

Development of a research model of Chinese jewellery e-commerce using the SOR model - The role of branding

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the role of branding in jewellery e-commerce in China using a SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model. It provides a theoretical basis for subsequent research by developing a research model that captures influence of brands on consumers in terms of stimuli, individual emotions and attitudes and purchase intentions in the jewellery e-commerce environment.

Design/methodology/approach: This study uses a literature review to construct a research framework as well as design a measurement scale to enable future empirical quantitative research.

Findings: This study constructs a conceptual framework to assess the role of branding in Chinese jewellery e-commerce using an SOR model. Subsequently, based on the conceptual framework developed, a scale containing multiple dimensions and items is designed.

Research limitations/implications: The measurement scale remains in development and has not yet been validated, and therefore, issues of accuracy and reliability remain.

Practical implications: The scale developed in this study, if validated by research, will provide important insights for branded jewellery e-commerce in China.

Originality/value: This research offers an in-depth assessment of the function of branding in the e-commerce environment by applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response model to the field of jewellery e-commerce in China for the first time. The scale will enable methodical analysis of how branding affects perceptions of customers, and actions while also introducing new theoretical and practical assistance for branding and marketing in jewellery e-commerce platforms.

Keywords: Measurement scale, Chinese jewellery e-commerce, SOR model

Introduction

Aided by ongoing economic and technological advancements, strong consumer demand during the COVID-19 epidemic spurred e-commerce growth. The transition from traditional offline retail trade to online sales platforms is today a crucial means for jewellery companies to enhance their competitiveness and will continue to play a significant role in the future of the Chinese jewellery industry. However, numerous issues confront Chinese jewellery e-commerce, including a late start, services unable to satisfy market demand, and customer uncertainty surrounding the hazards of e-commerce. The aim of this study is to build a

framework using classical S-O-R theory, adopt a quantitative approach to operationalize the variables in the research model, and ultimately create a theoretical basis for future research.

Literature Review

Opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese jewellery e-commerce

Technology development engenders a greater willingness among customers to participate in e-commerce activities. Customers are more eager to engage in e-commerce activities due to technological advancements (Kshetri, 2018) and are also interested in learning more about the goods they purchase (Rathi, 2021). Amid growing internet usage and a surge in the number of netizens, the rising popularity of online shopping has fuelled the transformation of the jewellery industry into luxury consumption. Statistics show that the jewellery market of China is worth close to 700 billion yuan today and that retail sales of jewellery in 2018 reached nearly 700 billion yuan, with a compound growth rate of 4.4% over the past five years (Chyxx.com., 2020).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 restricted offline shopping, yet demand among consumers remained strong. As a result, online shopping has developed globally (Davis & Toney, 2020; Bhatti et al., 2020). According to new research, jewellery is one of three categories with the largest share of total U.S. e-commerce retail sales (15.7%) (Mastercard Spending Pulse: April U.S. Retail Sales Grow 23.3% as Trends Point to a Recovering Economy, 2021). In China, the livestream model of e-commerce is eye-catching. For commodities with strong professional demand, such as jewellery and automobiles, on-screen anchors generate sales by conducting professional two-way communication with customers (Liu, 2020). This involves answering questions while introducing products to guide purchasing decisions. Due to the increased engagement of consumers, the transaction conversion rate has risen.

To date, there is limited research on Chinese customers' attitudes, preferences, and buying habits with respect to online jewellery purchases. Yet, the Chinese jewellery e-commerce business is full of possibilities. The lack of research may be a result of a dearth of reliable measuring instruments, making it challenging for researchers to evaluate certain concepts in this field with accuracy. Simultaneously, it is possible that existing assessment instruments are not culturally and socially sensitive enough to accurately capture Chinese customers' attitudes and actions in the e-commerce jewellery sector.

Therefore, conducting further in-depth study is essential to better grasp the distinctive features of the Chinese e-commerce jewellery business. Measurement instruments that are effective must not only apply pre-existing research methodologies but also consider the attitudes and expectations of Chinese customers regarding online jewellery purchases. Measuring instruments must be adjusted to more precisely capture the distinctive features of China's market environment and the elements most valued by shoppers when making purchases, as they may differ dramatically from those in other areas.

Any assessment instrument should also be adaptable enough to adjust to changing customer demands and market trends since researchers must consider the dynamic changes and quick expansion of the Chinese e-commerce jewellery business. The scale developed in this study can provide a better understanding of Chinese consumers' preferences, decision-making processes, and brand perceptions through an in-depth study of their online jewellery shopping behaviours. In turn, this can provide the jewellery e-commerce industry with targeted recommendations for market strategies and service optimisation.

This study seeks to contribute to the sustainable growth of the Chinese jewellery industry by addressing gaps in the literature and offering the industry more precise and useful information going forward.

