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CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF VISUAL INNOVATION IN CHINA TIME-HONORED BRANDS: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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ABSTRACT

China time-honored brands have been favored by consumers because of their unique cultural attributes. In the era of modern commerce, China has numerous time-honored brands. Yet, very few of them remain evergreen and thrive consistently over time. Therefore, it is very important to explore the innovative ways of China time-honored brands. After reviewed the research of China time-honored brands and existing literature on consumers' perception of brand visual innovation, this work obtained the function diagram of the visual innovation of brands perceived by consumers. This perception pertains to consumers' recognition of the visual imagery, craftsmanship, innovative services, and creativity of these brands, as well as the perception of whether there will be ongoing innovative activities and potential for innovation in the future. On this basis, combined with the characteristics of China time-honored brands, the theoretical model proposed in this paper can further develop the measurement of consumer perception of the visual innovation of China time-honored brands in the future, and carry out empirical research to provide theoretical support for the revitalization of China time-honored brands.

Keyword: China Time-Honored Brands, Consumer Perception, Craftsmanship, Visual Imagery, Visual Innovation.

INTRODUCTION

China time-honored brands refer to those with a long history, featuring products, craftsmanship, or services that have been passed down through generations (Han, 2022). They are deeply rooted in the distinct traditional Chinese cultural background and possess rich cultural heritage (Yu & Xu, 2019). Such brands have earned widespread social recognition and

have established an excellent reputation (Xiang, 2023). They are the pinnacles that have emerged from centuries of competition in commerce and handicraft industry, representing gems in the realm of business culture. A survey reveals that, as of the end of 2022, among the 1,128 China time-honored brands recognized by the Ministry of Commerce, 45% showed a growth trend, 50% maintained steady operations, yet 5% faced challenges in their development because of rigid mechanisms, outdated mindsets, lack of innovation, and weak succession (Han, 2023). Compared to some internationally renowned old brands like Coca-Cola, China time-honored brands often leave an impression of being "aged" rather than portraying an image of being "youthful, trendy, and innovative."

Brand image is the composite perception people have formed in their minds, based on various elements that make up a brand (Bakri, Krisjanous, & Richard, 2020). This encompasses the impressions left by brand value, product attributes, brand symbols, and the subjective evaluations people hold about the brand (Huang & Lu, 2000). However, most of China time-honored brands have focused on promoting their products without actively shaping their brand image (Song & Kim, 2022). This phenomenon arises from businesses and academics in China following the lead of others. When Western markets in the early 20th century were emphasizing product quality and enhancing product images, China's economy was still grappling with feudalism. China missed the early stages of market cultivation and foundational education. As Western economies began stabilizing their product quality standards and placing more emphasis on brand image in marketing activities, there arose a mistaken belief in China that business management equated to brand management, or that corporate image was the same as brand image. This has resulted in a general indifference towards product and its image.

The aesthetic premium, epitomized by the phrase "a single beauty hides a hundred flaws," not only fuels the rapid growth of the "The economics of beauty" but also provides enterprises with a model to capture the scarcest resource: consumers' attention. Whether it's in brand logo design, packaging, or atmosphere creation, businesses strive to influence consumers' aesthetic experiences. Aesthetics is a holistic engagement process. Amongst all sensory engagements, visual experience is the most dominant and deeply influences human cognition and behavior (Krishna, 2006). For instance, aesthetically pleasing products or packaging can activate the reward circuits in consumers' brains (Lacey et al., 2011; Reimann, Zaichkowsky, Neuhaus, Bender, & Weber, 2010), effectively evoking pleasure. A visually appealing design can also offer psychological benefits to consumers, affirming their self-worth (Townsend & Sood, 2012), thereby encouraging purchasing behavior and enhancing brand's performance in the market (Chatterjee, 2011).

