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A Study on the Impact of Sino-Thai Catering Brand Collaborations on Consumer Purchase Intention: An Empirical Analysis from the Perspective of Cultural Adaptation

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Abstract

With the concept of consumption upgrading and two-way cultural integration, cross-border co-branding in the catering industry is now one of the most important strategies. Nevertheless, there is no empirical evidence regarding the mechanism of its impact on consumer purchase intention within the Sino-Thai culture. According to the S-O-R model and 327 valid responses from China and Thailand utilizing SPSS and the Process, the findings show that brand fit positively influences brand identity, which subsequently enhances purchase intention and has a partial mediating role, while cultural adaptation positively moderates this association. Cultural adaptation moderating effect (β=0.252) and brand identity (49.12%) mediating effect have a higher value in Thailand than in China (41.65%; beta=0.159). The research extends existing theories and provides diverse co-branding recommendations for Sino-Thai catering companies.

Keywords: *catering cross-brand marketing, brand co-branding fit, brand identity, cultural adaptation, purchase intention, china-thailand comparison*

1. Introduction

The global catering cross-border co-branding market reached over $80 billion in 2023, with China and Thailand accounting for approximately 30% of this total (Euromonitor International, 2023). The two markets exhibit distinct co-branding patterns: Chinese brands rely on high-frequency collaborations, social media buzz, and contrast-driven campaigns (e.g., Luckin Coffee × Kweichow Moutai), while Thai brands emphasize deep emotional connections and star IP-driven ecosystems (e.g., YOLK Egg Tart × SCR Coffee). Despite the practical popularity of these strategies, academic research has not systematically compared their underlying consumer psychological mechanisms or identified the cultural boundaries that shape their effectiveness.

Existing literature on cross-border marketing primarily focuses on single-country case studies or resource synergy at the firm level. Few studies have integrated consumer identity theory and cultural adaptation theory to explain how co-branding fit translates into purchase behavior. Specifically, the mediating role of brand identity—the process by which consumers use brands to express self-identity and gain group belonging—has not been empirically validated in the Sino-Thai context. Additionally, cultural differences are often discussed in general terms rather than operationalized as measurable moderating variables, leaving a critical gap in understanding how cultural adaptation influences co-branding outcomes.

This study addresses these gaps by developing and testing an integrated theoretical model based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. The model positions brand co-branding fit as the external stimulus, brand identity as the internal organism, and purchase intention as the behavioral response, with cultural adaptation acting as a moderator. By comparing data from Chinese and Thai consumers, this research provides cross-cultural insights that can help catering brands optimize their co-branding strategies for different markets.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Cross-Border Co-Branding Theory

Cross-border co-branding is defined as a strategic partnership between brands from different industries or countries to share resources, expand customer bases, and create synergistic value (Zhou et al., 2024). According to Aaker's (1991) brand equity model, cross-border co-branding enhances brand value through three core dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, and brand loyalty. In the catering industry, co-branding typically takes two forms: format cross-border (e.g., catering + entertainment) and brand/IP cross-border (e.g., catering × star IP), with the latter being the focus of this study.

Previous research has consistently found that brand fit—the perceived consistency between co-branding partners in terms of image, values, and target audience—is the primary predictor of co-branding success (Wang, 2024). High fit reduces consumer cognitive dissonance and facilitates the transfer of positive associations from the partner brand to the focal brand. However, studies have also shown that moderate contrast can increase novelty and social media engagement, particularly in the Chinese market (Yang, 2024).

1.1.2 Consumer Identity Theory

Consumer identity theory posits that consumption is not merely a functional activity but a symbolic process through which individuals construct and express their self-identity (Baudrillard, 1998). In the context of co-branding, consumers who identify with a brand are more likely to purchase its products, recommend it to others, and pay premium prices (Sun, 2024). Brand identity encompasses both personal identity (alignment with individual values) and social identity (alignment with group norms), both of which drive purchase intention.

Recent studies have applied the S-O-R model to explain how co-branding stimuli influence consumer identity. For example, Han, Xin, and Yun (2025) found that perceived value in cross-border marketing significantly drives customer engagement through brand affect. Additionally, Zhuang et al. (2023) found that co-branding marketing activities evoke perceived emotions in consumers, which in turn enhance brand identity and purchase intention. However, these studies have not compared the relative importance of brand identity across different cultural contexts.

1.1.3 Cultural Adaptation Theory

Cultural adaptation theory argues that marketing strategies must be adjusted to align with the cultural characteristics of the target market to be effective (Meng & Fan, 2025). In cross-border co-branding, cultural adaptation operates at three levels: symbolic adaptation (alignment of visual and narrative elements), taste adaptation (adjustment of product flavors to local preferences), and scenario adaptation (alignment with local consumption habits).