Brand familiarity

From a wider range of information, consumers select just a limited handful of informational dimensions, with brand being one of the most favoured selections (Labrecque et al., 2020). When consumers are incompletely aware of the attributes of a given brand, they require information (Oh et al., 2020) and are expected by merchants to be able to recall enough information about the product category from memory to assimilate information and form an image of the brand (Rego et al., 2022). When consumers do not hold brand preferences, uncertainty about brands drives consumers to search for information (Ng et al., 2021). Brand image may be based on the information customers collect (Arslan & Zaman, 2015). The Internet makes recent information about brands easier for customers to obtain and allows them to become more familiar with companies by exposing customers to brand information (McClure & Seock, 2020). According to Miniard (2001), both internal information (such as brand familiarity) and exterior information-seeking behaviour may boost the inclination of customers to shop or make repeat purchases online.

Businesses in conventional marketplaces have established a solid image through branding, customer recommendations, and media exposure (Kaur, 2016), but the internet is altering how they develop a reputation (Nakara et al., 2014; Brogan & Smith, 2020). Customers must rely on online resources to compare shopping services or customer reviews for details that enable them to determine the company's reputation (Gopinath et al., 2014; Mo et al., 2015). Consumers were shown to rely on a variety of internet-based resources before making purchase selections to evaluate and distinguish between new and, in other words, unfamiliar online brand sellers (Naylor, 2012), enabling customers to more clearly understand the image of brand (Gensler et al., 2015).

When people choose to purchase a product, brand recognition is a key motivating factor (Das, 2015). Holden and Vanhuele (1999) argue that brand familiarity grows with greater interaction with a brand and that brand names and logos help consumers perceive brand messages (MacInnis et al., 1999). Mikhailitchenko et al. (2009) further contend that brand familiarity is dependent on the potency of associations evoked by the brand name in consumers' minds and that for familiar brands, consumers may rely on features like the brand name or logo in the evaluation process.

Customers trust known brands more when browsing online, making them more inclined to make a purchase. As a result, online retailers that achieve brand familiarity among customers are expected to enjoy higher purchase intentions (Comegys et al., 2009). The findings of Park & Stoel (2005) suggest that in the case of online shopping, brand familiarity involves consumers' pre-accumulated knowledge of the brand, i.e., brand familiarity reflects the amount of knowledge about a brand that consumers develop after being exposed to and experiencing the brand online. For online customers, accessing brand information and the ensuing rise in brand familiarity serve as the main sources of internal brand knowledge (Ha & Perks, 2005). As a result, online merchants should aggressively market their brands and gain more customer awareness by using the strength of their brand image (Edwards et al., 2009). Global online retailers should emphasise brands across all channels of competition. By using pre-acquired brand reputation and familiarity, they can attract more online shoppers (Kwon & Lennon, 2009).

H1: Brand Familiarity will positively influence the “Feelings about a Brand” among Chinese online jewellery customers.

Design

Brand design is a crucial component of an online brand development approach (Rowley, 2004). Consequently, other crucial factors include design and brand image, which are sometimes regarded as the foundation of a luxury brand (Rodrigue & Rodrigues, 2019). As brands are developed, they become one of a company's most valuable assets. Finding new ways to build them and achieve a position of differentiation in the minds of customers is crucial. Design is brand orientated and can act as a cohesive factor in configuring all elements of the brand experience, representing a clear source of differentiation (Montaña et al., 2007). The value and awareness of a brand may be increased by excellent jewellery design, evidenced by well-designed jewellery items that communicate the principles of business, cultural implications, and innovation (Banks, 2010; Priskila & Darma, 2020; Brandão et al., 2021). Consumers have a high appreciation for unique and tasteful design, and the design of a brand is directly associated with the projection of consumer value (Ratakam & Petison, 2022). Above any other subjective or objective attribute, design/appearance is the most important factor for consumers who purchase precious jewellery products (Jamal & Goode, 2001). When a new product is launched by luxury brands or they conduct marketing, it is accepted by consumers as a signal to buy (Kapferer, 2012; Zhang & Kim, 2013).

Additionally, attractive jewellery design prioritises user experience as well as aesthetic appearance, luring buyers with user-friendly features (Rana et al., 2020). Designers who consider wearer comfort, durability, and functionality during the design process (Yap & Yeong, 2014; Vasan, 2018; Hashim et al., 2020) and provide consumers with an impression that the brand cares about the user experience (Singh et al., 2022) tend to be more successful. This, in turn, improves brand image and increases word-of-mouth appraisal (Jain, 2017). Luxury consumers may make more informed decisions when purchasing luxury products online thanks to product design and brand storytelling, which elevate luxury goods and distinguish one premium brand from another (Morley & McMahon, 2011; Hughes et al., 2016).

H2: Brand Familiarity will positively influence the “Feelings about a Brand” among Chinese online jewellery customers.

Feelings about a brand

The digital revolution has led to more sophisticated brand building, which requires luxury brands to adapt, engage strategically in brand image building, and use digital media as a tool for customer-brand interaction (Hennigs et al., 2012; Pentina et al., 2018). According to a study by Wahab et al. (2019), if customers hold positive brand views, there will be a strong correlation between the degree of luxury of the product and their purchase decisions, such that people become less concerned about purchasing luxury brands online.

Feelings about a brand are a significant factor affecting consumers' online jewellery shopping, so online fashion jewellery companies take brand-building strategy as the most influential means to achieve a competitive advantage (Daemi, 2018). Compared with physical stores, the existence of the website helps luxury brands achieve better success in a highly competitive global market today, enabling companies to reach more consumers in a more cost-effective way (eMarketer, 2016). There are, however, those who believe that the fundamental principles of luxury brands are incompatible with online retail (Thorslund & Herrström, 2020).

