

Research on the High-End Market Positioning Strategy of MAOGEPING Cosmetics: The Brand Management Path of the Founder's Brand Effect and Cultural Connotations

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the positioning strategy of MAOGEPING cosmetics (MGPIN) in the high-end market, and explores how it achieves differentiated competition through the founder's brand effect and cultural connotations. Based on the data of 226 valid questionnaires and the case analysis method, the study finds that MAOGEPING cosmetics combines the professional authority of the founder (70% of the respondents recognize the professional image) with intangible cultural heritage elements (71.49% of consumers make purchases due to cultural co-branding) to create scarcity, forming a "professional + cultural" dual-driven model. However, the brand faces challenges such as a misalignment between the income structure and the high-end positioning (34.51% are from low-income groups), a shortfall in the recognition of brand ambassadors (84.16% are unaware), and an imbalance in the product line (the cosmetics line accounts for 87.33%). This research provides practical insights such as stratified marketing, innovative cultural storytelling, and experiential communication for domestic brands, filling the theoretical gap in the field of brand management of high-end domestic cosmetics brands.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the competition in the Chinese cosmetics market has become increasingly fierce. Domestic brands urgently need to break through the long-term monopoly of international brands through differentiated strategies and achieve a breakthrough. Most existing studies focus on brands in the mass market (such as Florasis and Perfect Diary), and there is insufficient discussion on the development path of high-end domestic cosmetics brands. Domestic cosmetics brands are faced with the dilemma of clustering in the mid-range and obvious homogenization. MAOGEPING cosmetics stands out with its high pricing strategy, the professional authority of the founder, and co-branding with intangible cultural heritage, successfully entering the high-end market. However, its brand management mechanism has not been systematically analyzed.

This study takes the "dual-driven model of professional authority + cultural scarcity" as the core, mainly exploring how MAOGEPING cosmetics achieves high-end positioning by combining high pricing with cultural connotations, the process of

transforming the founder's effect into brand value, and the inspiration of its strategy for the high-end development of domestic cosmetics brands.

The purpose of this study is to fill the theoretical gap and provide a replicable strategic framework for domestic brands. At the practical level, it provides a replicable strategic framework for other domestic brands, helping domestic cosmetics brands to achieve breakthrough and innovation in the high-end market dominated by international brands, and promoting the transformation of the industry towards professionalism, high-end, and high added value.

Existing studies mainly focus on the social media marketing (such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin) of domestic brands, the analysis of consumer behavior (the sense of identity of the young group), and the internationalization path. However, there is insufficient attention to the premium mechanism of high-end brands. The research on cultural connotations mostly stays on the surface, lacking an in-depth discussion on the correlation between intangible cultural heritage elements and brand value. In addition, the research on the founder's effect is scarce, especially how professional authority is

transformed into brand assets has not been systematically analyzed.

Based on David A. Aaker's brand equity theory, brand value can be constructed through product characteristics, user scenario associations, and cultural storytelling (Aaker, 1991). MAOGEPING cosmetics strengthens consumers' trust through the professional authority created by the founder's IP, and enhances the emotional value through co-branding with intangible cultural heritage elements. "Cultural memory empowers brand emotional value" verifies the feasibility of the brand's high-end development path in the dual dimensions of "function + emotion". From the perspective of brand symbol theory, MAOGEPING cosmetics uses the brand of a professional makeup artist as an identifier, sets the price by benchmarking international big brands, actively constructs the association between commodities and meanings, differentiates its target customer groups from similar cosmetics brands, and creates a differentiated identifier, fully reflecting the role of brand symbol identification.

Under the theoretical framework of consumer society, the brand serves as a communication tool that links consumers' identity, which provides certain ideas for this paper to explore the behavior of MAOGEPING cosmetics in the high-end market (Aaker, 1991). Based on the view of the symbiosis between the brand and urban culture, the co-branding strategy of MAOGEPING cosmetics and the Forbidden City is of great value. This strategy transforms regional culture into a brand's differentiated advantage, showing a new direction for brand development (Wei & Yu, 2022).

