

# From Growth to Differentiation: A study on the Impact of Luckin Coffee's Marketing Communication Strategies on Brand Favorability Among College Students

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of China's coffee market, Luckin Coffee has constructed a distinctive marketing communication system through low-price strategies, high-frequency co-branding, and brand positioning. However, brand favorability among college students has shown a certain degree of differentiation.

This study takes college students as the research object and adopts the analytical framework of "marketing communication strategies-brand cognition-brand favorability." Based on 120 valid questionnaire samples, descriptive statistical analysis is employed to examine and compare the effects of three types of strategies, namely price communication, co-branding marketing, and brand positioning.

The results show that the overall level of brand favorability toward Luckin Coffee among college students is at a moderate level. Price factors exert the most direct influence on brand favorability; however, this effect depends on the stability of expectations and therefore presents a certain degree of fragility. Co-branding strategies enhance brand attention to a certain extent, but their effect on purchase decision-making is limited and exhibits diminishing marginal effects. Brand positioning influences consumer cognition through factors such as convenience and product performance, and continuously affects brand evaluation.

By incorporating the three types of marketing strategies into a unified analytical framework, this study reveals differences in their mechanisms and stability, and provides a new perspective for understanding the mechanism through which multidimensional marketing communication strategies influence brand favorability.

**Favorability; Marketing Communication Strategies; College Students**

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, China's coffee market has continued to expand, with domestic chain brands developing rapidly and gradually reshaping the original market structure. Among them, Luckin Coffee has achieved rapid growth in a short period of time, particularly in terms of store expansion, becoming one of the largest coffee chain brands in China[1]. During this process, Luckin has gradually adopted marketing communication strategies, such as low-price, high-frequency co-branding, and a brand positioning characterized by "high quality, high cost-performance and high convenience."

However, with the intensification of market competition and adjustments in corporate strategies, the effectiveness of this system among college students has begun to change. With the reduction of promotional discounts, the accelerated entry of competitors, and the continuous evolution of brand image, consumer evaluations of Luckin have become differentiated. How different marketing strategies influence brand favorability among college students, as well as their mechanisms and relative importance, still requires further analysis.

Based on this, this study takes college students as the research object. Within the analytical framework of "marketing communication strategies-brand cognition-brand favorability," price communication, co-branding marketing, and brand positioning are incorporated into a unified analysis. Through questionnaire surveys and statistical analysis methods, this study conducts a comparative analysis of the effects of different marketing strategies on the formation of brand favorability.

## 2. Literature Review

**Keywords:** Luckin Coffee; Brand

## 2.1 Conceptual Definition of Brand Favorability

In existing studies, brand favorability is generally regarded as the overall positive emotional evaluation formed by consumers toward a brand. Keller(1993) pointed out that brand value originates from consumers' cognition and associative structures of the brand[4].Spears and Singh(2004) defined brand attitude as consumers' overall evaluation of a brand, which is closely related to purchase intention[3].

Based on the above, this study defines brand favorability as the overall positive emotional evaluation that consumers form toward a brand on the basis of existing cognition.

## 2.2 Low-Price Strategy and Consumer Brand Attitude

Price is an important signal influencing consumer decision-making. Zeithaml (1988) pointed out that price plays a key role in the selection process by influencing consumers' judgments of value[5]. On this basis, low-price strategies are often regarded as an efficient means to acquire users and expand market share. This is reflected in Luckin Coffee's pricing practices, which rely on relatively low prices and promotional strategies to attract consumers(Zhou, 2024)[2]

However, the sustainability of low-price strategies remains controversial. Bian(2021) suggests that price-based competition may be associated with lower consumer loyalty, and consumers may switch brands when promotional incentives are reduced[1]. The expectation-disconfirmation model proposed by Oliver(1980) further explains that when perceived performance falls below expectations, negative evaluations may arise, thereby affecting brand attitude[6].

## 2.3 Co-branding Marketing and Brand Attitude

Co-branding marketing has become an important strategy in brand communication in recent years. Simonin and Ruth(1998) pointed out that brand alliances influence consumers' attitudes toward co-branded partner brands through a "spillover effect"[7]. Keller(1993) argued that brand associations constitute the basis of consumer brand evaluation[4]. On this basis, co-branding marketing can enhance brand attention and

freshness.

However, the effect of co-branding strategies is not linearly increasing. When the frequency of co-branding is too high or the degree of fit is insufficient, it may weaken brand associations, leading to consumer aesthetic fatigue and negatively affecting brand attitude.

