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Shaping Agricultural Product Brand Images Driven by Visual Communication Design

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Abstract: Competition in the agricultural products market has shifted to brand competition, and brand image has become a core asset. From the perspective of visual communication design, this article explores the constituent dimensions, cultural logic, and strategic approaches to shaping agricultural product brand images by integrating regional culture, consumer culture, and brand narrative theory. The study argues that brand image building must be advanced through the coordinated efforts of four dimensions—visual identity, product packaging, IP characters, and communication experiences. By implementing a four-dimensional strategy of "symbolic distillation—systematic construction—narrative expression—scenario-based experience," it aims to achieve a value leap from product characteristics to visual symbols, from regional resources to brand essence, and from visual presentation to emotional resonance.

Keywords: Visual communication design; Agricultural product branding; Brand image building; Regional culture; Consumer culture

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1. Introduction

As the Rural Revitalization Strategy continues to advance and consumption patterns continue to upgrade, competition in China's agricultural products market is increasingly shifting from simple price competition to a multifaceted form of competition that encompasses quality, branding, distribution channels, and supply chain efficiency. Agricultural brand building has become a key driver for enhancing product value-added, increasing farmers' incomes, and promoting the transformation and upgrading of the agricultural industry. However, China's agricultural brand building currently faces prominent challenges, such as converging brand positioning, homogenized visual identities, and a lack of unique narratives; as a result, brand value has not been fully translated into market premiums and industrial competitiveness [1].

2. Dimensions and design elements of agricultural product brand identity

2.1. Dimensions of brand image

Agricultural product branding is a systematic endeavor involving the synergistic interaction of multiple dimensions and elements, which can be broken down into four core dimensions:

The visual identity layer forms the foundation of the brand image and includes the logo, standard colors, standard typeface, and supplementary graphics. Logo design is the cornerstone of a brand's visual identity; it is the most widely used and frequently appearing element in conveying a company's image. However, many agricultural product brands currently lack a logo. For example, the current packaging for Hengbei Early Crisp Pears features only centered text to convey information, without a corresponding brand logo design, resulting in low product recognition among consumers [2–3].

Product packaging is the most immediate aspect of a consumer's brand experience. In addition to protecting the product, well-designed packaging attracts consumer attention and serves as a promotional tool. Currently, agricultural product packaging generally suffers from simple designs and monotonous materials, with most products using corrugated cardboard boxes—a widely available option—that lack distinctive features in both material selection and structural design.

The IP character layer serves as a key vehicle for the personification of a brand's image. A successful IP character can intuitively convey its conceptual vision through a simple design and, through personification, imbue the IP with an inner soul, thereby establishing an emotional connection with consumers. Currently, IP design tailored to specialty agricultural products remains relatively rare; many agricultural product brand IPs suffer from issues such as poor recognizability, weak cultural characteristics, and a failure to meet emotional needs [4].

The communication and experience layer is a critical link in ensuring that a brand's image reaches consumers. In the internet age, the saying "good wine needs no bush" no longer applies to quality products; instead, brands must focus on both online and offline promotion and marketing. However, many agricultural product brands face issues such as a lack of online stores and inconsistent branding in physical retail spaces. For example, no product information for Hengbei Early-Ripening Pears can be found on platforms like Taobao and Tmall, and there is a lack of dedicated retail spaces for the product in physical stores.

