

BRIDGING INNOVATION AND PURCHASE INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED INNOVATIVENESS IN STRATEGIES OF CHINESE TIME-HONORED BRANDS

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Abstract

This study investigates how cross-over innovation strategies influence young consumers' purchase intentions toward Chinese time-honored brands, focusing on the mediating role of perceived innovativeness. A survey of 384 respondents in Wuhan was analyzed using structural equation modeling. Results show that functional, aesthetic, and experiential innovations significantly enhance purchase intentions through perceived innovativeness. However, the mediating effect of perceived innovativeness is not supported in the case of social media marketing. These findings emphasize the importance of product and experiential innovation in revitalizing heritage brands and highlight perceived innovativeness as a key mechanism linking innovation to consumer behavior.

Keywords: Chinese Time-Honored Brands; Cross-Over Innovation; Perceived Innovativeness; Purchase Intention; Experiential Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

In recent years, the revitalization of Chinese time-honored brands (THBs) has become a strategic priority in China's broader push toward consumption upgrading and cultural confidence. National-level initiatives such as "China Brand Day" and policy frameworks like the *Opinions on Promoting the Innovative Development of Time-Honored Brands* emphasize innovation, cross-sector collaboration, and digital transformation as pathways for sustaining the legacy of THBs in modern markets (Bonetti et al., 2024). These policy measures reflect growing recognition that cultural heritage must coexist with market relevance to ensure sustainable brand development (Hyde & Fu, 2022).

At the same time, the rise of the digital economy and the rapid proliferation of social media have dramatically transformed consumer-brand interactions. Platforms such as WeChat, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu have become critical spaces where younger consumers—especially those born after 1990—discover, evaluate, and emotionally engage with brands. These platforms not only offer marketing visibility but also facilitate immersive experiences through user-generated content, influencer campaigns, and real-time feedback loops (Barton et al., 2023). This evolution underscores the need for THBs to reimagine their communication and branding strategies, particularly through digital storytelling and cross-over innovation (Zheng, 2024; Guo & Kwon, 2018). Cross-over innovation has emerged as a key mechanism through which THBs integrate traditional brand attributes—such as cultural narratives and artisanal

heritage—with modern consumer expectations. Notable examples include the collaboration between Moutai and Luckin Coffee, or Tong Ren Tang’s functional beverages that blend traditional Chinese medicine with contemporary wellness trends (J. Zhang, 2024; Lulu et al., 2024a). These initiatives illustrate how perceived innovativeness—shaped by functional novelty, aesthetic appeal, and marketing creativity—can reposition heritage brands within the competitive landscape and engage new consumer segments (Calantone & Nguyen, 2018; Schafer et al., 2025).

Among these emerging consumer segments, young Chinese consumers—especially in culturally vibrant urban centers like Wuhan—have become central to the future of THBs. Characterized by strong national identity, high digital fluency, and evolving aesthetic standards, this generation seeks not only product functionality but also cultural resonance and emotional engagement (Liang et al., 2024; Guo & Kwon, 2018). The growing popularity of the “China-Chic” movement exemplifies this shift, as younger consumers favor brands that creatively blend modernity with traditional values (Hossain et al., 2024).

However, despite their cultural capital, THBs often face challenges in maintaining long-term consumer interest. While cross-over collaborations may attract attention in the short term, many fail to sustain engagement due to inconsistent innovation or perceived inauthenticity (Li et al., 2019; Miao, 2024). In this context, the construct of *perceived innovativeness* becomes critical: it reflects the consumer’s evaluation of how novel, creative, and forward-thinking a brand appears to be—an attribute that directly impacts purchase intention (Tellis et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2024).

This study, therefore, situates itself at the intersection of branding, consumer psychology, and innovation strategy. It examines how different dimensions of cross-over innovation—including functional and aesthetic product innovation, as well as social media and experiential marketing—shape consumers’ perceived innovativeness of THBs, and how this perception in turn influences their purchase intentions. By focusing on young consumers in Wuhan, the research offers both theoretical and practical insights into how innovation can bridge cultural legacy and modern consumer demand in the evolving Chinese market (Ying et al., 2024).

1.2 Problem Statement

Chinese Time-Honored Brands (THBs) face increasing pressure to modernize while preserving their cultural authenticity. In response, many have adopted cross-over innovation strategies that blend traditional brand elements with modern product formats and digital marketing tools to engage younger consumer segments (Hyde & Fu, 2022). While such strategies have demonstrated marketing potential—exemplified by collaborations like Maotai and Luckin Coffee—empirical evidence suggests that the effectiveness of these innovations in influencing consumer behavior, particularly purchase intention, remains poorly understood (Zhou, 2023).

A critical issue lies in the lack of clarity on how these innovations are perceived by young consumers. Despite visible market experimentation, many THBs struggle to systematically integrate product and marketing innovations in a way that fosters sustained consumer engagement (Calantone & Nguyen, 2018). Current innovation efforts often appear fragmented,

with limited insight into whether they enhance brand appeal or align with younger consumers' expectations for novelty, aesthetics, and cultural relevance.

Moreover, the mechanisms linking innovation strategies to consumer outcomes have not been sufficiently theorized. Specifically, little is known about the mediating role of perceived innovativeness—how young consumers interpret a brand's innovativeness when exposed to functional innovation, aesthetic enhancement, social media campaigns, or experiential marketing (Wu et al., 2024). Without understanding this perceptual pathway, THBs risk investing in innovation without measurable returns in brand value or consumer loyalty.

