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Stage: “Breaking Barriers: Effective
Strategies for Emerging Chinese
Brands in the Global eCommerce
Market”**



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Breaking Barriers: Effective Strategies for Emerging Chinese Brands in the Global eCommerce Market

1. RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Consumer sector accounts for over half of the global GDP and has always been a significant growth contributor to every country's economy. The sector is strategic for each country because it fosters innovations, particularly among small-and-medium-size companies that are the fundamental parties to developing the economy's growth momentum (Naradda Gamage et al., 2020). This is particularly important for countries such as China, which is transitioning from a manufacturing-focused country into a more diversified service-oriented economy (Liao and Yang, 2023). Over the years, we have seen many successful stories (i.e. new brands) from China and witnessed how they created disruptive business models in the domestic market that allowed them to challenge the larger traditional well-established global brands that possess strong scale advantages (Liu, 2022). These new brands typically excel in eCommerce strategies by leveraging creative online strategy to develop their core competencies. However, many of them have considered global expansion to seek larger addressable market size and growth catalysts amid the slowing domestic market (China Briefing, 2024).

When these young Chinese brands try to "Go Global", the key questions are how they should do it given they are facing intense challenges amid a lack of sales and distribution channels, the typical stereotype that Chinese brands are of low quality, the lack of consumer trust, etc (Rehman et al., 2019). However, we are witnessing some good successful cases (e.g. SHEIN, Carote, Miniso, Popmart, etc.) that have managed to break through these challenges via the use of innovative eCommerce strategies and allowed us to see many lessons learned (Qu, 2024). Hence, this study will explore how young Chinese brands can succeed in cross-border eCommerce by leveraging their strengths and mitigating common challenges, and become the "bible" for them when they consider expanding globally.

Research aim, objectives and gaps

Regarding the study's research aim, the study aims to provide insights to young Chinese brands that are considering their strategies to "Go Global" and realising how to transform typical challenges they face into competitive advantages. It will explore in detail how they can utilise their strengths (via cost-effective production, digital marketing expertise, agility in supply chain management, etc.) to target global consumers and compete against well-established competitors (Atherton, 2020).

Regarding the study's research objectives, the study aims to address certain key questions including but not limited to: (1) Challenges faced by young Chinese consumer brands over the competitive advantages owned by well-established global market leaders; (2) Strategies and approaches employed by young Chinese consumer brands; (3) Factors enabling successful cases of Chinese consumer brands; (4) Critical success factors for young Chinese brands to achieve global competitiveness; (5) Pathways and frameworks for new brands to navigate the competitive landscape; (6) Become the "Bible" for young Chinese brands to reference for "Go Global" and enhance the existing academic studies.

Regarding the study's research gap, the trend for Chinese brands to expand globally is relatively new and has had limited research coverage in the past. Most existing journals primarily focus on how international brands can enter China or how Chinese brands can improve their performance in the domestic market. In addition, many of the existing consumer behaviour theories are developed based on markets from Western countries, which may not be fully applicable to Eastern cultures such as Asian countries like China, which is known for creating unprecedented disruptive business models that tackle different consumer behaviours.

Theoretical framework:

The study will mainly use the Theory of Planned Behaviour ("TPB") as the backbone theory, with reference to two related theories: Consumer Engagement Theory ("CET") and Diffusion of Innovations Theory ("DIT"). TPB examines how consumer attitudes influence

purchasing decisions. CET explores how brands build relationships with consumers through interactive marketing strategies. DIT analyses how innovative products spread globally.

Literature review:

Over 50 journal articles and references related to the topic have been reviewed. A thorough assessment has been made to discuss how Chinese brands face typical challenges like the "Made in China" stereotype and limited brand recognition (Rua and Santos, 2022). However, they have strong manufacturing capabilities and expertise in eCommerce, which can be leveraged for global expansion (Li, 2023). A number of potential strategies are also identified, such as targeting niche markets, using direct-to-customer strategies, leveraging the eCommerce platform, and adapting local culture for further evaluation.

Research Methodology

The research proposes a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative phase includes selected case studies (successful cases in eCommerce) with expert interviews to gather insights from the business point of views. The quantitative phase involves a consumer survey to verify findings from a consumer point of views.

Conclusion

This study aims to provide actionable insights for young Chinese brands seeking to “Go Global” through eCommerce. By identifying key success factors and leveraging their strengths, these brands can better equipped to compete in international markets. In addition, it will aim to enrich the existing literature, especially to contribute from the “Eastern” cultures' standpoint.