Consumer passion for brands is influenced favourably by luxury brand recognition (Rodrigues et al., 2018). In research by Taghipour (2021), jewellery brand reputation is shown to be key in the online environment. Large-scale production and mostly with standardized designs are considered as the characteristics of traditional production in the jewellery industry (Carnevali, 2003). With the passage of time and the progress of technology, the uniqueness of product design is inevitably imitated by competitors, and this trend is especially evident in the e-

commerce industry (Zuccaro, 2016). E-jewellery tends to suffer more infringement and plagiarism, and this phenomenon is not uncommon among Chinese e-commerce sites (Hunter et al., 2021). Jewellery knockoffs have the potential to harm the prominent reputations of brands, erode their intellectual property rights, deplete brand capital, and lower business sales (Slocum & Collen, 2011).

The globalization trend of recent years has shifted the focus of jewellery production from traditional mass production to customization. Italian jewellery companies are committed to product innovation, including design and technology. Each jewellery item may be unique, and even the same design will have differences in characteristics (Yau, 2002; Viotto, 2017). Style and design are important for Chinese jewellery consumers (Guo & Chen, 2007). Jewellery brands should not only resonate with customers and increase their repeat purchases and brand loyalty but also differentiate themselves from competitors. Thus, innovative design is a priority (Kanakachandran & Saji.,2013). Excellent product strategy can accelerate the differentiation of brand jewellery, where the superior quality or unique attribute of a product is key. This means that jewellers should focus on quality and performance-conscious buyers through exquisite craftsmanship, excellent quality and frequent product innovation (Strategic Management, 2008). Both perceived quality and brand association can increase customer satisfaction (Johansson & Andersson, 2014), as well as the perception that a brand on consumers is evident in luxury brands (Ahn et al., 2018; Ehbauer & Gresel, 2013).

According to Batey (2008) in the book *Brand Meaning*, consumers' perception of luxury brands is ultimately determined by consumers themselves, not by the positioning of the company. While marketers are allowed to add meaning to luxury brands, it is the consumer who is at the centre of brand perception. When people are engaged in luxury consumption activities such as jewellery, they will nonetheless pay attention to the coordination and consistency of all aspects of brand marketing plans to ensure that they obtain high-quality products and services and a pleasant purchasing and consumption experience (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015). As one of the luxuries of the jewellery industry, branding is a powerful force. It is vital in creating consumer choice and bringing new consumers into the market. Those retailers who really understand how to transform consumer demand will occupy the market. The CEO of a jewellery e-commerce company summed up the challenges of the future jewellery industry: "Manufacturers must make today what customers will need tomorrow." (Yau, 2002).

H3: There is a positive relationship between Feelings of Brand and Intention to Buy Jewellery Online from Chinese jewellery e-commerce consumers.

S-O-R Model (Stimulus - Organism - Respond)

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model/theory is on the basis of the S-R (stimulus-response) model of the theoretical system collected by Hull (1966) and refined by Mehrabian and Russell in a paper entitled: *An Approach to Environmental Psychology* (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The theory proposes that human information processing begins with a physical stimulus, followed by the receipt of external stimulus via the senses, which leads the neurological system to make a decision and concludes with the output of an action response (Buxbaum, 2016). Contemporary cognitive psychology is predicated on the study of S-O-R models, which may be summarised as the study of the affective reaction and subsequent intentional behaviour that follows the stimulation of a target by an external environment (Yang et al., 2021).

The model consists of three components: stimulus, organism and behavioural response, and the following is an overview of each element as outlined by scholars:

Table 1. Overview of S-O-R Model

| | |
|--|--|
| | Shopping environment, user evaluation, information quality and other |
|--|--|

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Stimulus | external environmental factors (Ali et al.,2021; Guo et al.,2022). The stimulus in the retail sector can be defined as all physical and non-physical elements of the shop that are within the retailer's control to enhance the customer's shopping experience (Kumar & Kim, 2014). |
| Organism | Represents changes in individual mental states, such as perceived emotions or cognitive responses, as a mediating variable (Sultan et al.,2021). |
| Response | As an outcome variable, it represents the attitude or behaviour of individuals, usually manifested as approaching or avoiding something (Eroglu, 2003; Pandita et al., 2021). |
| Approach and Avoidance | These are the two most intuitive reactions of an individual to external environmental stimuli (Tang & Zhang, 2020). In the S-O-R Model of consumption, the approach is the willingness of the consumer to stay, explore, and interact in the environment and to identify with the environment, increasing his or her willingness to return to the environment again to purchase the goods; the avoidance is the lack of willingness or avoidance of the stimulus and have no willingness to consume the goods again (Lin et al., 2022). |

Current research on the application of S-O-R theory focuses on consumer behaviour, customer persistent use behaviour and the information domain (Sherman et al., 1997; Cao & Sun, 2018) and is generally applicable to the study of consumer purchase behaviour in the online shopping environment. Research focuses on the stimuli that motivate consumers to make purchases, and currently, the most well-recognised stimuli for online purchasing include promotional information, the quality and amount of information listed on a website, the ambience of the online store, the quality and value of the product, and the brand image (Park & Lennon, 2009; Zimmerman, 2012; Peng & Kim, 2014; Ilijevski, 2016; Aggarwal & Rahul, 2017; Zhu et al., 2020).

