Research on Branding Construction and Channel Expansion Management of Contemporary Art Education and Training Institutions: A Grounded Analysis Based on Multiple Cases

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of an increasingly saturated market in contemporary art education and training, coupled with the reshaping of the industry landscape by the "Double Reduction" policy, exploring how institutions can achieve sustainable development through scientific management strategies holds significant theoretical and practical importance. This paper aims to deeply analyze the management mechanisms and strategic synergy issues in the process of brand equity construction and channel expansion of art education institutions through qualitative research methods. Adopting a multi-case study approach and following the interpretivist paradigm, this study selects three typical art training institutions in Beijing at different developmental stages as research objects. Detailed primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, non-participant field observations, and archival data tracking. The study finds that there are three heterogeneous paths for brand construction in art education institutions: functional, relational, and personality-based. Furthermore, there is a significant non-linear coupling relationship between the accumulation of brand equity and channel selection. Channel expansion relying solely on traffic-oriented thinking often leads to the dilution of core brand values, whereas strategic configuration based on "Brand-Channel Fit" can significantly enhance the trust cost and conversion efficiency of the parent group. This paper constructs an integrated management framework, revealing how institutions can achieve dual improvements in student quality and operational efficiency through connotative brand construction and precise channel layout under resource constraints. The research conclusions provide empirical evidence and decision-making references at the micro-level for the standardized management and high-quality development of China's art education industry.

Keywords

Art Education Management; Brand Equity; Channel Governance; Qualitative Research; Strategic Synergy; "Double Reduction" Policy.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Over the past decade, with the significant improvement of China's national economic level and the deep transformation of residents' consumption structure, the art education and training industry has undergone a structural change from marginalized supplementary education to rigid family demand. Art education is no longer merely a cultural privilege of the elite class but has become an important avenue for the vast middle-class group to enhance their children's comprehensive quality and accumulate cultural capital (Zhang et al., 2025). However, the rapid

expansion of the industry has not brought a synchronous improvement in service quality; instead, it has triggered serious homogeneous competition on the supply side. Particularly after the introduction of the "Double Reduction" policy in 2021, a large amount of capital and talent spilled over from the academic training track into the quality education sector, further exacerbating market congestion (General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2021). In this "red ocean" market, the vast majority of small and medium-sized institutions face common challenges such as surging Customer Acquisition Costs (CAC), low Customer Lifetime Value (LTV), and blurred brand distinctiveness (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Traditional management models often rely on the personal experience of managers or single promotional means, lacking systematic thinking on the internal logic between brand construction and market channels, leading to inefficient resource allocation.

From the perspective of management, the operation of art education institutions is not only a unidirectional delivery process of teaching services but also a value creation and delivery system based on interactive relationships. According to Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic), value is co-created by enterprises and consumers. The brand, as an intangible asset, carries the institution's educational philosophy and market reputation; the channel serves as the key touchpoint and experiential field connecting services and consumers (Berry, 2000). In the context of digital transformation, the boundary between the two is increasingly blurred, and consumer interaction behaviors across different channels exhibit characteristics of high fragmentation, non-linearity, and immediacy (Verhoef et al., 2015). Therefore, how to build a resilient brand moat in a highly uncertain and fiercely competitive market environment, and explore efficient and low-consumption channel expansion models, has become a core strategic issue that education managers urgently need to resolve.

1.2. Problem Statement

Although existing literature has extensively discussed educational marketing and brand management, in-depth research focusing on the specific niche of art education remains insufficient. First, existing studies tend to focus on macro-level industrial policy analysis or micro-level pedagogical discussions, lacking deep examination of the micro-operational mechanisms of institutions from the dimension of corporate strategic management. Second, in the study of the relationship between brand and channel, there is often a fragmentation: brand research focuses on psychological cognition and consumer associations, while channel research focuses on logistics efficiency and distribution coverage, with few studies examining their synergistic effects and dynamic matching mechanisms under the same strategic framework (Neslin et al., 2006). This theoretical fragmentation leads to management blind spots in practice, making it difficult for many institutions to find a balance between brand image and market share.