Renowned brands claim that innovation is one of their core values, consistently engaging in innovative activities and establishing an innovative brand image for consumers. This is because innovation can drive growth and profit for companies. Successful innovation can help brands establish their status as industry leaders, such as iPhone and Coca-Cola. The diffusion of innovation is more critical than the practical innovative acts. Perceived innovation does not necessarily need to have a strong connection to innovative actions. Consumers' perception of innovation can become a sustained competitive advantage for companies. Based on this, we believe that the development of China time-honored brands not only depends on the innovative actions of the enterprises themselves but also heavily relies on consumers' perceptions of the brands' innovation, especially the visual innovation. So, is there any relationship between Chinese consumers' perception of China time-honored brands and brand image visual design? What kind of brand visual image can leave a deep impression on Chinese consumers? How do these visual images work? There are currently no effective methods and unified conclusions to

raise these issues. Thus, this research focuses on examining consumers' responses to China time-honored brands' adoption of different brand image visual design strategies, aiming to understand the cognition of such strategies that impact brand preference.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Development of China Time-Honored Brands

The rise and fall of China time-honored brands are part of the history of China's commercial civilization. Since the national "Revitalization of China Time-Honored Brands Project" was implemented in 2006, China time-honored brands have made significant progress. As can be seen from the data in Table 1, the brand value of China time-honored brands has greatly increased from 2006 to 2023. Among them, Moutai Group is the highest-valued company in the Chinese market, with a market value exceeding 2000 billion RMB. In 2023, among the world's most valuable brands, Apple ranked first with a value of 10 trillion RMB. It is evident that while the brand value of China time-honored brands has improved, there is still a significant gap when compared to internationally renowned ones.

Table 1

Brand value ranking of the top ten China time-honored brands in 2006 and 2023 (unit: Billion RMB)

Year	2006	2023
Brand value ranking (Billion RMB)	 3.0	 2298.0
	 2.6	 631.9
	 2.5	 334.6
	 2.4	 308.1
	 2.2	 164.1
	 2.1	 122.9
	 2.0	 96.5
	 1.9	 74.1
	 1.8	 34.7
	 1.5	 11.7

Current Research of China Time-Honored Brands

The development of China time-honored brands has attracted attention from both the industry and academia. However, research on China time-honored brands is not extensive. A review of the existing literature on China time-honored brands indicates that research is primarily qualitative, with limited quantitative studies. The qualitative research mainly focuses on the current status of China time-honored brands, their inheritance and development, cultural

regeneration and construction, image design, and legal protection, offering suggestions for their development. Quantitative studies mainly investigate consumer attitudes and purchasing intentions, relationships between consumers and brands (loyalty, trust, and commitment), and innovation in China time-honored brands.

1. **Consumer Behavior and Brand Loyalty:** This area of research primarily explores consumer attitudes towards China time-honored brands, purchasing intentions, and brand loyalty, focusing on marketing strategies of China time-honored brands (Chu, 2012), consumer nostalgia (Sun, 2013), authenticity of these brands (Xu, Wang, Wang & Song, 2015), quality of relationships with these brands (Li, 2013), external cues related to these brands (Ma, 2015), reputation (Dong, 2016), and brand extensions of these brands (Xu & Zhao, 2014).

2. **Innovation in China Time-Honored Brands:** Current research in this area primarily approaches innovation in China time-honored enterprises from a corporate perspective, emphasizing how these businesses should innovate at the corporate and brand levels. There's scant focus on examining the visual innovation of China time-honored brands from the consumers' perspective. Some scholars argue that China time-honored enterprises should undergo holistic innovations spanning from conceptual thinking, systems, technology, operations, management, products, services, market, to strategies. Among these, changes in thinking, organization, and systems are pivotal (Zhang & Sun, 2010). China time-honored brands should innovate their brand culture and counter any negative brand features by innovating their products and image (Qin, 2014). Wei and Huang summarized the factors inside and outside the enterprise that influence brand innovation. Their empirical analysis concluded that China time-honored enterprises emphasize brand promotion and brand image innovation but overlook innovation in brand management (Wei & Huang, 2016). Zhu and Chang used Pechoin as a case study to explore the relationship between product innovations in aging brands (functional innovation, appearance innovation, and symbolic innovation) and consumer purchase intentions. While their approach is from a consumer perception angle, they focus on the perceived value rather than consumers' perception of the product innovation (Zhu & Chang, 2012).