## 2.4 Brand Positioning and Its Fit with Target Groups

The degree of fit between brand positioning and target groups is an important factor influencing consumer attitudes. Sirgy (1982) pointed out that consumers tend to choose products or brand images that are consistent with their self-concept, and such consistency is closely related to brand attitude and choice behavior[8].

On this basis, relevant studies suggest that Luckin Coffee adopts a core positioning of "high quality, high cost-performance, and high convenience." By providing products that are affordable, easily accessible, and perceived to have a certain level of quality, the brand targets young consumer groups(such as students and urban white-collar workers), which to a certain extent aligns with their consumption needs(Zhou,2024)[2].

However, with continuous brand expansion and changes in the market environment, brand positioning may be extended or adjusted, thereby influencing consumers' cognition and evaluation of the brand, and further affecting brand favorability.

## 2.5 Literature Review Summary

Existing studies have explored the impact of brand communication on consumer attitudes from the perspectives of price strategies, co-branding marketing, and brand positioning. Relevant studies indicate that low-price strategies help expand user scale, but their sustainability remains controversial; co-branding marketing can enhance brand attention, but may also lead to aesthetic fatigue and brand image dilution; brand positioning emphasizes the importance of the fit between brand image and target groups in shaping consumer attitudes.

Overall, existing research mainly focuses on single strategies and lacks systematic analysis of the combined effects of different marketing strategies within the same consumer group. In addition, quantitative studies that take brand favorability as the core variable remain relatively limited.

Based on this, this study incorporates price communication, co-branding marketing, and brand positioning into a unified analytical framework and takes brand favorability as the core variable.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study takes integrated Marketing Communication(IMC) theory as the theoretical foundation and, combined with theories of consumer brand attitude formation, constructs and analytical framework of “marketing communication strategies-brand cognition-brand favorability.”

Specifically, this study divides marketing communication strategies into three dimensions: price communication, co-branding marketing communication, and brand positioning communication.

Among them, price communication is mainly reflected in the coverage and stability of low-price strategies; co-branding marketing communication is reflected in the frequency of co-branding and its impact on consumer attention and purchasing behavior; brand positioning communication is reflected not only at the level of brand image, but also through specific factors such as price advantage, convenience of use and product quality. These variables influence consumers’ brand cognition and emotional evaluation, thereby further affecting brand favorability.

In terms of variable design, this study takes college students as the research object and sets brand favorability as the dependent variable, which is measured quantitatively through indicators such as consumption frequency, brand preference, and recommendation intention.

### 4. Research Design and Methods

This study adopts a questionnaire survey method, taking college students as the research object, and obtains quantitative data on their evaluations of Luckin Coffee’s marketing strategies and brand favorability. Both brand favorability and marketing perception are measured using a five-point Likert scale. Brand favorability is comprehensively measured through consumption frequency, overall favorability, and recommendation intention, while marketing perception is operationalized through three variables: price communication, co-branding communication, and brand positioning.

The questionnaire was mainly distributed

through university samples and Luckin-related promotional groups, and a total of 120 valid responses were collected. In terms of data analysis, descriptive statistical methods are first used to analyze the overall distribution of brand favorability. In addition, competitive brand preference is used for supplementary analysis.

## 5. Result and Discussion

### 5.1 Main Findings

#### 5.1.1 Distributio of Brand Favorability Among College Students

As shown in Table 1, brand favorability toward Luckin Coffee among college students is mainly concentrated in the medium-level interval(7-10 points), accounting for 79.17%, while the proportion of high favorability(11-15 points) is only 4.17%. Overall, the distribution shows a pattern of “middle concentration with low proportions at both ends.”

This results indicates that Luckin has established a certain user base among college students, but has not yet formed a high proportion of high loyal consumers.The overall level of brand favorability is moderate, with limited intensity.

**Table 1. Distribution of Brand Favorability Among College Students**

Favorability Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Low Favorability (3-6)	20	16.67%
Moderate Favorability (7-10)	95	79.17%
High Favorability (11-15)	5	4.17%
Total	120	100%

#### 5.1.2 Impact of Pricing Strategy: Coexistence of Attractiveness and Fragility

The survey results show that price plays an important role in the consumption decisions of college students. Among the respondents, 80% reported choosing Luckin Coffee due to the “9.9 yuan pricing,” indicating that the low-price strategy has a significant effect in attracting consumers. At the same time, 64.17% expressed dissatisfaction with the reduction in promotional intensity and coverage, reflecting a high sensitivity to price changes.

This phenomenon can be explained by the expectation-disconfirmation theory. Continuous low-price promotions lead consumers to form stable expectations, When actual promotions fall below expectations, negative evaluations are likely to arise. Therefore, while price enhances brand attractiveness, it also makes brand

favorability dependent on price stability, exhibiting a certain degree of fragility.

