

Consumer Perceived Brand Innovativeness and Authenticity of Chinese Time-Honored Brand Restaurants: The Moderated Mediation Effect of Personal Traits

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Purpose: Numerous time-honored brand restaurants are gradually losing their authenticity in the development process. Brand authenticity serves as a symbol of China's unique culinary culture, and consistency lies at the core of preserving its authenticity. Failure to integrate innovative elements into the original components can potentially erode the brand's consistent image, leading to a negative impact on perceived authenticity and purchase intention (PI). However, existing research has largely neglected to investigate the influence of consumer perceived brand innovativeness (CPBI) and consumer perceived brand authenticity (CPBA) specifically within the context of time-honored brand restaurants. Additionally, there is a lack of research examining the individual differences of consumers and how these intersect with time-honored brands. Therefore, our research aims to address these research gaps.

Methods: The list of Chinese time-honored brands issued by the Ministry of Commerce of China served as the basis for the study's choice of time-honored restaurant brands. 689 relevant consumers were obtained through convenience sampling within China and the self-report method was adopted for data collection. Using the partial least squares structural equation modeling method and the SmartPLS software, the data was analyzed and the hypotheses were tested.

Results: CPBI positively influences PI. CPBA mediates the relationship between CPBI and PI. In contrast to personal innovativeness, which positively moderates the mediating relationship between CPBI and CPBA, nostalgia proneness moderates this relationship negatively.

Conclusion: Our results revealed that both CPBI and CPBA have a positive impact on PI within the domain of consumption in Chinese time-honored brand restaurants. This study addresses the research gap in brand innovativeness and authenticity in these restaurants. Furthermore, we identified the influence of consumer traits in this context. Our results can assist time-honored brand restaurants to effectively innovate and preserve their traditions, which will ultimately contribute to a more authentic service experience.

Keywords: Chinese time-honored brand restaurants, consumer perceived brand innovativeness, consumer perceived brand authenticity, personal innovativeness, nostalgia proneness, categorization theory

Introduction

Brands with a long history (ie, traditional brands), are characterized by their unique inherited products, skills or services,¹ some of which have come to be identified as time-honored brands, which enjoy a prestige and widespread social recognition.² However, certain long-established enterprises have come up against an insurmountable development bottleneck in their operations. In order to remain relevant and avoid becoming outdated and disconnected, these enterprises must adapt to the changing demands of consumers.³

Brand revitalization has become an effective tool for enterprises to tackle the aging and decline of their brand.⁴ Researchers point out that updating, extending or expanding the products or services provided is one way to achieve

revitalization.⁵ A brand's innovativeness directly and positively affects consumers' attitudes towards the brand and loyalty.⁶⁻⁹ As a result, time-honored brand restaurants need to modernize and innovate so as to keep their brand value and recognition of the market.²

Regrettably, a lot of time-honored brand restaurants have gradually lost their authenticity in the process of development. Brand authenticity is the subjective perception and assessments of a brand by consumers based on the brand's inherent attributes and their own experience and knowledge.¹⁰ In recent decades, the authenticity of consumer goods and services has become increasingly important to consumers. Researchers have proposed that consumers should be allowed to experience the brand's authenticity, to help them identify with the brand through its internal and external attributes, which will directly affect their attitudes and behavioral responses.^{11,12} Recognizing the significance of time-honored brand restaurants in the food service industry, several studies have indicated the importance of absorbing the perceived authenticity of consumers to help restaurants achieve and maintain authenticity.¹³⁻¹⁶ Zhang et al argue that inheritance refers to the authenticity of the brand, which is a crucial component of time-honored restaurant brands, and brand authenticity may make contributions to time-honored brand restaurants, helping these restaurants thrive and achieve continued success.¹⁷ Mody et al have shown that brand authenticity is a symbolization of China's unique catering culture.¹⁸

There are several reasons why many time-honored brand restaurants have gradually lost their authenticity in the process of development. Previous studies have indicated that numerous time-honored brand restaurants prioritize keeping up with current trends in the industry, often at the expense of preserving their traditional heritage.^{1,19} This can be seen as a reasonable explanation for the loss of authenticity in the development of time-honored brand restaurants. Additionally, categorization theory may offer further insight into this phenomenon and shed light on the significant role of brand authenticity in detail.

According to categorization theory, categorization is an important information-processing process of consumers in consumption.²⁰ This process requires the consumers to take the information about the object they have already had and stored it in their memory as a reference point and compare it with the updated information about the same object so as to get the results.²¹⁻²³ Eggers et al assert that brand consistency is the key measure in determining brand authenticity.²⁴ Time-honored brand restaurants are judged based on their ability to consistently deliver on their promises regarding the quality of food and service over time.^{25,26} Negative experiences that compromise a restaurant's originality can lead consumers to believe that the restaurant has failed to uphold its promises, values, and culture,²⁷ so as make consumers no longer willing to accept those in authentic brand actions.²⁸ Cultural value and credibility as well as good reputation are enduring characteristics of time-honored brands, which align closely with the concept of brand authenticity.^{28,29} Consequently, when consumers compare changes in time-honored brands with inheritance elements, if they believe that the innovation disregards and separates from the legacy factors and fails to categorize them accordingly, it can result in a loss of consistency and perceived authenticity of time-honored brands for consumers.

The implementation of embedded continuous innovation tradition is the key to the success of traditional brand heritage.³⁰ We support the conclusion that brand innovation continues to have a positive impact in the field of time-honored brand restaurant consumption.^{6,7,9} However, this study proposes time-honored brand restaurants should integrate new elements while preserving their original elements to maintain a consistent image and essence.

Regarding the revitalization of time-honored brands, differences exist in the selection of elements, such as heritage or remodeling, and whether to enact changes.³¹ Existing research on the inheritance and development of time-honored brand restaurants is relatively limited.¹⁷ Nostalgia marketing has received significant research attention.^{32,33} Previous studies clearly point out that nostalgic experience leads to the development of positive emotions, thereby significantly increasing the consumer's intention to revisit.^{34,35} However, research on the influence of brand innovativeness on time-honored brands from a consumer perspective is also limited, necessitating further exploration.¹⁷ Several studies call for the authenticity of time-honored brands,^{13,14,17,36} and more attention should be paid to innovation based on brand authenticity in future research.¹⁷ How can the corresponding mechanism of brand revitalization be constructed based on brand authenticity in Chinese time-honored brand restaurants? This is the first question that this study wants to answer. Addressing this research gap will provide additional support for our point that both innovation and inheritance should be simultaneously considered in the revitalization of time-honored brands.

