Rebranding the visual identity design of Chinese online casual menswear brands based on super symbols

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore a new domain within China's online casual menswear industry, proposing a comprehensive conceptual framework to address the complexities inherent in this vibrant sector. At its core is the innovative concept of "super-symbols," envisioned as tools for crafting visually striking and iconic expressions. These super-symbols are designed to shape a new brand identity, capturing not only consumer sentiments but also transcending traditional boundaries to make a lasting impact in the fiercely competitive market. By delving into unique cultural and aesthetic characteristics, the framework identifies elements that resonate with the target consumer base. Grounded in semiotic theory and visual identification principles, the study employs a qualitative research approach to construct a brand visual model. This involves a methodology of literature review, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis, with coding facilitated by Nvivo software. Integrating theoretical insights with practical applications, this research offers guidance for a nuanced and culturally appropriate methodology for brand rejuvenation. This meticulous framework provides crucial resources for designers and marketers, assisting them in thriving within the ever-evolving landscape of China's online fashion market.

Contribution/ Originality: This research offers insights into homogenization and visual disarray in China's menswear market, aligning with the digital economy focus of the 2023 government report. It innovatively applies semiotic analysis to online menswear enterprises, a scarcely explored area, providing a branding solution for the evolving online economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid development of the internet industry in China has propelled the digital economy into a central force driving economic growth. The vision outlined in the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China underscores the strategic importance of accelerating the development of the digital economy and promoting deep integration between the digital and real economies. This aligns with the ongoing national strategy of advancing the "Digital China" initiative (Xi, 2022).

Within this transformative landscape, the intersection of digital technology and the fashion industry, particularly online menswear, has become a focal point of exploration. The report by the China Research PwC Industry Research Institute highlights the expanding influence of clothing brands on consumers, positioning brand considerations as a crucial factor in the purchase decision-making process. As enterprises recognize the limitations

of focusing solely on product attributes, the infusion of brand culture, philosophy, and emotional communication emerges as a human-centric strategy permeating the industry.

Against the backdrop of the "Internet+" era, the integration of the internet with traditional industries has become a prevailing trend. In the context of consumer upgrading, fashion enterprises are embracing the strategy of strengthening their core business in response to the evolving landscape. The President of the China National Garment Association, Chen Dapeng, emphasizes the imperative to build a "Fashion Power" to propel China into a leading force in global fashion by 2035. The journey to becoming a fashion powerhouse encompasses becoming a technological, digitally intelligent, brand-oriented, talent-driven, and sustainable development-oriented nation.

To realize the vision of a brand-oriented nation, digital empowerment of clothing brands takes center stage, leading to fashion innovation. As the industry undergoes global collaboration, the need for leading Chinese-style fashion within the context of synchronized development becomes apparent. However, the majority of clothing enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are currently in the early stages or even untouched in their exploration of digital transformation. Understanding the path to digital transformation and brand reshaping is limited, and there is a scarcity of successful experiences for reference.

This paper recognizes the urgency in addressing the digital transformation and brand reshaping challenges faced by small and medium-sized online menswear brands in China. As most enterprises are in the nascent stages of digital exploration, strategies employed by larger enterprises may not be directly applicable and could potentially exacerbate operational and financial pressures. Additionally, existing digital transformation and brand reshaping strategies often cater to large or offline enterprises, neglecting the unique circumstances of small and online menswear brands. With over 90% of enterprises in the clothing industry being small and medium-sized, comprising around 170,000 micro-enterprises, the imperative to address the imminent need for digital transformation in this sector becomes evident.

