

Integrating Cultural Sustainability into Branding: Marketing Chinese-Indonesian Community Products

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ABSTRACT

Cultural sustainability has emerged as a critical dimension of sustainability discourse, particularly in the context of branding and marketing cultural products. This study examines how cultural sustainability is integrated into branding strategies in the marketing of Chinese-Indonesian community products. Drawing on cultural branding theory and sustainability-oriented marketing literature, this research explores how cultural values, heritage narratives, and symbolic meanings are embedded within brand identities to enhance market relevance and consumer engagement. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with producers, brand managers, and community stakeholders, complemented by document analysis and observational insights. The findings reveal that cultural sustainability functions as a strategic branding resource by reinforcing authenticity, strengthening cultural identity, and fostering emotional connections with consumers. Moreover, the integration of cultural sustainability contributes to brand differentiation and long-term value creation while supporting the preservation of cultural heritage within a multicultural society. This study offers theoretical contributions to the intersection of cultural sustainability and branding, while providing practical implications for marketers seeking to leverage cultural heritage as a sustainable branding asset in culturally diverse markets.

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural sustainability has increasingly been recognized as a vital dimension of sustainable development, complementing environmental and economic sustainability by emphasizing the preservation and continuity of cultural values, practices, and identities (Soini & Dessein, 2016). In the context of branding and marketing, cultural sustainability becomes particularly relevant for community-based products that embody heritage, symbolic meanings, and collective identity. In Indonesia, products developed by the Chinese-Indonesian community ranging from traditional culinary goods and herbal products to handicrafts and culturally symbolic merchandise represent a living manifestation of cultural heritage within a multicultural society. These products function not only as economic commodities but also as cultural carriers that communicate historical narratives and identity across generations. As markets become increasingly globalized and homogenized, branding plays a crucial role in mediating between cultural preservation and commercial competitiveness. Prior studies suggest that brands rooted in cultural heritage can enhance authenticity and emotional resonance when cultural values are meaningfully embedded into brand identity (Holt, 2004; Napoli et al., 2014). Consequently, integrating cultural sustainability into branding practices has emerged as a strategic approach to sustaining both cultural meaning and market relevance.

Despite growing scholarly interest in sustainability and branding, significant research gaps remain. Existing Scopus-indexed studies on sustainability branding predominantly focus on environmental responsibility, ethical consumption, and green marketing, often marginalizing cultural sustainability as an independent analytical dimension (Kumar et al., 2017; White et al., 2019). Meanwhile, cultural branding literature has extensively examined how brands leverage myths, symbols, and narratives to create meaning, yet this stream largely centers on global or mainstream brands, offering limited insight into community-based or minority cultural products (Holt, 2004; Thompson & Tian, 2008). Research on heritage and place branding highlights the economic and symbolic value of cultural heritage, but frequently treats culture as a marketing resource rather than as a sustainability concern requiring long-term preservation and ethical representation (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2015; Guzmán et al., 2020). Additionally, studies on ethnic and minority entrepreneurship tend to emphasize social networks and economic outcomes, with minimal attention to branding processes and their implications for cultural sustainability (Dana, 2007; Ram et al., 2017). To date, no Scopus-indexed study has explicitly examined how cultural sustainability is strategically integrated into branding practices for Chinese-Indonesian community products. This absence indicates a clear theoretical and empirical gap and positions the present study as the first to address this specific intersection of cultural sustainability, branding, and community-based products in the Indonesian context.

In response to this gap, the objective of this study is to examine how cultural sustainability is integrated into branding strategies in the marketing of Chinese-Indonesian community products. Specifically, this research aims to analyze the role of cultural values and heritage narratives in shaping brand identity, to explore how cultural sustainability contributes to perceived authenticity and brand differentiation, and to assess its implications for long-term value creation in multicultural markets. By positioning cultural sustainability as a strategic branding resource rather than a peripheral concern, this study seeks to contribute to sustainability-oriented marketing and cultural branding

literature while offering practical insights for community-based producers and marketers seeking to balance commercial objectives with cultural preservation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that combines Cultural Sustainability Theory, Cultural Branding Theory, and Sustainability-Oriented Marketing to explain how cultural sustainability functions as a strategic branding resource in the marketing of Chinese-Indonesian community products. These theoretical perspectives collectively provide a robust foundation for understanding the interplay between culture, branding, and long-term value creation in multicultural market contexts.