Consumers' personality affects their consumer behavior.³⁷ Consumer innovativeness is a tendency to purchase new and different products.³⁸ Therefore, consumers with a strong tendency to innovate may prefer innovative time-honored brands. On the other hand, Zimmer et al find that consumers' attitude toward nostalgia influences their perceived quality and brand image cognition.³⁹ Brown and Humphreys find that nostalgia is a key driver leading consumers to buy time-honored products.⁴⁰ However, there are great differences in the intensity and type of nostalgia experienced amongst different individuals.⁴¹ He et al suggest that the two psychological variables of innovativeness characteristics and nostalgia tendency can be used to effectively segment the market of time-honored brands.⁴² Therefore, the second question that our study wants to answer is whether the innovation strategies of time-honored brands play different roles for different consumers.

Through an analysis of the existing literature in this field, it is evident that many time-honored brand restaurants have caught up with the current trends of the industry while ignoring the inheritance of traditions,^{1,19} which is the focus of their continued survival.^{17,27} Previous research on the inheritance and development of time-honored brand restaurants is rather limited, with insufficient attention given to conducting quantitative research on development issues from the customer's perspective.¹⁷ In addition, the authenticity of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants needs to be further studied.^{13,14,17,36} On the other hand, previous studies have indicated the necessity of exploring intervening factors that influence perceived authenticity among different consumer segments.⁴³ To address these research gaps, this study aims to achieve three objectives:

First, to discuss the impact of consumer perceived brand innovativeness (CPBI) on the purchase intention (PI) in relation to Chinese time-honored brand restaurants.

Second, to discuss the mediating role of consumer perceived brand authenticity (CPBA) between CPBI and PI in relation to Chinese time-honored brand restaurants.

Third, to explore whether consumers' personality traits (ie, nostalgia proneness and personal innovativeness) play a moderating role between CPBI and PI via CPBA in the context of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants.

Theoretical Context, Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Context

Categorization Theory

Categorization theory suggests that individuals tend to organize external environment stimuli based on past experiences.²¹ When consumers evaluate product innovations or extensions, they draw upon their previously stored knowledge and transfer category associations.²² Consumers associate new elements with existing attributes or paradigms closely related to the category to make decisions.⁴⁴ Evaluations of authenticity are influenced by people's familiarity or experience with the original goods and/or services.⁴⁵ Consequently, brand knowledge and the original cognition of time-honored brands serve as the basis for consumers' assessments of the impact of innovativeness on the authenticity of time-honored brands. In terms of the characteristics of the products and services provided by time-honored brand restaurants, maintaining authenticity is consumers' expectations of these restaurants.⁴⁶ Authenticity is determined when individuals perceive a match between their experienced object and a referent.¹² Accordingly, if individuals believe that innovative factors and original factors are well integrated, the innovation of time-honored brands matches the original cognition of these brands, thus the innovative elements will be connected to the original elements. This enables the preservation of consistency between innovation and inheritance, leading consumers to perceive that these brands maintain their original promises, cultural values and characteristics, which are at the core of authenticity. In addition, innovation enhances consumers' knowledge of time-honored brands and creates positive associations, thereby increasing purchase intention. Thus, our study aims to explore the impact of consumer perceived brand innovativeness (CPBI) on consumer perceived brand authenticity (CPBA) and purchase intention (PI) toward Chinese time-honored brand restaurants. Specifically, we examine the positive effect of CPBI on PI, and the mediating effect of CPBA between CPBI and PI.

According to categorization theory, for consumers with high nostalgia proneness, the higher the degree of innovation of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants, the higher the degree of inconsistency between new elements and original elements they perceive, so as to have potentially lost, then adverse reactions generate. In contrast, innovative consumers are more likely to embrace the differences between innovative clues and original clues when comparing them, and are

more likely to generate positive association between the new elements and the original attributes, thus accepting the impact of innovation on authenticity to a greater extent. Therefore, we also explore whether consumers' personal traits (ie, nostalgia proneness and personal innovativeness) play a moderating role between CPBI and PI via CPBA. Based on this theory, we propose the following specific hypotheses.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Consumer Perceived Brand Innovativeness (CPBI) and Purchase Intention (PI)

An innovation is a unique product, idea, or service that is viewed as novel by individuals.⁴⁷ Brand innovativeness includes the unique characteristics of a product or service such as product, package, creative marketing approaches that delivers customer value and satisfy consumers' needs.^{48,49} Consumer perception of a brand's product innovativeness, its level of innovativeness, and the likelihood of ongoing innovative actions in a certain market in the future are the three components that Shams et al refer to as CPBI.⁶ It is found that the innovativeness performance of enterprises should be evaluated by consumers, rather than by the enterprise itself, so as to determine whether the products meet the market demand, the rationale here is that part of the reason for the very high proportion of brand innovativeness failures each year is the mismatch between the product innovativeness offered by brand providers and consumers' subjective perceptions of brand innovativeness.⁵⁰ CPBI and consumer perceived product innovativeness have a significant influence on consumers' PI and impulse buying behavior.^{49,51,52} In their survey of 370 consumers, O'Casey and Carlson find that when consumers perceive the innovativeness of e-retail websites, they will more positively evaluate the overall websites' service quality, increase the frequency of visits, enhance their PI, and generate higher trust level, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth publicity relating to the websites.⁵¹ Yi et al suggest that firms' innovation efforts on processes, products, and physical environment, positively related the brand prototype, thereby leading to brand preference, brand recommendation, and brand loyalty.⁵³ Past studies suggested that the problem of brand aging also warrants attention, as it needs to be effectively addressed as part of the long-term operation and management of brands, eg Keller.⁵⁴ Some admired brands, such Harley-Davidson and Mountain Dew, maintain leading positions in their respective industries. To adapt to changing market dynamics, these enterprises are extending or changing their main products and services accordingly, adopting innovativeness as one of their brand's core values. By engaging in innovative behavior, they can continuously occupy the minds of consumers and constantly expand the influence and competitiveness of the brand, even in a fiercely competitive market environment. It can be seen that innovativeness plays an important role in navigating brand aging. Accordingly, if consumers can perceive the innovativeness of time-honored brands, they will positively evaluate them and increase their PI. On this basis, this study leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: CPBI positively affects PI in the context of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants.