Existing literature in branding and consumer psychology has addressed innovation adoption and cultural branding in fragmented ways, yet a comprehensive framework connecting cross-over innovation, perceived innovativeness, and purchase intention remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, few empirical studies explore these dynamics within the context of Chinese heritage brands and urban youth markets such as Wuhan, where cultural identity and digital nativity significantly shape consumption behavior.

This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating:

- How functional and aesthetic product innovations, as well as marketing innovations (social media and experiential marketing), influence young consumers' perceived innovativeness of THBs.
- How perceived innovativeness mediates the relationship between innovation strategies and purchase intention.

1.3 Research Questions

This study investigates the role of perceived innovativeness as a mediating variable in the relationship between innovation strategies and young consumers' purchase intentions toward Chinese time-honored brands. It focuses on the following research questions:

1. To what extent do innovation strategies—specifically functional innovation, aesthetic innovation, social media marketing, and experiential marketing—influence young consumers' perceived innovativeness of Chinese time-honored brands?
2. Does perceived innovativeness mediate the relationship between these innovation strategies and young consumers' purchase intentions?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Aligned with the above research questions, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the influence of four types of innovation strategies—functional innovation, aesthetic innovation, social media marketing, and experiential marketing—on young consumers' perceived innovativeness of Chinese time-honored brands.
2. To assess whether perceived innovativeness mediates the relationship between these innovation strategies and young consumers' purchase intentions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cross-over Innovation in Chinese Time-Honored Brands

Cross-over innovation has become a pivotal strategy for revitalizing Chinese Time-Honored Brands (THBs), enabling them to navigate the dual challenges of cultural preservation and market modernization. Defined as the integration of traditional brand elements—such as craftsmanship, cultural narratives, and legacy products—with elements from other industries or modern consumer culture, cross-over innovation facilitates the creation of hybrid offerings that resonate with contemporary consumer preferences (Zhang, 2023).

2.1.1 Functional and Aesthetic Innovation

Functional innovation within cross-over strategies refers to improvements or reconfigurations of products that add new utility, align with modern health trends, or incorporate new technologies. For instance, Tong Ren Tang's development of wellness beverages that integrate traditional Chinese medicine with modern dietary preferences exemplifies how THBs can remain functionally relevant while retaining brand heritage (Guo, 2023). Aesthetic innovation, by contrast, focuses on visual and symbolic enhancements—such as updated packaging, contemporary graphic design, or fashionable reinterpretations of traditional motifs—which appeal strongly to design-conscious consumers, particularly younger demographics (Chen & Li, 2024). These innovations are not merely cosmetic. Aesthetic upgrades often serve as conduits for emotional engagement and cultural reinterpretation. The incorporation of traditional color schemes, symbolic motifs, and region-specific visual elements into contemporary product designs fosters both familiarity and novelty, enhancing the perceived cultural value of a product (Liu et al., 2023). Such dual-layered innovation has proven particularly effective among Gen Z consumers, who value both visual sophistication and symbolic resonance in branded offerings.

2.1.2 Marketing Innovation Approaches

Marketing innovation within THBs typically manifests through digital transformation and experiential engagement. Social media platforms like Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin have become key arenas where brands not only advertise but also co-create narratives with consumers (Cheng, 2022). Successful THBs now adopt interactive campaigns, influencer collaborations, and immersive storytelling to amplify their brand voice. For example, the viral co-branding campaign between Luckin Coffee and Maotai, which led to a significant surge in foot traffic and online engagement, illustrates how marketing innovation can generate real-time consumer enthusiasm and media amplification (Zheng, 2024). Experiential marketing also plays a central role in cross-over innovation strategies. By offering consumers personalized, memorable experiences—such as pop-up exhibitions, traditional craft workshops, or virtual try-on services—THBs can strengthen emotional connections and brand loyalty (Wang & Cao, 2024). These approaches shift consumer-brand interactions from transactional to relational, aligning with the expectations of younger consumers who seek meaning and story behind the products they purchase.

2.1.3 Strategic Role in Brand Revitalization

The strategic adoption of cross-over innovation allows THBs to reposition themselves in a saturated marketplace. It enables them to break free from rigid legacy associations and reinvent their value propositions for new generations of consumers. Cross-over collaborations—such as those with tech firms, fashion designers, or beverage companies—serve to modernize brand identity without abandoning core cultural values (Huang et al., 2023). This strategic flexibility is critical as brands seek to navigate intensifying competition and evolving consumer behavior.

Nevertheless, THBs face substantial risks in cross-over innovation. Many initiatives falter due to superficial collaboration, lack of narrative coherence, or misalignment with target audience expectations (Zhao, 2024). Moreover, excessive commercialization of traditional elements can lead to accusations of cultural dilution or inauthenticity, undermining brand equity. To avoid these pitfalls, cross-over innovation must be supported by sustained research into consumer preferences, deep cultural literacy, and a commitment to both creative excellence and strategic coherence (Wu, 2023).

In summary, cross-over innovation—through functional and aesthetic product enhancements, as well as dynamic marketing strategies—has become a core enabler of brand rejuvenation for Chinese THBs. When executed with cultural sensitivity and strategic vision, such innovation holds the potential to bridge generational divides, expand market relevance, and stimulate purchase intentions among digitally fluent, culturally conscious consumers.

