

Research on the Youth-Oriented Marketing Strategy of Tea Drink Brands of Shenzhen M Catering Management Co., Ltd

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Abstract: This paper takes Shenzhen M Catering Management Co., Ltd. as the research object, analyzing its existing problems and core cruxes in the process of brand marketing youthification. Based on the brand life cycle theory and consumer behavior theory, this paper proposes a marketing youthification upgrade path centered on health visualization, narrative scenario, price gradient, and content co-creation, and points out that brand youthification is not a one-time image refresh, but a dynamic process of continuously calibrating the resonance frequency between brand value and the self-concept of the youth group. The research conclusion provides operable strategic references for the development of tea beverage brands in stock competition.

Keywords: New-style tea drinks; Youth-oriented brand marketing; Consumer demands; Optimization of marketing strategies

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1. Introduction

The evolution of the new-style tea beverage industry may be regarded as a form of gustatory revolution, having rapidly progressed from the early stage of powdered tea preparation to the contemporary phase of “new tea beverages,” which are freshly produced using premium ingredients such as fresh tea leaves, fresh milk, and fruits. Once a niche segment, this industry has become an integral emotional companion in the daily lives of young consumers^[1]. By 2024, the market size of China’s new-style tea beverage industry had reached 354.72 billion yuan, reflecting not only substantial growth but also the underlying shift toward intensified stock competition as the industry transitions from rapid expansion to more refined and efficiency-driven operations. Within this context, youth-oriented marketing strategies employed by tea beverage brands function not merely as a mechanism for attracting consumer traffic, but also as a critical avenue for achieving differentiation and sustaining long-term growth^[2].

2. Company overview and marketing status

As the parent company of XC, a leading brand in the new-style tea beverage industry, Shenzhen M Catering Management Co., Ltd. has, since its establishment in 2012, positioned itself around the concept of “Inspired Tea.” By transcending the category boundaries of traditional tea beverages, the company successfully entered the market with innovative offerings such as cheese milk tea, thereby establishing itself as both an industry pioneer and a benchmark within the new-style tea beverage sector. Following more than a decade of development, the company has built an extensive store network spanning major first- and second-tier cities nationwide, while progressively expanding into third-tier and lower-tier markets. Concurrently, it has developed a standardized operational system encompassing four core functions, product research and development, brand marketing, supply chain management, and store operations, which operate in a mutually reinforcing manner.

In terms of digitalization, the company has established a proprietary ecosystem comprising a mini-program, a membership system, and a data platform, thereby enabling digital empowerment across user insights, marketing initiatives, and store operations. This integrated digital infrastructure has significantly enhanced both operational efficiency and customer experience, positioning the company as a representative example of digital transformation within the industry.

At present, Shenzhen M Company’s brand marketing strategy is structured around four key dimensions: product, channel, promotion, and experience, forming a comprehensive framework aligned with its mid-to-high-end market positioning. From a product perspective, the company consistently treats innovation as its core competitive advantage, continuously introducing popular offerings ranging from seasonal fruit teas to specialty tea series. Simultaneously, it has increasingly incorporated health-oriented concepts by optimizing raw materials and production processes, striving to achieve a balance between taste and health considerations.

Regarding channels and customer experience, the company adopts an integrated online-to-offline (O2O) model. Offline stores emphasize spatial design, creating a “third space” that integrates leisure, social interaction, and experiential consumption. Online, the company leverages its mini-program to facilitate seamless ordering and delivery services, thereby enhancing consumer convenience. In terms of promotion, the company strategically focuses on social media platforms frequented by younger demographics, such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok, expanding brand influence through key opinion leader (KOL) collaborations, topical marketing, and cross-industry partnerships. Notably, cross-industry collaborations have emerged as a critical mechanism for brand rejuvenation, with partnerships involving trendy intellectual properties (IPs) and cultural-creative brands consistently generating significant market engagement.

3. Demand research on young customers

This survey targets the core consumer group of new-style tea beverage consumers aged 18–30 in the Guangdong region, with a total of 322 questionnaires distributed. The sample encompasses respondents from first- and second-tier cities as well as third-tier cities, and includes diverse occupational categories such as students, entry-level employees, and young professionals. As such, the data provide an objective reflection of the consumption characteristics and preferences of young tea beverage consumers.

