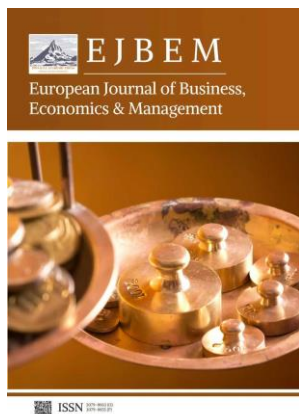


Article **Open Access**

Digital Brand Management in Social Media: A Case Study of Want Want's Consumer Engagement Strategy on Chinese Platforms

Zhe Chen ^{1,*}



¹ HKU Business School, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

* Correspondence: Zhe Chen, HKU Business School, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

Abstract: This study investigates the digital brand management strategies of Want Want Holdings Limited on Chinese social media, with a specific focus on anthropomorphic branding and consumer engagement. Employing a single case study methodology, the research analyzes the brand's official Douyin presence alongside user-generated content over one year period, utilizing content analysis of posts, engagement metrics, and brand consistency evaluation. Findings indicate that Want Want effectively utilizes anthropomorphic characteristics to foster emotional connections across diverse consumer demographics and maintains coherence between its official messaging and user interpretations, demonstrating successful digital brand identity management. However, challenges to brand authenticity arise from unofficial content creators imitating brand elements. The study yields insights for international brands operating within China's digital ecosystem, emphasizing the strategic imperative to balance brand control with organic user engagement. It contributes to understanding brand management in emerging digital markets, specifically elucidating the interplay between anthropomorphic branding and social media engagement in the Chinese context.

Keywords: digital brand management; social media marketing; anthropomorphic branding; consumer engagement; Chinese market; Douyin

Received: 29 July 2025

Revised: 08 August 2025

Accepted: 16 August 2025

Published: 26 August 2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The digital transformation of brand management has fundamentally altered how companies engage with consumers, particularly in emerging markets where social media platforms serve as primary communication channels. In China, the rapid adoption of short-video platforms like Douyin has created new opportunities and challenges for brand managers seeking to maintain consistent brand identity while fostering authentic consumer relationships.

Want Want Holdings Limited, a snack food manufacturer originating from Taiwan region, presents a compelling case study in digital brand management within the Chinese market. Since entering the mainland Chinese market in 1992, Want Want has evolved from a traditional food manufacturer to a digitally-savvy brand that leverages anthropomorphic characteristics to create emotional connections with consumers. The brand's name itself, which phonetically suggests good fortune in Chinese culture, has become synonymous with celebratory occasions and gift-giving traditions.

The concept of brand anthropomorphism, defined as the attribution of human characteristics, emotions, and intentions to brands or products, has gained significant traction in digital marketing strategies. This approach enables brands to create more relatable and

emotionally engaging experiences for consumers, particularly in social media environments where personal connection and authenticity are highly valued.

However, the democratization of content creation on social media platforms presents unique challenges for brand managers. When consumers and content creators begin to interpret and recreate brand elements independently, questions arise about brand consistency, authenticity, and control. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the Chinese digital ecosystem, where user-generated content and influencer marketing play crucial roles in brand perception and consumer decision-making [1].

This study addresses the research question: How do brands effectively manage anthropomorphic brand identity in social media environments while maintaining consistency and authenticity? Through an in-depth analysis of Want Want's digital brand management strategy, this research aims to provide insights into the complexities of brand management in contemporary digital markets [2].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Anthropomorphism in Digital Contexts

Brand anthropomorphism has emerged as a significant strategy in contemporary marketing, enabling companies to create emotional bonds with consumers by attributing human-like qualities to their brands. This approach is particularly effective in digital environments where brands compete for consumer attention and engagement. Digital engagement platforms empower brands with human-like agency, enabling them to interact directly with various stakeholders. Research indicates that anthropomorphic brands tend to generate higher levels of consumer identification and emotional attachment compared to non-anthropomorphic alternatives [3].

