

A Brief Analysis of the Communication Effects of Brand Co-branding

-- The Case of "Sauce-Flavored Latte"

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Abstract: Brand co-branding is a marketing strategy that pools the visibility, reputation and influence of two or more brands through collaboration and joint promotion, so as to enlarge brand awareness and communication effects. Taking the cross-category co-branding of Luckin Coffee and Kweichow Moutai—the “Sauce-Flavored Latte”—as the focal case, this paper examines how such collaboration influences brand communication. By reviewing the characteristics and advantages of co-branding and by integrating data on the communication effects, consumer feedback and market performance of the “Sauce-Flavored Latte,” the study finds that the collaboration effectively raised the heat and exposure of both brands, successfully attracted the attention of young consumers, boosted product sales and created strong market buzz. Meanwhile, the study also points out possible challenges in brand-tone coordination, consumer acceptance and reputational risk. The findings offer theoretical reference and practical guidance for enterprises when designing co-branding strategies, especially under the diversified market landscape where brand synergy and innovative communication are pursued.

Keywords: Brand co-branding; Communication Effects; Brand Awareness.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Brand co-branding is an efficient marketing strategy that integrates the awareness, reputation and influence of two or more brands, creating larger brand value, expanding market impact and strengthening consumer identification and purchase intention through resource sharing and complementary advantages. In recent years, co-branding has flourished across industries, particularly in food and beverages, becoming a key way to attract young consumers and generate buzz.

The collaboration between Luckin Coffee and Kweichow Moutai on the “Sauce-Flavored Latte” is a representative cross-category case. The drink blends Luckin’s modern urban style with Moutai’s traditional sauce aroma, organically combining two seemingly unrelated products, breaking consumers’ stereotypical perceptions of traditional beverages and quickly igniting social media.

Although the finished beverage contains less than 0.5 % alcohol by volume, its distinctive sauce-cream flavor is highly recognizable. Clear labeling warns minors, pregnant women, drivers and alcohol-allergic consumers, demonstrating concern for consumer health.

Kweichow Moutai, China’s most iconic baijiu brand, symbolizes authority, tradition and premium quality, whereas Luckin Coffee, a rapidly rising newcomer, stands for youth, innovation and speed. The co-branding achieves an “old-brand + new-brand” crossover and precisely meets contemporary consumers’ demand for novelty and cultural mash-ups, creating a high-topic, high-conversion communication event. From launch, the co-branding topped social-media trending lists, becoming a phenomenal marketing case.

Beyond short-term sales growth, the success of the Sauce-Flavored Latte offers valuable experience on “modern

expression of traditional culture” and “brand rejuvenation.” Such culturally colliding co-branding models are expected to become a new trend in brand marketing.

1.2. Practical Significance

Under the trends of consumption upgrading and brand rejuvenation, co-branding has gradually become an important tool for raising heat and expanding market influence, especially in food and beverages, showcasing new trends in brand-value fusion and innovative experience. Although widely applied in practice, systematic academic research on its mechanism of influence is still limited, especially in the beverage sector. Taking the phenomenal co-branded product “Sauce-Flavored Latte” as the case, an in-depth analysis of its market performance and consumer response helps fill research gaps and provides theoretical support and practical reference for companies to optimize co-branding strategies.

1.2.1. Theoretical Significance

Current literature on how co-branding affects consumer purchase behavior is scarce, particularly in beverages. Using the Sauce-Flavored Latte as the research object helps deepen understanding of how co-branding influences consumer perception and decision-making, and extends co-branding theory to cross-category collaboration and emerging consumption scenarios. The study is expected to fill academic gaps in beverage-industry co-branding research and to provide new theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence for consumer behavior, brand strategy and cross-category marketing. It also helps build a co-branding theoretical framework aligned with local market characteristics and promotes the integration of brand communication and consumer-psychology research.

1.2.2. Practical Significance

By studying consumers’ psychological reactions and purchase decisions when facing co-branded products such as the Sauce-Flavored Latte, companies can more accurately

grasp target consumers' needs and preferences, thereby optimizing product positioning, marketing strategies and sales-channel layout to enhance brand appeal and market performance. The study also helps companies understand differences in co-branded product performance across consumption scenarios, improving the flexibility and targeting of marketing strategies.

Moreover, the study can summarize key success factors of co-branding-such as brand-tone congruence, cultural-symbol integration, topic-communication strategy and product innovation-providing an actionable reference model and lessons for other companies. Through case analysis and theoretical extraction, it promotes wider application and innovative practice of co-branding across industries, enhances the effectiveness of collaborative marketing and realizes multi-win outcomes, further fostering the healthy development of the brand ecosystem.

2. Concept and Characteristics of Brand Co-branding

2.1. Definition

Co-branded products take various forms: joint creations by designers, products co-developed by brands and individuals, or innovative goods combining brands with hot elements. Chang Wand[1] notes that co-branding is a brand-marketing activity in which two or more brands jointly launch a product and promote it under a joint brand. Washburn et al. (2000)[2] define co-branding as two or more brands collaborating to create a unique joint brand, helping raise market exposure for both brands and realizing resource sharing and mutual benefit.