Existing literature offers an insufficient perspective on the study of China time-honored brands. Merely examining corporate behaviors or the products from a business viewpoint doesn't delve deep enough. In the present customer-centric environment, China time-honored brands should leverage their recognition and reputation, and various brand cues, to capture consumers' minds. They should strive to establish a fresh brand visual image in the minds of consumers rather than allowing the continued proliferation of an "aging" image.

The Basis of How Visual Image Affects Consumer Decision-Making

1. **Physiological basis:** Previous studies in neuroscience have advanced our understanding of the neural underpinnings of aesthetic preferences for beautiful faces (Aharon et al., 2001), geometric shapes (Jacobsen, Schubotz, Höfel, & Cramon, 2006), paintings, and artworks (Cela-Conde et al., 2004), as well as the brain's association with expertise in aesthetics. These studies indicate that human visual analysis operates on two levels: "what" and "where." From a physiological perspective, the ventral system is focused on object recognition, addressing the question of "what"; while the dorsal system transforms and utilizes this information from a self-oriented perspective, primarily addressing the question of "where" (Goodale, Milner, Jakobson, & Carey, 1991). Norman summarized neurophysiological and psychophysical research that distinguishes between these two visual systems, proposing that both systems are

used by people to analyze visual input, but for different purposes. The ventral system is responsible for object recognition, primarily dealing with objects and their features, such as color, size, and shape, and is sensitive to image details. On the other hand, the dorsal system facilitates visually guided behaviors, such as pointing, reaching, and grasping, primarily dealing with location, motion, spatial relationships, and transformations (Norman, 2002). Therefore, the perception of visual aesthetic elements in the consumer's brain primarily resides in the ventral system.

2. Psychological basis: Just as beauty can provide an unconscious "beauty premium," aesthetically pleasing design can bring various psychological benefits to consumers. The formation of consumer preferences for certain visual aesthetic elements is closely related to their psychological needs. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) and self-signaling theory (Prelec & Bodner, 2003) suggest that people infer information about themselves by observing their own behavior, obtaining diagnostic information about the self. Choosing beautiful or unattractive products is a signal of self-diagnosis or judgment by consumers. When their values are threatened, consumers will choose more attractive products as a means of self-affirmation (Townsend & Sood, 2012) and self-repair. Conversely, unattractive visual elements serve as negative self-diagnostic signals, such as unappealing or unattractive vegetables and fruits. Even the mere imagination of products lacking aesthetic appeal can have a negative impact on consumers' self-perception (Grewal, Hmurovic, Lamberton, & Reczek, 2019). Therefore, the pursuit of beautiful things arises from consumers' desire to positively regard themselves and utilize aesthetically pleasing brand signals to maintain a positive self-view.

Formation of Brand Visual Aesthetic Trigger Response Chain

Building upon the physiological and psychological basis, consumers translate visual information into individual aesthetic experiences. This article deconstructs this process into three stages: visual attention, visual processing, and visual comprehension, aiming to dissect the entire process through which consumers move from noticing brand visual elements to cognitively processing them, generating understanding and resonance, and ultimately forming an aesthetic experience.

1. Visual Attention: Visual attention is the process of capturing visual information. During this stage, consumers receive various types of information through the visual system from visual elements, such as color, shape, texture, and location on a partial level. Different types of information may involve different brain regions (Chatterjee, 2004). Visual attention marks the starting point of consumers' aesthetic responses, as without capturing their attention, there is no further progression. Typically, attention can be measured by the number of gazes, which strongly correlates with whether consumers include a specific brand in their consideration set. Consumer attention can be either self-driven or non-self-driven. Self-driven attention results from consumers' shopping goals and cognitive expectations, while non-self-driven attention is a function of brand visual aesthetics where visual attractiveness leads to the notice of some brands while ignoring others. All brand aesthetic designs aim to capture attention, which is crucial for brands. Brand-led visual elements can increase brand familiarity, alter perception, and ultimately influence choice (Janiszewski & Chandon, 2007).