2 RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a combination of questionnaire surveys and case analysis methods, aiming to have a more comprehensive understanding of brand communication and consumer behavior. Standardized questionnaires are designed around the core research questions, including consumers' basic information (age, income, etc.), brand cognition dimensions (channels of awareness, brand impression), and purchase behavior indicators (purchase frequency, decision-making influencing factors). In the logical setting, "Have you heard of this brand?" is used as a screening question, and only respondents who are aware of the brand will be shown the subsequent core questions, ensuring the

validity of the sample and the authenticity of the data. This structured question design ensures that the data is convenient for statistics and comparison, and it is easy to analyze the differences in the views of different groups on the brand through methods such as percentages, providing an objective data basis for the research. The "MAOGEPING" brand is selected as the research object, and its market strategy, product promotion activities, and brand development history are carefully sorted out. By analyzing public reports, brand activity materials, etc., the successful experiences and challenges faced by the brand in actual operation are summarized, so as to explain the reasons behind consumer behavior. For example, how the brand improves its popularity through cross-border co-branding. The quantitative data of the questionnaire survey and the interpretation of the case analysis complement each other. The former illustrates the phenomenon, and the latter explains the reasons. The combination of the two makes the research conclusions more persuasive and reliable.

2.2 Data Collection

The questionnaires are mainly distributed through mainstream social media platforms such as Weibo, Rednote, and Douyin. These channels are selected based on the large scale and high activity of social media users in China. The three platforms cover different age and consumption level groups, which can effectively reach the potential and existing consumers of the MAOGEPING brand. In order to improve the questionnaire response rate, incentive measures such as lucky draws and small red envelopes are set up in the study. Finally, 258 questionnaires are recovered. Through real-time monitoring, 32 invalid questionnaires such as those with too short answering time and contradictory answers are eliminated, and 226 valid questionnaires are determined. The sample screening process strictly implements the screening mechanism in the questionnaire design, ensuring that the target group is all consumers with a cognitive understanding of the MAOGEPING brand, providing a reliable basis for subsequent data analysis.

3 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Implementation Steps

In this survey, the questionnaire design work is carried out first. A questionnaire containing 17 core questions such as gender, age, income, and brand

cognition is carefully compiled to ensure that all the required information can be comprehensively obtained. After completing the questionnaire design, it is selected to be distributed online through beauty communities and social platforms. At the same time, the method of red envelope incentives is adopted to improve the enthusiasm of users to participate and expand the coverage and recovery quantity of the questionnaire. After the questionnaires are recovered, the data screening work is carried out. The invalid questionnaires with too short filling time and logical contradictions are carefully screened and eliminated to ensure the data quality. Finally, the Questionnaire Star platform is used to process the valid data. Through generating data charts, statistical tests, data visualization, and correlation analysis are realized, and the information and laws behind the data are deeply mined.

3.2 Challenges and Solutions

In this study, challenges such as sample bias, data accuracy, and regional limitations are faced. In terms of sample bias, female respondents account for 72.57%, and the male data is obviously insufficient. Although efforts have been made to broaden the scope of questionnaire distribution, due to the high proportion of female users on beauty community platforms such as Xiaohongshu, and the platform's push algorithm tends to favor female groups, and the enthusiasm of male respondents to fill in the questionnaire is relatively low, resulting in an imbalance of data in the gender dimension. This may limit the comprehensiveness of the analysis results and make it difficult to fully understand the views and behaviors of male consumers. To this end, in future research, questionnaires can be targeted to be put into the male group to improve the sample structure.

In terms of data accuracy, all the samples in this study are from online users, and there is randomness in filling in online questionnaires. Some respondents did not answer seriously, resulting in inconsistent data quality. To solve this problem, offline data collection can be supplemented in the follow-up, and online and offline data can be combined to improve the universality and reliability of the research data.

