The Influence of Maternity Wear Brand Image Innovation Elements on Consumer Behavior: A Grounded Theory Study

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ABSTRACT

This grounded theory study investigates the influence of maternity wear brand image innovation elements on consumer behavior, addressing two main research questions: (1) How to innovate the brand image of maternity wear? and (2) What is the relationship between brand image innovation and consumer behavior in maternity wear? Maternity wear brands play a critical role in meeting the diverse needs of expectant mothers, yet in China, they often lack distinct brand identities and fail to cater to the varied preferences of pregnant women. Through a comprehensive research design, including literature review, grounded theory analysis, and empirical testing via questionnaire surveys, this study identifies six dimensions of brand image innovation in maternity wear: Product, Identity, Corporate, Marketing, Service, and Store image innovation, along with 21 specific indicators such as style and fabric innovation. The findings reveal a significant impact of each dimension of brand image innovation on consumer behavior. Theoretical and managerial implications highlight the study's contribution in filling a research gap, providing a new framework for brand image research in maternity wear, and offering targeted recommendations for brand innovation efforts. This research expands understanding of the intricate relationship between consumer behavior and brand image, providing theoretical guidance for maternity wear companies to enhance brand appeal, meet diverse consumer needs, and ultimately improve sales and loyalty.

Keywords: Maternity wear brands; Brand image innovation; Consumer behavior; Grounded theory.

THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The maternity wear industry in China confronts a critical challenge in establishing distinctive brand identities that resonate with the diverse preferences and needs of expectant mothers. Despite the industry's pivotal role in providing essential functional and emotional support during pregnancy, there persists a notable homogeneity in brand imagery and style offerings. This raises concerns regarding the industry's ability to effectively innovate its brand image to engender consumer engagement and drive purchasing behavior. Furthermore, the intricate relationship between brand image innovation and subsequent consumer behavior within the maternity wear sector remains inadequately explored. This research aims to contribute actionable insights to aid maternity wear companies in enhancing brand differentiation, fostering consumer satisfaction, and fostering sustainable growth in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

INTRODUCTION

Brand image constitutes a pivotal element within the realm of brand equity, laying the groundwork for brand triumph(Ghaith AI-Abdallah, 2024; Keller, 1993; Lyu Liang, Sazrinee Binti Zainal Abidin & Mohd Faiz Bin Yahaya, 2024).Brand image innovation refers to the innovation of the connotations and extensions contained in the brand image, which involves restructuring the various constituent elements of the brand image. (Farai Chigora, 2024; Lyu Liang, Sazrinee Binti Zainal Abidin & Mohd Faiz Bin Yahaya, 2024)；Brand image innovation is also the most direct impact on consumers in brand innovation (Wei Fuxiang, 2001). Maternity wear brand image innovation in this paper refers to the reorganization, innovation, or expansion of the

constituent elements of maternity clothing brand image. Consumer behaviour is the purchase decision behaviour articulated by the consumer after gaining insight into various information in the decision-making process (Nyarkoik, 2015). Brand image innovation stimulates consumer behaviour (Cheng Zhen, 2024) So what is the impact of maternity clothing brand image innovation on consumer behaviour? How should the brand image of maternity clothing be innovated? These questions have attracted the attention of both academics and enterprises, and are worth exploring further.

This study firstly extracts the constituent elements of pregnant women's clothing brand image innovation based on literature analysis and case study analysis based on the grounded theory, then explores the relationship between each constituent element and consumer behaviour, and conducts empirical test through questionnaire survey method, and finally puts forward targeted suggestions from the perspective of how to innovate the clothing brand image based on the results of data analysis.

METHOD

Elements of brand image innovation for maternity wear

The innovation activities of an enterprise comprise five areas: development of new products, adoption of new technologies, opening up of new markets, control of new sources of supply of raw materials, and implementation of new systems, with a strong emphasis on innovation and restructuring. (Zhang Ruilin & Li Lin, 2015). Clothing brand image is the comprehensive perception and attitude of consumers towards brand-related content (Du Qinying & Chen Lihong, 2019). Clothing brand image innovation is a variety of innovative activities carried out by enterprises around the clothing brand image, aiming to improve consumer awareness and feelings about the brand image. This part firstly makes a rooted analysis of the relevant literature on brand image innovation of pregnant women's clothing, derives the main category and sub-category of brand image innovation of pregnant women's clothing, and then combines with the case study of clothing brand image innovation activities to distill the constituent elements of brand image innovation of pregnant women's clothing.

