

Research on the Formation Mechanism of Geographical Indication Agricultural Product Brand Value from the Perspective of Nostalgia

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Abstract: Geographical Indication (GI) agricultural products serve not only as symbols of agricultural civilization and regional culture but also as key resources in brand competition. From the perspective of nostalgia, this study explores the mechanism through which such sentiment influences the formation of brand value in GI agricultural products. As a crucial psychological bond between emotion and cultural memory, nostalgia effectively strengthens consumers' sense of belonging and identification, thereby enhancing the emotional and symbolic value of a brand. Drawing on brand value theory and psychological distance theory, this paper constructs a conceptual model illustrating the pathways linking nostalgia, geographical indication, and brand value. It focuses on analyzing how GI products trigger nostalgia, the moderating effect of psychological distance, and the influence of place image and origin awareness. The findings reveal that nostalgia not only enriches the cultural connotation of GI agricultural products but also reinforces their market recognition and brand loyalty, offering insights for promoting regional economic growth and rural revitalization.

Keywords: Nostalgia; Geographical Indication Agricultural Products; Brand Value; Formation Mechanism

1. Introduction

In recent years, the advancement of agricultural branding has been emphasized in relevant policy documents, which highlight variety development, quality enhancement, brand building, and standardized production, providing crucial guidance for this field. With the development of China's market economy, brands have assumed an increasingly vital role

in business operations, and awareness of brand value has grown. Once established, a brand often signifies greater corporate value, and a successful brand can be considered one of a firm's most valuable assets. Evidence shows that brands are important tools for differentiating agricultural products. Branded agricultural goods can not only enhance product competitiveness effectively but also provide stable and significant returns for market participants. A growing number of agricultural enterprises and cooperatives are now prioritizing brand development. Concurrently, consumer demand has diversified, with purchasing motivations extending beyond material needs to psychological and cultural dimensions. Brands help build consumer trust in products, while nostalgia can strengthen consumer identification. The integration of nostalgia and branding provides an emotional and cultural foundation for demonstrating brand value.

Beyond possessing a unique quality reputation, GI agricultural products are also important carriers of rural culture and hold significant value for rural revitalization. Exploring the formation mechanism of GI agricultural product brand value from the perspective of nostalgia helps producers, operators, and related service institutions further excavate, cultivate, and enhance this value, making it a new driver for rural revitalization, cultural heritage, and urban-rural integration.

2. Literature Review

Scholars both domestically and internationally have conducted multi-dimensional research on nostalgia, brand value, and GI agricultural products, laying an important foundation for this paper's exploration of the formation mechanism of GI agricultural product brand value from the perspective of nostalgia.

Existing research focuses primarily on the following four areas:

2.1 Research on the Connotation and Role of Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a universal social phenomenon and emotional experience. Lin noted that nostalgia is inevitable in any society undergoing development and mobility, as it pertains to the processing of memory and emotion [1]. Wang further defined nostalgia as a special sentimental attachment to the people, events, objects, and traditional culture of one's hometown, an emotion that can directly drive consumers' brand-related behavior toward hometown GI agricultural products [2]. From empirical perspectives, Zhang et al. verified that, considering psychological ownership and nostalgia, the place of origin significantly influences consumers' willingness to pay a premium for GI products [3]. At the application level, Gu et al. used traditional villages as a case study to explore the role of "nostalgia" imagery in cultural tourism perception [4]. Qiang explicitly proposed that building a "Remembering Nostalgia" brand is a crucial pathway for boosting rural revitalization [5]. These studies collectively indicate that nostalgia is not merely a personal emotion but also a social and cultural resource that can be evoked and utilized, positively impacting consumer behavior and regional development.

2.2 Research on the Connotation and Composition of Brand Value

Brand value is a vital component of a company's core assets. Fan and Leng pioneered the loyalty factor method for brand value assessment, emphasizing the key role of consumer loyalty in brand value [6]. Ma analyzed the relationship between consumer-perceived brand value and corporate brand equity from the perspective of business-consumer interaction [7]. Hu et al., through their evaluation of regional public tea brands, provided specific reference and analysis for measuring and building the value of Chinese agricultural product regional brands [8]. These studies offer a theoretical basis for understanding the multi-dimensional composition of brand value and its assessment methods.