The findings indicate that the consumption demands of young customers have evolved from a singular focus on taste toward a multidimensional framework encompassing health, individuality, social interaction, and emotional value. Among these factors, health attributes have emerged as a primary consideration. Specifically, 71.12% of respondents identified zero sugar, low fat, and fresh ingredients as their principal criteria when

selecting tea beverage brands. This trend reflects a growing preference for “burden-free enjoyment,” alongside heightened expectations regarding ingredient transparency and nutritional balance. Consequently, health considerations have shifted from being a supplementary attribute to an essential requirement in tea consumption.

In addition, personalized experiences and social attributes have become significant drivers of consumption behavior. Approximately 56.53% of respondents reported that brand collaboration activities increase both their purchase frequency and brand favorability. Younger consumers increasingly seek to express their identity and aesthetic preferences through personalized consumption choices. At the same time, tea beverages have evolved into a form of “social currency” among this demographic. More than 50% of respondents indicated that they are influenced to try new products through social media recommendations, whereas only 14.6% actively share their own consumption experiences. This disparity suggests that there remains substantial potential for brands to enhance experiential scenarios and encourage organic user-generated content.

Furthermore, cost-effectiveness and brand reputation have also emerged as important determinants of consumer choice. Notable differences in price sensitivity are observed across income groups. Students and entry-level employees tend to favor products with higher cost-effectiveness, whereas middle- and high-income consumers place greater emphasis on brand experience and emotional value. Overall, the consumption behavior of young tea beverage consumers reflects a comprehensive decision-making process that integrates product attributes, brand value, and experiential factors, thereby imposing more sophisticated and multidimensional requirements on brands seeking to cultivate a youthful market image.

4. Problems in the marketing strategy of Shenzhen M Company’s tea beverage brand

4.1. The brand’s visual system is conservative, with insufficient integration of youthful elements

Although Shenzhen M Company adopts a minimalist and modern visual identity, it exhibits notable limitations in aligning with the aesthetic preferences of younger consumer segments, thereby failing to establish a distinctive brand memory anchor through visual design. In terms of color application, the brand predominantly employs white and natural wood tones, which convey a sense of simplicity and refinement; however, this palette lacks the bright, vibrant, and high-saturation accent colors favored by younger audiences, making it difficult to evoke strong emotional resonance. Moreover, the visual presentation across different marketing contexts demonstrates limited variability, constraining the brand’s ability to communicate diverse emotional expressions.

With regard to graphic elements and IP development, the brand’s visual identity and supporting graphic design tend to emphasize rationality and restraint, with insufficient attention to storytelling and interactivity. As a result, the brand has not successfully cultivated a distinctive and personalized IP image, leading to a relatively weak emotional connection with young consumers ^[3]. At the same time, the adaptability of the brand’s visual system within digital environments remains inadequate. Dynamic visual components, such as animations and augmented reality (AR) filters, have not been fully explored or implemented. Although a degree of consistency exists across offline stores, product packaging, and online platforms, the lack of differentiated and creative visual expression reduces the brand’s ability to capture attention rapidly in an increasingly information-saturated market environment.

4.2. The lack of innovation in product development makes it difficult to meet diverse consumer demands

Continuous product innovation constitutes a critical foundation for sustaining competitiveness in the new-style tea beverage industry. However, Shenzhen M Company's new product development has increasingly fallen into the predicament of "incremental" or "micro-innovation," making it difficult to satisfy the increasingly diversified consumption demands of younger consumers. In terms of research and development direction, there is a pronounced reliance on the existing product framework, with most new offerings limited to minor modifications of established flavors or simple substitutions of ingredients. Such an approach lacks breakthrough product concepts and fails to create novel consumption scenarios, thereby diminishing consumers' sense of novelty and constraining the formation of differentiated competitive advantages.

