Exploratory Study on the Perceived Fit and Consumer Purchase Intention in Chinese Sports Brand Co-Branding

Zheyun Zheng[1*], and Yujun Lu[2]

Faculty of Thai-Chinese International School of Management,

University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce Thailand

Corresponding author. E-mail: zheng_zhe@utcc.ac.th[1*]

Abstract

This research aimed to study (1) the impact of perceived fit between brand and product attributes on consumer purchase intentions in the context of Chinese sports brand co-branding, (2) the influence of demographic factors such as age, education level, and income on these perceptions and intentions, and (3) the role of social media in shaping consumer attitudes and driving purchase decisions regarding co-branded products. This research is mixed-method research; 208 young consumers were stratified sampling selected for quantitative research, and 10 were purposive sampling selected as samples for qualitative research. The instruments for collecting data included a structured questionnaire and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, one-way ANOVA, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used for quantitative data analysis, and thematic analysis was used for qualitative data analysis. The research results revealed that (1) a high perceived fit between brands and products significantly enhanced consumer purchase intentions, with brand perceived fit and product perceived fit showing strong positive correlations with purchase intentions; (2) demographic factors such as age, education level, and income influenced these perceptions and intentions significantly, indicating the importance of tailoring co-branding strategies to different consumer segments; and (3) social media emerged as a critical platform for promoting co-branded products, where new releases and limited edition promotions significantly increase consumer interest and engagement. Interactive social media campaigns and influencer endorsements also play a pivotal role in enhancing the appeal and credibility of co-branded products.

Keywords: perceived fit; consumer purchase intention; exploratory study; co-branding

Introduction

The rapid development of China's economy has intensified competition within the sports products market, leading to an increased focus on brand differentiation as a critical strategy. In particular, product homogenization has made brand value and consumer perception paramount in maintaining competitive advantage. Co-branding, where two brands collaborate to launch a product, has gained significant traction as an innovative marketing strategy in this context. Notably, Chinese sports brands like Li-Ning and Anta have increasingly adopted co-branding to enhance brand awareness and consumer engagement, leveraging cross-industry partnerships to inject new vitality into their brands. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2023), the sports industry in China has witnessed a growth rate of over 6.7% annually, further emphasizing the importance of strategic brand alliances in capturing the evolving preferences of young consumers. However, despite the growing body of research on brand alliances, a gap exists in understanding how the perceived fit between co-branding partners influences consumer purchase intentions, especially within the dynamic Chinese market. Previous studies have explored the impact of brand fit on consumer attitudes (Mandarić et al., 2022; Smith & Brown, 2022; Luo et al., 2023), yet there is limited empirical evidence focusing on the Chinese sports industry, particularly considering the role of demographic factors and social media.

This research focuses on young Chinese consumers, recognized as the main drivers of sports consumption due to their distinct consumption behaviors, decision-making processes, and high purchasing power (Yan & Chen, 2024). This demographic's preference for co-branded products, characterized by unique designs and the complementary strengths of partnering brands, necessitates a closer examination of their attitudes and purchase intentions (Dangi et al., 2021). Previous studies have primarily concentrated on Western markets, leaving a significant gap in understanding the motivations and perceptions of Chinese youth in co-branding (Jin et al., 2018; Chen, 2023). Understanding these factors is crucial for developing targeted marketing strategies that resonate with this influential consumer segment.

This research's primary objective is to explore the relationship between perceived fit in brand and product and consumer purchase intentions within the context of Chinese sports brand co-branding. This study investigated how demographic factors such as age, education level, and income influence consumer perceptions and responses to co-branded products, as well as the impact of social media on consumer engagement and purchase decisions. The research employed a mixed-

methods approach, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights from in-depth interviews conducted with young Chinese consumers in Nanning, Guangxi, from April to June 2024.

Research Objectives

1. To study the impact of perceived fit between brand and product attributes on consumer purchase intentions in Chinese sports brand co-branding.

2. To study the influence of demographic factors such as age, education level, and income on these perceptions and intentions.

3. To study the role of social media in shaping consumer attitudes and driving purchase decisions regarding co-branded products.

Literature Review

Perceived Fit

Gammon et al. (2006) defined perceived fit from the perspective of brand extension as the degree of congruence between the parent brand and the extension brand. Brown and Dacin (1997) emphasized the manifestation of perceived fit in the similarity of attributes between two partnering brands. Building on previous studies, this research adopts the perspective of Dickinson and Heath (2006), defining perceived fit as a subjective perception of the degree of match between brands or products, providing an important theoretical foundation for understanding consumer cognition in brand collaborations.

