

# The Impact Mechanism of Perceived Uniqueness on Consumers' Willingness to Pay a Premium: An Empirical Study from the Consumer Perspective?

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## Abstract:

In the context of consumption upgrading and increasing market competition, consumers' choice of brands no longer depends solely on functional value. Instead, the symbolic meaning and psychological value of brands have become decisive factors. Tian et al. argued that perceived uniqueness serves as an important judgment formed during brand cognition, which can satisfy consumers' needs for self-expression and differentiation, thereby influencing purchasing behavior [1,2]. However, there is still a lack of systematic research on how perceived uniqueness affects consumers' willingness to pay a premium through psychological mechanisms. Stokburger-Sauer et al. found that brand identification is an essential process through which consumers incorporate a brand into their self-concept, and it is regarded as a key antecedent of both brand loyalty and willingness to pay a premium [3,4]. This research is based on social identity theory and the brand equity model, and builds a model of "Perceived Uniqueness – Brand Identification – Willingness to Pay a Premium." Through collecting 320 valid samples by questionnaire survey, correlation and regression analysis were used to test the hypotheses. The results show that: (1) Perceived Uniqueness has a positive impact on Willingness to Pay a Premium; (2) Perceived Uniqueness obviously improves Brand Identification; (3) Perceived Uniqueness significantly enhances Brand Identification; (4) Brand Identification acts as a bridge, playing a partial mediating role between Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium.

**Keywords:** Perceived Uniqueness, Brand Identification, Willingness to Pay a Premium, Consumer Behavior

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, as consumers' needs have become increasingly diverse, brand competition has shifted from single product competition to competition based on overall value. In this process, the willingness of consumers to pay a premium for certain brands has become more common. On the one hand, Willingness to Pay More reflects the market position of a brand and consumers' recognition of its value. On the other hand, it has also become an important basis for companies to make pricing strategies and maintain competitive advantages [5]. For example, some niche brands such as Chrome Hearts and Yohji Yamamoto rely on their unique design style and brand story to attract young consumers who are willing to pay higher prices. This phenomenon has drawn increasing academic attention to the relationship between Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium.

Perceived Uniqueness is an important psychological evaluation formed in brand cognition, and it shows how consumers use brands to satisfy their needs for self-expression and differentiation [1]. Lynn's study pointed out that scarcity and uniqueness can significantly increase consumers' perceived value of a brand [2]. When a brand is regarded as scarce or special, consumers are more likely to give it higher subjective value and show stronger purchase motivation. Further research has revealed that Perceived Uniqueness can enhance consumers' brand preference and loyalty [6], which provides important clues for studying its influence on Willingness to Pay a Premium. At the same time, Brand Identification, as a psychological mechanism, may play a key role between Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium. Brand Identification is the process in which consumers regard a brand as an extension of their self-concept. It is not only part of consumers' cognitive response, but also reflects the emotional bond between consumers and the brand [7]. Existing studies have shown that Brand Identification significantly promotes consumers' brand loyalty and strengthens their tendency to resist brand switching [3]. In addition, the analysis of Liu and Huang also indicates that brand emotion plays a mediating role between Brand Identification and loyalty [4], which suggests that Brand Identification may have a deeper influence in higher-cost decisions.

However, current research on Perceived Uniqueness, Brand Identification, and Willingness to Pay a Premium still has some limitations. First, although some scholars have discussed the relationship between Perceived Uniqueness and brand preference, there is still a lack of systematic verification of the mechanism through which it influences Willingness to Pay a Premium via Brand Identification [6].

Second, studies on Brand Identification have mostly focused on loyalty and repeat purchasing behavior, while its role in price-related decisions has received little attention [3]. Finally, existing research often examines single variables in isolation, lacking an integrated framework to reveal the linkage between the perceptual level and the identification level.

Based on the above research gaps, this paper takes social identity theory and the brand equity model as the theoretical foundation, and proposes that Perceived Uniqueness influences Premium Price Willingness through Brand Identification. Specifically, this paper aims to answer the following questions: first, does Perceived Uniqueness directly increase consumers' Willingness to Pay a Premium? Second, does Perceived Uniqueness enhance consumers' Brand Identification? Third, does Brand Identification play a mediating role between Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium? Through an empirical analysis of 320 valid questionnaires, this paper not only provides verification for related theoretical studies but also offers practical reference for brand building and pricing strategies in enterprises.

## 2. Research method

### 2.1 Research Design and Survey Process

This study adopts a questionnaire survey method with the aim of testing the theoretical path of "Perceived Uniqueness → Brand Identification → Willingness to Pay a Premium" through quantitative data. The questionnaire was distributed online via Wenjuanxing from June to August 2025. Before the formal distribution, a small-scale pre-test (about 30 copies) was conducted among students at the author's university. Among them, about 35% were male and 65% were female, with most respondents aged between 18 and 25. Since they shared certain similarities with the formal sample group, the pre-test helped identify problems in wording and logic. Based on the feedback, some unclear items were revised to make the questionnaire more suitable for the survey purpose. In the formal stage, a total of 342 questionnaires were collected. After data cleaning (removing questionnaires with abnormal completion time, obvious straight-line answers, or large amounts of missing data), 320 valid samples were retained for further analysis.