Current industry practices universally exhibit a binary opposition mindset of "heavy marketing, light branding" or "heavy teaching, light management." Many institutions adopt short-sighted strategies of blindly following trends in channel expansion, investing heavily in high-traffic platforms like TikTok and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book), yet neglecting the brand reception capability and conversion logic behind the traffic, leading to resource mismatch and brand image dilution (Porter, 1996). Moreover, as art education is a "Credence Good" with high involvement and high trust costs, the consumer decision-making process is unique. Parents

often find it difficult to assess service quality in the short term, so general commercial marketing theories are often difficult to apply directly (Zeithaml, 1988). There is an urgent need to reveal the deep mechanisms of brand and channel management in art education institutions based on real organizational contexts through rigorous qualitative analysis, answering key questions such as "how different types of institutions choose adaptive channels" and "how brand and channel achieve strategic synergy."

1.3. Research Significance and Structure

The contributions of this paper are mainly reflected in three aspects. First, through multi-case empirical analysis, it compensates for the lack of qualitative research in the field of art education management and enriches the micro-management theory in this field, particularly by organically integrating service brand theory and omnichannel management theory within the educational context. Second, it constructs a strategic analysis framework based on "Brand-Channel Fit," providing a theoretical explanation for the inefficiency of institutional resource allocation and revealing the mediating role of trust in the interaction between brand and channel. Third, it offers actionable strategic suggestions for educational entrepreneurs and managers, helping to promote the professionalization and standardization of the industry and assisting institutions in achieving high-quality development under the new normal post-"Double Reduction."

The subsequent structure of the paper is arranged as follows: Chapter 2 systematically reviews relevant literature on brand equity theory, channel management theory, and art education management, laying the theoretical foundation for the study; Chapter 3 elaborates on the qualitative research design, including case selection criteria, data collection, and Grounded Theory analysis methods; Chapter 4 deeply analyzes case data, extracts core themes, conducts cross-case comparisons, and constructs the theoretical model; Chapter 5 summarizes the research findings, proposes management implications, and points out research limitations and future prospects.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Equity and Consumer Trust Mechanisms

Brand equity theory is a cornerstone of marketing. The classic Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model posits that brand value stems from the knowledge structure related to the brand in consumers' minds, including brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Keller, 1993). In the field of educational services, due to the intangibility, inseparability, and heterogeneity of services, the brand becomes a key signal for reducing consumer perceived risk and establishing trust contracts (Aaker, 1991). The Service Brand Equity model proposed by Berry further emphasizes that service brands depend not only on external marketing communications but more on employees' service behaviors and consumers' actual experiences (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Especially for art education, where the manifestation of educational outcomes is lagged and subjective, parents often find it difficult to assess teaching quality in the short term, making brand reputation the primary basis for decision-making (Hsieh & Li, 2008). Existing research indicates that strong brand associations can significantly reduce search costs and psychological burdens for parents when choosing

training institutions, thereby increasing conversion rates and enhancing tolerance for price sensitivity (Erdem & Swait, 1998).

2.2. Channel Governance and Omnichannel Marketing

Traditional channel management theory focuses on how to deliver products to consumers at the lowest cost through distribution networks. However, with the proliferation of mobile internet, the function of channels has evolved from mere trading places to comprehensive platforms for information dissemination, experiential interaction, and relationship maintenance. Omnichannel Marketing theory emphasizes that enterprises should integrate all online and offline touchpoints to provide consumers with a seamless and consistent brand experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). For art training institutions, channels include not only offline teaching centers and ground promotion points but also social media, word-of-mouth communities, and third-party review platforms. Verhoef and other scholars point out that the core of channel management has shifted from managing distribution pathways to managing the Customer Journey, where different channels play differentiated roles at different stages of the journey (e.g., awareness, evaluation, purchase, advocacy) (Ansari et al., 2008).

2.3. Strategic Synergy and Fit Theory

Fit Theory in strategic management suggests that firm performance depends on the internal consistency among its strategic elements and the adaptation of strategy to the external environment (Venkatraman, 1989). In the marketing domain, this means that channel selection must serve brand positioning, and there should be synergistic effects between the two. Porter points out that the core of strategy lies in the fit among activities, and this fit can establish a moat that competitors find difficult to imitate (Barney, 1991). However, in the field of art education, research on the matching mechanism between brand and channel remains a blank. Some institutions blindly pursue omnichannel coverage while ignoring the conflict between channel attributes and brand tone, leading to the phenomenon of "Strategic Mismatch" (Cao & Li, 2015). For example, if a high-end brand frequently appears in low-end promotional channels, it will trigger cognitive dissonance and damage brand equity. Therefore, exploring the adaptive logic of brand and channel is of great significance for improving resource utilization efficiency.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design: Multi-Case Study Method

Given that this study aims to answer management process questions at the "how" and "why" levels, and involves complex social interactions and organizational behaviors, the multi-case study method within qualitative research is the most appropriate choice (Yin, 2018). Multi-case design can improve the external validity and robustness of research conclusions through Replication Logic among cases, compensating for the specific bias that may exist in single-case studies. This study does not seek large-scale statistical generalization but follows the theory-building path proposed by Eisenhardt, dedicated to revealing the causal mechanisms and management logic behind phenomena through deep analysis of typical samples (Eisenhardt, 1989). This method allows researchers to capture rich detailed information in natural contexts, thereby more accurately understanding the decision-making process of art education institution managers under resource constraints.

