



Cross-Brand Collaboration Strategies and Consumer Identity in New Tea Beverage Brands

Ziyue Meng

School of Arts, Performance Major, Nanchang University, Jiangxi 330031, China
5207124013@ncu.edu.cn

Abstract. Currently, competition in the new tea beverage market has become intense, with growing product homogeneity. Cross-brand collaboration has become a key strategy for brands to break through development bottlenecks and connect with young consumers. Existing research mostly focuses on cooperation formats or consumer identity analysis, yet rarely explores their internal mechanism, leading to a disconnect between theory and marketing practice and forming a clear research gap. This study adopts a case-study approach, examining Heytea × Fendi and Nayuki × CCTV News collaborations to analyze how cross-brand communication strategies influence consumer identity, emotional connection, and group belonging. It summarizes two successful models: “democratization of luxury symbols” and “leverage of mainstream culture,” both shaping consumer identity through an integrated “symbol-narrative-interaction” communication system. The luxury symbol model constructs identity via accessible brand prestige and social capital, while the mainstream culture model strengthens emotional bonds by awakening collective memory and resonance. Findings show cross-brand cooperation essentially involves grafting and recreating symbolic resources. Long-term value depends on the alignment of symbolic meaning, brand core identity, and consumer values, offering a path for new tea brands to shift from short-term online traffic to long-term consumer value and identity building.

Keywords: New Tea Beverage, Cross-brand Collaboration, Communication Strategy, Consumer Identity.

1 Introduction

In recent years, the competition in the new tea industry has been increasing, the phenomenon of product homogeneity has been serious, and the pressure of industry survival has continued to rise. Under the background of this industry, cross-brand cooperation has been frequently used by many brands with its efficient marketing value. It has become an important way for brands to make topics, attract traffic and reshape brand image. From Heytea to luxury brand Fendi to launch joint products, to the cooperation between Nayuki and authoritative cultural IP such as CCTV news, collaborative marketing has become a key strategic choice for new tea brands to break through the bottleneck of growth.

However, it is worth noting that the market practice of cross-border cooperation in new tea drinks is increasing, but the corresponding academic research is relatively lagging behind. In the existing relevant literature, some studies only stay at the operational level of cooperation strategy, analyze the internal logic and value co-creation mechanism of brand cross-border cooperation, and propose corresponding optimization schemes [1]. The other part of the research focuses on the theoretical discussion of consumer identity, and believes that the social value perceived by consumers when purchasing joint products can effectively enhance their purchase intention [2]. Few studies have combined brand communication strategies with consumer identity to systematically reveal the role of communication strategies in consumer psychological identity. This research gap not only restricts the deepening development of the theory in this field, but also leads to the lack of systematic theoretical guidance and practical basis when brands carry out cross-border cooperation.

This study directly addresses this disconnect between strategy and identity. It focuses on two core questions: First, what communication strategies do new tea beverage brands employ in their cross-brand collaborations? Second, how do these communication strategies influence consumers' identity, emotional connection, and sense of group belonging? By answering these questions, this study aims to construct an analytical framework for understanding the mechanism linking communication strategies and consumer identity in new tea cross-brand collaborations, offering both academic support and practical guidance for new consumer brands on how to build sustainable brand equity through collaborations.

This study is an in-depth exploration of the disconnection between communication strategies and consumer identity. The core focuses on two major issues : First, what specific communication strategies will be used by new tea brands in the process of cross-brand cooperation ? Secondly, in what ways do these communication strategies affect consumers ' identity, emotional connection and group sense of belonging ? This study attempts to answer the above questions, build a correlation analysis framework between communication strategies and consumer identity in cross-brand cooperation of new tea drinks, and provide academic support and practical guidance for new tea drinks brands to build sustainable brand assets through cross-border cooperation.

The study selected two representative cases of Heytea × Fendi and Nayuki × CCTV news ' newspaper ' milk tea for in-depth analysis. The advantage of the case study method is that it can make a comprehensive and practical interpretation of the complex social marketing phenomenon in combination with the specific situation. This study systematically collates multi-dimensional data such as official publicity materials, social media content, and industry research reports, deeply interprets the cases, and accurately explores the communication logic and consumer identity construction mechanism behind specific marketing events.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

As an important brand marketing strategy, cross-brand cooperation has received extensive attention from the academic community in recent years. The existing research analyzes from multiple perspectives such as consumer behavior, brand value, and communication effects, which provides a solid theoretical basis and method reference for this research.

