

## The Impact of Heritage Brand Storytelling on Young Consumers' Attitudes:

### An Empirical Study Based on DEMATEL-ANP and the ABC Attitude

#### Model — A Case of Hengshun

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**Abstract:** In the global consumer market, heritage brands often face challenges such as aging brand perception and a disconnect between their narrative approach and the target audience. This study uses the heritage brand Hengshun as a case study to investigate the consistency between expert decision-making logic and the psychological responses of young audiences. Depending on the findings, either the successful narrative path will be refined, or the cognitive logic behind any deviation will be analyzed to identify effective strategies for brand narratives to evoke attitudinal responses in young consumers. To this end, three narrative types were developed, and the DEMATEL-ANP expert decision-making method was employed alongside an empirical approach based on the ABC attitude model to compare the effects of brand narratives as perceived by experts versus young audiences. The experimental data reveal a significant cognitive gap: experts adhere to an internal-to-external logic in brand system construction, whereas young consumers are more inclined to enter the consumption process through emotions and social participation. Consequently, a brand narrative path tailored to the young generation was proposed: "emotional entry – cognitive deepening – behavioral transformation," which outlines a progressive method of emotional guidance, cognitive consolidation, and behavioral transformation. This study extends the application of narrative transmission theory and the ABC attitude model to heritage brands, thereby contributing to the sustenance of brand vitality.

**Keywords:** *Heritage brand; Brand narrative; Narrative transmission; Consumer attitude*

#### 1. Introduction

Brand heritage, the cumulative history and performance of a brand over time, is a fundamental component of brand equity [15]. In the contemporary global consumer market, heritage brands face unprecedented survival challenges. On one hand, their long historical accumulation provides a profound cultural foundation, granting them certain competitive advantages in an increasingly fragmented era. On the other hand, drastic changes in the global market environment and the rise of a new generation of young consumers have led these brands to gradually fall into the predicament of aging brand perception. Their traditional narrative systems are increasingly unable to resonate with the modern lifestyles of the young generation. As a leading brand in the Chinese condiment industry, Hengshun possesses a century-long historical and cultural heritage. However, in its efforts to expand into the young consumer market, it has encountered a gap between its established brand image and the psychological recognition of young people. For a heritage brand, attracting young consumers is not merely a competition for market share, but a crucial endeavor for the continuation of brand vitality. How to effectively enhance young people's brand recognition, emotional connection, and behavioral intention while maintaining cultural heritage is a common challenge that all heritage brands must address in the process of brand activation.

Brand storytelling is widely regarded as a core tool for revitalizing brand vitality. Stories possess significant

power in facilitating and sustaining communication in daily life. In the context of branding, a compelling narrative often underpins the most popular brands in today's marketing landscape. Essentially, brand narratives communicate through stories[16]. Defined as absorption into a story, transportation entails imagery, affect, and attentional focus [9]. When consumers immerse themselves in the scenario constructed by the story, their cognition and emotions will also undergo changes, story receivers are emotionally transported into the storyteller's world through empathy and imagery[18], thereby reducing their resistance to commercial advertisements. More and more brands increasingly use a strategic approach to brand content creation .

During the formulation of brand strategies, enterprises often rely on expert decisions. However, in a complex and ever-changing market environment, can the expert's empirical judgment accurately hit the psychological response of young people? Especially in the current young-oriented market where information is fragmented and sensory thresholds are constantly rising, the formation of consumers' brand attitudes is a complex psychological process, and affective elaboration is the dominant influencer during this attitude formation process . This study takes the heritage brand Hengshun as its core case, focusing on three narrative types: historical cultural heritage, quality value and innovation, and user co-creation with emotional connection. It seeks to address a central question: do the priority weights derived from the DEMATEL and ANP expert methods align with the empirical responses of young consumers based on the ABC attitude model? If the two are consistent, it would indicate that expert judgment has accurately captured market and consumer demands. The research would then further summarize and refine the successful brand narrative path, providing a reference and scalable framework for expanding heritage brands into the young consumer market. Conversely, if a significant mismatch emerges—for instance, if the historical cultural narrative favored by experts creates a sense of distance among young audiences, while the user co-creation and emotional connection narrative more effectively evokes stronger emotional resonance—this study will deeply analyze the cognitive logic underlying the deviation and, based on these insights, propose a verifiable brand narrative methodology.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the boundaries of brand narrative marketing research and offers a new foundation for applying the consumer ABC attitude model to heritage brands. From a practical standpoint, it aims to provide a verifiable brand narrative methodology for Hengshun and other heritage brands in engaging younger consumer demographics. Historically, marketing for heritage brands has often lacked data-driven support and psychological validation. This study, through quantitative analysis, translates three distinct narrative types of the Hengshun brand—historical cultural heritage, quality value and innovation, and user co-creation with emotional connection—into quantifiable variables. This approach enables business managers to identify which narrative types can effectively influence young consumers' purchasing decisions, thereby helping heritage brands further expand into the youth market and enhance brand vitality and consumer recognition.