### 5.1.3 Role of Co-branding Marketing: Marginal Effects and Aesthetic Fatigue

As shown in table 2, 38.33% of respondents indicated that they would make purchases due to co-branding, while 61.67% would not, suggesting that co-branding has a relatively limited direct effect on purchase decisions. In addition, 26.67% of respondents believed that there are too many co-branding activities, indicating the emergence of aesthetic fatigue.

These results indicate that co-branding marketing mainly enhances brand attention among college students, rather than serving as a core determinant of purchase decision. When co-branding frequency becomes too high, its novelty gradually decreases and may even weaken existing brand association, thereby reducing its positive impact on brand attitude.

**Table 2. Influence of Co-Branding on Purchase Decisions**

Purchase Due to Co-branding	Number of Respondents	Percentage
yes	46	38.33%
no	74	61.67%

### 5.1.4 Role of Brand Positioning: Perceptual Basis and Evaluation Differences

As shown in Table 3, convenience(46.67%) and product taste(41.67%) are the main factors influencing consumer choice, indicating that Luckin's positioning of "high quality, high cost-performance and high convenience" is reflected in actual consumption behavior.

These factors not only influence consumers' choices but also form the perceptual basis of brand evaluation. Based on their experiences of convenience and product performance, consumers gradually form overall evaluations of the brand. With the expansion of brand scale, differences in perception may arise among consumers, leading to variations in how brand positioning is perceived across different groups, thereby affecting the stability of brand favorability.

**Table 3. Factors Influencing Consumption Choices Among College Students**

Choice Factor	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Convenience	56	46.67%
Product Taste	50	41.67%
Availability of Consumption Scenarios	29	24.17%

### 5.1.5 Comparison with Competing Brands:

#### Mobility of Price-Oriented Consumers

Among respondents who prefer Cotti Coffee, 40.7% mentioned price as a key factor, while only 2.15% of those preferring Luckin did so. This difference indicates that price-oriented consumers are more likely to shift between brands.

Combined with the analysis of pricing strategies, it may be inferred that when Luckin reduces its promotional intensity, such price-sensitive consumers are more likely to switch to lower-priced competitors, demonstrating a certain degree of mobility.

## 5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study incorporates price communication, co-branding marketing, and brand positioning into a unified analytical framework to compare their roles in formation of brand favorability. The findings indicate that different marketing strategies influence consumer evaluation through distinct mechanisms, namely price expectations, brand associations, and perceived fit.

Furthermore, this study shows that there are structural differences in the pathways and stability of these strategies. Price communication exerts the most direct influence but is relatively unstable, whereas co-branding and brand positioning operate more indirect pathways in influencing brand favorability.

From the perspective of "unified framework-path difference," this study extends the understanding of brand favorability mechanisms and provides a new analytical perspective on how multiple marketing strategies jointly influence consumer attitudes.

## 5.3 Practical Implications

The findings suggest that brands targeting college students need to balance short-term attractiveness with long-term stability in their marketing strategies. In terms of pricing strategy, maintaining price attractiveness while stabilizing consumer expectations helps reduce negative effects caused by price fluctuations.

Regarding co-branding strategy, controlling the frequency of co-branding and improving the fit between co-branded content and brand image helps sustain novelty and attractiveness. In terms of brand positioning, strengthening the consistency of core values across different consumption scenarios helps improve the stability of consumer cognition and evaluation.

#### 5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study is mainly based on questionnaire survey data, and the results may be subject to social desirability bias due to the self-reported nature of the data. In addition, the sample is mainly drawn from the author's university, resulting in limited regional representation and restricted generalizability.

Further research can expand the sample scope and introduce multi-regional comparative analysis. In addition, qualitative methods such as interviews can be incorporated to further explore the internal mechanisms of brand favorability formation among college students, thereby enhancing the explanatory depth and external validity of the findings.

#### 6. Conclusion

This study investigates the impact of three types of marketing communication strategies--price communication, co-branding favorability among college students. The findings indicate that price perception has the most direct influence on brand favorability, although its effect is contingent upon the stability of consumer expectations. Co-branding marketing enhance brands attention and novelty but shows limited and diminishing effects on purchase behavior when overused. Brand positioning, reflected through elements such as convenience, product performance, and perceived value, constitutes the perceptual basis of consumers' overall brand evaluation, thereby sustaining brand favorability. Overall, these three dimensions jointly shape college students' brand favorability, highlighting the necessity for brands to adopt an integrated and balanced approach in marketing strategy

formulation.

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