This study, therefore, aims to bridge the knowledge gap, offering tailored strategies for digital transformation and brand reshaping specifically for small and online menswear brands. By delving into the challenges faced by these enterprises and analyzing the visual homogenization prevalent in the online menswear sector, the research proposes a comprehensive solution. Focusing on optimizing visual identity design, the study aims to provide a roadmap for these brands to enhance their brand recognition and stand out in a saturated and increasingly homogeneous market. Through the establishment of a symbolized visual identity recognition model, the research endeavors to contribute to the evolution of Chinese online casual menswear brands into distinctive and influential entities in the global fashion landscape.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Super Symbol Selection

Visual identity is an important part of branding since it influences both customer perception and brand perception. Aaker (2009) emphasizes the importance of visual aspects in developing a distinct and memorable brand image. A study of the significance of visual aspects in menswear companies indicates how visual identity influences customer decision.

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, and it is critical in understanding how symbols express meaning in branding. As Chandler (2022) discusses, semiotic analysis gives insights into the symbolic depiction of brands.

The literature on super symbols in brands is small but rising. Peirce (1974) semiotics work developed the notions of signs, icons, and indexes, which may be utilized to comprehend the power of super-symbols in brand communication. In symbol choosing, it is critical to consider cultural context. Bellazzi et al. (2022) highlights the function of perception in brand design and developing meaningful relationships between people and companies. Examining market reactions to rebranding attempts is worthwhile.

2.2. Integration of Visual Identity Elements

Visual identity is an essential aspect of brand communication in the fashion business. Scholars such as Gretzel and Collier de Mendonça (2019) stress the relevance of visual aspects in developing a distinct and identifiable brand image. Overview of China's online casual men's clothes industry: It is critical to grasp the distinctive history of China's online casual men's clothes sector. Baek, Huang, and Lee (2023) studied the link between visual features and customer perception. Understanding how customers understand and engage with visual identity aspects is key to effective brand communication.

This literature study focuses on the integration of visual identity aspects. Mohamed and Adiloglu (2023) research sheds light on coherent integration methods, highlighting the need of consistency across various brand touchpoints. The logo is an important part of one's visual identity. Erjansola, Lipponen, Vehkalahti, Aula, and Pirttilä-Backman (2021) research examine the strategic significance of logos in building brand connections and improving brand recall. Cultural subtleties are crucial in integrating visual identity components.

2.3. Consumer Acceptance

Understanding how people see and understand visual aspects is critical for brand communication. Iglesias, Markovic, Singh, and Sierra (2019) emphasizes the relevance of consumer perceptions in building brand image. It is critical to investigate the link between visual identity and customer behavior. Rafiq, Rai, and Hussain (2020) investigated how visual features impact customer choice and brand loyalty. Investigating how customers engage with fashion businesses gives insights for successful visual communication. Gazzola, Pavione, Pezzetti, and Grechi (2020) and Kananukul (2017) analyze the aspects that drive customer contact with fashion companies. Understanding the symbolic character of fashion consumption aids in the conception of visual symbols. Björner and Liu (2023) popularized the terms "extended self" and "symbolic consumption" in the context of fashion. Desmet and Hekkert (2007) study dives into the emotional components of design, offering insights into how emotions impact customer acceptability. Using user-centered design ideas can assist boost customer satisfaction. Yunpeng and Khan (2021) study of online consumer behavior highlighted how visual aspects are viewed and accepted in digital settings when applied to the online environment of Chinese casual men's apparel businesses.

2.4. Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural factors must be considered while designing a visual identity. Understanding the significance of symbols may be improved by investigating cultural symbolism in fashion. Berger (2019) research digs into the cultural meanings buried in clothes, revealing the function of symbols in fashion identity. Cross-cultural design brings distinct issues. Kananukul (2017) examine the constraints and potential of design in cross-cultural situations. Addressing cultural appropriation concerns is crucial while designing reconstruction. Chatterjee (2020), for example, has studied the processes of cultural appropriation in fashion, offering insights into ethical issues in visual identity design. Aesthetics vary by culture and impact design preferences. Torres, César Machado, Vacas de Carvalho, van de Velden, and Costa (2019) work investigate cultural aesthetics in design, so addressing the problems of incorporating cultural components into visual identity. It is vital to comprehend customer reactions to cultural design.