## **2. Literature**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.1.1 The ABC Model of Consumer Attitudes**

Attitude is a psychological construct that represents an individual's internal evaluative tendency when responding to a particular object or situation. In marketing, consumers' attitudes constitute a prevalent model of attitude structure, which consists of three components: affect, behavior, and cognition[4]. Cognition refers to the knowledge and perceptions that consumers acquire from various sources, such as brand attributes, image, and function. Affect denotes the emotional experience or feeling that consumers hold toward a brand. Behavior encompasses the intention to purchase or recommend the brand, as well as the actual actions taken. From a psychological perspective, attitudes are understood to be acquired through learning. They are shaped by the

information available to consumers and their self-understanding, and can also be influenced by surrounding information. In the process of attitude formation, some scholars argue that cognition serves as the foundation and prerequisite. Attitudes are formed based on the information consumers obtain and their own cognitive processing, with emotions emerging concurrently. Changes in both cognition and affect jointly give rise to the consumer's purchase intention. Regarding consumer information processing, traditional perspectives have identified two primary dimensions—*affect* and *cognition*—as the evaluative bases for attitude formation. These two main components of attitude may influence their attitudes towards brands with information awareness, because consumers are fundamentally diverse[10]. In MacKenzie's experiment, emotions were the direct and powerful driving force behind the formation of attitudes. At the same time, the opinions and suggestions of the environment are highly persuasive and have an impact on consumers' purchasing behavior[21].

### 2.1.2 Narrative Transportation

When Gerrig was conducting research on narrative experiences, he first employed the term "Transportation" [7], and described the state in which individuals were "transported" through the metaphor of a "traveler". Based on this, Green and Brock defined the meaning of narrative transmission in 2000, arguing that when an individual is attracted by a narrative and immersed in it, they will temporarily detach from the real world and enter the world of the story. This state is called "Narrative Transportation"[9]. In narrative communication theory in marketing, by meticulously designing story narratives, character development, plot construction, and emotional marketing, brands can effectively evoke consumers' emotions, enhance their immersion, and foster emotional resonance [8], reduce skepticism and rational rebuttals towards commercial advertisements, and thereby influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Although narrative advertisements can effectively influence the audience during the transmission process, their effects are influenced by individual characteristics and product categories. People with high transmissibility respond more positively to advertisements[4]. In the past, Narrative Transportation was mainly driven by two groups: storytellers and consumers. With the integration of media features (such as short videos, VR, and social media) as the third element, the presentation form of the story became more flexible, and the narrative would tend to develop towards co-creation, personalization, and immersion. Consumers will not only be the recipients of the story, but also the co-creators and main characters of the story. All these elements (the storyteller, the consumer, and the media characteristics) will be integrated in an unexplored manner, facilitating the further development of Narrative Transportation[24].

## **2.2 Review of Previous Research**

In the context of international academia, the research on Heritage Brand has shifted from merely historical preservation to core brand strategy. Urde et al. define brand heritage as a dimension of a brand's identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols, and particularly in an organisational belief that its history is important[25]. At the same time, they believe that these historical accumulations provide the brand with a profound cultural foundation, giving it a natural and inherent competitive advantage in the highly competitive market. Many scholars have focused on the concept of corporate legacy brands, as they hold significant value in maintaining the power of an established brand. Their research demonstrates how brand experience and knowledge enable Heritage brands to maintain a leading position in the market[2,3]. However, how heritage brands can cope with the unprecedented survival challenges in the contemporary market is also a major topic currently under study. Balmer believes that the concept of heritage itself is a paradox, because the focus on heritage is a characteristic of modernism[1]. Business managers should not view tradition and modernity as opposing concepts. Instead, they should adopt a brand management mindset to safeguard the core heritage while actively engaging in adaptive innovation. The value of heritage brands lies not only in the past, but also in how they can create value for the future through historical assets. Some scholars also focused their research on Brand Activation. The focus of brand

activation lies in the real-time two-way interaction between consumers and the brand, which leads to a deeper bond between the consumer and the brand[6,20]. Brand narrative is regarded as a powerful tool for Brand Activation. It helps establish a connection between the brand and consumers through story-telling. Green and Brock's narrative transmission theory states that through image construction and emotional arousal, stories can enable consumers to experience a deep sense of immersion, thereby effectively reducing their resistance to commercial information. Take the brand repositioning process of Burberry as an example. By telling the story of the explorers Scott and Sir Shackleton wearing Burberry fabrics to conquer the Antarctic, the brand transforms functionality into an image of the spirit of exploration, allowing consumers to experience a sense of heroic immersion across time and space when making purchases[17]. Further research has revealed that the core of narrative transmission lies in psychological simulation[7]. When consumers encounter brand stories containing heroic elements, they often experience a self-referencing effect. In the domestic Chinese market, emerging brands have achieved significant brand activation and narrative transmission by deconstructing and reinterpreting traditional culture. Taking the brand "Huaxizi" as an example, it has successfully established a differentiated competitive advantage in the highly competitive cosmetics sector by constructing a comprehensive narrative system rooted in Eastern aesthetics. By embedding its brand narrative within profound traditional Chinese aesthetics and integrating specific cultural imagery with its products, the brand has cultivated a sense of identity among consumers as a cultural inheritor. Furthermore, within the digital media environment, Huaxizi's narrative strategy exemplifies a shift from one-way brand communication to narrative co-creation. The research reveals that in the era of social media, narrative transmission is no longer a one-way output by the brand. The boundaries between the brand and consumers, as well as among consumers themselves, have become blurred, forming an interactive and co-creative narrative domain[26]. This highly integrated co-creation approach fosters more stable brand resonance than traditional marketing, thereby enabling consumers to identify with the brand's values through active engagement. In conclusion, both international heritage brands like Burberry and emerging Chinese brands such as Huaxizi owe their success to how they emotionally engage with their brand history. By employing emotional resonance and immersive imagery within a systematic narrative framework, they gradually cultivate psychological identification among their audiences. These cases collectively demonstrate that in today's competitive global market, brands must assess whether they possess heritage assets, consciously integrate them into their brand strategies, and establish a robust narrative system to cultivate this unique brand heritage.

