

The Association of Luckin Coffee's New Media Advertising Marketing and its Brand Equity: Brand Cultural Identity as A Mediator

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Abstract. The coffee industry has been commonly acknowledged as emerging. Given the popularity of Luckin Coffee in the Chinese market, this research aims to investigate the associations between Luckin Coffee's new media advertising and its brand equity, considering brand culture identity as a mediator. Considering brand equity as a multi-dimensional concept which is constructed of brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality, a total of six hypothetical relationships among the constructs were developed. This research collected online responses from 429 Chinese consumers of Luckin Coffee. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to examine the associations. As a result, new media advertising was significantly associated with all brand equity dimensions, on which, brand cultural identity was addressed as a significant mediator. The results of this research successfully contributed to the limited understanding of fostering brand equity through new media advertising in the coffee industry, and reported the essentialness of brand cultural identity in brand management. Practically, this research provided a robust framework for practitioners to enhance brand equity through effective advertising and consumers' cultural identity of the brand.

Keywords: Luckin Coffee, brand cultural identity, new media advertising, brand equity.

1. Introduction

The coffee industry has become a rapidly developing market with people's demands for quality of life and the rise of coffee culture [1]. In the global coffee market, driven by increased demand, coffee prices have also risen constantly during January 2025 [2]. This has brought challenges to coffee retailers and producers in selling products, as well as purchasing pressure on consumers. In China, while the coffee market penetration rate in third, fourth, and fifth-tier cities is increasing, the proportion of coffee shops in the first and second-tier cities decreased between 2023 and 2024 [3], reporting a potential problem in the sustainable development of coffee industry in the Chinese market. In the domestic coffee market, Luckin Coffee, as a representative brand, is in the leading position at all city levels [4]. Given the growing maturity and rapid expansion of the landscape of the Chinese market, there are some challenges for Luckin Coffee including the lack of innovation in marketing and taste, and the intensive fierce with other famous coffee brand, such as COTTI COFFEE and Starbarks [5]. Therefore, more innovation and special marketing strategies are warranted for Luckin Coffee's survival and development in the Chinese market.

Behind the success of Luckin Coffee, brand effect plays a crucial role in current marketing methods [5, 6] to improve the relationships between marketers and customers. For example, Luckin takes advantage of awareness of two or more brands, such as Kweichow Moutai, Coconut Palm Juice, and so on, to collaborate with them in social media which not only strengthens the perception and sensation between consumers and brands but also improves brand equity [6, 7]. With the digital era coming, new media advertisements drive associations between marketers and consumers [8]. For example, Facebook ads have a positive impact on customers' attitudes toward brands so online marketers use them to increase brand awareness and perception, further enhancing brand equity [9] [8].

However, the knowledge of the promoting role of advertising, especially new media advertising, in brand equity cultivation is still limited in coffee brands [10-13]. With the scope of advertising, new media advertising plays a significant role in improving purchase intention which contributes to

consumers' purchases and the company's revenue, such as the luxury goods industry in Budiman [11], automotive industry in Rajavi et al., [12] and online car-hailing industry in Aileen et al. [13]. In terms of advertising, the coffee industry is different from the luxury industry, automotive industry, and online car-hailing industry in the effectiveness of ads and promotion methods. Compared to other industries, the coffee industry has a tendency to be homogenized, unlike luxury goods and car brands where each brand is unique. The coffee industry is more concerned with the immediate sale results of advertising effects. Therefore, the coffee industry should adopt different advertising strategies from those of industries to enhance customers' purchase intention. Brand equity, as an incremental value that provides a reason to buy a brand, helps strengthen purchase intention [14], which can be improved by advertising [44]. Three dimensions of BE, i.e. brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality, have a strong positive influence on purchase intention in the food and beverage industry [14]. Therefore, this study aims to explore what factors affect those three dimensions and how to affect brand equity, especially in the coffee industry because the culinary business, including cafes or restaurants, has a great influence on the needs of the community itself, emerging fast and quickly [15]. There are many studies on the coffee industry that explore the factors to influence brand equity and the impact of brand assets on purchase intention in Southeast Asian countries [16, 17]. However, there is little study focused on Chinese local coffee brand. Therefore, this research will explore the relationship and mechanism of impact between new media advertising and brand equity in the Chinese coffee market, such as Luckin Coffee to fill the limited understanding of cultivating brand equity through new media advertising in the coffee industry.