Regarding In the field of consumer behavior research, in the study of the influence of tea brand joint marketing on purchase intention, Fan Dandan and Wu Xue constructed a theoretical model with brand awareness, brand fit, and participation of opinion leaders as independent variables, consumer trust as an intermediary variable, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. Through empirical analysis, the mechanism of tea brand joint marketing on consumer purchase intention was tested [3]. This study clarifies the mediating role of consumer trust, but the systematic analysis of the communication strategy itself is insufficient, and the specific role of different communication channels and content forms in joint marketing is not deeply explored.

From the perspective of brand value, Zhao Yan and Wang Siyi analyzed the influence of brand collaboration on customer perceived value from the six dimensions of product, service, emotion and social value, and confirmed that collaboration strategy can effectively enhance customer perceived value [2]. This study provides a reference for interpreting the psychological mechanism of consumers in joint marketing, but the research mostly relies on case analysis, and does not systematically explore the communication strategy, especially the lack of in-depth analysis of media selection and communication content design.

Yang Bingqi studies the synergy between visual expression and marketing strategy in cross-brand cooperation, analyzes its impact on the accumulation of brand equity of emerging brands, highlights the core role of visual innovation in shaping brand image and enhancing consumer loyalty, and provides ideas for the visual dimension analysis of communication strategy in this study [4]. However, this study only focuses on the dimension of brand equity, and does not deeply explore the formation mechanism of consumers' recognition of co-branding.

In international studies, Ali Selcuk Can et al. pointed out in the study of the impact of co-branding advertising on the perception of destination brand authenticity that co-branding advertising including real co-branding can positively enhance the perceived authenticity and related behavioral intentions of relatively unreal brands, revealing the strengthening effect of co-branding advertising on brand authenticity [5]. Through bibliometric analysis and systematic review, Sara Tavassoli et al. constructed the conceptual framework of co-advertising, clarified the definition of co-advertising, and combed the existing research results and core themes [6]. These studies provide an international perspective for interpreting the mechanism of joint communication, but the research scenarios are mostly focused on tourism destination brands, lacking targeted analysis of fast-moving consumer goods such as tea drinks.

In addition, some studies have focused on the market communication phenomenon and social repercussions of joint marketing. In the cold thinking of brand cooperation, Xiao Yingjing noticed the consumer rush to buy caused by joint marketing, and pointed

out that hunger marketing and IP effect were the potential communication strategies [7]. Zhou Kaihang analyzed the role of brand co-branding marketing in promoting the development of new tea brands from the perspective of hot sales of surrounding products [8]. Although this kind of research lacks systematic theoretical analysis, it provides a real market background and communication phenomenon reference for this research.

Starting from the design dimension, Zhou Wen et al. explored the application of cross-brand collaboration in the brand image building of new tea drinks, and analyzed the multi-dimensional impact of collaborative design on the brand [9]. From the perspective of consumer identity, Gelily and Xu Jing studied the impact of different forms of cooperation on consumer attention, and proposed that not all brand cooperation can be recognized by consumers, emphasizing the importance of brand fit and consumer psychological consistency [10]. These two studies provide theoretical clues for this study from the perspective of design strategy and consumer identity.

Ali Selcuk Can et al. further proposed in another related study that compared with single-brand advertising, co-brand advertising can increase tourists' search behavior, stimulate product interest, and then enhance tourists' willingness to visit, which provides empirical support for interpreting the mechanism of co-brand advertising on consumer behavior [11].

Based on the existing research, previous results have explored brand co-branding marketing from multiple dimensions such as consumer behavior, brand value, and visual design, which has laid a theoretical foundation for this research. However, most studies only focus on a single dimension and do not systematically integrate communication strategies with consumer identity. Especially for the specific industry of new tea, how to build consumer brand identity by means of communication remains to be further explored, and this study is to make up for the research gap between communication strategy and consumer identity.

Based on the above literature review, this study builds a theoretical analysis framework of communication strategy and consumer identity. Among them, the communication strategy is analyzed from four dimensions: partner selection, communication channel combination, visual narrative and product design, and interaction mechanism construction. Consumer identity is measured from three aspects: symbolic identity, emotional connection identity and social belonging identity. This framework will be used as the theoretical basis of case analysis to guide the systematic research of the following two typical cases.