### ***2.3 Research hypothesis derivation***

#### **2.3.1 The overall driving effect of narrative transmission on brand attitude**

Narrative transportation is defined as a deep immersive state in which the audience psychologically enters the story world. When consumers are transported into the narrative context, their capacity for logical assessment of the real world temporarily diminishes due to the highly focused attention and emotional imagery involved. Consequently, during this process, the audience's resistance to commercial advertising messages is effectively attenuated. When traditional heritage brands face the dual challenges of perceived aging and the need to expand into the youth market, narrative transportation—through the construction of imagery and the evocation of emotion—enables consumers to experience a profound sense of story immersion. This deep engagement fosters emotional resonance with the brand, thereby significantly enhancing consumers' overall attitudes toward the brand across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Specifically, the stronger the narrative immersion and preference of the audience, the higher the positive emotional response to the advertisement, and the stronger the willingness to spread the word[14]. For heritage brands like Hengshun with profound cultural heritage, the depth of the storytelling plays a significant role in determining the acceptance of brand information by consumers. When consumers are attracted and resonate with Hengshun's vinegar-making techniques, historical changes, or innovation stories, their negative stereotypes about the aging of the brand will weaken, and they will shift to more

positive and youthful evaluations.

H1: The sense of narrative transportation evoked by a brand story is positively correlated with the overall enhancement of brand attitude.

### 2.3.2 The narrative of historical and cultural heritage strengthens the cognitive dimension

Cognition reflects the audience's rational evaluation of brand-related attributes. The core assets of a heritage brand lie in its accumulated historical legacy and enduring core values. By narrating stories—such as the legend of Du Kang's vinegar-making or historical accounts of renowned figures—a profound perception of brand heritage can be established in consumers' minds, thereby reinforcing the brand's authority and trustworthiness.

H2: Narratives grounded in historical and cultural heritage significantly shape consumers' attitudes toward the brand.

### 2.3.3 The activation of the emotional dimension by quality value and innovative narrative

The emotional dimension reflects the audience's affective response and preference toward the brand. In the process of attitude formation, affect is often regarded as a core influencing factor. Quality value and innovative narratives, by imbuing the brand with human warmth and emphasizing the artisans' meticulous pursuit and emotional investment in their craft, can readily evoke admiration and a sense of closeness to the brand. Such emotionally charged stories of artisanship resonate more deeply with consumers, thereby establishing a profound affective connection.

H3: Quality value and innovative narratives significantly enhance the affective dimension of consumers' brand attitudes.

### 2.3.4 User co-creation and emotional connection narratives' driving force on behavioral intentions

Behavioral intention refers to the audience's likelihood and tendency to take specific actions. Brands cultivate this by crafting narratives that resonate with consumers' lived experiences, transforming them from passive observers into active participants within the story. This interactive narrative approach shortens the social distance between the brand and its audience. When consumers perceive themselves as part of the brand's narrative community, their sense of narrative transportation directly translates into tangible purchase intentions and word-of-mouth behaviors.

H4: User co-creation and emotional connection narratives significantly influence consumers' behavioral intentions toward the brand.

## **3. Method**

### ***3.1 Sampling Frame***

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative decision-making with quantitative experimentation. Through expert interviews and textual analysis, narrative materials for the Hengshun brand were developed, and three narrative dimensions were identified: historical and cultural heritage, quality value and innovation, and user co-creation with emotional connection. The DEMATEL-ANP model was applied to determine expert-level logical weights, while an experiment based on the consumer ABC attitude model was conducted with a sample of young participants to examine the influence of different narrative types on brand attitudes. By comparing the experimental data, if the weight predictions derived from expert logic align with the responses of the younger audience, a successful narrative path can be synthesized. Conversely, if a cognitive mismatch emerges—for instance, if experts prioritize historically and culturally rich stories while young consumers favor user-generated content and emotionally connected narratives—the research will conduct an in-depth analysis of the underlying cognitive differences and subsequently propose a verifiable brand narrative methodology.

### ***3.2 Construction of the narrative type dimension***

In the context of extending heritage brands into younger markets, the division of narrative dimensions should not only encompass the historical and cultural assets of the brand but also address the product and emotional needs of young consumers. Drawn from a literature review and expert interviews, this study categorizes the brand narratives of Hengshun into three dimensions: historical and cultural heritage, quality value and innovation, and user co-creation with emotional connection.

### 3.2.1 The Construction of Narrative Texts on Historical and Cultural Heritage

The historical and cultural heritage is the inherent competitive advantage that distinguishes heritage brands from emerging brands. For Hengshun, the depth of the brand's history and the scarcity of its culture are the core values[27]. In brand storytelling, the origin story serves as the foundation of brand identity. By exploring the legend of "Black Tower Vinegar," the origins of the vinegar are imbued with an artistic and mysterious quality. Furthermore, by integrating narratives associated with historical figures such as Li Bai, Yuan Mei, and Du Mu, the Hengshun brand acquires a richer layer of historical and cultural heritage.

