Research on the Paths of Cultural Elements Affecting Consumers' Attitudes to Chinese Brands

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Abstract

In recent years, it has become a popular trend for brands to use cultural elements to implement brand strategies. This article intends to examine the influence of brands on consumers' purchasing intentions after using Chinese local elements or global cultural elements, and introduce cultural identity as a moderating variable. The research results show that not all Chinese brands are suitable for direct selection of Chinese elements to implement brand strategies. Compared with brands with low PBL, brands high PBL use Chinese local cultural elements can enable consumers has a stronger purchase intention; and cultural identity can positively strengthen the influence of the above two situations on consumers' purchase intention.

Keywords

Chinese Brand; Perceived Brand Localness; Perceived Brand Globalness; Cultural Elements; Cultural Identity; Purchase Intention.

1. Introduction

Chinese consumer brands have developed over a century, time-honored brands such as Zhang Xiaoquan and Wufangzhai, early well-known brands such as Haier and Li Ning, Internet brands such as Three Squirrels and Didi and some emerging brands such as Broadcast has appeared and grown enormously. In recent years, with the improvement of China's comprehensive strength and its status, the cultural confidence of local consumers has been enhanced, and the recognition of Chinese cultural elements around the world has been improved, thus it has been promoted the strategic application of Chinese elements by Chinese brands. Local brands with Chinese characteristics have also set off a wave of national and domestic products in the local and global markets; Chinese brands such as Herborist and Franz have developed rich Chinese cultural characteristics by using the essence of the local culture, then to shape the brand image and successfully opened up their overseas markets (Meng & Fu, 2016).

However, due to the main influence of economic globalization and cultural globalization, Chinese consumers still have different degrees of prejudice or indifferent consumer awareness of typical cognitive biases towards local brands. That is, when the quality, function and experience value of local brands and foreign brands are at the same level, Chinese consumers still tend to buy foreign brands (Zhang & Gong, 2018), and have a stronger preference for foreign brands. Therefore, when some Chinese brands first enter the local market, they still package themselves as foreign brands to guide consumers to buy. Therefore, facing the current fierce competition between Chinese and foreign brands in the Chinese market, should Chinese brands continue to deepen their Chinese image or build a global image to more firmly establish a foothold in the local market and strengthen their brand image in the local market? On the basis of different brand cultural symbolism, how should existing local brands better choose cultural elements to use, to gain consumers’ preferences?
The existing literature on the research of cultural elements on consumers' brand purchase intention is not comprehensive. First of all, from the perspective of research subjects, existing studies have focused more on the mechanism of using cultural elements in the process of global brand localization and Chinese brand globalization, the influence path of perceived brand globalness and perceived brand localness (Meng & Fu, 2016), and the moderate role of different psychological mechanisms such as national product awareness or cultural identity.

The research about consumer cultural positioning are limited so far, and there is a lack of attention to the research on how Chinese brands use cultural elements and implement consumer cultural positioning strategy in the highly competitive and complex Chinese market. At the same time, there are relatively few research literatures related to the construction of Chinese independent brands, which mainly focus on how to cultivate independent brands, and lack of mechanism research on the implementation of different positioning strategies of Chinese brands in the Chinese market to improve the brand image. In addition, with the rapid development of China’s consumer market, Chinese consumers' cognition and behavior of brands have also changed. The research results on local brand construction based on other global markets may be different from the actual situation in China.

Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the path of Chinese brands with different brand cultures in using different cultural elements to enhance the consumption and purchase intention of Chinese local consumers in China’s local market, and introduces cultural identity as a moderator.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Consumer culture positioning

At the end of the 20th century, the process of globalization promoted the development of global market segments and the formation of global consumer culture. Alden and Batra (1999) creatively put forward the consumer culture positioning strategy based on the formation of global consumer culture and combined with the relevant theories of semiotics.

Consumer culture positioning strategy, including global consumer culture position (GCCP), local consumer culture position (LCCP) and foreign consumer culture position (FCCP). Global consumer culture positioning strategy is a strategy that connects the brand with specific global cultural symbols. For example, Haier’s brand slogan "Haier smart family, customized beautiful life" reflects the consensus and pursuit of global consumers for intelligent ideal life. Local cultural consumption positioning strategy is a strategy that combines the brand with specific local cultural significance, such as Chinese cosmetics brand INOHERB integrates traditional Chinese medicine into its product R & D and design. The foreign consumer culture position strategy is to connect the brand with a specific foreign culture and shape the symbol of foreign culture for the brand.