The Mediating Effect of Consumer Perceived Brand Authenticity (CPBA)

Kovacs et al suggest that consumers are more inclined to perceive the authentic value of restaurants.⁵⁵ In the market, the unique attributes of time-honored brands are cemented in the course of brand formation and development, forming an abstract and unique brand image and body of knowledge, which can readily be distinguished from the products or services of other brands, thereby allowing consumers to feel the value of time-honored brands, in keeping with the view of consumer-based brand equity, brand innovativeness can be regarded as an association associated with the brand in the consumers' memory, as innovativeness is a positive brand attribute, it may improve consumer attitudes towards new products sold by the brand.⁵⁶ In fact, when consumers first interact with a new product, they form an initial attitude by considering the attributes of the new product through the lens of their existing brand knowledge.⁵⁷ Keiningham et al argue that the importance of authenticity to today's consumers makes it crucial for service companies to adhere to their traditions and values when innovating.⁵⁸ Lehu explores how to enable historic enterprises to reestablish their leadership position in the market, suggesting brand innovativeness is the key, besides, the study concludes that brand innovativeness has an important impact on building an authentic image and revitalizing the vitality of long-lived enterprises.⁵⁹

The existing research highlights the important impact of perceived authenticity in relation to consumer behavior.⁶⁰ Previous studies suggest that brands perceived as authentic are more trustworthy, more likely to be seen as a preferred brand, and consumers are more willing to pay a premium for them, furthermore, these studies also show how brands leverage their authenticity to gain consumer satisfaction, preference, and loyalty.^{61,62}

Particularly, perceived authenticity is proved to positively relate with perceived value and behavioral intention under context of tourism and hospitality environments.⁶⁰ Researchers have focused on authentic food due to their belief in the role of food as a potential tool to attract consumers,⁶³ which demonstrates the role of authenticity in food culture. Hwang et al find that if restaurants design unique services to meet consumers' tastes and provide them with entertainment before their food is served, this positively impacts consumers' assessments of the restaurants' authenticity, thus generating consumer satisfaction and preference.⁶⁴ Youn and Kim found that food ingredients, food names, and stories about food origin contribute to creating a more authentic experience for consumers in restaurants, subsequently influencing their purchase intentions.⁶⁵ Previous studies have also highlighted the significance of perceived authenticity as a crucial characteristic for time-honored brand restaurants.^{13,66}

Studies on authenticity in the context of restaurants have shown that customers' loyalty tends to decline when they discover that a brand has changed from their previous understanding of it and how it performed.⁶⁷ According to categorization theory, if time-honored brands effectively incorporate innovative elements with inheritance factors, individuals will categorize the innovative elements within the positive image of these brands, so that consistency is formed and original cognition of time-honored brands is kept. Past research has demonstrated the positive value that innovativeness brings to enterprises.⁷⁻⁹ In this scenario, if innovativeness increases consumers' knowledge of time-honored brands and fosters positive associations between the innovative elements and original ones, it can reduce any uncertainty consumers may feel about the brand innovativeness. This establishes brand authenticity and helps consumers make purchase decisions. On this basis, the present study speculates that perceived innovativeness not only directly affects PI, but also indirectly affects PI through CPBA. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: CPBA plays a mediating role in the influence of CPBI on PI in the context of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants.

Moderated Mediation Effect of Personal Innovativeness (PIN)

Hausman describes personal innovativeness (PIN) as the extent to which an individual adopts innovativeness.⁶⁸ It has widely been observed that consumer-personality influences consumer behavior. Previous studies have shown that higher levels of PIN are related to a greater likelihood of innovativeness acceptance.^{69,70} Highly innovative individuals respond positively to new fads that provide novelty and excitement, such that their attitude towards new or unfamiliar products is to be open and less anxious.⁷¹ The propensity of consumers to accept new ideas, goods, and services plays an important role in decisions, preferences, brand loyalty, communication, and purchase schedule.⁷²

Innovativeness is involved in the development and continuation of time-honored brands. Although consumers can perceive the innovativeness of time-honored brands, there are some obvious risks associated with the innovativeness. However, as discussed above, more innovative consumers readily accept this risk. Their tendency toward innovativeness will make them more receptive to the innovativeness of time-honored brands, believing that the innovativeness of time-honored brands will bring higher value, strengthen their authenticity, and ultimately generate PI. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: PIN moderates the mediating relationship between CPBI and PI via CPBA. Specifically, this relationship is stronger when PIN is high than when it is low.

Moderated Mediation Effect of Nostalgia Proneness (NP)

Davis views nostalgia as the positive arousal of the negative emotions of present and future situations caused by things that occurred in the past.⁷³ Nostalgia is a valuable brand messaging strategy that marketers use to inspire fond memories of the "good old days" summoned by the brand.⁷⁴ Holbrook and Schindler propose that nostalgia is a kind of preference for things and styles consumers will remember from their youth that affect their preferences later in life.⁷⁵ Similarly, Baker and Kennedy also propose that nostalgia is the desire for the joys and sorrows of past experiences, products or services.⁷⁶ Brown and Humphreys suggest that nostalgia is a key driver to making consumers purchase products, stimulating their PI and behavior.⁴⁰ Baker and Kennedy point out that nostalgia is not completely consistent according to the differences in time, personal experience, and cognition.⁷⁶

Zimmer et al indicate that consumers with higher nostalgia tendencies influenced by nostalgia culture and personalized needs are more inclined to be receptive to nostalgia brand strategies.³⁹ Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent suggest manufacturers should keep older product options available for mature consumers who often have more NP, they frequently remain committed to options that they have been utilizing for a long time.⁷⁷ The long history and profound cultural background of time-honored brands trigger consumers' feelings of nostalgia. When the consumers' nostalgia tendency is high, their perception may be more easily affected by the nostalgia elements of time-honored brands, and the source of their perception of authenticity is more focused on nostalgia elements. Dimitriadou finds that nostalgic consumers prefer those brands with a deep connection to the past.⁷⁸ It is likely that where the nostalgia tendency of consumers is strong, the CPBI may easily weaken the nostalgic memory of consumers, such that the influence of CPBI on brand authenticity will be weakened, thereby weakening PI. Therefore, this study puts forward the hypothesis below:

H4: NP moderates the mediating relationship between CPBI and PI via CPBA. Specifically, this relationship is weaker when NP is high than when it is low.

