

The Impact of IP Co-Branding on the Construction and Dissemination of Brand Culture

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Abstract. The commercial development of IP industry partnerships has received widespread attention. However, in the context of a highly information-dense and saturated market, there are still deficiencies in the brand value perception and development strategies. This article analyzes the development background, underlying logic, symbiotic relationship between culture and business, potential problems, and corresponding development strategies and suggestions of IP industry partnerships. The analysis concludes that, based on IP partnerships, there are issues with brand positioning errors and the development strategies not matching the brand development. The following suggestions are proposed: Firstly, evaluate the brand value to ensure that the brand value is compatible during the cooperation. Secondly, establish a brand value protection mechanism to avoid having the value swallowed by the cooperating brand during the cooperation period. Finally, deepen the strategic synergy value creation to ensure that each business cooperation enhances the brand value and enables the strategy and brand to develop together, building sustainable brand development. Let IP industry partnerships, as a means, become the winning formula for brand development.

Keywords: Cultural empowerment, IP industry, collaboration.

1. Introduction

Under the tide of cultural prosperity in China and the global pursuit of product empowerment, IP collaborations have gradually expanded from fast-moving consumer goods to the luxury goods industry. The collaboration industry is no longer limited to products within a specific value range. For instance, luxury brand Fendi collaborated with tea brand Huitai. Moreover, people's definition of culture is no longer solely based on "national trend". Many brands, in pursuit of value symbiosis, seek corresponding cultural empowerment based on the needs of their target consumers, ensuring that the collaboration not only enhances the popularity of the product but also helps consumers build their emotional value.

The research on IP licensing not only reveals the reasons why it enables major brands to rapidly grow and increase their exposure, but also allows people to trace back to the root causes and utilize the same principles to solve different problems in the same industry. This process is not only a process of concretizing abstract concepts, but also a necessary path to overcome other obstacles in brand culture dissemination.

In this article, the main focus will be on exploring its internal logic and development structure. Based on the existing problems, it will predict other problems and provide suggestions to help it develop, in order to facilitate better progress in cultural dissemination.

2. The Underlying Logic and Function of IP Industry Collaboration

Before delving into the underlying logic of IP collaboration, it is necessary to first clarify its definition. IP is the abbreviation of Intellectual Property, referring to brands, works, and special symbols with commercial value and influence. IP industry collaboration is actually the combination of two highly influential and powerful brands. By sharing market resources, expanding the target

customer base, enriching the brand cultural background, and through collaboration, increasing market visibility, breaking the existing commercial barriers, achieving true cultural exchange, sharing beauty, and achieving common development.

2.1. IP Industry Collaboration and Cultural Innovation

In the context of the rapid development of digital cultural industries, IP (Intellectual Property) cross-border collaborations are no longer merely a commercial marketing strategy; instead, they play a significant role in promoting the re-creation of cultural art. Research suggests that IP collaborations, through cross-media and cross-disciplinary cooperation forms, bring new contexts and meanings to cultural symbols that are fixed in specific situations, thereby achieving "symbol re-contextualization" [1]. During this process, diverse cultural symbols such as traditional culture, popular culture, and urban culture are activated and brought into new consumption contexts, enhancing the visibility and public participation of culture. The theory of cultural dissemination emphasizes that cultural vitality requires continuous exploration of "new spaces", and the transfer of space, as a representative of modern social forms, is itself a manifestation of cultural modernity [2]. IP collaborations precisely bring new forms of expression to culture, breaking the barriers of static cultural display towards dynamic cultural generation. For example, cultural heritage IP collaborates with fields such as technology, trendy toys, and beauty products, presenting the stories of cultural relics in a more participatory form, that is, "narrative grafting", allowing cultural narratives to be recreated in new media [3]. Research shows that IP collaborations are influencing the construction of young cultural identities. Consumers passively participate in the reproduction of cultural symbols during the consumption process, thereby creating a new cultural economic structure of "cultural symbiosis" [4]. In this process, brands, cultural institutions, urban spaces, and consumers collaborate to jointly reconstruct cultural meaning, making IP collaborations a significant driving force for the transformation of cultural production from "one-way dissemination" to "multi-party co-creation". Overall, IP collaborations promote the re-creation of culture through means such as symbol renewal, narrative reshaping, cultural identity construction, and multi-party co-creation, rejuvenating traditional culture and enabling modern culture to continuously develop through cross-border collaborations, becoming a key path for promoting the sustainable evolution of culture [5].

