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A Study of Regional Brand Positioning Strategy for Linhai Orange Based on Soft Laddering

Ying TAO, Yueli ZHANG *

College of Economics and Management, Zhejiang A & F University, Lin'an 311300, China

Abstract In this paper, Means-End Chain Theory is used for the positioning strategy study on regional brand of Linhai Orange, and based on soft laddering method, 33 Linhai Orange consumers are interviewed. By understanding the individual needs of Linhai Orange consumers, this paper establishes the "Attributes- Consequences-Value" matrix and hierarchical value map. This study aims to explore the regional brand positioning strategy of Linhai Orange, in order to promote the regional brand building and extension of Linhai Orange and enhance the sustained regional brand development of Linhai Orange.

Key words

1 Introduction

From the theoretical or practical point of view, brand positioning plays a crucial role in the process of brand building. At present, there have been many problems in quite a number of Chinese enterprises when brand is developed to a certain stage due to fuzzy brand positioning, eventually leading to failure. Zhejiang Province is a major orange producer in China, and many important orange producing areas have expanded sales by building the regional brand to improve the competitiveness of orange. In just a decade, Zhejiang's Linhai Orange has become a well-known regional brand, and won the honors of Famous Brand in Zhejiang Province and Ten GI Regional Brands in Zhejiang Province. It becomes a promising new brand of orange in the province. However, there are still many problems restricting the development of Linhai Orange brand such as unobvious shelter effect of regional brand and chaotic individual brand. Therefore, with Linhai Orange in Taizhou City as sample, we use "Means-End Chain Theory" based on soft laddering to conduct in-depth interviews with 33 Linhai Orange consumers. Through the survey of Linhai Orange consumers' personal value demand, we establish the " Attributes- Consequences-Value" matrix and hierarchical value map according to the survey results, to finally get the real needs of consumers for Linhai Orange, in order to explore the regional brand positioning strategy of Linhai Orange, promote the building and extension of Linhai Orange brand, and enhance sustained development of Linhai Orange brand.

2 Soft laddering

Currently, the mainstream analysis method of Means-End Chain Theory (MEC) is a qualitative research method-laddering method, which uses induced way to find the relationship between consumers and ACV (Attributes, Consequences and Value) of products, and build the ACV structure. Soft laddering developed by Gutman is one of the laddering methods. Soft laddering operates in the form of "… in-depth interviews with respondents following as far as possible their natural flow of speech …". In soft laddering, researchers aim to learn the meaning of the given answers and to link them to the means-end chain model. Soft laddering is a process of reminiscence, which can reveal more details on the product perception, so it is suitable for small-size sample survey.

3 Research methods

In this study, we use the Means-End Chain Theory for the study on positioning strategy of Linhai Orange brand. Means-End Chain Theory (MEC) is described by Grunert and Valli (2001) as the most promising theoretical progress in the consumer research since the 1980s, and developed by Gutman (1982) on the basis of Means-End Theory proposed by psychologist Tolman (1932) and economist Abbott (1995). Means-end chains are a set of measures for the purpose of questioning interview participants regarding the reasons for their decision choice and capturing the responses in terms of linkages between different outcomes. Means-End Chain Theory is a simple structure linking attributes, consequences and values, and through the A-C-V (Attributes-Consequences-Values) connection, we can explore the consumers' value target and describe the meaning of goods or services to consumers. This study is the interview survey based on soft laddering, and according to scholars' use of this method in the study, we can get plenty of interview information by interviewing 30 – 50 people, so we interview a total of 33 respondents. From specific product attributes to consumption consequences and personal values, we ask the respondents questions in one-to-one way until the respondents can not give the answer. At this point, the interview is over. Then using content analysis, we encode the relevant information about attributes, values and consequences, build the meaning matrix and make the hierarchical value map which reveals the dominant

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* Corresponding author. E-mail: 760046832@qq.com

orientation of value chain, and reflects the A-C-V connection for Linhai Orange consumers.

3.1 Data collection In this paper, we use soft laddering for data collection and analysis, and links the product attributes with personal values. The interview steps based on soft laddering start from asking some questions such as "Why is it important to you?", to the progressive questions on specific product attributes, consumption consequences and personal values, to get the consumers real demand for Linhai Orange. Interview forms are as follows:

Question 1: Did you ever bought Linhai Orange?

Answer 1: Yes (interview continued); no (interview stopped).

Question 2: Why do you choose to purchase Linhai Orange?

Answer 2: Reason 1, 2, 3 .....

Question 4: Why do you think the reason is very important?

Answer 4: .....

.....