Consumer behaviour is a view of a customer, a group of customers or organizations who choose, obtain, operate, and incline intention, goods and services to fascinate the needs and wants of the customers. Researchers determine which products are needed in the market by examining what motivates consumers to purchase specific goods and services (Chopra et al., 2020). According to Blackwell et al. (2006), 'consumer behaviour is the actions and decision processes of people who purchase goods and services for personal consumption'. In the consumer domain, the model implies that buying behaviour is not just physically stimulated by the exterior environment but also guided by psychological factors (Buckley, 1991; Chang et al., 2011). The model considers these factors together as a complete consumer purchase decision process: the consumer is driven by the stimulus, makes a purchase decision, implements the purchase, and then may finally evaluate the product, the relevant channel, or the whole purchase process.

The model is applicable to the online consumer environment, where the stimulus (S) refers to the driving forces in the online shopping environment that influence the cognitive awareness of consumers and affective or emotional processes (Zhu et al., 2019). All the information to which the consumer is exposed when browsing online may be regarded as environmental stimuli (Sohaib & Kang, 2015; Gatautis et al., 2016). The organism (O) is the process that occurs within an individual that lies between the stimulus and the final response behaviour; the process and structure consist of perceptual, mental, sensory, and thinking activities and specifically refers to a person's feelings and perceptions of the website. Reaction (R) refers to

the final behaviour of the consumer (Eroglu et al., 2001; Hewei & Youngsook, 2022). In the research of Chandra (2018), information is shown to be the most prominent stimulant in an e-commerce environment. Lee & Min (2021) corroborate this finding and show that the quality of the information is crucial. In the study of Moon et al. (2017) on the fashion apparel industry, the authors note that research into online shopping using the S-O-R Model tends to focus on attitudes towards the shopping outlet's website (Hung, 2011; Nam et al., 2021). Yet attitudes towards the website do not necessarily drive the behaviour of customers. Accordingly, the authors chose instead to focus on online purchase intentions. This study, to some extent, echoes the findings of the studies above, which focus on luxury jewellery as its subject topic and share similarities.

In conclusion, consumer behaviour is induced by a certain psychological motivation to purchase. Stimuli originating from various sources may alter the psychology of a consumer, generate purchase motivation and ultimately induce a purchase decision. The model can better explain the psychological changes and purchase behaviour of consumers because it incorporates stimuli of different shopping environment factors as independent variables, as well as the psychological motivation of consumers (e.g., emotion and cognition) as a mediating variable and the behavioural state of convergence or avoidance as the dependent variable.

Competing theories

Finding the best theoretical framework for the study requires consideration of various theories and models. Several theories, including DeLone and McLean's information systems success model, E-S-QUAL, and WEBQUAL, have been utilised in past research on the topic of online purchase intention, and each of these ideas has merit and shortcomings.

The major focus of DeLone and McLean's information systems success model is the effectiveness of information systems and how they affect user satisfaction and use intentions (Wang, 2008). The correlations between the qualities of system, information, service, user satisfaction, and usage intention are examined by this model (McGill et al., 2003; Al-Ghazali et al., 2015). Even though the model offers a thorough framework for studying user behaviour on e-commerce websites, it does not capture all elements that impact user intention to purchase goods online.

Theoretical frameworks entitled E-S-QUAL and WEBQUAL evaluate the quality of online services and websites, respectively (Akinci et al., 2010). They investigate dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, security, ease of use, and privacy (Zavareh et al., 2012; Akkucuk & Teuman, 2016). These theories are beneficial for assessing the number of digital platforms, but they fail to directly measure the variables affecting the likelihood of an online purchase intention.

In the case of studying online purchase intention, the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model has been chosen as the theoretical framework in this study. The model takes the effects of external stimuli (S), psychological processes on the inside (O), and behavioural reactions (R) into account. A stimulus is interpreted and perceived by a person and goes on to influence behavioural reactions. Using the S-O-R model, it is possible to examine both internal and external elements that influence online purchase intention (Kawaf & Tagg, 2012).

The S-O-R model offers several advantages for this study in terms of examining the intention to purchase jewellery online. First, it offers a thorough framework that considers both internal and external elements, enabling a more holistic understanding of customer behaviour. The second is that this model acknowledges the significance of individual perceptions and interpretations and the subjectivity of online purchasing decision-making. Finally, the S-O-R model has been employed frequently in research on consumer behaviour and has been used to effectively predict and explain behavioural reactions.

While other theories like DeLone and McLean's information systems success model, E-S-QUAL, and WEBQUAL have their own strengths, the S-O-R model aligns more closely with this research focus on understanding online jewellery purchase intention. It provides a robust framework for examining variables that affect online purchase intention by placing emphasis on the interplay between stimuli, individual processes, and behavioural responses.

To sum up, the selection of the S-O-R model for this study is based on its comprehensive nature, consideration of subjective interpretations, and its established effectiveness in consumer intention research.