3 Research Design

3.1 Research Method

This study uses a double-case comparative study method. The case study method itself is suitable for exploring research questions such as 'how to do' and 'why', and can make a comprehensive and realistic interpretation of complex social marketing phenomena. Through the comparative analysis of two typical cases, the different paths of different communication strategies to shape consumer identity can be more clearly sorted out. The research selects the joint cooperation between Heytea and luxury brand

Fendi, and the joint cooperation between Nayuki and CCTV news as the analysis object. The case selection is mainly based on its typicality and uniqueness: both groups of cooperation are cross-industry cooperation that attracts nationwide attention, but there are significant differences in partner attributes, symbol resources, and communication paths. One group is an international luxury brand, which focuses on fashion and luxury symbols. The other group is a national authoritative media, relying on mainstream cultural symbols. This sharp contrast can accurately tap the internal logic of different cooperation models through comparative analysis.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

In this study, a comprehensive data collection was conducted on the two groups of joint cooperation events. The data sources include official propaganda documents, product design pictures, offline store decoration, limited peripheral products, hot topics, user original content, and in-depth reports of authoritative industry media on social platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Tik Tok, etc., forming a multi-dimensional and three-dimensional case database. The research adopts the content analysis method, according to the four analysis dimensions of partner selection, communication channel combination, visual narrative and product design, and interactive mechanism construction, encodes and integrates the case materials, and comprehensively disassembles the communication strategy framework of the two groups of cases.

4 Case Analysis

4.1 Heytea×Fendi: The Democratization of Luxury Symbols Model

The co-branded collaboration between HeyTea and Fendi accurately captures the consumer demand of young consumers for affordable luxury and fashion identity. As an international top luxury brand, Fendi has the symbolic value of scarcity and high prestige, which is highly consistent with the brand positioning of Xicha's youth and fashion. This co-branding is not a simple brand licensing cooperation, but a transformation of high-end luxury symbols into daily consumption symbols accessible to the public.

In the cooperation, bright yellow, which symbolizes vitality, is selected as the core visual element. This tone is consistent with the visual system of the two brands and is uniformly applied to product packaging, cup sets, badges and offline theme stores to form a unified visual communication system. In the online communication link, with the help of key opinion leaders to release out-of-the-box and punch-card content, the communication topic of 'Life's First Fendi' is created, and luxury symbols are disassembled into daily items that can be purchased and collected, so that consumers can obtain a light luxury experience at a lower cost.

The core interactive mechanism of this cooperation is that users spontaneously share purchase vouchers, and joint products and their surroundings are only obtained by purchasing tea. The scarcity greatly stimulates consumers' willingness to purchase and share. Users display Fendi's famous cup sets and peripheral products on platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Weibo, and complete social capital accumulation and self-identity expression. The brand did not design complex online interactive games, but handed the

interactive space to social media. The spontaneous dissemination of users' original content formed a secondary communication boom and magnified the marketing effect.

From the perspective of consumer identity, this model mainly promotes consumers to form symbolic identity. Consumers complete the expression and confirmation of self-identity on the social platform by owning joint products. This identity construction based on the sense of availability superiority meets the imagination and psychological needs of young groups for the upward mobility of social class.

4.2 Nayuki×CCTV News:The Leveraging Mainstream Culture Model

Nayuki jumps out of the conventional IP cooperation idea and chooses to cooperate with CCTV news with high credibility and cultural authority. It aims to use the influence of mainstream culture to upgrade the brand narrative from simple commercial consumption to an emotional communication framework carrying collective memory and national emotion.

The cooperation focuses on the core theme of "Chinese tea + cultural self-confidence" to build narrative content. The products launch seasonal categories such as scholar milk tea. The packaging integrates traditional Chinese aesthetic elements, adopts retro visual style, echoes the visual characteristics of news broadcast, and strengthens cultural attributes. In terms of communication channels, in addition to the promotion of conventional social media, the official platform of CCTV news is used to release cooperative information, and the endorsement of authoritative media is used to greatly enhance the authority and topic depth of the event, and effectively strengthen the brand reputation and social responsibility.

Interactive design focuses on emotional resonance and value recognition. Through "I hear you are reading this report", brand products are closely related to users' daily life scenarios such as learning, working, and preparing for exams, as well as their expectations for the future. What users spontaneously share is not only milk tea products, but also the emotional expression of personal state and national emotion. This interaction based on common cultural foundation and emotional experience builds a deep sense of group belonging beyond the material level.