Grounded theory analysis of the elements of brand image innovation in maternity wear

A total of 105 related materials were collected in this study, which were obtained from: 1) academic papers and book materials related to brand image innovation of maternity clothing; 2) related research reports of maternity clothing industry; 3) interview records of related scholars; 4) interview reports of related websites and news media. The analysis software Nvivo11.0 was used to conduct open coding, spindle coding and selective coding on the 35 pieces of literature materials that were repeatedly screened: firstly, the open coding initially obtained 188 labels and 21 concepts, such as service attitude and design concepts; secondly, from the perspective of consumer perception and brand image shaping, the concepts obtained by open coding were related to each other, and a look-over theatre among each other was established and through the principal axis coding and selective coding, to determine 6 main categories (denoted by Ax) and 21 sub-categories (denoted by ax), as shown in Table 1: Finally, saturation test was done with 10 literatures, and no new conceptual categories were found, which proved that the relational model reached theoretical saturation.

Table 1 Hierarchy of relevant factors derived from Nvivo 11.0 analyses

Principal category	Product image innovation (A1）	Corporate image Innovation (A3)	Service Image Innovation (A5)	Identify Image Innovation (A2)	Marketing Image Innovation (A4)	Store Image Innovation (A6)
subcategory	Style Innovation a1	Corporate culture innovation a10	Employee innovation a16	Packaging Innovation a6	Advertising Innovation a13	Window display innovation a19

Functional Innovation a2	Management innovation a11	Personalized service innovation a17	Logo Innovation a7	Marketing innovation a14	Store atmosphere innovation a20
Fabric Innovation a3	Technological innovation a12	Service concept innovation a18	Brand positioning innovation a8	Campaign Innovation a15	Store design innovation a21
Process Innovation a4			Clothing style innovation a9		
Design concept innovation a5					

Composition of brand image innovation elements in maternity wear

To further identify the above-mentioned elements of maternity clothing brand image innovation from practice, this paper further analyses the cases of maternity wear brand image innovation, and the results of the analysis are shown in Table 2. Using grounded Theory to analyse the results of the literature and cases, this paper extracts the components of image innovation of maternity wear, which consists of 6 dimensions and 21 indicators. The dimensions include product image innovation, marketing image innovation, service image innovation, product image innovation, corporate image innovation, and shop image innovation; product image innovation includes the improvement or redesign of maternity wear production process, style, fabric, function, and design concepts; recognition image innovation is the most intuitive manifestation of brand innovation for maternity, including the innovation of packaging, logos, brand positioning, and clothing styles; corporate image Innovation from the corporate culture, management style, technology and other aspects of innovation; marketing image innovation is the innovation of brand promotion, including marketing methods, promotional activities, advertising and other innovations; service image innovation is from the consumer point of view on the service concept, personalised service, staff image innovation; shop image innovation, including shop design, window display, the atmosphere of the shop's innovation.

Tab. 2 Case analysis of fashion brand image innovation

Dimension	Norm	Case
Brand Image Innovation	Style innovation	Zara launches Join Life line with simple, wearable styles
	Function innovation	Uniqlo Launches Heated Underwear Feature to Provide Warmth to Consumers
	Fabric innovation	Issey Miyake's Pleated Collection
	Technological innovations	Nike Introduces Flyknit Knitting Process, Producing Less Waste
	Design Concept innovation	Pinko creates a capsule collection based on the concept of sustainability.

Identity Image Innovation	Packaging innovation Labor innovation Brand Positioning Innovation Fashion Style innovation	Pangaia comes in biodegradable TIPA packaging. LI NING designed a simple and easily recognisable brand logo. Peace birds positioning the brand as youth, synonymous with "Chinese youth". GUOPEI Launches Haute Couture Clothing That Preserves Traditional Chinese Culture and Meets the Aesthetics of the Era
Corporate Identity Innovation	Corporate Culture Innovation Management Innovations Technological Innovation	Adidas joins Play for the Oceans to innovate corporate environmental culture LI NING Launched a new operation called "Closed Loop Retail Operations". Lingerie company develops laser processing technology for the apparel industry
Marketing Image Innovation	Advertising Innovation Marketing Innovation Promotion Innovation	Benetton keeps gaining attention with controversial adverts. ANTA Pioneered the marketing method of "sports stars + CCTV" in China. Adidas hosts running-themed event
Service Image Innovation	Employee Innovation Personalised Service Innovation Service concept Innovation	LINING Training for staff to show a good service outlook H&M launches garment repair, custom embroidery and clothes washing services Everlane is committed to transparency and simplicity. They provide transparent information about manufacturers, materials, and costs, and are committed to reducing their impact on the environment.
Shop Image Innovation	Visual Display Innovation Store Atmosphere Innovation Shop design Innovation	HERMES give shop windows a special theme and let them tell a story. Anthropologie's retail shops are designed with an artistic vibe and cultural flair. They often host art exhibitions, workshops and social events, providing customers with the opportunity to interact with the brand. Gentle Monster's Sunglass shop design is often filled with artistic atmosphere and creative elements, providing customers with a unique visual experience.