2.2. IP Collaboration and Business Development

The contribution of IP industry collaboration to culture cannot be ignored. However, when people look at the underlying logic, the purpose of IP collaboration is still to enhance the commercial profitability strategy of the brand. IP collaboration has become the primary means for brands to break through the market and achieve commercial profitability, especially in the context of consumption upgrading and the rise of the Z Generation economy [6]. Through breaking through commercial barriers, IP collaboration can enhance the commercial value of the brand. If two highly renowned brands collaborate, they can create buzz and strong media effects in a short period of time. For example, the collaboration between Moutai and Robinhood generated tens of millions of discussions within 48 hours, boosting store traffic and increasing the brand's market value. This "social dissemination as marketing" model demonstrates the direct promotion effect of IP collaboration on business development [2]. At the same time, it also pioneers the commercial IP collaboration, breaking the constraints and providing highly persuasive guiding examples for the development of other brands.

Secondly, IP collaborations can achieve the reconfiguration and expansion of the market. Relevant studies have shown that brands, through cross-circumference and cross-category collaboration, effectively reach user groups that were previously isolated and had little overlap, significantly increasing the penetration rate and re-recognition rate of the brand. For example, the cross-border collaboration between a trendy toy brand and a jewelry brand not only successfully captured the hearts of young female users but also activated those users in the jewelry market who had low consumption frequency and relatively low attention to new products. Through the form of emotional value,

storytelling, and aesthetic elements, the traditional jewelry industry found new growth momentum [4]. This type of cross-circumference penetration of the market indicates that IP collaborations are an effective tool for different industries to achieve user migration, user integration, and user value reconfiguration. At the same time, IP collaborations also drive systematic innovation in business forms. In recent years, collaboration has gradually evolved from a single "product cooperation model" to an overall "ecological linkage model". In the past, brands were limited to interactive collaborations between specific products. However, as various product markets became saturated and consumers' consumption concepts improved, consumers' requirements increased, and brands needed to redefine IP collaborations. Therefore, current IP collaborations tend to be symbiotic development between two brands, sharing target customers, development strategies, achieving resource complementarity, and providing sustainable business development for each other.

All these indicate that IP collaboration is not only focused on enhancing the intrinsic value of the samples, but also pays attention to its own "evolution". From a single profit-oriented corporation, it has developed into a "multi-track concurrent" business system. Whether in the tourism industry, the media industry, or the e-commerce industry, in the tide of the times, they jointly build value connections that belong to the new era. Through courageous practices across different eras and dimensions, IP collaboration has enhanced the popularity of brands and cultures, activated some consumer groups, and increased the economic benefits of peripheral attribute contents. Under the condition of building a stable and sustainable business model, it lays the foundation for a deeper brand strategy and economic development in the future.

3. Analysis of potential problems

In the practice of brand building and communication, IP co-branding has become a favored strategic choice. However, behind this upsurge, there are many risk factors that may weaken the long-term value of the brand. If it can not keep a clear understanding of these hidden dangers and effectively avoid them, the joint action may deviate from the original intention and cause irreparable damage to brand assets.

3.1. Value Cognition Dislocation and Image Conflict

When two brands with different market positioning and cultural backgrounds are co-branded, there will be asymmetric cooperation, which will cause consumers' confusion about the original brand. Asymmetric cooperation is a form of cooperation in which two brands that have significant differences in market positioning, brand culture, or audience groups jointly launch products or services. Simonin and Ruth found that "the spillover of attitudes from one brand to another is asymmetric and depends on the relative prominence of each brand" [7]. This finding reveals the complexity of attitude shift in Brand Co branding -- consumers' attitude towards well-known brands often strongly affects their evaluation of cooperative brands, and this effect is not always positive. If there are essential differences between the core value propositions of the two parties, this attitude spillover effect may lead to conflict and confusion of brand image. Taking the cooperation between high-end luxury goods and mass consumer goods as an example, there are usually significant differences in pricing strategies, distribution channels, and brand narratives. If there is no carefully designed value connection, luxury brands may be regarded as "self-depreciating" by consumers, while mass brands may be questioned as "unqualified". This cognitive disharmony will weaken the synergy of Brand Co branding and even damage the reputation foundation of the brand after long-term accumulation. More in depth, the dislocation of value cognition not only affects the short-term market acceptance, but also may shake the fundamental position of the brand in the minds of consumers, leading to the fuzziness of brand positioning, and then affecting its long-term market competitiveness.

