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Research on the Influence Mechanism of Regional Emotional Connection on Consumer Loyalty of Chinese Domestic Brands

Le Xu

Faculty of Business, City University of Macau, Macau, China
B23090110966@cityu.mo

Abstract. Regional emotional connection is a core emotional bond for Chinese domestic brands to build differentiated competitive advantages and enhance consumer loyalty. Taking Chayan Yuese and Tsingtao Brewery as research samples, this paper adopts the multiple case study method to conduct an in-depth analysis from the perspective of consumer behavior. It systematically explores the three-dimensional structure of regional emotional connection and the cognitive-affective-behavioral chain transmission path, and clarifies the driving logic of perception of regional culture, brand-regional association, and urban sense of belonging on attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. The results show that regional emotional connection affects consumer loyalty through the chain mechanism of cultural identity activation, emotional bonding reinforcement, and loyal behavior transformation. Chayan Yuese cultivates high-emotional and regionally concentrated loyalty via in-depth integration of urban culture, while Tsingtao Brewery realizes cross-regional and long-term loyalty diffusion relying on origin-based positioning and century-old heritage. This study enriches the theoretical interpretation of consumer loyalty in the local context and provides targeted references for domestic brands to implement loyalty management based on regional emotions.

Keywords: regional emotional connection, Chinese domestic brands, consumer loyalty, multiple case study

1. Introduction

Against the background of the rise of domestic brands and consumption upgrading, emotional marketing has become a core strategy for brands to maintain long-term user relationships. Compared with generalized national sentiment, regional emotional connection takes urban culture, production area symbols, and local memories as concrete carriers, forming more stable and distinctive user bonding. Chayan Yuese has grown into a regional benchmark of new consumption by relying on Changsha's cultural genes, and Tsingtao Brewery has built century-long consumer loyalty with its Qingdao production area identity. Both brands have achieved high user stickiness with clear regional positioning.

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Existing studies mostly focus on the quantitative tests of regional image and country-of-origin effect, and lack mechanistic case studies targeting real Chinese domestic brands, which makes it difficult to explain the internal behavioral logic of transforming regional emotions into brand loyalty. The theoretical contributions of this paper are as follows: integrating place attachment theory and consumer loyalty theory, this paper introduces the perspective of regional emotional connection to interpret the formation of consumer loyalty for domestic brands; constructs a cognitive activation-emotional bonding-behavior transformation chain mechanism based on the whole process of consumer behavior; and reveals differentiated loyalty paths for brands with different positioning through a dual-case comparison between regionally embedded brands brands and national-oriented production area brands. In practice, it provides actionable strategies for similar domestic brands to carry out user loyalty management based on regional emotions.

2. Theoretical basis and literature review

2.1. Definition of core concepts

Regional emotional connection refers to consumers' identification, belonging, and attachment to the regional culture, production area identity, and urban temperament linked with the brand. As an emotional bond between individuals and regional space in consumption scenarios, it consists of three core dimensions: perception of regional culture, brand-regional association, and urban sense of belonging.

This paper adopts the attitude-behavior dual-dimensional definition: attitudinal loyalty refers to consumers' consistent preference, recognition, and willingness to recommend the brand; behavioral loyalty refers to repeated purchase, continuous consumption, and brand choice inertia.

2.2. Literature review

Overall, existing research has three major limitations:

Research perspective: Most studies focus on the quantitative relationship between country-of-origin effect, regional image, and purchase intention, but ignore the internal logic of transforming regional emotions into long-term brand loyalty from the complete consumer behavior process. Scannell & Gifford proposed that place attachment is a multi-layered emotional bond between individuals and places, laying the theoretical foundation for regional emotional research [1]. Oliver emphasized that true consumer loyalty is a deep psychological commitment, not just repeated purchase behavior [2].

Research content: Most studies center on the macro national trend and national culture, without subdividing micro dimensions such as perception of regional culture and urban sense of belonging, which fails to explain the differentiated loyalty paths of localized domestic brands. Zhang et al. confirmed that regional symbols can significantly enhance consumers' purchase intention [3]. Yang & Dong found that regional cultural perception positively affects brand identification, with urban belonging playing a mediating role [4]. Huang & Bao further refined the dimensional structure of place attachment, providing a basis for measuring regional emotional connection [5]. Jiang & Guo pointed out that regional emotion is more stable than general national sentiment and drives long-term purchase intention [6].

