

Research on the Strategy of Lemoncello for Macao's Characteristic Snack Brand Based on Honeycomb Model

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Abstract

Driven by the tourism industry, the characteristic snack brands in Macao have gradually come to the fore. Lemoncello, as a local innovative brand, has attracted a large number of consumers with its healthy ingredients and unique flavors, demonstrating huge market potential. With the intensification of competition, how brands optimize their marketing strategies has become an urgent problem to be solved. Objective: To analyze the brand strategy and market positioning of Lemoncello using Dentsu's Honeycomb Model, and to provide theoretical guidance and practical reference. The method research adopted a combination of field investigation and consumer interviews, and conducted a multi-dimensional analysis of the brand's symbols, characteristics, functional benefits, emotional benefits, etc. in combination with Dentsu's Honeycomb Model. The conclusion is that Lemoncello has achieved remarkable results in brand building, especially in product innovation and health positioning. However, there is still room for improvement in brand story and emotional interaction. Optimizing brand communication and consumer experience will help Lemoncello further consolidate its market position and achieve sustainable development.

Keywords

Honeycomb Model; Macau; local snacks; brand strategy; Lemoncello

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Tourism holds a crucial position in the economy of Macao and is an important force driving the adjustment of the industrial structure and promoting regional economic growth. As a core component of the tourism industry, tourism food plays an indispensable role in the development of Macao's tourism. It not only meets the dietary needs of tourists during their travels, enhances their travel experience, but also promotes the popularity and reputation of the tourist destination. Therefore, the tourism food industry in Macao demonstrates great development potential and has become one of the important pillars of the region's economic growth. (Xin Wei,

2020) [12]

Based on this, the culinary culture of Macao has a unique charm and is deeply influenced by the integration of Chinese and Western cultures. In 2017, Macao was recognized by UNESCO as a "Creative City of Gastronomy", becoming the third Chinese city to receive this honor after Chengdu and Shunde. This move not only showcases Macao's achievements in culinary innovation and cultural inheritance, but also further establishes its status as a global center for cultural exchange and culinary innovation. Macao's culinary culture maintains traditional characteristics while incorporating innovative elements, providing rich resources and broad market space for the rise of local specialty food brands. [1]

Furthermore, with the changes in consumers' demands for food and the upgrading of the market consumption structure, the Chinese ice cream market also demonstrates significant growth potential. According to statistics, the scale of China's ice cream market reached 160 billion yuan in 2021, and it is expected to exceed 200 billion yuan by 2027 (China Report Hall, 2021)[16]. Although the consumption volume of ice cream in China is lower than the global average, the rapid growth of the market and the change in consumption habits have brought new development opportunities to the ice cream industry. Especially with the blurring of seasonal consumption demands, ice cream has gradually transformed from a traditional summer cooling food to a year-round leisure food. This trend provides strong support for the development of new snack brands. Against this backdrop, the rise of innovative brands such as Italian-style ice cream represents the emerging trend in the snack industry. These brands have won the widespread favor of young consumers through healthy, natural raw materials, innovative appearance designs, and personalized consumption experiences. The rise of the trend of ice cream and dessertization has driven consumers' demand for diverse and personalized products. This transformation has also led to the transformation of ice cream from traditional sales methods to socialization, fashionization, and multi-form, further expanding the depth and breadth of the market. [2]

Meanwhile, with the intensification of brand competition, the deepening of market segmentation, and the advancement of the integration of online and offline, the development of the snack industry exhibits characteristics such as diversification, high quality,[3] and convenience. Consumers' demands for food have gradually shifted from simple satisfaction of taste to more complex personalized needs, driving the development direction of the entire industry. (Huaguan Industry Research Institute, 2024)

