

The Impact of Brand Image Building on Consumer Decision-making: Taking the Milk Tea industry Represented by Mixue Ice Cream Tea as Example

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Abstract. Brand image is an important tool for brand marketing. It can help companies enhance their competitive advantages and increase customer loyalty, and it can also help the market expand its scale. Brand image will also provide different degrees of stimulation at different stages of consumer decision-making. Since the market environment of previous research is limited to industries such as automobiles and luxury goods, this study intends to further explore the impact of brand image on consumer decision-making under different market environment and cultural backgrounds. This research method is qualitative research, which mainly uses the process tracking method in case study to explore the strategies and measures taken by Mixue Ice Cream & Tea in the process of brand image building, and how to influence consumers' brand cognition and purchase decisions. By collecting data from Mixue Ice Cream & Tea and classifying and analyzing it according to different aspects of brand image, the relationship between brand image elements and consumer decision-making is further analyzed, and the five successful elements for brand image building are extracted from the analysis. In different industries in the future, companies can use these elements to shape their brand image, and then enhance consumer loyalty to the brand by linking different stages of consumer decision-making.

Keywords: Brand image, Consumer purchase decision, Brand image cognition, Brand marketing communication.

1. Introduction

With the era of global competition, the war in the market has gradually evolved from the competition of products to the competition of concepts. Brand image has gradually become a necessary tool for various industries to attract consumers in the commercial battlefield. Brand image is the overall cognition and feeling of consumers towards the brand [1]. The main purpose of marketing activities is to influence consumers' cognition and attitude towards the brand, stimulate consumers' purchasing decision-making behavior, and thus increase sales share [1]. Therefore, more and more brand industries have begun to pay attention to and shape their own brand image, thereby analyzing the connection between brand image shaping and consumer decision-making.

Brand image helps position products and determine targets, and a strong brand image is an important factor influencing consumers' perceptions of brands [2,3]. The main research questions of this study are to explore the reasons why brand image affects consumers' purchasing decisions, to study the impact of brand building strategies on brand image, and to verify whether the impact of brand image is differentiated among different consumer groups. This study will take Mixue Ice cream & tea as an example to provide valuable research and analysis for brand marketing in the era of global competition.

Researching the impact of brand image building on consumer decision-making has theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical perspective, the study of consumer behavior can be further deepened by analyzing the impact of brand image on the consumer purchase decision process. From a practical perspective, studying the impact of brand image on consumer purchasing behavior can help companies strengthen their core competitiveness, thereby further improving market share and the accuracy of market positioning.

2. Literature Review

According to the research of Lee, James and Kim, there are many different definitions of the concept of brand image [2]. Brand image is a combination of cognitive, emotional and evaluation processes. Through analysis and research, it is concluded that brand image needs to be uniformly defined in marketing, determine the target population and position the brand in the ideal direction in the minds of consumers. Malik and Saxena also studied the concept of brand image [4,5]. The difference is that it emphasizes that brand image is dynamic and is also affected by market feedback and consumer experience. A good brand image can increase customer trust.

Based on the empirical research on car buyers in the literature of Alamgir, Shamsuddoha and Nedelea, the impact of brand image and name on the consumer decision-making process was explored [6]. Research has found that brand image has a significant impact on consumers' decision-making processes, especially during the information search and evaluation stages. Consumers prefer to buy cars from well-known brands. A good brand image and name can make customers loyal. The literature Tekin, Yiltay and Ayaz also analyzed the impact of brand image on consumer behavior, especially its important role in the luxury market [3]. Research has concluded that a strong brand image can shape consumers' sense of self-identity and influence their pursuit of the social status and cultural value brought by the brand in their purchasing decisions.

According to Qazzafi, the literature studied the consumer purchase decision process and proposed five stages that consumers go through in the purchase decision process, especially the information search stage [7]. Consumers will collect information about products and brands and make a ranking evaluation. This shows the importance of brand image building in the consumer decision process.

