

# On the Importance of Historical and Cultural Factors in Brand Marketing

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**Abstract:** With the continuous improvement of social and economic levels, people's understanding of functions and values of historical culture has been improved. Therefore, it's beneficial for enterprises to use historical and cultural elements in their brand marketing. Historical and cultural factors can enhance people's sense of pride in their own culture and help enterprises to strengthen their brand images and expand their market shares. Hence this paper focuses on historical and cultural factors that used by some enterprises in brand marketing and the effects achieved. The study found that the importance of historical and cultural factors to brand marketing cannot be underestimated. If enterprises properly use historical and cultural elements in brand marketing, they can help enhance brand depth, strengthen brand images, enhance consumer trust and loyalty the brands, and eventually promote product sales. It's hoped that the present study can cast some lights on the importance of historical and cultural elements in brand marketing and be conducive to enterprises in making their marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** Historical and cultural factors; Brand marketing; Brand image

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## 1. Introduction

Due to cultural differences, there are inevitable differences in history, culture, and values between China and other countries when conducting brand marketing. The development path of products and enterprises cannot be separated from the support of their own culture and market, and each product in market more or less show the connotation of its own culture to varying degrees. In today's economic market, it is not uncommon for culture to be used in brand marketing. Brand marketing is infused with people's values, customs, national customs, historical traditions, and other cultural connotations under specific social and historical conditions <sup>[1]</sup>. In addition, with the development of the times, people's understanding of the functions and values of historical and cultural heritage is constantly changing and deepening. Heritages contain rich historical and cultural information, revealing objective laws of the development of human society in various historical periods <sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the role and influence of historical and cultural factors in brand marketing to promote cross-cultural business cooperation between China and other countries.

Schroeder's research shows that brand researchers need to develop tools to understand culture, ideology, politics and brand concepts and that brands have often caused controversy in management, academic and cultural fields <sup>[3]</sup>. O' Reilly advocates that the symbolic dimension of brand practice should be regarded as a cultural phenomenon and positioned in the artistic circle, because brand culture can influence people's values in all aspects of clothing, food, housing, and transportation <sup>[4]</sup>. In addition, Castro proposes that brands have become cultural equipment with economic significance because consumers are willing to pay for them. In the growing global economy, brands are carried out globally <sup>[5]</sup>.

In China, Chuansheng He points out that when a brand enters the market of another country, it needs to conform to the culture of the target country's language, which is a kind of cross-language and cross-cultural communication, and also the first step of the brand entering the international market <sup>[6]</sup>. Yuande Zhang points forward that the essence of "Hanwu" (Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, one of the most outstanding emperors in China's feudal dynasties) culture should be applied to the brand marketing of liquor, and the promotion of "Hanwu spirit" should be combined with the core socialist values. He further indicates that the soft power of cultural brands and the hard power of product quality are integrated to promote the construction of well-known brands and well-known trademarks <sup>[7]</sup>. In Sun and Li's research, they maintain that the intangible cultural heritage of Longquan celadon is a long historical memory as well as national wisdom and deep emotional accumulation. Therefore, the best protection of Longquan celadon culture is inheritance and development, which can give full play to the mutual promotion of cultural estate and brand marketing <sup>[8]</sup>.

It can be found that previous studies focus more on the perspectives of cultural communication or cultural heritage, while detailed and comprehensive research on the importance of historical and cultural factors in brand marketing is still relatively rare at home and abroad. Therefore, this paper analyzes examples of brand marketing using Chinese historical and cultural factors to help enterprises better understand the importance of those factors in brand marketing, so that consumers can better resonate with products and that brands can meet consumers' needs for historical and cultural values. At the same time, enterprises can develop a broader market and establish a better reputation.

## **2. Brief Introduction to Historical and Cultural Factors**

### **2.1 Classifications of Historical and Cultural Factors**

As the term suggests, historical and cultural heritage is material and spiritual wealth created by working people of the ancient time in the production and practice activities. In fact, the categories of historical and cultural factors include figures, events, clothing, food, architecture, writing, literature, etc. With the continuous development of the times and the continuous improvement of the social and economic level, people's understanding of the functions and value of historical culture has gradually become more and more important. They have played a significant positive role in understanding and respecting history for people in the present era <sup>[2]</sup>.

#### **2.1.1 Historical Figures**

Historical figure is a historical term. It refers to those who have played an important role in the development of history, left footprints in the long history, have clear records in history, and played a role in promoting the development of human history, such as Cao Cao, Du Kang, Confucius, etc. In Chinese history, these historical figures have made important contributions to China. Evaluation of historical figures is of great significance to the study of the evolution of human history.