2.2. Elements of visual communication design

Visual communication elements are fundamental tools for shaping a brand image, primarily including color, graphics, typography, spatial layout, and material design. Color is the most intuitive element: red represents passion, green represents nature, and blue represents trust. Agricultural product brands should select a primary color based on the product's attributes. Juices are best paired with vibrant, bright hues, while health supplements are best paired with soft, natural tones. Traditional agricultural products can incorporate colors reflective of local culture, with color combinations following the principle of "prominent primary color, unified secondary colors." Graphics serve as the visual focal point of packaging; they can feature representative fruit motifs or incorporate local folklore, landmarks, and patterns, with designs kept simple and clear. Typography must align with the brand image: ornate fonts emphasize high-end quality, while simple fonts highlight practicality and reliability; for younger consumers, fashionable and lively fonts are recommended. Spatial layout should highlight key elements and guide attention through the arrangement of design elements; thoughtful planning can enhance the shopping experience. In terms of materials and form,

consider innovative structures such as carry bags, zipper pouches, and boxed packaging. Align with green consumption principles by selecting recyclable or biodegradable materials, or incorporating visual design elements [5].

3. The cultural logic behind shaping the brand image of agricultural products

3.1. The design translation of regional culture

Agricultural products are highly regional and distinctive, embodying the unique agricultural resources and agricultural culture of rural areas. Regional cultural elements—including natural landscapes, historical contexts, folk crafts, and intangible cultural heritage—provide agricultural product brands with irreplicable, differentiating characteristics. The essence of brand image design lies in uncovering and distilling a region's unique industrial strengths, ecological attributes, and historical and cultural heritage, and then structurally integrating and creatively reinterpreting them.

Taking the Hengbei Early-Ripening Pear as an example, the Yancheng region boasts a rich natural landscape, including the ocean, wetlands, and forests. Among these, the wetlands were successfully inscribed on the "World Heritage List" in 2019; the Yellow Sea Forest Park is the largest man-made ecological forest park in East China; and Dafeng District—the pear-producing region—is home to the world's largest elk nature reserve. These regional characteristics attest to the area's green, ecological, and healthy environment. The packaging design fully incorporates the distinctive regional culture of the Early Crisp Pear's origin, blending elements such as wetlands, elk, forests, and pears. By utilizing the compositional elements of points, lines, and planes in an illustrative style, it creates a green, ecological, healthy, and poetic visual narrative [3].

3.2. Brand empowerment for the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage

As an integral part of rural culture, intangible cultural heritage embodies a rich history and folklore. Linking intangible cultural heritage with agricultural product branding not only helps preserve traditional ethnic culture but also enhances the visibility of agricultural product brands and fosters the development of distinctive agricultural products [6].

The development of the rattan weaving industry in Danyang Village, Disu Town, Du'an Yao Autonomous County, Guangxi, serves as a prime example of the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage. Danyang rattan weaving has evolved from everyday household items to a culturally distinctive ethnic industry and, ultimately, into an intangible cultural heritage brand. In 2020, the Du'an rattan and mangrove weaving craft was included in the eighth batch of the Autonomous Region's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Following its successful inclusion on the list, the craft has gradually been imbued with new cultural significance—from poverty alleviation to prosperity, and from industrial revitalization to cultural revitalization. The support of ethnic culture has provided fertile ground for the craft brand, not only expanding the reach of the craft industry but also promoting the innovative development of the brand [7].

3.3. Image alignment in consumer culture

As domestic consumption patterns and structures continue to evolve, people are no longer focusing solely on material consumption needs but are placing greater emphasis on cultural and spiritual consumption needs [4]. From the perspective of consumer culture, the visual identity of agricultural product brands exhibits three distinct characteristics:

The trend toward "symbolic consumption" emphasizes a shift from the consumption of material goods to the consumption of beauty. As products increasingly take on an aesthetic character, agricultural product brands must meet consumers' growing aesthetic demands, with design styles evolving toward diversification—such as flat design and illustrative styles. The "emotionalization" of consumption emphasizes a shift from functional perception to cultural perception; consumers are increasingly drawn to the cultural value of products, and brand IP images must embody cultural elements such as regional characteristics, humanistic history, and social value. The "experientialization" of consumption emphasizes a shift from visual differentiation to contextual experiences; the experience economy prioritizes open interaction and communication with consumers, and brands must focus on creating experiential scenarios and atmospheres that encourage consumer participation and interaction.