Moreover, the company demonstrates insufficient investment in technological innovation and health-oriented research and development. Current new product development remains largely confined to formula adjustments, with limited exploration of new raw materials or advancements in production processes ^[4]. Consequently, the potential value of natural ingredients and functional components has not been fully realized. The development of a health-oriented product portfolio also lacks systematic planning. Although certain low-sugar and low-fat options have been introduced, the overall product range remains incomplete, and product labeling lacks clarity, making it difficult to effectively address the growing demand among young consumers for healthier alternatives.

In addition, the product development process lacks an effective mechanism for consumer participation. Innovation activities are predominantly driven by internal teams, with insufficient engagement and interaction with target consumer groups. This limits the company's ability to accurately capture evolving market trends and consumer preferences, resulting in a misalignment between certain new product launches and consumer expectations.

4.3. The price positioning is on the high end, with insufficient accessibility and market coverage

Shenzhen M Company's pricing strategy has consistently targeted the mid-to-high-end market segment, thereby supporting its brand positioning and maintaining stable profit margins. However, this approach has also created a relatively high consumption threshold, limiting its appeal among price-sensitive young consumers and constraining further expansion of market share. In terms of pricing structure, the unit prices of its products are generally higher than those of comparable competitors within the industry, while the overall price gradient lacks rational differentiation. The limited availability of lower-priced options makes it difficult to satisfy the routine consumption needs of lower-income groups, such as students and entry-level employees, ultimately resulting in reduced purchase frequency and weaker customer retention within these segments.

Furthermore, the company's pricing promotion strategy lacks both flexibility and consistency. Promotional activities are predominantly concentrated around holidays and new product launches, with relatively infrequent and less impactful daily promotional efforts. In addition, promotional methods remain relatively homogeneous, relying primarily on direct price discounts, while lacking diversified approaches such as membership-exclusive benefits, bundled offerings, student discounts, and time-based pricing strategies. At the same time, the communication and dissemination of promotional campaigns are insufficiently effective, with certain preferential policies failing to reach target consumer groups. This results in a misalignment between consumer price perception and the brand's intended value proposition, leading some consumers to perceive that product

pricing does not fully correspond to the overall experiential value offered.

Moreover, the content of marketing communications lacks sufficient innovation, emotional resonance, and interactivity. This limits the brand's ability to engage young consumers effectively, thereby reducing the impact of promotional activities and weakening the overall attractiveness of the brand in a highly competitive market environment.

4.4. Lack of novelty in the dissemination of content, insufficient emotional resonance and interactivity

Brand communication functions as a critical bridge connecting enterprises with young consumers. However, Shenzhen M Company's communication strategy remains predominantly focused on conveying product functions and disseminating promotional information, lacking creativity and engagement, and thereby making it difficult to establish a deeper emotional connection with younger audiences. In terms of content development, there is an excessive emphasis on functional attributes such as product flavors and raw materials, accompanied by insufficient exploration and communication of the brand's cultural connotations and core values. As a result, the brand fails to produce content that is narrative-driven and compelling, limiting its ability to evoke emotional resonance among young consumers and hindering the alignment between brand value and consumers' self-identity.

Furthermore, the adaptability of content formats and communication channels remains inadequate. Brand communication continues to rely heavily on traditional graphic and text-based formats, with limited utilization of content forms favored by younger demographics, such as short videos, live streaming, and interactive digital experiences^[5]. The visual presentation and creative execution of such content lack distinctiveness, reducing the likelihood of achieving viral dissemination on social media platforms. At the same time, communication strategies are largely characterized by one-way information transmission, with insufficient development of interactive mechanisms. The brand has yet to effectively implement participatory initiatives, such as topic-based challenges or user co-creation activities, and often fails to respond promptly to consumer feedback. This absence of bidirectional "brand-consumer" interaction constrains user engagement and makes it difficult to stimulate organic sharing and secondary dissemination, thereby significantly diminishing the overall effectiveness of brand communication.

