

Exploring to Summer's Product Innovation and Market Positioning Strategy Based on 4P Theory

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Abstract: With the rise of national trend consumption, local high-end fragrance brand To Summer is rapidly rising based on 'oriental aesthetics', but its marketing strategy is facing challenges such as cultural convergence and single channel coverage. Based on the classic 4P theory of marketing, this study integrates the authoritative journal literature in the past five years to systematically analyse the current situation and core defects of To Summer's product, price, channel and promotion strategies. The study finds that the current brand development is facing four core problems: firstly, there is an over-reliance on single cultural symbols and technical shortcomings on the product side; secondly, the high-end pricing strategy creates consumer barriers and makes it difficult to break through the boundaries of the existing clientele; thirdly, the sales channel is overly focused on the operation of online private traffic, and the penetration rate of the offline market is not enough; lastly, promotional methods show homogeneous characteristics, and cross-border co-operation projects have not yet formed a cultural circle with market penetration. Cultural circle breakthrough with market penetration. These problems jointly restrict the brand's market competitiveness and sustainable development ability. To address these issues, this paper proposes strategies such as tiered pricing, dynamic cultural narratives and omni-channel content, and stresses the importance of balancing brand tone and market expansion needs through technology-enabled products and ethical premiums. The findings of the study not only provide new ideas for the strategic design of local cultural brands, but also shed light on the innovation of traditional frameworks in luxury marketing.

1 INTRODUCTION

Under the dual drive of the transformation of consumer structure and the reconstruction of traditional cultural values, China's fragrance market has shown rapid growth, and a number of emerging brands with 'oriental aesthetics' as their core competitiveness have emerged, and the fragrance brand To Summer is a typical representative. The fragrance brand To Summer is a typical example. It has successfully created a differentiated brand image by integrating traditional cultural symbols with modern design language, but it faces challenges such as rigid cultural narratives and solidified user circles in the process of scale expansion. Existing research lacks systematic analysis on the marketing practice of local cultural brands, especially in the context of 'national trend', how to reconcile cultural uniqueness and market universality is still a theoretical gap (Wu,

2024). Taking To Summer as a case study, this paper systematically explores three core propositions based on the 4P theoretical framework and the cutting-edge literature on cultural branding, luxury pricing, and omni-channel marketing (Gong, 2024). Firstly, it focuses on the core advantages and potential risks of To Summer's current marketing strategy, and through deconstructing the operation mechanism of its product design, pricing logic, channel layout and promotional means, it reveals the dynamic check and balance relationship between cultural premium and functional value. Secondly, it demonstrates the limitations of the 4P theory in the application of emerging cultural brands, and proposes improvement paths in combination with the dynamic cultural capital theory. Finally, the study explores how local high-end brands can achieve 'broken circle' growth through strategic innovation. The study adopts case studies and literature cross-validation to expand the

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explanatory dimension of the 4P theory in the field of cultural consumption at the theoretical level, and to provide a strategic framework for local brands to balance the high-end character and market penetration at the practical level. The study firstly examines the current status of To Summer's 4P strategy, then analyses the deficiencies of each dimension, and finally puts forward targeted suggestions based on the literature to provide references for similar brands.

2 CASE PRESENTATIONS

2.1 Brand Background

To Summer was born in 2018 at a key point in the value chain reconstruction of China's fragrance industry. At that time, international brands occupied more than 80% of the high-end market share by virtue of historical accumulation, and local brands were mostly trapped in low price competition (Wang, 2022). To Summer established 'Reconstructor of Oriental olfactory aesthetics' as the value proposition, accurately capturing the psychological demands of the new generation of consumers in search of their cultural roots, the Forbidden City Golden Laurel, Kunlun Snow Mountain and other imagery into the fragrance products, pioneering the opening of a new blue ocean of light luxury cultural consumption. Its explosive 'Kunlun cooking snow' to Jingdezhen non-heritage ceramics as a carrier, fusion of snowy mountain woody fragrance space narrative, to achieve the first year revenue of more than 100 million market breakthroughs, highlighting the effectiveness of the traditional cultural capital of the commercial translation. The brand relies on the DTC applet to build a private traffic pool, which contributes 70% of sales, and strengthens the image of 'the guardian of oriental aesthetics' through the Beijing Guozijian, Shanghai Hunan Road and other cultural landmarks. However, its R&D investment accounts for only 3%, and its dependence on imported core technologies still restricts its long-term competitiveness (Peng, 2023).