In summary, we constructed our research model as shown in Figure 1.

Materials and Methods

Sample and Data Collection

This study takes Chinese time-honored restaurant brands as research objects. The certification of time-honored brands by China's central and local provincial governments started in 1991. According to the Ministry of Commerce of China, a restaurant in China must meet the following requirements to be classed as a time-honored restaurant: (1) It must have been established in 1956 or before; (2) It must have inherited unique products, services and skills; (3) It must be able to reflect the cultural characteristics and historical value of a specific region; (4) It must have a good reputation and enjoy wide social recognition and praise.⁷⁹ The selection of time-honored brand restaurants in this study came from the list of Chinese time-honored brand published by the Ministry of Commerce of China.⁸⁰ The following prerequisites must be fulfilled by each participant: (1) Participants must not be younger than 18 years old; (2) Have dined at a time-honored brand restaurant in the previous six months. Then selection questions about their ages and the latest visiting time were designed to screen the respondents. The data were obtained through convenience sampling within China and the self-report method was adopted for data collection. Convenience sampling is a convenient, economical, and nonprobability sampling method that allows for the quick acquisition of a large amount of data, and it is often used in Internet-based questionnaire surveys, especially in studies focusing on consumer behavior within a specific cultural background.⁸¹ Given that the time-honored brand restaurants selected in this study are all located in China, and the consumer behavior in such restaurants is shaped by the background of Chinese culture, based on the study of Zikmund et al,⁸¹ the selection of convenience sampling as the sampling method is justified. Besides, convenience sampling has been employed in previous studies within the restaurant industry, such as the study of Wu et al⁸² and Mohamed et al.⁸³

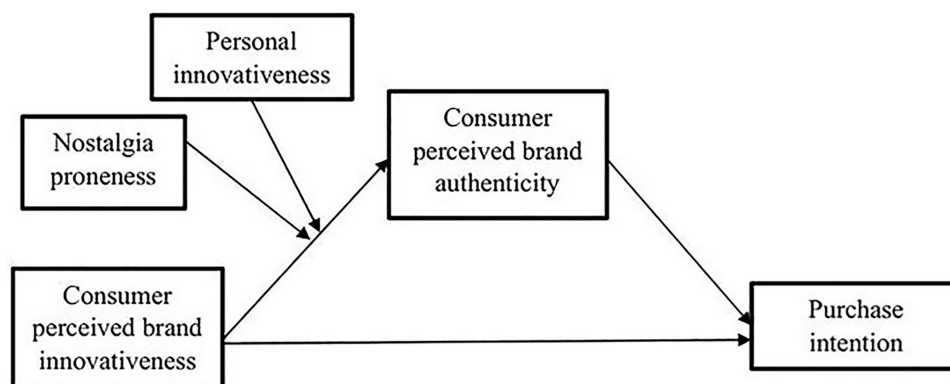


Figure 1 Research model.

The questionnaire was created and shared on the popular smart research platform Wenjuanxing (www.wjx.cn) from May 5, 2022, to August 20, 2022. The survey reached respondents across 13 provincial-level administrative regions of China, including Guangdong, Jiangsu, Liaoning, Zhejiang, and others, who had visited the time-honored brand restaurants. QR (Quick Response) code and questionnaire links are employed to collect the data. Two methods were used. The first method involved online forwarding, ie, asking people to fill in and forward the questionnaire on social media. The second method involved the operators of time-honored brand restaurants. Specifically, several restaurants in Guangdong and Liaoning invited customers who had dined at their establishments to fill out the online questionnaire. Online forwarding was the primary method used and was supplemented by forwarding by these operators. Eligible participants can fill out online questionnaires via smartphones, tablets or computers, and receive cash prizes upon completion. No fewer than five times the number of model parameters should be included in the sample size,⁸⁴ so 230 valid samples are the minimum sample size needed for this research (46 parameters \times 5 observations for each parameter).

Repeated answers are not allowed to ensure data quality. Besides, brands that did not satisfy the following screening criteria were also not included in this study: (1) Non-restaurant brands such as bakery brands; (2) Brands not in the list of Chinese time-honored brand published by the Ministry of Commerce of China.⁸⁰

Measurement Scales

The scales used were fully validated mature scales. After translating the English scale into Chinese, a back translation procedure was employed to verify the effectiveness of all measures. Each item was scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 represents strongly disagree, 5 represents strongly agree).

The scale used by Shams et al⁶ and Hubert et al⁸⁵ was deployed to measure CPBI, which contained 10 items. The scale items of CPBA were mainly taken from the study of Bruhn et al,¹⁰ which contained 15 items. The scale of Baek et al⁸⁶ was used to measure PI, which contained 3 items. The scale of Yang et al⁸⁷ was drawn on to measure PIN, which contained 4 items. Finally, the scale used by He⁸⁸ was referred to measure NP, which contains 14 items. Scales and items are shown in Table 1.

Data Analyses

The data analysis for this study was carried out using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Nowadays, modeling and research through the PLS-SEM are becoming increasingly common in various fields of study.^{89–91}

Table 1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Constructs	Factor Loadings	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Consumer perceived brand innovativeness (CPBI)		0.936	0.946	0.636	
I think this brand has some differences in goods and services from other brands	0.801				2.336
This is a dynamic brand	0.797				2.223
This brand has a “wow!” feeling about it	0.806				2.363
This brand frequently introduces new goods or services and drives market trends	0.766				2.033
This brand creates innovative goods and services with excellent design	0.817				2.475
This brand consistently introduces fresh concepts	0.805				2.324
This brand is a pioneer in the market for innovative goods or services	0.815				2.428
This brand's products or services have transformed the market	0.817				2.446
This brand represents first-class level	0.767				2.057
This brand is a pioneer in technology or production techniques	0.783				2.134
Personal innovativeness (PIN)		0.847	0.897	0.685	
When I learn about a new product, I try to find ways to test it out	0.799				1.800
I enjoy testing emerging products	0.823				1.803
Compared to others in my age group, I frequently investigate fresh products first	0.849				2.051
Generally speaking, I dare to test new products	0.838				1.944

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued).

