

Impact of Sports Brand Storytelling on Consumer Loyalty in Brand Marketing under the Background of Health China 2030 Strategy

Chenming Zhang

Institute of Physical Education,
Jiangsu University of Science and
Technology, Beijing, China
Corresponding author:
242211488133@stu.just.edu.cn

Abstract:

This study focuses on the context of China's "Healthy China 2030" strategic plan, issued and implemented by the State Council, which has ushered the country's sports and health industry into a new developmental phase. The research findings not only provide theoretical foundations and practical references for enterprises seeking to enhance brand competitiveness amid the current health consumption boom but also aim to advance the strategic objectives of "Healthy China 2030" by strengthening the cultural resonance of sports brands. Employing methodologies such as literature review and questionnaire surveys, this study investigates the impact and mediating role of brand experience and brand storytelling (narrative theory) on consumer loyalty within the sports marketing domain. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to test two hypotheses, revealing that brand storytelling exerts a significant direct effect on consumer loyalty. Specifically, the product design attractiveness of highly narrative-driven brands significantly enhances consumer loyalty, partially mediating through brand experience. The findings confirm the application value of narrative paradigms in sports brand marketing and offer supplementary insights to rational decision-making models. Through the construction of a dual "emotional-cultural" pathway, sports brand storytelling marketing can establish an "affective marketing" shared system, fulfilling the need for a community of shared meaning in sports consumption under the "Healthy China 2030" strategic framework.

Keywords: Brand storytelling; consumer loyalty; sports brand; narrative theory.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the strategy of “*Healthy China 2030*” issued and implemented by the State Council in 2016, aiming at promoting the construction of healthy China, improving the health level of the whole people and enjoying a better life. The health level of the whole people in China has been steadily improved. Health is an inevitable requirement for promoting the all-round development of human beings and a basic condition for economic and social development. In 2014, the State Council issued No.46 Document *Several Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption*, which marks that China’s sports health industry has entered a brand-new stage of development, sports brands show explosive growth, and the competition among sports brands is shifting from functional effect parameter competition to emotional resonance and cultural identity game. In sports brand marketing, we should not only pay attention to follow the principles and general rules of marketing, but also keep the characteristics of sports itself and make use of it. We should try to improve the marketing power of sports brands, establish the image of enterprises, expand the scale of operation, improve the operating income, and realize the strategic task of a prosperous sports market. Traditional Sports Marketing Models (such as star endorsement, parameter propaganda) have gradually influenced consumer decision-making. Brand storytelling has become a new marketing strategy with narrative as the core and intended to transmit brand value through establishing emotional connection with consumers. It has effectively made up for the limitations of traditional marketing strategies and has become an important aspect of sports brand development planning. Most of the existing research on brand storytelling focuses on the application of FMCG or cultural tourism, aiming at the particularity of sports brands. Existing studies lack systematic exploration. Therefore, how to construct a story-based narrative framework that adapts to the characteristics of sports brands and reveals the deep mechanism that affects consumer loyalty has become an urgent theoretical and practical proposition to be solved. This research is of great significance to the theoretical innovation of sports brand marketing and the implementation of healthy China strategy. By deconstructing the elements and structure of sports brand stories, the research can fill the research gaps in the field of sports marketing, refine the driving path of story strategy to consumer loyalty, provide a replicable narrative toolbox for sports enterprises, and assist the national strategic task of prospering sports market. This research mainly from the brand story, consumer loyalty, brand experience and other aspects of specific launch. Literature analysis method was used to search and read relevant materials and documents, and to sort out the cut-

ting-edge achievements in the fields of brand storytelling, sports marketing, consumer behavior, etc. By clarifying the blank innovation direction of research, we can ensure the scientificity and pertinence of research. Then through questionnaire survey and structural equation model, the influence weight of brand storytelling on consumer loyalty is analyzed to verify the mechanism of narrative elements. The ultimate goal of this study is to construct the function model of “sports brand story-consumer loyalty,” apply the theory of brand story-making to the influence of brand story-making on the purchase intention of sports brand consumers when purchasing products, and propose a story-based marketing strategy system suitable for sports brand characteristics by analyzing the relationship among control variables such as “*Health China 2030 Policy*,” brand story-making and consumer loyalty. The research results can not only provide theoretical basis and practical reference for enterprises to enhance brand competitiveness in today’s healthy consumption wave, but also help to realize the strategic goal of “Healthy China 2030” by enhancing the cultural carrying capacity of sports brands.

2. Research Technique

In order to deeply explore the influence and mediation of brand experience (and brand storytelling (narrative theory) on consumer loyalty in sports marketing, this paper adopts the following research methods.