### 3.2.2 The Construction of Narrative Texts on Quality Value and Innovation

Quality and innovation are regarded as the fundamental survival principles of a brand, and they play a significant role in the development of an enterprise[5]. In constructing its narrative around quality value and innovation, Hengshun emphasizes its stability as a heritage brand while simultaneously highlighting its resilient vitality in response to changing times. Its continued resilience, demonstrated through several major recoveries from environmental upheavals over the past century, showcases the brand's enduring strength. In the modern market environment, Hengshun has shifted its strategic focus toward developing modern and intelligent innovative factories. This modernization, driven by technological advancement, meets consumers' high expectations for food safety and standardized quality, all while preserving a sense of human touch. The narrative also portrays the dedicated and innovative craftsmen who remain at their posts and actively embrace innovation. By adhering to a model of human-machine collaboration and maintaining innovation rooted in tradition, Hengshun revitalizes its brand vitality while upholding its commitment to quality and innovation.

### 3.2.3 The Construction of Narrative Texts on User Co-creation and Emotional Connection

The effectiveness of engagement marketing arises from the establishment of psychological ownership and self-transformation[11]. When consumers invest their energy, time, or creativity in co-creation, they develop a sense of shared agency with the brand. This feeling can significantly reduce young consumers' defensive mindset toward the brand. By integrating experiences such as the Hengshun Vinegar Museum study tour, cross-border collaborations like vinegar-flavored ice cream, and vinegar-related cultural products into social hotspots, the brand embeds itself into the aesthetic life and social spaces of young people. At the same time, by collecting consumers' emotional life stories connected to the brand, a narrative is constructed that conveys the brand's emotional attachment and role as a life companion. Within this narrative framework, consumers are no longer passive recipients of brand information but active co-creators of brand meaning.

## **3.3 Expert decision-making through DEMATEL-ANP**

A relationship matrix is used to examine the interrelationships among various elements within a research system. In this study, the factor system of the Hengshun brand narrative comprises three dimensions: historical and cultural heritage, quality value and innovation, and user co-creation with emotional connection. These three dimensions are interrelated and collectively constitute the narrative factor system for the brand.

### 3.3.1 Expert decision scoring

These data are derived from evaluations provided by 10 experts, who rated the direct influence of each narrative dimension on the others. The scoring scale is as follows: 0 = no influence; 1 = weak influence; 2 = moderate influence; 3 = strong influence; 4 = extremely strong influence. The collected data were then aggregated. To minimize individual biases, the arithmetic mean of the scores from the 10 experts was calculated. Let the rating

matrix of the k-th expert for the influence of element i on element j be denoted as  $x_{ij}^k$ . Then, the initial average direct influence matrix A has its elements as

$$m_{ij} = \frac{1}{10} \sum_{k=1}^{10} x_{ij}^k$$

Based on the aggregated scores from the 10 experts, the resulting average direct-influence matrix A was obtained. Following data aggregation, the DEMATEL data are presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Initial Average Direct-Influence Matrix (Expert Scoring)

Element	Historical and cultural heritage	Quality Value and Innovation	User co-creation and emotional connection
Historical and cultural heritage	0	3.8	3.0
Quality Value and Innovation	2.2	0	2.8
User co-creation and emotional connection	1.0	2.0	0

### 3.3.2 The calculation norms directly affect matrix N

The dimensional processing of the relationship matrix is then performed. This typically employs maximum value normalization, where each value is divided by the sum of the influence values of the elements. The formula is as follows:

$$N = \frac{A}{\text{Max} \left( \sum_{j=1}^n A_{ij} \right)}$$

In this study, the sums of the influence values for the three narrative dimensions—historical and cultural heritage, quality value and innovation, and user co-creation with emotional connection—were calculated as 6.8, 5.0, and 3.0, respectively. The maximum of these sums is 6.8. Accordingly, each element of the initial matrix was divided by 6.8 to obtain the normalized direct-influence matrix N, which is presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Normalized Direct-Influence Matrix N

Element	Historical and cultural heritage	Quality Value and Innovation	User co-creation and emotional connection
Historical and cultural heritage	0	0.559	0.441
Quality Value and Innovation	0.324	0	0.412
User co-creation and emotional connection	0.147	0.294	0

### 3.3.3 Calculate the comprehensive influence matrix T

The total influence matrix T is then derived from the normalized direct-influence matrix N. The formula is given by:

$$T = N(I - N)^{-1}$$

In the formula, N represents the direct influence matrix; I is the identity matrix, which means the comprehensive influence matrix T is equal to the result of multiplying the direct influence matrix by (the identity matrix minus the direct influence matrix). The comprehensive influence matrix T is shown in **Table 3**.

**Table 3.** Total-Influence Matrix T

Element	Historical and cultural heritage	Quality Value and Innovation	User co-creation and emotional connection
Historical and cultural heritage	0.577	1.235	1.204
Quality Value and Innovation	0.689	0.678	0.995
User co-creation and emotional connection	0.435	0.675	0.470

The values in the total influence matrix T represent the magnitude of the interaction between any two elements within the system. The larger the value, the stronger the mutual influence between the corresponding pair of elements. For instance, the value 1.235 indicates the magnitude of the influence of historical and cultural heritage on quality value and innovation.

3.3.4 Calculate the degree of influence, the degree of being influenced, the degree of centrality, and the degree of causality

From the total influence matrix T, the influence degree D of each element is obtained by summing the rows. Similarly, the influenced degree C of each element is obtained by summing the columns. The influence degree represents the extent to which an element affects other elements, while the influenced degree indicates the extent to which an element is affected by other elements. The calculation formulas are as follows:

$$D_i = \sum_{j=1}^n T_{ij}, \quad (i = 1,2,3, \dots, n)$$

$$C_i = \sum_{j=1}^n T_{ji}, \quad (i = 1,2,3, \dots, n)$$

By combining the influence degree D and the degree of influence C, the centrality M can be further calculated. This value is equal to the sum of the influence degree D and the degree of influence C. Its practical meaning is how significant a certain element is in the system. The larger this value is, the higher the overall status of the element in the system.