Vivid visual information helps brands maintain consumer attention (McGill & Anand, 1989), and brands can enhance consumer attention through various aesthetic elements. For example, product images on packaging are likely to attract special attention because they trigger image processing and are seen as clues conveying internal information (Clark & Paivio, 1987);

product shape also affects consumer attention, as consumers judge shape area by comparing the most prominent linear dimensions, leading to a systemic bias in volume perception (Krider, Raghubir, & Krishna, 2001). Folkes and Matta (2004) revised this view, suggesting that visual attention tends to perceive objects as a whole rather than individual dimensions, and any packaging shape that attracts more attention (e.g., asymmetry) is perceived as larger (Folkes & Matta, 2004). Milosavljevic et al. conducted research on visual salience bias from a holistic perspective and found that consumers are more inclined to choose visually salient brands because visual salience can trigger higher attention (Milosavljevic, Navalpakkam, Koch, & Rangel, 2012). In summary, any visually salient aesthetic design will create an attention-attracting effect, making the brand stand out.

2. Visual Processing: Visual processing is the process of handling and processing visual information. Both visual attention and visual processing are automatic processes, meaning that these two stages do not require consumers to have any knowledge or skills; they are spontaneous physiological processes. After consumers have noticed brand visual elements, they must "process" the information conveyed by these visual elements from various touchpoints to form an overall visual perception. Through the human perceptual system, consumers gain an understanding of the characteristics of visual elements, and features such as the complexity, concreteness, dynamism, and typicality of brand visual elements are processed during this stage.

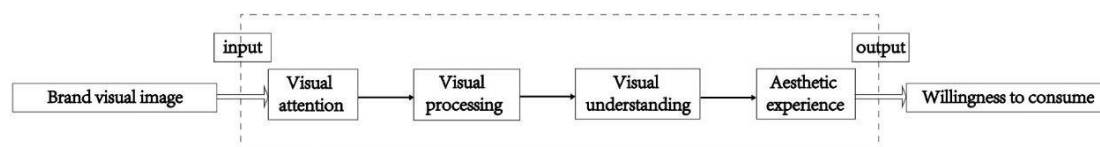
Because visual processing requires consumers to systematically process various types of visual information they receive, it implies that consumers need to expend a certain amount of mental effort. Therefore, features such as the complexity and dynamism of visual elements may impact the difficulty of visual processing. Past research has used the concept of "processing fluency" to measure the difficulty of this information processing. It is generally believed that higher processing fluency can lead to more positive evaluations of brands by consumers. Schwarz introduced the concept of "processing preference" (Schwarz, 2004), suggesting that processing fluency can influence consumer preferences for products even when it does not provide additional benefits (Janiszewski, Kuo, & Tavassoli, 2013). When processing fluency is high, consumers feel more confident and are more likely to have a positive view of visual information (Beier et al., 2015). High processing fluency results in successful recognition of visual stimuli (Carver & Scheier, 1990), implying to consumers that the stimulus is familiar (Zajonc, 1968). Therefore, any visual design with high processing fluency is more likely to be favored by consumers.

3. Visual Understanding: Visual understanding is the process of contemplating and interpreting visual information, involving conscious thinking by consumers. Building upon visual processing, consumers interpret visual information to gain subjective cognition and generate emotional responses. Perception of a brand's visual style by consumers is formed during this stage. Visual understanding serves as the basis for consumers' aesthetic judgments and reflects the aesthetic cognition related to visual elements in consumers' minds. This understanding process is influenced not only by the characteristics of visual elements themselves but also by consumers' existing aesthetic experiences and expertise. In the context of brand visual aesthetics, consumers form visual understanding based on the associations between visual elements and products, past purchases, or usage situations, combined with their own expertise. The consumer's brain receives visual inputs from various sources, and impressions left by previous visual stimuli are retrieved in some form to assist the consumer in various subsequent tasks. In other words, based on past encounters with certain visual elements, specific visual elements may be associated with different concepts in memory, and these associations can lead