Cultural Sustainability Theory emphasizes the preservation, continuity, and adaptive transformation of cultural values, practices, and identities over time (Soini & Dessein, 2016). Within this perspective, culture is not treated as a static artifact but as a dynamic system that evolves while maintaining its core meanings. Applied to marketing and branding, cultural sustainability highlights the ethical and strategic responsibility of brands to represent cultural heritage authentically and to support its intergenerational transmission. For community-based products, cultural sustainability manifests through the use of traditional knowledge, symbolic meanings, and heritage narratives that reflect collective identity. This theory provides the foundational lens through which cultural elements embedded in Chinese-Indonesian community products are conceptualized as enduring assets rather than short-term marketing tools.

Building on this foundation, Cultural Branding Theory explains how brands create value by embedding culturally resonant meanings, myths, and narratives into brand identity (Holt, 2004). According to this theory, strong brands function as cultural symbols that address identity needs and resonate with shared social values. In the context of community-based products, branding extends beyond functional differentiation to communicate authenticity, belonging, and cultural continuity. Cultural branding theory is particularly relevant for minority and diaspora communities, where products often serve as expressions of cultural identity within broader societal structures. In this study, cultural sustainability is positioned as a core input into cultural branding processes, shaping brand storytelling, visual identity, and symbolic associations that reinforce perceived authenticity and emotional engagement.

Furthermore, Sustainability-Oriented Marketing provides a strategic perspective on how sustainability principles can be integrated into value creation and market positioning (Kumar et al., 2017; White et al., 2019). While much of this literature has focused on environmental and ethical dimensions, recent scholarship calls for a broader understanding of sustainability that includes cultural considerations. From this viewpoint, cultural sustainability enhances brand differentiation, strengthens trust, and supports long-term consumer–brand relationships. In multicultural markets, sustainability-oriented branding that incorporates cultural values can foster deeper emotional bonds and enhance brand legitimacy among culturally connected consumers. This study extends sustainability-oriented marketing by explicitly incorporating cultural sustainability as a strategic branding dimension rather than a peripheral ethical concern.

Integrating these perspectives, the proposed theoretical framework conceptualizes cultural sustainability as an antecedent that informs branding practices, including brand identity formation, heritage storytelling, and symbolic representation. These branding

practices, in turn, influence key branding outcomes such as perceived authenticity, brand differentiation, and emotional connection, which contribute to long-term brand value creation in multicultural contexts. In the case of Chinese-Indonesian community products, cultural sustainability operates as a mediating cultural resource that aligns commercial objectives with cultural preservation.

By synthesizing cultural sustainability, cultural branding, and sustainability-oriented marketing, this framework offers a comprehensive explanation of how culturally embedded branding strategies can support both market competitiveness and cultural continuity. The framework responds to gaps in existing literature by moving beyond fragmented discussions of sustainability or cultural symbolism and providing an integrated model tailored to community-based products in non-Western, multicultural settings. As such, it establishes a solid theoretical basis for examining the strategic role of cultural sustainability in branding and marketing practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in the analysis of secondary data to explore how cultural sustainability is integrated into branding practices for Chinese-Indonesian community products. A qualitative approach is appropriate as it enables an in-depth interpretation of meanings, narratives, and symbolic representations embedded within branding practices, particularly in culturally grounded contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Secondary data were collected from multiple Scopus-indexed academic journals, including studies on cultural sustainability, cultural branding, sustainability marketing, and heritage-based products. In addition, publicly available documents such as brand websites, marketing materials, sustainability reports, and policy documents related to cultural heritage and community-based enterprises were systematically reviewed.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure, allowing patterns and themes to emerge inductively from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved iterative coding, theme development, and theoretical abstraction, guided by cultural sustainability and cultural branding frameworks. To enhance analytical rigor, data triangulation was applied by comparing insights across different sources and disciplines (Yin, 2018). This method ensures credibility and consistency in interpreting how cultural values and heritage narratives are translated into branding elements and market positioning. By relying on secondary qualitative data, this study contributes a theoretically informed synthesis of existing empirical evidence while offering a novel conceptual understanding of cultural sustainability as a strategic branding resource in multicultural markets.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Integrating Cultural Sustainability into Branding: Marketing Chinese-Indonesian Community Products

The findings of this study reveal that cultural sustainability plays a central and integrative role in shaping branding practices for Chinese-Indonesian community products. Analysis of secondary qualitative data indicates that cultural values, heritage narratives, and symbolic representations are systematically embedded within brand identity and marketing communications. These culturally grounded branding practices

contribute to the construction of perceived authenticity, emotional connection, and brand differentiation in multicultural market contexts. The results further demonstrate that cultural sustainability functions not merely as a background ethical consideration, but as a strategic branding resource that supports long-term brand trust, loyalty, and value creation while reinforcing cultural continuity within the Chinese-Indonesian community.