S-O-R model and luxury

In a study by Schil & Godefroit-Winkel (2021), the authors applied a theory that suggests that retailing should consider the environmental expectations of consumers (Baker et al., 2020). The study centred on research into the luxury goods sector and confirmed environmental information as a stimulus in the S-O-R framework of intentions among consumers to purchase luxury goods. Previous studies focused on the impact of the atmosphere as a stimulus on luxury purchases in the S-O-R model, including lighting, cleanliness, odour, design, layout, music and staff interaction (Nunthiphatprueksa, 2019; Yang et al., 2022).

Li et al. (2014), who applied the results of previous research to the online luxury sector, confirmed the applicability of the S-O-R model in the online luxury industry and found that consumer purchase intentions are influenced by the environment in their study. Further, the study of Jain (2022) is a rare example in which the S-O-R model is applied to online luxury consumption. This study confirms the significance of informational stimuli by showing that informational content generated by luxury brands acts as a stimulus in the S-O-R model to influence consumer behaviour (Rao & Ko, 2021). Luxury brands with websites that are both informative and simple to use may lead to an increase in the amount of traffic on online store websites (Dauriz et al., 2014), which is directly correlated to the willingness of customers to buy luxury items online.

Mediating Effect of Feelings of Brand between the Brand Familiarity and Intention to Buy Jewellery Online

Customers tend to be more inclined to trust a brand and desire to purchase items when they are familiar with it (Arani & Shafiizadeh, 2019). Consumers may have a more positive opinion of a brand and be more likely to choose its products if they are familiar with it as part of an emotional connection, according to Keller (2003). Several studies have shown that brand familiarity is an essential requirement for consumers to assess a brand and will influence perceptions (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2017). Laroche et al. (1996) also validated this idea in their study and further confirmed that consumers who are familiar with a brand are encouraged to form brand attitudes, and these brand attitudes result in intent to buy branded goods.

Consumers require trust and recognition of brands and products when buying jewellery products through online channels (Haridasan & Fernando, 2018). By evoking strong and distinctive brand associations as well as emotional resonance in the memories of customers, brand familiarity helps consumers recognise and trust a brand (Benediktus et al., 2010; Kakati & Choudhury, 2013; Jain, 2017). As a result of their familiarity with a brand, consumers form more lasting impressions (Lowry et al., 2008), which boosts brand sentiment and helps to develop a reputation of the brand for quality, dependability, and trustworthiness, which all increase purchase propensity (Deli-Gray et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2021). Brand familiarity also helps to foster feelings of brand loyalty, which in turn increases the likelihood that customers choose the brand's goods and develop enduring purchasing patterns (Latif et al., 2014).

H4: Feelings of Brand positively mediate the relationship between Brand Familiarity and Intention to Buy Jewellery Online.

Mediating Effect of Feelings of Brand between the Design and Intention to Buy Jewellery Online

To establish an emotional connection with a brand, brand designers seek to trigger internal processing reactions, such as subjective sensations (Brakus et al., 2009), as consumers' preferences for product design concepts and styles influence brand identity (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). In turn, this stimulates an aesthetic resonance between consumers and the product (Ranscombe et al., 2012). Joseph (2014) notes that consumers tend to prefer branded jewellers when choosing to purchase jewellery products, and this preference is mostly attributable to the brand's design. Visual identity increases consumers' likelihood of being attracted to and identifying with the jewellery made by that brand.

Consumers who buy jewellery online are unable to physically handle or test the product (Noronha, 2015). Therefore, they rely more heavily on the reputation of the brand and design style when choosing what to buy (Bhat & Bowonder, 2001; Lather & Khatri, 2011; Guercini et al., 2020). Excellent luxury brand design can showcase individuality and originality, thus creating a brand image in the minds of consumers (Monfared et al., 2020). Brand design is crucial in the context of online purchasing. By creating items that are distinctively and aesthetically pleasing, brands may win over reputation and trust in the minds of consumers (Einwiller, 2001).

Cho & Lau (2014) found that brand design is an important influence in China in the decision-making process of online jewellery purchases, with consumers assessing the quality and trustworthiness of products through the design style, reputation and uniqueness of the jewellery brand (Hashim et al., 2018). Chinese jewellery sellers should concentrate on creative and appealing designs to pique consumers' attention and garner recognition, increasing the competitiveness of their brands in the online jewellery industry (Yuan, 2010).

H5: Feelings of Brand positively mediate the relationship between the Design and Intention to Buy Jewellery Online.

Hypothesis Development

Based on the literature review, the hypotheses of this study are summarised, and the research framework is depicted.