2.2. Perceived brand globalness and perceived brand localness

The successful implementation of consumer cultural positioning strategy can often make consumers perceive the globalness or localness of the brand. Perceived brand globalness was first proposed by Steenkamp, Batra and Alden (2003), and at the same time they proposed the corresponding concept "brand local cultural symbolism". Since then, many other scholars have put forward concepts similar to the symbolism of the brand’s local culture on the basis of Steenkamp and others. Although the various concepts are named differently, they have similar connotations, so they can be regarded as the same concept. This paper will use the "perceived brand localness"(PBL) and "PBG" as independent concepts corresponding to each other for study. Özsomer (2012) used consumers from emerging markets in Turkey, mature markets in Singapore, and Denmark as research samples, and found that in emerging markets, PBG has a
significant positive correlation with brand’s local symbolism; but in mature markets, these two sides shows a significant negative correlation. Meng and Fu (2016), from the perspective of research on the internationalization of Chinese brands, found that Chinese brands with "Chinese style" are very popular among French consumers. Swoboda, Pennemann and Taube (2012) investigated the willingness of more than 1,000 Chinese consumers to visit various retailers from West, Asia and Chinese local markets, and found that the PBG has a stronger effect on consumers' patronage of foreign retailers; PBL has a greater role in promoting consumers’ patronage of local retailers in China. He, Wu and Xie (2014) found that the stronger the brand's stereotype consistency when using Chinese cultural elements, the stronger the PBL, which verified the relationship between the stereotype consistency, PBL and products purchase possibilities under the regulation of cultural identity. Therefore, domestic and foreign scholars' rich researches on PBG and PBL have laid a rich theoretical foundation for the research of this article.

2.3. Cultural elements

The formal public formulation of "Chinese Elements" came from the Chinese advertising industry, and was put forward by the famous local advertiser Mr. Gao Jun. Most of the relevant research also started from the perspective of advertising or communication, and there are relatively few studies from the perspective of marketing. He et al. (2014) studied the mechanism of global brands using Chinese elements in brand marketing activities in the process of localization based on the perspective of stereotype consistency, setting a precedent for empirical research on Chinese elements in domestic marketing circles; from the perspective of marketing, he innovatively proposed the first definition of Chinese elements: that is, symbols, spiritual connotations or objects that are derived from Chinese cultural traditions or that are closely related to Chinese culture arising from the development of modern Chinese society which are recognized by the most Chinese people and consumers can use it to associate Chinese culture rather than other national cultures, such as Chinese characters, Spring Festival, Peking Opera, Chinese medicine, etc. Regarding the definition of global elements, Huang (2018) summarized previous studies on global elements in the research on the effectiveness of cultural elements in brand consumer cultural positioning strategies, and defined global elements as: affected by global consumer culture, certain symbols which is driven by the globalization, some spiritual connotations or objects are understood and shared by most consumers worldwide, such as English, Christmas, World Cup, etc.

2.4. Local identity and global identity

Consumer cultural identity, including global identity and local identity, that is an important psychological variable to explain global and local brand or product attitudes (He, 2013b). Huang, He and Zhu (2018) demonstrated the internal logic of local identity driving global brands to effectively implement the global localization strategy from the perspective of local symbolic value of brands. He et al. (2014) found that compared with global identity, people with local identity are more vulnerable to the impact of local cultural element strategy on their product attitude, and the PBL will positively affect the attitude or purchase probability of consumers with high local identity towards products. Based on the data of consumers in five major cities in China, He and Cheng (2015) clarified the concept and mechanism of cultural identity and ethnocentrism (i.e. awareness of domestic goods), and pointed out that cultural identity can positively affect the preference and purchase intention of local brands at the same time. He and Cheng (2017) explored the moderate role of cultural identity in the study of global brands using local elements to increase consumers' purchase probability, and stated that local cultural identity can positively moderate the impact of PBL on brand purchase probability, while global cultural identity will weaken the impact. When studying the impact of perceived globalness and perceived localness on consumers' willingness to foreign retailers and local
retailers, Swoboda et al. (2012) use the cultural identity as a moderate, and found that perceived globalness has a stronger positive role in promoting global-identity consumers' willingness to foreign retailers.

Therefore, there has already been a certain research basis on the impact of cultural identity on local brands and global brands, but it will be of some innovative significance to carry out relevant research on cultural identity based on the complex and changeable Chinese market.