1.2. Research Objectives

In this market environment, the local specialty food brands in Macau are encountering unprecedented opportunities and challenges. This research will take "Lemon Car Lu" as the core case study. Based on the brand Honeycomb Model proposed by Dentsu Company in Japan, through field research and analysis, this

study will conduct a systematic analysis of the strategies of the "Lemon Car Lu" brand. The hope is to conduct an in-depth analysis of this brand to provide valuable theoretical guidance and practical references for brand building, market positioning, and sustainable development in the local specialty food industry of Macau.[4]

2. Discussion on Literature of Honeycomb Model Theory

During the process of brand service and research, the Japanese advertising agency Dentsu Corporation developed an effective brand value positioning model, known as the "Dentsu Honeycomb Model". This model is based on the basic functional benefits of the product or service, and further extends to elements such as brand personality, emotional benefits, user image, logo symbol, authoritative traits, and related functional benefits. These six elements together constitute the core value of the brand, and through these elements, a clear and complete brand value construction system is formed.[5]

Table 1. A literature review on Honeycomb Model Brand Research

Researcher	Time	Research Topic	Key Points of Discussion/Research Methods	Published In
Le Hejian, Zheng Liping	2004	Analysis of the Honeycomb Model of Zhejiang Satellite TV Brand	The Honeycomb Model is adopted to analyze the brand communication strategy of Zhejiang Satellite TV, revealing how it builds its brand image through six key elements, maintains interaction with the audience, and strengthens brand recognition and loyalty.[8]	Modern Communication, Zhejiang Satellite TV Marketing Center, Zhejiang Satellite TV Marketing Center.
Lu Taihong, Wu Shuilong, Zhu Huihuang, He Yun	2009	Analysis of Milestones in Brand Theory	By using the literature review method, the evolution of brand theory was systematically analyzed, with a focus on the position of the Honeycomb Model in brand theory. The main developments of brand theory were reviewed, and the Honeycomb Model was proposed as an important component of brand management theory, especially in brand interaction and relationship management, which has significant innovative significance.[9]	Foreign Economics and Management
Zhao Jie	2009	The Application of Honeycomb Model in Building Brand Equity	Through quantitative analysis and case studies, this paper explores the role of the Honeycomb Model in brand equity construction, emphasizes its significance in the interaction between brands and consumers, and enhances brand awareness and loyalty.[17]	In the business era, Beijing Wuzi University
Guan Shunfeng, Li Yanmin	2015	Research on Brand Core Value Positioning: A Case Study of Huayi Brothers Media Group[6]	Combining the Honeycomb Model to analyze the core value of Huayi Brothers brand, it is proposed that the Honeycomb Model is conducive to the precise positioning of the brand, clarifying the core value, and shaping the brand image in complex environments.	Design Art Research, Wuhan University of Technology
Zhang Chuwei, Zou Hui	2021	Research on the Brand Value Composition and Enhancement Strategies of Shanxi Medicinal Tea	By using the case analysis method, the core value, communication strategy and brand image improvement path of Shanxi medicinal tea brands are analyzed. The Honeycomb Model helps to explore the intrinsic value of the brand and enhance its influence.[15]	Business Economics, Zhejiang A&F University
Shen Ting	2021	Analysis of the Brand Construction Method of Macau Juji Souvenirs: A Study Based on Dentsu's Honeycomb Model	By analyzing the brand value of Juji souvenirs through Dentsu's brand Honeycomb Model, we study how it can establish value sharing with consumers at multiple levels and create a brand environment conducive to	Decoration, School of Intermedia Art, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts

			long-term development.	
Wen Jiayi	2023	Research on Marketing Strategies of Local Coffee Brands in Macao Based on Honeycomb Model	Taking Blooom Coffee House and Starbucks as examples, this paper analyzes the Honeycomb Model of coffee brands, interprets the core values of the brands and provides a basis for optimizing brand marketing strategies.	Marketing, School of Innovation and Design, City University of Macau
Shang Shenhao, Sun Jiawei, Chen Jiayi	2023	Research on the Rebranding Strategy of "Lao Gan Ma" Brand Image Based on Honeycomb Model	Combining the Honeycomb Model to analyze the brand image of "Lao Gan Ma", its application in brand repositioning is proposed, and brand awareness is enhanced through brand interaction and consumer feedback.[11]	China Business Review, Macau University of Science and Technology
Liu Yan, Zhou Yue	2024	Research on the Brand Value Enhancement Strategy of Huazhu Homestay Based on Honeycomb Model	Combining the Honeycomb Model to analyze the brand positioning and value enhancement of Huazhu Homestay, strategies are proposed to improve brand awareness and loyalty.[10]	Western Tourism, Jishou University

Data source: Collation of this study.

Based on the above literature, the Honeycomb Model, as an innovative tool for brand management, has demonstrated its strong application potential in multiple fields. It can provide strong theoretical support for the "Lemon Car Sausage" brand, a characteristic snack brand in Macau, especially in aspects such as brand communication, brand asset building, brand image shaping, and brand positioning. The Honeycomb Model, by strengthening the interaction between the brand and consumers, helps the brand enhance market awareness, increase brand loyalty, and maintain the brand's market competitiveness through continuous innovation. [7]

3. Analysis of Lemoncello Brand

3.1. Brand Introduction

Lemoncello is a local ice cream brand originating from Macau, founded by Nikita Fu in 2007. It is the first store in Macau that focuses on making and selling Italian hand-drawn ice cream (gelato). The core concept of the brand is to provide ice cream that suits the tastes of the Eastern population. Therefore, it pays special attention to reducing sweetness and introduces a large number of fresh fruit flavors. Up to now, Lemoncello has developed over 100 different flavors, with fruit flavors being the main feature. Since its establishment, Lemoncello has gradually expanded its business scale, from the initial local store, to having stores in multiple locations in Macau, and has also successfully entered large resorts such as Macau Galaxy. The brand has always adhered to high-quality and handmade ice cream to win the favor of local consumers and tourists. [13]

3.2. Brand Market Research

The global ice cream market is undergoing a transformation towards health and artisanal products. Consumers are increasingly concerned about natural ingredients

and products without additives,[14] and Lemon Carrot Ice Cream meets this trend by using healthy ingredients such as natural lemon juice. (Iimedia Research, 2023). [4] The global ice cream market is expected to reach \$91.9 billion by 2027, with the high-end artisanal ice cream category occupying an important position. Lemon Carrot Ice Cream's handmade production process and high-quality image align with the international market's preference for healthy and high-end ice cream. With the rise of the experience economy, more and more brands choose to provide immersive experiences for consumers through offline stores. Lemon Carrot Ice Cream attracts consumers who value brand stories and artisanal craftsmanship through its exquisite store design and on-site production demonstrations. In Europe and the United States, consumers' emphasis on experiential consumption has made offline stores not only sales venues but also an important part of brand experiences. In China, the demand for healthy food among consumers is increasing day by day, especially among the younger generation. Pursuing low-sugar, natural and additive-free products has become the mainstream. Lemoncello, with its natural lemon ingredients and handmade production process, can meet this demand, especially among the young consumers in first- and second-tier cities. Unlike ice cream brands that rely on e-commerce channels, Lemoncello focuses on offline operations. It enhances brand awareness through cooperation with popular shopping districts and high-end malls. In recent years, the demand for high-end ice cream in the Chinese market has been continuously rising, especially in high-traffic areas such as shopping centers and tourist attractions. Opening offline stores can attract loyal customers through high-quality services and on-site experiences. According to market research reports, consumers are more willing to pay a premium for high-quality experiences and fresh products. This provides a solid foundation for Lemoncello to expand its business offline.

As a tourist city, Macao's market structure is different from that of the Chinese mainland. It relies more on international tourists, especially the high-consumption groups from the Chinese mainland and other East Asian countries. Lemon Car's offline brand experience model is particularly suitable for the Macao market. Tourists tend to purchase high-end ice cream with local characteristics and are willing to experience both handcrafted and on-site made ice cream.