The reason degree R is equal to the influence degree D minus the degree of being influenced C. When this value is greater than 0, it indicates that the element has a greater tendency to influence other elements; otherwise, the opposite is true. The calculation formulas are as follows:

$$M_i = D_i + C_i$$

$$R_i = D_i - C_i$$

The calculation indicators of DEMATEKL are shown in **Table 4**.

**Table 4.** DEMATEL Results: Degree of Influence, Influenced Degree, Centrality, and Cause Degree

Element	D	C	M	R
Historical and cultural heritage	3.02	1.70	4.72	1.32
Quality Value and Innovation	2.36	2.59	4.95	-0.23

User co-creation and emotional connection	1.58	2.67	4.25	-1.09
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**3.4 Empirical Study on the Consumer ABC Attitude Model Experiment**

3.4.1 Research experimental design plan

A single-factor three-level inter-group experimental design was adopted.

Independent variable (X): Brand narrative type, which is divided into three dimensions: historical cultural heritage C1, quality value and innovation C2, user co-creation and emotional connection C3.

Dependent variable (Y): Brand attitude response (based on the score of the ABC model).

Control variables: The subjects' original attitude towards the condiment industry, the experimental environment (online questionnaire), and the presentation duration (mandatory reading time).

3.4.2 Subject Recruitment and Procedure

Sample size: A total of approximately 300 participants were recruited and evenly divided into three experimental groups.

Selection criteria: Participants were required to be young consumers aged between 18 and 35 years who had engaged in online shopping or cooking activities within the past six months.

Experimental process: 1. Random grouping: participants were randomly assigned to one of three parallel experimental groups via a randomized link. 2. Intervention measures: each group was exposed to a corresponding narrative text or short video, with a minimum viewing duration of 30 seconds enforced to ensure adequate exposure to the stimulus. 3. Post-test: participants completed the ABC attitude scale and manipulation check questions.

3.4.3 Scale design and data collection

In the questionnaire design, brand attitude was measured using a multi-dimensional scale. This scale employed a seven-point Likert format, where scores from 1 to 7 represent progressively higher levels of agreement. By recording respondents' choices for each statement, the scale quantified their attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies toward the target topic. The scale consisted of 10 items, measuring brand attitude across three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. An overview of the scale items is provided in **Table 5**. In addition, the questionnaire also incorporates the simplified Big Five Personality Scale to measure the five personality trait dimensions of consumers, namely openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The scale is scored using the Likert seven-point scale, as shown in **Table 6**.

**Table 5.** Measurement Scale of Consumer Brand Attitude

Number	Topic
1	After reading this story, I felt happy or surprised.
2	I felt a resonance with the emotions conveyed in this story.
3	I think Hengshun is a brand that is warm-hearted and understands life.
4	This narrative dispelled my sense of distance from the heritage brand.
5	I believe that the product quality of Hengshun is highly reliable.
6	This content enables me to perceive the brand's profound professional accumulation.
7	I think Hengshun has demonstrated remarkable innovation and vitality.
8	I am willing to give a like or share this content on social media.

9	In the future shopping scenarios, I will give priority to purchasing Hengshun products.
10	I would like to recommend Hengshun to my friends around me.

**Table 6.** Big Five Inventory-10

Number	Topic
1	I usually like to try new things.
2	I am a person who is organized and has a plan when doing things.
3	I enjoy being the center of attention in a crowd.
4	I usually get along well with others.
5	I tend to feel anxious or nervous.
6	I am very interested in art and beautiful things.
7	I tend to do things in a rather casual manner and don't pay much attention to details.
8	I have an introverted personality and don't tend to talk much.
9	Sometimes I don't show much understanding for others' feelings.
10	I have a relatively stable mood and am not prone to getting agitated..

By combining online questionnaires with offline paper questionnaires, they were distributed to approximately 300 participants, and 290 valid questionnaires were retrieved. The collected data were then integrated into a table.

#### 3.4.4 Data processing

Before conducting the formal analysis, this study conducted a cleaning process on the 300 collected questionnaires.

Elimination of invalid samples: Questionnaires with response times shorter than 15 seconds and those with repetitive answers were excluded.

Final valid samples: N = 286 (94 from the historical group, 96 from the quality group, and 96 from the co-creation group). The effective recovery rate was 95.3%.

#### 3.4.5 Reliability analysis

The internal consistency of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient. A higher coefficient indicates greater inter-item correlation within the scale and, consequently, more reliable measurement results. Generally, an  $\alpha$  coefficient above 0.7 signifies good reliability; values between 0.6 and 0.7 are considered acceptable; and a coefficient below 0.6 suggests poor reliability, necessitating scale revision. The analysis results show that the  $\alpha$  values for all dimensions exceed 0.7, indicating high internal consistency and relatively reliable measurement. The reliability assessment results are presented in **Table 7**.