3.2. Dilution of Brand Identity and Memory Interference

When brands cooperate frequently, the clarity of brand identity faces severe challenges. Cunha, Forehand, and Angle pointed out through empirical research that "less-known brands may fail to establish unique brand associations when partnering with prominent brands" [8]. This phenomenon is particularly significant in the current upsurge of IP co-branding. When an emerging brand frequently cooperates with well-known IP in different fields, consumers' cognition of its core values will gradually become blurred, and finally, they can only remember its appearance of "being good at co-branding", while ignoring the unique positioning of the brand itself. This memory interference effect will seriously hinder the in-depth construction of brand culture. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, consumers' memory capacity for brands is limited. When brands transmit complex information to the market through too many co-branding activities, it will become difficult to extract and recall key brand elements. Especially for brands in the growing period, excessive reliance on CO branding for short-term attention is tantamount to drinking poison to quench thirst. These brands should recognize that the establishment of unique brand associations requires continuous and consistent information transmission, and the changing co-branding cooperation will interrupt this process, making it difficult for brands to form a stable and clear cognitive structure in the minds of consumers. In the long run, the brand will fall into a vicious circle of maintaining market voice through more co-branding, while its independent brand value is declining.

3.3. Disconnection Between Brand Co-Branding and Strategic Development

When pursuing the upsurge of CO branding, many brands often ignore the in-depth cooperation between the two sides at the strategic level. Tschirhart, Christensen, and Perry pointed out that "the collaborative paradox lies in the tension between maintaining brand integrity and pursuing collaborative advantage" [9]. This precisely points out the dilemma of Brand Co Branding: both hope to expand the market with the help of cooperation, and must maintain the core value of their own brand. Once the co-branding activities are out of line with the long-term development direction of the brand, it will not only be difficult to achieve the effect of "one plus one is greater than two", but will also cause a waste of resources. Specifically, this problem is reflected in three aspects: first, the capital investment failed to bring the corresponding strategic value. Secondly, the energy of the management is dispersed, which affects the development of the core business; Finally, the brand image becomes blurred, and consumers' cognition of the brand is no longer clear. If it lacks clear strategic guidance and blindly follows the trend, the brand will easily fall into the cycle of constantly chasing hot spots, but it is difficult to leave a stable and profound impression on consumers. What is more serious is that frequent and messy co-branding will make the brand appear to lack assertiveness and long-term planning, which will damage its credibility in the hearts of consumers and partners.

4. Countermeasures and Suggestions

Based on the above problems, the brand needs to establish a systematic management mechanism to ensure that IP co-branding can effectively serve the long-term construction of brand culture. The following suggestions provide a comprehensive guidance framework for brands from strategic planning to implementation monitoring.

4.1. Establishment of Value Fit Evaluation System

To solve the problem of asymmetric cooperation, the brand should establish a professional value fit evaluation system in the early planning stage of joint decision-making. This system needs to go beyond the surface market data and deeply analyze the matching degree of brand and IP in multiple dimensions, such as core value proposition, target audience characteristics, and cultural expression. Himme and Zührhofer emphasized when comparing different brand strategies, "the success of brand alliances depends on the strategic fit between partners" [10]. This insight reveals that the strategic fit is the key factor determining the success of the joint venture. The evaluation of value fit should

include three levels: first, at the core concept level, it examines whether there is resonance between the brand and IP in the basic values. Secondly, at the level of expression style, it evaluates whether the two sides coordinate in visual language and narrative mode; Finally, it experiences the delivery level to ensure that CO-branded products or services can consistently deliver the expected value proposition. The brand can establish a systematic evaluation method, taking into account the quantifiable data and factors requiring subjective judgment, so as to accurately screen out those cooperation opportunities that truly meet the long-term development of the brand. Specifically, a scoring table with key items can be designed to comprehensively evaluate potential partners from several key perspectives, such as "whether the brand tone is consistent", "whether the target customers match", and "whether the values of both parties agree". Only those joint projects that have passed the screening and scored high enough can go to the next step. This process can avoid the brand image conflict caused by the mismatch between the two sides of the source.