2.3 Research on the Value and

Manifestations of Geographical Indication Brands

Geographical indication brands possess multiple values due to their unique attributes. Chen affirmed research exploring the development of the agricultural product geographical indication industry, highlighting its industrial significance [9]. Wang studied consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions regarding GI agricultural products using specific product cases [10]. Xiao Renrong et al. further examined the heterogeneous spatial distribution characteristics of agricultural product GI brands and their causes [11]. Zhou Anning and Ying Ruiyao employed a hedonic price model to empirically analyze consumers' willingness to pay for GI agricultural products [12]. Tan explored the influence mechanism of GI agricultural product perceived value on brand loyalty [13]. Chen and Xie conducted in-depth research on the construction and development of agricultural product brands and GI brands from cultural and brand growth perspectives, respectively [14, 15]. Zhang systematically studied issues in agricultural product regional brand development [16]. Internationally, Agarwal and Barone discussed emerging issues in geographical indication branding strategies [17]. Menapace and Moschini investigated the roles of geographical indications, trademarks, and firm reputation in quality certification [18]. Loureiro and McCluskey assessed consumer responses to protected geographical indication labeling [19]. These studies collectively reveal the significant value of GI brands in ensuring quality, conveying credibility, promoting industrial development, and influencing consumer decisions.

2.4 Research on Influencing Factors and Mechanisms of Agricultural Product GI Brand Value

A synthesis of existing literature shows that GI brand value is influenced by various factors, including the natural environment, cultural history, organizational management, marketing strategies, and consumer characteristics. Among these, consumers' native-place sentiment, ethnocentrism [12], and their perception of the origin's reputation [19] are key psychological drivers of their preference, trust, and willingness to pay a premium for GI products. Furthermore, the perceived value carried by GI

agricultural products directly influences market loyalty [13].

2.5 Summary and Review

In summary, existing research has accumulated substantial findings on nostalgia theory, brand value theory, the attributes and value of GI brands, and some influencing factors, providing a solid theoretical foundation and multiple perspectives for this study. However, this review also identifies the following research gaps: First, most studies treat nostalgia as a single emotional variable or marketing backdrop, lacking an integrated research framework that systematically explains the internal mechanism of GI agricultural product brand value formation from a nostalgia perspective. Second, existing research pays insufficient attention to the heterogeneity of psychological distance between consumers and GI brands, failing to deeply explore differences in nostalgia triggering and brand value perception pathways under varying psychological distances. Third, the spillover effects of GI brand value and the underlying motivational mechanisms stemming from the consumer end warrant further exploration. Therefore, this paper focuses on these shortcomings, attempting to construct an integrated theoretical model combining nostalgia, psychological distance, and brand value to reveal the core role and complex pathways of nostalgia in the formation of GI agricultural product brand value.

3. The Connotation and Composition of GI Agricultural Product Brand Value

This section analyzes the similarities and differences between GI agricultural product brands and general product brands, as well as the elements of GI agricultural product brand value, to explore the connotation and composition of GI agricultural product brand value.

3.1 Similarities and Differences between GI Agricultural Product Brands and General Product Brands

3.1.1 Definition of general product brands

The term "brand" originates from the Old Norse word "Brandr," meaning "to burn" as a mark. Historically, a brand served as a mark for identification. Essentially, a brand is a symbol that allows producers and consumers to

differentiate and identify goods and services. Literally, the Chinese term "pinpai"(brand) consists of two characters: "pin" refers to product and quality, reflecting the product's characteristics, technology, and quality as prerequisites for the market, while "pai" refers to signboard, reputation, and business strategy, reflecting acquired conditions like market credibility. On one hand, a brand is a tangible entity attached to a product or its packaging, visible and tangible, capable of enduring in text or public perception. Simultaneously, a brand is highly specific and representative, encapsulating product features, corporate philosophy, and market response through symbolic form. Therefore, brand building is a crucial part of a company's marketing plan and strategy. Clearly, brands can not only protect a company's products and itself but also serve as tools for differentiation and enrichment and as instruments of competition.

3.1.2 Definition of geographical indication agricultural product brands

According to relevant regulations on agricultural product geographical indications, a GI for an agricultural product is its unique identifier, indicating that the product originates from a specific region where its quality and characteristics are primarily attributable to the natural ecological environment and historical/cultural factors, and it uses the region's name as the identifier. Based on the concept outlined in the Ministry of Agriculture's "Measures for the Administration of Geographical Indications of Agricultural Products," a GI for an agricultural product is its unique identifier, indicating origin in a specific region, where its quality and characteristics are mainly determined by the natural ecological environment and historical/cultural factors, using the region's name. Examples include "Gannan Navel Orange" and "Ningxia Goji Berry."