2. EVALUATE AND CRITIQUE THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The research proposal explores the strategic success factors that enable young Chinese brands to excel in the cross-border eCommerce market. The research is timely, given the growing importance of young Chinese brands going overseas and the need to mitigate the challenges faced by using eCommerce as an effective strategy. Below is a critical evaluation of the proposal, highlighting its strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and initial thoughts for self-recommendation.

2.1 Strengths

Chinese brands going overseas is a new trend, and the existing theories are mainly developed based on Western culture and consumer behaviour. Hence, this study could enrich the existing literature by providing an Asian angle (Eastern culture). Below are some of the strengths based on the initial assessment.

- **Relevance and timeliness:** The research proposal addresses a timely and relevant topic, given the growing importance of eCommerce versus the typical challenges Chinese brands face in expanding globally. The focus for Chinese brands to leverage on digital platforms and innovative marketing strategies aligns with current market trends. In addition, using a disruptive marketing approach to increase direct-to-customer marketing as a key differentiator is deemed very effective for younger brands when competing with large, well-established brands. The takeaway would provide strong insights to young brands expanding their business overseas and enrich academic concepts for consumer behaviour.
- **Theoretical framework:** The study employs a comprehensive theoretical framework, incorporating the TPB theory as the backbone and referring to other theories such as CET and DIT. This multi-theoretical approach enhances the depth of analysis and provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding consumer behaviour and brand success factors.

- **Mixed methodology:** This research aims to use a mixed-method approach, allowing qualitative and quantitative insights. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the research problem from both business and consumer perspectives (whereby we will first identify the effective business strategies from the business point of view via a qualitative approach, then confirm our findings from the consumer point of view via a quantitative approach). This methodology will be well-suited for capturing the complexities of consumer behaviour and brand strategies in eCommerce.
- **Case study and expert interviews:** The inclusion of case studies (e.g., successful Chinese brands with substantial overseas exposure) and expert interviews (business leaders, accountants, industry experts, bankers, etc.) provides practical insights into the successful strategies and challenges faced by young Chinese brands. This qualitative data can offer rich contextual information.
- **Practical implications:** The study aims to guide young Chinese brands seeking "Go Global" expansion by exploring how they can mitigate typical shortcomings and transform them into competitive advantages. This focus on practical implications makes the research valuable for academics and practitioners.

2.2 Weaknesses

The research is based on a relatively new trend of Chinese brands going overseas; hence several weaknesses have been identified amid a lack of direct existing references.

- **Research gap:** The research topic around Chinese companies, such as "Go Global," is relatively new trend which involves understanding of new disruptive business models that were unseen in the past. The challenge comes when applying the existing theories into these unprecedented market behaviours, particularly given most of the existing academic theories were originally developed based on Western culture and

traditional business models. Whether these existing theories could apply entirely to these disruptive business models founded by Chinese markets will require further assessment.

- **Sampling strategy:** The research proposal has not yet reached to the stage of providing detailed criteria for selecting participants for the case study and expert interviews. Given the broad spectrum the research will cover (Global consumers), sampling size would be challenging for both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For the qualitative approach, the sample size will be required to be insightful enough as the approach outcome will be to identify the key business strategies and best practices to “Go Global”; hence, if the interviewees’ qualifications are not competent enough, the outcome may not provide sufficient insights. For the quantitative approach, given the study will be for “Go Global”, we will need a sample that would cover global markets (i.e. very wide), so the number of survey participants may require a very large number across a very broad spectrum.
- **Quantitative survey design:** Although the questionnaire design is based on existing literature, it may benefit from more specific details on how it will be tailored to the unique context of Chinese brands expanding globally. Ensuring cultural relevance and specificity in survey questions is crucial. Also because the research covers a wide space, whether using TPB as a backbone would be sufficient, or the questionnaire should considered expanding to cover questions from other theories to generate a more comprehensive outcome. In addition, “Global” is a very wide space, hence there are clear challenges in determining the sample coverage (whether we should survey users around the globe or find a region that could be representative to global users).
- **Data analysis plan:** While the research proposal mentions various statistical techniques, a more detailed explanation of how these methods will address specific research questions would improve the study's clarity. Predicting the

outcome/regression is challenging currently, given that it is a new trend that will be covered in this research.