4. Strategic approaches and case studies in shaping the brand image of agricultural products

4.1. Symbolic distillation: From product characteristics to visual symbols

The symbolic value of consumption is an intangible, imagery-based value created on the foundation of material form. IP character design is guided by the symbolic value of consumption, internalizing the characteristics of agricultural products at every stage of the supply chain to ultimately form a brand IP symbol that is conveyed to consumers. The exploration of agricultural products' characteristics is primarily reflected in three aspects: first, their physical form—including color, shape, and function—which creates symbolic distinctions; second, the spatial environment—including the environments in which they are grown, transported, and consumed—where different scenarios generate different consumer values; and third, brand value, which refers to consumers' overall impressions and experiences of the products, services, and functions.

In the semiotic theory of structural linguistics, the sign system comprises two levels: denotation and connotation. As a symbol of visual consumption, the design of an IP visual identity extracts a brand's characteristics, connotations, metaphors, or spirit into visible symbolic elements or emblematic images through the level of connotative meaning, and translates and expresses them through simplified visual elements—such as graphics, characters, and colors—at the level of denotative manifestation. Taking the visual identity design for the Wens Tianlu brand IP as an example, the design selected colors and graphics associated with the "native black-bone chicken" product symbol. The color scheme features white and black as the primary tones, with blue as an accent color—blue conveys purity and safety. The graphic design consists of circles and curved lines, with a head-to-body ratio of 1:1 to enhance its cuteness and make it appear more approachable [4].

4.2. Systematic development: From individual design to a cohesive brand identity

Building a brand image for agricultural products requires establishing a systematic design framework that integrates elements such as logos, packaging, IP characters, and online presence into a cohesive design, maintaining visual consistency and creating a unified brand identity system.

The visual identity design for the Hengbei Early Crisp Pear brand serves as a model of systematic design. The logo incorporates the initials "HB" from the pinyin of "Hengbei," blending the imagery of pear trees and pears with the letters to resemble both a bountiful pear tree and a fresh, crisp pear. A refreshing

green was chosen to symbolize nature and health, while the Chinese name "Hengcui" combines the character "Heng" (from the place of origin) with "cui" (meaning "crisp"). The packaging design presents regional elements—such as wetlands, elk, forests, and pears—through illustrations. Set against a white background, shades of green (both analogous and adjacent) represent the forest and pear orchards, while blues of varying brightness depict the sky and wetlands. Yellow pears serve as accents throughout the design, which includes various formats such as single-fruit packaging, top-and-bottom lids, carry boxes, and deluxe carry boxes. The online brand identity design, tailored for platforms such as Weidian, Taobao stores, and WeChat Official Accounts, employs a flat interface structure consistent with the brand's overall aesthetic. For the IP character design, a healthy, lively, and adorable cartoon character was created based on a pear, complemented by a rich collection of emoji designs to capture the attention of a broad base of young consumers [3]. Through the systematic design described above, Hengbei Early-Ripening Pears has established a comprehensive brand visual identity system.

4.3. Narrative expression: From visual presentation to storytelling

Brand storytelling establishes a logical relationship that shapes brand perception through brand culture, brand image, and brand communication. To create a brand narrative, it is necessary to build three key components: comprehensive narrative content, IP visual identity, and narrative media. Ultimately, this enables the brand's IP image to be internalized through narrative strategies that tap into the psychology of storytelling [8].

Extracting the core narrative values is the starting point for brand storytelling. A brand story should be unique, evoke emotional resonance, and convey the brand's values. Agricultural product brands can draw their narrative threads from regional contexts and industry practices, such as an industrial chain narrative centered on "ecological farming—traditional methods—modern quality control," or a regional narrative centered on "local land and water—local craftsmanship—local flavors" [1].