Table 2. Hypotheses summary

| No. | Hypotheses |
|-----|---|
| H1 | Brand Familiarity will positively influence the Feelings of Brand of Chinese online jewellery customers. |
| H2 | Design will positively influence the Feelings of Brand of Chinese online jewellery customers. |
| H3 | There is a positive relationship between Feelings of Brand and Intention to Buy Jewellery Online of Chinese jewellery e-commerce consumers. |
| H4 | Feelings of Brand positively mediates the relationship between Brand Familiarity and Intention to Buy Jewellery Online. |
| H5 | Feelings of Brand positively mediates the relationship between the Design and Intention to Buy Jewellery Online. |

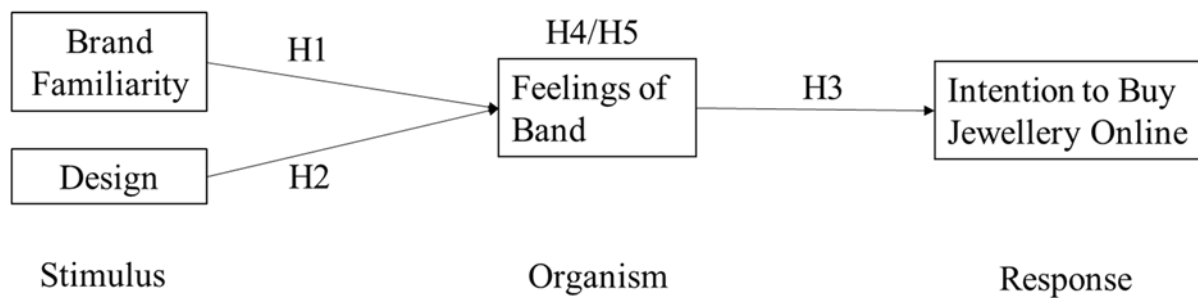


Figure 1. Research Framework

Methods

The utilization of the SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model employed in this study underscores the interplay and impact of stimuli, organisms, and responses. This model posits that human behaviour emerges from a confluence of external stimuli, individual attributes, and internal cognitive processes. Fundamentally, the model posits that stimuli are perceived and processed by the organism, leading to a response, with individual attributes and psychological processes governing this dynamic. Accordingly, the pertinent stimulus is presented to the respondent prior to the administration of the questionnaire, ensuring its contextual relevance and alignment with the theoretical framework.

Numerous studies employing the SOR model have investigated online consumer behaviour, often utilizing web pages or websites as stimuli sources (Changhyun et al., 2021; Peña-García et al., 2022). In China, online sales of jewellery primarily occur through brand-owned online shops or official flagship shops established by brands on popular e-commerce platforms such as JD.com and Taobao. Chow Tai Fook Jewellery, a globally recognized Chinese jewellery brand, stands out as an early adopter of online sales, surpassing its counterparts in recent years (Tian et al., 2021; Nobile & Cantoni, 2021; Chen, 2023). This study contributes significantly to the existing literature on e-commerce brand jewellery in China, where Chow Tai Fook Jewellery is outstanding among the e-commerce brand jewellery companies. Consequently, the study selects consumer stimuli from the web pages of Chow Tai Fook Jewellery's official self-operated shop and online shop on the Taobao platform, offering valuable insights into e-commerce jewellery consumption.

Findings

Based on the literature review and methodology, this study develops modified scales to test the hypotheses.

Brand Familiarity

Brand Familiarity is considered a significant factor in influencing consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards a brand (Ha & Perks, 2005; Yunpeng & Khan, 2021). The scales utilized in this study were adapted from the works of Ha and Perks (2005) and Yunpeng & Khan (2021), which have been subjected to rigorous testing to ensure reliability and validity.

Table 3. Measurement for brand familiarity

| Brand Familiarity | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|--------|
| No. | Adapted Items | Original Items | Source |
| 1 | "I have a feeling of goodwill towards this online jewellery brand." | The brand gives me a feeling of goodwill. | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|------------------------|
| 2 | "I am always aware of this online jewellery brand on the web." | I am always aware of the brand on the web. | (Ha & Perks, 2005) |
| 3 | "The online jewellery site has a good reputation." | The site has a good reputation. | |
| 4 | "Navigation at the online jewellery site makes me feel comfortable." | Navigation at the site makes me feel comfortable. | |
| 5 | "I am quite familiar with the products offered by this website." | I am quite familiar with the products offered by this website. | (Yunpeng & Khan, 2021) |
| 6 | "I am quite familiar with other websites which offer similar products. " | I am quite familiar with other websites which offer similar products. | |
| 7 | "I usually consume products offered by websites like this. " | I usually consume products offered by websites like this. | |

Ha & Perks' study with online brands is like this study, while Yunpeng & Khan's (2021) study is set within a Chinese context. To ensure semantic consistency and contextual appropriateness, slight modifications were made to specific sections of the scales to better align with the objectives of the research. In addition to providing for a more thorough examination of the phenomena of branding in a specific context, convergence under a high degree of similarity indicates that this study is congruent with earlier research, which enhances the generalizability and credibility of the results. The research scales of Yunpeng & Khan and Ha & Perks are combined and drawn upon to provide a more thorough and in-depth investigation of the phenomena and affecting elements in the field of concern.

Design

Design serves as a significant stimulus for eliciting brand-related emotions, and its impact can be measured through the variable of product design (Bettels & Wiedmann, 2019).