With the customers' fatigue with co-branded products, Luckin Coffee seeks featured co-branding to realize differentiation and innovation [5], including cooperating with specific cultural IP, such as Black Myth: Wukong, and adding cultural elements in advertising such as promoting new products with the elements of Chinese New Year. Cultural elements play an important role in enhancing cultural consistency with consumers, aiming at achieving a higher degree of brand recognition and enhancing consumers' understanding and loyalty to local brands [18]. Therefore, it is warranted for coffee brands' future expansion to explore identified content in new media advertising to empower consumers' perception of a brand.

On the relationship between consumers' perceptions of firms' marketing activities and their psychological responses toward the firms' brand, the cultural identity of focal brands [19] plays a significant mediating role [20-22], which has been ignored in coffee industry literature [23]. According to Amaral and Torelli [24], brand culture identity serves as a critical bridge between firms' marketing activities and consumers' psychological behavioral responses, facilitating consumers' emotional connections with local brands and enhancing brand equity. However, the mediating role of brand culture identity has not been thoroughly examined in coffee brands. In the coffee industry, there exists a common problem that homogeneous and standardized products lead to the lack of uniqueness of a certain coffee brand [25], such as similar prices and similar marketing methods (e.g. celebrity marketing and low-price marketing), where culture features can solve this problem by brand storytelling with national culture to empower the value of a coffee brand whose worth transcends the beverage itself [25]. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the mediating role of consumers' cultural identity with Luckin Coffee in the relationship between Luckin Coffee's new media advertising and its brand equity, using Luckin Coffee as a case study. The understanding of the mediating role of brand culture identity could provide robust guidance for Luckin Coffee's advertising strategies, meeting their warranted needs in practical marketing strategy and brand management.

With the fierce competition in the coffee market, brand development has become a crucial link to enhance the interaction with consumers in the long run. Previous studies have paid little attention to how advertising affects brand equity among Chinese coffee brands, and lack exploration of the uniqueness of coffee brands. Taking Luckin Coffee as an example, this study provides an innovative suggestion for improving brand equity to integrate cultural elements into advertising to build cultural identity in local coffee brands. This study addresses a critical gap in the intersection of marketing,

brand equity, and cultural dynamics within the rapidly evolving global coffee industry, particularly in the context of emerging markets like China.

2. Literature review

2.1 New Media Advertising

Patrick et al. [26] define advertising constitutes a sponsored activity by a number of stakeholders, with its primary aims including the instigation of awareness, persuasion (the building of brand liking and the encouragement of brand switching), and the reminder of target markets of the brand's availability. Typically, advertising is funded by a designated sponsor and designed to influence individuals' attitudes toward specific entities, including people, organizations, products, services, or ideas [27]. In the contemporary business environment characterized by intense competition, advertising assumes a pivotal role as a medium through which organizations communicate with their existing and prospective customers. The overarching objective of any advertising campaign is to achieve a specific purpose. These objectives may encompass a wide range of aims, including the creation of awareness for a new product or brand, the dissemination of information regarding the benefits of the product or brand, the cultivation of desire perceptions, the establishment of a preference for the product or brand, and the persuasion of customers to make purchases [28].

Today, the average time spent by individuals on mobile phone internet is 3 hours and 39 minutes per day. In comparison, the average time spent viewing television is 3 hours and 24 minutes per day [29]. The advent of social media advertising as a distinct form of Internet advertising has further facilitated the ability of businesses to reach consumers [30]. In the context of social media, consumers engage in the creation of content, the dissemination of information, and the exchange of ideas, thereby facilitating interactions with others. Consequently, highly active users can generate novel advertising values for businesses and consumers [31]. Keskin and Baş (2015) argued that consumer behavior is influenced by social media tools. In order to fulfill the objective of generating sales, companies allocate a substantial portion of their resources to advertising initiatives [32]. Cobb-Walgren [33] found that the allocation of advertising expenditures has been shown to exert a favorable influence on brand equity and its constituent components. Advertising has been demonstrated to facilitate positive brand evaluations and attitudes [33]. This is crucial to the development of brand equity.

2.2 Concept of Brand Equity

Kevin Keller's concept of customer-based brand equity concentrates on how customers' knowledge and perception of a brand influence their responses to the brand's marketing efforts [34, 35]. Positive customer-based brand equity is reflected when customers react more favorably to a product and its marketing when the brand is mentioned, compared to when it is not [35]. Keller emphasized the importance of understanding customer perceptions and preferences, creating brand identity and positioning, developing marketing programs and communications that reinforce the brand, and evaluating the success of these efforts. According to a model introduced by Aaker [36], brand equity consists of five elements: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets, where brand loyalty is especially important for competing with others [36]. As a dimension, other propriety assets do not have a significant contribution to measure BE, therefore, this dimension has not been applied in various studies ([37]; [38]; [39]. Moreover, Aaker [36] thought that the last four brand equity dimensions can enhance brand loyalty. Rizwan et al., [14] pointed out that three dimensions of brand equity, i.e. brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality, have a strong positive influence on purchase intention in the food and beverage industry. In this study, because brand loyalty is often studied only in the context of repeat purchases, the brand loyalty dimension is not included. Therefore, this study focuses on those dimensions that influence the perceived identity of customers, three dimensions of brand equity are included in this study, notably brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality.