- **Operational challenges:** Conducting qualitative and quantitative research within a limited timeframe may pose logistical challenges. Ensuring adequate resources and time for data collection and analysis is essential to maintaining the study's quality. This is particularly relevant to this research because it provides a conclusion on user coverage and how the survey can be distributed practically.

2.3 Limitations

A number of limitations are identified for the research execution.

- **Cultural and market variability:** The study may face challenges in generalising findings across different cultural and market contexts. Young Chinese brands may encounter varying consumer behaviours and market conditions in different regions, which could limit the applicability of the results. For example, consumer behaviour in developed countries (such as US, Japan, Europe, etc) could be different compared to developing countries (such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Africa, etc.).
- **Access to data:** The study may see difficulties in obtaining operating data for the selected case studies. This limitation could impact the depth of analysis and the reliability of findings, particularly if critical data is unavailable. The challenges could be in various folds: (1) Case study: whether it is possible to collect all the operating data from the targeted company given some of the information is private in nature and will depend on how much information would be available in public; (2) Literature review: whether majority most of the best practice would be able to capture given the strategies continue to evolve at a rapid speed. For example, a strategy that was applicable in the past may no longer applicable in today's context, especially amid the rapidly changing geopolitical environments; (3) Quantitative approach: whether it is

possible to limit the scope to make the questionnaire more practical, especially around the distribution to users.

- **Timeframe and resources:** External factors such as economic fluctuations, changes in consumer behaviour, or shifts in global trade policies could influence the study's outcomes. These factors may affect the validity and relevance of the findings over time.
- **Generalisability:** The focus on certain specific case studies may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or brands. It is important to ensure that the case study is representative of broader trends in eCommerce.

2.4 Self-recommendation (Areas of improvement)

By reflecting on the above critical review, below sets forth some of the potential areas for improvement that could further enrich the research proposal based on self-assessments:

- **Clarify research gap:** Conduct a more detailed literature review to clearly articulate how this study contributes to existing knowledge of Chinese eCommerce brands.
- **Specify sampling criteria:** Clearly define the criteria for selecting case study participants and expert interviewees to enhance the study's reliability, with detail profile of the participating expert for the qualitative interviews.
- **Tailor survey questions:** Ensure that survey questions are culturally relevant and tailored to the specific context of Chinese brands expanding globally, with considerations to include questions from the other two referencing theories.

- **Detail data analysis plan:** Explain how our statistical methods will be applied to address specific research questions and further evaluate the relationship among the questions.
- **Address potential biases:** Consider potential biases in data collection and analysis, such as cultural or market biases, and develop strategies to mitigate these. Or alternatively select a non-bias location for the survey that could represent global consumers.
- **Flexibility in research design:** Be prepared to adapt the research design if unforeseen challenges arise during data collection or analysis.
- **Enhance generalisability:** Consider including multiple case studies across different industries to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

By addressing these areas, the study can strengthen its methodology, enhance its contributions to the field, and provide valuable insights for young Chinese brands seeking to expand globally through eCommerce.