Constructs	Factor Loadings	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Nostalgia proneness (NP)		0.966	0.969	0.690	
People in modern society are getting increasingly utilitarian	0.813				2.653
People today lead more hectic and fast-paced lives than in the past	0.829				2.866
People today are more complex than they used to be	0.832				2.817
Relationships today are a lot more complicated than before	0.847				2.974
The pace of life has accelerated significantly in recent times	0.856				3.174
In the past, family time was something to treasure	0.823				2.637
I often reflect on my childhood family's love and concern	0.844				2.974
I am appreciative of my prior experiences	0.822				2.737
When I was young, I felt content because of my family life	0.841				3.055
The older tunes now sound memorable and timeless	0.804				2.625
I frequently recall unforgettable childhood experiences	0.820				2.767
I still enjoy watching old television dramas and movies	0.814				2.725
I still enjoy the tastes from my childhood	0.844				2.986
I miss the place where I used to live	0.842				3.020
Consumer perceived brand authenticity (CPBA)		0.969	0.972	0.700	
I believe the brand has remained consistent throughout time	0.835				2.975
I believe the brand maintains its integrity	0.836				2.916
The brand provides continuity	0.841				3.017
A clear concept is pursued by the brand	0.851				3.189
The brand is unique compared to other brands	0.844				3.175
The brand distinguishes itself from competing brands	0.823				2.755
I believe the brand is distinctive	0.849				3.174
The brand clearly sets itself apart from other brands	0.833				2.937
My interactions with the brand have convinced me that it fulfills its claims	0.820				2.712
The brand keeps its promises	0.827				2.808
The brand's claims are reliable	0.840				2.990
The brand makes trustworthy claims	0.835				2.929
The brand does not appear to be fake	0.855				3.350
The brand's image is sincere	0.827				2.826
The brand conveys the idea that it is organic	0.833				2.970
Purchase intention (PI)		0.770	0.867	0.685	
I would seriously consider buying from this brand	0.825				1.576
I would purchase from this brand	0.833				1.586
How likely are you to buy from this brand	0.825				1.560

The data analysis procedure was divided into four steps: First, a detailed demographic analysis was performed on the full sample of 689 respondents with the help of SPSS software v.27.0. Second, the reliability and validity of the constructs were verified with the help of SmartPLS software v.4.0.8. Third, the structural model was tested with the significance of the path coefficient, the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the predictive relevance of endogenous (Q^2). Finally, the moderated mediating effect is tested by SmartPLS software.

Results

Sample Profile

In total, 716 respondents participated in the survey. After invalid questionnaires were eliminated, 689 valid questionnaires remained, with an effective recovery rate of 96.22%, which greatly exceeded the minimum sample size needed for this study. According to the descriptive analysis (Table 2), the proportion of males and females in the respondents was

Table 2 Profile of Respondents

Demographic	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	350	50.8
	Female	339	49.2
Age	18–24	78	11.3
	25–29	189	27.4
	30–39	197	28.6
	40–49	151	21.9
	50–59	58	8.4
	Above 59	16	2.3
Educational Background	High school and below	140	20.3
	College	349	50.7
	Undergraduate	141	20.5
	Master degree and above	59	8.6
Monthly Income (CNY)	5000 and below	55	8.0
	5001–7000	186	27.0
	7001–9000	226	32.8
	9001–12,000	160	23.2
	12,000 and above	62	9.0

nearly equal, accounting for 50.8% and 49.2%, respectively. The majority (28.6%) were between 30 and 39 years old. Most of the respondents (50.7%) had a college degree, and 32.8% reported a monthly income between 7001 and 9000 yuan. Middle-aged and older individuals are the main consumers of time-honored brand restaurants.⁹² Our study found that 60% of the respondents were over 30 years old, which is consistent with the results of existing literature.⁹² However, these traditional brands have recently made successful efforts to attract younger consumers aged 30 and below through innovations, such as leveraging digital tools.⁹³ Consequently, our study aimed to include individuals from different age groups, showing the representativeness of our sample. The sample distribution in this study is similar to that in the study of Xu et al⁴³ on time-honored brand restaurants.

Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model of this study is reflective measurement model. For this type of model, confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation is typically used to assess its reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.⁹⁴ As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's α (CA) of the model structure is higher than 0.7, which is the threshold the model has to overcome to be considered reliable.⁹⁵ Additionally, all constructs' composite reliability (CR) ratings, which ranged from 0.867 to 0.972, were higher than the threshold of 0.7.⁹⁶ As a result, each variable's items show a high level of internal consistency and reproducibility of the outcomes.

This study employed the index of factor loading, the average variance extraction (AVE) criteria, and composite reliability (CR) to assess convergent validity. A suitable level of convergent validity is often indicated by standardized factor loadings of 0.7 or higher, AVE values of 0.5 or higher, and CR values of 0.7 or higher combined.⁹⁵ As shown in Table 1, all factor loadings, AVE values, and CR values adhere to the above rules. Therefore, the convergence of the research model can be fully proved.

Using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, we compared the square root values of AVE with the correlation coefficients between constructs to examine discriminant validity. It should be noted that the AVE square root value of constructs should always be higher than the correlation coefficient between constructs.⁹⁵ As shown in Table 3, this measurement model satisfies the criterion mentioned above and is considered to have discriminant validity.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

	CPBI	PIN	NP	CPBA	PI
CPBI	0.798				
PIN	-0.584	0.827			
NP	-0.036	0.189	0.831		
CPBA	0.607	-0.465	-0.188	0.837	
PI	0.590	-0.432	-0.213	0.453	0.828

Notes: The square roots of AVEs are shown in the diagonal elements (bold). The correlations between the constructs are shown below the diagonal elements.