Cavazos & Varadarajan (2012) introduced the concept of brand-perceived fit when exploring the effects of brand alliances, reflecting consumers' unified perception of the brand image and associations of the co-branded entities. In analyzing co-branding strategies, brand perceived fit can be focused on the level of brand image to evaluate whether the partnered brands achieve a consistent effect in their image (Chaffey et al., 2009). Charry and Dumoulin (2014) highlighted that brand perceived fit mainly manifests in three dimensions: brand image, brand reputation, and brand personality. Colombo et al. (2006) further expanded the concept to include the degree of fit in brand culture, brand personality, and consumer usage image. Chung et al. (2000) found that in cross-domain collaborations, the brand perceived fit could measure the congruence in other aspects, including brand image and brand awareness. When discussing product-level perceived fit, research

primarily focuses on the similarity of product attributes with the original products, including components and functions. De Faultrier et al. (2014) refined this concept, distinguishing between product intrinsic and extrinsic similarities. De Man (2013) defined product perceived fit as the degree of similarity exhibited at the product level by the cooperating brands. In brand equity, product perceived fit emphasizes consistency in product categories and other product-related characteristics (Dickinson & Barker, 2007).

Consumer Purchase Intention

Consumer purchase intention, as a specific application of this concept, represents the potential action tendency of consumers in a purchasing decision (Ali et al., 2019). External factors influence consumers' attitudes, forming purchase intentions, which become a core element in predicting consumer behavioral intentions (Awasthi & Mehta, 2022). Consumer purchase intention reflects the subjective probability of purchasing a particular product and encompasses both "positive" and "negative" aspects. Positive purchase intention tends to enhance the likelihood of consumers purchasing the product, while negative purchase intention may diminish this likelihood (Arli et al., 2018). Ali et al. (2019) further pointed out that purchase intention is consumers' potential probability or tendency to purchase a specific product or service. Awasthi and Mehta (2022) also emphasized that the potential likelihood of consumers purchasing a product is what we refer to as consumer purchase intention.

Research indicates that various factors influence consumer purchase intention. Widjojo & Yudianto (2015) pointed out that the formation of consumer purchase intention results from the interplay between external stimuli and personal traits. External stimuli include promotional activities and advertising by businesses, while personal traits encompass gender, age, educational background, and economic capability of consumers. Angell et al. (2016) found that consumer age and educational level significantly affect purchase intentions for the same product. Consumers with higher education levels are more inclined to purchase high-end products, producing a positive influence.

Perceived value is a core measure of attitude and a fundamental driver of consumer purchase decisions. When consumers hold a positive perception of co-branded products, their perceived value of cross-brand collaborations increases, translating into a positive brand alliance attitude and ultimately stimulating purchase intention (Awasthi & Mehta, 2022). Widjojo and Yudianto (2015) revealed that factors such as brand perceived fit and attitudes towards the original brand could indirectly influence purchase intention by affecting consumer attitudes towards the co-branded

brand. Additionally, Arli et al. (2018), in their study on co-branded products in the wearable sports market and luxury products, highlighted that brand fit, product involvement, and product-person identity congruence significantly promote consumer purchase intention. Angell et al. (2016) focused on co-branded mobile phone brands. They found that the reputation and type of the main brand significantly affect consumer perceptions of the co-branded brand, which in turn enhances purchase intention. Awasthi and Mehta (2022) further pointed out that brand self-congruity significantly impacts consumer willingness to purchase co-branded products, with product involvement as a moderator. Widjojo and Yudianto (2015) summarised previous studies and concluded that consumer perceptions of product quality, service, brand image, and marketing methods significantly positively affect purchase intention.

The Relationship Between Perceived Fit and Consumer Purchase Intention

Helmig et al. (2007) found that consumer attitudes and purchase intentions toward brand alliances significantly correlate with the perceived fit between the brands. Specifically, when both products' perceived and brand-perceived fit are at high levels, consumers' attitudes toward the brand alliance tend to be more positive, significantly enhancing purchase intentions. Furthermore, when exploring the effects of brand alliances, it is important to consider the cognitive aspect of fit and how it influences the evaluation of brand alliances. Samuelsen et al. (2015) discovered that the complementarity of product attributes is a key element for the success of brand alliances. Winning consumers' positive evaluations is challenging without complementarity, even when collaborating with well-known brands. Mansoor & Paul (2022) highlighted the critical role of brand image fit in co-branding strategies, demonstrating that a strong alignment between the images of collaborating brands significantly enhances consumer evaluations and purchase intentions. This research underscores the importance of ensuring that co-branded products reflect the strengths and reputations of both brands involved. Wang (2023) explored the impact of crossover brand co-branding on consumer purchasing behavior. The findings indicated that the perceived fit of a product ⸺especially regarding consistency in design style and functionality ⸺ plays a crucial role in enhancing consumer purchase intentions. Consumers strongly preferred co-branded products that maintained cohesive design elements, similar to collaborations involving popular brands like Li-Ning. This supports the notion that product perceived fit significantly influences purchase decisions in co-branding contexts.