Shavitt and Barnes (2020) study evaluated customer responses to culturally adapted items, offering insights into the usefulness of culturally sensitive visual identities. The study by César Machado, Fonseca, and Martins (2021) on the impact of culture on color perception gives insights into the strategic use of color in culturally sensitive visual identity design. Gagné et al. (2019) highlights the significance of cultural knowledge in design work. Understanding and implementing cultural competence concepts can aid in the development of a culturally responsive visual identity framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

Full ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA before the start of the study (approval number REC/08/2023 (PG/MR/300)). The purpose of the study was explained to participants, and they were informed that their participation was purely voluntary.

3.1. Sample

Based on the researcher's social industry experience, the comprehensiveness of the research results was carefully considered when recruiting initial participants, and four interviewees were finally selected, namely industry experts, brand managers, brand designers, and graphic designers. Based on the initial four respondents, the researcher will individually ask the next potential respondent whether to participate in this study, with respondents from each domain having the same characteristics. The final number of respondents was established based on the principle of theoretical saturation, where new information and insights begin to show diminishing returns after a certain point in data collection. Based on the findings of Parker, Scott, and Geddes (2019), this is achieved when the researcher notices that information, themes, or insights gathered from consecutive interviews are repetitive and no longer provide new or significantly different perspectives or details. saturation. At this point, further data collection is deemed unnecessary as the researcher may already have a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The research locations were selected as four representative cities in China where the Internet clothing industry is developed. They are Guangzhou and Shenzhen in China's Pearl River Delta region and Shanghai and Hangzhou in the Yangtze River Delta region, which are more representative of the current development status of China's Internet clothing industry.

3.2. Instrument

In this research method, the use of qualitative data analysis software NVivo will play a key role in managing and analyzing the large amount of qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews. Siccama and Penna (2008) illustrate that NVivo provides a systematic approach to organizing, coding, and interpreting qualitative data, ensuring a rigorous and comprehensive analysis process consistent with the goals of the paper.

3.3. Data Analysis

The in-depth interview approach was utilized to obtain data. According to Mears (2012), an in-depth interview is a qualitative research method used to gather extensive and comprehensive information on a given topic, experience, or issue from individuals or participants, often the researcher and the participants. A semi-structured, open-ended discussion between participants with the primary purpose of getting an in-depth knowledge of the participants' ideas, feelings, views, and experiences connected to the study issue. The method and justification for employing thematic analysis to find repeating themes, patterns, and insights that answer the research questions and aid in the refinement of this conceptual framework.

3.4. Procedures

Research on the conceptual framework for redesigning the visual identity design of Chinese online casual men's apparel firms based on super symbols, which is utilized for visual upgrades in the brand development process. Super symbols are employed to give incentive to a brand's visual identity system. Analyze the aspects and stages necessary for development, focus on consumers' aesthetic demands, and rebuild the online men's brand visual identity system using super symbols. The goal is to inspire customer resonance and loyalty using super symbols in order to modify the problems experienced in brand creation.

The method framework (Figure 1) begins with a comprehensive exploration, providing a background introduction and outlining the research questions to address the challenges and opportunities in the realm of online