Regional limitations cannot be ignored either. Since the data is mainly collected through online channels, there are limitations in the geographical distribution and occupational structure of the samples, making it difficult to completely present the views and behavior patterns of people from different regions and occupations on MAOGEPING

cosmetics. In subsequent research, the data collection method should be further optimized, and the sample coverage should be expanded to minimize the impact of regional and sample structure biases on the data results.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Consumer Portrait and Brand Cognition

The results and analysis of this survey show that the consumer portrait of MAOGEPING cosmetics is characterized by mainly young women. Among the samples, 72.57% are women, 48.67% are aged between 18 and 25, and 34.51% have a monthly income of less than 3,000 yuan, revealing a misalignment between the "brand tone and users' payment ability". In terms of brand cognition, 78.76% of the respondents are aware of the MAOGEPING brand, and 70% recognize its professional makeup artist image, which is significantly higher than other brand image labels (such as high-end luxury goods, cost-effective domestic products). It can be seen that the brand has a strong basic cognition, and the professionalism as the core image is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. In terms of communication channels, 94.57% of the respondents came into contact with the brand through social media, while the offline penetration rate is less than 40%.

Based on the brand symbol theory that "the brand is the active construction of the association between commodities and meanings", MAOGEPING has successfully benchmarked international big brands through the symbolized label of "the brand of a professional makeup artist" (recognized by 70% of users) (Aaker, 1991). The demand of young female users for professional authority (such as the courses of the makeup artist academy) forms a strong association with the brand symbol, verifying the mechanism of "identification drives identity" in the symbol theory. However, due to the limitations of sample bias, future research should focus on the acceptance of professional cosmetics by men. Considerations can be given to launching neutral packaging or men's skin care lines to expand the coverage of the brand symbol.

Further analysis shows that there is a positive correlation between price recognition and professional image cognition: among the group that believes that the price "is very consistent with the value", the professional image recognition rate is as

high as 83.33%, while the proportion of the group that does not recognize the price drops to 63.64%. Mr. MAO Geiping, the founder, as a professional makeup artist, his professional image and personal brand effect are one of the core competitiveness of the brand. 70% of the respondents position it as a "professional makeup artist brand", and there is a positive correlation between price recognition and professional image cognition. This shows that the founder's authority as a professional makeup artist provides a trust guarantee for the brand's high-end positioning, and consumers are willing to pay a premium for the "professional value". In addition, the establishment of the MAO Geping Makeup Artist Academy (40% of the respondents learned about the brand through related activities) further strengthens the brand's industry influence, extending the founder's IP from the individual level to the corporate level, forming a closed loop of "professional education + product service".

The brand's practice of corporate social responsibility by advocating the maintenance of a fair and good order or the protection of cultural inheritance is a key part of constructing the meaning of commodities (Wang, 2021). The construction of the meaning of the MAOGEPING brand closely revolves around the needs of the consumer group. In terms of strategy implementation, on the one hand, MAOGEPING launches co-branded products, and on the other hand, it actively participates in social welfare activities and focuses on women's issues. As a high-end positioning cosmetics brand, the main consumers of MAOGEPING are mostly women. Based on this, the brand actively advocates the concept of "her power" in the product concept communication. Taking the intangible cultural heritage co-branding cooperation of "Oriental Garden, Symbiotic by Love" as an example, MAOGEPING has always adhered to the position of striving for a broader development space for women and actively voiced its opinions. According to the analysis of the "price sensitivity adjustment effect" in the research on feminist advertising, low-income groups pay more attention to the functional value of products (such as long-lasting wear and cost-effectiveness) than cultural premiums, while high-income users (with a monthly income of more than 10,000 yuan) are more likely to pay a premium for "professional endorsement + cultural scarcity" (73.33% price acceptance) (Li, 2024; Zeng, He & Liu, 2022). MAOGEPING cosmetics integrates feminist values into the narrative of "her power", which coincides with the mechanism of "self-cognition drives purchase intention" in the

research on feminist advertising (Li, 2024; Zeng et al., 2022). This series of measures not only reflects the successful practice paradigm of the brand fulfilling its social responsibility while pursuing its own development. Through establishing a deep meaning connection with the connotation of feminism, MAOGEPING has successfully created a unique brand symbol, built a differentiated brand image in the market competition, and stood out among domestic cosmetics brands and entered the high-end market.