2.2 Perceived Innovativeness and Consumer Response

2.2.1 Conceptualization of Perceived Innovativeness

Perceived innovativeness refers to consumers' cognitive evaluation of the novelty, uniqueness, and creativity embodied in a brand's products or marketing strategies (Tellis et al., 2009). It is not merely a reflection of technical innovation but also includes symbolic and experiential attributes that signal modernity and differentiation. Particularly in competitive markets, perceived innovativeness shapes brand image and influences consumer evaluations (Henard & Szymanski, 2001).

In the context of Chinese time-honored brands, perceived innovativeness captures how well these heritage enterprises respond to contemporary trends through cross-over innovations. It acts as a key cognitive mechanism by which consumers reconcile traditional brand associations with new forms of expression such as experiential marketing, digital storytelling, and product rebranding (Li et al., 2019). When time-honored brands engage in functional upgrades, aesthetic enhancements, or unexpected collaborations, they generate renewed attention and are perceived as dynamic and trend-conscious.

2.2.2 Perceived Innovativeness as a Mediator

Within the framework of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), perceived innovativeness operates as the "organism" — the internal state that translates external stimuli (i.e., cross-over innovations) into behavioral responses (i.e., purchase intentions). It mediates how consumers interpret innovation stimuli and subsequently

form intention-related judgments. Prior studies support this mediating role. For example, Wanglaoji's collaborative campaigns with KFC and NetEase Games infused health-conscious beverage traditions with modern lifestyle branding, significantly enhancing young consumers' perception of innovativeness and thereby increasing engagement and purchase likelihood (Shi, 2024). Similarly, the collaboration between the Palace Museum and beauty brands created emotionally and aesthetically enriched products that resonated with consumers' desire for culturally rooted innovation (Qi, 2023). These examples illustrate how perceived innovativeness links innovative branding actions to favorable consumer behaviors, reinforcing its importance as a mediating construct.

Moreover, perceived innovativeness often serves as a proxy for risk reduction. When consumers view a brand as innovative, they are more likely to infer competence, relevance, and adaptability, which enhances trust and reduces hesitation, especially when confronted with unconventional product formats (Newmeyer & Sridharan, 2020).

2.2.3 Empirical Evidence on Perceived Innovativeness and Consumer Behavior

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that perceived innovativeness exerts a significant positive influence on consumer responses, including attitude formation, willingness to try, and purchase intention. In the context of Chinese time-honored brands, cross-over innovation often plays a decisive role in shaping these perceptions.

For instance, the high-profile partnership between Luckin Coffee and Moutai to release the Sauce-Flavored Latte not only fused the old and the new, but also attracted record-breaking sales on launch day, a clear indicator that perceived innovativeness mediated the collaboration's impact on consumer purchase behavior (Huang, 2024). Similarly, the rebranding of Li-Ning through partnerships with gaming brands like Peace Elite led to elevated consumer perception of the brand's creativity, resulting in greater brand engagement among Gen Z consumers (Yuan, 2024). These examples highlight that consumer are not merely passive recipients of innovation. They actively interpret symbolic cues embedded in product design, marketing, and collaboration choices. When such cues resonate with their sense of modernity and self-image, perceived innovativeness becomes a decisive factor that shapes brand evaluation and drives consumption choices.

2.3 Purchase Intention and Its Antecedents

2.3.1 Conceptualizing Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's willingness and likelihood to purchase a specific product or service. It is widely regarded as a key predictor of actual buying behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991). While general attitudes reflect broad evaluations, purchase intention is more targeted, reflecting motivational readiness to act. Scholars such as Kotler and Keller (2012) have defined it as the consumer's decision readiness formed after weighing internal and external considerations. In this regard, purchase intention is not only a psychological construct but also a central indicator for forecasting consumer behavior (He, 2024).

2.3.2 Key Influencing Factors

A review of the literature reveals five primary antecedents that significantly influence purchase intention:

a) Consumer Attitudes:

Attitudes, often shaped by perceived benefits and emotional responses, play a central role in determining behavioral intention. According to Jacoby et al. (1971) and Seo and Hwang (2022), positive attitudes can trigger favorable purchase intentions. Empirical studies in China, such as those by Wu (2024) and Wang et al. (2024), demonstrate how warmth, competence, and hedonic perception foster trust and lead to stronger purchase intentions.

b) Perceived Value:

Perceived value—the trade-off between perceived benefits and sacrifices—has been identified as a crucial driver of purchase intention. Consumers tend to make purchasing decisions when the perceived utility outweighs the associated costs (He, 2024; Hasmalawati et al., 2024). Wu (2024) and Huang et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of psychological benefits and opportunity costs in shaping these perceptions.

c) Perceived Risk:

Perceived risk acts as a deterrent to purchase intentions. Originating from early consumer psychology research, this construct refers to consumers' fear of negative consequences—financial, psychological, or functional—associated with a purchase. Recent studies (Cai et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023) confirm that increased perceived risk negatively correlates with the willingness to buy.

d) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB):

Ajzen's (1991) TPB remains a dominant framework for understanding how behavioral attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control contribute to the formation of purchase intentions. Zhang (2024) applies this model to contemporary consumer contexts, illustrating how innovation consciousness and normative beliefs shape youth purchasing behavior.

e) Perceived Innovativeness:

Perceived innovativeness—the extent to which a brand is viewed as novel and forward-thinking—has emerged as a strong predictor of purchase intention, particularly among younger consumers. Through the lens of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, perceived innovativeness acts as an external stimulus that elicits positive cognitive and emotional reactions, ultimately leading to favorable purchase decisions (Sung et al., 2016; Fan & Ismail, 2024; Chen et al., 2023).