5. Formulation of a youth-oriented marketing strategy for the tea beverage brand of Shenzhen M Company

5.1. Revitalize the brand's visual system, incorporating youthful and creative elements

To address the issue of a relatively conservative brand visual identity, it is necessary to undertake a comprehensive optimization of the visual system while preserving the core elements of brand recognition. By incorporating more youthful and creative design elements, the brand can establish a visual identity that is both distinctive and communicatively effective. In terms of color strategy, the existing palette should be enhanced through the introduction of high-saturation auxiliary colors, such as bright yellow, fresh green, and vibrant orange, alongside the primary tones. These colors can be flexibly applied across different product lines and marketing contexts, thereby enriching the visual hierarchy while aligning more closely with the aesthetic preferences of younger consumer groups and conveying a wider range of brand emotions.

In addition, the development of a personalized brand IP and creative graphic system is essential. By

integrating elements of tea culture with contemporary fashion trends, the brand can design an IP image that embodies narrative depth and interactivity, supported by clearly defined personality traits. This IP should be systematically applied across product packaging, retail space design, and marketing campaigns, thereby strengthening the emotional connection between the brand and its consumers. At the same time, a series of auxiliary graphic elements incorporating popular cultural symbols and everyday lifestyle scenarios familiar to young audiences should be developed to enhance both the appeal and adaptability of the visual system.

Furthermore, the brand should expand its digital visual capabilities by developing dynamic design elements, including proprietary AR filters and animated short-form content. Such initiatives would enable cohesive visual integration and differentiated expression across offline stores, product packaging, and online platforms. Through these measures, the brand's visual identity can achieve greater vitality and relevance within digital environments, thereby enhancing its overall attractiveness and competitiveness among younger consumers.

5.2. Strengthen product research and development innovation, and precisely meet the needs of young consumers

Positioning product research and development innovation as the central driver of marketing youthfulness, Shenzhen M Company should move beyond the constraints of “micro-innovation” and establish a product system that systematically addresses the needs of young consumers across three key dimensions: health orientation, personalization, and scenario-based consumption as follows:

- (1) With regard to health-oriented innovation, health concepts should be embedded throughout the entire product development process. This includes the systematic development of product lines characterized by low sugar, low fat, and zero additives. The company may adopt natural sugar substitutes such as erythritol and steviol glycosides, introduce plant-based milk alternatives including oat milk and almond milk, and further explore the application of functional ingredients such as acai berries and ginger. In addition, transparent labeling of sugar content, caloric value, and raw material composition should be implemented for each product, thereby enhancing the visibility of health attributes and meeting the growing demand among young consumers for healthier beverage options;
- (2) Efforts should be directed toward advancing personalized and scenario-based product innovation. The introduction of customized tea beverage services would enable consumers to independently select variables such as sugar level, ice level, and ingredient combinations, and even participate in flavor co-creation, thereby strengthening their sense of engagement and brand affiliation. At the same time, the company should develop seasonal limited editions, holiday-specific offerings, and scenario-adapted products based on seasonal trends, festive occasions, and the lifestyle patterns of young consumers. Examples include breakfast-oriented tea beverages, functional drinks designed for late-night consumption, and portable products suitable for outdoor activities such as camping. Such offerings can enhance product scarcity and social value, thereby stimulating consumer purchase intentions;
- (3) The establishment of a consumer-participatory research and development mechanism is essential. By leveraging social media platforms and membership systems to collect consumer feedback, and by organizing activities such as new product tastings and preference voting, the company can transform consumers into active contributors to the innovation process. This approach would enable more accurate identification of evolving market demands while enhancing consumer engagement and brand loyalty.

5.3. Optimize the price gradient strategy to enhance brand accessibility and market coverage

On the basis of maintaining the brand's mid-to-high-end positioning, it is necessary to optimize the existing pricing system by establishing a multi-tiered and flexible pricing strategy, thereby reducing consumption barriers, enhancing brand accessibility, and achieving broader coverage across young consumer segments with varying income levels. A tiered pricing structure should be developed through the extension of the product portfolio, including the introduction of more affordable product lines. In particular, cost-effective items priced within the 15–20 RMB range can be introduced, along with economical offerings characterized by smaller portions and simplified packaging, in order to meet the routine consumption needs of price-sensitive groups such as students and entry-level employees. At the same time, the core mid-to-high-end product series should be retained to serve consumers who prioritize quality and experiential value, thereby achieving a dual strategic objective of reinforcing premium brand positioning while expanding market reach through accessible pricing.