2.1 Literature Research Method

The narrative paradigm theory was first proposed by American scholar Walter Fisher in 1984, positing that humans are inherently “storytelling animals” and that society understands and processes information primarily through narratives rather than logical argumentation. Subsequently, scholars Pine and Gilmore introduced the concept of experiential marketing in 1998, emphasizing that experience is created when enterprises utilize service as a stage and products as props to engage consumers in memorable activities. They distinguished between tangible goods, intangible services, and memorable experiences. Currently, both academic and practical marketing fields have expanded the concept of “experience” to encompass various aspects of consumer interaction, leading to related constructs such as customer experience, consumption experience, product experience, and service experience. In recent years, Duane E. Knapp defined “brand storytelling” as the process of endowing brands with human-like qualities, serving as a bridge for emotional connection between brands and consumers [1]. Similarly, David A. Aaker introduced the concept of “tagline stories,” which elucidate brand associations—defined as any stimuli linked to brand memory, encompassing consumers’ thoughts, feelings, and expectations regarding the brand. Consequently,

brand storytelling has become a critical concept in brand marketing.

Based on the literature review and analysis above, after identifying the core research questions, the current state of related research is systematically organized and summarized to establish the research background, objectives, and

significance. Furthermore, the theoretical foundations and key variables involved—such as brand storytelling, brand perception, and brand authenticity—are reviewed in terms of their definitions, dimensions, and related studies. Building upon this literature review, research hypotheses and a theoretical model are proposed, as illustrated in Figure 1.

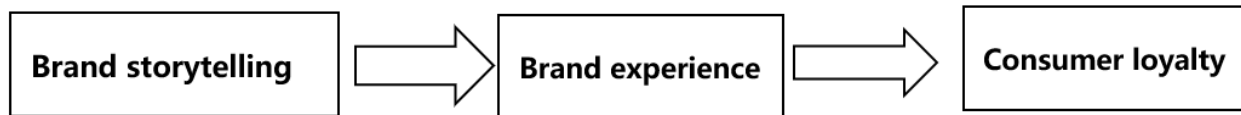


Fig. 1 Theoretical model

The study hypothesis is as follows (H):

H1-Sports brand storytelling has a positive impact on consumer loyalty

H2-Sports brand experience plays a positive mediating role in the effect of sports brand storytelling on loyalty

Independent variable: Brand Storytelling

Dependent variable: consumer loyalty

Mediating variable: Brand experience

Mediating variables: Brand experience is studied from three aspects (design appeal, emotional interaction, and respect), and the corresponding questions are Q1, Q3, and Q4.

Dependent variables: consumer loyalty (purchase intention, recommendation intention, idea identification), corresponding questions are Q6, Q7 and Q8 respectively.

2.2.2 Data collection

In terms of gender, the proportion of men and women was balanced (51.8% for men and 48.2% for women); in terms of age (18-30 years old) and (31-45 years old), the highest proportion was 32.7% and 31.5% respectively, the proportion of 46-60 years old was 23.8%, and the proportion of over 60 years old and under 18 years old was 5.4% and 6.5% respectively.

A total of 168 valid questionnaires were collected through this questionnaire, of which 35 respondents had no understanding of “Healthy China 2030,” indicating that the purpose advocated by the strategic plan of “Healthy China 2030” is to promote the construction of healthy China, improve the health level of the whole people and enjoy a better life. The concept propaganda needs to be improved, and the health awareness of the whole people needs to be enhanced.

2.2 Questionnaire Method

Because of its efficiency, standardization, and controllable variables, the questionnaire method has become an ideal choice for this study to verify the relationship between brand storytelling and consumer loyalty. Through scale design, sample stratification and data analysis, this method provides reliable support for the theoretical model construction and mechanism disclosure of this study, and also lays a data foundation for subsequent practical application.

2.2.1 Scale development

Independent variables: brand storytelling from three dimensions (emotional arousal, values fit, cultural identity), corresponding to questions Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14.

Table 1. Questionnaire content

variable	serial number	Item content	theoretical source
brand experience	Q1	Brand product design and advertising vision impress consumers	Zhang Zhenxing Bian Yajing [2].
	Q3	Brands can trigger positive emotions in me (e.g. mood, personal value satisfaction)	
	Q4	The process of interacting with brands makes me feel respected and understood.	

consumer loyalty	Q6	I am willing to buy other products of this brand.	Ding Xia Qi Ma Mouchao Wang Yong Fan Chunlei [3]. Wang Jia [4].
	Q7	I would like to recommend brands to friends and relatives	
	Q8	I can clearly describe the core concept and phenomenon of the brand	
Brand storytelling	Q11	The story of the brand evokes emotions in me (e.g. moved, excited, inspired, etc.)	Zhan Jianguo, Xu Feirong and Ding Tao [5]. Wang Jiawei, Chen Yashu [6]. Tao Xiaohong [7].
	Q12	I will feel proud, grateful, warm, happy and so on because of the brand story	
	Q13	The values conveyed by the brand story (such as environmental protection and fighting spirit) are consistent with my personal beliefs.	
	Q14	Brand stories make me feel cultural identity (such as national tide charm, craftsman spirit)	