Abbreviations: CPBI, consumer perceived brand innovativeness; PIN, personal innovativeness; NP, nostalgia proneness; CPBA, consumer perceived brand authenticity; PI, purchase intention.

Structural Equation Model and Hypotheses Analysis

This study started by looking at the structural model’s collinearity issue. To assess the collinearity issue, the variance inflation factor (VIF) value was used: if the VIF value is less than 5, this indicates that the structural model is not affected by collinearity.⁹⁷ Table 1 demonstrates that all of the VIF values were below 5 in this study, indicating that the structural model is not influenced by the collinearity. In addition, this study used the path coefficient, significance level, and determination of coefficients (R^2) to evaluate the structural model, whilst the predictive relevance of endogenous (Q^2) was used to evaluate the model’s fitness. R^2 indicates the degree to which the data explain the model: the larger the value, the better the degree of explanation.⁹¹ As shown in Table 4, Q^2 (CPBA) =0.308, Q^2 (PI) =0.258. The cross-validated redundancy reports a Q^2 value above zero, indicating that the model has predictive relevance. In this study, R^2 (CPBA) =0.418 and R^2 (PI) =0.363, which indicates that the structural model’s in-sample predictions were satisfactory.⁹¹

A bootstrap technique was used to examine the significance of the path coefficients in order to ascertain the significance of the hypotheses in this study. The path coefficients, t-statistics, significance levels, and corresponding 95% confidence intervals are shown in Table 4. The empirical results show that the relationship between CPBI and PI is significant positive (H1: $\beta=0.500^{***}t=11.439, p<0.001$), so H1 is accepted.

Moderated Mediation Testing

In the path (CPBI→CPBA→PI), the indirect effect value is 0.073 and the bootstrap 95% confidence interval is 0.030–0.118, excluding 0, this indicates that CPBA plays a mediating role in the influence of CPBI on PI, which supports H2.

Table 4 Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing

Structural Path	Path Coefficient	P	t-value	95% BC Confidence Interval (n=5000 Subsamples)	Hypothesis Result
<i>Structural model results</i>					
Direct effect CPBI→PI	0.500	***	11.439	(0.415,0.586)	H1, Support
Mediation effect CPBI →CPBA→PI	0.073	0.002	3.254	(0.030,0.118)	H2, Support
Structural model fit R^2 (CPBA) = 0.418; R^2 (PI) = 0.363					
Predictive relevance of model fit Q^2 (CPBA) = 0.308; Q^2 (PI) = 0.258 Omission distance = 7					

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

Abbreviations: CPBI, consumer perceived brand innovativeness; PIN, personal innovativeness; NP, nostalgia proneness; CPBA, consumer perceived brand authenticity; PI, purchase intention.

Table 5 Conditional Indirect Effect Process Analysis

Conditional Effect	Level	Effect	Boot S.E.	95% BC Confidence Interval (n=5000 Subsamples)
At the level of PIN, CPBI influences PI through CPBA	Low	0.409	0.074	(0.257,0.550)
	High	0.567	0.044	(0.479,0.653)
	Index of moderated mediation	0.079	0.037	(0.008,0.154)
At the level of NP, CPBI influences PI through CPBA	Low	0.469	0.052	(0.469,0.673)
	High	0.279	0.059	(0.279,0.513)
	Index of moderated mediation	-0.087	0.028	(-0.144,-0.031)

Abbreviations: CPBI, consumer perceived brand innovativeness; PIN, personal innovativeness; NP, nostalgia proneness; CPBA, consumer perceived brand authenticity; PI, purchase intention.

Based on PIN, CPBI has statistical significance in the moderated mediation index of PI through CPBA (0.079, 95% BCCI [0.008, 0.0154]). As such, H3 is true. Based on NP, through the operation of CPBA, CPBI has statistical significance in the moderated mediation index of PI (-0.087, 95% BCCI [-0.144, -0.031]), meaning that H4 is true. As shown in Table 5, as the level of PIN, the impact of CPBI on PI through CPBA becomes increasingly significant. To be precise, as NP intensity increases, the impact of CPBI on PI through CPBA weakens significantly.

Discussion and Conclusion

General Discussion

This study discusses the relationships between CPBI, CPBA and PI of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants. At the same time, whether consumers' personality traits (ie, nostalgia proneness and personal innovativeness) play a moderating role between CPBI and PI via CPBA is also be investigated.

The findings of our research indicate that CPBI has a direct positive impact on PI. This result is consistent with the research of O'Cass and Carlson.⁵¹ Furthermore, our study confirms that the positive effect of innovation on purchase intention is also evident in the domain of consumption in time-honored brand restaurants. This finding successfully addresses the dilemma of choosing between innovation and inheritance in the revitalization of a time-honored brand, as highlighted in previous research.³¹

Past studies have primarily focused on the brand authenticity of Western countries' native restaurants,¹⁶ leaving limited research on the consumers' perceived authenticity of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants.^{13,14,17,36} This study investigated the mediation effect of CPBA, highlighting that CPBI has an indirect impact on PI through CPBA in the domain of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants. The findings suggest that when developing consumer-perceived innovation, brands should consider the combination of innovative and original factors to maintain consistency and perceived authenticity.

Not all consumers regard brand innovativeness as equally important in evaluating time-honored brand restaurants' authenticity. Different personality traits, this study specifically refers to consumers with personal innovativeness and nostalgia proneness, their influence on the relationship between CPBI and PI via CPBA is different. This result is consistent with Bosnjak et al,³⁷ verifying the applicability of consumer traits in the domain of time-honored brands. However, past studies focus on the positive effect of consumer traits in the corresponding context.^{39,71,72,77} As evidenced by the results of this study, for consumers with strong personal innovativeness and consumers with strong nostalgia proneness, they hold opposite levels of impact on CPBI on PI via CPBA. Consumers with strong personal innovativeness believe that CPBI is beneficial for CPBA, while consumers with strong nostalgia proneness believe that CPBI will weaken CPBA and then influence their subsequent behavioral intentions. Therefore, consumer traits do not always play a positive role in some contexts.