The theoretical foundation for brand anthropomorphism draws from social cognition theory, which suggests that humans naturally tend to attribute human characteristics to non-human entities as a way of making sense of their environment [4]. In marketing contexts, this tendency can be leveraged to create more meaningful brand-consumer relationships.

2.2. Social Media Brand Management

The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed brand management from a primarily company-controlled activity to a collaborative process involving multiple stakeholders, including consumers, influencers, and content creators [5]. This shift requires brands to develop new competencies in managing distributed brand narratives while maintaining core brand identity.

Brand consistency across digital touchpoints has become increasingly challenging as consumers encounter brand messages through various channels and intermediaries. The traditional approach of centralized brand control is no longer sufficient in environments where user-generated content can significantly influence brand perception.

2.3. Consumer Engagement in Digital Platforms

Consumer engagement in digital environments encompasses multiple dimensions, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Effective engagement strategies must address each of these dimensions to create sustainable brand-consumer relationships.

Emotional branding has been identified as a particularly effective approach for creating consumer engagement, as it addresses fundamental human needs for connection and belonging [6]. In social media contexts, emotional branding often manifests through storytelling, community building, and interactive content that encourages consumer participation.

2.4. Brand Management in Emerging Markets

Emerging markets present unique challenges and opportunities for brand management, particularly in digital contexts where technological adoption often outpaces regulatory frameworks and established business practices. The mainland Chinese market, with its distinctive digital ecosystem and cultural characteristics, requires specialized approaches to brand management [7].

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a single case study methodology to examine Want Want's digital brand management strategy [8]. Case study research is particularly appropriate for investigating contemporary phenomena in their real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident [9].

The choice of Want Want as the focal case was based on several criteria: (1) the brand's established presence in the Chinese market, (2) its distinctive anthropomorphic brand characteristics, (3) its active engagement on Chinese social media platforms, and (4) the availability of both official brand content and user-generated content for analysis.

3.2. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over one year period (2023-2025) and included multiple sources:

- 1) Official Brand Content: Analysis of Want Want's official Douyin account, including video content, engagement metrics, and brand messaging consistency.
- 2) User-Generated Content: Examination of content created by independent bloggers and influencers featuring Want Want products or brand elements.
- 3) Engagement Metrics: Collection of quantitative data including views, likes, shares, and comments on both official and user-generated content.
- 4) Brand Consistency Analysis: Evaluation of visual identity elements, messaging consistency, and brand representation across different content creators.

3.3. Data Analysis

The analysis employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative metrics analysis with qualitative content analysis. Brand consistency was evaluated using established frameworks for visual identity management, while engagement analysis drew from social media marketing literature [10].

Content analysis focused on identifying patterns in brand representation, consumer responses, and the alignment between official brand messaging and user interpretations. Particular attention was paid to instances where user-generated content diverged from official brand guidelines.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Want Want's Anthropomorphic Brand Identity

Want Want has successfully developed a distinctive anthropomorphic brand identity centered around its mascot character and the emotional associations of its brand name. The brand name itself, which phonetically suggests "prosperous" or "thriving" in Chinese, creates immediate positive associations that extend beyond product functionality to emotional and cultural significance [11].

The brand's anthropomorphic elements include:

- 1) Visual Identity: The Want Want mascot character exhibits human-like expressions and behaviors, making the brand more relatable and approachable to consumers.

- 2) Emotional Positioning: The brand positions itself as a companion for celebratory moments, gift-giving occasions, and family gatherings, emphasizing emotional rather than purely functional benefits.
- 3) Communication Style: Official brand communications adopt a friendly, approachable tone that reflects the anthropomorphic brand personality.

4.2. Digital Brand Management Strategy

Analysis of Want Want's official Douyin account reveals a sophisticated approach to digital brand management that balances consistency with platform-specific content optimization. The brand maintains visual and messaging consistency while adapting content formats to suit the short-video platform's requirements.