**Table 7.** Reliability Analysis of the Measurement Scale

Variate	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Emotional Response Alpha	0.892
Cognitive evaluation alpha	0.845

Behavioral intention  $\alpha$

0.878

3.4.6 Validity Analysis

The validity of the questionnaire was analyzed to confirm the correctness and effectiveness of the measurement results. Through validity analysis, the appropriateness of the measurement item design was assessed. The KMO and Bartlett's sphericity tests were conducted. The KMO value was 0.82 (exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.6), and Bartlett's sphericity test yielded a significance level of 0.001 (below 0.05). These results indicate that the data were suitable for factor analysis and that the structural validity of the scale was satisfactory.

3.4.7 Manipulation test

To examine whether the narrative type (independent variable) has a significant effect on brand attitude (dependent variable), a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. For all three narrative dimensions, the F-values were statistically significant, with p-values below 0.001. This result strongly supports the research hypothesis that the choice of narrative style for the Hengshun brand significantly influences the psychological responses of young audiences. Given the significant ANOVA results, the LSD post-hoc test was further employed to identify specific differences between groups. The results are presented in **Table 8**.

**Table 8.** One-Way ANOVA Results of Consumer Brand Attitude Responses Across Different Narrative Types

Element	Historical cultural heritage C1	Quality value and innovation C2	User co-creation and emotional connection C3	F	$\rho$	Comparison (LSD)
Emotional Response	2.85	4.20	6.15	58.42	<0.001	C3>C2>C1
Cognitive evaluation	5.92	4.85	3.90	24.15	<0.001	C1>C2>C3
Behavioral intention	2.55	4.10	5.85	54.33	<0.001	C3>C2>C1

To ensure the comparability of the experimental groups, this study further examined whether there were significant differences in the three narrative dimensions on the personality trait dimensions. The results of the one-way analysis of variance showed that in the five dimensions of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, the mean differences among the three groups did not reach a significant level ( $\rho > 0.05$ ), indicating that the random grouping of the subjects was effective and the personality traits did not cause systematic interference to the experimental results. The results are presented in **Table 9**.

**Table 9.** Comparison of Personality Trait Means Across Narrative Groups

Personality Trait	Historical cultural heritage C1	Quality value and innovation C2	User co-creation and emotional connection C3	F	$\rho$
Openness	5.12	5.23	5.03	0.28	> 0.05
Conscientiousness	5.28	5.41	5.19	0.35	> 0.05
Extraversion	4.92	5.08	5.02	0.22	> 0.05

Agreeableness	5.18	5.32	5.09	0.31	> 0.05
Neuroticism	5.04	4.92	5.855.17	0.41	> 0.05

**4. Result**

This study conducted a multi-dimensional and in-depth analysis of the narrative approach of the Hengshun brand through the combination of expert decision-making DEMATEL and the consumer ABC attitude model. This study first constructed a narrative text consisting of three dimensions: historical cultural heritage, quality value and innovative narrative, user co-creation and emotional connection. Ten experts scored the direct influence degree between these dimensions based on the scoring criteria, and the arithmetic average method was used to eliminate individual deviations. When calculating the standardized direct influence matrix N, the research data showed that the sum of the influence relationship values of the three elements was 6.8, 5.0, and 3.0, respectively. The maximum value 6.8 was taken as the normalization benchmark. Through matrix operations, the comprehensive influence matrix T was obtained. The data results show that the historical and cultural heritage has a significant impact on the value of quality and innovation, with an amplitude value of 1.235. This indicates a strong correlation between the two. In the quantitative assessment of indicators, the influence degree D of historical and cultural heritage is 3.02, and the reason degree R is 1.32. This clearly demonstrates its driving position as a causal factor. The centrality M of the narrative of quality value and innovation is 4.95, ranking first, proving that it holds a core position in the entire narrative system. However, the reason degree R of user co-creation and emotional connection is -1.09, indicating it is a typical result factor and is easily influenced and driven by other factors.

During the empirical research phase, this study employed a single-factor three-level between-group experimental design to verify the actual impact of the aforementioned narrative dimensions on the brand attitudes of young audiences. A total of 300 young consumers aged 18-35 were recruited. After data processing, 286 valid samples were obtained (with an effective rate of 95.3%). Among them, there were 94 samples in the historical cultural heritage group, 96 samples in the quality value and innovation group, and 96 samples in the user co-creation and emotional connection group. The measurement was conducted using the Likert seven-point scale across three dimensions: emotions, cognition, and behavioral tendencies, involving a total of 10 items. The reliability analysis revealed that the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for emotional response, cognitive evaluation, and behavioral intention were 0.892, 0.845, and 0.878, respectively, all of which were greater than 0.7, indicating that the measurement tool has extremely high internal consistency. In the validity test, the KMO value was 0.82, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity significance was 0.001 (less than 0.05), suggesting that the scale structure validity was good and suitable for factor analysis. The manipulation check results show that the choice of brand narrative style has a decisive influence on the psychological responses of young audiences. The F values for each dimension are significant and the  $p$  values are less than 0.001. Through the LSD method for comparison, it was found that in the emotional response dimension, the scores were C3 (6.15) > C2 (4.20) > C1 (2.85), indicating that user co-creation can most effectively evoke audience empathy and reduce the distance between the brand; in the cognitive evaluation dimension, the scores were C1 (5.92) > C2 (4.85) > C3 (3.90), proving that historical cultural heritage is the cornerstone for establishing a reliable brand quality perception and professional accumulation; in the behavioral intention dimension, the scores were C3 (5.85) > C2 (4.10) > C1 (2.55), clearly revealing the efficiency of the co-creation narrative in driving likes, sharing, and priority purchase behaviors.