Theoretical Implications

Time-honored brands are historic brands that reflect strong cultural and national or regional characteristics, at the same time enjoying great economic and cultural value,²⁹ so as become welcome worldwide, including in China.⁹⁸ However, the weakening and aging phenomena of time-honored brands are prominent and have been widely reported.^{99,100} There is

an urgent need to revitalize time-honored brands. Six significant theoretical contributions based on the current research gaps are made in this paper.

Firstly, numerous studies looked into how consumers' perceptions and willingness to visit time-honored brand restaurants are affected by brand authenticity.^{13,14,60,66} The authenticity of time-honored brands should be preserved and remain the cornerstone of their business proposition to consumers. The issue of time-honored brands' revitalization remains unresolved in existing research, with varying opinions on the selection of elements such as heritage or remodeling and the implementation of changes.³¹ There is still an incomplete understanding of this issue.¹⁷ Studies on nostalgia marketing got much attention in past, exploring the influence of innovativeness on brand authenticity need to be further investigated.¹⁷ With regard to the dilemma of "change" or "no change",¹⁰¹ the outcomes of this study contribute new empirical conclusions, which verifies the effectiveness of innovation in time-honored brand restaurants and provide a new perspective to solve the confusion of whether time-honored brand restaurants should innovate or maintain legacy.

Second, this study adopts CPBI as a tool to measure the innovativeness of time-honored brands, which is a notable departure from previous discussions of the innovative ability of time-honored brands from an enterprise perspective. This study builds a model from a new customer perspective. Previous research has pointed out that the existing studies on innovativeness ignore consumers' perception of brand innovativeness.¹⁰² This study also responds to the call of Zhang et al¹⁷ for the development of time-honored brands from the perspective of customers.

Third, this result supports and extends the application of categorization theory in the research of time-honored brand innovation and confirms the rationality of categorization theory in the field of brand innovation. Innovation is not only a significant direct impact factor on purchase intention but also has a positive impact on purchase intention through authenticity.

Fourth, this study responds to recent calls by Zhang et al,¹⁷ Kim¹⁴ and Campagna et al³⁶ to further study the authenticity of Chinese time-honored brand restaurants. By examining the mediating role of CPBA, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the importance of brand authenticity to time-honored brands. In the previous section, we used categorization theory to explain how innovation can positively affect purchase intention in the field of time-honored brand consumption under certain circumstances. According to categorization theory, individuals evaluate new elements based on their existing impressions. When brands effectively incorporate new elements into their original perceived image, consumers classify the innovative factors within the same category as the original brand, ensuring its positive association and consistency, therefore, keeping the authenticity. Our results confirm our viewpoint and deduction, underscoring the rationality and significance of brand authenticity as a mediating variable. The finding is consistent with Kim's research,¹⁴ which emphasizes the importance of stability and consistency in delivering the goods and services of time-honored brand restaurants.

Fifth, this study finds that consumers with two different personality traits involved in the study think and categorize the innovativeness based on their own past experiences when facing the innovativeness of time-honored brand restaurants, and then make the subsequent behavior with preference, which shows that the effective use of categorization theory can be applied to different personal traits.

Finally, in the face of the increasingly trend of consumer differentiation, this study explores the moderating effect of consumer traits on CPBI, CPBA, and PI, respectively. Our finding responds the call of Xu et al⁴³ for study of exploring intervening factors that influence perceived authenticity among different consumer segments, and makes up for the lack of research on the individual differences of consumers and how these intersect with time-honored brands.

Practical Implications

The study will provide some new insights for managing perceived innovativeness and authenticity of time-honored brands. This study shows that CPBI positively affects PI through CPBA. Such a result confirms that authenticity is particularly important to the management and operation of time-honored brands. Authenticity is the core and essence of a brand and should not be changed with innovation. For time-honored brand restaurants that already have local cultural representation and profound historical and cultural value, on the basis of good use of their history, culture and brand story, they should maintain the quality of their products, traditional techniques, and spiritual connotation. If this can be

achieved, they will create a competitive advantage that will allow them to stand out in an increasingly crowded marketplace based on ensuring authenticity.

All successful brands go through the process of creation, development and expansion. It should be highlighted that a brand will gradually die of aging if not managed properly. Due to changes over time, the development of the economy, and the emergence of new technologies, the gap between the time-honored brands and the personalized and diversified needs of consumers are inevitably widening. Consumers will turn to other new brands if the time-honored brands cannot satisfy their needs. However, many time-honored brands continue to live by the proverb that “wine is not scared of deep alleyways”. As a result, they do not understand the needs of consumers and remain stagnant. In the era of information, technology is constantly updated. No matter how good the craft is, it can easily and quickly be copied, and what awaits it is only the fate of elimination. Therefore, maintaining innovativeness is an effective way to revitalize time-honored brands. Time-honored brand innovativeness image will powerfully translate to its new products, ensuring the success of innovation. Managers should devote more time and energy to improving brand innovation, as it has shown many benefits.

Indeed, young consumers are the mainstream consumer groups in the market, and time-honored brands should promote their innovativeness to young consumers. This study also confirms the mediating effect of CPBA in CPBI and also that PI will be strengthened for consumers receptive to innovation. However, nostalgia increasingly resonates with consumers, and the emotional connection of time-honored brands creates opportunities for enterprises. This study also shows that for those consumers with a strong sense of NP, the mediating effect of CPBA on CPBI and PI will be weakened. Chinese time-honored brands have profound brand culture, a continuous business philosophy, and rich brand stories, all of which provide an incomparable advantage in terms of their nostalgic marketing efforts. Given that brand heritage has a significant role in determining brand authenticity and purchase intention, Chinese time-honored brands cannot ignore the factor of consumer nostalgia when innovating. This also confirms the view of Keiningham et al those service-oriented enterprises cannot be separated from their traditions and values when innovating, and should innovate on the basis of inheriting the essence of the tradition, so as not to lose their authenticity.⁵⁸

Thereby, time-honored brand restaurants should be considered to enhance the perceived innovativeness of consumers while maintaining the nostalgic element, which will contribute to creation of a more unique and authentic service experience. The outcomes of the present study provide four management suggestions on how to revitalize the brand and keep the authenticity simultaneously from the consumer-perspective.