Key elements of the digital strategy include:

- 1) Content Consistency: Official content maintains consistent use of brand colors, mascot character, and messaging themes across all posts.
- 2) Platform Adaptation: Content is specifically designed for Douyin's format requirements, including optimal video length, trending hashtags, and platform-specific features.
- 3) Engagement Optimization: The brand actively responds to comments and encourages user interaction through contests, challenges, and interactive content.

4.3. User-Generated Content and Brand Interpretation

The analysis revealed significant user-generated content featuring Want Want products and brand elements. Independent content creators, including the blogger Kong Kong Diary, have created content that both celebrates and reinterprets Want Want's brand identity.

User-generated content simultaneously presents opportunities and challenges for brand management [12]. On the positive side, consumer-initiated creations organically extend brand reach by accelerating diffusion through interpersonal networks; authentic endorsements and word-of-mouth are typically perceived as more persuasive than corporate advertising and thus enhance brand credibility. Moreover, users in different regions localize brand narratives within their own cultural contexts, enabling global brands to sustain cultural relevance and perceived proximity [13].

Nevertheless, significant risks remain: when numerous consumers reinterpret the brand according to their own understandings, core brand values and visual identity may fragment, resulting in brand dilution. Platform constraints make it impossible to pre-screen every piece of user content, undermining narrative and visual consistency. Finally, variable content quality ranging from low-resolution images to vulgar, misleading, or negatively valenced associations can stigmatize the brand and erode long-accumulated reputational assets [14].

4.4. Brand Consistency Analysis

Comparison between official brand content and user-generated interpretations reveals generally high levels of brand consistency in visual elements and core messaging. However, variations emerge in:

- 1) Content Quality: User-generated content varies significantly in production quality and brand representation accuracy.
- 2) Message Interpretation: While core brand values are maintained, individual creators add personal interpretations that may not align with official brand strategy.
- 3) Cultural Adaptation: User-generated content often incorporates local cultural elements that may not be present in official brand communications [15].

4.5. Consumer Engagement Patterns

Analysis of engagement metrics reveals that Want Want's anthropomorphic branding strategy effectively drives consumer interaction across different demographic groups. The brand's emotional positioning resonates particularly well with:

Young Adults (18-30): High engagement with nostalgic content and gift-giving themes.

Parents (30-45): Strong response to family-oriented content and celebratory occasions.

Older Adults (45+): Positive associations with traditional values and cultural significance [16].

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to understanding brand anthropomorphism in digital contexts by demonstrating how brands can maintain anthropomorphic characteristics while adapting to platform-specific requirements [17]. Want Want's success suggests that anthropomorphic branding can be effectively scaled across digital platforms when core brand elements are consistently maintained.

The study also highlights the importance of cultural alignment in anthropomorphic branding [18]. Want Want's success in the mainland Chinese market can be attributed partly to the cultural resonance of its brand name and positioning, suggesting that effective anthropomorphic branding requires deep cultural understanding [19].

5.2. Practical Implications

For brand managers operating in digital environments, the Want Want case provides several practical insights:

- 1) Consistency Framework: Establishing clear guidelines for brand representation while allowing flexibility for platform-specific adaptation is crucial for maintaining brand integrity across digital channels [20].
- 2) User-Generated Content Management: Brands should develop strategies for encouraging positive user-generated content while maintaining brand consistency. This may include influencer partnerships, content guidelines, and community management [21].
- 3) Cultural Sensitivity: Anthropomorphic branding strategies must be culturally relevant and sensitive to local market characteristics to achieve maximum effectiveness [22].
- 4) Engagement Strategy: Emotional positioning through anthropomorphic characteristics can drive higher levels of consumer engagement, but requires consistent execution across all touchpoints [23].