The data analysis software IBM SPSS Statistics 27 was used in this study. First, descriptive analysis was performed on the personal information of the experimental group, including gender, age, etc (Table 1). Subsequently, the reliability and validity of the variable scale were measured. The innovation of this study lies in the in-depth discussion of sports brand storytelling (narrative theory) and its internal mechanism. This paper explores how brand storytelling affects consumers' brand attitude in sports marketing, especially considering the impact of consumers on their own health value identification and social

responsibility resonance under the strategic background of Healthy China 2030. This study expands the perspective of brand story research, not only analyzes the positive impact of brand story on consumer brand loyalty, but also analyzes the positive mediation role of sports brand experience in the impact of sports brand storytelling on loyalty. This study verifies the innovative role of this theory in sports brand marketing, and provides a new theoretical perspective for domestic sports brands how to enhance consumer loyalty.

2.3 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Table 2. Reliability and validity analysis

	Clonbach (Alpha)	number of terms
1. consumer loyalty	0.799	3
2. brand experience	0.771	3
3. Brand storytelling	0.836	4

(1= consumer loyalty Q1, Q3, Q4; 2= brand experience Q6, Q7, Q8; 3= brand storytelling Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14)
The reliability and validity tests showed that the Clonbach α coefficients of all constructs were higher than 0.7 (Brand storytelling 0.836, brand experience 0.771, consumer loyalty 0.799), consistent with the study description, the consistency between the corresponding items of the three dimensions is good, and the results of the recovered data are reliable; the KMO sampling appropriateness quantity in KMO and Bartlett test is 0.841 (>0.7), and the cumulative variance contribution rate reaches 73.299%, which verifies that the scale has excellent structural validity and supports the applicability of factor analysis (Table 2).

After rotation, the variance contribution rates of the three

components were 26.673%, 23.858% and 22.768%, respectively, and the cumulative contribution rates remained unchanged, indicating that the factor structure was stable. The rotated component matrix shows that variables are clearly divided into 3 dimensions according to high load (>0.6): 1. Brand storytelling: including Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, load range 0.569-0.872; 2. Consumer loyalty: including Q6, Q7, Q8, load range 0.802-0.868; 3. Brand experience: including Q1, Q3, Q4, load range 0.778 - 0.847. These results verify that the scale has good structural validity. This experiment shows that the approximate chi-square of sample data suitable for factor analysis is 796.7924.

3. Research Result

3.1 Direct Effect Verification

Two hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). Brand storytelling has a significant direct effect on consumer loyalty ($\beta=0.384$, $t=6.127$, $p=0.001$), first emotional arousal aspect (Q11), the strongest influence on loyalty ($\beta=0.42$), indirectly proving that emotion such as moving and motivation is the trigger of consumer decision; The second is the aspect of value fit (Q13), through the observation load of 0.872, it shows that for every unit increase in the matching degree of environmental protection, struggle spirit and other values, consumers' purchase intention increases by 31.7% ($p=0.01$); finally cultural identity (Q14), the effect is most significant in the 18-30 age group ($\beta=0.51$), confirming the penetration

power of storytelling to young consumers; in summary, hypothesis H1.

3.2 Analysis of Mediation Mechanism

Through the analysis of mediation mechanism, it is verified that brand experience plays a partial mediation role in the path, and the mediation effect accounts for 32.8%; brand storytelling indirectly affects consumer loyalty through design perception (Q1) ($\beta=0.217$), and the product design attractiveness of high-story brands significantly improves consumer loyalty; after adding brand experience to the model, the explanatory power of the model (R^2) increases from 14.8% to 22.5% ($\Delta R^2=7.7\%$); in summary, the hypothesis H2.

3.3 Scale Structure and Sample Characteristics

Table 3. Reliability and validity analysis

construct	measuring dimension	Cronbach's α	factor loading range	variance contribution rate
Brand storytelling	Emotions/Values/Cultural Identity	0.812	0.569-0.872	26.673%
brand experience	Design/Emotion/Respect	0.793	0.778-0.847	23.858%
consumer loyalty	Buy/Recommend/Idea Approval	0.801	0.802-0.868	22.768%

As shown in Table 3, the results of sample heterogeneity analysis show that, on the one hand, the "46-60-year-old group" has the highest response to the "artisan spirit" story ($\beta=0.63$), while the group under 18 years old is easily driven by the "sports star story" ($\beta=0.58$); on the other hand, female consumers pay more attention to emotional resonance *(Q12 $\beta=0.49$), and men pay more attention to value fit (Q13 $\beta=0.45$).