Brand awareness can be defined as the extent to which customers are aware of the brand, and the depth of their knowledge, including the association between the brand name and the product category. According to Herdana[40], brand awareness is the ability of consumers to remember and recognize a brand or product in their own minds. Raising awareness of a brand is one of the ways to introduce and develop a brand to a wider market [41]. Consumers will buy a product or use a service based on a brand they know and trust. This is important for every company to create brand awareness because it can allow a brand to be chosen or purchased because it first appears in the minds of consumers [42]. In the coffee field, brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on consumer's purchase decisions [41] and sales. One of the cafes in Bandung, namely De.U Coffee is one of the experienced examples of an increase in sales through brand awareness [43].

Brand associations are central to brand equity [44]. brand associations are defined as anything linked in memory to a brand and brand image as a set of associations, usually in some meaningful way [45], involving attributes, benefits, and attitudes, which can be stored in consumers' minds after they are memorized [34]. brand associations or brand image is perhaps the most accepted aspect of brand equity [39]. In the food and beverage industry, by aligning the brand associations the company communicates with the brand associations consumers perceive can strengthen the relationship and communication between brands and consumers, fostering brand equity [46].

Perceived quality is consumers' perception of a brand's products or services. Zeithaml [47] defines perceived quality as a "product's overall excellence or superiority". This suggests that the concept of quality is a customer-centric issue, as customers assess product performance through the lens of their expectations and market comparisons [47]. Therefore, it is a subjective evaluation from customers or users. The product brand plays a primary role in the food and beverage industry: its perception has an impact on consumers' preferences [46]. In a study about the coffee experience, La Won and Nuangjamnong [48] certified that improving content value and experience value that consumers perceive contributes to consumers' satisfaction and purchase intention.

2.3 Relationships Between New Media Advertising and Brand Awareness, Brand Associations, Perceived Quality

A study conducted by Cobb-Walgren [33] indicated that advertising can exert a significant influence on brand equity through a variety of mechanisms.

Advertising is an effective medium for increasing brand awareness and enhancing the probability of the brand being selected by consumers [44]. Aaker conceptualized brand awareness must precede brand associations. It is imperative that consumers develop an awareness of the brand in order to establish a foundation of associations [49]. The attainment of successful brand awareness is contingent upon a brand's pervasive and readily identifiable presence within the market [50]. Implementing effective advertising strategies is one of several key components of expanding influence [50]. Advertising is a significant channel to improve brand awareness. Advertising is one of the effective methods for marketers. Apart from these, [51] focused on the impact of YouTube advertising perceptions on advertising value and the subsequent influence on brand awareness. It was found that advertising value had a positive and significant impact on brand awareness. Thus, we could say that advertisements positively affect brand awareness. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1a: New media advertising marketing is positively associated with brand awareness.

Brand associations or brand image is perhaps the most accepted aspect of brand equity [39]. The phenomenon under customers' consideration has the capacity to contribute to brand associations. When these associations are stored in accessible memory, they translate into "non-conscious but reliable behavioral predispositions." [44]. The process of constructing a robust brand identity is predicated upon the establishment of a distinct brand identity. Strong, positive, and unique associations contribute to strengthening a brand and increasing its equity. Advertisement informativeness has a significant positive impact on consumers' perceived depth of brand associations [52]. According to research from Efendioglu and Durmaz [10], the perception of an

advertisement has a positive effect on brand associations, such as Instagram. Also, advertising is concerned with the promotion of brand awareness and the enhancement of brand equity [44]. It is thus proposed that new media advertising positively affects brand associations, which leads to the following hypothesis:

H1b: New media advertising marketing is positively associated with brand associations.

Advertising has the capacity to influence the perception of brand quality and the usage experience [33]. Keller and Aaker [53] identified a positive relationship between advertising and perceived quality. Thus, we could say that advertising positively affects perceived quality and subsequently brand equity. Advertising can affect the perceived quality of a brand, and it can influence usage experience [33]. Kim [54] demonstrated that social media advertising interactivity can enhance the consumers' perceived quality and behavioral intention. On this basis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1c: New media advertising marketing is positively associated with perceived quality.