3.3. Current Situation of Brand Marketing Strategies Based on Honeycomb Model

The Honeycomb Model posits that when consumers come to understand a brand, they form multiple perspectives on the brand, including feelings, experiences, evaluations, associations, and brand positioning, etc. These elements can be classified into three progressively nested levels from a horizontal perspective. Firstly, the first level describes the objective attributes of the brand, referring to consumers' cognition of the basic facts of the brand, including objective elements

such as the brand's symbols, logos, and their authoritative basis. Secondly, the second level focuses on the benefits of the brand, referring to the emotional and functional needs that consumers' satisfaction with the brand fulfills. Finally, the third level emphasizes the brand's personality, endowing the brand with anthropomorphic characteristics to facilitate emotional communication between the brand and consumers. Consumers achieve self-identification by choosing brands that align with their preferences, thereby enhancing their brand loyalty through this sense of identity.

From the perspective of the symbol system, Lemoncello conveys the core values of the brand through its unique visual elements. The brand's logo has been redesigned, removing the style of the color block ice cream but retaining the handwritten English "LEMONCELLO" and the traditional Chinese characters "柠檬车露" design. The store design has simplified the complex design, using four candy colors as the main color scheme, and using color block elements to form the design packaging and the store, which helps consumers make associations and forms a strong brand recognition.

At the brand characteristic level, Lemoncello emphasizes the handmade production and the use of healthy ingredients of its products, highlighting the uniqueness and high-end quality of the brand. Different from traditional ice cream brands, the brand image of Lemoncello is presented through its innovative flavors and on-site production, enabling consumers not only to purchase the product but also to acquire a unique experience. However, the lack of a brand story prevents consumers from feeling the humanistic care and exquisite craftsmanship behind the brand while enjoying the product.

From the perspective of functional benefits, the brand value of Lemoncello mainly lies in the high quality and healthy characteristics of its ice cream. By using natural ingredients, handcrafting, and the concept of no additives, the brand can meet consumers' demands for health, deliciousness, and unique flavors. Moreover, the brand enhances consumers' trust in product quality through on-site production demonstrations and tasting sessions, thereby boosting its market competitiveness.

At the emotional benefit level, Lemoncello enhances the brand's appeal by deeply connecting with consumers' emotions. The brand achieves this through meticulous services and considerate consumption experiences, allowing consumers to feel joy and warmth. Particularly in its interactions with consumers, Lemoncello conveys the emotional appeal of "sharing happiness and enjoying health", making the brand not only a provider of products but also a bridge for emotional communication.

At the brand personality level, Lemoncello has created a warm, friendly and creative brand image. The brand's personality is reflected in the professionalism of its staff, the atmosphere of its stores, and the unique design of each ice cream. Lemoncello encourages its employees to showcase their individuality, while also requiring them to convey the brand's enthusiasm and vitality, which has helped to shape a brand

image that is friendly and innovative.

In terms of the ideal user profile, the target customers of Lemoncello are mainly young people and family groups who pursue health and value a high quality of life. These consumers usually have a high level of health awareness and are willing to try new and creative foods. Lemoncello specially takes into account the needs of these groups when designing its products and stores, enabling the brand to resonate with their lifestyles.

From the perspective of core values, the brand core value of Lemoncello lies in its commitment to health, quality and innovation. Every product of the brand reflects the meticulous selection of raw materials and the pursuit of excellence in craftsmanship, promising to provide consumers not only delicious but also healthy ice cream. This core value not only enhances the brand's market competitiveness, but also enables Lemoncello to stand out among numerous ice cream brands and become the trusted choice of consumers.