2.2. Characteristics and Advantages

Co-branding refers to two or more brands jointly conducting marketing activities or launching joint products to achieve common marketing goals. Literature identifies the following characteristics:

1. Raise brand awareness: leverage partners' influence and visibility to quickly expand exposure and attract consumer attention.

2. Strengthen brand image: borrow partners' brand image and values to enhance identity and credibility.

3. Expand target audiences: attract each brand's audience, realize complementary audience expansion and increase consumer diversity.

4. Create unique experiences: innovative design and uniqueness provide fresh purchase experiences, arousing interest and curiosity.

5. Share resources and costs: reduce single-brand marketing expenses, improve efficiency and ROI.

6. Build partnerships: foster inter-brand cooperation and future collaboration opportunities.

Overall, co-branding can rapidly boost brand visibility and recognition through partners' resources, create unique experiences, expand audiences and realize resource sharing and cost splitting.

2.3. Communication Effects of Brand Co-branding

Communication effects refer to the influence and outcomes generated in the market, reflecting changes in audience cognition, emotional connection and market performance. Discussion can proceed as follows:

1.Enhance brand awareness: integrate multiple brands'

influence to merge and expand audiences, significantly boosting market exposure. Co-branded products are topical, gain media coverage and spontaneous social-media dissemination, rapidly enlarging brand awareness.

2.Strengthen brand image: collaboration with congruent or complementary brands injects new cultural elements and emotional value, enriching brand connotation. Unique brand stories and collaboration backgrounds enhance personalization, strengthening consumer identification and trust.

3.Expand target groups: break original audience boundaries, reach consumers of different ages, interests or industries, achieve cross-circle expansion and win potential users.

4.Enhance product perceived value: joint products combine each brand's advantages, featuring uniqueness and scarcity (limited editions, custom models, cross-category designs), raising premium capability and market appeal. Uniqueness increases purchase intention and builds high-end or trendy brand perception.

5.Promote word-of-mouth: high attention and differentiated experiences trigger sharing and comments on social platforms. Positive consumer reviews and recommendations circulate on social media, boosting brand influence and trust, forming a virtuous word-of-mouth cycle.

In summary, co-branding is not only a collaboration model but also an effective communication tool. It can rapidly raise brand heat, reshape brand image and expand audiences in a short time, holding significant meaning for brand-communication efficiency and user emotional connection. Under highly active social media, co-branding has viral potential and is an indispensable means of innovative brand communication.

3. Research Design

3.1. Data Analysis

Li(2024) [3]and Han(2025)[4] Studies have shown that the symbolic value and cultural attributes of co-branded products often arouse consumer interest and social communication more than functional experience, thereby amplifying marketing effects.

Table 1. Statistical results of basic information of respondents

	Category	Percentage (%)
Age	18-24	28.13%
	25-34	55.21%
	35-44	10.42%
	45-54	6.25%
Gender	man	31.25%
	female	68.75%

According to the topic of this study, the questionnaire survey mainly on the basic information of the respondents and co-branded effect, a total of 100 questionnaires were collected, the number of effective questionnaires 96, the questionnaire efficiency of 96%. Descriptive statistics based on the results of this questionnaire are shown in Table 1. From the age distribution, the age group of the most respondents is 25-34 years old, accounting for 55.21%, and the post-80s and post-90s may be the potential target market because they account

for the highest proportion. The 18-to 24-year-old age group also accounted for a large proportion of respondents, may represent the younger generation of potential consumers. From the gender distribution, women accounted for higher, accounting for 68.75%, we can see that women are the main consumer groups, advertising and product positioning can be more focused on women consumers.

3.1.1. Brand Awareness

Nearly half of buyers of the Sauce-Flavored Latte are regular Luckin customers, showing high loyalty—a potential advantage for new-product promotion. 69.79% of respondents had never bought Moutai, indicating different consumer bases; the co-branding raised Moutai’s visibility among Luckin consumers and vice versa, achieving win-win brand communication.

Table 2. Brand understanding of Luckin Coffee and Moutai respectively

	Category	Percentage (%)
Whether you are a regular customer of Luckin Coffee	Yes	47.92%
	No	52.08%
Have you bought and tasted Moutai?	Yes	30.21%
	No	69.79%

The survey data shows that the surprise brought by "Sauce Latte" to consumers is still high, capturing the attention of consumers and stimulating the potential demand of consumers.