2.4 Brand Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is defined as the concept of nationality or regionalism that is inherent within each ethnic group, subsequently influencing their integration within the social structure. According to Clark [55], the term refers to the extent to which individuals within a given cultural context recognize and identify with a set of focal elements that serve to distinguish that culture from other cultural contexts. Consumers' identification with a particular culture will influence their preference for products or brands associated with their cultural symbols. A well - developed, strong sense of cultural identity provides meanings and symbolic values of one's belongings to people from the same culture. As a product or brand, the symbolic meaning of one's cultural element has been demonstrated to enhance one's self-identity [56]. As the level of knowledge of consumers increases, so too does their propensity to purchase intangible cultural heritage products, a propensity that is particularly pronounced in those consumers who possess a strong cultural identity [57]. According to the research from He and Wuang [58], cultural identity has been demonstrated to be positively associated with a preference for domestic brands. For example, the French and Japanese cultures are typified by hedonistic products, such as those in the automobile industry ([59]; [60]. The relationship between brand culture and brand equity has been demonstrated to be positive, with a concomitant impact on brand equity ([58]; [61]. Besides, McCracken [62] thinks consumer goods are infused with cultural significance derived from the 'culturally constituted world', with the role of advertising and fashion serving as instruments for this infusion. It can be posited that the effect of advertising on a brand that is culturally symbolic is positive [63]. According to Hajdas [64], the "cultural brand narrative" constructed by advertising, as an independent variable, significantly improves brand equity by enhancing dimensions such as brand awareness, relevance, preference, and purchase intention. On these bases, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2a: Brand cultural identity is a positive mediator in the relationship between new media advertising and brand awareness.

H2b: Brand cultural identity is a positive mediator in the relationship between new media advertising and brand associations.

H2c: Brand cultural identity is a positive mediator in the relationship between new media advertising and perceived quality.

All hypotheses are shown in Figure 1.

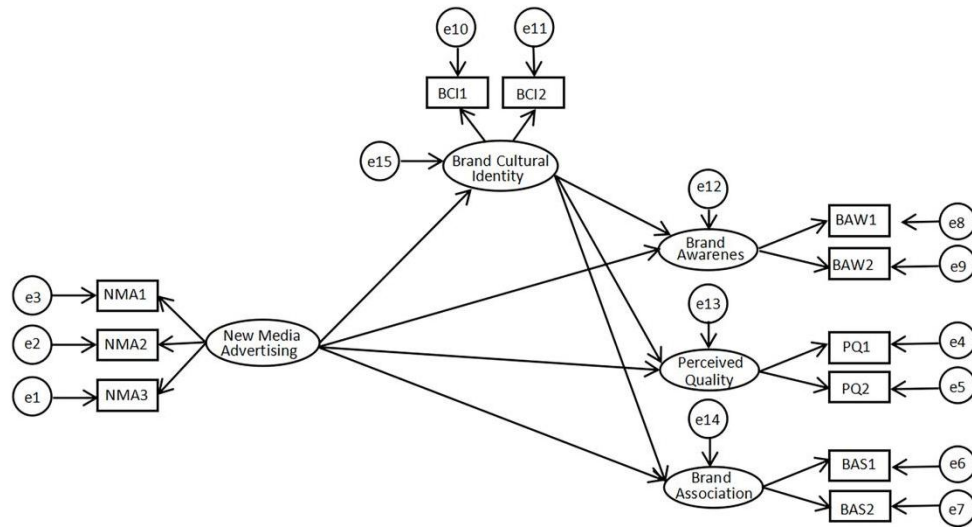


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this study

Note: BCI = Brand Cultural Identity; BAW = Brand Awareness; BAS = brand associations; NMA = New Media Advertising.

3. Methodology

3.1 Appropriateness of the Method

To test consumers' perception to Luckin Coffee's service quality, this research adopts quantitative methods by questionnaire. Theoretically, the service quality measurement methods can be broadly classified into two dominant types: incident-based and attribute-based methods [65]. Specifically, an incident-based method collects and analyses consumers' perception to a brand and consumers' experiences in enjoying brand products through qualitative interviews, while an attribute-based method measures perceived quality on a multidimensional approach through a structured questionnaire [65]. The incident-based method is more appropriate to measure customers' quality perceptions for simple structured services with one or few phases, rather than a more comprehensive service process with multiple episodes during the service delivery [66]. Thus, the incident-based method might not be suitable for this study. Furthermore, the service quality in this study is measured using a hierarchical and multi-dimensional structure. In light of the merits of a quantitative attribute-based measurement method, this property-oriented approach is deemed suitable for addressing the research questions posed in this study. It is distinguished by its capacity to evaluate customers' experiences from multiple perspectives, in contrast to the process-oriented method that focuses on specific service encounters during interactions [67, 65, 68]. Based on the above reasons, an attribute-based quantitative method was thus employed.