casual menswear brands. A thorough review of existing literature follows, offering a foundation for the subsequent research steps. Ethical considerations are prioritized with the initiation of the process to seek research approval from UiTM. The study employs in-depth interviews with industry experts and managers to gather valuable insights. Subsequently, a meticulous data analysis is conducted to distill key patterns and trends. The core of the framework involves the development of a visual identity design model for online casual menswear brands, emphasizing the integration of super symbols. This model is then subjected to content verification through a peer expert review to ensure its validity and effectiveness. The results are rigorously analyzed, paving the way for a conclusive and insightful discussion. The study culminates in a well-rounded conclusion and recommendations, providing valuable insights for the enhancement of visual identity strategies in the dynamic landscape of online casual menswear brands.
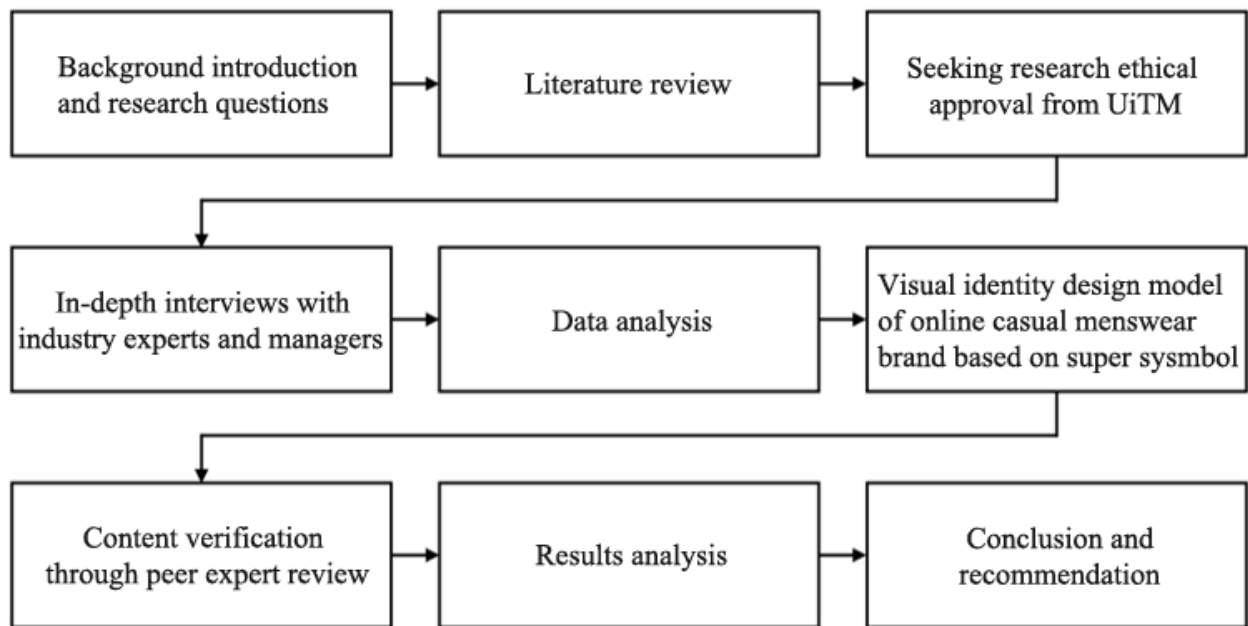

Figure 1. Methodology framework.

4. LIMITATION

An Update to the Conceptual Framework In the fast-paced world of fashion and online retail, what resonates with consumers today may be outdated or irrelevant tomorrow. Using "supersymbols" as powerful iconic expressions may capture the current zeitgeist, but the framework may struggle to adapt quickly to emerging trends or changes in consumer preferences. This limitation means that a visual identity redefined based on a specific set of super symbols may have a limited shelf life. Furthermore, this article's emphasis on cultural and aesthetic characteristics may inadvertently overlook the diversity of preferences within the target consumer group. While this study aims to resonate with Chinese consumers, the heterogeneity of this market may challenge the generalizability of the proposed rebranding framework. As a result, designers and marketers taking this approach may find it challenging to create a one-size-fits-all solution that effectively appeals to the diverse tastes of China's online casual menswear consumers.

While this article provides a well-structured conceptual framework for the rebranding of online casual menswear brands in China, its limitations arise from the changing nature of consumer tastes and the potential difficulty in achieving a timeless and universally appealing visual identity. This requires constant adjustments to the framework to adapt to the dynamic landscape of the online fashion market.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings are utilized to address the following research question: How to restructure the visual image brand of casual menswear online in China?