3. Research hypothesis

3.1. The impact of cultural elements and PBL on purchase intention

The brand can implement the brand strategy by combining the signals with global symbolism or local symbolism, so as to shape the local or global image of the brand. Cultural elements exist in the form of spiritual connotation, symbols or physical objects to express a specific culture, which can be recognized by consumers in a certain scope and actively associate with relevant culture. Therefore, cultural elements often have a good signal function to express globalness or localness, so they are often carried by brands or brand products to reflect their local or global image. Based on the existing brand image, the brand uses cultural elements to strengthen or update the local symbolism or global symbolism in the hearts of consumers, which can directly affect consumers' purchase intention.

Brands with high PBL are easier for consumers to quickly associate with the content related to China, while brands with PBL are harder for consumers to quickly associate with the meaning of China. Brands with different PBL are likely to produce different effects and lead to different consumers' purchase intention when using different cultural element strategies. Therefore, we propose the following assumptions:

H1a: compared with global elements, brands with high PBL adopt Chinese element strategy can make consumers have higher purchase intention.

H1b: compared with local elements, brands with low PBL adopt global element strategy can make consumers have higher purchase intention.

3.2. Moderate role of cultural identity

Cultural identity is a value orientation, there are some value differences between global identity and local identity. Global identity means that consumers identify with the values related to global consumer culture, and local identity means that consumers identify with the values related to local consumer culture (Huang et al., 2018). When consumers process information from brands or products, cultural identity will affect consumers' enthusiasm for information processing, and further affect consumers' purchase intention and decision-making. When the culture showed by the brand is consistent with the cultural orientation of consumers, the brand is more likely to be loved by consumers. At the same time, cultural identity will not make people reject the brand once the symbolic culture of the brand is inconsistent with his or her cultural orientation. Therefore, under the effect of cultural identity, consumers' preference and purchase intention for brand is a psychological behavior driven by internal emotion.

Hence, this paper speculates that when the local identity is high, consumers will have higher awareness of the high PBL and local elements of the brand, and positively affect their purchase intention of the brand or products, while the PBG or low PBL of the brand will have no impact; vice versa. Cultural identity can moderate the influence of different cultural element strategies on consumers' purchase intention by brands with different PBL. Thus, this paper puts forward the following assumptions:

H2: The stronger the local identity of consumers, the more likely that they will buy brands with high PBL adopting Chinese element strategy.
H3: The stronger the global identity of consumers, the more likely that they will buy brands with low PBL adopting global element strategy.

4. Methods and data

4.1. Design

This study aims to explore the impact of different cultural element strategies on consumers’ purchase intention of existing Chinese brands, and try to explain the moderate role of cultural identity in this process. This study adopts a two factor inter group design of 2 (PBL: high vs low) * 2 (type of cultural elements: local vs global) to explore how different cultural elements will affect Chinese consumers’ purchase intention of brands with different PBL. This study will determine the experimental categories and cultural elements through the prediction test, so as to ensure the effectiveness and scientificity of the test as much as possible. The online professional questionnaire platform "questionnaire star" is used to distribute and recover the questionnaire, and specific questions are set to eliminate the invalid questionnaire. Finally, Excel, SPSS and Amos are used to process and analysis data.

4.2. Question design and data collection

Based on the characteristics of the experimental materials, this study adjusted the language wording of certain items, integrated the measurement items of each concept, so as to make the overall expression of the questionnaire more appropriate and easy to understand. Referring to the previous research methods, this study adopts the 7-point Likert method to reduce the possible deviation of each measurement item due to word understanding in the process of filling in the questionnaire. The control variables include individual background information such as gender, age and consumption expenditure level of skin care products. This study adopts an inter subject experimental design of 2 (PBL: high vs low) * 2 (cultural elements: local vs global). Undergraduate and graduate students from Shanghai University were selected as subjects, and finally 167 subjects participated, they are randomly assigned to four experimental scenarios. Among all the subjects, the proportion of women was slightly higher (59.9%), the age was mainly between 18 and 25 years old (79.6%), and the annual consumption expenditure of most people on skin care products was between 500 and 3000 yuan (61.7%). In a conclusion, the subjects are consistent with the target consumers of the test category, and the sample quality is good.

4.3. Result analysis

In this study, spss24.0 and amos22.0 software were used for statistical analysis and hypothesis test.

4.3.1. Reliability and validity test

Cronbach’s α value of the whole variables is between 0.866-0.952, which is greater than the standard of 0.700, that is the scale has good internal consistency. In addition, the combined CR values of all measurement items were significantly greater than 0.600, which means the reliability of the scale was accepted.