Table 4. Measurement for eliciting brand-related emotions

| Design | | | |
|---------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| No. | Adapted Items | Original Items | Source |
| 1 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand is good-looking. " | I expect a product from this brand to be good-looking. | (Bettels & Wiedmann, 2019) |
| 2 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand is visually striking. " | I expect a product from this brand to be visually striking. | |
| 3 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand will look appealing. " | I expect a product from this brand to look appealing. | |
| 4 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand will perform well. " | I expect a product from this brand to perform well. | |
| 5 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand is capable of doing its job. " | I expect a product from this brand to be capable of doing its job. | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| 6 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand would be functional. " | I expect a product from this brand to be functional. | |
| 7 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand will help me establish a distinctive image. | I expect a product from this brand to help me establish a distinctive image. | |
| 8 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand would be helpful to distinguish myself from the masses. " | I expect a product from this brand to be helpful to distinguish myself from the masses. | |
| 9 | "I think an online jewellery product from this brand accurately symbolizes or expresses my achievements. " | I expect a product from this brand to accurately symbolize or express my achievements | |

Given that the original study measured this variable as a dependent variable, certain semantic adjustments have been made in this research to align with the measurement framework, accompanied by the inclusion of modifiers to elucidate the study's scope. The existing scale uses the expression "I expect" to measure consumer intention. However, in the proposed scales presented in this study, the expression "I think" was changed to capture the perceptions and thoughts of consumers more precisely, further clarifying the scope of the study to make the results more accurate and convincing.

Feelings of Brand

Existing studies on feelings of brand focus on the brand preferences and brand loyalty of consumers (Yigi & Tigli, 2018; van der Westhuizen, 2018) or the perception of a brand shopping website encompassing dimensions such as visual design, emotional interaction, and ease of use of the website (Chen, 2012; Kalia et al., 2014). In contrast, this study investigates intangible aspects of branding on consumer online jewellery shopping behaviour. This study will adapt the scales described in Aslam et al. (2018) and Beig & Nika (2022).

Table 5. Measurement for feelings of brand

| Feelings of Brand | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|----------------------|
| No. | Modified Items | Original Items | Source |
| 1 | "I can be certain that I will save money and time when purchasing online jewellery products of the brand. " | I can be certain that I will save money and time when purchasing online apparel products of the selected brand. | (Aslam et al., 2018) |
| 2 | "I trust the quality of the online jewellery products provided by the brand. " | I trust the quality of the products provided by my 'favourite e-commerce brand'. | (Beig & Nika, 2022) |
| 3 | "Online products provided by brand jewellery are of | Products provided by my 'favourite e-commerce brand' are of good quality. | |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| | good quality. ” | | |
| 4 | “Brand jewellery provides excellent services online. ” | My ‘favourite e-commerce brand’ provides excellent services. | |
| 5 | “Online services offered by brand jewellery are reliable. ” | Services offered by my ‘favourite e-commerce brand’ are reliable. | |
| 6 | “Brand jewellery would be my first choice when shopping online. ” | ‘My favourite e-commerce brand’ would be my first choice when shopping online. | |
| 7 | “I will keep buying brand jewellery online as long as it provides me with good products and excellent services. ” | I will keep buying from my ‘favourite ecommerce brand’ as long as it provides me with good products and excellent services. | |
| 8 | “I am still willing to buy from online brand jewellery even if the price of products provided by it is a little higher than of other e-commerce nonbrand jewellery. ” | I am still willing to buy from my ‘favourite e-commerce brand’ even if the price of products provided by it is a little higher than that of other e-commerce brands. | |

The scales developed by Aslam et al. (2018) and Beig & Nika (2022) were chosen as these scales allow measurement of online purchasing behaviour of branded goods. In the present study, the term "online jewellery" is added, and the primary modification to existing scales is the removal of the phrases "selected" and "my favourite" in order to render the results more objective.

Intention to Buy Jewellery Online

Following an extensive literature review, the scale of Bian & Forsythe (2012) is chosen to measure intentions for luxury goods purchases.

Table 6 Measurement for intention to buy jewellery online

| Intention to Buy Jewellery Online | | | |
|--|--|---|-------------------|
| No. | Modified Items | Original Items | Source |
| 1 | “If I were going to purchase a jewellery product, I would consider buying it online. ” | If I were going to purchase a luxury product, I would consider buying this brand. | (Bian & Forsythe, |
| 2 | “If I were shopping for jewellery, the likelihood I would purchase | If I were shopping for a luxury brand, the likelihood | |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|-------|
| | online is high. ” | I would purchase this luxury brand is high. | 2012) |
| 3 | “My willingness to buy jewellery would be high if I were using online shopping platforms. ” | My willingness to buy this luxury brand would be high if I were shopping for a luxury brand. | |
| 4 | “The probability I would consider buying jewellery online is higher than offline.” | The probability I would consider buying this luxury brand is high. | |

The scale developed by Bian & Forsythe (2012) is chosen because luxury goods and jewellery belong to the same domain. To reflect the fact that the study focuses on online jewellery products, the "brand" in the existing scale is modified to "online". The term "brand" in Bian & Forsythe's (2012) study refers to the general perception of a luxury brand, as the study focuses mainly on certain categories of online jewellery products. Therefore, the adapted scale is more relevant to our research question. Other minor scale adjustments are made to maintain the measure's original consistency and increase the study's dependability.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of branding on consumer perception, satisfaction, and purchase intention in an e-commerce environment. A comprehensive scale is constructed using insights from Stimulus, Organism and Response theory to investigate the key role of brands in Chinese jewellery e-commerce.