Narrative visual expression uses visual elements such as graphics, images, colors, and fonts to intuitively convey the essence of a brand's story. IP character design should adhere to principles such as regional identity, inclusivity, commercial viability, promotional value, and scalability. Taking "Xiguan Xiangxiang" as an example, the selection of "Miss Xiguan" as a cultural element stems precisely from its strong regional identity, broad inclusivity, unique commercial attributes, and significant scalability. The character's design features a cute, cartoonish expression, with closed eyes conveying a refined, delicate, and innocent personality. Narrative-driven communication is a key channel for brand storytelling. It unfolds through interactive storytelling, both online—including short videos, emojis, live streams, Xiaohongshu, and WeChat official accounts—and offline—such as product packaging, cultural and creative merchandise, flagship stores, product launches, harvest festivals, educational tours, and fruit-picking festivals. The internalization of narrative psychology represents the highest level of brand storytelling. Centered on the consumer and rooted in cognitive understanding, this process fosters emotional recognition and a positive attitude toward the brand. The core and ultimate goal of brand storytelling is emotional resonance. Xiguan Xiangxiang integrates its brand story with the life experiences and values of young women, establishing a unique and meaningful connection between the brand and consumers.

4.4. Immersive experiences: From visual differences to emotional connections

In consumer culture, IP visual identities embody broad contemporary characteristics and emotional qualities;

only by endowing them with an emotional connection strong enough to attract consumers can they evoke a sense of resonance. Presenting and promoting IP visual identities within specific contexts effectively enhances consumers' psychological satisfaction and serves as a key pathway to delivering a positive consumer experience.

The visual identity design for the Wens Tianlu brand IP revolves around the brand slogan "Seven Black Standards for Good Nutrition, Replenish Vitality Every Week," focusing on the lifestyle characteristics of its target consumer groups and exploring their values and lifestyles. The IP identity uses the "native black chicken" as its product symbol, from which five characters—the "Flavor Guardians Adventure Squad"—are derived. These correspond to the five "Flavor Guardians" in the supply chain: farmers, procurement officers, quality inspectors, researchers, and transporters, presenting the brand's "trustworthy and down-to-earth" image to consumers in a vivid and engaging way. In terms of content design, the concept of "Guardians" is central, integrating occupational characteristics with the product's "vitality-boosting" attributes into storytelling and character development. For scenario-based applications, online efforts center on themes such as dining, work, exercise, rest, and entertainment to develop emoji packs, build a user-facing app guided by the IP, and implement augmented reality designs; offline, a series of merchandise—including pillows, blind boxes, lunch boxes, and phone cases—is developed to provide consumers with real-world experiences [4].

In summary, the Four-Dimensional Strategy forms a comprehensive pathway: symbolic distillation transforms product characteristics into visual symbols; systematic construction establishes a unified brand identity system; narrative expression elevates the concept from visuals to storytelling; and contextualized experiences bridge the gap from visual differentiation to emotional connection. Hengbei Early-Ripening Pears, Wenshi Tianlu, and Xiguan Xiangxiang have each validated the effectiveness and feasibility of this strategic framework from three distinct perspectives: the translation of regional culture, adaptation to consumer culture, and narrative-driven strategies.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of visual communication design, this paper explores the constituent dimensions, cultural logic, and strategic approaches to shaping the brand image of agricultural products. Brand image encompasses four dimensions: visual identity, product packaging, IP characters, and communication experience; visual elements such as color, graphics, and typography serve as the fundamental tools for brand building. In terms of cultural logic, the process must adhere to the principles of regional cultural translation, the revitalization and empowerment of intangible cultural heritage, and adaptation to consumer culture. The strategic approach can be summarized as "symbolic distillation—systematic construction—narrative expression—scenario-based experience," and three case studies—Hengbei Early Crisp Pears, Wenshi Tianlu, and Xiguan Xiangxiang—validate its effectiveness. In the future, new scenarios such as digital technology, the metaverse, artificial intelligence, and social media will bring both greater challenges and opportunities.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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