In empirical studies, Yu et al. (2021) examined the impact of co-branded products with varying degrees of fit on consumer purchase intention using sports apparel as a case study. Their

findings indicated that a higher degree of perceived fit between the partnering brands significantly enhanced consumer purchase intentions, emphasizing the importance of brand alignment in co-branding strategies. Abdolmaleki et al. (2023) explored the impact of co-branded products on consumer purchase intention within the sports industry. They found that a strong perceived fit between professional sports organizations and on-field sports apparel sponsors significantly enhanced consumer purchase intentions, highlighting the critical role of brand congruence in successful co-branding strategies. Lou & Bhattacharya (2006) studied luxury brands and revealed that co-branded products with a high brand perceived fit between luxury and sports fashion brands are more likely to receive positive consumer evaluations and purchase intentions. Hence, the proposed hypotheses are:

H1: Brand perceived fit has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention.

H2: Product perceived fit has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention.
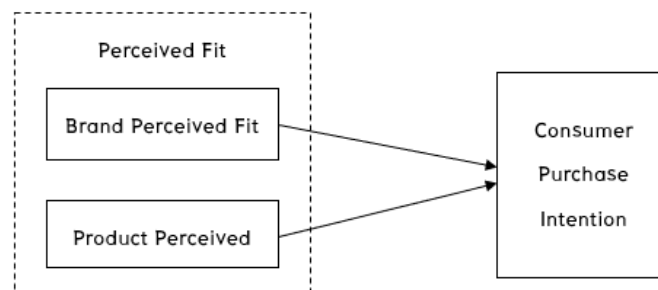
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Research Framework

Research Methods

Research Analysis Process

"Co-branded sports" refers to products created through collaborations between two or more brands, typically combining the strengths and reputations of the partnering brands to produce a unique offering (Yu et al., 2021). The study focuses on consumer perceptions and behaviors toward co-branded sports products in this context. This research utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. Due to practical limitations such as time, budget, or a larger sample pool, this study used stratified sampling to select samples through a third-party survey agency, www.wjx.cn. The study area is Nanning, Guangxi, with a population of

young consumers interested in sports brand co-branding. The sample includes 2 0 8 participants, selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals familiar with and interested in co-branded sports products. Data was collected from April to June 2024. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including an independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA, to assess differences across demographic groups. Regression analysis assessed the impact of perceived fit between brand and product attributes on consumer purchase intentions.

Research Instruments

The quantitative research used a questionnaire as a research tool in this study. The questionnaire has four parts: 1. Identify items to identify respondents interested in sports brand co-branded products; 2. personal information of the subjects; 3. perceived fit instrument; 4. consumer purchase intention instrument. Demographic information mainly includes four aspects: gender, age, education level, and monthly income level.

The measurement of perceived fit, according to the relevant concepts of this study, is divided into two dimensions: brand perceived fit and product perceived fit. Referring to Yao's (2022) scale on perceived fit, there are 3 items for brand perceived fit and product perceived fit, respectively. The consumer purchase intention scale referred to as Jin's (2020) has 3 items. Since the research field is the co-branded products of the clothing industry, the statements related to the aviation industry in the questionnaire were replaced with the relevant content of the clothing industry's co-branded products to ensure the questionnaire's pertinence and applicability. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale with a score of 1-5, with "1" representing "completely disagree", "2" representing "disagree", "3" representing "uncertain", "4" representing "agree", and "5" representing "completely agree". After reliability and validity testing, the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Result of Reliability and Validity Test

Variables		Exploratory Factor Analysis	Reliability Analysis	
Perceived fit	Brand perceived fit	0.842	0.843	0.827
		0.862		
		0.825		
		KMO=0.787; p=0.000		
		x^2=648.955; df=15		
		Variance=64.968		
	Product perceived fit	0.870	0.894	
		0.888		
		0.854		
Consumer purchase intention		0.862	0.850	
		0.839		
		0.805		
		KMO=0.729; p=0.000		
		x^2=268.735; df=3		
		Variance=78.670		

Table 1 presents the perceived fit as two factors, with factor loadings ranging from 0.825 to 0.888. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure for the perceived fit is 0.787, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant (p<0.001). The total variance explained is 64.968%. The reliability of the perceived fit scale is also high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.827. For the consumer purchase intention, the factor loadings range from 0.805 to 0.862, with a KMO measure of 0.729 and a significant Bartlett's test (p<0.001). The total variance explained is 78.670%, and the reliability score is 0.850. The KMO value of these results is over 0.5. The significance level for Bartlett's test is below 0.05, the factor loadings are all above 0.4, and the Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.8 (Ho, 2014). These results suggested that the scales used for both constructs are reliable and valid for measuring the intended variables.