**5. Discussion**

## **5.1 Conclusion and Analysis**

Based on the comparative analysis of the above two sets of experimental data, we can start from the differences between the expert's logical weight and the feedback from young audiences.

### **Conclusion 1: Cognitive Displacement**

Through data comparison, it was found that in the expert decision-making model (DEMATEL-ANP), the centrality of user co-creation and emotional connection was the lowest among the three dimensions, at 4.25, with a cause degree of -1.09. This negative value indicates that experts qualitatively identified this dimension as an effect item in brand communication. In contrast, the cause degree for historical and cultural heritage was 1.32, suggesting that experts tended to regard it as a cause item. However, among the young audience, this same dimension—user co-creation and emotional connection—recorded the highest scores across the entire sample for both emotional response (6.15) and behavioral intention (5.85). This finding suggests that, from the perspective of young consumers, user co-creation and emotional connection are perceived as the key drivers in transitioning from cognitive awareness to actionable engagement.

Reason analysis: Experts believe that the brand-building path should proceed from the inside out, with emotions cultivated gradually over time. In this view, a brand can evoke users' emotional resonance only after establishing a historical foundation and core quality. In contrast, the consumption decision-making logic of young consumers diverges from that of experts. For younger audiences, affect serves as the primary driver in making consumption decisions. Value is not transmitted unilaterally by the brand, but is formed in the consumers' daily lives and social contexts[12]. User-generated narratives serve as the initial entry point, sparking interest and motivating deeper engagement with the brand. The significant cognitive discrepancy between experts and young audiences regarding the logical sequence of brand narrative fundamentally reflects a mismatch between supply and demand. In the DEMATEL-ANP analysis, experts follow an inside-out logic grounded in the robustness of the brand system. They identify historical and cultural heritage as the driving factor (cause degree = 1.32), position quality value and innovation as the narrative core (centrality = 4.95), and regard user co-creation and emotional connection as natural by-products emerging from the integration of these elements (cause degree = -1.09). In contrast, the ABC attitude model experiment reveals that young audiences adopt a logic of affective perception rooted in social interaction. They treat affect as the primary gateway for activating brand attitudes. For young consumers, while traditional historical narratives can establish cognitive trust, they lack behavioral intention due to the absence of audience participation. In comparison, co-created narratives that evoke emotional resonance shorten psychological distance with the brand and generate purchase intention. The root cause of this divergence lies in the experts' focus on the functional legitimacy of the brand—that is, establishing professionalism and reliability through historical accumulation. This explains why historical and cultural heritage scores highest in cognitive evaluation (5.92). Meanwhile, young consumers in their daily lives prioritize the brand's social relevance and personal resonance, emphasizing affective connection. Consequently, user co-creation and emotional connection score highest in affective evaluation (6.15), revealing a fundamental cognitive disconnect between the logic of experts and that of the young audience. At the same time, Rosenberg believes that attitudes are systematically driven and maintained by a decomposable cognitive structure system. This cognitive structure consists of two independent and operational core dimensions: the importance of value and the perceived instrumentality[19]. Consumers may perceive a brand's history as personally irrelevant or even detrimental to achieving contemporary values such as innovation, fashion, and cost-effectiveness. Consequently, they fail to develop a positive affective response, which ultimately results in weak behavioral intention.

### **Conclusion Two: Sluggish Transformation**

Comparative analysis reveals that experts identify historical and cultural heritage as the primary driving factor of attitudes, with a cause degree of 1.32—the highest among all dimensions. Data from the consumer ABC attitude

experiment confirm that the historical narrative group scored highest in cognitive evaluation (5.92), substantially exceeding the other groups. This indicates that, from the perspective of young audiences, historical narratives play a crucial role in establishing perceptions of brand heritage and trustworthiness. However, this same group recorded the lowest scores in both behavioral intention (2.55) and affective response (2.85). Thus, while historical and cultural heritage effectively builds deep cognitive associations in consumers' minds, it does not translate into purchase-related behavioral tendencies.

Reason analysis: For young audiences encountering heritage brands, the psychological evaluation of brand perception and the triggering of consumption decisions operate in two distinct dimensions. This separation stems from a divergence in psychological distance. In the experimental data, the cognitive evaluation score for the historical and cultural heritage narrative group reached 5.92, indicating that audiences strongly affirm the brand's historical depth and legitimacy at a rational level, thereby generating a sense of authority. However, this sense of authority is often accompanied by a relatively distant psychological distance, resulting in an affective response of only 2.85. For young consumers, a brand with profound historical and cultural accumulation is worthy of respect. Yet, if it fails to enter their daily social context or emotional life, this respect remains confined to the cognitive level and fails to translate into behavioral intention, ultimately impeding changes in consumption decisions. As Sirgy's self-image congruity theory posits, consumers are not purchasing the product itself, but rather the extent to which the product image aligns with or promises consistency with their own self-image[22]. Consumers tend to purchase products from brands that align with their self-image. A brand's history represents social recognition, while the emotional connection fostered through user participation pertains to self-expression. Young consumers acknowledge the legitimacy and authority of a brand through its historical narratives, yet they also base their consumption decisions on the brand's user-generated content and emotional resonance. If a heritage brand fails to transform its historical assets into a medium of social expression capable of carrying the audience's self-image, this sense of authoritative recognition may become an invisible barrier. Consequently, the brand may encounter a situation in which consumers respect it but do not translate that respect into commensurate purchasing behavior.