3.1.3 Similarities and differences between GI agricultural product brands and general product brands

(1) Similarities

Brands legally exist as "trademarks"; geographical indications, as intellectual property, are also legally recognized as trademarks. Clearly, GIs and trademarks can be identical, and GIs possess the commercial characteristics of trademarks. Brand equity refers to the intangible assets associated with

the brand name, logo, etc., that provide additional value for a company's stakeholders. From the consumer's perspective, brand equity encompasses not only the physical characteristics and actual functions of the product but also the specific utility provided. From a corporate perspective, brand equity refers to the intangible assets associated with the brand name, logo, etc., that generate additional revenue for the company.

(2) Differences

GI agricultural product brands are regional agricultural development brands. The unique natural and ecological environment forms the objective basis for the distinctive quality of GI agricultural products, making it difficult to replicate, which grants them natural monopoly characteristics and high market premium potential, thereby increasing farmers' income. The branding and growth of GIs can drive the industrial development of GI products, promoting the formation of GI industry clusters. On the other hand, developing the GI industry from a brand perspective can circumvent the constraints of mandatory GI intellectual property rules, allowing for the development and extension of the comprehensive functions of characteristic sectors, innovation of distinctive products, extension of the industrial chain, and expansion in the depth and breadth of characteristic sectors. The brand building and development of geographical indications contribute to regional economic development.

3.2 Elements of GI Agricultural Product Brand Value

3.2.1 Connotation of GI agricultural product brand value

GI branding and brand growth can, firstly, promote the standardization of GI products, ensuring stability and innovation in product quality. Secondly, they can provide continuously reinforced signals to the market, enhance the reputation of the GI, and improve consumers' understanding of the connotation and value of GI products, thereby strengthening their market competitiveness. Agricultural product geographical indications play a significant role in developing regional economies, creating characteristic brands, enhancing agricultural product market competitiveness, and increasing farmer income. They are particularly important for promoting high-quality agricultural development, building distinctive agricultural product brands, and rural revitalization. As shown in Table 1, the brand value of China's GI agricultural products is of great significance to regional economic development. Taking Fujian's Anxi Tieguanyin as an example, it ranks first in China's GI agricultural product brand value ranking with a value of 142.846 billion yuan, making it one of Fujian Province's most advantageous and valuable local public brands. Fujian's Anxi Tieguanyin has followed the trend of survival and development through branding, promoting the development of local characteristic brands in Fujian and enabling the regional economy to form strong market competitiveness. This demonstrates that the branding development and growth of GI products profoundly impact their regions' economic and social development, further confirming the importance of GI agricultural brand development for regional progress.

Table 1. Top 10 Ranking of Chinese GI Agricultural Product Brand Value in 2022

| Rank | province | Brand | Category | Brand Value |
|------|--------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Fujian | Anxi Tieguanyin | Tea | 142.846 billion CNY |
| 2 | Fujian | Wuyi Rock Tea | Tea | 72.066 billion CNY |
| 3 | Heilongjiang | Wuchang Rice | Rice | 71.028 billion CNY |
| 4 | Jiangxi | Gannan Navel Orange | Fruit | 68.637 billion CNY |
| 5 | Jiangsu | Xuyi Lobster | Aquatic Product | 30.65 billion CNY |
| 6 | Heilongjiang | Jiamusi Rice | Rice | 21.289 billion CNY |
| 7 | Ningxia | Zhongning Wolfberry | Chinese Medicinal Herb | 19.188 billion CNY |
| 8 | Sichuan | Pujiang Queshe | Tea | 19.14 billion CNY |
| 9 | Sichuan | Anyue Lemon | Fruit | 19.064 billion CNY |
| 10 | Shandong | Dongning Black Fungus | Edible Fungus | 18.19 billion CNY |

Source: China Council for Brand Development <http://www.ccbd.org.cn>

3.2.2 Brand value elements of geographical indication agricultural products

GI agricultural product brands integrate natural

ecology with human history, traditional craftsmanship with modern technology, product quality characteristics, and a unique reputation

closely tied to their region. They can effectively differentiate themselves from other similar agricultural brands and easily form a unique brand image and product symbol in consumers' minds. Therefore, the geographical indication of agricultural products is a unique brand advantage that can enhance their market competitiveness. As shown in Figure 1, the brand value elements of agricultural product GIs can be divided into functional value, symbolic value, and emotional value. These three value elements are analyzed below.

