

Research on the Construction Path and Practical Strategies of the "Sense of Relaxation" in the Brand Marketing of Muji: From Psychological Placebo to Consumption Resonance

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Abstract: In today's fast-paced and high-intensity modern society, consumer shopping demands have shifted from mere material satisfaction to seeking psychological and emotional comfort and relaxation. This shift has led to the emergence of "relaxation" marketing. This study focuses on the concept of "relaxation" in brand marketing, first clarifying its connotation and essential characteristics, analyzing the marketing strategies that instill "relaxation" in products, and finally summarizing the impact on brand development. Taking Muji as a typical case, this paper explores its brand philosophy, spatial experience, content, and social media marketing strategies related to "relaxation", as well as consumer behavior and identification mechanisms. The study extracts a theoretical model and mechanism for constructing "relaxation" driven by three factors: perception shaping, experience deepening, and emotional resonance. The findings not only fill the research gap in "relaxation" marketing, offering theoretical contributions to academia, but also provide enterprises with new emotional marketing strategies, supporting brand differentiation in competitive pathways.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's society, the fast-paced lifestyle and high work pressures are omnipresent, permeating people's daily routines. In this environment, consumer shopping demands have undergone a profound transformation, no longer confined to material satisfaction alone. Amid their busy lives, consumers long for psychological comfort and emotional relaxation from brands, hoping that the brand can serve as an emotional support and refuge. Much like finding a peaceful harbor in a bustling world, they seek a temporary respite for their weary minds. Brands that focus on creating a sense of "relaxation" achieve this through minimalist designs, eliminating unnecessary decorations, and using simple lines to highlight the purity of their products. They employ gentle color tones such as beige and light blue, soft hues that convey warmth and tranquility. Natural materials like unbleached cotton, linen, and raw wood are used, making consumers feel that, through the use of these products, they can unload the weight of the world and reconnect with nature, experiencing a gradual integration with it, which effectively

alleviates their emotional burdens and brings inner peace. Meanwhile, the rapid development and widespread dissemination of social media have accelerated the rise of "relaxation". More and more brands have keenly captured this trend, incorporating "relaxation" elements into product development and marketing strategies to attract consumers' attention and loyalty, setting themselves apart in a competitive market and creating unique brand sparks. In the study "From Psychological Placebo to Consumer Resonance: The Construction and Practice of 'Relaxation' in Brand Marketing", the role of psychological placebo in marketing is not to be overlooked. Its marketing strategy subtly influences consumers' cognition and emotions during shopping, thus gaining the trust and affection of the consumer group.

From a cognitive perspective, according to Whang et al. (2020), when consumers are faced with a large number of similar products, they often struggle with which brand to choose. At such times, if a brand uses "relaxation" as a marketing theme, consumers subconsciously believe that purchasing that brand's product will solve their inner indecision and reduce the probability of making a wrong choice.

Even though the product itself may not actually have the effect of easing psychological burdens, this marketing approach subtly implies to the consumer, creating a relaxed and positive emotion, which enhances the consumer's liking for the product and willingness to purchase.

From an emotional perspective, as Zhu and Huang (2018) pointed out, consumers' emotional experiences are particularly crucial in brand marketing. Psychological placebos can evoke positive emotional responses in consumers. As a popular emotional appeal in the current era that aligns with the needs of consumers in high-stress environments, the concept of "relaxation" enables consumers to experience joy, ease, and comfort associated with a brand. This emotional connection fosters a strong bond between the brand and the consumer, promotes word-of-mouth marketing, expands the consumer base, enhances customer loyalty, and ultimately brings positive social benefits to the brand.

From a behavioral standpoint, according to Li (2019), psychological placebos can guide consumers in choosing and purchasing a brand's products. By cultivating a brand atmosphere of "relaxation"—for example, through the use of lighthearted advertising language, comfortable store layouts, and minimalist product designs—consumers subconsciously associate the brand with an uplifting and relaxed lifestyle. They are more likely to purchase products in pursuit of this psychological satisfaction, especially those who seek relief from stress and aspire to a simple, tranquil life. Through psychological cues that stimulate emotional resonance, brands achieve both communication and sales objectives.