#### Conclusion Three: Status Discontinuity

Comparative analysis reveals that experts regarded quality value and innovation as the core of narrative dissemination, with a centrality of 4.95—the highest among all dimensions. However, data from the consumer ABC attitude experiment indicate that the quality value and innovation narrative exhibited a distinctly centralized pattern. Across all three dimensions—cognitive evaluation (4.85), affective response (4.20), and behavioral intention (4.10)—its scores consistently occupied the middle position, situated between the historical heritage group and the user co-creation group.

Reason analysis: For young audiences, products from heritage brands like Hengshun are generally assumed to be of high quality. This psychological expectation, rooted in ingrained perception, leads to perceptual blunting toward related narratives. In the context of information-saturated social media, and viewed through the lens of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory[13], exquisite craftsmanship and rigorous quality standards are often regarded by young consumers as inherent brand benefits rather than motivating factors. Traditional quality narratives, which tend to emphasize profound professional expertise, reinforce the brand's industry position at a cognitive level but remain weak in terms of affective engagement. For young audiences who prioritize visual impact and social interaction, such narratives lack the emotional resonance necessary to activate psychological involvement—unlike user co-creation and emotionally connected stories, which generate high affective response.

## **5.2 Narrative Strategy**

This study reveals a significant discrepancy between expert logic and the psychological responses of young audiences. For heritage brands seeking to expand into the youth market, a decision-making framework should be adopted that prioritizes the affective entry point of young consumers. Specifically, a narrative path of "emotional

entry – cognitive deepening – behavioral transformation" is proposed. This path begins with user co-creation and emotional connection as the brand's narrative entry point, utilizing authentic consumer life scenarios, emotionally resonant stories, or cross-border collaborations to rapidly narrow the psychological distance between the brand and young audiences. By leveraging the highly affective response triggered by narrative transportation, the aim is to activate emotional resonance and social sharing intentions among young consumers. Once audiences develop an emotional affinity for the brand, narratives centered on historical and cultural heritage can be naturally introduced to establish brand authority and trust, thereby enhancing cognitive evaluation. Finally, quality value and innovation narratives—such as those highlighting intelligent factories or artisans' commitment to tradition and innovation—serve to consolidate rational quality recognition and facilitate the translation of consumer attitudes into behavioral intention.

Historical and cultural heritage narratives can be transformed into participatory, expressive, and collaborative social content. The historical stories of Hengshun are reconstructed through contemporary media formats. For example, the legend of "Du Kang making vinegar" can be adapted into short videos, Guochao-style animations, or co-branded cultural products, inviting young audiences to participate through reinterpretation and co-creation. At the same time, user-generated content such as "My Daily Story with Hengshun" or "100 Ways to Use Vinegar" is encouraged, integrating the brand's history into the everyday lives of young consumers. This approach encourages young consumers to reframe their consumption as a means of cultural self-expression, thereby helping to bridge the psychological distance. Given that young consumers perceive the quality of heritage brands as a natural and necessary hygiene factor, a covert narrative strategy is therefore appropriate. Quality-related information is embedded within scenarios and experiences, allowing consumers to gradually internalize the brand's core quality throughout the narrative process.

In practical brand communication, the proportion of the three narrative types should be flexibly adjusted according to the characteristics of different media and target users. In emotionally driven, fragmented content scenarios—such as social media platforms and short-video channels—priority should be given to promoting user-generated content and emotionally resonant stories. In contrast, in deep content scenarios—such as official websites, documentaries, and brand museums—historical and cultural heritage narratives, along with quality and innovation stories, should be prominently featured. In purchase-oriented scenarios, such as e-commerce product pages and live-streaming sales, emotional narratives can serve as a transitional guide, while historical and quality narratives help facilitate the final consumption decision. Furthermore, brands should establish a dynamic monitoring mechanism for narrative effectiveness, regularly evaluating the performance of different narrative types across affective response, cognitive evaluation, and behavioral intention. This enables timely optimization of content strategy, activation of the youth market, and ultimately the sustained vitality and transformation of the brand.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study takes the heritage brand Hengshun as a case example to investigate how heritage brands can achieve brand activation in the youth consumer market through storytelling. The research employs the expert decision-making method DEMATEL-ANP alongside an experimental approach based on the consumer ABC attitude model to compare the differential effects of brand storytelling as perceived by experts versus young audiences. The findings reveal a significant cognitive disconnect between experts and young audiences regarding the logical sequence of brand storytelling. Based on these results, this study proposes a narrative path tailored to young audiences: "emotional entry – cognitive deepening – behavioral transformation." This path begins with user co-creation and emotionally connected narratives to establish resonance and stimulate interest, followed by the introduction of historical and cultural heritage narratives to deepen brand recognition and trust. Quality and

innovation narratives then consolidate rational identification and facilitate behavioral transformation. In terms of theoretical contribution, this study extends the boundaries of brand narrative marketing research, verifies the differential impacts of various narrative types on cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and provides a new foundation for applying the ABC attitude model in the context of heritage brands. From a practical standpoint, it offers a verifiable brand narrative pathway for Hengshun and other heritage product brands, enabling brand managers to refine their brand strategies, effectively expand into the youth market, and sustain brand vitality. However, this study has certain limitations. The experimental sample is limited to specific brands and age ranges. If future research can include more relevant moderating variables, conduct long-term follow-up studies, and supplement qualitative analysis in subsequent research, then the research results will be more comprehensive and in-depth, and the proposed brand narrative strategies will be more adaptable and sustainable, thereby providing more systematic theoretical support and practical guidance for the revival of global heritage brands.

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