5.1. Conceptual Framework Design

The research proposes a design model conceptual framework for constructing visual identity design for online casual menswear brands based on super symbols. For example, it is suggested that small, medium and micro enterprises need to transform and build brand differentiation to provide practices and help provide ideas and clues for their brand development. Creating a personalized design mockup for the visual identity of a Chinese online casual menswear brand required tightly combining various elements. The framework is shown in Figure 2:
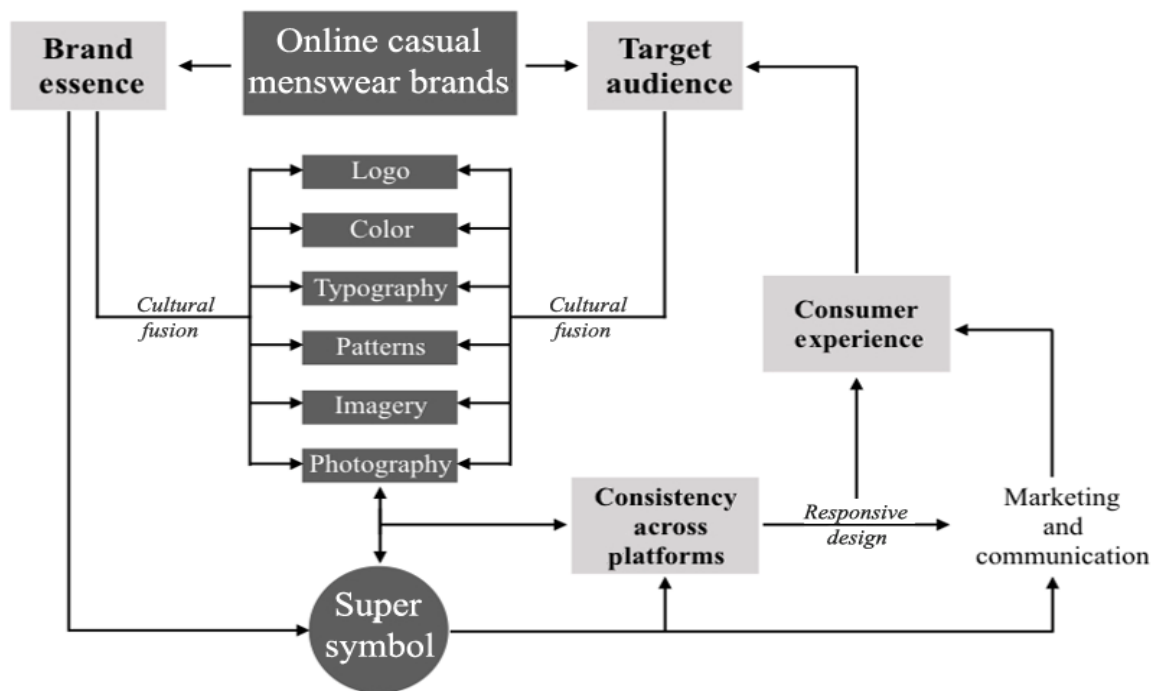

Figure 2. Based on the super symbol online casual men's brand visual identity design system framework.

5.1.1. Brand Essence

Brand essence refers to the brand's basic features. It defines the distinct qualities, values, and features that identify a brand and set it apart from rivals in the minds of consumers. This is the essence of what the brand stands for and how it intends to elicit an emotional response from its target audience. Brand essence extends beyond the characteristics of a product or service to include the characteristics that make a brand memorable and significant. It is often stated in the form of a short declaration of the brand's personality, purpose, and promise. The heart and soul of a brand is its essence, which embodies the company's basic values and leaves a lasting impression in the minds of consumers.

5.1.2. Audience

The primary persons or groups that a brand targets are referred to as its target audience. This entails identifying the groups of individuals who are most likely to be interested in or benefit from a brand's products or services and developing marketing strategies and brand communications campaigns for them. When identifying a brand's target audience, businesses typically evaluate a variety of characteristics such as age, gender, geographical area, interests and hobbies, values, and so on. Understanding the qualities and demands of the target audience allows companies to more effectively position themselves and deliver appealing products or services to the target

population. When creating a brand's target audience, companies may utilize market research, consumer analytics, and other data collecting methods to guarantee that their target population is precisely identified and that the brand strategy is conveyed to this specific demographic.