to inferences about designs that incorporate these visual elements. For example, the color gold can evoke associations with luxury, so using gold items in a restaurant can make consumers perceive themselves and the restaurant as having a higher status (Lee, Noble, & Biswas, 2018). Furthermore, consumers' aesthetic knowledge plays a crucial role in the formation of visual understanding. When consumers have limited aesthetic knowledge, their visual understanding may remain at the stage of simple content description. As knowledge increases, other forms of visual understanding are more likely to emerge. In addition to deep-level perception, aesthetic knowledge also influences visual understanding through "generalized enjoyment." Once consumers learn and master concepts of certain artistic styles, they can generalize based on these styles to identify new aesthetic styles, such as the "cool," "cute," or "personification" styles mentioned. Different levels of aesthetic knowledge lead to different visual understandings of the same object, contributing to the emergence of new aesthetic styles. These potential new styles provide an endless treasure trove for possible aesthetic experiences.

4. Brand Aesthetic Trigger Response Chain Based on Aesthetic Experience: Aesthetic experience is a high-level cognitive process closely related to consumers' visual understanding, where consumers' cognition, imagination, and emotions interact (Li, Li, & Wu, 2013). As early as 1871, Fechner recognized that individual taste and knowledge would influence one's aesthetic experience of genuine art (Fechner, 1871), and Dewey proposed a similar concept, suggesting that viewers must "create their own experience in abstract behavior, extracting meaningful elements" (Dewey, 1934). Aesthetic experience encompasses aesthetic judgment and aesthetic emotions, with aesthetic judgment considered as the outcome of understanding the ambiguity of the object, stemming from consumers' visual understanding. It is often regarded as a significant measure of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic emotions can be seen as subjective assessments of success in the process of forming an aesthetic experience. The deeper the understanding, the more confident consumers are about the content, style, and other aspects of visual elements, resulting in higher levels of emotional satisfaction (Leder et al., 2004). Aesthetic experience influences consumers' subsequent purchase decisions. After forming an aesthetic experience, consumers make choices based on aesthetic judgment and emotional responses (Chatterjee, 2004).

Figure 1
Brand Visual Aesthetic Trigger Response Chain



Therefore, based on the analysis of the impact of visual elements in brand aesthetics on consumers and their mechanisms, He Yun proposed the "Brand Visual Aesthetic Trigger Response Chain", as shown in Figure 1. This response chain begins with brand aesthetic elements and ends with consumers' purchase intentions. The mechanism of brand visual aesthetics is based on consumers' physiological basis and psychological needs, and the magnitude and direction of its impact vary with consumers' psychological needs. The influence of visual elements on consumers' purchase decisions depends on consumers' aesthetic experience, which can be deconstructed into three stages: visual attention, visual processing, and visual understanding. The first two stages are spontaneous processes, while the third stage involves conscious thinking. This response chain represents a process of receiving visual

information, processing visual information, understanding visual information, and forming subjective cognition and emotional responses.

Defining the Concept of Consumer Perception of Brand Visual Innovation

The notion of "innovativeness" was initially used in studies related to innovation diffusion and new product adoption. As it was introduced to the realm of perceived innovation, scholars began examining it from product, corporate, and brand perspectives, namely perceived product innovation, corporate innovation, and brand innovation. Typically, the research is based on corporate and consumer viewpoints. The focus of this study is consumers' perception of brand visual innovation.

After the introduction of brand visual innovation into the literature of perceived innovativeness, the scholar Ouellet was among the first to define the term. Ouellet defined a brand's visual innovation as "consumers' perception of a brand's inclination and support for new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes based on their understanding of the brand's visual image". This suggests that visual innovation is related to consumer perceptions and should be interpreted as consumers' perception of the introduction of innovative new products, new services, and other forms of innovation like creative advertising (Ouellet, 2006).