According to the above previous research literature, it is concluded that brand image building has a certain effect on consumer decision-making and the impact is multi-faceted. The literature shows that brand image not only affects consumers' brand choice and purchase intention, but also plays a role in all stages of purchase decisions. However, the market environment of previous research is limited to the automobile and luxury industries. Future research can further explore the impact of brand image on consumer decision-making in different market environments and cultural backgrounds, and explore new brand image building strategies to cope with changing consumer needs.

3. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea brand image Building Practice

Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is a national chain of ice cream and tea brands. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is mainly positioned for young people and students, emphasizing high cost performance and a fashionable brand image. The brand's product prices are relatively affordable compared to other milk tea shops, making it very attractive in the highly competitive milk tea market. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has also established a wide market coverage through a large number of stores and online promotions. In the early stages of its development from 1997 to 2007, it mainly focused on ice cream as its main product and gradually expanded the market. Then from 2008 to 2019, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea began to transform its brand, vigorously develop milk tea series products, launch a variety of flavors of milk tea and fruit drinks, and update the brand image of the Snow King IP. Since 2020, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has entered a stage of rapid expansion, opened a large number of chain stores, and established a complete direct sales and franchise network across the country. During this period, it continued to launch new products and upgrade existing product lines, strengthen online and offline integration, and enhance user experience.

Through careful planning of its brand image, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has established a unique market position in the Chinese tea and ice cream market and successfully established a deep emotional connection with consumers. The logo of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea is a cute image of a snow king licking his mouth. This design easily makes people feel friendly and happy. It has become the symbolic symbol of the Mixue Ice Cream & Tea brand and runs through all the visual communication of the brand. Consumers can quickly associate this image with the brand itself and its products. The red and white color design reflects the passion and freshness of Mixue, which just matches the

attributes of ice cream and tea products. This color combination also deepens consumers' memory of the brand. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea creates a relaxed and vibrant atmosphere through large areas of red and white decorations and lively and cute snow king elements, so that customers can feel the unique charm of the brand when they enter the store. The brand story of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea comes from the founder Zhang Hongchao starting from a small stall and gradually developing the brand into a nationally renowned chain store after years of hard work. This story of starting from scratch, often called "grassroots entrepreneurship", will resonate with many consumers, especially young people. After seeing this story, many people will associate positive words such as struggle, effort, and opportunity with the brand, forming an emotional identification. In addition, the image of the Snow King has also been given anthropomorphic characteristics and participated in various brand marketing activities. The image of the Snow King interacts with fans on social media in a similar capacity as a "dream pet." This makes the brand image more vivid and also brings it closer to consumers.

In terms of marketing communication, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has become a phenomenal marketing case through the rapid spread of simple and brainwashing brand theme songs and related videos on short video platforms. The melody and lyrics of the main song are extremely simple. Consumers will unconsciously hum after listening to it once, forming a wide range of brand memories. In addition, the repeated brand name in the song further deepens the impression of the brand in the minds of consumers. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has built a warm and story-telling brand image through social media interaction through the personified image of the Snow King and the friendly entrepreneurial story. When consumers consume Mixue Ice Cream & Tea products, they are not only buying a cup of tea or an ice cream, but also having an emotional exchange with the brand. This emotional connection can make consumers feel understood and respected in front of the brand, and are willing to repurchase again. In addition, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has continuously launched innovative products that meet the preferences of young people, and has accumulated a lot of consumer loyalty to the brand through its cost-effective pricing strategy.

4. Brand Image Perception and Consumer Behavior

There is a close relationship between brand image cognition and consumer behavior. Brand image cognition is acquired by consumers through various channels, including advertising, promotional videos, social media, which convey brand information and help consumers form brand cognition [2]. Product experience is an important source of brand image cognition. By telling brand stories and conveying brand culture, brands can make consumers resonate emotionally with the brand and further deepen their cognition of the brand image. Brand image cognition will directly affect consumers' purchasing decisions. This is because consumer information processing is mainly an unconscious processing of incomplete or simplified information, which also includes simplifying product symbols and clues [8].