2.3.3 Cross-Over Innovation and Purchase Intention

Cross-over innovation is a key mechanism through which time-honored brands enhance purchase intention by modernizing their identity and improving cultural relevance.

These innovations can take the form of product co-creation, aesthetic rebranding, or strategic marketing partnerships. For example, Wanglaoji's integration with KFC (Shi, 2024) and the Palace Museum's cosmetic collaborations (Qi, 2023) demonstrate how cultural depth combined with contemporary formats stimulates youth interest and emotional resonance.

Moreover, cross-over innovation can reduce perceived risk through brand partnerships. The co-branded "Sauce-Flavored Latte" by Luckin Coffee and Moutai illustrates how dual-brand equity mitigates hesitation, builds trust, and drives market success (Huang, 2024; Liang, 2025). These partnerships often lead to high levels of consumer engagement and trial.

Finally, crossover innovation fosters an innovation-oriented brand image that appeals to trend-sensitive, early adopters. Li-Ning's collaboration with Peace Elite (Yuan, 2024) exemplifies how tapping into gaming subcultures and fashion-forward aesthetics can expand brand reach and boost purchase intent by aligning with youth identities (Fu, 2022).

2.4 Previous Empirical Evidence on Innovation and Intention

2.4.1 Innovation-Driven Branding and Purchase Intention

A growing body of empirical research has established that innovation—both in product development and marketing—significantly contributes to the enhancement of purchase intention. Particularly in fast-evolving consumer markets such as China, innovation serves not merely as a differentiator but as a critical survival strategy for heritage brands (Wang et al., 2024).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that product innovation positively correlates with consumer responses, especially when innovation is perceived as meaningful, user-centered, or emotionally resonant (Tellis et al., 2009).

For example, a study by Zhou (2023) found that cross-over innovation in time-honored Chinese brands effectively enhanced brand perception and triggered higher purchase intent among Gen Z consumers. This was especially evident when traditional cultural cues were reinterpreted through modern aesthetics, thereby increasing both novelty appeal and cultural identity alignment.

2.4.2 Perceived Innovativeness as a Mediating Mechanism

Several empirical studies have examined the mediating role of perceived innovativeness between innovation strategies and consumer behavioral outcomes. Kim and Ko (2012) observed that luxury fashion consumers who perceived brands as innovative were more likely to develop brand attachment and, consequently, purchasing motivation.

Similarly, Fan and Ismail (2024) validated this mechanism in the Chinese context, demonstrating that perceived innovativeness significantly mediates the relationship between cross-over innovation and purchase intention in young consumers.

Moreover, Brakus et al. (2009) highlighted that experiential component—such as multisensory marketing or emotional storytelling—are often interpreted by consumers as signals of innovativeness, which then positively shape behavioral intentions.

These findings align with the SOR framework, where perceived innovativeness functions as a psychological trigger (Organism) between external stimuli (Innovation Strategy) and consumer action (Response).

2.4.3 Marketing Innovation and Youth Engagement

The use of social media and experiential marketing—both key forms of marketing innovation—has also been empirically linked to increased purchase intention. In the context of Chinese heritage brands, such innovations not only modernize brand image but also create immersive consumer-brand interactions (Angella & Ko, 2012).

For example, experiential campaigns that blend tradition with digital storytelling (e.g., augmented reality or gamified cultural experiences) have proven effective in capturing the attention of Gen Z audiences (Chen et al., 2023).

A recent study by Li and Zhang (2023) examined the impact of short video platforms like Douyin (TikTok) on youth engagement with time-honored brands. The study found that brands that incorporated interactive, visually rich content into their marketing strategies were more likely to be perceived as culturally relevant and innovative, thus increasing purchase intention.

2.5 Theoretical Foundations

This study is underpinned by two major theoretical perspectives: the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model and the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory. These frameworks are selected for their complementary explanatory power in addressing how cross-over innovation strategies influence young consumers' perceptions and behavioral intentions, particularly in the context of Chinese time-honored brands (THBs).

2.5.1 Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Model

The SOR model, introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), provides a foundational structure for understanding the psychological mechanisms through which environmental stimuli influence consumer behavior.

The model posits that external stimuli (S) affect the internal state of an individual (O), which in turn triggers a behavioral response (R). In the domain of consumer research, this model has been widely adopted to explain how various marketing stimuli such as atmospheric cues, digital engagement, and brand messaging evoke emotional or cognitive reactions that shape consumer decisions (Hochreiter et al., 2023; Mkpojiogu et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2024).

In this study, cross-over innovation strategies are conceptualized as external stimuli, including both product innovations (functional and aesthetic) and marketing innovations (social media and experiential marketing). These innovations influence consumers' perceived innovativeness—a cognitive construct representing their evaluation of novelty and creativity—which in turn affects their purchase intentions.

The SOR model thus provides a coherent lens to trace the path from innovation stimuli to consumer action, mediated by perception. Moreover, cultural identity is introduced as a moderator, recognizing that internal evaluations may be shaped by personal identification with

traditional cultural values (Ric & Benazić, 2022). The adoption of the SOR model allows this study to systematically test direct, mediated, and moderated relationships, aligning with the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach employed in the analysis. The model's adaptability to complex consumer environments and its capacity to accommodate cognitive mediators make it a theoretically robust framework for this investigation.

2.5.2 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory, developed by Rogers (1962), is instrumental in explaining how new ideas, products, and services are adopted within a social system over time. DOI theory identifies five key attributes that shape consumer adoption: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Stephenson et al., 2018). These attributes influence how potential adopters evaluate the desirability and usability of innovations, thus determining the rate and extent of adoption.