Empirical evidence suggests that cultural adaptation moderates the relationship between brand fit and consumer responses. For example, Wang and Wan (2023) found that culturally incongruent co-branding campaigns often generate high social media buzz but low actual sales, as consumers perceive them as inauthentic. However, the strength of this moderating effect may vary across markets depending on the cultural sensitivity of consumers.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this study are specified as follows:

1) To develop and validate a theoretical model explaining the impact of brand co-branding fit on consumer purchase intention in the Sino-Thai catering industry.

2) To examine the mediating role of brand identity in the relationship between brand co-branding fit and purchase intention.

3) To investigate the moderating effect of cultural adaptation on the link between brand co-branding fit and brand identity.

4) To compare the differences in the above mechanisms between Chinese and Thai consumers.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design using a scenario-based questionnaire survey to test the proposed hypotheses. The methodology was designed to ensure the reliability and validity of the data, as well as the comparability of results between China and Thailand.

3.1 Research Model and Hypotheses

3.1.1 Research Model Construction

This study is built on the classic Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, which explains how external environmental stimuli trigger internal psychological processes and subsequently lead to behavioral responses. In the context of Sino-Thai catering co-branding:

Stimulus (S): Brand co-branding fit, which serves as the core external marketing stimulus that consumers perceive when exposed to a co-branding campaign.

Organism (O): Brand identity, representing the internal psychological state where consumers integrate the co-branded brand into their self-concept and group identity.

Response (R): Purchase intention, the final behavioral outcome reflecting consumers' willingness to purchase the co-branded product.

Additionally, cultural adaptation is introduced as a moderating variable that influences the strength of the relationship between the external stimulus (brand co-branding fit) and the internal organism (brand identity).

This moderating effect accounts for cross-cultural differences in how consumers perceive and respond to co-branding elements.

Based on the above theoretical framework, the conceptual research model is constructed as shown in Figure 1.

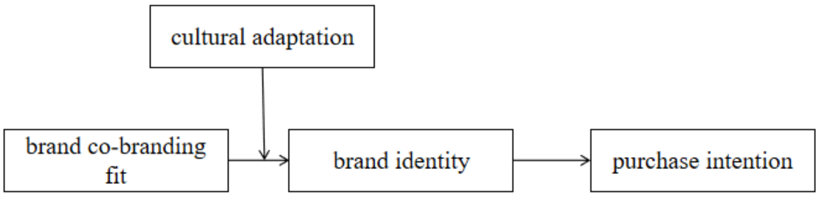

Figure 1 Conceptual research model of Sino-Thai catering co-branding

3.1.2 Variable Definition

All variables in this study are operationalized based on established academic scales and adapted to the catering co-branding context:

1) Brand co-branding fit (Independent variable): The degree to which consumers perceive consistency between the two co-branding partners in terms of brand image, core values, target audience, and product style. High fit indicates that the collaboration appears logical and meaningful to consumers, rather than a forced combination.

2) Brand identity (Mediating variable): The psychological process through which consumers develop emotional attachment and self-alignment with the co-branded brand. It includes both personal identity (the brand reflects individual values and personality) and social identity (the brand signals membership in a desired social group).

3) Purchase intention (Dependent variable): The likelihood that consumers will purchase the co-branded catering product in the future. It encompasses willingness to initiate purchase, pay a price premium, and overcome minor inconveniences (such as queuing) to obtain the product.

4) Cultural adaptation (Moderating variable): The extent to which the co-branding campaign aligns with the cultural characteristics of the target market, including the use of appropriate cultural symbols, respect for local customs, and adaptation to local aesthetic preferences and consumption habits.

3.1.3 Hypothesis Derivation

According to the fit hypothesis of cross-border marketing (Wang, 2024), high co-branding fit reduces consumer cognitive dissonance and facilitates the transfer of positive associations from the partner brand to the focal brand. When consumers perceive that two brands share similar values and positioning, they are more likely to view the collaboration as authentic and develop a stronger sense of identification with the joint brand. Previous empirical studies have also confirmed that perceived fit is a significant predictor of consumer brand acceptance (Yang, 2024). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Brand co-branding fit has a significant positive effect on brand identity.