2.2 Market Orientation

As a paradigm case of value reconstruction in China's fragrance industry, To Summer's market positioning and audience research shows that the brand builds differentiated competitive advantages through the dual path of cultural identity and emotional value. The study found that the core consumer group

consists of three categories: the new middle class with a sense of cultural consciousness, whose consumption behaviour carries the identity needs of oriental aesthetics; the highly sensitive people who pay attention to spiritual healing, and who ease the anxiety of urban life through fragrance consumption; and the high-net-worth group who pursue artistic life, whose motivation stems from the preference for product uniqueness. The brand relies on three strategies to consolidate its differentiated positioning: firstly, it uses 'oriental botanical' scents (e.g. osmanthus, mugwort) to construct a cultural symbolic system; secondly, it transforms the product into an emotional medium through scenario narratives (brand magazines, curated shops); and lastly, it uses a limited edition mechanism and an internationally certified supply chain to create scarcity and quality trust. By avoiding functional competition and occupying the blank space of local cultural consumption, this model provides both theoretical and practical inspiration for the transformation of local brands into high-end brands

2.3 Core Data

As a high-end fragrance brand, To Summer's core data demonstrates significant market performance and precise user positioning. 2021 annual sales reached 143 million yuan, to 2023 Tmall channel sales exceeded 100 million yuan, a year-on-year increase of 49%, with sales of nearly 300,000 pieces (Haimian Lao Beibi, 2022). In the same year, Double Eleven among the second in the fragrance category on Tmall, and with a high re-purchase rate of 60% to highlight the loyalty of the user (data as of 2023). User profile shows that the brand's core customer base is 26-35-year-old middle-class women in first-tier cities (accounting for more than 80%), focusing on quality of life and preference for oriental cultural elements, the offline shop bag rate of 20%-30%, the main consumer for women over 30 years of age, while male users mainly follow the logic of the gift economy to complete the purchase behaviour. The product focuses on oriental botanical fragrance and high value design, and the customer unit price is concentrated in the range of 300-500 yuan, which accurately targets the users of international big brand fragrance, and stabilises the high-end market position. It should be noted that some data may change with market dynamics, and it is recommended to verify with the latest financial reports or industry reports (e.g., 2023 sales data quoted from public channels).

3 MARKETING STRATEGY ANALYSIS

3.1 Product

To Summer to 'Oriental fragrance' as the core, product design around the traditional Chinese cultural elements, through the 'Kunlun boiled snow' 'Yihe Jin Gui' and other explosive products to achieve annual sales of more than 100 million, of which 'Kunlun boiled snow' has long accounted for more than 30% of the brand's sales, and many times due to stock out on social media platforms hot search. Among them, 'Kunlun Boiled Snow' has long occupied more than 30% of the brand's sales, and has been on the hot search of social platforms for many times due to out-of-stock. Its product strategy is driven by cultural symbols, such as the co-branded aromatherapy 'Dunhuang Cloud Mirror' series with Dunhuang Research Institute, sales exceeded 2 million yuan in the first month of launch, successfully transforming cultural premiums into commercial value. However, the brand has not invested enough in technology research and development (patents focus on design rather than fragrance innovation), resulting in product iteration lagging behind competitors - similar brands such as Bing Xili launched new products every two months on average, while To Summer's main series of 'Four Seasons Aroma' has only added one to two new products since 2020 (Lian Danlu E-commerce Intelligence, 2023; Weining News, 2021). Since 2020, only 1-2 new fragrance types have been added, and the homogenisation of cultural symbols (the reuse rate of elements such as osmanthus and bamboo reaches 60%) may lead to consumer aesthetic fatigue. Product functionality problems still exist: some users feedback fragrance diffusion effect is general, crystal stone aromatherapy relying on stone diffusion, practicality is weaker than the traditional liquid aromatherapy, the functionality of the body is not fully matched with the positioning of the high price. To Summer needs to balance the cultural narrative and technology investment to break through the current growth bottleneck.