Mixue Ice Cream & Tea has established a high level of recognition among consumers through a concise, interesting and fun visual image and brainwashing brand songs. The principle of brand communication is actually similar to the three-level cultural model theory, which is mainly composed of an object's visible form, communication and interaction, and thinking activities [9]. From the perspective of visual design, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea uses the image of a snowman. The image of a snowman is consistent with the brand positioning of selling ice drinks and ice cream. For example, the image design of the ice cream cone on the snowman's cane points out a major selling point of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea, which belongs to the visual level. The cute expression and the corners of the mouth that are like a child's greed present a warm and cute image, which facilitates close interaction between the brand and consumers, which belongs to the behavioral level. The personality characteristics of the image positioning of the snowman IP of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea on social media show the characteristics of the king of snow, which belongs to the intangible level. The visual color of the snow king retains the white of the prototype, the yellow of the cone, and the main visual

is red. In the color system, red is the most impressive and has a wider audience [10]. In addition, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea uses viral marketing to repeatedly spread the brand theme song containing the brand name on social media to build auditory brand recognition. Such a brand image design is not only in line with the brand positioning, but also deepens consumers' awareness. In addition, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea conveys brand culture by spreading the brand's own brand story, allowing consumers to resonate emotionally with the brand and further deepen their awareness of the brand image. A feedback loop is formed here between brand image awareness and consumer behavior. By shaping its own brand image, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea makes consumers widely aware of the brand's logo and theme song from a visual and auditory perspective, and forms positive associations with them. A positive overall impression will increase attention and interest in the object's information [8]. Consumer behavior from purchase, recommendation, and feedback will further affect the construction and dissemination of the brand image [7]. This image not only deepens the brand's recognition, but also allows consumers to feel a pleasant emotional experience when interacting with the brand, which in turn inspires consumers to share and recommend it to people of the same identity, thereby changing the brand awareness of people around them.

5. Brand Image and Consumer Decision Path

The decision path of consumer purchase is the behavior of individuals when deciding to spend resources to purchase goods and services. In the consideration and evaluation stage of consumers, the shaping of brand image uses word-of-mouth sharing and consumer feedback on social media to further enhance consumers' trust in the brand. Previous literature Lee studied the factors affecting consumer behavior in some specific milk tea shops and found that most customers of specific milk tea shops are composed of groups or partners, and are more involved in social interactions [11]. If marketers target promotional activities at reference groups and then extend them to followers of the group through these groups. More valuable marketing methods often come from the surrounding environment and recommendations from friends [12]. This marketing method is called relationship marketing. Compared with ordinary advertising marketing, recommendations from friends in the surrounding environment have higher credibility and marketing power. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea provides consumers with a good brand positioning and a good word-of-mouth image, which prompts consumers to share their consumption experience on social media platforms such as Douyin through word-of-mouth communication when choosing tea and ice cream. From taste, service to price, a large number of positive word-of-mouth images have been formed. Word-of-mouth marketing is based on the real experience of consumers and is easier to build trust and increase purchase intention [13]. Therefore, recommendations from friends and family will greatly influence consumers' decision-making process. When consumers see people around them sharing and affirming Mixue Ice Cream & Tea, they will tend to imitate their actions. Therefore, a real experience sharing feedback is more convincing than an advertisement in the eyes of some potential consumers. Through word-of-mouth communication among consumers, brands can spread quickly and establish their image and reputation [13]. Make consumers promoters of the brand and establish a reliable brand image to reduce potential consumers' doubts about the brand, thereby driving more consumers to make purchase decisions more quickly.