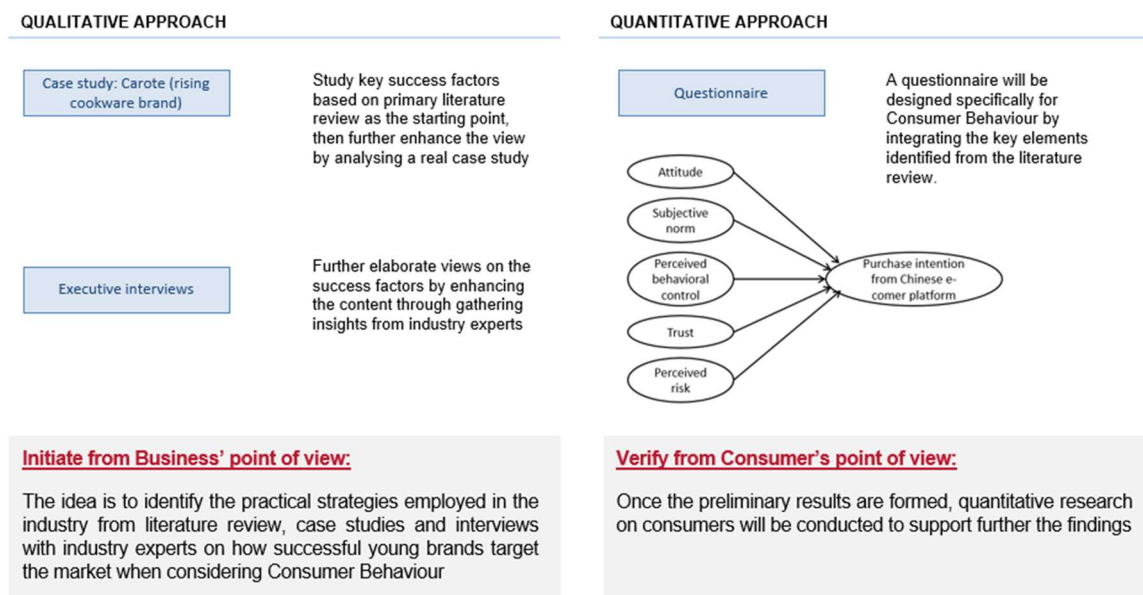
3. APPLY ALTERNATIVE APPROACH IN RESEARCH DESIGN TO ADDRESS SHORTCOMINGS

The research proposal explores how young Chinese brands can succeed in the global eCommerce landscape. Below sets forth some ideas to refine the existing research design which involve adjusting both the qualitative and quantitative approaches to address the research proposal's shortcomings.

3.1 Enhance the overall mixed method approach

To address the above discussions on the strengths and weaknesses analysis, a tightening approach will be implemented to enhance the correlation between the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach will focus entirely on a business point of view, and the quantitative approach will focus entirely on a consumer point of view. A more comprehensive literature review will also be conducted before initiating the qualitative approach to ensure that the research would identify sufficient best practices or strategies employed in the industry for “Go Global” initiatives, which is the backbone of the research, thereby ensuring a substantial research outcome that would work for the study. Below sets forth the functional diagram of the mixed method research design.

Figure 1: Enhanced overall mixed method approach



3.2 Refine the qualitative approach (from Business point of view)

Case Study Enhancement – choosing a highly relevant case study with deep insights

The qualitative approach will include one highly relevant case study, rather than multiple general case studies, to provide a more focused analysis approach with more substantial and insightful findings that align with the literature review's conclusion. The selected case study is Carote Ltd (“Carote”), a successful Chinese brand in the global eCommerce market that was recently listed on the Stock Exchange of HK (“HKEx”). Below are several key rationales for selecting Carote after further detailed studying before conducting the case study:

- **Rationale 1: Carote is the global rising star in a traditional industry (Kitchenware)** that managed to disrupt the international market and is founded in China (CIC Research, 2024). Below are the financial and operating data that show how Carote won market shares from its global competitors, despite having a short operating history, and justify the selection decision.

Figure 2: Comparative analysis

	Groupe SEB (ie. Tefal)	Supor	Carote
Description	Global top cookware conglomerate, owner of well-known brands such as brands such as Tefal	Leading cookware brand founded in China “Supor” with manufacturing capabilities	A rising star in the <u>online cookware sector</u> focuses on its own brand “Carote”
Key product categories	Cookware, kitchenware, small kitchen appliances	Cookware, kitchenware, small kitchen appliances	Cookware, kitchenware
Sales distribution model	Traditional offline distribution model focus	Traditional offline distribution model and also sells through eCommerce	Online “Direct-to-Customer” model
Revenue size (USD m, 2023)	8,384	3,009	224
Revenue CAGR trend (FY2021 - FY2023)	-4.7%	-5.2%	+46.3%
Profit margin (EBITDA, 2023)	12.1%	13.0%	16.8%

Source: Bloomberg, publicly available data.

Figure 3: Market positioning (2023)