5.3. Strategic Recommendations

Based on the analysis, several strategic recommendations emerge for brands seeking to implement similar approaches:

- 1) Develop Clear Brand Guidelines: Establish comprehensive guidelines for anthropomorphic brand representation that can be applied across different platforms and content creators.
- 2) Invest in Community Management: Active engagement with user-generated content and community building can help maintain brand consistency while encouraging organic content creation [24].
- 3) Monitor Brand Representation: Implement systematic monitoring of brand representation across digital platforms to identify potential inconsistencies or negative associations.
- 4) Cultural Adaptation: Ensure that anthropomorphic brand characteristics align with local cultural values and consumer expectations.

6. Conclusion

This study examined Want Want's digital brand management strategy, focusing on the implementation of anthropomorphic branding in mainland Chinese social media contexts. The findings demonstrate that effective digital brand management requires balancing brand consistency with platform-specific adaptation and user-generated content management.

Want Want's success in maintaining anthropomorphic brand identity across digital platforms can be attributed to several factors: cultural alignment of brand characteristics, consistent visual and messaging elements, and active engagement with user-generated content. However, the case also highlights the ongoing challenges of managing brand representation in democratized content creation environments.

The research contributes to the literature on digital brand management by providing empirical evidence of how anthropomorphic branding can be effectively implemented in emerging digital markets. The study demonstrates that brands can maintain consistency and authenticity while embracing user-generated content, provided they establish clear guidelines and actively engage with their digital communities.

6.1. Managerial Implications

For practitioners, this study offers actionable insights for managing anthropomorphic brands in digital environments. The Want Want case demonstrates the importance of developing culturally-sensitive brand strategies that resonate with local market characteristics while maintaining global brand consistency. Brand managers should invest in community management capabilities and develop frameworks for encouraging positive user-generated content while maintaining brand integrity.

6.2. Future Research Directions

Several avenues for future research emerge from this study. First, comparative analysis across multiple brands and markets could provide broader insights into the effectiveness of anthropomorphic branding strategies. Second, longitudinal studies examining the evolution of brand-consumer relationships in digital environments could offer deeper understanding of engagement dynamics. Third, investigation of consumer perception and brand authenticity in user-generated content contexts could inform brand management strategies.

The study's limitations, including its single-case design and platform-specific focus, suggest opportunities for broader empirical investigation. Cross-platform analysis and multi-brand comparisons could provide more generalizable insights for digital brand management practice.

References

1. A. Aguirre-Rodriguez, "Cultural factors that impact brand personification strategy effectiveness," *Psychol. Mark.*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 70–83, 2013, doi: 10.1002/mar.20676.
2. M. Anderski, L. Griebel, P. Stegmann, and T. Ströbel, "Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms," *J. Bus. Res.*, vol. 166, p. 113905, 2023, doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113905.
3. N. Balashova and I. Urupa, "Formulating global branding strategies in the context of cultural differences," *Bull. Acad. Labor, Soc. Relat. Tourism, Ser. Econ. Psychol. Manag.*, no. 1, 2024, doi: 10.54929/alsrt-economics-2024-01-05-01.
4. J. L. Bowden, M. Gabbott, and K. Naumann, "Service relationships and the customer disengagement-engagement conundrum," *J. Mark. Manag.*, vol. 31, no. 7–8, pp. 774–806, 2015, doi: 10.1080/0267257X.2014.983143.
5. H. J. Cheong and M. A. Morrison, "Consumers' reliance on product information and recommendations found in UGC," *J. Interact. Advert.*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 38–49, 2008, doi: 10.1080/15252019.2008.10722141.
6. B. Cova and D. Dall'Aglio, "Working consumers: The next step in marketing theory?" *Mark. Theory*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 315–339, 2009, doi: 10.1177/1470593109338144.
7. Á. Garrido-Morgado and Ó. González-Benito, "Applying the triple coherence line to in-store marketing plans to increase private label market share," *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, vol. 77, p. 103642, 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103642.

