

Factors Influencing Consumer Purchase Intentions through Emotional Branding in the Food Industry: A Case of JiaHua Fresh Flower Cakes in Yunnan, China

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Abstract: Purpose: This study aims to investigate the impact of emotional branding on consumer purchase intentions in the fresh flower cake industry in Yunnan, China. It examines how brand personality, brand storytelling, emotional response, and brand identity influence emotional branding and subsequent consumer purchase intentions. Research design, data, and methodology: The research utilizes a quantitative approach with online questionnaires distributed to 390 respondents familiar with JiaHua Fresh Flower Cakes. The questionnaire covers brand personality, storytelling, emotional response, brand identity, emotional branding, and purchase intentions. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression and simple linear regression. Results: Findings indicate that brand personality, storytelling, emotional response, and brand identity significantly influence emotional branding. Emotional branding, in turn, strongly affects consumer purchase intentions. The analysis shows that emotional branding explains 82% of the variation in consumer purchase intentions. Conclusions: This study highlights the importance of emotional branding in enhancing consumer purchase intentions. By understanding and leveraging emotional connections, businesses can foster stronger brand loyalty and increase market share. Implementing emotional branding strategies can provide a competitive edge in the highly competitive fresh flower cake market in Yunnan. The study also offers recommendations for improving emotional branding and suggests areas for future research.

Keywords: Emotional branding; Consumer purchase intentions; Brand personality; Brand storytelling; Emotional response; Brand identity; Fresh flower cakes; Yunnan

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1 Introduction

In Yunnan Province, China, the flower industry is thriving, boasting the largest flower trading market in Asia. People in Yunnan not only enjoy admiring flowers but also utilize them to create delicacies (Yang, 2017). Among these delicacies, JiaHua Fresh Flower Cakes stand out as a unique culinary product, leveraging the region's abundant floral resources and the local people's emotional affinity for flowers. From cultivation to processing, JiaHua has established a complete industry chain, offering consumers novel and emotionally resonant food choices. (Li & Wang, 2019).

In the fresh flower cake industry, the influence of emotional branding on consumer purchase intentions has garnered widespread attention. The global food industry is experiencing rapid growth and increased competition, with rising demands for health, quality, and personalization. Traditional marketing techniques are becoming less effective as consumers focus more on emotional connections with brands than product features (Holt, 2004). This trend is particularly evident in China, where consumer behavior is rapidly evolving (Zhang & Huang, 2020).

JiaHua Fresh Flower Cakes, a local specialty of Yunnan, are made from edible roses. Representing the unique flavors of the region, they are one of China's four major types of mooncakes. The craftsmanship of JiaHua Fresh Flower Cakes dates back approximately 300 years, preserving traditional methods while incorporating modern innovations. JiaHua Company cultivates its own roses, using fresh edible petals as filling, resulting in pastries with a crispy crust and a soft, original-flavored filling (Zhang, 2018; Chen & Liu, 2019).

As JiaHua has grown, it has become a beloved brand among tourists and locals alike. JiaHua Fresh Flower Cakes

adhere to traditional handmade techniques and high-quality standards. The brand's commitment to authenticity and excellence has led to its increasing popularity and market share. Historically, fresh flower cakes were primarily sold through media and department stores. However, with the rise of e-commerce, sales channels have diversified, and competition has intensified (Wu & Deng, 2020). Despite employing modern strategies such as online platforms and social media, food brands often face stagnant sales and low consumer loyalty due to product homogeneity and high brand switching rates (Lin, 2020).

In this competitive environment, fresh flower cake brands need new strategies to capture consumer attention and increase purchase intentions. Emotional branding is emerging as a key strategy to enhance the emotional connection between brands and consumers. By addressing consumers' emotional needs, wants, and values, brands can resonate more deeply with their audience, shaping perceptions and attitudes toward the brand (Schmitt, 2012). Emotional branding is considered an effective strategy for building strong brand identity and loyalty, especially in the fresh flower cake industry (Li & Zhao, 2019).