3.2 Price

To Summer's pricing strategy is a sophisticated psychological warfare, To Summer adopts luxury pricing strategy, perfume pricing 598 yuan / 30ml, aromatherapy candles average price of 400-600 yuan, significantly higher than similar local brands (such as RE perfumery 200 yuan average price), close to the

international light luxury brands, through the limited edition of the sale and exclusive rights and benefits of the members (eg, customised boxes) to maintain the scarcity of high-priced. Its pricing logic is based on the oriental aesthetic narrative and the added value of the brand story. But its high price strategy leads to user groups limited to first-tier cities delicate women (26-35 years old mainly), resulting in insufficient penetration of second and third-tier cities, disconnected from the demand of the mid-range market, the penetration of the sinking market is difficult; and some consumers believe that the product premium transition relies on the "Oriental story" marketing, the cost of spices and the pricing match is doubtful, the price may be higher than the price. Pricing to match the degree of doubt, may trigger some consumers to "premium reasonableness" of the question. Compared with super high-end brands such as DOCUMENTS Wen Xian (RMB 2,250/30ml), To Summer has not been able to break through the RMB 1,000 threshold, and its high-end brand image has not yet been fully established.

3.3 Place

To Summer adopts the DTC (direct-to-consumer) model, relying on WeChat applets (private domain operation) and Tmall flagship shops online to create a sense of scarcity through the "timed rush"; and laying out high-end experience shops offline (Guozijian in Beijing and Hunan Road in Shanghai) to strengthen the spatial immersion line and the brand's character. However, the number of offline shops is limited, the shop is limited to North, Shanghai and Shenzhen, did not cover the new first-tier and second and third-tier cities, the second and third-tier cities, consumer reach is insufficient; early over-reliance on the private domain led to user growth bottlenecks, Tmall stationed late (2022), missed the e-commerce dividend period, the channel coverage is too single. And not stationed in NET-A-PORTER and other international e-commerce platforms, globalisation layout lags behind the brand's cultural output ambitions.

3.4 Promotion

To Summer's promotional strategy suffers from three structural deficiencies within the framework of integrated marketing communication (IMC) and AIDA models (Analysis of channel synergy strategies in integrated marketing communication, 2025). Firstly, the coverage of communication channels is

insufficient. The brand overly relied on co-branding partnerships in the vertical art field (e.g. Pine Art Museum), and failed to expand mass traffic entrances such as film, TV and gaming, resulting in weak consumer awareness outside the target circle, which is contrary to the principle of “omni-channel synergy” advocated by the IMC theory. Second, the absence of behavioural incentive tools. Although the holiday limited edition (such as the Mid-Autumn Festival gift box) maintains the high-end tone through scarcity, the long-term lack of discounts, gifts and membership incentives (such as the empty bottle recycling programme) has led to a lack of conversion rate of new customers, and it is difficult to sustainably increase the rate of repurchase relying only on cultural identity. Finally, the innovation of promotion means lags behind. Relying on the hunger marketing strategy of “limited rush”, lacking interactive games such as live limited-time discounts, and comparing with the “consumption is to get peripheral” mode of “Dream China Book” co-branded by Xi Tea, To Summer has failed to reduce the decision-making cost of consumers through interesting promotions, resulting in the conversion efficiency of advertisements after reaching the behaviour of the customers is affected by the lack of innovation. As a result, the efficiency of behavioural conversion after reaching consumers is limited.

4 SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Product

To Summer needs to break through the aroma homogenisation predicament, accelerate product iteration and broaden the cultural narrative dimension, through “open innovation” to build the user co-creation mechanism, for example, through the Xiaohongshu, microblogging and other social media to solicit consumers to regional culture (such as Jiangnan, Lingnan) fragrance inspiration, the development of regionally limited series to enhance the differentiation, to break the single At the same time, in view of the general effect of fragrance diffusion and the problem of short fragrance retention time, Formula optimization may be achieved through collaboration with specialized spice research institutes, accompanied by the adoption of microcapsule slow-release technology to prolong olfactory persistence (Zhou et al., 2022). Concurrently, explicit documentation of technological enhancements should be systematically integrated into product specifications to validate

functional claims. Or the introduction of intelligent diffusion technology, reference to the atomisation diffusion system of the Inhalio Digital Fragrance 3.0 platform, the development of intelligent aromatherapy machines that support mobile phone APP control, to improve the diffusion efficiency and scene adaptability. This kind of technological upgrade can not only solve the practical pain points of user feedback, but also consolidate the high-priced positioning through the composite narrative of “technology + culture”.