In the interview, this research selected five well-known Chinese sports brands (Table 1): LINING, ANTA, 361°, XTEP, and PEAK. These co-branding cases were used as examples for in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured thematic interview instrument, which allows for flexibility, enabling the exploration of topics such as perceived fit, brand image, consumer perceptions, purchase intention, and emotional response. For instance, participants were asked how they perceive the fit between the collaborating brands in these co-branded products and what aspects of the brands they find most compatible. They were also questioned on how the collaboration affects the brand image of each involved brand, highlighting specific elements that may enhance or diminish the brand's image. Etc. The interviews seek to understand whether the collaboration influences the participants' intention to purchase the products and, if so, how. These questions aim to uncover respondents' cognitive and emotional responses to the co-branding initiatives, providing insights into the effectiveness of such strategies in enhancing

brand value and consumer engagement. The semi-structured format also allows for follow-up questions and exploring additional themes that may arise during the interviews, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of consumer attitudes toward these co-branded products.

Research Sample

Considering that young consumers are more familiar with and have a high degree of acceptance of co-branded marketing activities, this paper takes the youth group as the main survey object. However, due to the limitations of time and economy, the study adopts a one-time online collection method to distribute questionnaires to the youth group in Nanning, Guangxi, in April 2024. To ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the data, this study completed the design of the electronic questionnaire through the professional online questionnaire production platform www.wenjuanxing.com. 208 valid questionnaires were retained, with an effective rate of 90.4%.

Table 2 Quantitive Research Sample

Variables		Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	91	43.8
	Female	117	56.3
	18–21	65	31.3
	22–25	58	27.9
Age	26–30	44	21.2
	31–35	33	15.9
	36–40	8	3.8
	≤Colledge	49	23.6
Education	Undergraduate	86	41.3
	Master	64	30.8
	Ph.D	9	4.3
	≤1000	30	14.4
	1000–2500	53	25.5
Monthly Income (RMB)	2501–4000	68	32.7
	4001–5500	47	22.6
	≥5500	10	4.8

Among the 208 respondents (Table 2), the ratio of men to women is relatively balanced, with 91 males accounting for 43.8% and 117 females accounting for 56.3%. In terms of age distribution, there are 65 people aged 18–21, 58 people aged 22–25, 44 people aged 26–30, 33 people aged 31–35, and 8 people aged 36–40, with a relatively young age structure. In terms of education level, 159 people have a bachelor's degree or above, accounting for 76.4% of the sample.

In terms of monthly income, 68 people have an income of 2501–4000 yuan, accounting for 32.7%, followed by 1000–2500 yuan and 4001–5500 yuan, with 53 and 47 people, respectively. It can be inferred that most respondents are students and young people who have just entered society.

To better understand the impact of Chinese youth on the perceived fit of Chinese sports brand co-branding and consumer purchase intention, this study used purposive sampling to research 10 young Chinese consumers (Table 3) based on the co-branding cases of Chinese sports brands.

Table 3 Qualitative Research Sample

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Preferred Brand
A	Female	22	Undergraduate student	Li Ning, Anta
B	Male	25	Graduate student	Peak, 361
C	Female	30	HRM Manager	Xtep, Li Ning
D	Male	27	IT Engineer	Li Ning, Peak
E	Female	24	Freelancer	Anta, Xtep
F	Male	32	Saler	361, Xtep
G	Female	21	Marketing Manager	Li Ning, Anta
H	Male	28	Graduate student	Peak, 361
J	Female	26	Fitness coach	Anta, Li Ning
K	Male	23	Intern	Li Ning, Anta

The 10 participants were interviewed for a total of 513 minutes, which were recorded through voice-to-text conversion. Finally, a total of 77,439 words were collected from the interviews with the 10 participants, and after deleting invalid words such as modal particles, a total of 65,823 words were collected.

Research Results

Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to quantify and reveal the characteristic levels of each variable. According to Table 4, the mean values of perceived fit (Mean=3.35, SD=0.74), brand perceived fit (Mean=3.22, SD=0.97), product perceived fit (Mean=3.48, SD=0.82), and consumer purchase intention (Mean=3.16, SD=1.09) are at a medium level.