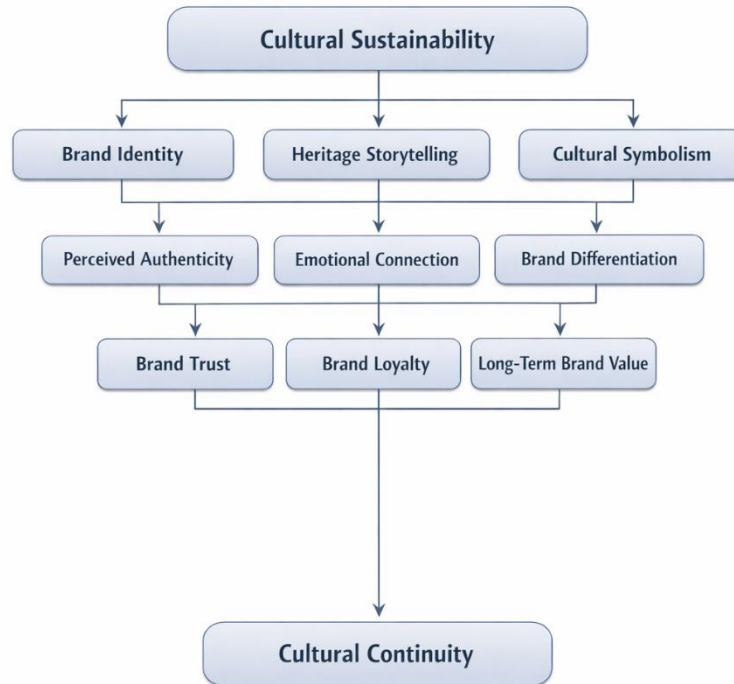


Figure 1. Integrating Cultural Sustainability into Branding: Marketing Chinese-Indonesian Community Products

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how cultural sustainability is operationalized as a strategic branding approach in the marketing of Chinese-Indonesian community products. The analysis reveals a structured and interconnected process through which cultural sustainability shapes branding practices, influences consumer perceptions, and generates long-term branding outcomes. As illustrated in the research findings model, cultural sustainability functions not merely as an ethical or symbolic backdrop, but as a foundational driver that actively informs brand construction, market communication, and value creation.

At the foundational level, the results demonstrate that cultural sustainability serves as the core resource underpinning branding practices. Cultural sustainability is manifested through the preservation of cultural values, the continuation of heritage practices, and the conscious representation of symbolic meanings rooted in Chinese-Indonesian identity. The findings indicate that producers and brand narratives consistently emphasize cultural continuity, intergenerational knowledge, and historical legitimacy as essential elements of brand meaning. Cultural sustainability thus provides the ideological and symbolic foundation upon which branding strategies are developed, ensuring that market engagement does not compromise cultural integrity.

Building on this foundation, the study identifies three primary mechanisms through which cultural sustainability is translated into branding practices: brand identity, heritage storytelling, and cultural symbolism. First, brand identity emerges as a critical

site where cultural sustainability is materialized. The results show that brand identity encompasses not only visual elements such as logos, color schemes, and typography, but also naming conventions, language use, and symbolic references that reflect cultural heritage. These identity markers function as cultural signifiers that communicate authenticity and legitimacy, allowing brands to position themselves as culturally grounded rather than commercially generic.

Second, heritage storytelling plays a central role in embedding cultural sustainability into branding narratives. The findings indicate that brands actively construct stories that reference ancestral origins, traditional production methods, historical struggles, and cultural resilience. These narratives are not presented as static historical accounts, but as living stories that connect past traditions to contemporary market contexts. Heritage storytelling thus operates as a bridge between cultural memory and modern branding, enabling consumers to engage with products as carriers of cultural meaning rather than mere commodities.