3.2 Data Collection and Participant

Before the distribution of the questionnaire, the Chinese version was translated into English version which was distributed together with the Chinese version. This questionnaire has been supported by ethics approval. Documents including information sheets and consent forms for participants were sent out. Participants who agreed to participate in this survey before they answer this questionnaire. A total of 429 valid samples were collected using a convenience sampling technique: 153 participants from China and 276 participants from overseas countries. Among all valid responses, the nationalities of respondents were mainly from overseas areas, accounting for 64.33%, and the rest of respondents were from China (35.67%). A large majority of the respondents were currently located in China mainland (45.22%). The ages ranged from 21 to 30 years old (51.98%).

3.3 Instrument Development

The questionnaire included three parts. The first part illustrated the research background, instructions for answering questions and contact details of the researcher. The second part aimed to understand players' demographic profiles. The third part included items measuring social media engagement and cultural identity perception and consumer perception of the brand, including surveys of brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality. The five-point Likert scale with 20 items, developed by Ren et al., [15], Yoo and Donthu [69], Low and Lamb [70], Levesque and Pons [71] and Pan et al., [72]. Three dimensions of brand equity items were adapted from Ren et al., [15], Yoo and Donthu [69], Low and Lamb [70]. Cultural identity perception items were developed from Pan et al., [72]. A 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree) was used. The tools of IBM SPSS Statistics 27, SPSSAU and AMOS version 28 were adopted to analyzed questionnaire and measure SEM.

3.4 Data Analysis

Firstly, a preliminary analysis was performed to provide insights into the data. Secondly, the global (goodness - of - fit) and internal (reliability and validity) model fit to the overall dataset were assessed. Furthermore, a path analysis was carried out to test hypotheses of new media advertising - brand cultural identity - three dimension of brand equity (brand awareness, brand associations and perception quality), reporting statistical significance, effect size and directions of parameter estimates. In addition to the hypothesis testing, the explanatory power of the model (R²) was examined. Lastly, to test the brand cultural identity's mediating effect, a multi-group invariance analysis was used. The overall model fit to each data set was first examined, followed by a chi-square difference test (ΔX^2) between the unconstrained and constrained models. A mediating effect of brand cultural identity can be confirmed once a significant ΔX^2 value at the probability .05 level is found.

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analysis

The results showed that z - values are consistently between -2.647 and 1.103, indicating an absence of univariate outliers. All measures in the model were closed to normally distributed, with the skewness values ranging from -1.057 to -0.874 and kurtosis values ranging from -0.315 to 0.149 (see Table 1). Moreover, the measures in all dimensions seemed internally consistent, where Cronbach's alphas is 0.948. Accordingly, 429 cases were retained for further analysis.

4.2 Overall and Internal Model Fit

The structural model fitted the overall data set (N = 429) well: $\chi^2/df = 1.631$, CFI = .999, GFI = .985, AGFA = .953, NFI = .989, TLI = .999, RMSEA = .013 [73]. The CR values ranging from .777 to .831 demonstrated good reliability of the measures. For convergent validity, all AVE's ranging from .788 to .84 were greater than .50. All items' loadings ranged from .782 to .851, supporting convergent validity (see Table 1). Finally, the square root of each construct's AVE was higher than its correlations with the other constructs (see Table 2), supporting discriminant validity.

4.3 Testing the Structural Model

The path analysis supported six in the structural model (see Table 3). Based on Cohen's f² [75] guideline, the effect sizes between .02 and .15, between .15 and .30, and above 0.30 represent small, medium and large effect sizes, respectively. New media advertising has been shown to have a significant association on brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. All predictors are greater than 0.30 showed large effect sizes. Those results confirmed the correctness of H1a, H1b, and H1c.

In addition, it was evident that new media advertising has been shown to exert a significant and positive relationships on the cultural identity of brands. Then, brand cultural identity has significant connections with brand associations, brand awareness and perceived quality. The results showed that only brand cultural identity had a medium effect size on perceived quality. The rest of the predictors above .30 showed small effect sizes. The results showed that new media advertising - brand cultural identity- three dimensions of brand equity (brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality) existed mediating relationship (see Table 4). Therefore, H2a, H2b, and H2c are supported.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties of Measurement Items

Constructs	Items	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	S.D.	Standardized Loading	CR	AVE
Brand Cultural Identity	BCI1	-1.001	.149	3.746	1.037	.831	.800	.817**
	BCI2					.801		
Brand Awareness	BAW1	-.874	-.218	3.686	1.138	.795	.777	.797**
	BAW2					.800		
Perceive Quality	PQ1	-.929	-.131	3.671	1.107	.806	.793	.811**
	PQ2					.816		
Brand Associations	BAS1	-1.057	-.019	3.763	1.121	.828	.827	.840**
	BAS2					.851		
New Media Advertising	NMA1	-.914	-.315	3.653	1.094	.782	.831	.788**
	NMA2					.787		
	NMA3					.794		

Note: BCI = Brand Cultural Identity; BAW = Brand Awareness; BAS = brand associations; NMA = New Media Advertising. **p < 0.01.