Research method: Dominated by single-case analysis and quantitative empiricism, existing research lacks dual-case comparisons of different types of domestic brands and cannot reveal the heterogeneous effects of regional emotions on brands with different positioning. Yin pointed out that

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multiple case studies are suitable for exploring complex mechanism relationships [7]. Sun & Wang verified that place attachment effectively drives tourist loyalty through emotional identity [8]. Hu et al. further noted that perceived authenticity of regional culture strengthens place attachment and loyalty intention [9].

3. Research design

3.1. Research method

This paper adopts the multiple case study method, following the principles of theoretical sampling and typicality. Dual-case comparison is used to improve the stability of research conclusions, focusing on the process mechanism and behavioral interpretation of the regional emotional connection affecting brand loyalty.

3.2. Case selection

Chayan Yuese and Tsingtao Brewery are selected for the following reasons:

1. Both have strong regional genes, and regional attributes serve as core brand assets.
2. Both enjoy high market recognition and outstanding consumer loyalty performance.
3. They have obvious type differences: Chayan Yuese is a new consumption tea brand adopting a regionally embedded brand strategy, while Tsingtao Brewery is a traditional fast-moving consumer goods brand with a national-oriented production area strategy, which has high comparative value.

3.3. Data sources and analysis

The research data are mainly secondary data, including official brand information, media reports, industry research, user comments, and word-of-mouth data. Multi-source cross-validation is adopted to ensure research reliability. Cross-case comparison is used to extract the common chain mechanism and differentiated path characteristics.

4. Case analysis

4.1 Chayan Yuese: Loyalty construction via in-depth integration of Changsha urban culture

With Changsha as its core market, Chayan Yuese deeply integrates Hunan culture, urban vitality, and new Chinese aesthetics into its brand system, forming a high-intensity regional emotional connection. The formation of loyalty follows the progressive transformation of consumers' cognition-affection-behavior.

4.1.1. Perception of regional culture: Activating cultural identity at the cognitive level

The brand enables consumers to directly perceive Changsha's regional culture and form a clear brand-regional cognition through product naming (Orchid Latte, Sound of Oolong), Chinese-style store decoration, and classical visual symbols.

Consumer behavior mechanism: Cultural symbols trigger cognitive processing, establish the association of Chayan Yuese = Changsha culture, differentiate the brand from homogeneous tea drinks, and form an initial cognitive preference.

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4.1.2. Brand-regional association: Binding urban identity at the effective level

The brand is closely integrated with Changsha's urban image, becoming a landmark for cultural tourism and local life. Consumers couple their consumption behavior with the identity of a Changsha resident/Changsha tourist.

Consumer behavior mechanism: Regional association transforms into emotional attachment; the brand acts as a carrier of regional identity expression, generating strong attitudinal loyalty.

4.1.3. Urban sense of belonging: Transforming into sustainable loyalty at the behavioral level

Localized operation and community-based interaction strengthen the identity of local users; offline check-in and social sharing become an emotional expression for tourists.

Consumer behavior mechanism: Sense of belonging promotes high-frequency repurchase, active recommendation, and in-store check-in, and steadily transforms attitudinal loyalty into behavioral loyalty.

Chayan Yuese has over 20 million members, with a core member repurchase rate exceeding 70% [10].

4.2. Tsingtao Brewery: Loyalty construction via origin-based positioning

Taking the Qingdao production area as its core cognitive label, Tsingtao Brewery converts regional industrial culture, production quality, and marine culture into brand assets based on its century-old heritage, and drives cross-regional loyalty diffusion through production area trust.

4.2.1. Perception of regional culture: Establishing quality trust at the cognitive level

The brand highlights the advantages of the Qingdao production area, century-old brewing technology, and marine culture, helping consumers form a stable cognition that the Qingdao production area = high quality.

Consumer behavior mechanism: Production area endorsement reduces perceived risk, forms quality cognition and initial trust, laying a cognitive foundation for loyalty.

4.2.2. Brand-regional association: Strengthening regional pride at the affective level

Made in Qingdao has become the core brand label. Local users generate dual pride in the city and the brand, while consumers nationwide recognize the value of regional quality endorsement.

Consumer behavior mechanism: Regional association sublimates into emotional identity, forming cross-regional attitudinal loyalty beyond geographical restrictions.

