition of the IP character (as shown in Figure 4).



Fig. 4. IP image element design description



Fig. 5. Main colors of IP image

4.2 Color extraction

The color scheme for the main IP character is inspired by the brand color of "Xinglinchun" herbal tea, which is primarily green. Various Chinese herbs are also predominantly deep green in color. The brand's signs, interior decor, and packaging often feature extensive use of green, with white and red used for differentiation and accents. Therefore, the color scheme for the IP character includes different shades and saturations of green. The two Ge Gen leaves that make up the left and right panels of the "Qu Ju" robe consist of dark green and light green. The pants formed by the Su Ye are a combination of grass green and leaf green. The light brown hair color is drawn from the bittersweet herbal tea and the cool and sweet tortoise jelly, with light yellow inner lining and cuffs that harmonize with the yellow apricot in the hair. A touch of off-white and red is used around the waist to balance the overall visual effect. The overall color scheme for the IP character utilizes low saturation and high brightness. This brings a calm and comfortable effect without causing excessive visual impact, making it appealing and aligning with the character's gentle and adorable traits (as shown in Figure 5).

4.3 Brand IP derivative series

The design of a brand's IP character needs to adapt to new ways of communication and widespread dissemination in the context of the internet era. It should utilize various mediums that are commonly seen in people's daily lives, such as animated images and

short videos. This can involve forms of interaction like dialogues, engagement with topics, and everyday storytelling to effectively communicate with the target audiences.^[7] Making the brand IP character more visual can attract more people to learn about the brand, achieving promotional effects. Emojis used in conversations can serve as a powerful means of communication. They are products of the ever-changing online social sphere, and they are inherently fun and highly shareable.^[8]

Building upon the completed design of the IP character, it's important to give the character various emotions like happiness, anger, sadness, etc. These emotions can be expressed through facial expressions, body language, and accompanying graphics. Nine static emojis can convey a range of common emotions and physical actions used in everyday life, such as "urgency, surprise, anger, thumbs up, love you," and more. Using the adorable IP character as a vehicle, this subtly integrates the old brand into people's daily communication, becoming a way for individuals to express themselves. This continually strengthens the brand's presence in the target groups (as shown in Figures 6, 7, 8, 9)



Fig. 6. IP image emoticon package design



Fig. 7. Dynamic emoticon package please sequence



Fig. 8. Dynamic emoticon question mark sequence



Fig. 9. Dynamic emoticon package appearance sequence

4.4 Dress extension design

The transformation and extension of the main IP character incorporate various other herbal ingredients found in "Xinglinchun" herbal tea. Eight herbal ingredients, including Jin Yin, Dandelion, Juemingzi, Balloon Flower Root, Houttuynia, Goji Berry, Orange Peel, and Lotus Leaf, were selected as themes. Their external structures and forms were used to design the character's skirts, sleeves, and accessories. Petal structures and external leaf patterns were extracted to create details on the clothing's hem and cuffs. These eight transformations feature distinctive headgear, belts for differentiation and connection, and include accents in the form of the ingredients' fruits or leaves (as shown in Figure 10).



Fig. 10. IP image Dress extension draft

4.5 Scene poster design

The five poster designs convey different information characteristics of "Xinglinchun" herbal tea. (as shown in Figure 11).





Fig. 11. Scene poster design

4.6 Peripheral design

The branding and derived products provide a deeper exploration and realization of IP value, further extending the brand culture.^[9] IP-designed derivative merchandise serves as an excellent means of brand communication, enhancing the brand's stickiness with consumers.^[10] Building upon the “XiaoNuan” IP image, the “Xinglinchun” herbal tea products were expanded and designed, including paper cups, tea bags, bags, and gift boxes. This approach fulfills both aesthetic and practical aspects, raising brand recognition and exploring new consumer markets (as shown in Figure 12).



Fig. 12. Peripheral products of the brand

5 Conclusions

“Xinglinchun” herbal tea is a well-known old-brand brand in Dongguan, and IP image design has been employed to boost brand innovation and development. Through analyzing its origins and characteristics, key elements were extracted to design an IP image, which was then given personalized features. This led to the creation of emoticons, character transformations, promotional short videos, and other new applications, strengthening the connection between the brand's IP image and consumers. The use of the IP image was leveraged to narrate the brand's cultural story, and new media marketing strategies were applied to attract a fan base, ultimately contributing to the prosperity and revival of this old-brand.

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