Table 4 Result of Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Perceived fit	1.17	4.83	3.35	0.74
Brand perceived fit	1.33	5.00	3.22	0.97
Product perceived fit	1.00	5.00	3.478	0.82
Consumer purchase intention	1.00	5.00	3.16	1.09

Difference analysis

To reveal the possible differences in the perceived match of sports brand co–branding and their purchase intention among young consumers with different demographic characteristics, this study used an independent sample t–test and one–way ANOVA to analyze gender, age, education level, and monthly income, respectively (Table 5).

Table 5 Result of Difference Analysis

Variable		Perceived fit			Consumer purchase intention		
		Mean	S.D.	t/F	Mean	S.D.	t/F
Gender	Male	3.28	0.77	1.247	3.04	1.12	1.41
	Female	3.51	0.72		3.25	1.06	
Age	18–21	3.66	0.59	6.142^{***}	3.60	0.91	10.39^{***}
	22–25	3.29	0.66		3.35	0.94	
	26–30	3.35	0.81		3.06	1.10	
	31–35	2.99	0.81		2.52	1.08	
	36–40	3.27	0.89		2.13	1.21	
Education	≤College	3.20	0.69	3.644^{*}	3.01	1.03	4.19^{**}
	Undergraduate	3.28	0.77		2.95	1.14	
	Master	3.49	0.73		3.42	1.02	
	Ph.D.	3.91	0.49		3.93	0.72	
Monthly Income	<1000	3.08	0.91	4.291^{**}	2.53	1.11	7.47^{***}
	1000–2500	3.25	0.79		2.93	1.11	
	2501–4000	3.29	0.72		3.20	0.97	
	4001–5500	3.59	0.54		3.57	0.98	
	>5500	3.91	0.41		4.10	0.82	

Note: $^{***}p<0.001$, $^{**}p<0.01$, $^{*}p<0.05$

The difference analysis results (Table 5) showed that there is no significant difference between gender in perceived matching and purchase intention ($p>0.05$). There are significant differences ($p<0.001$) between different age groups in perceived fit ($F=6.142$) and consumer purchase intention ($F=10.383$). Among them, the 18–21 group has the highest score in perceived

fit (Mean=3.66, SD=0.59) and consumer purchase intention (Mean=3.60, SD=0.91), while the 31–35 age group had the lowest scores on perceived fit (M=2.99, SD=0.81) and consumer purchase intention (Mean=2.52, SD=1.08). Differences in education level also significantly affected perceived fit (F=3.644, $p<0.05$) and consumer purchase intention (F=4.182, $p<0.01$), with respondents with a doctoral degree showing higher differences in perceived fit (Mean=3.91, SD=0.49) and consumer purchase intention (Mean=3.63, SD=0.72), with undergraduate students scoring the lowest in perceived fit (Mean=3.28, SD=0.77) and purchase intention (Mean=2.95, SD=1.14). In addition, monthly income also has a significant impact on perceived fit (F=4.291, $p<0.01$) and consumer purchase intention (F=7.487, $p<0.001$). The higher the income, the better the perceived fit. These results show that age, education level, and monthly income significantly affect perceived fit and consumer purchase intention, while the effect of gender is more limited.

Correlation analysis

Through correlation analysis (Table 6), it is found that perceived fit (r=0.534, $p<0.01$) is positively correlated with consumers' purchasing intention, and the two dimensions of perceived fit, brand perceived fit (r=0.418, $p<0.01$) and product perceived fit (r=0.471, $p<0.01$), are positively correlated with purchasing intention.

Table 6 Result of Correlation Analysis

	1	2	3	4
1	1			
2	0.418**	1		
3	0.471**	0.369**	1	
4	0.534**	0.858**	0.794**	1

Note: 1=Perceived fit, 2=Brand perceived fit, 3=Product perceived fit, 4=Consumer purchase intention; **$p<0.01$

Regression analysis

In the regression analysis of this study, age, education level, and monthly income were used as control variables to conduct a regression analysis on the effects of brand–perceived fit and product–perceived fit on consumer purchase intention (Table 7).

Table 7 Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Consumer purchase intention			
	B	β	t	p
Brand perceived fit	0.298	0.267	4.558	0.000
Product perceived fit	0.263	0.199	3.054	0.003
R		0.634		
R^2		0.402		
F		34.108		
p		0.000		

In the regression analysis, after taking age, education, and monthly income as control variables, the perceived fit of the brand (B=0.298, β=0.267, t=4.558, p<0.001) and the perceived fit of the product (B=0.263, β=0.199, t=3.064, p=0.003) have a significant impact on consumer purchase intention. The overall model has R=0.634 and R^2=0.402, indicating that the model explains 40.2% of the variation in consumer purchase intentions. F=34.108, p<0.001, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant. These results indicated that the brand perceived fit and product perceived fit significantly impact consumers' purchase intentions.