3.2.   Case Selection and Research Objects

Following the principle of theoretical sampling, this study selected three representative art training institutions in Beijing as case objects: **Beijing Mingxuetang Education Technology Co., Ltd.** (hereinafter referred to as "Mingxuetang"), **Beijing Yuelin Art Education Center** (hereinafter referred to as "Yuelin Art"), and **Beijing Zhaolin Painting Studio** (hereinafter referred to as "Zhaolin Studio"). These three institutions have significant differences in scale, developmental stage, and market positioning, covering the main forms within the industry, thereby enhancing the universality of the research conclusions.

Mingxuetang is a high-end chain institution established for over 10 years, focusing on professional art grading and study-abroad portfolio tutoring, representing a capital-driven scale development model. **Yuelin Art** is a burgeoning institution in a rapid growth phase, relying on community operations and focusing on children's art enlightenment, representing a community-service-oriented refined operation model. **Zhaolin Studio** is a "small and beautiful" studio founded by a renowned artist, relying on strong personal IP operation, representing a profession-driven craftsman model. The selection of research objects balances "extremeness" and "typicality," helping to discover common laws and situational differences in cross-case analysis, consistent with sample selection norms in qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

3.3.   Data Collection and Analysis Methods

This study adopts a data collection strategy of Triangulation to ensure research validity and reliability. Data sources mainly include three aspects: First, in-depth interviews. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews totaling 15 sessions with founders, marketing directors, and core teachers of the three institutions, with each interview lasting 60-90 minutes, focusing on understanding their brand philosophy, channel strategies, and decision-making processes. Second, field observations and small-scale questionnaire surveys. Researchers engaged as "mystery shoppers" to experience the service processes deep within the institutions and distributed questionnaires regarding brand perception and channel preferences to 150 parents of enrolled students as auxiliary evidence for qualitative analysis. Finally, archival data analysis, collecting institutional brochures, internal training documents, and social media operation data. In the data analysis phase, the coding technique of Grounded Theory was employed, proceeding through Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding to progressively extract core categories and theoretical models (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

To enhance the transparency and reproducibility of the research process, Table 1 displays the logic of extracting theoretical categories from parts of the original interview corpus in this study.

Table 1: Example of Grounded Theory Coding Process (Partial)

Original Interview Corpus (Excerpt)	Initial Concepts (Open Coding)	Axial Categories (Axial Coding)
"When parents walk in and see the wall covered with offers from famous foreign universities, the doubt in their eyes is basically half gone; sales	Visualization of Explicit Results	Brand Cognition Construction

staff don't need to waste much breath." (Mingxuetang Marketing Director)		
"We resolutely do not distribute flyers. The feeling of being thrown into the trash by passersby makes us feel the brand is cheap; it's not only ineffective but also damages the image." (Mingxuetang Founder)	Channel Image Backfire Effect	Channel Risk Perception
"When we do activities in the community, word-of-mouth spreads very fast in the moms' groups. One recommendation from a core parent is worth ten cold calls." (Yuelin Art Admissions Supervisor)	Strong Relationship Chain Conversion	Trust Transmission Mechanism
"Many parents come for Mr. Zhao's personal fame. They feel only Mr. Zhao's teaching is authentic; they don't recognize other teachers." (Zhaolin Studio Academic Affairs)	Founder IP Dependence	Resource Dependence and Bottleneck

Note: This table only displays part of the coding logic; the actual research covers 128 initial concepts.