Third, cultural symbolism reinforces both brand identity and storytelling by incorporating culturally recognizable symbols, rituals, and motifs into marketing communication. The results show that cultural symbolism is strategically deployed to evoke shared cultural understanding and emotional resonance. Importantly, the findings suggest that symbolic elements are selectively and thoughtfully integrated to avoid cultural dilution or misrepresentation. This careful symbolic alignment underscores the role of cultural sustainability as a guiding principle that shapes how culture is represented in the marketplace.

At the intermediate level, the findings reveal that these culturally embedded branding practices generate three key branding outcomes: perceived authenticity, emotional connection, and brand differentiation. Perceived authenticity emerges as a direct outcome of consistent and credible cultural representation. The results indicate that consumers interpret culturally sustainable branding as more trustworthy and legitimate when cultural elements are deeply embedded rather than superficially displayed. Authenticity, in this context, is not limited to product origin but extends to the sincerity of cultural representation and the alignment between brand values and cultural practices.

Emotional connection represents a second critical outcome of culturally sustainable branding. The findings show that heritage storytelling and cultural symbolism facilitate emotional engagement by evoking feelings of belonging, nostalgia, pride, and cultural identification. This emotional connection is particularly salient in multicultural contexts, where community-based products serve as symbolic anchors of identity. The study finds that emotional connection strengthens consumer engagement beyond functional product attributes, fostering deeper relational bonds between consumers and brands.

Brand differentiation constitutes the third intermediate outcome identified in the results. The findings indicate that cultural sustainability enables brands to distinguish themselves from competitors by offering culturally meaningful value propositions that are difficult to replicate. Rather than competing solely on price or functional attributes, culturally sustainable brands differentiate themselves through symbolic depth and cultural legitimacy. This form of differentiation enhances brand distinctiveness in crowded markets and contributes to stronger brand positioning.

At the strategic level, the results demonstrate that these intermediate outcomes

collectively influence brand trust, brand loyalty, and long-term brand value. The analysis shows that perceived authenticity functions as a key antecedent of brand trust, as consumers are more likely to trust brands that consistently honor cultural values and heritage narratives. Emotional connection, in turn, fosters brand loyalty by strengthening affective attachment and repeated engagement. Brand differentiation contributes to long-term brand value by enhancing brand salience and reducing substitutability in competitive markets.

Importantly, the findings reveal that these strategic outcomes are interdependent rather than isolated. Brand trust reinforces loyalty, loyalty enhances long-term brand value, and sustained brand value further legitimizes culturally grounded branding practices. This cumulative effect highlights the role of cultural sustainability as a long-term strategic asset rather than a short-term marketing tactic. The results suggest that brands grounded in cultural sustainability are better positioned to sustain market relevance and consumer relationships over time.

At the final level of analysis, the study identifies cultural continuity as a critical overarching outcome of culturally sustainable branding. The findings indicate that branding practices informed by cultural sustainability contribute not only to market success but also to the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage. By embedding cultural values into brand identity and market communication, brands function as vehicles for cultural continuity, ensuring that cultural knowledge and practices remain visible and relevant in contemporary contexts. This outcome underscores the dual role of branding as both an economic and cultural mechanism.

The results confirm that integrating cultural sustainability into branding creates a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between market value and cultural preservation. Cultural sustainability informs branding practices, branding practices shape consumer perceptions, and consumer engagement reinforces both brand value and cultural continuity. In the context of Chinese-Indonesian community products, this process enables brands to navigate the complexities of multicultural markets while maintaining cultural integrity. The findings thus position cultural sustainability as a strategic branding resource that aligns commercial objectives with long-term cultural sustainability, offering a robust and transferable model for culturally grounded branding in diverse market settings.

Discussion: Integrating Cultural Sustainability into Branding: Marketing Chinese-Indonesian Community Products

The findings of this study provide empirical support for Cultural Sustainability Theory, which conceptualizes culture as a dynamic system that must be continuously reproduced and adapted across generations rather than preserved as a static artifact (Soini & Dessein, 2016). The results demonstrate that cultural sustainability operates as a foundational logic shaping branding practices for Chinese-Indonesian community products. This confirms that cultural values, heritage narratives, and symbolic meanings are not peripheral elements of branding, but core resources that guide how brands are constructed and communicated. In this sense, the study extends cultural sustainability scholarship by showing how cultural continuity can be actively embedded within market-facing branding strategies, rather than remaining confined to policy or heritage conservation discourse.