In-depth interview analysis

This study conducted a thematic analysis of the converted texts using the thematic analysis method. The analysis resulted in 4 themes and 12 sub-themes.

1. Brand Perception Fit

Alignment of Brand Image and Culture: A and D both expressed a strong interest in Li-Ning's co-branded products, citing the brands' perception as high-end, fashionable, and innovative. A believes that Li-Ning's collaborations with various trendy brands align well with the brand image, making them highly attractive to young consumers. D emphasized that the partnership between Li-Ning and Peak appears natural and enhances the appeal and collectible value of the products. Similarly, J noted that the high degree of alignment in brand culture between Li-Ning and its partners ensures quality and design, further increasing his purchase intention.

Alignment of Brand Audience and Values: E and F emphasized the compatibility of brand audience and values. E favors Anta's co-branded products because these brands emphasize innovation and uniqueness, aligning with her values. She believes that the strong consistency in brand philosophy and innovation makes these co-branded products highly appealing in the market. On the other hand, F values the collaboration between 361° and certain celebrities, noting that their

target audiences are highly compatible, especially appealing to fitness enthusiasts. These brands showed high-intensity training and performance, making the co-branded products highly valuable in his view.

2. Product Perception Fit

Design Style and Functionality: A and B preferred co-branded products with consistent design styles. A particularly appreciates Li-Ning's collaborations with trendy brands, believing the products offer a highly consistent design and functionality, providing a better user experience. B mentioned the collaboration between Peak and outdoor brands, noting that these products perfectly blend the comfort of athletic shoes with the fashion sense of outdoor brands.

Utility and Material Compatibility: C believes that the co-branded products between Xtep and brands like Shaolin Temple are meticulous in material selection, making the products more appealing. D highlighted that the co-branded shoes between Li-Ning and Peak are highly complementary in their utility and suitable for sports and everyday wear, significantly increasing his interest in these products.

Innovation and Performance: E prefers Anta's co-branded products with celebrities, believing that these products exhibit high levels of innovation in both design and functionality. F finds certain co-branded products from 361° to be outstanding in performance, meeting the demands of high-intensity training.

3. Purchase Intention

Brand and Cultural Compatibility: B noted that they are likelier to purchase co-branded products when the brand image and culture are highly aligned. C emphasized that co-branded products with reasonable prices and high brand compatibility are more acceptable to her. She specifically mentioned the collaboration between Xtep and Shaolin Gongfu, as these two brands represent high-quality and classic design in her mind.

Scarcity and Collectible Value: D considers the scarcity and collectible value of co-branded products as important factors in increasing purchase intention, especially limited-edition collaborations between Li-Ning and trendy brands. He is willing to pay a higher price for these rare products.

Innovative Design and Brand Philosophy: E believes that Anta's collaborations with celebrities stand out in innovation and design, making her very interested in these products. G emphasized that high brand compatibility and unique designs are the main factors that increase her

purchase intention. She also expressed high appreciation for Anta's co-branded products with new-generation celebrities.

Brand and Product Compatibility: F particularly mentioned 361°'s co-branded products, as they are highly consistent with his needs in terms of performance and design. Respondent H believes that Peak's co-branded products are outstanding in functionality and design, making him very interested in these products.

4. Social Media Promotion

New Releases and Limited Edition Promotions: A and B stated that they frequently follow social media promotions of co-branded products, especially new releases and limited edition promotions, significantly influencing their purchase decisions. A mentioned that she learned about Li-Ning's co-branded products with trendy brands through social media, which increased her interest in the products. B also emphasized that social media promotional activities significantly impact his purchase decisions, particularly for Peak's co-branded shoes, as these promotions gave him a deeper understanding of the product's functionality and design.

User Reviews and Discussions: G and H emphasized that user reviews and discussions on social media substantially impact their purchase decisions. G mentioned that she often relies on social media to understand other consumers' evaluations of co-branded products, which helps her make more rational purchase decisions. H believed that social media discussions could increase his interest in co-branded products, especially those that receive widespread acclaim, making him more willing to purchase.

Product Quality and Cost-Effectiveness: C and K pointed out that the final purchase decision needed to consider the product's quality and cost-effectiveness. C mentioned that although social media promotions can increase her interest in co-branded products, she would still forgo the purchase if the product is overpriced or lacks quality. K believed that creative design and brand style compatibility are more likely to stimulate her purchase intention, with social media promotions serving only as a supplementary factor.