Consumer identity theory posits that consumption is a symbolic act through which individuals construct and express their self-identity (Baudrillard, 1998). When consumers identify with a brand, they view the brand as an extension of themselves and are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors, including purchasing the brand's products, recommending it to others, and paying premium prices. Sun (2024) found that brand identity is the strongest predictor of consumer purchase intention in the context of co-branding. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Brand identity has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

Combining H1 and H2, brand co-branding fit may not directly influence purchase intention but instead act through the mediating mechanism of brand identity. That is, a well-fitted co-branding campaign first enhances consumers' identification with the brand, which in turn drives their willingness to purchase. Zhuang et al. (2023) provided preliminary evidence for this mediating path in the Chinese tea market, showing that perceived emotions (a component of brand identity) mediate the relationship between co-branding marketing and purchase intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand co-branding fit and purchase intention.

Cultural adaptation theory argues that marketing strategies must be adjusted to match the cultural context of the target market to be effective (Meng & Fan, 2025). In cross-border co-branding, high cultural adaptation makes the campaign more relatable and authentic to local consumers, amplifying the positive effect of brand co-branding fit on brand identity. Conversely, low cultural adaptation may lead to consumer skepticism or even backlash, weakening the relationship between fit and identity. Given the significant cultural differences between China and Thailand, the strength of this moderating effect is expected to vary between the two markets. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Cultural adaptation positively moderates the relationship between brand co-branding fit and brand identity.

3.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: (1) case selection and scenario description, (2) core variable measurement, and (3) demographic information. All core variables were measured using 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), adapted from established scales in the literature and modified to fit the catering co-branding context.

3.2.1 Scenario Anchors

To enhance the ecological validity of the study, four representative co-branding cases were selected as scenario anchors:

China: Luckin Coffee × Kweichow Moutai ("Sauce Latte") and Heytea × FENDI ("Joy Yellow")

Thailand: YOLK Egg Tart × SCR Coffee and Cha Tra Mue × Moodeng

Respondents were asked to select one case they were familiar with and evaluate all subsequent questions based on that case. This approach ensured that respondents had a concrete reference point for their judgments.

3.2.2 Variable Measurement

The measurement items for each variable are summarized in Table 1. Brand co-branding fit was measured using 3 items adapted from Wang (2024), assessing the perceived consistency between the co-branding partners. Brand identity was measured using 6 items adapted from Sun (2024), capturing both personal and social identity dimensions. Purchase intention was measured using 4 items adapted from Sun (2024), assessing willingness to purchase, pay a premium, and recommend the product. Cultural adaptation was measured using 3 items adapted from Yao (2024), evaluating the alignment of the co-branding campaign with local cultural characteristics.

Table 1 Measurement Scales for Core Variables

Variable	Measurement Items	Source
Brand Co-Branding Fit	1) I think this collaboration between the two brands is a good match 2) I think the brand images of the two partners are harmonious 3) I think this co-branding is reasonable and meaningful	Wang (2024)
Brand Identity	1) This co-branded product makes me like the brand more 2) The image of this product matches my personal image 3) Using this product helps me express myself 4) I am more willing to recommend the brand to others 5) Using this product makes me feel closer to my favorite groups 6) This brand understands what consumers like me want	Sun (2024)
Purchase Intention	1) I will actively purchase this co-branded product if given the chance 2) I am willing to pay a higher price for this product than regular products 3) I will increase my consumption frequency at this brand because of this product 4) I am willing to try this product even if I have to queue or make a reservation	Sun (2024)

Table 1 Measurement Scales for Core Variables(continued)

Variable	Measurement Items	Source
Cultural Adaptation	The cultural symbols used in this campaign make me feel familiar This campaign respects and integrates the characteristics of local culture The design of this campaign considers the aesthetic habits of the local market	Yao (2024)

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected from May to June 2025 using online convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The Chinese version of the questionnaire was distributed via Wenjuanxing, WeChat, and Xiaohongshu, while the Thai version was distributed via Google Forms, Facebook, Instagram, and LINE. To ensure data quality, attention check questions were included in the questionnaire, and responses with completion times under 4 minutes or consistent response patterns were excluded.

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, with 327 valid responses retained after data cleaning (164 from China and 163 from Thailand). The sample characteristics are presented in Table 2. Both samples were predominantly female (53.66% in China, 51.53% in Thailand) and aged 26-30 (29.27% in China, 41.72% in Thailand), which is consistent with the target demographic for catering co-branding activities.