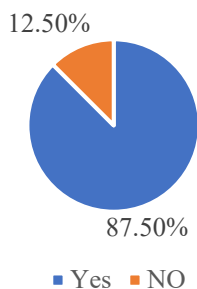


Figure 1. The awareness percentage of the "Sauce Latte" launched by Luckin Coffee and Moutai

3.1.2. Co-branding Communication

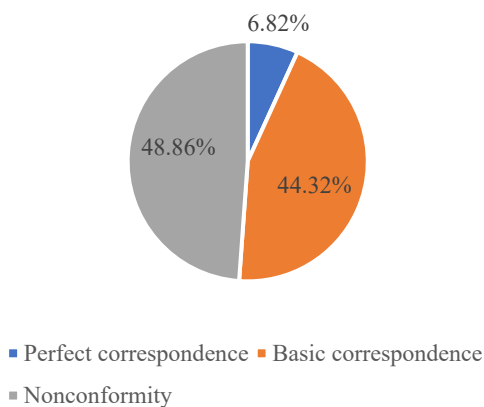


Figure 2. Whether the "Sauce Latte" meets the expected proportions

Social media and online dissemination are the main information sources, indicating effective social-media advertising. Word-of-mouth through friends is also important. 54.84 % had not tried the product, slightly more than the

45.16 % who had, showing online communication outperformed actual consumption. Among those who tried it, 48.86 % felt the product did not meet expectations, warranting further market research.

Overall, the co-branding achieved “1+1>2” communication: 34.41 % rated it “very successful,” 33.33 % “successful,” only 4.3 % “completely unsuccessful.” 61.29 % said the co-branding enhanced their brand cognition of Luckin and Moutai; 36.56 % gave the communication effect 4 out of 5, indicating strong appeal to young consumers.

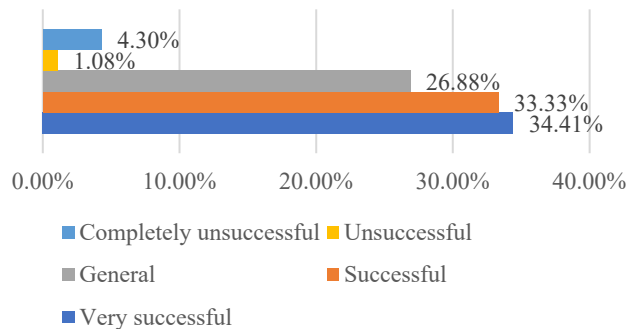


Figure 3. Evaluation of the success of the co-branding effect of "Sauce Latte"

3.1.3. Joint Communication

Regarding the reasonableness of the product price, 67.74% of buyers believe that the price of "Sauce Latte" is reasonable, which helps to promote the acceptance of the product in the market. 40% of buyers are willing to recommend a product to a friend or family member, indicating the potential word-of-mouth effect. However, 61.63% are reluctant to buy "sauce latte" again, which may require further understanding of the reasons to improve the product or pricing strategy.

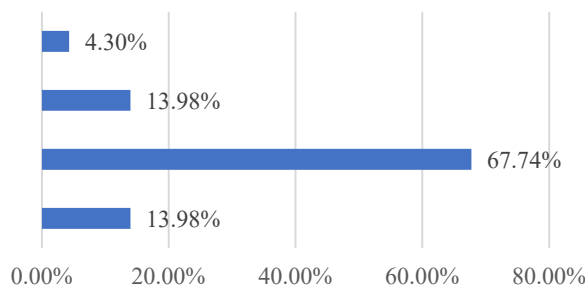


Figure 4. The ratio of reasonable price of "sauce latte"

4. Conclusion

Using Luckin × Moutai’s “Sauce-Flavored Latte” as the case, this study explores the communication effects, consumer responses and brand-value impacts of co-branding in beverages. Results show co-branding has strong topic-making and traffic-driving power, rapidly raising brand attention, attracting young consumers and expanding influence. Yet communication success does not equal long-term product acceptance; consumer feedback on quality and experience is the core criterion of success. Co-branding should not chase heat and traffic alone; product vitality and sustainability must be emphasized. During design, production and packaging, companies must maintain quality control to win continued consumer support. Brand awareness is external; true consumer identification and loyalty stem from product quality and cultural connotation.

1. Significant co-branding communication, but product reputation affects recommendation. High communication

success did not directly drive purchase intention, yet strongly influenced communication effects. Consumers cared more about the brand topic and social value than taste per se; controversy itself became a marketing highlight.

2. Brand awareness markedly raised, youth influence expanded. The collaboration expanded Moutai's reach among young consumers and enriched Luckin's brand tone and cultural value, enhancing both brands' cognition and loyalty.

3. Product-experience shortcomings affect repurchase and conversion. Despite reasonable pricing, unsatisfactory taste and texture led to low repurchase. Brands must pair communication with product quality to achieve sustained conversion and loyalty.

When launching co-branding, companies should maintain high value alignment and cultural consensus to avoid consumer backlash and brand damage. Co-branding's core should not stop at gimmicks; it should deepen brand philosophy, inspire innovation and build emotional links. Only by respecting consumers, insisting on quality and

strengthening brand spirit can co-branding move from momentary heat to long-term value accumulation, achieving true "win-win" or "multi-win."

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