4.2. Build Brand Identity Protection Mechanism

In the process of CO branding, brands need to establish a clear identity protection mechanism. This mechanism should ensure that no matter what kind of IP brands cooperate with, the core identification elements and value proposition of the brand can be clearly displayed, while avoiding dilution of brand identity under frequent co-branding. Capelli, Fayolle, and Sabadie proposed that when studying brand entertainment marketing, "the integration of brand elements into entertainment content must be both organic and distinctive" [11]. This principle also applies to IP co-branding scenarios, requiring brands to find a balance between natural integration and maintaining their own characteristics in cooperation.

The implementation of the brand identity protection mechanism should include the following key links: first, establish a clear primary and secondary visual identity standard, and clarify the use rules and spatial relationship between the brand logo and IP image; Secondly, formulate content communication guidelines to ensure that the core information of the brand is fully reflected in all communication materials; Thirdly, establish user experience standards to ensure that CO branded products can convey consistent brand feelings on different contacts. In addition, the brand should also consider setting up the role of "brand guardian", which is specially responsible for reviewing the use of brand identity at all stages of the joint project, so as to ensure that the recognition and consistency of the brand are not sacrificed due to cooperation. Through these measures, brands can maintain the independence and clarity of their brand identity with the help of IP influence and avoid being completely submerged by partners.

4.3. Value Creation of Deepening Strategic Synergy

The brand should upgrade the IP co-branding to the strategic management level to ensure that each cooperation can have a cumulative effect on the long-term construction of the brand culture, so as to avoid the possibility of disconnection from the brand development trend due to the neglect of in-depth cooperation at the strategic level. This requires the brand to establish a special co-branding strategy management process, including early strategic positioning, mid-term implementation supervision, and late effect evaluation. Perry pointed out when discussing public sector brand cooperation, "strategic collaboration requires alignment at multiple organizational levels" [9]. This insight also has enlightening significance for the IP co-branding of enterprise departments, that is, the real strategic collaboration needs to be aligned at multiple levels of the organization. First of all, the brand needs to clearly incorporate IP co branding into the overall brand strategic planning to ensure that the co branding activities are consistent with the brand development direction; Secondly, a joint management team should be established to coordinate the design, production, marketing and other aspects; Finally, it must establish a perfect evaluation system, which not only focuses on short-term sales data and social media volume, but also evaluates the long-term impact of CO branding on brand equity indicators, such as brand recognition, association strength, perceived quality and loyalty. In addition, the brand should also establish a joint knowledge management system to transform the

experience and lessons of each cooperation into organizational memory, so as to continuously optimize the subsequent joint decision-making and implementation process. Through this systematic management, the brand can ensure that each co-branding is not an isolated marketing activity, but a continuous investment in the construction of brand culture, and ultimately realize the steady improvement of brand value.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the core issue of how IP co-branding affects the construction and dissemination of brand culture. Through the analysis, it has revealed three major problems hidden behind the upsurge of CO Branding: first, the "value cognition dislocation" caused by market positioning and cultural gene differences may cause consumers to confuse the brand image; Second, frequent co branding may lead to "dilution of brand identity" and weaken the unique memory of the brand in the minds of consumers; Third, the long-term "strategic development gap" between joint branding activities and brands has reduced cooperation to short-term gimmicks and failed to accumulate brand assets.

To solve these problems, the core conclusion of this paper is that IP co-branding is a "double-edged sword". By means of "recontextualization of symbols" and "narrative grafting", it can effectively inject new vitality into brand culture and promote cultural innovation and dissemination. At the same time, it is also an efficient business strategy to break through market barriers and reach new users. However, the key to its success does not depend on the popularity of CO branding, but on whether the brand can adhere to its strategic determination. In order to ensure the positive effect of CO branding, the brand must establish a systematic management mechanism: strictly evaluate the "value fit" before cooperation to prevent image conflict from the source; Build a "brand identity protection" mechanism in implementation to ensure that core values are not submerged. At the strategic level, it should pursue "deep synergy" so that each co-branding can serve the long-term construction of brand culture, so as to realize the sustainable growth of brand value.

In a word, if IP co-branding wants to contribute to the construction of brand culture, it must change from the short-term behavior of chasing traffic to the long-term brand strategy of planning, screening, and adherence. Future research can further track consumers' emotional experience in CO branding activities, or further explore the long-term effect evaluation system of IP co-branding in different industries.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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