Research has shown that emotionally connected consumers value brands significantly more than those who are merely satisfied (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). Emotional branding not only enhances consumer loyalty but also drives sales growth. For instance, purchase intentions for emotionally influenced TV advertising are significantly higher than those driven by the advertising content alone (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). This underscores the importance of emotional branding for influencing customer purchase intentions, especially in Yunnan's highly competitive market environment (Wang & Sun, 2020).

In summary, this study aims to investigate the impact of emotional branding on consumer purchase intentions in the fresh flower cake industry in Yunnan. By analyzing the mechanisms through which emotional branding influences consumer behavior, this research will highlight the importance of emotional branding in the fresh flower cake industry and provide relevant recommendations. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

- To explain the significant influence of brand personality on emotional branding.
- To explain the significant influence of brand storytelling on emotional branding.
- To explain the significant influence of emotional responses on emotional branding.
- To explain the significant influence of brand identity on emotional branding.
- To explain the significant influence of emotional branding on consumer purchase intentions.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Brand Personality

Brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand, helping consumers relate to brands on a personal level and fostering deeper emotional connections. When a brand's personality resonates with consumers' self-concept, it creates a sense of identity and belonging, which is crucial for building brand loyalty (Belk, 1988). For instance, a brand perceived as adventurous might attract consumers who see themselves as thrill-seekers, aligning brand personality with consumer identity to strengthen emotional connections and loyalty (Swaminathan, Page, & Gurhan-Canli, 2007). Research indicates that brand personality significantly impacts consumer behavior. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) found that a strong emotional attachment to a brand leads to higher levels of consumer loyalty and advocacy. Similarly, Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) showed that brand experience, including emotional responses, plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. In industries where functional differences between products are minimal, brand personality provides a competitive edge by creating a unique and compelling brand narrative. Brands like Apple and Nike have leveraged strong brand personalities to build iconic identities that go beyond their products' functional attributes (Keller, 2001).

2.2 Brand Storytelling

Brand storytelling involves crafting a narrative around a brand that resonates emotionally with consumers, including the brand's history, values, mission, and vision (Lundqvist et al., 2013). By weaving a compelling story, brands can create

emotional connections that foster loyalty and differentiate themselves from competitors. Stories evoking nostalgia, hope, or inspiration trigger emotional responses, making the brand memorable and fostering positive associations (Escalas, 2004). Successful storytelling integrates the brand's core values and mission into a narrative that informs, entertains, and emotionally engages the audience (Holt, 2004). Research shows that consumers are more likely to remember and share emotionally strong brand stories, leading to increased brand awareness, loyalty, and advocacy (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). Additionally, storytelling enhances the perceived value of a brand by creating an emotional bond beyond the product's functional benefits (Gensler et al., 2013). Moreover, it emphasizes the uniqueness and distinctive features of a brand, driving differentiation and making the brand more memorable and recognizable (Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2005).

2.3 Emotional Response

Brand identity refers to the visible elements of a brand, such as logo, color, design, and overall image, that distinguish it in consumers' minds (Aaker, 1996). A cohesive brand identity enhances recognizability and relatability, making it easier for consumers to form emotional connections. This connection is stronger when the brand's identity aligns with the consumer's values and self-image (Bjerre, 2020). A strong brand identity communicates the brand's values and mission effectively, fostering trust and loyalty. For example, a brand that conveys sustainability can attract consumers who value ethical practices, leading to a stronger bond (Kapferer, 1997). Brand identity also plays a crucial role in differentiating a brand from competitors, creating a unique presence in the market, and aiding consumer choice (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). Additionally, it helps build brand equity by creating strong associations in consumers' minds (Keller, 1993). A consistent and appealing brand identity enhances perceived quality and reliability, increasing consumer trust and loyalty (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998). In summary, a strong brand identity is fundamental for creating lasting connections with consumers, fostering trust, loyalty, and differentiation in a competitive market.