An investigation into the relationship between brand image innovation and consumer behaviour in maternity wear

To further explore the relationship between maternity clothing brand image innovation and consumer behaviour, the literature on the correlation between the dimensions of maternity clothing brand image innovation and consumer behaviour was analysed. (Jalal Hanaysha, Haim Hilman, 2014) A belief that the higher the degree of product image innovation, the more positive consumers' attitudes towards the product. A product image innovation that is recognised by consumers is considered to be a valuable innovation.（(Tannady et al., 2022). The brand image created by the company if it is in accordance with consumer expectations, will attract customer interest, affecting purchase decisions (Aaker, 1996). (Kotler, 2000) considered customer satisfaction as a mental state that results from a customer's comparison of expectations prior to a purchase with performance perceptions after a purchase. In addition, customer satisfaction is the customer's assessment of a service in terms of whether that service has met the customer's needs and expectations (Zeithaml, V.A., Bitner, M.J. & Gremler, 2006). Therefore, it can consider consumer satisfaction as a response based on evaluations and expressed some time during the purchase-consumption process (Lee, C. Y., Tsao, C. H, & Chang, 2015), where is possible that a good marketing innovation can influence positively. (Yan Xiang, 2001) believes that service innovation is the secret weapon for enterprises to gain advantages in the market competition. (Lu T.Y., 2017) Lo Ting Yuen believes that focusing on service image innovation and shop image innovation can win the hearts of consumers. Based on the above analysis, this paper concludes that product image innovation, identity innovation, corporate image innovation, marketing image innovation, service image innovation and shop image innovation all have an impact on consumer behaviour.

AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF MATERNAL CLOTHING BRAND IMAGE INNOVATION ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Research Methodology

Maturity scale based on customer perceived value (Shams R， Alpert F, 2015)，Development of a measurement scale for the innovation dimensions of the brand image of maternity clothing, and measurement of consumer behaviour based on the scale of Zeithaml et al. (Lu A. W., 2013; Wang J. Q., 2019). To prevent the respondents from choosing neutral options and to ensure the validity of the data, the variables of the questionnaire were measured on a six-point Richter scale. A total of 330 questionnaires were distributed online and offline, 325 questionnaires were recovered, 37 unqualified questionnaires were raised, and 288 valid questionnaires were obtained, with a validity rate of 85%. The quantitative distribution of the research sample in terms of gender, education, occupation, age, income, and place of residence is relatively normal, and the research data meets the research requirements and can be analysed subsequently.SPSS22.0 software was used to statistically analyse the research data, firstly, the questionnaire reliability test was carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire; then, the correlation between the constituent elements and the consumer behaviour was explored; finally, the constituent elements of the apparel brand image innovation were taken as the independent variables, and the consumer behaviour was taken as the dependent variable, and the linear regression analysis was carried out.
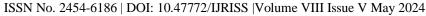
Reliability and validity tests

The results of the reliability test of the questionnaire are shown in Table 3; the overall Gronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire is 0.921>0.7; the Gronbach's alpha coefficients of the dimensions are between 0.7-0.9, which indicates that the questionnaire has a high degree of reliability; the kmo is 0.0884>0.7, and the Bartlett sphericity test reaches 0.000 significance level. Bartlett sphericity test reaches 0.000 significance level, indicating that the research data is suitable for factor analysis; factor loadings of all variables are greater than 0.5 and reach a significant level, the combined reliability is greater than 0.8, and the average distillation variance is greater than 0.5 cumulative variance contribution rate of 70.07%, and the comprehensive results of the above data analysis proves that the research questionnaire has a good reliability and validity, and is suitable for further analysis.