From the perspective of consumer resonance, the theoretical framework of consumer resonance is central to understanding the impact of "relaxation" in brand marketing. Many studies have provided definitions of consumer resonance. Keller's (2013) brand resonance model suggests that brand resonance is not merely the awareness of a brand, but rather the creation of enduring brand relationships through consumers' emotional responses and social identification. "Relaxation", as an emotional regulation mechanism, can stimulate consumers' feelings of ease and comfort through emotional design, visual elements, communication style, and other factors in brand communication, thereby further fostering the formation of consumer resonance. For instance, brands can create a warm, tranquil, and comfortable atmosphere to make consumers feel relaxed, thereby establishing a strong emotional connection (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). This "relaxation" is often conveyed through emotional advertisements, soothing tones, and relaxed storytelling methods, ultimately leading to consumer

recognition and brand loyalty (Escalas, 2004). Therefore, brands should pay attention to emotional design in their marketing, especially for target groups seeking relaxation and comfort, using the theory of consumer resonance to maximize brand value.

Against this backdrop, this study will delve deeper into the topic. First, it will clearly define the internal concept of "relaxation" in brand marketing and accurately pinpoint its essential characteristics. Second, it will comprehensively analyze the specific marketing strategies brands use to imbue their products with "relaxation", and how these methods, like psychological placebos, provide consumers with emotional support and comfort. The study will also examine the profound impact of "relaxation" marketing on brand development. Using Muji as a case study, this paper aims to deepen the understanding of consumer psychological mechanisms in brand marketing, provide theoretical support for companies to develop marketing strategies with emotional value, and offer new differentiated competitive paths for brands in a fiercely competitive market. Furthermore, it will contribute to the academic field by promoting systematic research on "relaxation" marketing, offering new perspectives for the innovation of future brand marketing theories.

2 INTRODUCTION TO MUJI BRAND

In 1983, Muji opened its first flagship store in Aoyama, Tokyo. The minimalist store design and simple products quickly attracted consumers' attention. Subsequently, the brand embarked on an international expansion, opening its first stores in the UK and Hong Kong in 1991, spreading its unique Japanese aesthetic of simplicity and practicality to regions beyond Asia and introducing consumers from different cultural backgrounds to the idea of minimalist and functional products. In the 21st century, Muji accelerated its globalization. In 2003, it established a company in Singapore, officially entering the Southeast Asian market. In 2005, it entered China, where its distinctive brand image and high-quality products rapidly gained popularity in major cities and were enthusiastically embraced by consumers. In 2007, Muji successfully entered the U.S. market, further expanding its global market influence. In 2012 and 2013, the brand entered Malaysia and the Middle East, continuing to expand its market presence in different regions. During this period, Muji not only continued to deepen its presence in retail but also innovated in its business model. In

2019, the opening of Muji's Ginza restaurant and Ginza hotel marked the brand's extension from pure product retail to a comprehensive lifestyle experience. Muji has always pursued the philosophy of "simple, natural, and quality living", offering consumers minimalist, natural, high-quality, and reasonably priced products. It avoids waste in material production and emphasizes environmental sustainability. In product development, Muji has continuously provided consumers with high-quality choices, ensuring that users feel the brand's dedication and experience a sense of inner peace and tranquility when using its products, thus reflecting the aspiration for a beautiful life. Throughout its development, Muji has received numerous honors. In 2017, it was ranked 230th in Asia's top 500 companies, highlighting its strong influence and brand value in the Asian market. This recognition reflects the brand's active exploration and potential in retail model innovation and digital development. These achievements not only affirm Muji's past successes but also lay a foundation for its future development, inspiring continuous innovation and the delivery of higher-quality products and services to consumers.

3 CASE ANALYSIS

3.1 Brand Philosophy

Muji's brand philosophy centers on "a pleasant life", aiming to provide consumers with a high-quality lifestyle through minimalist design, environmentally friendly materials, and premium product quality. For example, Muji emphasizes "simplicity" by eliminating unnecessary decorations and processing, retaining only the most essential functions of its products to reflect the value of "reducing unnecessary waste". It also focuses on "practicality", with great attention to durability and functionality, embodying the brand's core belief in "quality first". Thoughtful, practical design details—such as umbrellas with hooks for hanging shopping bags—leave a lasting impression on consumers. As Chitturi et al. (2007) pointed out, effective design contributes to an ideal consumer experience and positively influences subsequent purchasing behavior. Muji also adopts a no-logo strategy, encouraging consumers to focus on the product itself rather than the influence of brand labels. Additionally, Muji strives to use natural and recyclable materials in both products and packaging, promoting sustainable development and minimizing exposure to harmful substances. This reflects its environmental values and commitment to "eco-friendliness" and "harmony between humans and

nature". These values support the brand's marketing strategy by helping establish a unique and memorable brand personality. Such values are key to generating consumer resonance, recognition, affection, and emotional connection. Muji's brand philosophy particularly appeals to consumers aged 18 to 50, a group that tends to favor simplicity, authenticity, and quality over the bright, saturated aesthetics associated with excessive visual stimulation.