2.4 Brand Identity

Brand identity refers to the visible elements of a brand, such as logo, color, design, and overall image, that distinguish it in consumers' minds. A strong brand identity is essential for emotional branding, as it helps create a recognizable and consistent brand image that consumers can connect with emotionally (Aaker, 1996). It enhances emotional branding by making the brand more identifiable and relatable, fostering an emotional connection when the brand identity aligns with consumers' personal values (Bjerre, 2020). Additionally, a strong brand identity communicates the brand's values and mission effectively, fostering trust and loyalty (Kapferer, 1997). Research indicates that brand identity differentiates a brand from its competitors, creating a unique market presence and aiding in brand equity building through strong consumer associations (Keller, 1993). A consistent and appealing brand identity can enhance perceived quality and reliability, leading to increased consumer trust and loyalty (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998).

2.5 Emotional Branding

Purchase intentions refer to the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product or service, significantly influenced by positive emotional responses (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Positive emotional experiences with a brand can increase consumer trust and preference, leading to higher purchase intentions (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brands that evoke joy and satisfaction can become preferred choices, thus enhancing purchase likelihood. In a competitive market, brands that evoke positive emotions stand out and attract more customers (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Positive emotions also increase the perceived value of the brand, influencing purchase decisions (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Additionally, emotional branding can enhance perceived brand quality, making it more likely for consumers to choose it over competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Long-term consumer loyalty, fostered by emotional bonds, leads to repeat purchases and recommendations, going beyond rational decision-making (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). In conclusion, positive emotional responses significantly enhance consumer purchase intentions by creating favorable attitudes, differentiating brands in the market, and building long-term loyalty.

2.6 Consumer Purchase Intentions

Consumer purchase intentions refer to the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product or service, significantly influenced by positive emotional responses. Emotional branding can impact purchase intentions by creating a favorable attitude towards the brand. Positive emotional experiences with a brand increase consumer trust and preference, leading to higher purchase intentions (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brands that evoke joy and satisfaction become preferred choices, enhancing purchase likelihood. In a competitive market, brands that evoke positive emotions stand out and attract more customers (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Positive emotions also increase the perceived value of the brand, influencing purchase decisions (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Additionally, emotional branding enhances perceived brand quality, making it more likely for consumers to choose it over competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Long-term consumer loyalty, fostered by emotional bonds, leads to repeat purchases and recommendations, going beyond rational decision-making (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). In conclusion, emotional branding significantly influences consumer purchase intentions by creating favorable attitudes, differentiating brands in the market, and building long-term loyalty.

3 Research Framework and Methodology

This research examines the factors impacting consumer purchase intentions influenced by emotional branding in JiaHua Fresh Flower Cakes in Yunnan, China. The study utilizes online questionnaires to gather data and perform statistical analysis, making it a quantitative research effort aimed at obtaining statistical results. Drawing upon theories, literature reviews, and a range of relevant research sources from "The Impact of Brand Personality on Consumer Behavior: A Case Study of Starbucks in Shanghai, China" (Li & Kim, 2016) and more, the research framework and methodology are as follows:

3.1 Research Framework

This conceptual framework is constructed based on six key components: brand personality, brand storytelling, emotional response, and brand identity, and their impact on emotional branding and consumer purchase intentions. The first framework, proposed by Aaker (1997), discusses the impact of brand personality on emotional branding. The second framework was proposed by Lundqvist et al. (2013) and focuses on brand storytelling and its impact on emotional branding. The third framework was proposed by Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer (1999) and discussed the impact of emotional response on emotional branding. The fourth framework, proposed by Aaker (1996) and Jean-Noël Kapferer (1997), emphasizes the impact of brand identity on emotional branding. Finally, the fifth framework was proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen, (1975), suggesting the influence of emotional branding on consumer purchase intentions.