(1) Regarding functional value elements, the registration and management of agricultural product geographical indications can guarantee the environmental and quality standards of the place of origin, ensuring that GI agricultural products possess unique characteristics derived from the region's natural or human factors, thereby providing consumers with higher perceptions of quality and safety.

(2) In terms of symbolic value elements, by strengthening the intrinsic connection to a specific region, GI agricultural brands demonstrate consistency and continuity across geographical and historical space. This is reflected in the brand's traditional development and can inspire pride in the natural and human elements of the rural landscape, which are characteristic of GI agricultural product brands, indicating that they belong to a specific "terroir." GI agricultural product brands commit to the objective authenticity of a specific "terroir." This perception of authenticity is further divided into "authentic heritage" and "symbolic value": on one hand, the value embodied by GI agricultural product brands—unique natural conditions, traditional culture, classical memories, and origin image—reflects the brand's credibility; on the other hand, the "place name + product name" approach to GI branding clearly indicates the differential and particularity of the resource advantages, experiential value, or relationships endowed by the brand. When consumers choose GI agricultural product brands, these resource advantages, experiential value, or relational differential and particularity help shape their image to some extent, reflecting the authenticity of the brand's "value symbol" dimension.

(3) From the perspective of emotional value, agricultural product GI brands possess unique geographical characteristics, resource advantages, and a long history. Consumers

choose GI brand agricultural products not only to meet their practical needs for the product itself but also to appreciate and pursue the brand's intangible emotional connotations, which hold emotional value. Brand sales refer to the profit consumers pay for branded products, which is higher than the average for similar products; brand strength refers to the ability to generate sustainable future revenue; and brand loyalty refers to the premium consumers are willing to pay.

Therefore, GI agricultural product brands, by providing functional, symbolic, and emotional value, can create significant brand equity and potential competitive advantages in the market. This can not only enhance consumer recognition and awareness of the product brand, offering them more differentiated quality and emotional experiences, but also increase sales and product price premiums, ensuring brand performance and profitability for producers, while also promoting regional economic growth and high-quality industrial development.

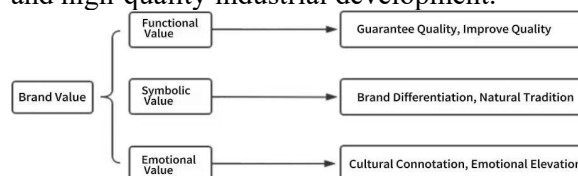


Figure 1. GI Agricultural Product Brand Value Elements

4. Formation Mechanism of GI Brand Value from the Perspective of Nostalgia

The preceding analysis of the value connotation and composition of agricultural GI brands is based on their definition, value connotation, and value elements. Building on this, this section researches the formation mechanism of GI agricultural product brand value from the perspective of nostalgia. First, it discusses the connotation of nostalgia to understand its role in brand value formation. Next, it researches the triggering mechanism of nostalgia by agricultural product geographical indications and the influence mechanism of nostalgia on brand value. Then, it examines how psychological distance affects the relationship among agricultural product GI information, nostalgic sentiment, and brand value. Finally, it studies how place image and reputation influence the relationship among nostalgic sentiment, brand value cognition, and brand effects.

4.1 Connotation of Nostalgia

Literally, "nostalgia" consists of "xiang" (hometown) and "chou" (sorrow), referring to people's feelings and longing for their hometown. Nostalgia arises from yearning for rural life, typically denoting the homesickness of those away from home, and it effectively connects people's scattered cultural memory fragments. Simultaneously, nostalgia is a spiritual need, rooted in the land and related to human emotion and memory; it is an emotion born of or evoked by the hometown, a common and eternal human emotion, and even more, an emotion that awakens strong memories in those who have left their hometowns. A schematic of the connotation of nostalgia is shown in Figure 2.

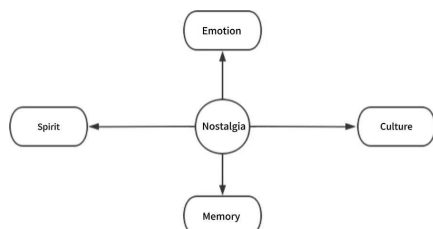


Figure 2. The Connotations of Nostalgia

4.2 Mechanism of the Relationship among Geographical Indication, Nostalgia, and Brand Value

Based on theories such as brand value, consumption motivation, and psychological distance, this paper constructs a scenario for GI brand value cognition and realization from multiple dimensions, including psychological distance and purchase motivation. It aims to theoretically clarify ① the triggering mechanism of nostalgia by agricultural product geographical indications and the influence mechanism of nostalgia on brand value; ② how psychological distance affects the relationship

among agricultural product GI information, nostalgic sentiment, and brand value; and ③ how place image and reputation affect the relationship among nostalgic sentiment, brand value cognition, and brand effects. Based on this analysis, a theoretical framework for the formation of agricultural product GI brand value is established, as shown in Figure 3.