3.2 Spatial Experience and the Sense of Relaxation

Taking offline experience as an example, Muji's physical stores predominantly adopt natural and plain color tones such as brown, white, and beige, creating a clean, warm, and tranquil atmosphere that enhances the user experience and visually relaxes customers. The background music played in the store is also soothing, ensuring a stress-free shopping process and promoting auditory relaxation. Product displays in Muji stores follow minimalist principles—organized, concise, and with intentional white space—to maintain visual harmony across different areas and create a calm, healing experience for customers during product selection. Soft and warm lighting is used to foster a cozy and immersive environment. Rest areas are available, allowing customers to pause and relax when tired or to handle urgent matters, providing a tactile sense of being at home. Changing rooms ensure privacy and convenience, reducing pre-purchase pressure and fostering a relaxed shopping experience. As Pham and Sun (2020) noted, consumers' willingness to pay for retail products and services increases by 11% when they are in a relaxed state. Muji also offers reliable after-sales service in its offline stores: products with quality issues can be returned within 30 days with proof of purchase, and items with sizing issues can be exchanged within 7 days. The return process is simple—customers can bring the receipt and item to any Muji store, where staff will assist with inspection and processing. Returned items are carefully checked for signs of use or damage, and eligible returns are promptly refunded or exchanged, ensuring that the interests of the next customer are protected.

3.3 Content Marketing and Social Media Marketing of the Sense of Relaxation

In content marketing, Muji has always adhered to a simple and authentic creative style, contrasting

sharply with the exaggerated and attention-grabbing content marketing strategies popular today. Its official blog, magazines, and promotional materials rarely feature ornate language or flashy images; instead, they share small stories and practical experiences from daily life. For example, Muji often publishes in its magazines how ordinary people use Muji products to create cozy and comfortable homes, showcasing home decor examples that are full of life and demonstrating how these products seamlessly integrate into real-life settings to bring convenience and beauty to daily living.

In the age of social media, Muji has fully leveraged major platforms to spread the concept of relaxation to a wider audience. On social platforms like Instagram and Weibo, Muji's posts exude a simple, soothing style. The product images shared often feature simple, natural backgrounds, using solid colors or natural landscapes to highlight the minimalist design and natural texture of the products. The placement of products in these images appears casual yet aesthetically pleasing, as if they were placed there inadvertently, yet perfectly showcasing the product's features and appeal. The videos, often narrative-driven, subtly present the advantages, characteristics, and values of the products in a non-intrusive way, creating a relaxed and practical atmosphere for the product. For example, a video Muji posted tells the story of a person traveling with Muji products, including a cosmetic bag and a travel backpack. The video discusses how Muji products make their life more convenient, presented in a casual, everyday-sharing manner, with cheerful background music, evoking a relaxed feeling that doesn't feel like an advertisement at all.

Additionally, Muji regularly hosts online interactive activities such as photography contests and life-hack sharing. These activities all focus on daily life and the sense of relaxation, encouraging consumers to discover and capture beautiful moments in their own way. Through these activities, Muji has successfully built a vibrant and interactive brand community, where consumers feel a sense of belonging and identification, further strengthening the connection between the brand and the sense of relaxation.

3.4 Consumer Behavior and Identification Mechanisms

Consumers choose Muji products not just to satisfy material needs but, more importantly, to pursue a lifestyle and spiritual fulfillment. For example, when purchasing a Muji aroma diffuser, consumers are not only interested in its ability to release a refreshing

fragrance and improve indoor air quality but, more importantly, they seek to create a tranquil and relaxing atmosphere in their lives through its use. Similarly, when buying Muji's minimalist stationery, consumers are pursuing a simple and efficient state of learning and work. These stationery items lack extravagant decorations but fulfill consumers' desires for quality and practicality through their fine craftsmanship and functional design. While using these items, consumers are able to focus more on their learning or work, avoiding distractions caused by overly complicated designs, and thus achieving a balance in their work and life, transitioning from material consumption to spiritual satisfaction.