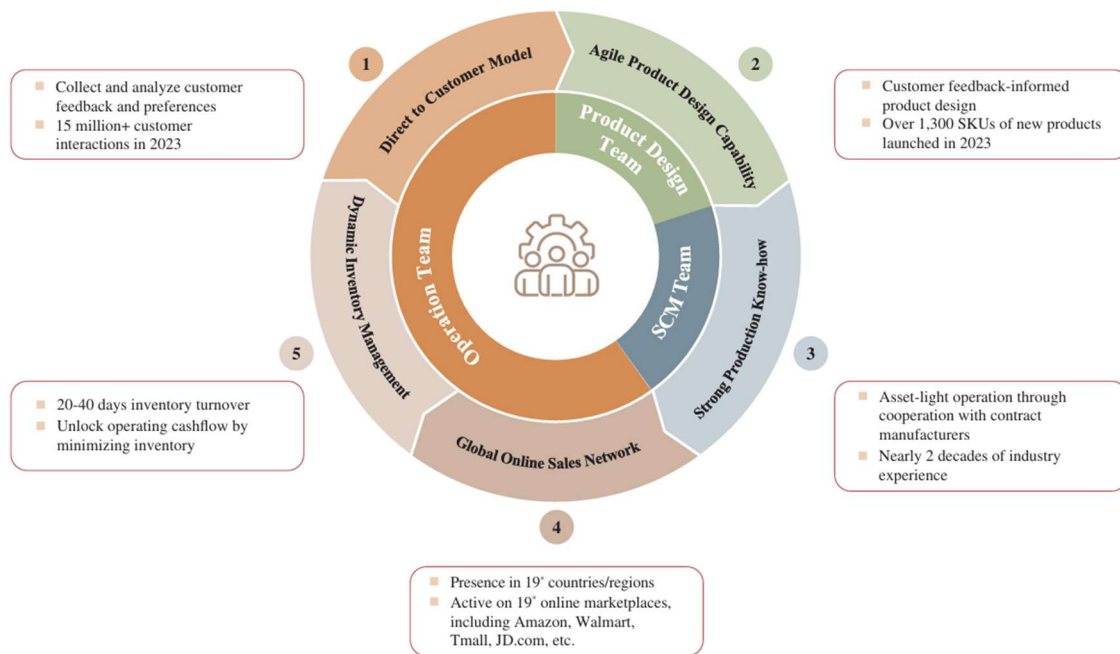
	China	United States	Japan	Europe	South East Asia
Country market share	1.2%	13.1%	8.1%	1.3%	8.6%
Country ranking	#4	#2	#2	#3	#2

Note: Market share is computed based on online retail sales in cookware industry

Source: Carote prospectus.

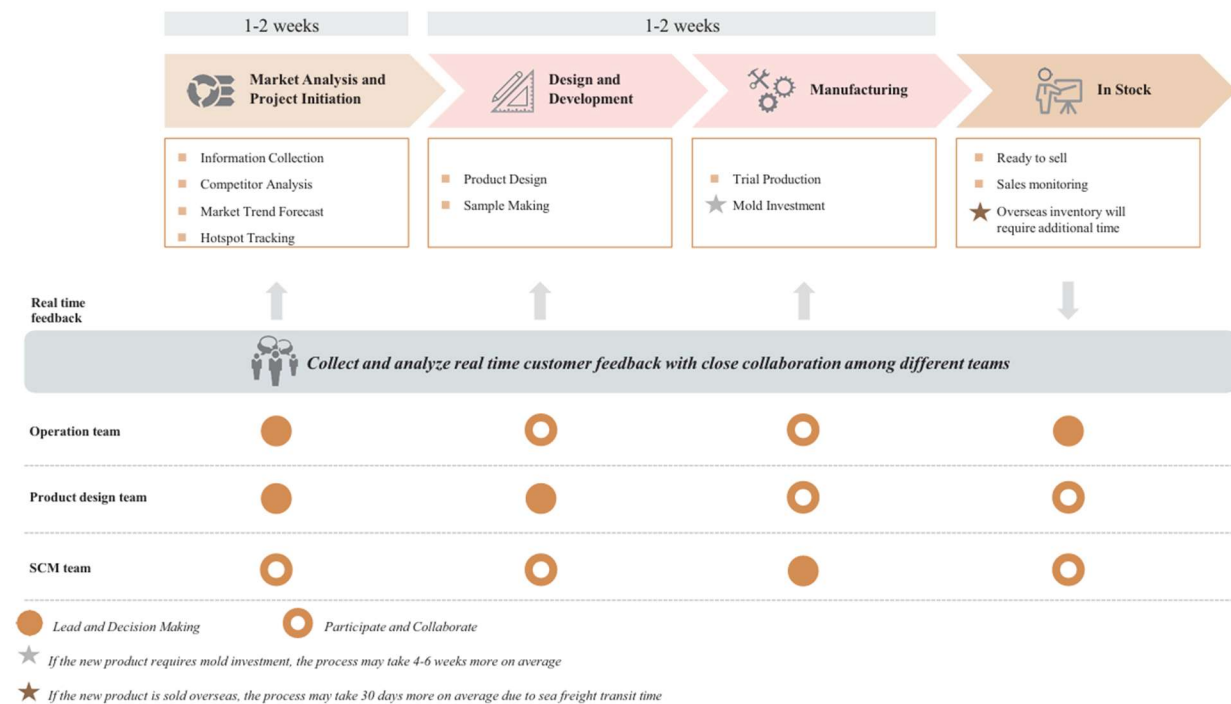
- Rationale 2: Carote possesses a highly differentiated business model** that the incumbent well-established brands could not match, and the company was founded in China. The success factors can offer strong insights for a “Go Global” view. Below is a summarised diagram that explains Carote’s business model and how quickly it can turn around its products, which its competitors could not match.