4.2.3. Urban sense of belonging: Realizing nationwide loyalty at the behavioral level

It consolidates the urban identity of local users and transforms production area emotion into public consumption inertia through national channel penetration.

Consumer behavior mechanism: Emotional bonding converts into long-term repurchase, scenario-based consumption, and brand adherence, realizing the diffusion from regional emotion to national behavioral loyalty.

Tsingtao Brewery ranks first in China's beer industry in brand value, with products exported to over 120 countries and regions [11].

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5. Cross-case comparison and influence mechanism refinement

5.1. Case comparison

Chayan Yuese and Tsingtao Brewery both take regional emotional connection as the core driver of consumer loyalty, but differ significantly in construction strategies, transmission mechanisms, and loyalty characteristics:

Chayan Yuese: Positioned as a regionally embedded brand's new consumption tea brand, it takes Changsha's local urban culture as the core binding carrier to activate the urban identity of young consumers. Loyal users are concentrated in Changsha and tourists, featuring high regionality, strong emotion, and high-frequency consumption.

Tsingtao Brewery: Positioned as a national production area-oriented fast-moving consumer goods brand, it takes Qingdao's production quality as the core label covering all age groups. Loyal users are nationwide, featuring cross-regionality, long-term consumption, and popularity.

Joint verification: Regional emotional connection is a stable path for Chinese domestic brands to improve loyalty. Perception of regional culture, brand-regional association, and sense of belonging constitute the action basis, and brand type (regionally embedded brands/national-oriented) plays a regulatory role.

5.2. Influence mchanism model

The impact of regional emotional connection on consumer loyalty of Chinese domestic brands follows a three-layer chain transmission mechanism:

Cognitive layer: Activation of regional culture perception

Consumers acquire regional symbols through products, visuals, and scenarios, form clear regional cognition, and activate cultural identity, providing a cognitive premise for loyalty.

Affective layer: Brand-regional association and belonging bonding

Cognition transforms into emotion; the brand is deeply connected with regional value and self-identity, generating attachment and belonging, and forming attitudinal loyalty.

Behavioral layer: Sustainable consumption and loyalty transformation

Emotional bonding promotes repeated purchase, active recommendation, and brand adherence, and finally forms stable behavioral loyalty.

6. Conclusion

Regional emotional connection is composed of three dimensions: perception of regional culture, brand-regional association, and urban sense of belonging, which jointly drive consumer loyalty of Chinese domestic brands.

The impact of regional emotions on loyalty follows the chain mechanism of cognitive activation-emotional bonding-behavior transformation, and the progressive transformation of consumer behavior is the core internal logic.

Regional deep-plowing is suitable for building strong regional loyalty through in-depth integration of urban culture, while national production area-oriented brands can realize cross-regional loyalty diffusion via production area positioning.

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7. Practical implications

7.1. Activate regional emotional dimensions hierarchically to consolidate the cognitive basis of loyalty

Perception of regional culture: Transform regional culture into perceivable symbols (products, visuals, scenarios) to reduce consumers' cognitive cost.

Brand-regional association: Clarify the core binding point between the brand and the region (urban image/authentic production area) to form a differentiated cognitive label.

Urban sense of belonging: Conduct community-based operations for local users and create regional cultural experiences for non-local users to strengthen two-way emotional connections.

7.2. Open the chain transformation path to realize the closed-loop from attitude to behavior

Cognitive end: Transmit regional symbols through all-around touchpoints to continuously strengthen cultural identity.

Affective end: Deepen emotional bonding through interactive experience and identity empowerment.

Behavioral end: Promote repurchase and word-of-mouth recommendation through membership system, scenario-based consumption, and social incentives to complete the loyalty closed loop.

7.3. Select differentiated regional loyalty paths according to brand positioning

Regional new consumption brands (e.g., Chayan Yuese): Deeply cultivate urban culture, build an urban symbiotic brand, and construct regional barriers through high emotional bonding.

National traditional brands (e.g., Tsingtao Brewery): Strengthen production area cognition, and realize the diffusion from regional emotion to national loyalty through quality endorsement and historical accumulation.

7.4. Accumulate regional emotional assets in the long run to build sustainable loyalty barriers

Upgrade regional emotions from a marketing tool to a core brand asset, and continuously invest in regional culture exploration and user emotion maintenance.

Balance regional characteristics and large-scale development, avoid regional attributes restricting expansion, and realize the coordination between regional genes and national layout.

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