3.4. Interview Method

After conducting theoretical analysis of the existing data on lemon car lu, the author, starting from the seven aspects of the cellular theory, conducted a field survey of the offline users of the "lemon car lu" brand, a characteristic snack in Macau, in two stores. The aim was to deeply understand the opinions, perceptions, and strengths and weaknesses of the brand among different consumer groups. The interviewees included local residents, students, employees, and tourists from different regions, covering users of different genders, age groups, and professional backgrounds. Through these interviews, we can obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the customers' needs and preferences, thereby better using the model to provide reference for the brand's future development. The key points of this interview included the factors that attract consumers to the brand, their views on the brand's strengths and weaknesses, and the overall experience they gained during consumption.

Table 2. Offline user interviews with Lemoncello

Identity	Gender	Age	Brand Advantages/Disadvantages/Attractive Factors	Region	Store of the Interview
undergraduate	female	21 years old	I brought my friends from the mainland to taste it and found that the Lemoncello has a very local flavor. Moreover, its healthy ingredients and novel innovative taste are very popular among people of the same age. I am willing to recommend it to more friends. It is believed that the drawback is that it can only be eaten in Macau and the brand design is not obvious.	Macao	Front Lane of the Ruins of St. Paul's
shop assistant	male	26 years old	As a local of Macao, I have been a regular customer who has accompanied the growth of the store since the brand opened when I was in junior high school. From a regular customer after school to a recommender who often brings friends over for meals and then to a store clerk who loves this job. I think the service of Lemoncello is very humanized and can convey a sense of "happiness" to customers. The store told the author that due to healthy ingredients, innovative flavors	Macao	Dibao Street/Guanyue Street

Identity	Gender	Age	Brand Advantages/Disadvantages/Attractive Factors	Region	Store of the Interview
			and Michelin recommendations, there are always many tourists in the store throughout the year, and there is no obvious seasonal difference.		
visitors (lovers) (freelancer)	male/female	28 years old / 27 years old	A tourist who came to Guanye Street for a meal felt a strong desire for dessert after having the local specialty, the pork chop bun. When passing by a store and seeing many people inside, he was interested and searched for a guide on social media before tasting it. I think it's great that the store is located in an area with many tourists. I also have a high evaluation of the service provided by the staff. The flavors I tried are all very novel and I think they are very suitable for the eating habits of East Asians. If I come again, I would recommend it to my friends on a regular basis, but I think it can enhance the brand's promotional efforts.	Korea	Dibao Street/Guanye Street
visitors (teach culture center teacher)	female	26 years old	A friend brought me here for a taste. I thought the brand had no distinctive culture and came simply because I heard from my friend that it was unique. After tasting, the experience was just so-so due to poor packaging design, but I thought the taste was quite good and would recommend it with caution.	Shenzhen	Front Lane of the Ruins of St. Paul's
visitors (working class)	male	32 years old	I think there are too many people in the store and no rest space. I also think the brand service is just so-so. The staff don't communicate proactively. Moreover, the product packaging is not good. Because the handmade ice cream melts very quickly without packaging design, it gets all over my hands. All these factors lead to a poor experience. Besides, I think the price is a bit high and won't recommend it to my friends.	Guangzhou	Front Lane of the Ruins of St. Paul's
native	female	59 years old	I brought my grandson here to eat it. I also like this kind of ice cream very much and am a regular here. I think it does no harm to my health. They think that the space in the store is limited, and it's hard for them to have a seat when there are other customers after their children sit down.	Macao	Dibao Street/Guanye Street
tourists (Private enterprise owner)	female	45 years old	When planning the itinerary, I specially arranged a brand tour of Lemoncello. I highly praised the brand's service and thought it had a very unique flavor. Before leaving, I still wanted to have it again. I personally like it very much and will recommend it to my friends. I believe that brands can discover their own brand culture more often and strengthen social media construction more.	Kaohsiung City, Taiwan	Dibao Street/Guanye Street