In this conceptual framework, brand personality, brand storytelling, emotional response, and brand identity are the independent variables, emotional branding is the mediating variable, and consumer purchase intentions, is the dependent variable. This thesis investigates how brand personality, brand storytelling, emotional response, and brand identity influence consumer purchase intentions through emotional branding.

3.2 Research Methodology

The research design is quantitative research. Population, sample, sample size, sampling technique, research instrument with reliability test of the instrument, until data analysis mentioned under research methodology.

3.2.1 Population, Target Sample, Sample Size, Sampling Technique

The target population of this research project consists of consumers in Yunnan Province, China, who are familiar with or have purchased JiaHua fresh flower cake. According to Worldometer (2023), the estimated population of Yunnan Province is approximately 46,000,000, making it one of the most populous provinces in China. As part of the methodology for selecting sample sizes for specific target populations, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) provided recommendations for appropriate sample sizes based on population size. For example, they suggested that for a sample of one million people, 384 respondents would be sufficient. Based on this reasoning, 390 respondents from Yunnan who were familiar with or had experienced Jiahua fresh flower cakes were selected for this study. A convenience sampling method was used to collect data via an online survey created using Wenjuanxing.

3.2.2 Research Instrument

The questionnaire was distributed through online channels such as email, Messenger, Line, and WeChat. The questionnaire is divided into three sections, with a total of 38 questions. The first section includes 3 screening questions, the second section contains 5 demographic questions, and the third section consists of 30 questions related to the factors influencing the impact of emotional branding on consumer purchase intentions for JiaHua Fresh Flower Cakes in Yunnan. The research design is quantitative, utilizing structured questions to gather data systematically. In the third section, responses are measured using a five-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 representing "strongly disagree," 2 representing "disagree," 3 representing "neutral," 4 representing "agree," and 5 representing "strongly agree."

4 Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Enhancing brand storytelling by utilizing multimedia to communicate the brand story by producing microfilms showcasing JiaHua Flower Cake's origin, heritage, and artisan spirit and sharing them on WeChat, Facebook, and TikTok. Collaborate with popular bloggers and celebrities to experience and promote the brand story through their influence.

Solidifying brand identity by increasing brand visibility by participating in cultural festivals and food expos around the world to increase brand exposure and awareness. Set up booths at these events to provide on-site sampling and interactive experiences to introduce the uniqueness of JiaHua Flower Cake to more consumers.

Elaborating brand personality by conveying unique brand personality through creative advertising and social media demonstrates the unique personality of JiaHua Fresh Flower Cake, such as the image of nature, health, and high quality. Produce a series of short videos showing the whole process of making fresh flower cakes, from flower picking to completion, emphasizing the value of nature and craftsmanship.

Improving emotional response by creating a platform for emotional interaction by setting up an emotional sharing area within the app, where users can upload photos and text describing their stories with JiaHua Fresh Flower Cake. The best story will be selected as "Emotional Story of the Month" and displayed on JiaHua Fresh Flower Cake's official social media channels, with free vouchers provided. Enhance Consumer Emotional Experience.

Enhancing Emotional Branding through Festive Activities by organizing special events such as flower cake workshops and cultural exhibitions during traditional festivals or brand anniversaries. Through interactive experiences and emotional resonance, they increase consumer engagement and a sense of belonging, thereby strengthening emotional branding and ultimately boosting consumer purchase intentions.

5 Limitation and Future Research

The depth and breadth of this study may have been compromised due to time constraints. Future studies should consider extending the timeframe, and in addition to extending the timeframe, future studies should explore other aspects such as different geographic locations, different respondent goals, etc. This will help to validate the research findings and improve their applicability. For example, other cities or countries could be selected for the study to compare differences between geographies; other variables such as trends in consumer behavior, emerging market dynamics, etc. could also be explored to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

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