As Fournier (1998) mentioned, when consumers derive emotional value beyond the product itself, their loyalty to the brand increases. Baser (2023) further proved that brand product experiences contribute to loyalty at an effectiveness rate of 42%, far higher than traditional marketing methods. Muji has successfully attracted a large number of consumers with shared life philosophies by continuously providing brand content and experiences related to relaxation. These consumers gradually develop a strong sense of identification and loyalty to the brand through their use of Muji products. They are not just customers of Muji, but also promoters and practitioners of its brand philosophy. For example, some consumers actively share their experiences using Muji products on social media, showcasing how they use Muji products to create a relaxing living space. They post photos and texts on platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and others, recommending Muji products to their friends and explaining how these products have transformed their lifestyles, helping them find moments of peace and relaxation in their busy lives. This word-of-mouth method not only attracts the attention of potential consumers but also further strengthens existing consumers' sense of identification and belonging with the brand.

4 CONSTRUCTING THE RELAXATION MARKETING SYSTEM

In the field of brand marketing, the mechanism for constructing "relaxation" can be theoretically distilled into a three-dimensional driving model: Perception Shaping - Experience Deepening - Emotional Resonance.

From the perspective of perception shaping, the focus is on deeply studying the sources of stress in the target consumers' daily lives and simplifying the operational process from a functional standpoint. For example, smart home products can reduce user steps by offering scene mode settings. Brands use product

design, visual communication, and brand storytelling to convey a de-stressing image, creating a tranquil and soothing sensory experience, thereby lowering consumers' decision-making costs. This enables consumers to cognitively associate the brand with "relaxation" and develop expectations of a relaxing experience with the brand.

In the realm of experience deepening, brands engage multiple sensory experiences, optimize interactive experiences, and incorporate emotional design into product functions. For example, in using aromatic products, the experience extends beyond just soothing fragrances; it can be complemented with soft music and warm lighting to create a fully immersive relaxation atmosphere. By integrating relaxation into the process of consumers interacting with the product or service—such as through comfortable packaging or pressure-free service policies—brands strengthen the consumer's psychological sense of relaxation, thereby enhancing the emotional value of the brand.

From the emotional dimension, emotional resonance plays a long-term sustaining role. Brands establish emotional connections between consumers through community interactions, UGC (User-Generated Content), and social media operations. Methods such as collaborations with KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) and user story sharing help create deep consumer identification and a sense of belonging, internalizing the brand into their lifestyle and boosting brand loyalty. This three-dimensional driving model provides a systematic approach to emotional marketing, helping brands create a psychological placebo effect and achieve consumer resonance.

In terms of visual communication, brands can utilize natural elements such as the ocean or sky in advertisements, packaging, and store designs to convey a relaxed atmosphere. These scenes help alleviate visual fatigue and provide a sense of calm. Brands can also tell real-life stories, showing how they help consumers find moments of relaxation amidst busy lives. For example, a brand might share a story about a workplace professional finding a relaxing moment during a hectic workday, with a cup of coffee, sparking emotional resonance among consumers.

5 CONCLUSION

In modern society, consumer shopping demands have shifted from material to psychological and emotional fulfillment, with "relaxation" becoming a fashionable trend. Through the analysis of cases such as Muji, it was found that "relaxation" marketing is primarily

realized in two areas: brand design and advertising promotion. Taking Muji as an example, first, its brand design adopts a minimalist style and uses environmentally friendly materials to create practical and simple products that retain only basic functions while eliminating unnecessary decorations. This conveys the concept of avoiding excessive packaging and emphasizing the brand's intrinsic quality. Secondly, in advertising, Muji uses social media to drive the minimalist trend and showcase its practical value, using the understated appearance of the products to communicate the concept of relaxation. At the same time, a theoretical model of the "relaxation" construction mechanism, driven by the interaction of perception shaping, experience deepening, and emotional resonance, has been formulated, providing clear guidance for brands in incorporating "relaxation" into their marketing processes.

Currently, there is a significant gap in the systematic study of "relaxation" marketing within the academic field. This research aims to fill this gap, offering contributions that not only assist the academic community in improving theoretical understanding but also provide strong theoretical support for businesses to develop more emotionally valuable marketing strategies. In today's highly competitive market, this study also opens new differentiated competitive paths for businesses, helping them stand out.

In conclusion, this study has certain limitations. On one hand, it has not explored the synergistic effects of "relaxation" marketing with other marketing elements. On the other hand, the number of cases analyzed is limited and shows a high degree of homogeneity. Moreover, the study lacks supporting data and official information, which restricts its generalizability. In the future, researchers can delve deeper into the underlying logic of "relaxation" marketing from a consumer psychology perspective, and supplement more cases and data to enhance the scientific rigor and persuasiveness of the research.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

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

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