Table 2 Sample Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	China (n=164)		Thailand (n=163)	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender				
Male	76	46.34	79	48.47
Female	88	53.66	84	51.53
Age Group				
18-25	41	25.00	33	20.25
26-30	48	29.27	68	41.72
31-40	31	18.90	33	20.25
Above 40	44	26.83	29	17.78
Education				
Below Bachelor	51	31.10	60	36.81
Bachelor	93	56.71	86	52.76
Above Bachelor	20	12.20	17	10.43
Monthly Disposable Income				
≤3000 CNY	66	40.24	86	52.76
3001-5000 CNY	59	35.98	51	31.29
≥5001 CNY	39	23.78	26	15.95

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and Process v4.0. The analysis procedure included four steps:

1) Reliability and validity test: Cronbach's α coefficient was used to assess internal consistency reliability, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to evaluate construct validity.

2) Correlation analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the bivariate relationships between variables.

3) Hypothesis testing: Hierarchical regression was used to test the main effects (H1 and H2) and moderating effect (H4). The mediating effect (H3) was tested using the Bootstrap method with 5000 resamples.

4) Cross-cultural comparison: The above analyses were conducted separately for the Chinese and Thai samples, and the results were compared to identify cross-cultural differences.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

The reliability analysis results are presented in Table 3. For both samples, the Cronbach's α coefficients for all variables were above 0.7, indicating good internal consistency. The KMO values were 0.873 (China) and 0.875 (Thailand), and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p<0.001$) for both samples, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

Table 3 Reliability Analysis Results

Variable	**China**		**Thailand**	
	Cronbach's α	Number of Items	Cronbach's α	Number of Items
Brand Co-Branding Fit	0.745	3	0.778	3
Brand Identity	0.875	6	0.887	6
Purchase Intention	0.812	4	0.837	4
Cultural Adaptation	0.810	3	0.799	3

Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation extracted four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 66.29% of the variance in the Chinese sample and 67.99% in the Thai sample. All items loaded on their respective factors with loadings above 0.6, confirming good construct validity.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis results are presented in Table 4. For both samples, brand co-branding fit was significantly positively correlated with brand identity ($r=0.441$, $p<0.01$ in China; $r=0.465$, $p<0.01$ in Thailand) and purchase intention ($r=0.447$, $p<0.01$ in China; $r=0.388$, $p<0.01$ in Thailand). Brand identity was also significantly positively correlated with purchase intention ($r=0.547$, $p<0.01$ in China; $r=0.499$, $p<0.01$ in Thailand). Cultural adaptation was significantly positively correlated with brand co-branding fit in the Thai sample ($r=0.170$, $p<0.05$) but not in the Chinese sample.

Table 4 Correlation Matrix of Core Variables

Variable	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Mean**	**SD**
Panel A: China (n=164)						
1. Purchase Intention	1				4.572	0.943
2. Brand Co-Branding Fit	0.447**	1			4.339	0.960
3. Brand Identity	0.547**	0.441**	1		4.724	0.945
4. Cultural Adaptation	0.106	0.113*	0.153		4.331	1.101

Table 4 Correlation Matrix of Core Variables(continued)

Variable	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
Panel B: Thailand (n=163)						
1. Purchase Intention	1				4.860	0.921
2. Brand Co-Branding Fit	0.388**	1			4.550	1.039
3. Brand Identity	0.499**	0.465**	1		4.492	1.006
4. Cultural Adaptation	0.037	0.170*	0.112		4.460	1.062
*Note: *p<0.05,**p<0.01						

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

4.3.1 Main Effects (H1 and H2)

Hierarchical regression was used to test H1 and H2. For H1 (brand co-branding fit → brand identity), after controlling for demographic variables, brand co-branding fit had a significant positive effect on brand identity in both samples (β=0.445, p<0.01 in China; β=0.443, p<0.01 in Thailand). Thus, H1 was supported.

For H2 (brand identity → purchase intention), after controlling for demographic variables, brand identity had a significant positive effect on purchase intention in both samples (β=0.539, p<0.01 in China; β=0.458, p<0.01 in Thailand). Thus, H2 was supported.

4.3.2 Mediating Effect (H3)

The mediating effect of brand identity was tested using the Bootstrap method. For the Chinese sample, the direct effect of brand co-branding fit on purchase intention was 0.262 (95% CI [0.123, 0.400]), and the indirect effect was 0.187 (95% CI [0.108, 0.284]), accounting for 41.65% of the total effect. For the Thai sample, the direct effect was 0.173 (95% CI [0.038, 0.309]), and the indirect effect was 0.167 (95% CI [0.090, 0.264]), accounting for 49.12% of the total effect. Since both the direct and indirect effects were significant, brand identity played a partial mediating role in both samples. Thus, H3 was supported.