#### **2.1.2 Historical Buildings**

Historical buildings refer to buildings and structures that have specific protection values, which can reflect historical features and local characteristics, and have not been approved as cultural relics protection units or registered as immovable cultural relics, such as the Forbidden City, Beijing Tongrentang, the Great Wall, the Old Fengxiang Silver Tower in Shanghai, and so on. "Historical building" is a legal concept of traditional buildings in China, which is different from cultural relic buildings. Because these historical buildings are unique, they can represent China.

#### **2.1.3 Historical Events**

The concept of historical events can be defined from two perspectives. In a broad sense, historical events are the development process of the movement of the objective world, which can be divided into natural history and human social history. In a narrow sense, historical events refer to the process of the occurrence and development of human society.

#### **2.1.4 Other Historical and Cultural Factors**

There are many other historical and cultural factors, most of which are complex, pluralistic and even abstract, such as marriage, family, state power and even trade, food and clothing, writing, literature, classics, religion, morality, folk customs, festivals, etc. These historical and cultural elements can form a clear and brief epitome of ancient social life.

### **2.2 Functions of Historical and Cultural Factors on Brand Marketing**

History and culture are essential treasures for every country, and they are crucial spiritual wealth of humankind. Each kind of historical and cultural heritages has condensed the ancient working people's understanding of the nature and laws of things, and combined with people's wisdom. Historical and cultural heritages provide extremely important reference materials for scientific research. Hence, the use of historical and cultural factors in the process of brand marketing is of great importance. In fact, proper use of historical and cultural factors in brand marketing is a win-win situation for both customers and enterprises. Because when people buy products, they can recall the excellent historical culture, which can not only meet people's spiritual needs, but also help brands increase their turnover.

#### **2.2.1 Increasing Brand Depth and Strengthening Brand Image**

A brand can be an intermediary for spreading culture. In brand marketing, enterprises use historical and cultural factors to generate new concepts and historical and cultural details, which resonate with the brand image and historical culture <sup>[2]</sup>. In this way, brand products can not only convey brand ideas and stories, but also transmit and even inherit historical culture. Hence, enterprises that are good at making use of historical and cultural factors can strengthen their brand image and enhance their brand's credibility <sup>[9]</sup>.

## 2.2.2 Enhancing Consumers' Trust and Loyalty to Brands

Paying attention to applying historical and cultural factors in brand marketing can also attract loyal fans<sup>[19]</sup>. Consumers are willing to buy unique products with historical and cultural factors. In addition, once the reputation for the brand is improved, the enterprise can save marketing expenses for brand products to a certain extent, and customers will automatically ignore the advertising of competitive products.

## 2.2.3 Promoting the Sales of Products

In fact, the most apparent advantage of appropriately applying historical and cultural factors to brand marketing is that it can increase the sales of products<sup>[1]</sup>. When a product with historical and cultural factors is favored by customers, consumers will increase the number of times they buy the product, bringing stable profits to the enterprise. Historical and cultural factors and brand products form a link to transmit culture. When an enterprise sells products, the historical and cultural factors contained in brand can resonate with consumers, thus allowing the enterprise to occupy a larger share in the market.

# 3. Analysis of Historical and Cultural Factors in Brand Marketing

## 3.1 Historical Figures

Enterprises usually use historical figures in brand marketing from two aspects: (1) Names of historical figures. Enterprises could combine the name of a historical figure with the name of a product to form the name of a brand product, which let consumers think that the product may have a direct relationship with the historical figure. (2) Portraits of historical figures. Portraits of historical figures could serve as a reminder of historical figures. Enterprises could print the portraits of historical figures on the packaging, signboards or posters of products to create a bond between consumers and those historical figures and even make consumers feel closer to them.

There are many examples using historical figures for brand marketing, such as Cao Cao Chuxing, Du Kang Wine, Kung Fu Fast Food Restaurant, etc. The following examples illustrate how brands use historical figures for brand marketing.

### (1) Cao Cao Chuxing

Founded on May 21, 2015, Cao Cao Chuxing is a shared travel platform created by Geely Holding Group. Its business covers online car rental, hitch riding services and taxis, etc. When customers call for a taxi or car, they expect to wait for a short time. There is a famous saying "speak of the devil". In Chinese, the saying indicates someone arrives in no time and is related to the name of "Cao Cao". And because the name of Emperor Wu of Wei Dynasty is also Cao Cao, therefore, the name "Cao Cao Chuxing" was born. This household name "Cao Cao" and its inherent positive meaning in Chinese is ideally suitable for a Chinese travel platform. On January 7, 2018, Cao Cao Chuxing completed Series A funding round of 1 billion RMB, with a valuation of more than 10 billion RMB, and successfully ranked among the unicorns<sup>[10]</sup>.