Tab.3 Reliability and validity of the questionnaire result

latitudinal layer	indicator layer	Combinatorial. reliability	Average refining variance	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Product Image Innovation	Process Innovation	0.853	0.538 9	0.790	
	Style Innovation			0.716	
	Quality Innovation			0.788	
	Design Concept Innovation			0.705	0.854
	Fabric Innovation			0.663	
Identity Image Innovation	Packaging Innovation			0.785	
	Labor Innovation	0.816 9	0.528 1	0.734	0.758
	Positioning Innovation			0.714	
	Fashion Style Innovation			0.669	
Corporate Image Innovation	Corporate culture Innovation			0.797	
	Management mode Innovation.	0.821 6	0.605 6	0.782	0.792
	Technical Innovation			0.755	
Marketing Image Innovation	Advertising Innovation			0.768	
	marketing Innovation	0.836 7	0.6309	0.795	0.827
	Promotion Innovation			0.819	
Service image innovation	Employee innovation			0.835	
	Service concept Innovation	0.809 8	0.588 2	0.777	0.827
	Personality service innovation			0.618	
Shop Image Innovation	Store atmosphere Innovation			0.819	
	Store design Innovation	0.871 1	0.6928	0.812	0.877
	Window display Innovation			0.865	
accepted value		>0.7	>0.5	>0.5	>0.7

Analysis of Clothing Brand Image Innovation in Relation to Consumer Behaviour.

As shown in Figure 4, the six components of apparel brand image innovation and consumer behaviour are all significantly positively correlated, and their degree of influence is in the following order: marketing image innovation > product image innovation > service image innovation > shop image innovation > corporate image innovation > recognition image innovation, in which the higher the degree of marketing image innovation, the easier it is for consumers to have a good feeling about the brand, which in turn prompts the occurrence of consumer behaviour. Consumers perceive that there are differences in the constituent elements of apparel brand image innovation, and from the dimension of marketing image innovation, creative advertisements, marketing methods that are in line with the development of the times, etc. can prompt consumers to take the product as the first choice for purchasing similar products.

Tab. 4 Correlation analysis of constituent elements and consumer behavior

	Program	Product Image Innovation	Identify Image Innovation	Corporate Identity Innovation	Marketing Image Innovation	Service Image Innovation	Shop Image Innovation	Consumer's Behavior
Consumer's behavior	Pearson Correlation Conspicuousness	0.629** 0.000	0.351** 0.000	0.413** 0.000	0.639** 0.000	0.571** 0.000	0.495** 0.000	

Regression Analysis of Maternity wear Brand Image Innovation and Consumer Behaviour

Based on the results of the above data analysis, further regression analysis is done on the components of clothing brand image innovation and consumer behaviour, and the results are shown in Table 5. The influence coefficients of product image innovation, marketing image innovation, service image innovation and shop image innovation on consumer behaviour are 0.234, 0.217, 0.101 and 0.068 respectively, and the influence coefficients are all positive, indicating that the four variables have a positive and significant influence on consumer behaviour; while the contribution of corporate image innovation and recognition image innovation to consumer behaviour is not significant, so these two dimensions are excluded when establishing the regression equation. Therefore, these two dimensions are excluded from the regression equation. Based on this result, the regression equation is constructed: consumer behaviour = 0.235 x product image innovation, +0.217 x marketing image innovation +0.101 x service image innovation +0.068 x shop image innovation +1.781. The adjusted R^2 is 0.606, indicating that the four factors can jointly explain 60.6% of the variation in consumer behaviour, and the F-value is 74.685, P=0.000, indicating that the regression equation is significant and effective; among them, information such as management style and corporate culture in corporate image innovation can attract consumers' direct attention, and it needs to be promoted with the help of advertising media and other media marketing; brand name, LOGO, and other information in identity image innovation are important to consumers, and it is necessary to use advertising media and other media marketing; brand name, LOGO, and other information in identity image innovation can attract consumers' direct attention. LOGO and other information is impressive to consumers, can cause emotional resonance, if the innovation, consumers will not have psychological expectations, not to mention the psychological expectations of consumers.

Tab.5 Regression analysis of components and consumer behavior

	Non-Standardized coefficients Standardized coefficients B Standard Error Trial Edition			t	Conspicuousness	R²	F	p
(constant)	1.781	0.180	9.914		0.000			

Product Image Innovation	0.235.	0.033	7.095	0.339.	0.000			
Marketing Innovation	0.217.	0.028.	7.870	0.355	0.000	0.606	74.685	0.000[b]
Service Image Innovation	0.101.	0.028.	3.572	0.172	0.000			
Shop Image Innovation.	0.068.	0.025	2.744	0.125	0.007			

CONCLUSION

Through grounded theoretical analysis and case study, we have extracted 6 dimensions of product image innovation, identification image innovation, corporate image innovation, marketing image innovation, service image innovation, shop image innovation and 21 specific indicators such as style innovation and fabric innovation; at the same time, we have deeply analysed the influence of the dimensions of apparel brand image innovation on the consumers' behaviour, and the degree of influence is in the following order: marketing image innovation > product image innovation > service image innovation > shop image innovation > corporate image innovation > identification image innovation > product image innovation. > service image innovation > shop image innovation > corporate image innovation > identification image innovation.