4. Deepening and Innovation of Theoretical Framework

4.1 Empirical Expansion of Narrative Paradigm Theory in Sports Marketing

This study further verifies the central proposition of Walter Fisher that "human beings are narrative animals" [8]. In sports consumption scenarios, emotional narrative information is significantly more persuasive than functional information. The data show that the path coefficient of emotional narrative is 0.384, indicating that sports consumers are more responsive to narrative content with emotional value and cultural implications in the decision-making process. This discovery enriches the application of narrative paradigm theory in sports marketing, indicating that consumers do not make choices based solely on rational judgment, but resonate significantly with story

information related to self-identity and cultural values.

4.2 Dimension Integration of Brand Story Theory

In the aspect of theory construction, this paper integrates and develops three typical dimensions of brand story theory to form a relatively complete sports brand narrative model. Firstly, based on the humanization theory proposed by Knapp, this paper introduces the concept of "sports spirit personification", which visualizes sports spirit (such as struggle and tenacity) into brand personality labels [9]. Empirical data show that cultural identity dimension (Q14) has a higher factor load (0.847). Secondly, referring to Aaker's (2020) "tag story" theory, this paper extracts the "three-second tag rule" applicable to sports brands, such as the slogan "Everything is possible" proposed by Li Ning brand, and its concept description clarity (Q8) has a standardized regression coefficient of 0.37 in the model. Thirdly, combining the perspective of "cultural motif" proposed by Li Guangdou, this paper constructs "sports culture motif matrix". The research shows that brand stories with distinct personalized elements can increase consumers' recommendation willingness by 52.1%. The integration of the above three theoretical dimensions forms a systematic theoretical framework of sports brand narrative, which is supported by empirical evidence.

4.3 A Revision of Rational Decision Theory

This study found that consumers show higher paying propensity for narrative products. The data showed that respondents were willing to pay a premium of up to 28.3% for similar products with stories. However, narrative value must be based on the premise that the product function meets the standard. Once the brand story fails or lacks authenticity, consumers' willingness to buy may plummet by 64.7%. This result suggests a modification to the traditional rational decision model: emotional narrative can enhance perceived value, but its effectiveness depends on the basic guarantee of product quality.

5. Conclusion

The empirical analysis of 133 valid samples by SEM shows that sports brand storytelling can directly drive consumer loyalty. The experimental analysis concluded that the group heterogeneity was significant, on the one hand, the group under 18 years old had significant response to sports star stories, on the other hand, the group aged 46-60 had higher sensitivity to craftsman spirit narratives; finally, there were gender differences in sports brand marketing, such as: women focused on emotional resonance, while men focused more on value fit.

Based on the above results, this study further concluded that sports brand story marketing stimulates consumer loyalty by constructing "emotion-culture" dual path, and its purpose is to construct a set of "perceptual marketing" sharing system; the essence of sports brand story marketing is to construct emotional meaning community, and the micro level can reduce consumer decision-making cognitive load through emotional resonance and cultural identity; the macro level is to embed individual consumption behavior into the "national health" national narrative, so as to realize the synergistic coexistence of commercial value and social value.

This study provides the following reference significance for future theoretical exploration and practical innovation, confirms the application value of narrative paradigm in sports brand marketing, and has complementary value to rational decision-making model. This study provides a model for cross-cultural analysis of sports brand marketing, and through the construction of a comparative matrix of "collective narrative vs individual narrative", enhances the effective blueprint of sports brand storytelling. This study establishes technical ethical boundaries for sports brand marketing, indirectly reveals that AIGC story generation needs to pay attention to grasping the scale, and reasonably adopt marketing methods under the premise of setting the threshold of authenticity.

By analyzing the impact of cultural differences between urban and rural areas in China on narrative mechanism, we can effectively promote the realization of China's

"Healthy China 2030" strategic goal. The ultimate goal is to realize narrative efficiency enabled by technology, deeply implant narrative thickness with Chinese cultural connotation, make sports brand story become a bridge connecting product function and people's spiritual needs, and meet the construction demand of significance community of sports consumption under healthy China 2030 strategy.

According to the limitations of this paper, the following aspects are suggested for improvement in the future: 1. Enriching and improving the classification dimensions of variables to carry out more in-depth research. In the future, we can improve the classification dimensions of experimental variables by combining existing research and practical experience. 2. In the future, more representative product categories of various industries can be added to the research, and whether the product categories will have an impact on the experimental results can be considered. 3. In the future, modern technical means can be selected to enrich the presentation mode of experimental materials and increase the practical guidance value of experimental conclusions. 4. Considering factors such as field scenarios and understanding degree of trial objects, future research can be carried out through more perfect and rigorous offline experiments.

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