The questions are continued until consumers can not give an answer. Using one-to-one way, the interviews spanned from November 2014 to December 2014, lasting two months, and the interview with each respondent took about 30 minutes or so. Interview principle is to allow respondents to talk in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, and timely adjust questions for different persons, to get information as much as possible.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable		Quantity	Percentage %
Sex	Male	17	51.5
	Female	16	48.5
Age	25 – 35	23	69.7
	36 – 45	6	18.2
	46 – 55	3	9.1
	56 – 65	1	3.0
Education level	Senior high school and below	11	33.3
	Technical secondary school	2	6.1
	University (including junior college)	17	51.5
	Master degree and above	3	9.1
Occupation	Government and public institutions	7	21.2
	Employees	12	36.4
	Self-employed people	8	24.2
	Others	6	18.2

Note: Number of samples is 33.

3.2 Respondents The interview used by soft laddering is in-depth interview, which is relatively time-consuming in the survey, so we use the convenience sampling way in the research. The interview object is the person having ever actually consumed Linhai Orange. Based on previous scholars' research results, we successfully interviewed 33 Linhai Orange consumers. Respondents include 17 males and 16 females; there are 23 respondents aged 25 – 35, accounting for 69.7%; there are 6 respondents aged 36 – 45, accounting for 18.2%; there are 3 respondents aged 46 – 55, accounting for 9.1%; there is only one respondent aged 56 – 65, accounting for 3%; the respondents with education level of university (including junior college) account for 51.5%, while the respondents with education level of senior high school and below account for 33.3%; 21.2% of respondents working in government and institutions, 24.2% of respondents are self-employed people, and the remaining respondents account for 18.2%.

3.3 Data analysis After obtaining the interview data based on soft laddering, the next step is to organize and process these data. The entire soft laddering process is shown in Fig. 1. And the data analysis methods and processes are shown in Stage I of Fig. 1.

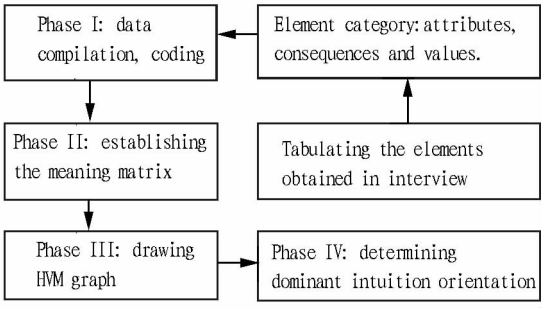


Fig. 1 Data analysis process

4 Research results

4.1 Consumption attributes, consequences and values of Linhai Orange Through the content analysis of soft laddering, we finally extract five Attributes (A), four Consequences (C), and four Values (V) (Table 2). In the five Attributes (A), "perceptual feature" is most frequently mentioned, followed by "regional characteristics" and so on; in the four Consequences (C), "good taste" appears most frequently, followed by "contributing to learning" and so on; in the four Values (V), "sense of belonging" appears most frequently, followed by "achievement and self-esteem" and so on. If there are more Attributes, Consequences and Values, it indicates that consumers pay more attention to them.

4.2 The value linking matrix about Linhai Orange consumption According to various levels of elements generalized above, we calculate the frequency of linking between A and C, A and V, C and V, to generate the value linking matrix about Linhai Orange consumption (Table 3). In the linking between Attributes and Consequences, perceptual feature (A_2) and good taste (C_3) are linked most frequently (18: 4) (directly linked 18 times and indirectly linked 4 times), indicating that Linhai Orange is delicious, expensive, famous and well-packaged, so that consumers feel the enjoyment of high-grade tasteful fruit. In the linking between Consequences and Values, emotional contact (C_4) and sense of belonging (V_1) are linked most frequently (0:13), indicating that in the process of buying Linhai Orange and sharing with family, consumers better feel affection and friendship, thereby achieving the ultimate value of "sense of belonging".

4.3 Linhai Orange's value hierarchy Based on the linking matrix in Table 3, we draw Linhai Orange's value hierarchy figure

(Fig. 2). The lines represent the intensity of linking between the elements, and the thicker the lines, the closer the relationship. Through the overall analysis, "sense of belonging" and "achievement and self-esteem" are consumers' main ultimate value demand.