4. Case Analysis and Findings

4.1. Heterogeneity in Brand Positioning and Value Propositions

Through coding analysis of case data, it was found that the three institutions showed significant heterogeneity at the starting point of brand construction, and this difference directly determined the path dependence of their subsequent channel strategies. **Mingxuetang** defines its core brand value as "Professionalism and Results," and its brand asset construction relies heavily on the explicit display of teaching outcomes (e.g., grading pass rates, elite school admission lists). This positioning concentrates its brand associations mainly on the functional dimension, aiming to resolve parents' anxiety about advancement. In contrast, **Yuelin Art**'s brand proposition is "Joy and Companionship," focusing on emotional dimension connections, dedicated to creating a "third space" within the community, with brand value lying in providing convenience and emotional comfort. **Zhaolin Studio** relies entirely on the founder's personal charisma, with obvious personality-based brand characteristics, and its value proposition lies in scarce expert resources and unique artistic aesthetics. Empirical data indicate that clear and differentiated brand positioning is a prerequisite for effective channel management, while Brand Confusion is the fundamental reason institutions fall into the quagmire of homogeneous price wars (Kapferer, 2012).

Table 2 further compares the deep differences in trust construction and risk management among these three brand modes from the perspective of strategic configuration.

Table 2: Strategic Configuration Comparison of Three Brand Asset Construction Modes

Strategic Dimension	Mingxuetang (Functional)	Yuelin Art (Relational)	Zhaolin Studio (Personality)

Value Proposition Logic	Result-Oriented: Resolving advancement and grading anxiety, emphasizing ROI	Emotion-Oriented: Providing convenience and community belonging, emphasizing growth companionship	Faith-Oriented: Pursuing scarce aesthetics and master worship, emphasizing exclusivity
Source of Trust	Authoritative certificates, admission lists, standardized systems (Institutional Trust)	High-frequency interaction, neighborhood word-of-mouth, service details (Interpersonal Trust)	Founder charisma, professional aura, mentorship relations (Trait Trust)
Typical Channel Risks	Excessive traffic costs devouring profits; policy change risks	Limited physical radius, difficult to replicate across regions; homogeneous competition	Founder's limited energy, inability to scale; personal reputation risks
Resource Allocation Priority	Priority on public domain advertising and high-end brand endorsement	Priority on community operations and offline experiential activities	Priority on professional display and core circle maintenance

4.2. Channel Selection Mechanisms and Resource Matching

In terms of channel expansion, the study found that an institution's resource endowments strictly constrain its set of channel choices. **Mingxuetang**, relying on strong financial strength and brand endorsement, adopted a "high-profile" strategy. Its main channels include Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and high-end mall booths. These high-cost channels form a virtuous loop with its high-unit-price products. **Yuelin Art**, constrained by budget, innovatively adopted a low-cost channel strategy of "Cross-Industry Alliance + Community Fission." By cooperating with surrounding picture book libraries and children's playgrounds, it achieved precise traffic import and utilized the WeChat private domain ecosystem for high-frequency interaction. Notably, after **Zhaolin Studio** failed in promoting via Dianping (a public review platform), it returned to private domain traffic operations, proving that for highly non-standardized personal studios, strong-tie word-of-mouth channels are far more effective than weak-tie public domain traffic. This finding challenges the traditional view of blindly pursuing "omnichannel coverage," confirming that "Channel-Resource Fit" is the key variable determining Marketing Return on Investment (ROI) (Reinartz et al., 2019).

4.3. Empirical Observation of Brand-Channel Synergy Effects

A core finding of this study is the bidirectional dynamic synergy mechanism between brand equity and channel efficacy. In the survey of 150 parents, data showed that parents who encountered the brand through "High-Trust Channels" (e.g., friend recommendations, offline experiential activities) had an acceptance of brand premium approximately 35% higher than those who encountered it through "Low-Trust Channels" (e.g., online ads, flyers). This indicates that channels are not merely pipelines for information but "filters" and "amplifiers" of brand value. The success of **Mingxuetang** shows that when it held high-specification student art

exhibitions offline (High-Potential Channel), the conversion rate of subsequent online course promotions increased by nearly 50%. This online-offline linkage synergy verifies that the sense of experience in physical space is not only necessary for building trust in art education brands but is also a catalyst for digital marketing conversion. Conversely, **Yuelin Art** attempted to invest in high-end advertising channels inconsistent with its positioning in the early stages, which not only failed to bring effective conversion but also triggered negative word-of-mouth due to insufficient service reception capability, further corroborating the importance of maintaining strategic consistency between brand and channel.

To more specifically guide managers in channel configuration, Table 3 constructs a matching matrix of channel attributes and consumer psychology, revealing the unique roles of different touchpoints in the decision chain.