Table 2. The squared root of AVEs vs. inter-construct correlations

	Brand Cultural Identity	Brand Awareness	Perceived Quality	Brand Associations	New Media Advertising
Brand Cultural Identity	.817**				
Brand Awareness	.457**	.797**			
Perceived Quality	.369**	.381**	.811**		
brand associations	.407**	.432**	.439**	.840**	
New Media Advertising	.405**	.443**	.435**	.459**	.788**

Note: The diagonal shows the square root of the AVE of each construct. **p < 0.01.

Table 3. The results of the direct paths

Path relationship			B	S.E.	C.R.	P
NMA	→	BAW	.368	.066	5.677	< 0.001
NMA	→	BAS	.427	.074	6.623	< 0.001
NMA	→	PQ	.427	.075	6.29	< 0.001
BCI	→	BAW	.419	.06	6.186	< 0.001
BCI	→	BAS	.317	.064	4.955	< 0.001
BCI	→	PQ	.278	.064	4.196	< 0.001

Note: BCI = Brand Cultural Identity; BAW = Brand Awareness; BAS = brand associations; NMA = New Media Advertising.

Table 4. The results of the mediation effect test by bootstarp

Paths	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P	Effect Ratio
NMA→BCI→BAW	.211	.140	.317	0.001	11%
NMA→BCI→PQ	.151	.068	.262	0.001	8%
NMA→BCI→BAS	.180	.089	.302	0.001	10%
Note: BCI = Brand Cultural Identity; BAW = Brand Awareness; BAS = brand associations; NMA = New Media Advertising.					

4.4 Discussion

Firstly, according to H1a, H1b, and H1c, new media ads have a positive and significant impact on brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality. It can be argued that brands can still enhance the value of the brand itself and improve brand assets by adapting to the development of the times and utilizing new technologies for brand communication. Brands will build associations with consumers or users through various new media advertising. These findings are in alignment with previous studies, which argued that new media ads play an important role in brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand equity in social apps and auction industries [8, 10, 44]. Apart from these, Rajavi et al., [12] found that ads expenditure has an important role in perceived quality. Aileen et al. [13] studied the effectiveness of advertising has a positive effect on brand awareness.

Secondly, according to H2a, H2b, and H2c brand cultural identity, as a positive mediator, plays a role in the relationship between new media advertising and brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality. It is because when customers and a brand come from the same cultural group, they tend to resonate and respond to the brand, which strengthens consumers' brand perception and purchase intention [24]. Brands can enhance self - equity by considering cultural elements in new media ads. These facts are supported by studies conducted by Holt [22], Kobayashi et al., [20], and Grzeskowiak et al., [21] in sports brands, and retail stores. Holt [22] argued that advertising needs to build brand assets through cultural identity narratives. Kobayashi et al., [20] argued that advertising plays an important mediating role in brand transnational development. Since brand development is related to brand equity, it can be said that the current research has drawn similar conclusions to the study. Grzeskowiak et al., [21] pointed that cultural identity has a positive mediating role on consumers' perceived quality of shops. Because physical stores are a concrete manifestation of a brand, it can be posited that the present research has yielded conclusions that are analogous to previous studies.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes theoretical contributions to the literature on brand equity, advertising effectiveness, and cultural identity, particularly within the context of the coffee industry and Chinese local brands such as Luckin Coffee.

Firstly, the study addresses a critical gap in understanding the cross-industry variability of advertising effectiveness. New media advertising is a catalyst for brand equity in homogenized markets. While prior researches have highlighted the role of advertising in building brand equity across industries (e.g., luxury, automotive), this study emphasizes the unique significance of new media advertising in the coffee sector, which is characterized by product homogeneity and intense competition [11, 12, 25]. Unlike luxury or automotive brands that rely on exclusivity, coffee brands must leverage dynamic, digitally native strategies—such as co-branding with cultural IP (e.g. Black Myth: Wukong) and integrating cultural elements (e.g., Chinese traditional festival themes)—to differentiate themselves [5]. This finding enriches advertising theory by demonstrating how platform-specific content (e.g. social media campaigns) can enhance brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality—key dimensions of brand equity [14] — in an industry where functional

differentiation is limited. It also challenges generalized assumptions about advertising elasticity, showing that in homogenized markets, content innovation and cultural relevance outweigh sheer advertising expenditure in driving effectiveness [12]. Besides, unlike the luxury or automotive sectors, where advertising focuses on cultivating long-term brand prestige, the coffee industry prioritizes immediate purchase intention through tactics such as social media-driven co-branding and time-limited cultural campaigns [11, 12, 6, 7]. This finding contributes to consumer behavior theory by demonstrating how short-term, culturally resonant advertising can drive tangible outcomes—such as sales and repeat purchases—in a fast-moving, experience-based industry.