The CFA model fitting indexes of each variable meet the requirements, and the factor loading of each variable is significantly more than 0.500, and the T-value meets the significant level of less than 0.050. In addition, the AVE of each variable is significantly greater than 0.500 which stands that the convergence validity of each variable is good.

Besides, the AVE of each variable is greater than the square of its correlation coefficient with other variables, that is, each potential variable has good differential validity.
4.3.2. Manipulation test

According to the independent sample T-test, in the high-PBL brand situation, consumers’ perception of the PBL is significantly higher than that in the low PBL brand situation (M high PBL = 5.22, M low PBL = 2.61, P < 0.001), thus indicates that the cultural symbolic manipulation of the brand in this study is successful.

In addition, the independent sample T-test of cultural element types shows that there is a significant difference in consumers’ perception of PBL and PGL situational manipulation (P < 0.001). The perception of local elements in local context is M local = 6.04, and the perception of local elements in global element context is M global = 3.72, which proves that the situational manipulation of cultural element types is successful.

4.3.3. Hypothesis test

1) Test of PBL/PGL and cultural element types

For brands with high PBL, when using Chinese local cultural elements to launch the strategy, consumers have higher willingness to buy products of the brand (M high PBL + local elements = 4.56, M high PBL + global elements = 3.33, t (79) = 5.25, P < 0.001). For brands with low PBL, when the global element strategy is adopted, consumers’ willingness to buy products of the brand is higher (M low PBL + global element = 4.48, M low PBL + local element = 3.21, t (84) = 6.54, P < 0.001). Therefore, the experimental results show that compared with global elements, brands with high PBL adopt Chinese element strategy can make consumers have higher purchase intention. And compared with local elements, brands with low PBL adopt global element strategy can make consumers have higher purchase intention. H1a and H1b are both supported by validation.

![Figure 1. The influence of PBL and cultural elements on purchase intention](image)

2) Role test of local cultural identity and global cultural identity

In the moderate role test of local cultural identity, the results are shown in Figure 2 below. When consumers with a high local cultural identity, for brands with high PBL, consumers have higher purchase intention for brand or products adopting Chinese element strategy than adopting global elements (M high PBL + high local identity + local elements = 5.33, M high PBL + high local identity + Global elements = 3.33, t (48) = 6.54, P < 0.001). hen consumers with a low local cultural identity, there is no significant difference in consumers' purchase intention for brands with high PBL whether using local elements or global elements (M high PBL + low local identity + local elements = 3.47, M high PBL + low local identity + Global elements = 3.33, t (29) = 0.66, P > 0.01)
Secondly, in the moderate effect test of global cultural identity, the results are shown in Figure 3 below. When consumers with high global cultural identity, for brands with low PBL, consumers have higher purchase intention for brand products adopting global element strategy than adopting local elements (M low PBL + high global identity + Global element = 5.21, M low PBL + high global identity + local element = 3.21, t (52) = 10.44, P < 0.001). When consumers with low global cultural identity, there is no significant difference in consumers' purchase intention for brands with low PBL whether using local elements or global elements (M low PBL + low global identity + Global elements = 3.29, M low PBL + low global identity + local elements = 3.21, t (30) = 0.09, P > 0.01)

According to the above analysis, when consumers have a stronger local identity, consumers are more likely to buy brand products with high PBL using Chinese local element strategy; while consumers have a stronger sense of global identity, brands with low PBL using global cultural elements is more attractive for consumers to buy. Therefore, H2 and H3 are both verified.

5. Discussion

So far, the research hypothesis proposed in this paper has been basically verified and supported. The results show that the existing brands that have formed certain cultural symbols (brands with high PBL or low PBL) adopt different types of cultural element implementation strategies
will have different effects on consumers’ purchase intention. Among them, for brands with high PBL, compared with adopting global elements, adopting Chinese cultural element strategy can make consumers have higher purchase intention (H1a); for brands with low PBL, the global cultural element strategy can promote consumers’ purchase intention (H1B). In this process, cultural identity will affect consumers’ recognition and emotion towards brands and cultural elements, thus moderating the process. Specifically, when brands with high PBL adopt Chinese cultural element strategy, high local identity has a significant positive moderate effect on consumers’ purchase intention, while it has no significant effect on the process of brands with high PBL adopting global cultural element strategy (H2); when brands with low PBL adopt the global element strategy, high global identity also significantly strengthens consumers’ purchase intention which means it has a positive moderate effect, but it has no significant impact on the process of low-PBL brands using the Chinese element strategy (H3). This paper has some feasible theoretical contributions and practical significance for the process of strengthening, improving or changing the brand image on the basis of the original cultural symbolism.

References