Table 2 Various levels of elements of Attributes, Consequences and Values

Attributes (A)	Description	Answer
Regional characteristics (A_1)	Taizhou specialty, home of orange Taizhou specialty, tangerine town	15
Perceptual feature (A_2)	Sweet taste, attractive packaging, national fame, high price	32
Nutritional value (A_3)	Water replenishing, containing vitamin	8
Symbolic rituals (A_4)	Sending orange to customers, friends or relatives, to express good will	12
Habits and preferences (A_5)	Like oranges, necessities	2
Consequences(C)	Description	Answer
Feeling good (C_1)	Enjoying eating	6
Broadening social networks (C_2)	Oranges with exquisite package can be sent to customers and friends	19
Good taste (C_3)	Orange nobility, high-grade food	24
Emotional contact (C_4)	To share with family and friends	18
Values(V)	Description	Answer
Sense of belonging (V_1)	Feelings of family affinity, friendship, love	24
Enjoying life (V_2)	Enjoying daintiness, happiness and satisfaction brought by orange	9
Achievement and self-esteem (V_3)	Having the honor, getting others to respect, gaining socializing success	16
Health care (V_4)	Good health, relieving a cough	8

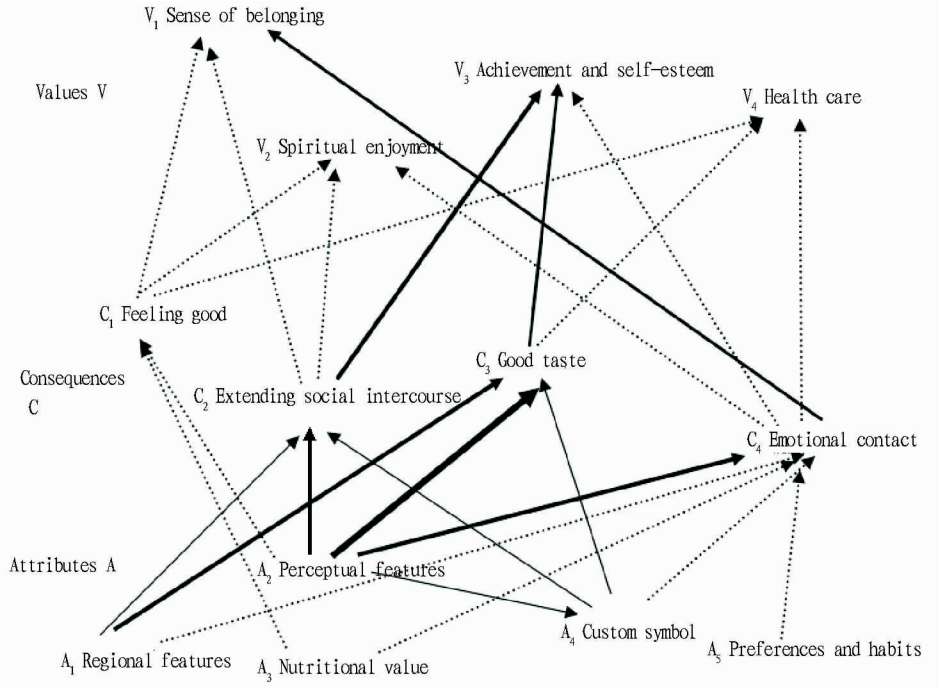
Table 3 The value linking matrix about Linhai Orange consumption

Elements	A_2	A_3	A_4	A_5	C_1	C_2	C_3	C_4	V_1	V_2	V_3	V_4
A_1	15:0		8:0			6:4	8:4	1:4	0:7	0:2	0:8	
A_2		8:0	10:0		2:4	11:4	18:4	10:8	0:23	0:9	0:15	1:5
A_3				2:0	1:1			2:3				1:6
A_4						6:4	9:1	2:5	0:8		0:9	
A_5								0:2	0:2	0:1	0:1	0:1
C_1								2:0	0:4	0:5		0:2
C_2							9:3	5:8	0:8	0:5	0:11	
C_3								6:7			0:12	0:2
C_4									0:13	0:4	0:9	0:3
V_1										0:6	0:11	
V_2											0:3	
V_3												
V_4												

Note: The numbers before the colon are the frequency of linking; the numbers after the colon are the frequency of indirect linking; the blank part means that there is no linking.

4.4 Main value chains of Linhai Orange The chain having the greatest impact on Linhai Orange consumption is "perceptual feature"→"good taste"→"achievement and self-esteem". This result suggests that the reason for consumers' choice of Linhai Orange lies in the perceptual features of Linhai Orange such as good taste and attractive packaging. In addition, there are also three secondary consumer value chains: "perceptual feature"→"extending social intercourse"→"achievement and self-esteem"; "regional characteristics"→"good taste"→"achievement and self-esteem"; "perceptual feature"→"emotional contact"→"sense

of belonging". The first chain indicates that the unique characteristics of Linhai Orange can help consumers to better achieve success in the process of interaction with others; the second value chain suggests that Home of Orange-Linhai can improve the grade of orange and help consumers to get the respect of others; the third value chain suggests that consumers achieve the ultimate value of a sense of belonging by sharing the delicious taste of Linhai Orange with relatives and friends.