This study finds that brand has a significant impact on Chinese jewellery e-commerce. First, as a stimulus, brands create psychological brand perceptions through their familiarity as well as their design, which leads to the formation of purchase intention. In addition, brands convey product characteristics and values within the e-commerce environment, thereby influencing consumers' purchase intentions. This stimulus-individual-response process highlights the important role of brands in motivating consumer purchase behaviour.

The development of a Chinese jewellery e-commerce scale based on the SOR model emphasises the influence of brands on consumer purchasing behaviour. The findings provide valuable insights for e-commerce platforms and jewellery brands. If the scale is confirmed after launch, e-commerce platforms can enhance consumers' familiarity with the brand by strengthening brand publicity and promotion, which in turn will promote purchase behaviour. In addition, jewellery brands can enhance consumers' purchase intention and satisfaction by conveying the design features and artistic value of certain products.

Theoretical Implications

A review of the literature on Chinese jewellery e-commerce reveals that most existing studies concentrate on development and countermeasures (Wang et al., 2012; Yue & Chai; Mo, 2013; Zhao & Huang, 2008), and within both the English and Chinese literature there is a lack of empirical case studies and related scales (Armano, 2020). The consumption of luxury products in China, a growing market, is rising yearly (Chevalier et al., 2009; Jin et al., 2017; Wang, 2012). Multiple research efforts have provided insight into the online strategies of luxury brand companies, yet few of these studies have specifically examined how customers perceive the luxury online experience (Halwani, 2020). In the Chinese literature, empirical research exists on luxury items and luxury e-commerce (Zhu, 2006; Guo & Su, 2007; Du, 2021). However,

for the category of jewellery, and especially that which is sold online, we suggest that a new experiment will help to fill a gap in the literature (Greenberg et al., 2019).

A study by Srikrisanapol (2017) discovered that Thai jewellery consumers frequently search for information both offline and online and that their sources of information reliability also include marketers who provide comprehensive product information and product guarantees to get the best jewellery products at the best price. At the information search stage, they pay close attention to brand image, word-of-mouth recommendations, and personalised design. Empirical research on Chinese online luxury platforms can also clarify the impact of branding on customer behaviour (Gao, 2020). Luxury goods branding depends heavily on distinctive design to achieve marketable differences. Therefore, the development of relevant measurement scales is necessary for the study.

In China, on the other hand, there are a rising number of online jewellery stores, very few of which have been studied. Furthermore, the underlying theory should be further strengthened through the development of additional frameworks and scales.

Practical and Social Implications

E-commerce is a new online transaction mode, while jewellery is a traditional, valuable, and personal consumer good. How to combine the two organically to create a new development model is worthy of study (Bian, 2020).

The results of this study can be applied to the study of brand perception among Chinese jewellery e-commerce consumers to explore consumer psychology. Also, this study can assist Chinese traditional jewellery businesses in accelerating their digital transformation. It may also help those who are already active online in better adapting to the market and developing digital marketing strategies to increase revenue, profitability, as well as customer satisfaction and loyalty to ultimately fuel growth. It can also drive purchases of jewellery while making a broader contribution to management practices within the jewellery industry.

The findings of the study will have a significant influence on management and research practices. For instance, this study enables jewellery brand owners to take proactive measures. These results will also benefit jewellery e-commerce businesses in creating brand identities.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Brand influence is a complex and diverse process influenced by the interaction of many factors. Although the SOR model enables analysis of brand role from the perspective of stimulus, organism to response, it is difficult to comprehensively consider and control all the possible influencing factors in the actual research. For example, factors such as consumers' personal traits, psychological state, and socio-cultural background may also have an impact on brand role, and the influence of these factors cannot be completely excluded from the study.

Second, the dynamic nature of the e-commerce environment may lead to limitations in the applicability of the scale. Technology, platforms, and user behaviours in the e-commerce domain are constantly changing and evolving, and the developed scales may not be able to adapt to such changes in a timely manner. Over time, the validity and accuracy of the scales may fade, and they may need to be revised and updated periodically.

In addition, the role of branding itself may be affected by individual differences and attitudes and reactions to brands may vary between consumers. Therefore, the characteristics of different populations should also be considered to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the brand's role in jewellery e-commerce.

Finally, the scale is still in the development stage, and it is unknown whether it has high reliability and can be used in research.

The following points should be noted for any future use of the questionnaire: In the development of the scale, the differences in e-commerce consumers of jewellery in different regions and cultures of China should be taken into account, and cross-cultural research should be carried out in order to obtain more comprehensive information.

Long-term studies: The role of e-commerce and branding may change over time. It is recommended that a long-term tracking study be conducted to understand the ongoing impact of branding on jewellery e-commerce consumer behaviour.

Multi-dimensional Measurement: When studying the role of a brand, multi-dimensional measurement should be performed, incorporating brand awareness, brand perception, brand loyalty, etc., in order to obtain more comprehensive information about the brand effect.

Qualitative research: In addition to quantitative research, qualitative research can be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons and motives behind consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviour towards brands so as to better understand the mechanism of branding.

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