4.2.1 Triggering mechanism of nostalgia by GI agricultural products and the influence mechanism of nostalgia on brand value

As shown in Figure 4, GI agricultural products are historical assets, products accompanied by stories, and industries imbued with nostalgia, possessing significant profit potential. The geographical indication of agricultural products symbolizes rural and farming civilization, represents agricultural culture, and signifies specific regions, capable of forming symbolic value within brand value. Simultaneously, GI agricultural products are accompanied by rural stories, which can create a sense of hometown for consumers, especially for those living away from home. Therefore, GI agricultural products viewed through the lens of consumer nostalgia can better stimulate their inner sense of belonging, self-identity, and efficacy, enhancing the brand's emotional value and additional connotation, which in turn triggers a series of consumption behaviors. A geographical indication is essentially a regional brand with high brand value. It can reduce consumers' identification costs, promote competitive quality offers, help consumers better understand quality characteristics, facilitate their purchasing and premium payment behavior, and integrate functional value into brand equity. The logical reason consumers are willing to pay higher prices for GI products is product quality.

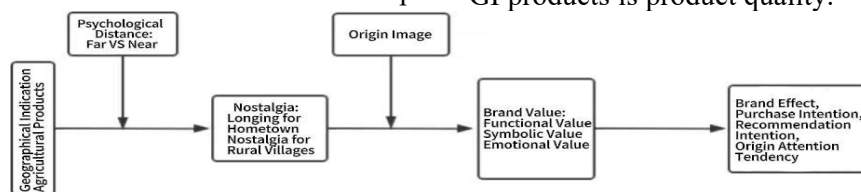


Figure 3. Formation Mechanism of the GI Agricultural Product Brand Value

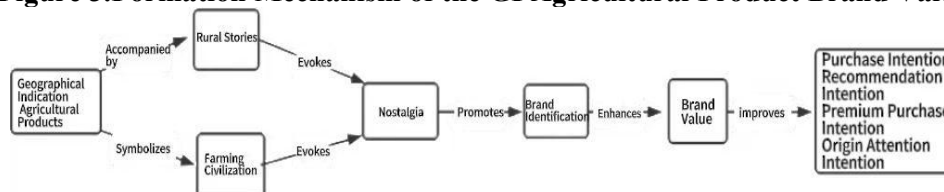


Figure 4. The Triggering Mechanism of GI Agricultural Products on Nostalgia and the Impact Mechanism of Nostalgia on Brand Value

4.2.2 How psychological distance affects the relationship among GI agricultural products, nostalgic sentiment, and brand value

Psychological distance manifests as the perceived degree of closeness or remoteness in feelings, attitudes, and behaviors toward an object or event, with the self as the reference point.

Some scholars believe that the degree of psychological distance affects the level of consumers' nostalgic sentiment, which in turn influences their emotional identification with GI agricultural products, thereby affecting the emotional value contained in GI agricultural products and further impacting their brand

value. When consumers' psychological distance is close, the emotional value contained in GI agricultural products from a nostalgia perspective is greater, thus increasing the brand value of GI agricultural products. Simultaneously, it encourages consumers to focus on the origin of GI agricultural products [20]. Conversely, if consumers' psychological distance is far, from a nostalgia perspective, the emotional value of GI agricultural products is lower, making it more difficult to form brand value, and consumers' tendency to focus on the origin is also lower. In summary, psychological closeness can influence the brand value of GI agricultural products, as shown in Figure 5.

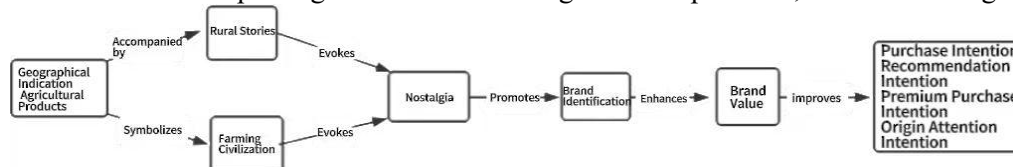


Figure 5. The Moderating Role of Psychological Distance in the Relationship from Nostalgia to Brand Value (Triggered by GI Products)

4.2.3 How place image and reputation affect the relationship between nostalgic sentiment and brand value

"Place image" refers to the specific form or posture of a product's production area that can evoke thoughts or emotional activities; "place reputation" refers to the degree to which the production area is known and understood by the public. GI agricultural product brands are product brands and important marks for identifying homogeneous agricultural products, serving as the basis for establishing consumer confidence in agricultural products. Some scholars propose that when consumers purchase agricultural products, the reputation and image of the origin significantly affect their trust in the agricultural product brand [21], thereby influencing the brand value of the agricultural product.