In their study on the drivers of brand commitment, Eisingerich and Rubera defined brand visual innovation as "the extent to which consumers perceive that the brand's visual image offers new and useful solutions to meet their needs". They believed that only when consumers perceive the brand's visual image as fulfilling their needs will they commit to the brand accordingly (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010). This definition was subsequently adopted by Pappu and Quester in their study on the relationship between brand visual innovation and brand loyalty (Pappu & Quester, 2016). Boisvert, while examining consumer attitudes towards service extensions and the parent brand, defined the perceived innovation of service extensions as "the extent to which extended intangible products, actions, and reactions are perceived as novel by consumers" (Boisvert, 2012). Barone and Jewell, in their study on corporate innovation licenses and the advertising advantages created by brand innovation, noted that brand innovation is the extent to which consumers perceive brand innovation, representing the reputation a brand earns from consumers when offering valuable new products (Barone & Jewell, 2014).

It is evident that the definition of consumers' perception of brand visual innovation can be categorized into two dimensions: consumers' perception and the degree of consumers' perception. We believe that consumers' perception is a broader dimension than the degree of consumers' perception. Compared to other scholars, Shams' definition is more comprehensive, encompassing the visual innovation of brand products, the overall innovative capacity of the brand, and the brand's willingness and potential to continue innovating in the future (Henard & Dacin, 2010). Referring to the definitions provided by existing scholars and considering the characteristics of China time-honored brands, we find that Shams' definition is apt for delineating consumers' perception of the visual innovation of such brands. This definition is framed as: consumers' perception of the degree of innovation and creativity in products, craftsmanship, or services of China time-honored brands, and whether these brands will continue their innovative activities with potential in the future.

Dimensions and Measurement of Consumers' Perception of Brand Innovation

The academic division of the dimensions regarding consumers' perception of brand visual innovation has primarily been uni-dimensional. The scales used by scholars vary in focus, and there hasn't been a universally accepted scale. Eisingerich and Rubera's scale was the first to measure brand visual innovation from the consumer's perspective. The scales used by scholars are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of perceived brand innovativeness scale

Scholars	Cultural Attributes
Eisingerich&Rubera (2010)	It mainly focuses on whether the brand provides new products to meet the needs of consumers
Boisvert&Ashill (2011); Boisvert&Ashill (2022); Boisvert (2012)	Consists of four relative groups of words: predictable/innovative; Common/unique; Universal/ primitive; Old/trend-setting
Barone&Jewell (2014)	Single-item scale, advertising brand laptops are innovative
Shams (2015) ;(Hetet, Ackermann, & Mathieu, 2020)	The definition is mainly designed around the degree of consumer perception of the brand's product innovation, creativity, and the brand's potential for continuous innovative activities in a given market in the future
Pappu&Quester (2016) ;(Atulkar, 2020) ;(Parris & Guzmán, 2023)	Based on a survey of product innovation conducted by Song and Xie (2000), it is applied to the brand context, and the selected items are all relevant to consumers
Hubert (2017)	It mainly includes consumers' perceptions of whether the brand is a technology leader, hiring smart people, meeting their needs with new products, and registering many patents

So far, the works on consumer perception of brand innovation was biased to the study of consumer behavior, ignoring the perspective of brand and the relationship between consumers and brands. In this study, the relationship between visual innovation and consumers of China time-honored brands is studied, so as to build a corresponding research model and clarify the path of consumer perception of brand innovation.

METHODOLOGY

Research on Antecedent Variables

The existing research on factors influencing consumer perception of brand innovation can be categorized, in the author's view, into business and consumer perspectives.

From a business perspective: Firstly, on the design level, color harmony influences cognitive creativity and perception of brand innovation. Businesses can stimulate consumer creative thought and their perception of brand innovation by using moderately discordant color combinations.

From a consumer's perspective: Firstly, a consumer's brand knowledge and visual information processing capabilities affect their perception of brand visual innovation. Built on physiological and psychological needs, consumers convert visual information into aesthetic experiences. He et al. decomposed this process into three stages: visual attention, visual processing, and visual understanding. They attempted to elucidate the consumer's journey from noticing brand visual elements, processing these elements cognitively, to understanding and resonating with them, culminating in a complete brand aesthetic experience (He, 2022).