First, time-honored catering brands should recognize that innovative products and services can be used to achieve a competitive edge.¹⁰³ Hence, time-honored brands should keep abreast of current market trends by developing new products and services, to address the need for healthy foods, for example, low-fat, low-sugar, and low-salt products could be created, all the while considering the integration of innovativeness and nostalgia. Specifically, time-honored brand restaurants can maintain their recipes, which are an important element to maintaining authenticity, whilst at the same time choosing modern and creative ways to cook food.

Second, the innovativeness of the store image is also particularly important. Time-honored brand restaurants need to change their messy, poor, or negative image, optimize their store environments, reflect their artistry, interactivity and experience in the spatial layout, enhance the attraction of the new generation of consumer groups, and update their facilities and equipment. Further, the time-honored brand restaurants should retain nostalgic factors according to their own characteristics and enhance the cultural atmosphere of their stores. The service environment should inspire a sense of heritage and place, for instance by showing historic photographs from the restaurant’s past or by having staff members dressed in traditional Chinese attire. Such cues may evoke fond recollections and a sense of nostalgia in customers, increasing their propensity to dine at these time-honored brand restaurants.

At the same time, marketing innovativeness is also an important aspect of maintaining relevance. It is necessary to create a young and fashionable brand image through the use of new media, carry out the secondary positioning of the market going beyond the history and age of the brand itself, and obtain market opportunities. Promoting the brand through young celebrity endorsements is also an effective way. However, the traditional factors of time-honored restaurant brands must be guaranteed and retained, such as the brand logo, style, and visible design. Besides, Chinese time-honored brand restaurants must dig into and publicize the information related to their brand

heritage, such as the history through both online (eg official websites and mini programs) and offline (eg menus and indoor signage).

Fourth, the target market of consumer segmentation should be determined according to the consumers' innovativeness and nostalgia preferences and then the brand positioning should be carried out according to the target market. For example, different marketing programs can be adopted to attract consumers with different preferences. For innovativeness-oriented consumers, brands can actively expand online sales channels, make use of social media, and combine with the current hot topics for promotion purposes. For consumers who prefer to nostalgia, it is necessary to convey to them the inertia and stability information of dishes from raw material selection to cooking techniques, and the service style should highlight the sense of history associated with the brand. For such consumers, special attention needs to be paid to the degree of memory restoration of their offline experiences.

Limitations and Future Research

This study still has some limitations. First, since the same participants reported both the antecedents and consequent variables in the suggested research model, common method variance may be a problem in this study. Although this method is commonly used in the existing research,¹⁰⁴ more objective measures should be incorporated in the future.

Second, in terms of sample collection, convenience sampling was employed in this study. One drawback of convenience sampling is that the sample obtained may not be representative of the target population. Although, we have demonstrated its suitability in our research context. In future studies, to address this limitation, some probability sampling methods can be incorporated. For example, stratified sampling can be selectively used in subsequent studies to enhance the accuracy of data collection. Questionnaires can be distributed to different age groups, income categories, and geographical regions, including international diners. Additionally, by analyzing the data collected through stratified sampling, the influence of demographic variables on consumer nostalgia or innovative proneness can be examined, providing further insights into the potential impact of consumer characteristics.

Third, there are indeed many factors influencing the purchase intention of time-honored brand restaurants, such as inheritance, longevity and so on. However, in order to respond to research gaps specifically and pointedly, and highlight the purpose of this study, this study just focuses on investigating the impact of CPBI on PI via CPBA. This study suggests that future research may include other antecedents and moderators as well as intermediate mechanisms to further examine topics related to the purchase intention of time-honored brand restaurants. For instance, for high price-positioning establishments, such as Michelin restaurants, consumers are willing to pay a premium for their products and services because they believe these restaurants can satisfy their vanity, trend-following and hedonistic needs.¹⁰⁵ In future studies, it would be beneficial to classify time-honored brand restaurants based on their price positioning and examine the factors influencing purchase intention or willingness to pay a premium for these restaurants respectively. Price will be a very important variable in this context.

Fourth, as this study mainly explores the moderating effect of consumers' traits tendencies, subsequent scholars can choose consumers' cultural tendencies (ie, collectivism and individualism), as moderating variables.

Finally, the cross-sectional data of this study can support its conclusions at present, but may not be supported in the future. Moving forward, time-honored brands will face increasing challenges, and consumers' consumption mentality and values will change at the same time; in this context, longitudinal research can provide more information.

Conclusion

Numerous time-honored brand restaurants are gradually losing authenticity in the innovation. However, research has largely overlooked the influence of innovativeness on the perceived authenticity of time-honored brand restaurants. In addition, there is a lack of research into the individual differences among consumers and how these intersect with time-honored brands. To fill these gaps, we discussed: (1) The impact of CPBI on PI; (2) The mediating effect of CPBA between CPBI and PI; (3) The moderated mediation effect of consumers' personality traits (ie, NP and PIN) between CPBI and PI via CPBA.

We focused on Chinese time-honored brand restaurants as research objects. Through the use of convenience sampling in China, we obtained a sample of 689 relevant consumers who had relevant experience with these restaurants. Data collection was conducted using a self-report method. The partial least squares structural equation modeling method and the SmartPLS software were used to examine the data and evaluate the hypotheses made.

The empirical test confirms that CPBI has a positive impact on PI via CPBA. The moderating effects of personal innovativeness and nostalgia proneness in the above relationship are significant, with personal innovativeness showing a positive effect and nostalgia proneness showing a negative effect. As evidenced by the results of this study, our research expands the application of brand innovativeness, brand authenticity, and categorization theory in the field of time-honored brand consumption and puts forward some managerial implications. We suggest that time-honored brand restaurants should consider the brand's heritage when carrying out brand innovation. Restaurants should also treat consumers with different tendencies toward innovation and nostalgia. By understanding and utilizing their diverse perspectives on the relationship between CPBI and CPBA, restaurants can effectively meet their needs and enhance customer satisfaction.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval for all procedures in this study was obtained from The Institute for Sustainable Development at Macau University of Science and Technology. Each participant in this study provided their informed written consent prior to undertaking the research.

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Disclosure

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