8. S. Gensler, F. Völckner, Y. Liu-Thompkins, and C. Wiertz, "Managing brands in the social media environment," *J. Interact. Mark.*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 242–256, 2013, doi: 10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.004.
9. A. Hajian, R. Sadeghi, V. R. Prybutok, and C. E. Koh, "Increasing trust and value of mobile advertising in retailing: A survey design, machine learning approach, and blockchain in the trust path," *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, vol. 79, p. 103794, 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.103794.
10. C. Hedin and B. Balogh, "Brand consistency: A case study of Stadium," M.S. thesis, Kristianstad Univ., 2011.
11. M. Jamwal and V. Soodan, "Emotional branding as tool for dissonance reduction: A strategy for competitive advantage," *Int. Mon. Refereed J. Res. Manag. Technol.*, vol. 3, pp. 25–32, 2014.
12. L. Jin, "A comparison of marketing strategies between the U.S. and China influenced by individualism-collectivism under cross-cultural perspective: Taking MDLZ International, Ltd. as an example," *OALib*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 1–7, 2022, doi: 10.4236/oalib.1108593.
13. B. Wu, "Market Research and Product Planning in E-commerce Projects: A Systematic Analysis of Strategies and Methods," *Acad. J. Bus. Manag.*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 45–53, 2025, doi: 10.25236/AJBM.2025.070307.
14. M. Sharma and Z. Rahman, "Anthropomorphic brand management: An integrated review and research agenda," *J. Bus. Res.*, vol. 149, pp. 463–475, 2022, doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.05.039.
15. M. Juntunen, S. Saraniemi, and W. J. Elving, "Visual identity and IPRs in corporate brand management," in *Proc. Conf. Corporate Commun.*, 2010, p. 122.
16. Y. K. Kim and P. Sullivan, "Emotional branding speaks to consumers' heart: The case of fashion brands," *Fashion Text.*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1–16, 2019, doi: 10.1186/s40691-018-0164-y.
17. G. M. Ji, J. H. Cheah, M. Sigala, S. I. Ng, and W. C. Choo, "Tell me about your culture, to predict your tourism activity preferences and evaluations: Cross-country evidence based on user-generated content," *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.*, vol. 28, no. 10, pp. 1052–1070, 2023, doi: 10.1080/10941665.2023.2283599.
18. A. M. Muniz and H. J. Schau, "Vigilante marketing and consumer-created communications," *J. Advert.*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 35–50, 2007, doi: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367360303.
19. T. N. Ngoc Dan and P. Ngo Trong, "Does brand anthropomorphism and brand intimacy matter to assess consumers' engagement successfully?" *Cogent Bus. Manag.*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2023, doi: 10.1080/23311975.2023.2249897.
20. M. Patrizi, M. Šerić, and M. Vernuccio, "Hey Google, I trust you! The consequences of brand anthropomorphism in voice-based artificial intelligence contexts," *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, vol. 77, p. 103659, 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103659.
21. B. L. Weathington, C. J. Cunningham, and D. J. Pittenger, *Understanding business research*. Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012. ISBN: 9781118342978.
22. U. Tuškej and K. Podnar, "Consumers' identification with corporate brands: Brand prestige, anthropomorphism and engagement in social media," *J. Prod. Brand Manag.*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 3–17, 2018, doi: 10.1108/JPBM-05-2016-1199.
23. M. Vernuccio, M. Patrizi, M. Šerić, and A. Pastore, "The perceptual antecedents of brand anthropomorphism in the name-brand voice assistant context," *J. Brand Manag.*, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 302–317, 2022, doi: 10.1057/s41262-022-00305-6.
24. H. Wang, "Exploring brand attachment dynamics in live streaming platforms: A TikTok perspective in the digital knowledge economy," *J. Knowl. Econ.*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 5967–5998, 2024, doi: 10.1007/s13132-024-01786-3.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The views, opinions, and data expressed in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of PAP and/or the editor(s). PAP and/or the editor(s) disclaim any responsibility for any injury to individuals or damage to property arising from the ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content.