In the current study, functional innovation is aligned with relative advantage—reflecting the practical utility that young consumers perceive in the redesigned or modernized products of THBs. Aesthetic innovation, on the other hand, relates to compatibility and observability, capturing the alignment of product appearance with consumer lifestyle and values, and the visibility of design-related novelty (Harikrishnan & Vikraman, 2024).

DOI also recognizes the heterogeneity of adopters and highlights the role of early adopters—a consumer segment particularly relevant in urban Chinese markets like Wuhan, where Generation Z consumers are digitally connected and culturally expressive. These consumers are more open to new formats and collaborations, often driving diffusion through social media and peer influence (Guo & Huang, 2024).

By embedding DOI into the conceptualization of product innovation, the study ensures that the innovation variables are grounded in a tested framework. It also enhances the interpretive depth of the analysis by accounting for the perceptual dimensions that underpin adoption behavior, especially among young consumers navigating the intersection of heritage and modernity.

2.6 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

2.6.1 Conceptual Framework Overview

Building upon the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model and Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory, this study proposes a conceptual framework that explains how cross-over innovation strategies influence young consumers' purchase intentions toward Chinese time-honored brands (THBs) through the mediating mechanism of perceived innovativeness and the moderating role of cultural identity.

As shown in Figure 1, In line with the SOR framework, cross-over innovations are treated as external stimuli (S), perceived innovativeness represents the internal organismic state (O), and purchase intention is the final response (R).

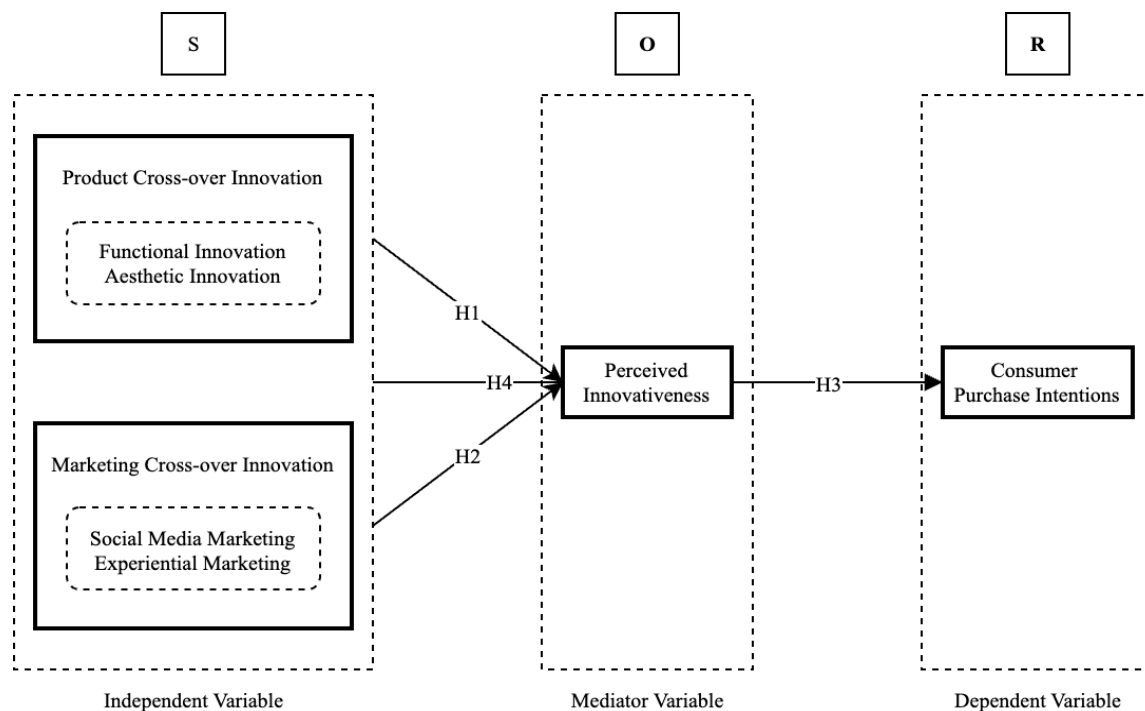


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

Perceived innovativeness is conceptualized as the subjective judgment of consumers in evaluating whether the brand's innovation efforts are creative, relevant, and novel. This internal cognitive assessment plays a central mediating role between innovation stimuli and behavioral outcomes.

2.6.2 Hypothesis Development

Based on the above framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Product Cross-Over Innovation and Perceived Innovativeness

- **H1a:** Functional innovation positively influences consumers' perceived innovativeness of Chinese time-honored brands.
- **H1b:** Aesthetic innovation positively influences consumers' perceived innovativeness of Chinese time-honored brands.

These hypotheses are grounded in DOI theory, which posits that innovation attributes such as relative advantage (functional utility) and compatibility/observability (aesthetic appeal) significantly affect consumers' evaluation of new offerings (Stephenson et al., 2018; Liu, 2019).

H2: Marketing Cross-Over Innovation and Perceived Innovativeness

- **H2a:** social media marketing positively influences consumers' perceived innovativeness of Chinese time-honored brands.

- **H2b:** Experiential marketing positively influences consumers' perceived Sinnovativeness of Chinese time-honored brands.

These hypotheses are supported by the SOR model and recent studies indicating that interactive digital and offline experiences can enhance brand perception by stimulating cognitive engagement (Mkpojiogu et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2024).

H3: Perceived Innovativeness and Purchase Intention

- **H3:** Perceived innovativeness positively influences consumers' purchase intentions toward Chinese time-honored brands.