5.1.3. Logo

A brand logo is a graphic identity or symbol of a company that is used to symbolize and identify the company. It is a key component of a brand's visual identity and is also known as a trademark, logo, or logotype. Typically, brand logos are created with the business's basic principles, personality, and target audience in mind. An effective brand logo may represent the business's individuality in a simple image and create a lasting impact on consumers' minds. In the market, the brand logo is quite significant. It is not only the brand's outward emblem, but also one of the most important components in customers' impression and recall of the brand.

5.1.4. Color

Brand color is an essential component of the visual identity system; it is the exact color or color combination used by the brand in design and marketing. Choosing certain brand colors is frequently dependent on the brand's values, personality, target demographic, and market position. Brand colors are essential for brand identification and emotional connection. Because various colors may express different emotions and meanings, companies must carefully select colors to ensure they are consistent with their brand image and resonate with their target audience. Brand color consistency is crucial for developing brand identification and recall. Brands frequently maintain consistent color application across various media and channels to improve the brand image and guarantee that customers can readily link a certain color with the brand.

5.1.5. Typography

Brand visual typography refers to the precise styles and layout principles employed by businesses in their designs to maintain consistency and recognition across several media platforms. Visual typography is essential for maintaining brand consistency, as it contributes to the formation of a brand's distinct style and allows customers to instantly recognize the brand in a variety of situations. To guarantee that all brand materials express the same brand image, brand visual layout may include standards such as font selection, icon positioning, color use, picture style, and so on. The visual layout of a brand may generate a professional, cohesive, and clearly recognized image for the brand, improving its credibility and awareness.

5.1.6. Photography

Online menswear brand image and photography are inextricably linked, and photographic style may create a distinct and unforgettable impression in the minds of customers. The photographic style of a fashion company should correspond to its positioning and target demographic. Models serve as brand image communicators as well as product presenters. The shoot's sets and backgrounds may reflect the brand's lifestyle, beliefs, and stories, producing an emotional environment that connects with the target audience. Colors and lighting utilized in fashion brand photography should be consistent with the brand colors, helping to promote the brand's visual consistency. Post-processing ensures that all photographs have a similar style.

5.1.7. Patterns

Brand patterns are repeated visuals, patterns, or textures that are utilized in brand design. These patterns may be utilized to reinforce brand consistency and visual identity in packaging, advertising, website backdrops, and other areas. Brand logos and visuals are frequently used to create a distinct and consistent brand image. These features might occur in many marketing materials to build the brand's overall visual style.

5.1.8. Super Symbol

Create a set of icons or symbols that reflect significant features of your brand, particularly in the context of visual arts, cultural symbols, and communications. In a larger sense, it refers to the visual depiction of ideas, concepts, or things using symbols or icons. Images play an important role in establishing visually identifiable and communicating aspects in the context of branding and design. Icons are frequently simplified, stylized representations that communicate message in a simple and widely recognized manner. These symbols are intended to be simply understood and generally recognized in the digital environment, overcoming language limitations. In the field of branding, a brand may have its own set of pictures that symbolize significant components of its identity, beliefs, or goods. Contributes to a brand's entire visual language, strengthening messaging and making it more memorable for viewers. Super symbols are strong instruments for brand communication, allowing complex concepts or messages to be expressed fast and effectively through simple symbolic representations.

5.1.9. Cultural Fusion

Cultural fusion is the amalgamation, blending, or mixing of various cultural components, influences, or traditions. This occurs when multiple cultures interact and contribute to the development of new cultural expressions, behaviors, or artifacts. This tendency frequently results in rich hybrid civilizations that include aspects from numerous origins. Combine traditional Chinese cultural components with contemporary features. This may be seen in patterns, images, and even logos.