Secondly, in the actual purchase decision stage of consumers, the shaping of brand image can further promote consumers to make purchase decisions through price. When consumers buy milk tea and seek a balance between price and quality. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea's low-price strategy also attracted a large number of price-sensitive consumers at this time. Low-priced products make consumers feel that they are getting more value, especially when the budget is limited. This price advantage often becomes a key factor for consumers to choose Mixue Ice Cream & Tea. When the quality of the product meets the requirements and the price is attractive, it can also increase the purchase volume of the company [14]. In addition, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea's affordable strategy also lowers the purchase threshold for consumers. For example, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea's target audience

also includes the younger generation of students. It meets the students' demand for milk tea without increasing their pressure, which is equivalent to reducing the time consumers spend on decision-making and weighing.

After consumers make actual purchase decisions, the shaping of the brand image also affects their post-purchase behavior, which is conducive to building consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Because research has found that the psychological state of customers, including frequency, and the amount of money consumers are willing to spend on milk tea are mainly derived from consumers' satisfaction with the brand [11]. Among the many milk tea brands, consumers will first consider brands that they are familiar with and trust. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea's cute brand image and high frequency of exposure have an advantage in this regard. Because of the repeated brainwashing songs on social media, consumers will unconsciously think of this brand when making decisions. Mixue Ice Cream & Tea's image shaping of stores and brand culture will also make consumers feel a sense of participation and belonging, and further influence consumers' long-term purchase decisions. For example, in Mixue Ice Cream & Tea stores, a person dressed as the "Snow King" was designed to interact with consumers at the door of the store. Taking photos with the Snow King also became a hot topic on social platforms. In addition, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea once launched a limited-time event where singing the Mixue Ice Cream & Tea theme song could get a free drink. In this way, the brand not only provides drinks, but also becomes a part of consumer social interaction. When consumers feel the brand image and happiness after purchase, and the actual product quality is up to standard, they will be more willing to make repeat purchases, thus generating brand loyalty. As mentioned above, word-of-mouth communication, high-satisfaction consumers conduct secondary communication and continue to interact with the brand.

6. Market Challenges of Brand Image

In the fierce brand competition, the successful shaping of brand image can not only win market share and competitiveness for enterprises, but also face a series of challenges with the changes in the market environment and the diversification of consumer demand. The competitiveness of the same industry has gradually increased. The milk tea industry has been a hot industry in recent years. It has low barriers, low costs, low investment, but large profit margins, leading to more and more investors choosing to enter this industry [15]. If there is no continuous innovation, any brand image will become outdated with the development of the times. Then there is the uncertainty of the economic environment, such as some economic recessions or rising raw material prices, which will have a negative impact on the profitability and market performance of the brand. How Mixue Ice Cream & Tea can cope with market changes while maintaining its low price advantage has become a challenge.

7. Conclusion

The results of the study show that brand image not only affects consumers' initial cognition, but also affects consumers' purchase decision path. The successful shaping of Mixue Ice Cream & Tea's brand image depends on its clear brand positioning in the market. By using cute cartoon images and magical brand songs for marketing communication, it successfully links with consumers emotionally, wins a positive word-of-mouth image, maintains consumers' loyalty to the brand, and further promotes consumers' secondary promotion behavior. By studying the impact of brand image building on consumer decision-making, this study can provide a deeper understanding of how brands trigger consumer loyalty through emotional links, brand stories, and word-of-mouth communication. Sharing real consumer experience helps to increase consumers' trust in the brand. In addition, this study also shows the role of word-of-mouth communication and social interaction in promoting the brand image of enterprises, which serves as a good reference for other enterprises in the future. However, brand image shaping is also accompanied by many challenges, because the times are constantly developing, consumers' psychology is constantly changing, and market challenges are changing. This study did

not take into account the different purchase decision paths of different consumer groups such as different age groups or different regions. Because the method of this study is qualitative analysis, it lacks the support of quantitative data on consumer purchase decision performance. Therefore, it is recommended that quantitative analysis methods be used in future research to use data to enhance the credibility of research results. It is also possible to further analyze the impact of changes in consumer psychology and emotions on the path of purchase decisions.

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