The qualitative results in this study complement the quantitative findings by providing in-depth explanations and real-world contexts that enhance the understanding of the relationships identified in the conceptual model. Specifically, while the quantitative analysis reveals significant correlations between brand-perceived fit and consumer purchase intention, the qualitative data offers insights into why these correlations exist, as evidenced by participants' discussions on brand

alignment with personal values and preferences. These qualitative findings validate the theoretical constructs in the model and refine them by highlighting specific consumer experiences and perceptions that underpin the statistical relationships. Furthermore, the themes identified in the qualitative analysis, such as "Design Style and Functionality" and "Social Media Influence," directly explain how and why certain factors impact consumer decisions, enriching the theoretical framework and offering practical implications for co-branding strategies.

Discussions

This study's findings indicated that both brand-perceived fit and product-perceived fit significantly influence consumer purchase intention. This aligns with the research by Helmig et al. (2007), which found a significant positive correlation between consumer attitudes toward brand alliances and the perceived fit between the brands. Additionally, Samuelsen et al. (2015) highlighted that the complementarity of product-perceived fit is crucial for the success of brand alliances, a point corroborated by our study, especially in the collaborations between sports and fashion brands.

Regarding brand perceived fit, the study revealed that the alignment of brand perceived fit and culture significantly impacts consumer purchase intention. For instance, A and D expressed strong interest in Li-Ning's co-branded products, citing that these brands align well with young consumers' aesthetic preferences and values. This alignment enhances the brand's appeal and increases the collectible value of the products. These findings are consistent with Kotler and Lee's (2005) research, which emphasized the positive effect of brand-perceived fit on consumer evaluations.

In terms of product perceived fit, the consistency in design style and functionality is considered a key factor. The study found that consumers are more inclined to purchase co-branded products with consistent design styles, such as those from collaborations between Li-Ning and trendy brands, as they provide a cohesive design and functionality experience, enhancing user satisfaction. This supports the findings of Wang et al. (2023), who noted that product perceived fit significantly impacts purchase intention.

The study also identified significant differences in perceived fit and purchase intention across different demographic characteristics, such as age, education level, and monthly income. At the same time, the impact of gender was more limited. This suggested that demographic factors

influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward co-branded products. Brands should consider these factors when formulating co-branding strategies to increase market effectiveness.

The study highlighted the role of social media promotions in influencing consumer purchase decisions. New releases and limited-edition promotions on social media significantly impacted participants' interest in co-branded products, particularly those from collaborations involving Li-Ning and trendy brands. This finding aligns with Chaffey et al. (2009), who noted the potential of internet marketing strategies to influence consumer behavior.

New Knowledge

This research elucidates the importance of perceived fit in brand and product as a critical determinant of consumer purchase intentions in the context of Chinese sports brand co-branding (Figure 2). The study highlights that a high perceived fit significantly enhances the appeal and acceptance of co-branded products, underscoring the necessity for strategic alignment in brand collaborations. Additionally, the findings reveal that demographic factors such as age, education level, and income play crucial roles in influencing consumer perceptions and responses, suggesting that tailored branding strategies are essential for effectively targeting different consumer segments. The research emphasizes the pivotal role of social media in shaping consumer attitudes and driving purchase decisions. Social media promotions, especially those featuring new releases and limited editions, boost consumer interest and engagement with co-branded products. These insights provide valuable guidance for marketers and brand managers in leveraging perceived fit and digital marketing channels to optimize the success of co-branding initiatives.
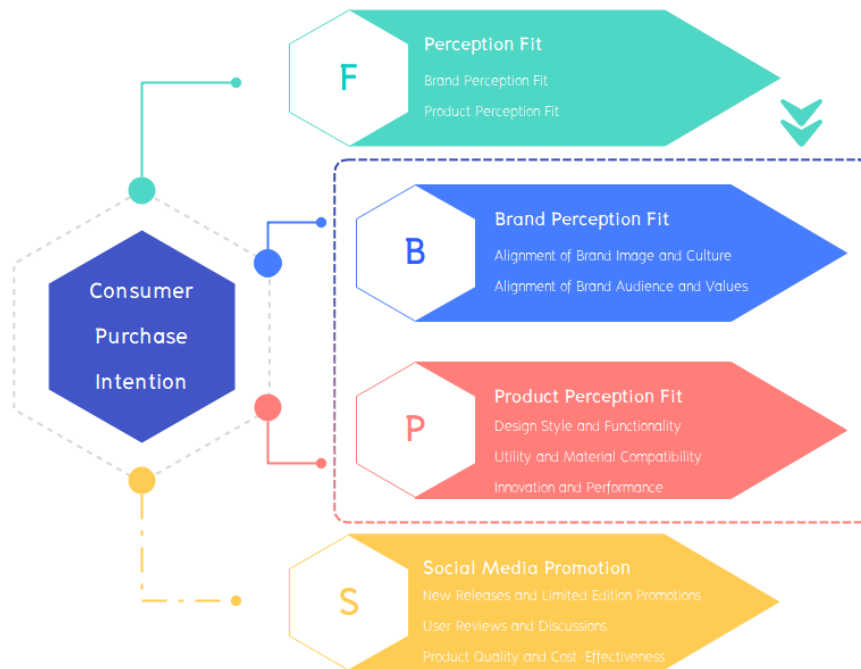
Figure 2 Impact model of consumer purchase intention