5.1.10. Consistency Across Platforms

Brand consistency across platforms denotes the brand's ability to maintain a consistent image and messaging across various media and platforms. This involves establishing brand consistency across online and physical channels. Building brand recognition, trust, and loyalty requires ensuring brand consistency across platforms. By maintaining consistency, a brand may more effectively express its image, values, and message, resulting in a strong and united brand presence. This assists consumers in developing a consistent and favorable perception of the brand.

5.1.11. Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is the use of digital channels, platforms, and technology to promote products, services, or brands to specific audiences. It encompasses a wide variety of online marketing operations aimed at reaching and engaging customers via digital media. Digital marketing employs the internet and technological gadgets to communicate with potential clients in a more personal and engaging way than previous methods.

5.1.12. Responsive Design

Responsive design is the process of producing web pages that are optimized for reading and interaction across a wide range of devices and screen sizes. The primary purpose of responsive design is to guarantee that a website or online application appears and performs properly on desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets, and mobile phones. Make certain that brand websites are responsive and optimized for a wide range of devices. Responsive design is critical in today's world, when people access websites and apps from a variety of devices. It contributes to the creation of a uniform and user-friendly experience regardless of screen size or device type, which improves usability.

5.2. Expert Review Results

The proposed conceptual framework for altering the visual image of China's online casual men's brand focuses on the integration of "super symbols" and has been carefully validated by five industry experts. The expert validation method aims to evaluate the framework's practicality, relevance, and validity in the context of China's

changing online fashion industry. The findings of expert validation validated the suggested conceptual framework's reliability and applicability.

5.2.1. Feasibility of "Super Symbol"

Experts believe that including "super symbols" into your rebranding approach is critical. They underline that using culturally relevant symbols is a deliberate strategy to create a distinct visual identity that corresponds to the preferences of your target audience.

5.2.2. Consistency of Dynamic Consumer Preferences

The framework's emphasis on exploring unique cultural and aesthetic elements to resonate with dynamic consumer preferences was positively recognized. Experts believe that understanding and adapting to the changing tastes of contemporary Chinese consumers is critical to successful rebranding.

5.2.3. Structured Approach of Designers and Marketers

The structured approach provided by this framework is considered a valuable tool for designers and marketers. Experts acknowledged the combination of theoretical insights and practical applications, noting that it provides a comprehensive guide to navigating the complexities of rebranding in a dynamic and competitive market.

5.2.4. Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptability

Experts endorsed the framework's cultural sensitivity and adaptability. Given the diversity of the target audience, they emphasized the importance of a detailed understanding of Chinese culture and consumer preferences.

5.2.5. Potential of Industry Impact

Experts are optimistic about the potential impact of the proposed framework on China's online casual menswear industry. They recognize its relevance and applicability in guiding brands to implement effective rebranding strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this essay is to present a conceptual framework for revitalizing Chinese online casual menswear firms in a fast-changing digital world. The research emphasizes the need of rebranding in addressing consumers' changing tastes, highlighting the use of "hyper-symbols" to build a powerful and iconic brand image. The successful integration of Super Symbols highlights the possibility of combining traditional symbols with current design concepts. This mutually beneficial collaboration not only redefines brand perception but also contributes to the creation of engaging visual storytelling that cross cultural boundaries. In a dynamic and competitive market, a focus on developing distinctive cultural and aesthetic features may significantly boost brand awareness. Brands may effectively negotiate the complexity of rebranding by recognizing and responding to the tastes of current Chinese customers. Designers and marketers benefit from a systematic and pragmatic strategy that combines academic ideas with practical implementations. This strategy was critical in leading them through the complicated rebranding process and ensuring the final visual image fully connected with their target demographic.

This study's significance is its ability to give a thorough foundation for digital rebranding efforts. The symbiotic link between ancient iconography and current design concepts raises brand recognition while also allowing the company to survive in the extremely competitive online casual menswear industry. As companies communicate with modern Chinese customers, using super symbols becomes a dynamic and effective technique. This study paves the door for future investigation of the complex interaction between tradition and modernity,

giving useful insights for firms seeking to establish distinct and resonant visual identities in the ever-changing online fashion market.

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