This hypothesis reflects the core SOR pathway, positing that internal evaluations mediate between external stimuli and behavioral responses (Liu & Wang, 2024).

H4: Mediating Role of Perceived Innovativeness

- **H4a:** Perceived innovativeness mediates the relationship between functional innovation and purchase intention.
- **H4b:** Perceived innovativeness mediates the relationship between aesthetic innovation and purchase intention.
- **H4c:** Perceived innovativeness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.
- **H4d:** Perceived innovativeness mediates the relationship between experiential marketing and purchase intention.

These hypotheses empirically examine the psychological mechanism through which innovation strategies influence consumer behavioral outcomes, positioning perceived innovativeness as a pivotal cognitive mediator.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional online survey to examine the relationship between cross-over innovation, perceived innovativeness, and purchase intention among young consumers of Chinese time-honored brands. The structural relationships were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Respondents were selected through non-probability purposive sampling, targeting Chinese consumers aged 18–25 residing in Wuhan, a key urban center with a high concentration of youth and cultural consumption. Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed through Wenjuanxing, a widely used survey platform in China. A total of 384 valid responses were obtained.

3.3 Measurement Instruments

All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from previous studies:

- Functional Innovation and Aesthetic Innovation were adapted from Wang & Ahmed (2004) and Homburg et al. (2015).
- Social Media Marketing and Experiential Marketing followed Kim & Ko (2012) and Brakus et al. (2009), respectively.
- Perceived Innovativeness was measured using items from Tellis et al. (2009).
- Purchase Intention was assessed using the scale by Spears and Singh (2004).

All items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”).

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data were first screened using SPSS 26.0 for accuracy, normality, and outliers. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and SEM were conducted using AMOS 26.0 to assess model fit and test hypotheses. Model reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were examined prior to testing the structural model. Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was used to assess the mediating effects of perceived innovativeness.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained digitally prior to the survey. All responses were anonymized and kept confidential. This research followed ethical guidelines consistent with academic standards for human subjects research.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the empirical results of the study aimed at evaluating the effects of product and marketing cross-over innovations on young consumers’ purchase intentions toward Chinese time-honored brands, with a particular focus on the mediating role of perceived innovativeness.

The analysis follows a structured approach, beginning with reliability and validity assessments, followed by confirmatory factor analysis, structural model testing, and mediation analysis.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

To ensure the validity and reliability of the latent constructs, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS. This step evaluates the measurement model before proceeding to the structural path analysis. The assessment focused on three key areas: internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

4.2.1 Internal Consistency Reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each construct to assess internal consistency. As shown in Table 1, all values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), indicating acceptable reliability. Notably, perceived innovativeness ($\alpha = 0.900$), experiential marketing innovation ($\alpha = 0.891$), and purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.885$) demonstrated particularly strong internal consistency.

Table 4.1: Reliability Analysis Results

Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Functional Innovation	3	0.884
Aesthetic Innovation	3	0.865
Social Media Marketing Innovation	3	0.883
Experiential Marketing Innovation	3	0.891
Perceived Innovativeness	4	0.900
Purchase Intentions	3	0.885

4.2.2 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was evaluated through standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As illustrated in Table 4.2, all standardized loadings ranged from 0.81 to 0.879, exceeding the 0.60 benchmark (Hair et al., 2019). CR values ranged from 0.87 to 0.90 and AVE values ranged from 0.68 to 0.73, thus satisfying the conditions for convergent validity.

Table 4.2: Convergent Validity Results

Item	Factor Loading λ	Squared Factor Loading λ^2	Measurement Error	AVE	CR
Functional Innovation1	0.823	0.677	-	0.72	0.88
Functional Innovation2	0.854	0.729	0.056		
Functional Innovation3	0.865	0.748	0.056		
Aesthetic Innovation1	0.836	0.699	-	0.68	0.87
Aesthetic Innovation2	0.81	0.656	0.057		
Aesthetic Innovation3	0.831	0.691	0.057		
Social Media Marketing Innovation1	0.87	0.757	-	0.72	0.88
Social Media Marketing Innovation2	0.841	0.707	0.052		
Social Media Marketing Innovation3	0.829	0.687	0.053		
Experiential Marketing Innovation1	0.867	0.752	-	0.73	0.89
Experiential Marketing Innovation2	0.82	0.672	0.05		
Experiential Marketing Innovation3	0.879	0.773	0.049		
Perceived Innovativeness1	0.83	0.689	-	0.69	0.90
Perceived Innovativeness2	0.848	0.719	0.051		
Perceived Innovativeness3	0.819	0.671	0.055		
Perceived Innovativeness4	0.832	0.692	0.053		
Purchase Intentions1	0.849	0.721	-	0.72	0.89
Purchase Intentions2	0.852	0.726	0.052		
Purchase Intentions3	0.845	0.714	0.053		

4.2.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. According to Table 4.3, the square roots of the AVE values (diagonal elements) were greater than the inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal elements), confirming that all constructs were empirically distinct from each other.