Note: The thick lines represent the linking between the elements, and the thickness of lines represents the intensity of linking.

Fig. 2 Linhai Orange's value hierarchy

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions In this study, we use soft laddering in Means-End Chain Theory to get the basic elements of Attributes, Consequences and Values concerning Linhai Orange brand, establish the "A-C-V" value linking matrix, and draw the value hierarchy chart. (i) The Attributes of consumers' preference for Linhai Orange include "perceptual feature", "regional characteristics" and so on, and they want to use these Attributes to meet the consumer Consequences such as "good taste" and "extending social intercourse", to ultimately achieve the Values such as "sense of belonging" and "achievement and self-esteem". (ii) By drawing the value hierarchy chart of Linhai Orange consumption, we can clearly understand the linking between Linhai Orange Attributes and Consequences, between Consequences and consumers' values, and find the consumers' cognitive path of Linhai Orange. (iii) The chain having the greatest impact on Linhai Orange consumption is "perceptual feature"→ "good taste"→ "achievement and self-esteem". In addition, there are also three secondary consumer value chains: "perceptual feature"→ "extending social intercourse"→ "achievement and self-esteem"; "regional characteristics"→ "good taste"→ "achievement and self-esteem"; "perceptual feature"→ "emotional contact"→ "sense of belonging". (iv) The positioning based on attributes has provided a reason to buy product and strengthened consumers' buying behavior, but it is easy to generate similarity with competitors, while the brand positioning based on consequences and values has a long-term competitive advantage, because it is difficult to be imitated and excelled.

5.2 Recommendations The study finds the value chain dominating Linhai Orange consumption, and we can extract the core brand value on this basis, and make effective advertising and marketing strategies based on the predicted consumer attitudes to stimulate consumers' buying motives. The value chain "perceptual feature"→ "extending social intercourse"→ "achievement and self-esteem" indicates that companies can position the products as high-end gifts to make consumers achieve the ultimate success in the social intercourse. The value chain "regional characteristics" → "good taste"→ "achievement and self-esteem" suggests that enterprises can position the target market as the out-of-town consumer markets, and conduct characteristic culture marketing by highlighting the origin attributes. The value chain "perceptual feature"→ "emotional contact"→ "sense of belonging" suggests that companies can focus on taste and emotion to position brands in order to achieve the ultimate goal of emotional resonance when consumers share with others.

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plant cash crops, to obtain economic benefits and famous brand benefits, so as to boost rural economy.

5.3 Guiding development of new financial institutions under the premise of guaranteeing development of traditional financial institutions Our study results indicate that there is a long-term co-integration relation between rural finance and rural economy of Yunnan Province. Therefore, government should issue pertinent policies to promote rural financial development, especially development of rural informal financial institutions, and carry out proper supervision. In this way, it is expected to promote rural economic development. In the past, farmers obtain funds mainly from normal financial institutions like banks. The amount and convenience of available funds are limited and impede farmers' obtaining agricultural production funds and consequently restricts agricultural economic growth. Therefore, it is recommended to properly develop informal financial institutions, such as rural private financing and fund raising, and properly supervise operation and development of funds, to facilitate agricultural production of farmers, invigorate rural financial development, promote rural economic development, and so as to guide development of rural finance.

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ity fresh fruit for customers, adjust supply of products in dull and busy seasons, extend the industrial chain, increase added value of products, improve quality of Gauri Gvong *Phyllanthus embica Linn*, increase income and ability of planting farmers.

4.7 Establishing fine brand of Gauri Gvong *Phyllanthus embica Linn* and extending the market It is recommended to actively carry out geographical identification and origin certification trade mark certification of Gauri Gvong *Phyllanthus embica Linn*, protect and strengthen variety resources of Gauri Gvong *Phyllanthus embica Linn*, and enhance the intellectual property right protection of Gauri Gvong *Phyllanthus embica Linn*. It is recommended to combine tourism development of Gauri Gvong, fully explore ecological and cultural resources of Gauri Gvong *Phyllanthus embica Linn*, build ecological, cultural and tourism brands of Gauri Gvong *Phyllanthus embica Linn*, extend market, and enrich tourism culture and tourist industry of Gauri Gvong.

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