The results of the study show that pregnant women's clothing brand image innovation of the various components of the impact of consumer behaviour, and thus clothing enterprises should be targeted to plan and carry out brand image innovation activities, in order to effectively enhance consumer perception of brand image and subjective evaluation, such as marketing image innovation has the greatest impact on consumer behaviour, clothing enterprises can use new media according to market demand for their own marketing image to continue to Innovation; planning innovative advertisements, developing attractive promotional activities, as well as changing marketing methods to enhance the brand market competitiveness, and obtain consumer recognition, and then stimulate the occurrence of consumer behaviour. Product image innovation pays full attention to the various attributes of the product, as it has a certain impact on consumer behaviour, apparel companies should be based on consumer demand, and constantly bring new products to the market, through creative design concepts, the use of new technology, change the obsolete product style, improve the product features or the use of new fabrics, etc., to directly hit the pain points of the consumer, to attract the attention of the consumer; and at the same time, improve the service system, the introduction of more personalized services, such as customized clothing. At the same time, improve the service system and introduce more personalised services, such as customised clothing, repair, washing, etc., to establish the customer service concept and ensure that consumers are provided with quality services to stimulate consumer preference.
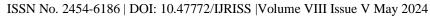
SUGGESTIONS

Maternity Wear Enterprises:

Innovate Marketing Image: Given the significant influence of marketing image innovation on consumer behavior, companies should focus on developing creative advertisements, engaging promotional activities, and adopting evolving marketing methods to enhance brand competitiveness and consumer recognition. Embracing new media platforms aligned with market demands can be particularly effective in this regard.

Enhance Product Image: Recognizing the importance of product image innovation, companies should continually introduce new products that resonate with consumer preferences. This involves incorporating creative design concepts, leveraging new technologies, refreshing outdated product styles, and enhancing product features or materials to address consumer pain points effectively.

Improve Service Offerings: Building upon the positive impact of service image innovation, enterprises should prioritize enhancing their service systems. Introducing personalized services such as customized clothing options, repair services, and premium customer support can establish a customer-centric approach, thereby fostering consumer loyalty and satisfaction.

Advertising and Marketing Agencies:

Tailored Campaigns: Collaborating with maternity wear brands, advertising and marketing agencies can develop tailored campaigns that highlight the innovative aspects of brand image. By crafting compelling narratives around product, identity, and service innovations, agencies can amplify brand messages and resonate with target consumers more effectively.

Embrace Digital Platforms: With the increasing influence of digital media, agencies should leverage various online platforms to disseminate brand messages and engage with consumers. Integrating innovative marketing strategies on social media, influencer partnerships, and immersive digital experiences can enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement.

Consumers:

Vocalize Preferences: Consumers can actively engage with maternity wear brands by providing feedback and vocalizing their preferences for innovative products and services. By expressing their needs and desires, consumers can influence brand decisions and contribute to the development of more consumer-centric offerings.

Support Innovative Brands: Recognizing the efforts of brands that prioritize innovation, consumers can actively support these companies by patronizing their products and advocating for their brand values. This not only fosters brand loyalty but also incentivizes brands to continue innovating to meet evolving consumer demands.

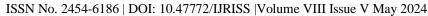**Industry Associations and Regulatory Bodies:**

Promote Innovation Culture: Industry associations and regulatory bodies can play a crucial role in fostering an environment conducive to innovation within the maternity wear sector. By facilitating knowledge-sharing platforms, funding research initiatives, and providing incentives for innovative practices, these entities can stimulate industry-wide innovation and growth.

Advocate Consumer Rights: Ensuring transparency and consumer protection in brand innovation efforts is essential. Industry associations and regulatory bodies can advocate for policies that safeguard consumer rights, promote truthful advertising practices, and uphold ethical standards in brand image innovation within the maternity wear industry.

In conclusion, by implementing these recommendations, stakeholders across the maternity wear ecosystem can collaboratively contribute to advancing brand image innovation, enhancing consumer satisfaction, and driving sustainable growth within the industry.

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