Furthermore, it is essential to develop a normalized and diversified promotional pricing strategy. The frequency and consistency of daily promotional activities should be increased, while a wider range of promotional mechanisms, such as membership discounts, points redemption schemes, buy-one-get-one-free offers, and bundled packages, should be introduced. Targeted discount programs, including student-exclusive pricing and time-based “afternoon tea” promotions for working professionals, can further enhance segmentation effectiveness. In addition, the communication and dissemination of promotional activities should be strengthened through multi-channel outreach, including social media platforms, in-store promotional materials, and membership communities, ensuring timely and effective delivery of promotional information to target consumers.

Moreover, the perceived value of products should be enhanced through improvements in service quality, optimization of store environments, and the creation of distinctive consumption scenarios. These measures can strengthen consumers' perception of overall value, increase price acceptance, and ultimately achieve a simultaneous enhancement of both cost-effectiveness perception and experiential value.

5.4. Enrich brand communication content and build an interactive emotional communication system

It is necessary to move beyond a singular, information-oriented communication approach and establish a brand communication system centered on emotional resonance and characterized by interactive co-creation. Such a transformation would enable brand communication to align more closely with the discourse practices and social behaviors of younger consumer groups. Accordingly, the cultural essence of the brand should be further explored, and communication content should be structured in a narrative-driven format that transcends the product level itself. By focusing on themes such as the brand's founding philosophy, innovation in tea culture, and contemporary youth lifestyles, the brand can develop diverse content forms including short-form videos with narrative depth, graphic storytelling, and brand documentaries. This approach facilitates the integration of brand values with the lifestyle attitudes and value orientations of young consumers, thereby fostering emotional resonance and positioning the brand as a symbolic representation of youth-oriented lifestyles.

In addition, communication formats and channels should be further diversified, with strategic emphasis placed on social media platforms widely used by younger audiences, such as TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo. The production of interactive and visually engaging content should be strengthened, particularly in formats such as short videos, live streaming, and gamified participation. Content that is highly shareable, visually appealing, and easily replicable, such as thematic challenges like “Unlocking Hidden Tea Consumption Methods” and

“My Exclusive Tea Combination” can effectively stimulate user engagement and encourage spontaneous dissemination. At the same time, deeper collaboration with trendy IPs, animation franchises, cultural and creative brands, and key opinion leaders (KOLs) should be strengthened. Through co-branded content and limited-edition product launches, the brand can leverage the traffic and fan bases of partner entities to achieve broader reach and enhanced visibility within youth subcultures.

Furthermore, it is essential to establish a bidirectional interaction mechanism between the brand and consumers. User co-creation initiatives, such as tea packaging design competitions and flavor innovation proposals, should be actively implemented to enable consumers to participate in content creation and enhance their sense of brand ownership. Simultaneously, timely responses to consumer comments, feedback, and suggestions should be ensured through regular engagement on social media platforms and membership communities, thereby cultivating a more personable and approachable brand image. Ultimately, these measures can form a closed-loop system of “brand creation–user participation–spontaneous dissemination–brand optimization,” thereby improving both the efficiency and effectiveness of brand communication.

6. Conclusion

The needs of young consumer groups are characterized by continuous dynamism and ongoing transformation. The trends toward health orientation and personalization are expected to further intensify, while social and emotional needs will continue to evolve in increasingly diversified forms. This development requires the industry to establish a normalized consumer insight and research mechanism, enabling timely identification of market changes and adaptive adjustment of marketing strategies. At the same time, in the process of youth-oriented transformation, enterprises must adhere to core brand values and maintain strict product quality standards, thereby avoiding homogenized competition driven solely by trend-following behavior. Youthfulness should be positioned as a long-term strategic driver for sustainable brand development rather than a short-term marketing tactic. Overall, the future development of youth-oriented tea beverage brands is likely to move toward greater refinement and emotional sensitivity. Only by centering on consumer needs, continuously advancing innovation, and consistently aligning brand positioning with the evolving preferences of young consumer groups can enterprises maintain vitality in an increasingly competitive market and achieve long-term, sustainable growth.

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