Table 3: Matching Matrix of Channel Touchpoint Attributes and Parental Decision Psychology

Channel Touchpoint Type	Trust Transmission Efficacy	Information Load	Emotional Involvement	Best Matching Decision Stage	Corresponding Management Strategy
Weak-Tie Public Domain *(e.g., TikTok Ads, Flyers)*	Low	Low-Medium	Low	**Awareness Stage** *(Building initial impression)*	Cast a wide net, emphasize visual impact, do not expect strong conversion, focus on brand exposure
Functional Platforms *(e.g., Dianping, Official Website)*	Medium	High	Low	**Evaluation Stage** *(Rational comparison and verification)*	Perfect information disclosure, manage negative reviews, display hard power of faculty and environment, eliminate concerns
Strong-Tie Private Domain	Very High	Medium	High	**Purchase/Advocacy Stage** *(Closing the deal and repurchase)*	Design incentive mechanisms, maintain KOC relationships,

(e.g., Mom Groups, Referrals)					achieve low-cost conversion through emotional maintenance
Immersive Experience *(e.g., Art Exhibitions, Trial Classes)*	High	High	Very High	**Conviction Stage** *(Value perception and confirmation)*	Create ritual sense, shift from "selling courses" to "selling experiences," use physical space to build trust highlands

4.4. Management Dilemmas and Game Analysis

Interview data also revealed profound dilemmas faced by managers in actual operations, the most prominent contradiction being the game between "short-term cash flow pressure" and "long-term brand construction." Interviewed managers generally reflected that although they knew certain promotional channels (like low-price group-buying platforms) would damage brand tone, they were often forced to use them to maintain cash flow. A manager from **Yuelin Art** mentioned, "We also want to be a high-end brand, but survival comes first; sometimes we have to bow to traffic." This short-sighted behavior statistically manifests as increasing customer acquisition costs year by year and declining user retention rates. Qualitative analysis indicates that a lack of strategic determination and refined financial measurement models is the main internal cause leading to distorted actions in institutional brand and channel decisions. Successful managers are often able to establish a decision evaluation system based on long-termism, adhering to the brand bottom line under pressure, thereby ultimately achieving compound growth of brand equity.

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1. Research Conclusions

This study re-examines the brand and channel management issues of contemporary art education institutions through multi-case qualitative analysis. The research results indicate: First, brand construction in art education institutions must return to the essence of education. Differentiated value propositions are the only way to avoid homogeneous competition, and institutions should choose functional, relational, or personality-based brand development paths according to their own genes. Second, there is no absolute optimal solution for channel selection, only an "adaptive solution" based on the institution's resource endowment and developmental stage. Precise vertical channels are often superior to broad mass channels, and channel effectiveness depends on the degree of fit with brand tone. Third, there is a profound endogenous interactive relationship between brand and channel. High-potential channel

activities (such as exhibitions, performances) can effectively accumulate brand equity and reduce subsequent marginal marketing costs. Successful institutions are often able to establish a positive reinforcing loop of "Brand Asset Accumulation - Channel Efficiency Improvement - Student Quality Optimization."

5.2.   Management Implications

Based on the above conclusions, this paper proposes the following suggestions for art education managers: First, abandon the internet mindset that "traffic is king" and instead establish an education logic based on "trust," prioritizing resources into touchpoints that can generate deep connections to build trust-centric brand equity. Second, in channel layout, implement "layered management," using high-cost public domain traffic as a brand display window and low-cost private domain communities as the conversion core, building a public-private linked traffic funnel to achieve efficient traffic retention and conversion. Finally, managers need to establish a dynamic decision-making mechanism based on data feedback, regularly evaluating retention rates and Customer Lifetime Value (LTV) of each channel rather than merely focusing on initial Customer Acquisition Cost, thereby finding a dynamic balance between short-term and long-term interests to achieve sustainable institutional development.

5.3.   Limitations and Future Prospects

Although this study reveals the deep logic of the management process through qualitative methods, there are still certain limitations. Restricted by the number of cases and geographic scope (limited to Beijing), the external generalizability of the research conclusions may be limited. Future research could consider introducing more samples from second and third-tier cities for comparative analysis. Additionally, this study mainly focused on management strategies from the institutional perspective, and exploration of the consumer psychological "black box" remains insufficient. Future research can further expand the sample size, introduce quantitative questionnaires for large-sample hypothesis testing, or introduce behavioral experimental methods to explore the specific impact mechanisms of different brand narratives and channel combinations on parents' decision-making psychology, thereby providing more diverse evidence support for the improvement of art education management theory.

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