Secondly, this study illustrates the mediating role of brand cultural identity is significant. A critical theoretical advancement lies in identifying consumers' cultural identity with the brand as a pivotal mediator between new media advertising and brand equity [19]; [22]. Existing studies on advertising effects often focus on direct impacts on brand awareness or purchase intention (e.g., Budiman, 2021 [11]; Rizwan et al., [14], neglecting the mediating role of cultural identity. This research reveals that brand culture identity acts as a critical bridge between new media advertising (e.g., co-branding campaigns with Moutai) and brand equity dimensions (brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality). For instance, Luckin's collaboration with Black Myth: Wukong, whose status as a national cultural symbol, thereby enhances consumers' perception of Luckin as a brand that embodies "Chineseness" and modernity. This insight illustrates how brand cultural identity bridges marketing actions (e.g., co-branding, cultural storytelling) and consumer psychological responses (e.g., loyalty, brand recognition), thereby enhancing brand equity. It highlights that in markets with functionally similar products, cultural identity transcends mere product attributes to become a core driver of brand differentiation [25].

Thirdly, this study contributes to local brand management and cultural capital enhancement. By focusing on a Chinese local brand, Luckin Coffee, this study enriches global branding theory by highlighting the role of national cultural elements in building local brand equity [15, 16]. Whereas existing research on Southeast Asian coffee brands often emphasizes functional factors like price and product quality, this study demonstrates that integrating cultural narratives into advertising can create symbolic value that resonates with domestic consumers, fostering deeper brand loyalty [18]. This aligns with cultural identity theory, illustrating how brands can leverage local cultural capital to differentiate in saturated markets—an especially relevant mechanism for emerging-market brands seeking to compete with global giants like Starbucks while affirming the cultural identities of local consumers.

5.2 Practical Implications

This study provides actionable strategies for Luckin Coffee marketers and managers, coffee brand marketers, industry practitioners, or researchers — particularly those operating in culturally saturated or homogenized markets like China — to leverage new media advertising and brand culture identity as tools to enhance brand equity.

For Luckin Coffee, managers and marketers should enhance brand equity through new media advertising with cultural characteristics. Firstly, Luckin Coffee managers can leverage cultural IP co-branding to strengthen brand associations. It should continue strategic co-branding with culturally resonant partners, particularly local cultural IPs (e.g., traditional festivals, iconic cultural symbols, or emerging digital IPs like Black Myth: Wukong). It is a possible marketing solution to collaborate with Chinese literary or historical IPs (e.g., Journey to the West, Dunhuang culture) to create limited-edition products or campaigns. For instance, a "Chinese New Year Zodiac Collection" could pair coffee with symbolic designs or flavors (e.g., osmanthus latte for Mid-Autumn Festival), embedded with stories of cultural heritage. Such collaborations enhance brand awareness by tapping into pre-existing cultural familiarity and fostering brand associations with authenticity and cultural relevance, as demonstrated by Luckin's successful collaboration with Kweichow Moutai [5]. Secondly, Luckin Coffee marketers and managers can consider integrating cultural narratives into new media content by developing storytelling-driven campaigns on social media (e.g., Douyin, Xiaohongshu) that

highlight the brand's alignment with local lifestyles and values. For example, new media marketing officers of Luckin Coffee create short videos showcasing the journey of coffee beans from Chinese-origin farms or partnerships with local artisans, emphasizing sustainability and community support. During Chinese New Year, launch a campaign titled "Reunion in a Cup," linking coffee consumption to family traditions and modern lifestyles. Cultural narratives enhance perceived quality by adding symbolic value, as consumers associate the brand with shared cultural identities [18]. Thirdly, Luckin Coffee managers and marketers should actively encourage consumers to create and share content that reflects their personal connection to the brand's cultural elements. For instance, Luckin Coffee's official account hosts a #MyChineseCoffeeStory contest, where users submit photos/videos of how Luckin fits into their daily routines or cultural practices (e.g., enjoying a coffee during a traditional tea ceremony), rewarding winners with cultural-themed merchandise or limited-edition products. UGC amplifies brand engagement and builds brand loyalty by co-creating cultural meaning, aligning with the theory of social identity and self-congruity [23]. Fourthly, Luckin Coffee marketers should optimize targeted advertising for cultural identity fit by using data analysis to segment consumers by cultural identity (e.g., Generation Z's preference for modern vs. traditional cultural symbols) and tailor ads accordingly. Luckin can run personalized WeChat ads for urban millennials featuring sleek, minimalist designs paired with modern cultural references (e.g., contemporary art or tech trends), while targeting older generations with ads emphasizing tradition and family values, which aligns ad content with consumers' cultural identities strengthens the mediating role of brand cultural identity, driving higher brand satisfaction and repurchase intention [24].