The data also reflects that the social media communication of the brand is better than the offline communication. The digital marketing of MAOGEPING cosmetics has achieved remarkable results. Social media recommendations have become the primary driving force for purchase decisions (78.28%), but the offline channel penetration rate is insufficient (only 40% learned about the brand through counters). Although online traffic brings high exposure to the brand, the lack of offline experience leads to insufficient in-depth interaction with users. For example, only 13.12% of consumers came into contact with the brand through friends' recommendations, reflecting the shortcoming of interpersonal communication. It is recommended that the brand rely on the founder's IP to create an "experiential consumption scene" - such as opening intangible cultural heritage-themed pop-up stores and holding makeup master classes, converting online traffic into offline loyal users, and at the same time enhancing the brand's storytelling and sense of ritual.

4.2 Cultural Empowerment and Professional Image Driving

In terms of cultural empowerment and professional image driving, MAOGEPING cosmetics shows a unique development path and remarkable results. The survey data shows that the co-branding projects with the Forbidden City (63.8%) and the mother-of-pearl inlay intangible cultural heritage (62.9%) have a relatively high recognition rate. Intangible cultural heritage elements (71.49%), social media recommendations (78.28%), and product quality (72.85%) constitute the core purchase driving forces. Pearson correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant positive correlation between consumers' price recognition and the brand's professional image and cultural connotations, verifying the synergistic effect of cultural empowerment and professional image on the brand's premium ability (Zong & Liu, 2022).

MAOGEPING skillfully combines "professional authority (the founder's IP)" with "cultural scarcity (co-branding with intangible cultural heritage)" to construct brand assets. Relying on the founder's professional image to lay a trust foundation for the brand, such as strengthening user education through the makeup artist academy; using cultural scarcity to enhance the emotional value of products, such as integrating the patterns and color schemes of the Forbidden City into product design, endowing products with artistry, thus forming a dual-dimensional premium ability of "function + emotion".

From the perspective of the symbiosis between the brand and urban culture, the co-branding strategy of MAOGEPING and the Forbidden City has pioneering value. As an iconic symbol carrying Chinese traditional culture and the urban memory of Beijing, the Forbidden City contains architectural aesthetics, imperial culture, and historical heritage, which are deeply integrated with the product design of MAOGEPING cosmetics, transforming regional cultural capital into the brand's differentiated competitive advantage (Wei & Yu, 2022). This symbiotic model is not only reflected in the concrete presentation of the colors and patterns of the Forbidden City in the product appearance, but also through various forms such as co-branding activities and cultural exhibitions, a deep interaction between the brand and the urban cultural space is constructed. For example, the accurate reproduction of the architectural colors of the Forbidden City in the co-branded products makes the cosmetics a flowing carrier of urban culture; the immersive experience activities carried out by the brand with the help of the IP of the Forbidden City further strengthen consumers' sense of identity with the brand's cultural value. This practice of injecting urban cultural genes into the brand development strategy provides a new paradigm for the beauty industry to explore the path of cultural empowerment, showing an innovative direction of mutual promotion and coordinated development between the brand and regional culture.