The translation of cultural sustainability into brand identity, heritage storytelling, and cultural symbolism strongly aligns with Cultural Branding Theory, which argues that brands derive value from culturally resonant meanings that address identity needs and shared understandings (Holt, 2004). However, the findings refine this theoretical perspective by demonstrating that, in the context of community-based products, cultural branding is inseparable from cultural responsibility. While Holt (2004) emphasizes myth-making and cultural resonance as drivers of brand strength, this study shows that resonance is sustained only when cultural representations are perceived as legitimate and grounded in lived heritage. Thus, branding does not merely appropriate cultural elements for symbolic consumption, but functions as a mechanism for articulating and sustaining cultural identity in the marketplace.

The study's results regarding perceived authenticity are consistent with prior research emphasizing coherence, credibility, and heritage alignment as key drivers of authenticity in branding (Napoli et al., 2014). However, this study contributes a more nuanced interpretation by demonstrating that authenticity in Chinese-Indonesian community products is evaluated not only through product attributes, but through the perceived sincerity of cultural representation. This finding contrasts with much of the heritage branding literature, which often treats authenticity as an aesthetic or origin-based attribute (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2015). Instead, the present study suggests that authenticity emerges from the alignment between cultural values, narrative consistency, and symbolic representation, reinforcing the idea that authenticity is socially constructed and context dependent.

The identified role of emotional connection further supports consumer culture perspectives that view consumption as intertwined with identity formation and cultural belonging (Thompson & Tian, 2008). The findings indicate that heritage storytelling and cultural symbolism facilitate emotional engagement by enabling consumers to connect products with memory, pride, and collective identity. Unlike studies that focus primarily on consumer interpretation, this research highlights the producer-side mechanisms through which emotional connection is intentionally cultivated. This shifts the analytical focus toward branding as an active cultural mediator rather than a passive reflector of consumer meanings.

In contrast to dominant sustainability marketing research, which has largely emphasized environmental responsibility, ethical norms, and pro-environmental behavior (Kumar et al., 2017; White et al., 2019), this study empirically demonstrates that sustainability-oriented branding can also be achieved through cultural pathways. The results show that cultural sustainability contributes to brand differentiation, trust, loyalty, and long-term brand value without relying on environmental claims. This finding extends sustainability marketing theory by positioning cultural sustainability as a distinct and viable route to sustainable competitive advantage, particularly in multicultural and heritage-rich contexts.

When compared with research on ethnic and minority entrepreneurship, which often prioritizes social networks and economic outcomes (Dana, 2007; Ram et al., 2017), this study adds branding as a critical mediating process through which cultural resources are transformed into market value. Rather than reducing culture to an instrumental asset, the findings indicate that branding grounded in cultural sustainability enables firms to balance commercial objectives with cultural continuity. This balance is crucial in contexts

where cultural misrepresentation can undermine trust and long-term legitimacy.

Based on these findings, several practical implications can be derived. For community-based producers, cultural sustainability should be institutionalized within branding governance by clearly defining core cultural values, heritage narratives, and symbolic boundaries that guide brand expression. Consistency across product design, packaging, and communication is essential to maintain perceived authenticity and trust. For marketers, differentiation strategies should emphasize culturally meaningful value propositions rather than competing solely on price or functional attributes. From a policy perspective, cultural and MSME support institutions may play a role in facilitating culturally responsible branding practices through training, certification, or collaborative storytelling initiatives.

Confirms that integrating cultural sustainability into branding offers a coherent theoretical explanation for how community-based products achieve both market relevance and cultural continuity. By empirically linking cultural sustainability to branding mechanisms and long-term brand outcomes, this study advances cultural branding and sustainability marketing literature and provides a transferable framework for understanding culturally grounded branding in diverse market settings (Soini & Dessein, 2016; Holt, 2004; Napoli et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2017; White et al., 2019; Thompson & Tian, 2008; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that integrating cultural sustainability into branding provides a coherent and effective strategy for marketing Chinese-Indonesian community products in multicultural contexts. The findings demonstrate that cultural sustainability shapes brand identity, heritage storytelling, and symbolic representation, which in turn strengthen perceived authenticity, emotional connection, and brand differentiation. These branding outcomes support brand trust, loyalty, and long-term brand value while simultaneously contributing to cultural continuity. By positioning cultural sustainability as a strategic branding resource rather than a peripheral ethical concern, this research extends cultural branding and sustainability-oriented marketing literature. The study highlights that market competitiveness and cultural preservation can be mutually reinforcing when branding practices are grounded in culturally responsible principles.

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