For other coffee brands, they should adopt culturally tailored strategies. First of all, other coffee brand marketers could localize new media campaigns with regional cultural elements. Coffee chains entering new markets (e.g., Southeast Asia, Europe) should embed regional cultural symbols into their advertising. For example, a Turkish coffee brand could use new media to highlight traditional coffee rituals (e.g., fortune-telling with coffee grounds) alongside modern lifestyles, while a European brand might emphasize artisanal brewing techniques tied to local heritage. This strategy addresses the coffee industry's homogeneity by creating unique cultural differentiation, as seen in Luckin's co-branding success with Chinese Valentine's Day [6]. Secondly, coffee brands should invest in cultural storytelling beyond product features, shifting focus from functional benefits (e.g., price, quality) to cultural values and lifestyle alignment. Starbucks in Japan has successfully integrated local aesthetics (e.g., seasonal cherry blossom designs, minimalist packaging) into its new media campaigns, enhancing brand relevance without direct price competition. This cultural storytelling transcends product homogeneity, creating emotional connections that drive long-term brand equity [22]. Thirdly, new media marketing officers of coffee brands should foster online brand communities around cultural identity (e.g., Discord, brand-specific forums) where consumers can engage with the brand's cultural narrative. Aston Martin's online community co-creation model [19] demonstrates how stakeholder interactions strengthen brand identity, applicable here to cultural alignment. A Brazilian coffee brand could create a community platform for coffee lovers to share stories about Brazilian coffee culture, recipes, and sustainable farming practices, fostering a sense of cultural belonging.

For industries practitioners, they can harness brand cultural identity as a general strategy to enhance brand value. Firstly, industry researchers can regularly assess consumer cultural values, symbols, and narratives through surveys, focus groups, or social listening tools. Luckin could analyze social media conversations to identify trending cultural topics (e.g., China chic, Chinese national pride) and integrate them into ad content, ensuring alignment with consumer self-identity. Then, industry researchers should balance cultural authenticity with modern relevance, avoiding stereotyping by blending traditional cultural elements with modern lifestyles. For Example, a campaign celebrating Chinese craftsmanship could feature young artisans using traditional techniques alongside modern design, appealing to both heritage-conscious and progressive consumers. Besides, industry practitioners can measure cultural identity's impact on brand equity by using metrics such as cultural congruence scores (e.g., how well ads reflect consumers' cultural self-concept) alongside traditional brand equity indicators (awareness, association, quality). For instance, scales from self-

congruity theory [74] can be adopted to measure how cultural elements in ads enhance perceived brand identity alignment.

In conclusion, for who want to seek to differentiate in crowded markets and to build long-term brand equity through culturally resonant strategies (e.g., Luckin Coffee marketers and managers, coffee brand marketers and industry practitioners or researchers), can explore the intersection of culture, new media, and consumer behavior to enhance brand awareness, positive associations, and perceived quality; they can deepen consumer connections. By leveraging brand cultural identity as a mediator, brands can foster emotional loyalty and resistance to price competition; they can gain adaptable strategies such as cultural IP co-branding, localized storytelling, and community co-creation, offering scalable models for both regional and global coffee brands.

5.3 Limitation and Future Research

It is imperative to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the interpretation of the results of the present study. Primarily, one of the purposes of this study is to seek differentiation of coffee brands. This article provides a cultural perspective on differentiating coffee brands. Future researches can further combine marketing psychology with cultural theory to explore innovative methods. Second, although the mediation effect has been confirmed in this paper, the specific contents conveyed by new media advertisements that affects consumers' perceptions still needs to be explored in future research. Finally, it is important to note that the present survey was conducted exclusively online, lacking in in - depth interviews and interaction with participants. By interviewing with participants, it is able to identify the causal mechanisms of consumers' attitudes toward products containing cultural elements and deriving the result on the phenomenon, which contributes to refining the quantitative design.

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