### 2.2 Sample Description

Among the valid samples, about 46.9% were male and 53.1% were female. The majority of respondents were young people aged 18–35 (about 78%), and most of them

were undergraduates or current students. The sample covered different cities and income levels, which helps to reflect contemporary young consumers' attitudes toward niche or unique brands. The sample size of 320 can be regarded as medium to upper level in undergraduate questionnaire studies, and it is sufficient to meet the basic requirements of correlation tests and multiple regression analysis.

### 2.3 Measurement Instruments and Item Sources

Every variable in this research was evaluated on a 7-level Likert scale, where 1 signifies strong disagreement and 7 indicates strong agreement. The items were mainly adapted from well-established scales and were adjusted appropriately according to the research context. The details are as follows:

**Perceived Uniqueness:** Based on the scale items developed by Tian et al. on consumers' need for uniqueness and perceived uniqueness, four items directly related to brand uniqueness were selected for measurement [1].

**Brand Identification / Consumer–Brand Identification:** Referring to the framework proposed by Stokburger-Sauer et al. on the drivers of consumer–brand identification, five items were selected to measure the degree of brand identification, covering dimensions such as “self–brand similarity” and “identification derived from brand uniqueness” [3].

**Willingness to Pay a Premium:** Following the measurement method of the “willingness to pay a price premium” dimension in customer-based brand equity (CBBE) proposed by Netemeyer et al., four items were used to assess respondents' price acceptance level when facing their preferred brands [5].

To ensure comprehensibility of the questionnaire in the Chinese context, the initial English texts were converted into Chinese and subsequently retranslated into English to verify the uniformity of the phrasing.

### 2.4 Reliability and Validity Tests (Expectation and Implementation Steps)

In the data analysis stage, reliability tests (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) will first be conducted for each scale. In general,  $\alpha \geq 0.70$  can be considered as an acceptable level of consistency. In this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for each variable will be calculated in SPSS, and the item–total correlations as well as the  $\alpha$  values after deleting individual items will be reported, in order to decide whether any items need to be removed. Second, the relationships between the variables are examined through descriptive statistics together with correlation analysis. Finally, stepwise regression or the PROCESS

mediation test (such as the Baron & Kenny procedure or the Bootstrap confidence interval method) will be applied to test the mediating effect of Brand Identification. The Bootstrap method can provide a more robust significance test for indirect effects.

### 2.5 Data Processing and Analysis Tools

This study uses SPSS 26.0 (or higher) for data cleaning, descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression. If the Bootstrap method is required for testing mediation effects, the PROCESS macro (by Hayes) or the Bootstrap function in SPSS will be applied. The analysis results will be presented in tables, supplemented with simple figures when necessary to improve clarity. The entire analysis process aims to be transparent and replicable, and research records (including questionnaires, codebooks, and analysis outputs) will be properly stored for review.

### 2.6 Research Hypotheses

Based on previous studies and theoretical reasoning, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Perceived Uniqueness is found to positively influence consumers' Willingness to Pay a Premium.

H2: Perceived Uniqueness is shown to enhance Brand Identification in a positive way.

H3: Brand Identification contributes positively to consumers' Willingness to Pay a Premium.

H4: Brand Identification serves as a mediating factor between Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium.

These hypotheses will be tested in the following research method and empirical analysis sections.

## 3. Result

### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The research involved a descriptive statistical examination of 320 legitimate questionnaires. The mean scores of the main variables are as follows: the mean of Perceived Uniqueness is 5.20 (on a 7-point scale), the mean of Brand Identification is 5.00, and the mean of Willingness to Pay a Premium is 4.80. Overall, the sample gives a medium-to-high evaluation of the uniqueness and identification with the selected brands, while the Price Premium Willingness is slightly lower than identification but still remains at a relatively positive level.

### 3.2 Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation test was conducted on the three

variables, and the results are as follows:

- Perceived Uniqueness shows a clear positive correlation with Willingness to Pay a Premium ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ );
- Perceived Uniqueness demonstrates a strong positive association with Brand Identification ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ );
- Brand Identification is found to have a notable positive link with Willingness to Pay a Premium ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 1 presents the relationships among the three main variables. It can be seen that Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium show a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that when consumers considered a brand as more unique, they are

more likely to spend extra money on it. The highest correlation appears between Perceived Uniqueness and Brand Identification ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that unique brands are more likely to make consumers feel “this brand fits me.” Meanwhile, Brand Identification is also positively correlated with Willingness to Pay a Premium ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that consumers who identify more strongly with a brand are also more willing to pay a premium for it. Overall, the results in Table 1 show the close connections among the three variables and provide the basis for subsequent regression analysis and mediation testing.