From the perspective of consumer identity, this model mainly promotes consumers to form emotional connection identity and social attribution identity. By awakening collective memory and national emotion, consumers can obtain emotional connection and value identity in consumer behavior. This emotional connection rooted in cultural identity has stronger persistence and user stickiness than simple symbolic consumption.

4.3 Comparative Analysis of the Two Models

Through comparison, it can be seen that the two cooperation modes have obvious differences in communication strategies and consumer identity mechanisms, and are complementary at the same time (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of the two collaboration models.

Dimension of Comparison	Heytea×Fendi Model	Nayuki×CCTV Model	News

Collaboration Partner	International Luxury Brand	National Authoritative Media
Type of Symbolic Resource	Fashionable Luxury Symbols	Mainstream Cultural Symbols
Core Narrative Strategy	My First Fendi	Chinese Tea and Cultural Confidence
Interaction Mechanism	Sharing purchase proofs to display social capital	Emotional expression and cultural identification
Primary Identity Type	Symbolic Identity	Emotional Connection Identity, Social Belonging Identity
Consumer Psychology Basis	Imagination of upward mobility	Collective memory and national sentiment

Although the implementation paths of the two models are different, the internal core logic is highly consistent : successful cross-brand cooperation is by no means a simple splicing of brand logos, but an integrated communication system combining symbols, narratives, and interactions to complete the shaping of consumer identity through a differentiated path. This conclusion also provides an empirical basis for the subsequent theoretical development in this field.

5 Conclusion

Through the systematic analysis of two cases of Heytea × Fendi and Nayuki × CCTV news, this study summarizes two typical successful models of cross-brand cooperation in the new tea industry, namely, the democratization model of luxury symbol and the leverage model of mainstream culture. The former integrates high-value luxury symbols into daily consumption scenarios to meet consumers ' needs for identity expression and social display, and promotes identity construction based on social capital accumulation. With the help of mainstream cultural symbols recognized by the public, the latter awakens collective memory and national emotions, deepens the emotional resonance between brands and consumers, and strengthens consumers ' sense of group belonging.

Based on the above research conclusions, this study believes that successful cross-brand cooperation is far more than superficial brand co-branding. It is essentially a systematic project of symbolic meaning production, emotional resonance creation, and social relationship activation. When the brand carries out cross-border cooperation, it is necessary to abandon the short-term flow thinking, deeply grasp the value pursuit and social and cultural environment of the target consumers, and build an integrated com-

munication system of symbol selection, narrative construction and participatory interaction, so that cross-border cooperation can be transformed from a single marketing event into a sustainable brand equity, and finally obtain the long-term recognition of consumers.

This study makes up for the lack of disconnection between communication strategies and consumer identity in existing research, builds an analytical framework of communication strategies and consumer identity, reveals the mechanism of communication strategies on consumer identity, and provides a new theoretical perspective for interpreting the identity construction mechanism in cross-border cooperation.

From the perspective of theoretical contribution, this study mainly has three breakthroughs : First, break the previous research paradigm that marketing strategy and consumer psychology research are separated from each other, and build a correlation analysis framework between the two ; secondly, two typical cooperation models are extracted to lay the foundation for the follow-up typology research in this field. Third, it clarifies the corresponding relationship between different symbolic resources and consumer identity types, and deepens the research on the formation mechanism of consumer identity.

From the perspective of practical guiding significance, this study provides three core inspirations for brand managers : first, the choice of partners should not only focus on short-term traffic, but also consider the fit between their symbolic resources and brand core identity ; second, visual narrative and product design are the key carriers to convey symbolic meaning, and brands need to pay enough attention. Third, the design of interactive mechanism should guide users to carry out valuable content co-creation, rather than simple punching and sharing shallow interaction.

There are some limitations in this study : on the one hand, although the double case study can achieve in-depth analysis, the external validity of the research conclusion needs to be further verified by more cases ; on the other hand, the research mainly relies on public communication materials to carry out analysis, and lacks in-depth consumer interview data, which limits the accurate grasp of the dynamic formation process of consumer identity to a certain extent.

Future research can be further expanded from three aspects : First, more types of cooperation such as animation, games, and artist IP are included to test and improve the theoretical framework of this study and explore other consumer identity-driven models ; secondly, longitudinal tracking research or experimental method is used to further clarify the dynamic formation process, long-term impact and boundary conditions of consumer identity under different cooperation modes. Third, explore the negative effects of brand dilution and consumer aesthetic fatigue caused by excessive cross-border cooperation, and build a more comprehensive and balanced cross-brand cooperation theory system.

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