Table 4.3: Discriminant Validity Results

	Functional Innovation	Aesthetic Innovation	Social Media Marketing Innovation	Experiential Marketing Innovation	Perceived Innovativeness	Purchase Intentions
Functional Innovation	0.847					
Aesthetic Innovation	0.37	0.826				
Social Media Marketing Innovation	0.233	0.17	0.847			
Experiential Marketing Innovation	0.42	0.309	0.186	0.855		
Perceived Innovativeness	0.432	0.338	0.17	0.431	0.832	
Purchase Intentions	0.416	0.26	0.358	0.362	0.386	0.849

4.2.4 Model Fit Indices

To assess the overall goodness-of-fit of the measurement model, several indices were considered. The CFA results revealed excellent model fit, with all indicators meeting conventional thresholds: $\chi^2/df = 1.332$, CFI = 0.990, TLI = 0.987, GFI = 0.952, and RMSEA = 0.029. These results, summarized in Table 4.4, indicate that the measurement model adequately represents the data.

Table 4.4: Model Fit Indices of Measurement Model

Fit Indices	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA
Threshold	<3	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.10
Value	1.332	0.952	0.99	0.961	0.987	0.029

4.3 Structural Model Evaluation

Following confirmation of the measurement model's validity and reliability, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to assess the hypothesized relationships among constructs. The analysis was conducted using AMOS, focusing on both direct and mediating effects, with a particular emphasis on the role of perceived innovativeness in bridging innovation strategies and purchase intention.

4.3.1 Model Fit Assessment

The structural model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data, with fit indices consistent with

established thresholds: $\chi^2/df = 1.768$, CFI = 0.982, TLI = 0.975, GFI = 0.942, and RMSEA = 0.037. These values confirm that the proposed structural framework adequately represents the observed relationships among variables.

Table 4.5: Model Fit Indices of Structural Model

Fit Indices	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA
Threshold	<3	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.10
Value	1.768	0.942	0.982	0.961	0.975	0.037

4.3.2 Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Standardized path coefficients were estimated to test the proposed hypotheses (H1–H3). As presented in Table 4.6, all four innovation dimensions—functional innovation, aesthetic innovation, social media marketing, and experiential marketing—showed statistically significant relationships with perceived innovativeness. Furthermore, perceived innovativeness exhibited a strong, positive effect on purchase intention.

Table 4.6: Path Hypothesis Testing

Y	<---	X	Estimate	SE	C.R.	p
Perceived Innovativeness	<---	Functional Innovation	0.29	0.066	4.394	***
Perceived Innovativeness	<---	Aesthetic Innovation	0.168	0.062	2.723	0.006
Perceived Innovativeness	<---	Social Media Marketing Innovation	0.025	0.053	0.466	0.641
Perceived Innovativeness	<---	Experiential Marketing Innovation	0.284	0.058	4.895	***
Purchase Intentions	<---	Perceived Innovativeness	0.197	0.063	3.096	0.002

4.3.3 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

A summary of hypothesis results is provided in Table 4.7. Among the five direct paths tested, four hypotheses were supported, while H2a (social media marketing → perceived innovativeness) did not achieve statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Table 4.7: Hypotheses Testing results

Hypothesis	Results
H1a: Functional Innovation in product cross-over innovation positively influences brand Perceived Innovativeness.	Supported
H1b: Aesthetic Innovation in product cross-over innovation positively influences brand Perceived Innovativeness.	Supported
H2a: Social Media Marketing in marketing cross-over innovation positively influences brand Perceived Innovativeness.	Not Supported
H2b: Experiential Marketing in marketing cross-over innovation positively influences brand Perceived Innovativeness.	Supported
H3: Perceived Innovativeness positively influences young consumers' Purchase Intentions.	Supported

4.4 Mediation Analysis

This section investigates whether Perceived Innovativeness serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between Cross-over Innovation strategies (product and marketing) and Purchase Intentions. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, the

mediation analysis aims to determine whether the influence of innovation strategies operates directly or indirectly through consumers' perceptions of innovativeness.

4.4.1 Indirect Effect Analysis

To assess the indirect effects, bootstrapping was conducted using the default setting in AMOS (bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals). An indirect effect is considered significant when the confidence interval (CI) does not contain zero.

Table 4.8 Mediation Effect Testing

Path	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P	Test Result
Functional Innovation → Perceived Innovativeness → Purchase Intentions	0.057	0.026	0.11	0.000	Supported
Aesthetic Innovation → Perceived Innovativeness → Purchase Intentions	0.033	0.011	0.072	0.001	Supported
Social Media Marketing Innovation → Perceived Innovativeness → Purchase Intentions	0.005	-0.009	0.028	0.488	Not Supported
Experiential Marketing Innovation → Perceived Innovativeness → Purchase Intentions	0.056	0.025	0.101	0.000	Supported

The results indicate that three of the four cross-over innovation strategies—Functional Innovation, Aesthetic Innovation, and Experiential Marketing—exert significant indirect effects on Purchase Intentions through Perceived Innovativeness. The non-significant path for Social Media Marketing Innovation implies that while it may influence purchase intentions directly, it does not do so through enhancing perceptions of innovativeness.

These findings highlight that product-based innovation (both functional and aesthetic) and immersive offline experiences more effectively shape consumer perceptions of innovativeness, which subsequently drive behavioral intentions. In contrast, digital engagement strategies alone do not appear to strengthen innovativeness perceptions in a meaningful way.

4.4.2 Hypothesis Testing Results

To validate the conceptual model, the mediation hypotheses (H4a–H4d) were tested. The results are summarized in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Mediation Effect Hypotheses Testing results

Hypothesis	Results
H4a: Perceived Innovativeness mediates the relationship between Functional Innovation and Purchase Intentions.	Supported
H4b: Perceived Innovativeness mediates the relationship between Aesthetic Innovation and Purchase Intentions.	Supported
H4c: Perceived Innovativeness mediates the relationship between Social Media Marketing Innovation and Purchase Intentions.	Not Supported
H4d: Perceived Innovativeness mediates the relationship between Experiential Marketing Innovation and Purchase Intentions.	Supported

The validation of H4a, H4b, and H4d confirms that perceived innovativeness plays a key mediating role in linking innovation inputs to consumer behavior. These findings underscore the importance of designing innovation strategies that not only appeal to utility and aesthetics but also create meaningful experiences that consumers interpret as novel and valuable.