Most consumers have highly praised the brand Lemoncello for its healthy ingredients, innovative flavors, and service attitude. Especially among young people and tourists, the brand's appeal is particularly prominent. However, consumers have also raised some suggestions for improvement, particularly in terms of brand design, packaging, and promotion. Some users believe that there is still room for optimization in these aspects. Overall, the brand advantages of Lemoncello are obvious, but it still needs to be improved in details to better meet consumers' needs and enhance its market competitiveness. Based on these interview results, it can be seen that Lemoncello's positioning in the Macau market is successful, especially in attracting tourists and young consumers. However, regarding feedback on brand promotion, packaging design, and consumer experience, the brand can further strengthen social media construction, improve spatial experience, and perfect product packaging to further consolidate its market position.

4. Research Results and Discussion

Based on the seven levels of the cellular theory, the Lemoncello brand has demonstrated its potential in multiple aspects, but there is still room for improvement. Through the analysis of the brand's current situation, the following are the advantages and disadvantages of Lemoncello in each level.

Table 3. Brand strategy analysis at seven Levels Based on the Honeycomb Model

Aspect	Advantages	Disadvantages
symbol system	The unique visual design, simple logo and color scheme enhance the brand's recognition.	The brand packaging design is a bit simple and crude, which may affect the brand image.
brand attributes	Emphasizing handcrafted production and healthy ingredients, it attracts consumers who pay attention to health and fresh flavors.	The brand story is not prominent enough and lacks emotional connection.
functional benefits	Provide healthy and high-quality ice cream to enhance consumers' trust in the products.	The store space is small and the interaction among some service staff needs to be improved, which affects the overall experience.
emotional Benefit	The brand conveys the emotional appeal of "sharing happiness and enjoying health", attracting young people and family groups.	Insufficient emotional communication and a lack of personalized brand interaction.
brand personality	The brand image is warm and highly creative, and the staff are enthusiastic and professional, which enhances the brand's affinity.	Although the atmosphere inside the store is good, the space and comfort level need to be improved.
ideal user image	It has successfully attracted a healthy and young consumer group.	Other consumer groups have potential.
core value	Adhering to health, innovation and high quality, it has won the recognition of the market.	The brand's social media interaction is less targeted, and external communication needs to be strengthened.

Overall, Lemon Car excels in aspects such as symbol design, brand characteristics, functional benefits, and emotional benefits, accurately capturing consumers' demands for health and high-quality products. However, there is still room for improvement in brand communication, packaging design, consumer experience, and emotional connection. Particularly in the construction of brand stories, the enhancement of service quality, and the improvement of spatial experience, the brand should further strengthen detail management to better consolidate its competitiveness in the market.

5. Conclusion

This study employed field research and consumer interviews to obtain direct feedback. However, the respondents were mainly young people and tourists, which might limit the generalizability of the research results. Future studies could be expanded to include more diverse groups of different ages, occupations, and regions to enhance the representativeness of the research and further verify the universality and effectiveness of the brand strategy. To increase the credibility of the research, experts with industry backgrounds, such as brand management experts and market analysts, could be invited to participate in the interviews or surveys to ensure the authority and scientific nature of the assessment results.

Through the analysis of the brand building of Lemoncello using the cellular theory, although it has achieved a certain depth, it has not been compared horizontally with other local or international brands to explore the similarities and differences in

brand communication, market positioning, and consumer perception. This comparative study will help to further clarify the unique characteristics of Lemoncello's brand and provide more comprehensive strategic suggestions for its future development.

Finally, although Lemoncello has achieved some success in the Macao market, with the diversification of market demands and the intensification of competition, the brand needs to constantly adjust and optimize its strategies. On the basis of meeting consumers' demands for healthy and high-quality products, Lemoncello should also focus on enhancing differentiation and upgrading its premium positioning. Moreover, the brand should strengthen brand culture construction and actively respond to market changes to seize new opportunities. In summary, if Lemoncello can further enhance its brand image and improve the consumer experience, it will help it solidify its position in the fierce market competition and achieve sustainable development.

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