### (2) Dukang Wine

Dukang Wine is a famous wine in Chinese history. It is named after Dukang's creation, and has the reputation of "tribute wine" and "immortal wine". Dukang liquor enterprise in Luoyang, Henan Province, used Dukang as its brand name. While retaining its historical and cultural heritage, Dukang Wine was also integrated into the fashion culture, and launched a series of fashion-cultural marketing activities since 2011, including micro-marketing, the issuance of Henan's first dialect poker, and the launch of "Chinese Love" event marketing. This has provided a strong potential for Dukang's sales revenue to grow nearly 20 times in three years, and a 30% growth against the trend in 2013. It has also given Dukang, an ancient historical and cultural brand, new vitality in modern consumer culture<sup>[11]</sup>. However, due to the failure of quality improvement and fierce market competition from counterparts, Dukang Wine gradually declined in recent years. In 2022, the sales volume of Dukang Wine was only 1.505 billion RMB. As a comparison, Maotai achieved a total operating revenue of 127.2 billion RMB in 2022, while Wuliangye reached 55.78 billion RMB in the first three quarters of 2022. It was obvious that Dukang Wine, known as the ancestor of liquor, was not inferior to Moutai and Wuliangye in terms of reputation, but its sales volume was far behind Maotai and Wuliangye. Therefore, in many people's minds, Du Kang Wine has not reached the position and height it should have<sup>[12]</sup>.

## 3.2 Historical Buildings

Enterprises usually use historical buildings in brand marketing from the following two aspects: (1) Using the name of historical buildings directly. Enterprises use the name of historical buildings as the name of their brand products, so that consumers can form the primacy effect on the products. Consumers may believe that those products have a direct relationship with historical buildings, and indirectly think that those brand products have a long history and culture. (2) Using historical building images to create co-branded

products. Enterprises create their products in the shape of historical buildings or print the image of historical buildings on the brand packaging so as to bring consumers closer to historical buildings, or to form a link between the products and the historical building culture, and make customers think that those products are produced by time-honored brands.

There are many examples of using historical buildings for brand marketing, such as Yellow Crane Tower cigarettes, Yueyang Tower building blocks, Laofengxiang jewelry store, Tongrentang drugstore, the Forbidden City Ore, and so on. The following is a specific example of how brand uses historical building for brand marketing and the positive effects achieved.

Tongrentang was founded by Xianyang Le in the eighth year of the Kangxi reign of the Qing Dynasty (1669) and has a history of more than 300 years to this day. Since the first year of the Yongzheng reign (1723), Tongrentang has officially enshrined medicine in the imperial pharmacy of the Qing Dynasty. It has been the only official medicine and has been used by eight emperors for 188 years. It is the most famous traditional Chinese medicine time-honored brand in China.

Beijing Tongrentang Group is a famous time-honored brand in the traditional Chinese medicine industry, which was founded in the eighth year of the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty. Tongrentang has experienced several centuries, and the “golden signboard” has been flourishing for a long time. The essence of traditional Chinese medicine culture that has been accumulated for thousands of years is now brought to every ordinary person by Tongrentang. According to statistics from its official website, Beijing Tongrentang has set up more than 2400 retail terminals in 28 countries and regions at home and abroad, and has national engineering centers and post-doctoral scientific research workstations <sup>[13]</sup>. In 2018, the group registered a revenue of 19 billion RMB with a profit of 2.7 billion RMB <sup>[14]</sup>.

### **3.3 Historical Events**

Enterprises also can establish links between products and historical events in their brand marketing. Some major historical events can be integrated into the concept of brand products, so that consumers can recall the historical events when purchasing products. On the contrary, if enterprises neglect history and involve negative historical events in brand marketing, it could hurt the feelings of some consumers, resulting in consumers’ resistance to products and directly damaging their brand images.

At the time of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, China’s heavy industry development was very backward. At that time, there were only 100,000 cars in China, far from meeting the needs of economic construction at that time. When visiting Moscow Stalin Automobile Factory, Chairman Mao solemnly said to his entourage, “We should have such a big factory!” On July 15, 1953, FAW (First Automobile Works) held a grand groundbreaking ceremony. A large-scale construction project in the history of China’s automobile industry began. In the second half of 1953, the research and development of automobiles entered the final stage, and the naming of new cars was put on the agenda. Later, Chairman Mao chose the name “Jie Fang” (which means “liberation”) from numerous proposals collected. The birth of “Jie Fang” brand automobile meant that the three-year construction goal of the First Automobile Factory was achieved as scheduled, and it also ended the history of China’s inability to mass produce automobiles. The factory engraved these two Chinese characters “Jie Fang” from *Jiefang Daily* that autographed by Chairman Mao on the first set of mold of its car <sup>[15]</sup>. Now, Jie Fang brand automobile has a place in the current Chinese market, and its existence has witnessed the development of Chinese cars. Obviously, behind Jie Fang is the dream of many Chinese people to own cars.