4.3.3 Moderating Effect (H4)

Hierarchical regression was used to test the moderating effect of cultural adaptation. After controlling for demographic variables, brand co-branding fit, and cultural adaptation, the interaction term between brand co-branding fit and cultural adaptation had a significant positive effect on brand identity in both samples (β=0.159, p<0.01 in China; β=0.252, p<0.01 in Thailand). This indicates that cultural adaptation positively moderates the relationship between brand co-branding fit and brand identity. Thus, H4 was supported.

Further analysis revealed that the moderating effect was stronger in the Thai sample. For Thai consumers, the effect of brand co-branding fit on brand identity increased from 0.187 (low cultural adaptation) to 0.722 (high cultural adaptation), while for Chinese consumers, it increased from 0.274 to 0.623.

4.4 Cross-Cultural Discussion

To rigorously verify whether the observed cross-cultural differences in mediation and moderation effects are statistically significant (rather than relying on mere coefficient comparisons), we conducted a formal multi-group analysis. Specifically, we introduced country (China vs. Thailand) as a dummy-coded moderator in a moderated mediation framework. The results of the coefficient comparison test (using Fisher's z-transformation) revealed that the difference in the indirect mediating effect between Thailand and China was significant ($z = 2.54$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the interaction term between country and cultural adaptation on the brand fit → identity path was also significant ($\beta = 0.098$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that the moderating effect of cultural adaptation is statistically stronger in the Thai market. These statistical tests substantiate the following cross-cultural comparisons. The cross-cultural comparison revealed three key differences between the Chinese and Thai markets:

1) Stronger mediating effect of brand identity in Thailand: The higher mediating effect in Thailand suggests that Thai consumers are more likely to base their purchase decisions on emotional and cultural identification with the brand. This is consistent with the Thai market's emphasis on star IP-driven emotional

connections, where consumers often purchase products to support their favorite celebrities and express their cultural identity.

2) Stronger moderating effect of cultural adaptation in Thailand: The stronger moderating effect indicates that Thai consumers are more sensitive to cultural elements in co-branding campaigns. This is likely due to the deep integration of Buddhism and local traditions into Thai daily life, making cultural authenticity a critical factor in consumer acceptance.

3) Stronger direct effect of brand fit in China: The higher direct effect in China suggests that Chinese consumers are more responsive to the novelty and contrast of co-branding campaigns. This aligns with the Chinese market's focus on social media buzz and viral marketing, where high-contrast collaborations can generate immediate attention and drive impulse purchases.

These findings highlight the importance of tailoring co-branding strategies to the cultural characteristics of each market. In Thailand, brands should prioritize emotional connection and cultural authenticity, while in China, they can leverage novelty and social media engagement to drive sales.

5. Conclusion

This study developed and tested an integrated model explaining the impact of Sino-Thai catering brand collaborations on consumer purchase intention. The results confirmed that brand co-branding fit positively affects brand identity, which partially mediates the relationship with purchase intention. Cultural adaptation was found to positively moderate the link between brand fit and brand identity, with stronger effects in the Thai market.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

1) This study extends cross-border marketing theory by identifying brand identity as a key mediating mechanism linking co-branding fit to purchase intention. This fills a gap in the literature by explaining the psychological process through which co-branding strategies influence consumer behavior.

2) This study validates the applicability of consumer identity theory and cultural adaptation theory in the Sino-Thai context, providing cross-cultural evidence for these theories.

3) This study operationalizes cultural adaptation as a measurable moderating variable, demonstrating its differential impact across markets.

5.2 Practical Implications

1) For Chinese brands entering Thailand: Prioritize cultural adaptation by incorporating local cultural symbols, adjusting product flavors to Thai preferences, and partnering with local star IPs to build emotional connections with consumers.

2) For Thai brands entering China: Leverage social media platforms to create viral marketing campaigns, design high-contrast co-branding collaborations to generate buzz, and incorporate Chinese cultural elements such as guochao to resonate with Chinese consumers.

3) For all brands: Adopt a "fit-identity-adaptation" three-dimensional evaluation framework before launching co-branding campaigns. Balance short-term traffic generation with long-term brand identity building to achieve sustainable growth.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it used a cross-sectional survey design, which cannot establish causal relationships. Future research could use longitudinal studies or experimental designs to confirm the causal links between variables. Second, the sample was limited to young, urban consumers in major cities. Future research could expand the sample to include older consumers and those in non-urban areas. Third, the cultural adaptation scale focused on surface-level elements such as symbols and aesthetics. Future research could develop a more comprehensive scale that includes deeper cultural dimensions such as values and social norms.

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