Research on Outcome Variables

Current research on the impact of consumers' perception of visual innovation mainly touches upon two levels: consumer-brand relationship (brand attitude, brand loyalty, brand commitment) and consumer behavior (consumer satisfaction, and purchase intention).

1. Consumer-Brand Relationship:

i. Brand Attitude: Brand visual innovation has a direct and positive impact on consumers' attitudes toward the brand. Innovation positively moderates the relationship between consumers and the brand (Ouellet, 2006). When consumers perceive visual innovation, they become excited about the brand.

ii. Brand Loyalty: The innovation of a brand, as perceived by consumers, positively influences their brand loyalty. When consumers believe that visually innovative brands better meet their needs, they tend to be more loyal to those innovative brands. This is a direct effect (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010).

iii. Brand Commitment: Eisingerich and Rubera view brand innovation as a antecedent variable to brand commitment. They believe that the more consumers feel a brand can provide new and relevant solutions to meet their needs, the more committed they are to that brand.

2. Consumer Behavior

i. Consumer Satisfaction: Consumer perception of brand innovation has a positive impact on consumer satisfaction (Shams, Alpert, & Brown, 2015).

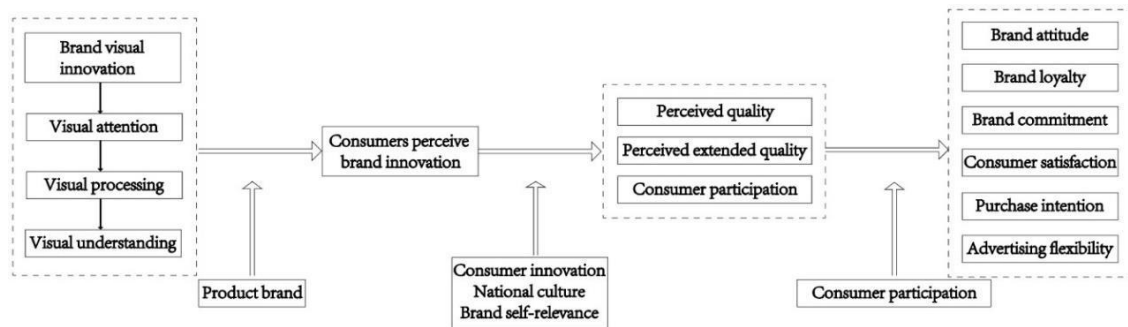
ii. Purchase Intention: In Boisvert and Ashill's research regarding service extension, the perceived innovation of service extension influences attitudes towards the extension indirectly through the perceived quality of the extension. This, in turn, affects consumer behavioral

intentions (Boisvert & Ashill, 2011). Visual innovation positively influences consumers' purchase intentions for China time-honored brands. It serves as a crucial pathway in the revival strategies of such heritage brands.

In summary, the relationships among the variables related to consumer perception of brand visual innovation is obtained. As depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The relationship between consumer perception and brand visual innovation

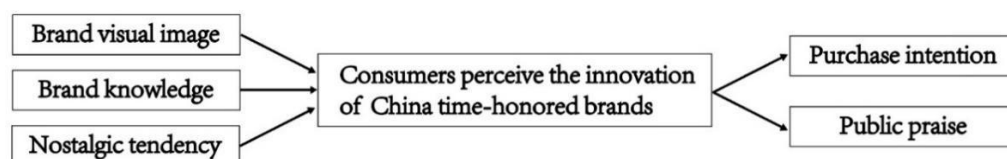


THE ORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Through a review of the literature, and in consideration of the unique characteristics of China time-honored brands, it is proposed that the visual image of China time-honored brands, as well as consumers' knowledge of them, will influence their perception of these brands' visual innovation. This, in turn, can impact their purchase intentions and word-of-mouth behaviors. Additionally, environmental factors like reference groups may also affect consumer perceptions and judgments. Therefore, this study attempts to include reference groups as an antecedent variable to explore their impact on consumers' perception of visual innovation. Furthermore, with the increasing trend and phenomenon of nostalgia, China time-honored brands have become a symbol of nostalgic sentiments for many consumers. The study seeks to understand whether this affects their perception and attitudes towards the visual innovation of these brands. Building on this, the author also seeks to explore the influence of consumers' nostalgic tendencies on their perception of visual innovation, as well as their purchase intentions and word-of-mouth behaviors. So, the theoretical model of this study is derived, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