## **4. Suggestions for Using Historical and Cultural Factors in Brand Marketing**

### **4.1 Conducting In-Depth Market Research Before Launching Brand Marketing**

Before brand marketing, enterprises must conduct in-depth market research. Conducting studies of the history and culture of various countries can help enterprises make full use of their strengths and avoid weaknesses, and adequately use historical and cultural factors in brand marketing. Enterprises can either refer to some successful cases or learn from failure cases of neglecting historical and cultural factors. The use of positive historical and cultural factors in brand marketing by enterprises can improve their brand images, and also reflect that the brand side respects history and transmits meaningful historical information and positive energy. In addition, enterprises must not fabricate historical figures or events so as to avoid consumers thinking that those brand products are fake and inferior products, which will affect brand reputation and generate negative effects. History and culture thrive due to diversity, and they deserve to be valued and respected by everyone. Therefore, a thorough market survey could help enterprises better understand and respect historical and cultural factors around the world and maintain the authenticity of history and culture, avoid distorting historical and cultural facts or falsifying or tampering with them.

## 4.2 Enhancing Brand Quality and Consolidating the Foundation of Brand

As Dale Carnegie said, attitude determines height<sup>[16]</sup>. The attitude of an enterprise determines the height of the product, and the quality of the product determines the market of the enterprise. When enterprises applying historical and cultural factors in their brands, they must maintain the quality of their products. In the economic market, some enterprises may become eager for quick success and instant profits. To reduce production costs, the production standards of these eager enterprises may be lowered, resulting in a loss of consumer interest and trust in the brands. Hence enterprises must ensure their product quality and maintain the reputation of time-honored brands by strictly setting prescribed standards for the production of products. At the same time, enterprises should have a strong sense of responsibility, do a good job in after-sales work and be responsible for consumers.

## 4.3 Rooting in Excellent Historical Culture and Elevating Brand Connotation

Cultural identity is a manifestation of cultural pride, which means that a person can recognize cultural elements of his or her own nationality that are different from those of other nationalities. Therefore, enterprises should actively respond to the national theme, inject excellent local historical and cultural elements into brand marketing, establish cultural confidence, and resonate with consumers, which is beneficial to enhancing consumers' love and confidence in their own country's history and culture<sup>[17]</sup>.

To establish emotions and resonate with customers, products cannot be just superficial cultural symbols, but must have sufficient product connotations as support. Taking Li Ziqi, a famous short video creator of Chinese cuisine, as an example, her Weibo followers reach 26.504 million, with 7.691 million on Bilibili and 17.2 million on YouTube<sup>[18]</sup>. She practiced the pastoral life described by Tao Yuanming with her own actions. Although the public knows that this is an illusory experience, these imaginations, through rich content, form an incredibly realistic picture, allowing those who work hard in the city to find a spiritual home, which is a cultural resonance<sup>[19]</sup>. Therefore, enterprises cannot simply blindly apply historical and cultural factors, but should integrate excellent historical and cultural elements into their products based on their attributes.

## 5. Conclusion

Enterprises need to maintain sensitivity to historical and cultural factors in brand marketing. If historical and cultural elements are properly applied, they can play a positive role in brand marketing.

The research results of the present study can be summarized as follow. First, one of the reasons why historical and cultural factors play an essential role in brand marketing lies in that consumers can better resonate with products and brands. Those elements meet consumers' needs for historical and cultural values, and at the same time allow enterprises to develop a broader market and establish a better reputation. Secondly, in brand marketing, the proper use of historical and cultural factors can strengthen brand images and enhance consumers' trust and loyalty to brands. Thirdly, if enterprises apply historical and cultural factors appropriately in brand marketing, they could enhance those brands' popularity and increase their sales volume. Finally, enterprises need to carefully conduct historical and cultural background surveys and utilize historical and cultural factors for brand marketing with carefulness to avoid distorting or tampering with historical and cultural facts. It's hope that the present study can fill the gap in the study of historical and cultural factors in brand marketing and be a guide when enterprises plan to launch brand marketing.

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