MAOGEPING launched the project of "Oriental Garden, Symbiotic by Love", combined with the public welfare activity of "Show What She Embroidered" (Official Website of MAOGEPING Cosmetics, 2023). Inspired by ethnic embroideries such as Qiang embroidery and Zhuang embroidery, it launched the limited "Red Rhyme" series of products. This not only injects storytelling into the products, enhancing the emotional resonance with users, but also integrates ethnic themes into the makeup creation, deepening the connection between

consumers and the brand's values. MAOGEPING cosmetics deeply integrates cultural genes with color narratives. Taking "Chinese colors" as the core, it combines traditional color aesthetics with modern cosmetics technology to construct a unique cultural logo. The research shows that 71.49% of consumers make purchase decisions due to the co-branding with intangible cultural heritages, which confirms the mechanism of "cultural memory empowers emotional value" in the national trend culture. For example, "lapis lazuli blue" is taken from the mineral pigments of Dunhuang, and "cinnabar red" is derived from the lacquerware of the Forbidden City. These colors are not only visual symbols but also carry profound historical narratives and national aesthetic identities. Through the "Oriental Garden" series, the brand closely links colors with regional cultures, making the products carriers of the living inheritance of traditional culture, echoing the trend of "cultural confidence drives consumption" in the national trend economy (Huangpu, 2022; Huang, Feng, Cai, Li, 2022; Zhang, 2023; iiMedia Research, 2024). This strategy is in line with the logic of "symbolic social interaction" of national trend fashion brands. Consumers complete their identity expression and group belonging through sharing on social media while using specific color shades, forming a consumption ecology where "colors are social currency", further enhancing the brand's cultural influence and market competitiveness (Wang, 2021; Huangpu, 2022; iiMedia Research, 2024).

At the same time, MAOGEPING held the exhibition of "The Light of the Nation, Shining in Paris" in Paris and launched the "Splendid Color Light" series of products (Official Website of MAOGEPING Cosmetics, 2024). The design skillfully integrates Eastern and Western elements, not only highlighting profound cultural connotations and innovative design concepts but also demonstrating unique competitiveness in the global market. Inspired by Eastern and Western architectures, this series takes the French Art Deco style as the core, integrating the urban cultures of China and France, the spirit of competition, and the images of athletes, while also incorporating traditional Eastern designs such as Chinese auspicious clouds and sea cliff patterns. It not only presents a unique commemoration for the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France but also realizes in-depth dialogue and integration between Eastern and Western cultures. While inheriting traditional Chinese culture, it shows tolerance and innovation

towards diverse cultures, greatly enhancing the brand's international image and cultural value. This design concept breaks the boundaries of traditional aesthetics, meets the diverse needs of consumers from different cultural backgrounds, endows the products with both Western fashion sense and Eastern charm, and effectively expands the audience. This innovative practice provides valuable experience for domestic cosmetics brands, proving that by exploring their own cultural characteristics, combining with international popular elements, accurately positioning around specific themes, and injecting cultural connotations, products with unique charm can be created. In terms of opening up the world market, MAOGEPING makes full use of its status as the official beauty service provider for the Chinese national team, relies on international events such as the Paris Olympics to bring its products to the global stage. At the same time, it conducts cultural exchange activities and grand beauty art styling shows to convey the concept of Eastern aesthetics and enhance the cultural identity of international consumers. In addition, it actively expands cooperation with international retailers and e-commerce platforms, sets up overseas counters and experience stores, and constructs a global sales network, promoting the brand's global development from multiple dimensions and setting a successful example for other domestic cosmetics brands to enter the international market, confirming the concept of "cross-cultural communication requires two-way efforts" (Cultural Proficiency).

4.3 Contradictions in Market Positioning and Strategy Optimization

MAOGEPING faces multiple contradictions and challenges in market positioning. Currently, although the brand positions itself as high-end, the survey data shows a significant contradiction in the income structure of its core consumers: the group with a monthly average income of less than 3,000 yuan accounts for 34.51%, among which 41.67% hold negative opinions about the price-value match. The high proportion of low-income groups and the high-end positioning have a potential contradiction, which may affect the brand's premium ability and long-term market development. This phenomenon may be related to the brand's social media-dominated strategy (with a reach rate of 94.57%) - the cost-effective content attracts price-sensitive users, but their consumption ability conflicts with the high-end positioning. In contrast, the high-income

group (with a monthly income of over 10,000 yuan) accounts for only 18.58%, but their recognition of the professional image (83.33%) and price acceptance (73.33%) are significantly higher.