By contrast, the rejection of H4c suggests that social media-based campaigns, although useful for brand visibility, may lack sufficient depth or uniqueness to shape consumer perceptions of innovativeness, limiting their indirect impact on behavioral outcomes.

5. DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the role of perceived innovativeness as a mediating mechanism between cross-over innovation strategies and young consumers' purchase intentions toward Chinese time-honored brands (THBs). Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model and the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory, the research confirms that functional innovation, aesthetic innovation, and experiential marketing innovation significantly enhance perceived innovativeness, which in turn drives purchase intentions. However, social media marketing, while having a direct effect on purchase intention, does not significantly influence perceived innovativeness.

The findings reinforce the notion that functional innovation remains a cornerstone of perceived value in traditional brands. Consumers respond positively to product enhancements that are tangible and performance-based, such as improvements in technology integration or usability. These upgrades are closely aligned with Rogers' conceptualization of "relative advantage" in the DOI framework, which emphasizes the practical benefits of innovation as a key determinant of consumer adoption. In the case of Chinese THBs, integrating modern product functionality appears to serve not only as a signal of technical progress but also as a bridge that connects heritage value with contemporary expectations.

Aesthetic innovation was also found to have a significant, albeit less pronounced, impact on perceived innovativeness. Modifications in design, visual identity, or packaging help THBs align with evolving consumer tastes, especially among younger demographics who associate visual sophistication with brand relevance. These changes serve as observable cues of brand modernization, increasing consumer recognition of the brand's adaptability. However, the relatively weaker effect compared to functional innovation may suggest that aesthetic enhancements, while important, are insufficient if not accompanied by substantive improvements in product quality or performance.

The influence of experiential marketing innovation on perceived innovativeness was both strong and significant. This underscores the importance of immersive experiences in shaping consumer perceptions, particularly in bridging the historical identity of THBs with emotionally engaging narratives. Offline events, pop-up stores, and interactive installations allow consumers to "experience" innovation in a way that feels authentic and memorable. These findings are consistent with the SOR model, wherein the stimulus of experience triggers a strong organismic response—cognitive and affective evaluation—which eventually leads to

behavioral intent. In contrast, social media marketing innovation did not have a significant impact on perceived innovativeness, though it did directly affect purchase intention. This finding suggests that while digital engagement through influencers, short videos, and interactive campaigns may succeed in generating attention or facilitating transactions, it does not necessarily alter consumers' core evaluations of brand novelty or creativity. This may be attributed to the oversaturation of marketing content on digital platforms, which has led to a normalization of social media tactics. In the context of heritage brands, where authenticity and differentiation are crucial, superficial digital interactions may fail to convey the depth of innovation needed to transform perceptions.

The mediating role of perceived innovativeness was confirmed in three out of four innovation pathways, further validating its central function in the decision-making process. When consumers recognize innovation—whether through functionality, aesthetics, or experience—they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the brand and ultimately translate these attitudes into purchase behavior. The absence of mediation in the social media marketing path reinforces the idea that not all forms of innovation stimulate cognitive recognition in the same way, and that perceived innovativeness must be meaningfully activated to influence outcomes.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored how product and marketing cross-over innovation strategies influence young consumers' purchase intentions toward Chinese time-honored brands (THBs), with a particular focus on the mediating role of perceived innovativeness. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model and the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory, the research constructed and empirically tested a conceptual model using data collected from 384 young consumers in Wuhan.

The results confirm that functional innovation, aesthetic innovation, and experiential marketing innovation significantly enhance perceived innovativeness, which in turn leads to stronger purchase intentions. Among these, functional innovation exhibited the strongest mediated effect, indicating that consumers place high value on practical product improvements when evaluating brand innovativeness. Aesthetic and experiential innovations also contributed meaningfully, demonstrating the importance of both visual appeal and immersive brand experiences in shaping perceptions. These findings provide strong evidence that innovation in THBs must go beyond tradition-preservation and actively engage with contemporary consumer expectations.

Conversely, while social media marketing innovation directly influenced purchase intentions, it did not significantly affect perceived innovativeness. This suggests that digital marketing alone may enhance brand visibility but is insufficient to shift consumers' perceptions of innovation. For heritage brands aiming to revitalize their image, this finding underscores the need to pair digital communication with deeper, experience-driven or product-based innovation strategies.

The study makes several important theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it extends the SOR framework by positioning perceived innovativeness as a central organismic response that links innovation stimuli to behavioral outcomes. It also enriches the application of DOI theory within the context of cultural and legacy brands, emphasizing how innovation characteristics resonate with modern consumers. Practically, the findings offer valuable guidance for brand managers of THBs: to increase market relevance among younger generations, brands must strategically invest in functional product upgrades, elevate aesthetic design, and deliver engaging, real-world brand experiences.

In conclusion, perceived innovativeness serves as a vital psychological mechanism through which innovation strategies influence consumer behavior. For Chinese time-honored brands navigating the tension between heritage and modernization, success lies not merely in preserving the past, but in creatively reinterpreting tradition through innovation that is both meaningful and perceivable to a new generation of consumers.

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