The framework of consumers' perception of China time-honored brands innovation



DISCUSSION

In the study of consumer perceptions of visual innovation in China time-honored brands, the literature review reveals that there isn't a consensus yet. Much of the research focuses on non-Chinese context, suggesting a need for localized studies in China. Many scholars choose electronic products like mobile phones and cars - brands that continually update - as their subjects. Therefore, future studies can diversify the subjects. Moreover, future research should delve deeper into the factors influencing consumer perceptions of visual innovation and the impacts. Based on the analysis above, the following recommendations are proposed for future research:

1. Focus on cross-sensory aesthetic experiences. Brand experiences are often achieved through multiple senses, but current research tends to focus only on individual sensory attributes. This disconnects from the real consumer brand experience as consumers rarely encounter isolated sensory information in the market. In fact, there are stable cross-sensory correspondences between attributes such as shape, color, material, sound, and other sensory properties (especially taste, aroma, and oral perception). Brand managers can enhance consumer aesthetic experiences by ensuring that the sound symbols of brand names, shape symbols on labels, or even the shape of product packaging establish correct and consistent sensory expectations in the minds of consumers.
2. Expand research on the aftereffects of brand visual aesthetics. While "beauty is good" in the moment of purchase decision, visual beauty may reduce the subsequent actual product usage experience, as using a product that looks beautiful implies potential damage to its beauty. Furthermore, accurately predicting consumers future preferences is a challenge for consumers. Given that post-consumption experiences directly impact brand reputation and consumer repurchase behavior, it is crucial for brands to understand how visual aesthetic elements and stylistic features influence consumers' post-purchase experiences and usage behavior.
3. Explore individual differences in aesthetic judgments. Individuals' perceptions of beauty result from a combination of subjective and objective factors, and there are individual differences in aesthetic judgments. Understanding and measuring these individual differences related to visual design are crucial, as they form the basis for many mature consumer behavior variables (such as product involvement, brand loyalty, brand self-connection) and contribute to understanding the consumer decision-making process.
4. Conduct research on brand visual aesthetics based on the Chinese context. Existing research has mostly been conducted in Western cultural contexts, and it remains unclear whether the conclusions of these studies fully apply to Chinese consumers. In terms of consumption, Western countries generally emphasize sensory pleasure, while Eastern countries emphasize restraint, leading to differences between the two. Therefore, researchers should take note of the unique characteristics of Chinese consumers and explore their preferences for brand visual aesthetics. Additionally, while economic development has pushed the world in a common direction, cultural development has not converged. In recent years, there has been a rise in "national trends" and "Chinese style," drawing attention from the industry and academia. Investigating the role of brand visual aesthetics and the value of Chinese elements in the Chinese context is a research direction worth exploring.

CONCLUSION

China time-honored brands have stood the test of time, emerging as the best from centuries of competition in commerce and the handicraft industry. They represent the gems of business culture. However, with China accession to the WTO and the continuous impact of modern goods around the world, some China time-honored brands have fallen behind and are not competitive in the market. Therefore, it is particularly important to carry out brand innovation for China time-honored brands so as to enhance their competitiveness. By reviewing the development status of China time-honored brands and studying the relationship between brand visual design and consumer perception, this work constructs a model of China time-honored brands' visual innovation design and consumers' perceived value, in an attempt to change consumers' traditional impression of China time-honored brands through brand image visual innovation design. The construction of this theoretical model can further develop the measurement of consumer perception of brand visual innovation, and carry out empirical research to provide theoretical support for the revitalization of China time-honored brands.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by all authors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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