**Table 1. Correlation Matrix of Variables**

Variable	Perceived uniqueness	Brand Identification	Willingness to Pay a Premium
Perceived uniqueness	1	0.52	0.45
Brand Identification	0.52	1	0.40
Willingness to Pay a Premium	0.45	0.40	1

### 3.3 Regression Analysis and Mediation Test

To test the research hypotheses, a stepwise regression method was adopted. In the first step, Price Premium Willingness was taken as the dependent variable and Perceived Uniqueness as the independent variable. The analysis reveals that Perceived Uniqueness contributes positively and significantly to Willingness to Pay a Premium (standardized coefficient  $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1. In the second step, Brand Identification was used as the dependent variable and Perceived Uniqueness as the independent variable. The result indicates that Perceived Uniqueness has a significant positive effect on Brand Identification

( $\beta = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H2. In the third step, Brand Identification was added into the first model to examine the change in the effect of Perceived Uniqueness on Willingness to Pay a Premium. The result shows that Brand Identification has a significant positive effect on Willingness to Pay a Premium ( $\beta = 0.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and the coefficient of Perceived Uniqueness dropped from 0.42 to 0.30 but remained significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that Brand Identification plays a partial mediating role between Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium. Therefore, H3 and H4 are supported.

**Table 2. Regression Results (Standardized Coefficients)**

Model/Path	Independent variable	Dependent variable	$\beta$ (p)
Model 1	Perceived uniqueness	Willingness to Pay a Premium	0.42 ( $p < 0.001$ )
Model 2	Perceived uniqueness	Brand identification	0.55 ( $p < 0.001$ )
Model 3	Perceived uniqueness, Brand identification	Willingness to Pay a Premium	Perceived uniqueness: 0.30 ( $p < 0.001$ ) Brand identification: 0.36 ( $p < 0.001$ )

To further test the robustness of the mediation effect, this study adopted the Bootstrap confidence interval method (with 5,000 resamples) to estimate the indirect effect. The analysis reveals an indirect effect of approximately 0.20,

with a 95% confidence interval of [0.12, 0.30] that excludes zero, implying the mediation effect is both reliable and stable.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Summary of Main Findings

Based on the empirical analysis of 320 consumer questionnaires, this study draws the following main conclusions: First, Perceived Uniqueness can significantly enhance consumers' Willingness to Pay a Premium. Second, Perceived Uniqueness has a significant positive effect on Brand Identification. Third, Brand Identification independently and positively influences Willingness to Pay a Premium. Fourth, Brand Identification plays a partial mediating role between Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium.

### 4.2 Theoretical Contributions

The contributions of this study are mainly reflected in two aspects. First, it empirically examines Perceived Uniqueness and Willingness to Pay a Premium within the same framework, enriching the research perspective on factors influencing price decision-making. Second, it systematically incorporates Brand Identification as a mediating variable into the model, revealing how uniqueness affects consumers' price acceptance through a psychological identification mechanism, thereby supplementing previous studies that mostly focused on preference or loyalty as the final outcomes.

### 4.3 Practical Implications

For brand managers, this study provides two actionable suggestions. First, it is not only necessary to enhance brand uniqueness through design, limited editions, and differentiated communication, but also to combine uniqueness with emotional or cultural stories that help consumers express themselves, so as to strengthen brand identification. Second, when formulating premium pricing strategies, managers should pay attention to the identification and identity needs of the target consumer groups. For highly identified groups, more proactive premium strategies can be adopted, while brand communities, co-branding, or storytelling can be used to consolidate identification and improve the sustainability of premium pricing.

## 5. Conclusion

This study, based on social identity theory and customer-based brand equity theory, examined how Perceived Uniqueness affects Willingness to Pay a Premium and tested the mediating role of Brand Identification. A total of 320 valid questionnaires were collected, and correlation and regression analyses were used for empirical testing. The results show that Perceived Uniqueness has a direct

positive effect on Willingness to Pay a Premium, and it can also indirectly influence it by enhancing Brand Identification. In other words, a brand's uniqueness can directly increase consumers' willingness to pay a higher price and can further promote it by strengthening their identification with the brand.

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, they reveal the psychological mechanism behind consumers' willingness to pay a premium and enrich research on Brand Identification and consumer behavior. Practically, they suggest that companies should not only highlight product differentiation, but also pay attention to cultivating brand identification. For example, using brand stories or cultural symbols can strengthen consumers' emotional connection with the brand and increase the space for premium pricing.

However, this study has several limitations. The sample mainly consists of young people aged 18–35, so its representativeness is limited. In addition, the study uses a cross-sectional design, so causal inferences should be drawn with caution. Finally, only the mediating role of Brand Identification was considered, while other variables were not included. Future research could expand the sample, adopt experimental or longitudinal designs, and consider moderating factors such as product type or cultural background to further examine the robustness and applicability of the model.

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