Based on the social stratification theory that "stratification determines brand operation strategies", this income mismatch reflects the necessity of market stratification. A stepped strategy can be adopted, launching limited co-branded products such as the Forbidden City Collection series to maintain the brand's tone, and at the same time, developing mini-sets such as the "Student Starter Gift Box" to expand the lower-tier market, obtaining more consumer groups while avoiding diluting the brand value (Aaker, 1991).

In addition, judging from the survey data, the promotion effect of brand ambassadors is not ideal, and there are dilemmas in the awareness and conversion of the ambassador strategy. Market research shows that 84.16% of consumers are not aware of the brand ambassadors, which means that the ambassadors have not fully played their role in enhancing the brand's popularity and influence. However, 60.63% of consumers believe that brand ambassadors have a certain influence on their purchase decisions. This contradiction highlights the limitations of the current ambassador strategy: although there is potential influence, the lack of awareness restricts actual conversion. It is worth noting that the sensitivity of the group concerned about intangible cultural heritage to brand ambassadors (63.29%) is higher than the average, suggesting that the brand can appoint brand ambassadors who possess both cultural temperament and fashion influence (such as ambassadors for promoting traditional culture), and strengthen the brand narrative through public welfare actions (such as intangible cultural heritage protection projects) to achieve the dual empowerment of "culture + celebrity" (Wang, 2021; Huang et al., 2022).

In terms of the product line layout, the cosmetics line stands out with a high popularity rate of 87.33%, while the development of other product lines is relatively lagging behind. This unbalanced product structure not only limits the brand's diversified development but also makes it difficult to meet the diverse beauty needs of consumers. It is necessary to accurately adjust the market strategy to resolve the contradictions and achieve the brand's sustainable development.

"The brand should be as natural as brushing teeth", enabling consumers to develop usage habits. MAOGEPING cultivates user habits by updating short videos daily on social platforms (such as

"makeup tutorials" and "creative makeup looks"), combined with the activity of getting trial products by checking in. It transforms low-frequency consumption into high-frequency interaction, improving the repurchase rate and user stickiness, thus optimizing the market strategy.

5 CONCLUSION

MAOGEPING cosmetics verifies the applicability of Aaker's brand equity theory in the high-end development of domestic brands through the "dual-driven model of professional authority + cultural scarcity". The linkage between cultural co-branding (such as with the Forbidden City and lacquer mother-of-pearl inlay) and the founder's IP (the personal influence of MAOGEPING, the founder of the brand, and the makeup artist academy) successfully constructs a differentiated competitive barrier. However, the income mismatch and the imbalance of communication channels need to be solved through stratified strategies (luxury + lower-tier products) and experience upgrades (intangible cultural heritage pop-up stores). This research fills the theoretical gap in the field of brand management of high-end domestic cosmetics brands, revealing the linkage mechanism between the founder's brand effect and cultural connotations: professional authority provides a trust foundation for the brand, and cultural storytelling enhances the premium ability through emotional value.

The practical experience of MAOGEPING cosmetics provides systematic inspiration for domestic cosmetics brands: brands can deepen consumers' trust by strengthening the combination of the founder's IP and the professional education system; deeply integrate intangible cultural heritage elements into product design and experience scenarios to enhance the appeal of cultural storytelling; launch differentiated product lines to balance high-end positioning and market coverage, achieving a dual improvement in brand tone and audience scale; and at the same time, innovate the ambassador strategy, selecting partners with high recognition to strengthen brand memory points. In addition, constructing the "dual-driven model of professional authority + cultural scarcity" can effectively shape a high-end brand image - the integration of intangible cultural heritage and the brand positioning of professional makeup artists can strengthen consumers' associations with product features, usage scenarios, and brand images, thereby enhancing the perception and evaluation of product

and service quality, providing strong support for brand pricing and communication.

Future research can be expanded to the analysis of the male market and the balance of product lines to comprehensively evaluate the brand's high-end development path. It provides a transformation path for domestic brands from "price competition" to "value competition".

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