4.2 Price

To address the disconnect between the pricing system and the needs of the sinking market, To Summer can adopt a “pyramid-type price stratification” strategy: retain the existing high-end product line to maintain the brand's tone, while launching miniaturised, low-cost entry models (such as mini aromatherapy candles and travel-size perfume) to meet the needs of customers to taste and strengthen the cost-effectiveness of the perceived value for money. You can also launch the To Summer sub-brand, pricing down to 200-300 yuan range, using simplified packaging and small volume specifications to reduce the threshold. Specific reference can be made to the strategy of Hermes to launch the “Petit h” sub-line, covering different consumption levels through product line extension (Chen, 2021).

4.3 Place

In order to optimise To Summer’s channel strategy, it is recommended to build a ‘omni-channel matrix’ to break through the growth bottleneck: offline should accelerate the layout of experience shops in new first-tier cities, and the offline channel can explore the mode of ‘urban flash mob + cultural space cooperation’, and short-term stationing in the scenes of art galleries, bookstores and other scenarios in second- and third-tier cities, so as to test the market potential at a low cost. Online need to reduce the dependence on a single platform, can be stationed in NET-A-PORTER and other international e-commerce platforms, the layout of Jieyin e-commerce and get things and other emerging channels, the use of short-video content intuitively conveying the fragrance scene experience (such as the ‘sleepy aromatherapy’ demonstration of the use of the ‘sleepy aromatherapy’). At the same time, the operation of private traffic was optimised, combined with the implementation of personalised fragrance recommendation services via WeChat to enhance

repurchase rates. This strategy corresponds with the prevailing market trend characterised by the integration of online and offline consumer engagement channels.

4.4 Promotion

In order to break through the monotony of the existing promotional strategy, To Summer needs to design a tiered promotional programme. For repeat buyers, the company can offer 'empty bottle recycling coupons' or exclusive gifts on members' day, such as customised fragrance cards, to avoid direct price reductions (News Kuaibao, 2024). In addition, To Summer in cross-border cooperation should break through the limitations of the existing art co-branding, expanding the co-branding field to film and television and fashion industry. For example, it can cooperate with film and television IP to develop thematic fragrance, such as 'Flower' and 'Flower' cooperation to launch '1990s Shanghai Memory Limited Series', drawing on the scene-based marketing model of Xi-tea and 'Dreams of Records'. To Summer can also cross-border into the field of e-sports, for the 'original God' character design exclusive fragrance, and through the game props redemption code to achieve traffic conversion; Finally, To Summer should layout emotional healing track, for example, cooperation with Keep to launch the 'meditation exclusive aromatherapy set', and implanted in the sports course scene. In terms of promotional activities, 'scent customisation service' can be added, users can upload poems or paintings to generate AI scent programme, this form of interaction not only strengthens the cultural attributes of the product, but also meets the pursuit of personalisation of the Z generation.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the 4P theoretical framework, this study systematically analyses the current status and core flaws of To Summer's current marketing strategy, and reveals the common problems faced by local cultural brands in the process of premiumisation. The study finds that in the marketing practice of cultural brands, the application of 4P theory needs to break through the traditional static framework. Specifically, pricing strategies should balance the relationship between cultural premium and market penetration; and promotional strategies need to incorporate the user co-creation model in order to better adapt to the needs of Generation Z. The study finds that the 4Ps

theory should be applied in the marketing practice of local cultural brands. The essence of the dilemma faced by To Summer lies in the insufficient ability to dynamically transform cultural capital, and the over-reliance on a single cultural symbol can be effectively broken through technological empowerment and layered narrative strategy. This study suggests optimising the 4P strategy through the combination of "Pyramid Pricing + Intelligent Products + Omni-Channel + IP Co-branding", thus verifying the value of the dynamic cultural capital theory in modifying the traditional marketing framework. The results of this study confirm that local brands need to establish a dynamic balance mechanism between cultural uniqueness and functional universality, and realise the value leap through the synergistic evolution of "symbolic precipitation - technological innovation - channel adaptation".

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