The pathway through which origin awareness and image impact brand value is as follows: the reputation and image of an agricultural product's origin directly affect brand trust. If the place image of a GI agricultural product's origin has a high reputation, it forms a geographical advantage. When purchasing agricultural products, consumers can judge product quality based on familiarity with the origin, i.e., its reputation. A favorable origin image and high reputation make consumers associate the product with high quality, more easily satisfying their emotional needs during

purchase. Therefore, the origin's reputation and image can enhance the product's emotional value. At the same time, the original image influences consumers' perceptions of its functional and symbolic value, which in turn affects brand loyalty. A good place image allows consumers to associate high-quality products with the place, thereby building trust in the brand. Agricultural product brand building based on origin image should focus on improving product quality, creating a good perceived value experience for consumers, and further deepening product quality. A circle of brand loyalty is formed; GI agricultural product brands are important marks for identifying agricultural products and the basis for consumers to differentiate homogeneous products. Brand names combined with origin-related names are more expressive, easier for consumers to remember, and can remind consumers of the quality of the agricultural product's origin environment, thereby creating emotional support for the brand. From a nostalgia perspective, if the place image of hometown agricultural products is favorable and the origin awareness is high, it enhances consumers' purchase and recommendation intentions. Compared to ordinary agricultural products, GI agricultural products have a higher origin awareness and a better place image, which promotes brand value formation, as shown in Figure 6.

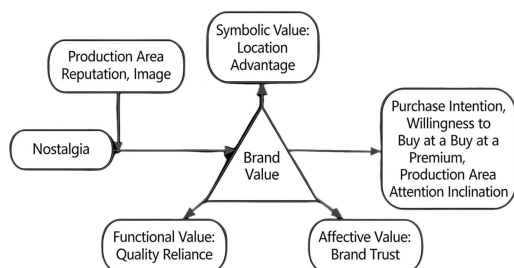


Figure 6. The Joint Moderating Role of Place Image and Awareness in the Nostalgia-Brand Value Relationship

5. Conclusion and Outlook

5.1 Conclusion

This study first analyzed the connotation and composition of brand value for GI agricultural products, concluding that they differ from general agricultural products by carrying local human emotions and possessing good market credibility. This paper emphasizes the important role of nostalgia in building agricultural product brand value assets, researching the formation mechanism of GI agricultural product brand value from a nostalgia perspective. First, it analyzed the connotation of nostalgia. Nostalgia records people's memories of their hometown. Infusing nostalgic emotion into GI agricultural product brand value can give consumers a sense of belonging and evoke their inner emotional identification. Second, it researched the relationship among geographical indication, nostalgia, and brand value in three parts: first, research on the triggering mechanism of nostalgia by GI agricultural products and the influence mechanism of nostalgia on brand value; second, research on how psychological distance affects the relationship among GI agricultural products, nostalgic sentiment, and brand value; third, research on how place image and reputation affect the relationship between nostalgic sentiment and brand value. The findings are that GI agricultural products possess substantial brand equity and symbolic value. From a nostalgia perspective, they can promote the formation and enhancement of emotional and functional value. Simultaneously, the degree of psychological distance affects the level of consumers' nostalgic sentiment, thereby influencing brand value formation. Moreover, from a nostalgia perspective, if the place image of hometown agricultural products is favorable and the origin awareness is high, it enhances consumers' purchase and recommendation

intentions. Compared to ordinary agricultural products, GI agricultural products have a higher origin awareness and a better place image, which promotes brand value formation.

5.2 Outlook

This research, based on existing studies and the nature of GI agricultural products, constructs the formation mechanism of agricultural product GI brand value from the consumer perspective. It conducts research from the perspectives of nostalgia, GI agricultural products, brand value, and formation mechanism. However, this paper still has shortcomings: the research remains largely at the theoretical level and lacks empirical testing in practice. Future research should not only emphasize theoretical study but also enhance the completeness of empirical analysis and framework.

Acknowledgements

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