Conclusions

This study demonstrates the significant impact of perceived fit in brand and product on consumer purchase intentions within the Chinese sports brand co-branding context. The findings confirm that high perceived fit enhances the attractiveness and marketability of co-branded products, indicating the critical role of strategic brand alignment in successful co-branding efforts. Additionally, demographic factors such as age, education level, and income significantly influence consumer perceptions, highlighting the need for brands to consider these variables when designing targeted marketing strategies. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of social media as a key influence on consumer behavior, particularly through promotions of new and limited edition products. Social media channels enhance consumer awareness and engagement and are crucial in shaping purchase decisions. These insights offer practical implications for marketers and brand managers, emphasizing the need for a cohesive approach that integrates perceived fit and digital marketing strategies to maximize the effectiveness of co-branding initiatives.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for implications.

To optimize the success of co-branding strategies, brands should prioritize achieving a high perceived fit between the collaborating entities. This begins with strategic partner selection, ensuring the partners share complementary brand images, values, and product attributes. This alignment should be communicated through unified brand narratives that emphasize the synergy between the brands, reinforcing the perceived compatibility and authenticity of the collaboration. A consistent narrative across all marketing channels can enhance consumer perceptions and increase the appeal of co-branded products.

Leveraging social media platforms is crucial for promoting co-branded products, particularly focusing on new releases and limited editions to create excitement and buzz. Tailoring these campaigns to specific demographic segments is essential; younger audiences might be more attracted to dynamic and visually engaging content, while older consumers may prioritize quality and functionality. Utilizing data analytics can help identify and effectively target these segments. Interactive social media campaigns, such as polls, giveaways, or hashtag challenges, can engage consumers and provide valuable insights into their preferences and attitudes toward co-branded products.

Involving influencers and celebrities in promotional efforts can significantly boost the appeal and credibility of co-branded products. Influencers whose personal brands align with co-branded products, can effectively offer authentic endorsements and reach specific target groups. Similarly, celebrity endorsements can enhance the perceived value and desirability of the products, especially when the celebrities' image resonates well with the brand's identity. Regularly monitoring consumer feedback and social media discussions is vital for adapting and refining marketing strategies, ensuring they remain relevant and aligned with consumer expectations and trends. By focusing on these areas, brands can create compelling co-branded offerings that resonate with their target audiences, leading to increased engagement, higher sales, and stronger brand loyalty.

2. Suggestions for future research

The current study primarily focuses on young consumers in Nanning, Guangxi. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, future research should consider expanding the sample to include participants from other regions of China and overseas Chinese communities. This would allow for a comparative analysis of how regional cultural differences influence the perceived fit of co-branded

products and consumer purchase intentions. Additionally, while the current study employs a mixed-methods approach, future research could benefit from a more integrated use of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. For instance, employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could provide deeper insights into the relationships between variables, while broader qualitative data collection, such as focus group discussions, could enrich the understanding of consumer attitudes. Such methodological enhancements would offer a more comprehensive perspective on the effectiveness of co-branding strategies across different consumer segments.

Furthermore, future research could adopt a longitudinal design to observe changes in brand fit and consumer purchase intentions over time, providing a better understanding of the long-term effects of co-branding strategies. Comparing consumer responses to co-branding across different cultural backgrounds would also be a valuable direction, particularly in examining behavioral differences between Western and Eastern cultures. With the advancement of big data and artificial intelligence technologies, researchers could leverage these tools for more precise data analysis and consumer behavior prediction, such as analyzing real-time feedback from social media or using machine learning algorithms to forecast the most effective co-branding combinations. These improvements would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of co-branding strategies in diverse markets and cultural contexts.

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