Figure 4: Carote’s unique disruptive business model that starts from DTC to real-time continuous development



Source: Publicly available information and analysis

Figure 5: Carote’s operation model and how they involve all employees’ feedback to analyse customer feedback
in real time



Source: Publicly available information and analysis

In addition, Carote was listed in HKEx in 2023 with sufficient information disclosed that would allow for the research to support how a business can leverage eCommerce platforms and the Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) model. This could involve analysing Carote's marketing strategies, supply chain management, and customer engagement practices and be a relevant successful case study for young Chinese brands.

Expert Interviews

Expert interview is a key component of the qualitative approach to enhance the case study. The qualitative questionnaire will clearly define the selection criteria for participants, thereby enhancing the quality of the interviews. The selection of the participants will include industry leaders (eg. Chairman of Carote), industry consultants, and professionals with experience in cross-border eCommerce. A structured questionnaire should be developed to guide the interviews, ensuring that all relevant topics are covered.

Thematic Analysis

After conducting the interviews, thematic analysis will be used to identify patterns and insights. This involves systematically coding the transcripts and utilising visual tools, such as network diagrams, to represent the relationships between concepts. This method helps uncover key success factors and challenges faced by young Chinese brands.

3.3 Refine the Quantitative Approach (from Consumer point of view)

Survey Design

The quantitative approach involves a consumer survey to gather data on brand preferences and purchasing behaviour. To refine this, the survey questionnaire should be tailored to the specific context of Chinese brands expanding globally. Questions should be designed to capture consumers' attitudes toward these brands, including factors that influence purchase intentions and brand loyalty.

Sampling Strategy

The survey aims to target a diverse group of consumers who have experience with Chinese brands. This could include consumers from different regions and age groups. Ensuring a representative sample size is crucial for generalising the findings. In addition, given the scope of “Global” is very wide and it is not possible to collect a sample around the globe due to its size. Hence, the study will use Hong Kong as the research area for its consumers. Hong Kong is one of the most international cities in the world and is a good area that could represent the global consumer’s preferences.

Statistical Analysis

The data analysis plan should be detailed, including how statistical methods, such as regression analysis, will be applied. For instance, multiple linear regression can be used to model the relationship between brand attributes and consumer choices. Cluster analysis can segment the consumer population based on preferences and behaviours.

Integration of Qualitative & Quantitative and Triangulation

The mixed method approach allows for both qualitative and quantitative insights. To enhance this, the findings from both approaches should be integrated effectively. For example, qualitative insights from case studies and expert interviews can provide context for quantitative survey results, while survey data can validate or challenge qualitative findings. Triangulation involves using multiple methods to validate findings. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, we can increase the study's reliability and validity. This approach helps ensure that the conclusions drawn are robust and well-supported.

3.4 Address shortcomings

Research Gap Identification

Given that most consumer-related theories are developed based on Western culture, which may not be directly applicable to the research, this study has employed a core theory, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), with reference to two other theories in the context of CET and DIT. When developing the questionnaire, the research will incorporate questions from the CET and DIT to create a questionnaire that integrates all three theories, thereby capturing the research outcome more effectively and drawing stronger correlations.

Identify the Key Strategies to be Used for the Research for Better Preparation

The research will focus on the key strategies that young Chinese brands can explore when they “Go Global”. To better prepare the writing, the following key strategies have been identified at this stage through an extensive literature review and will serve as the backbone for further research.

- **Target Niche Markets:** Young Chinese brands can succeed by targeting niche markets that larger brands overlook. This allows them to differentiate themselves and build a strong online presence. (Odlin and Benson-Rea, 2021)

- **Leverage eCommerce platforms:** Utilising global eCommerce platforms like Amazon and Shopee can help Chinese brands reach international customers at lower costs. More effective strategies can be developed compared to creating an in-house online portal, as these platforms enable innovative marketing strategies and direct customer interactions. (Al Jamil and Ahmed Ismail, 2022; Carote, 2024; Nam and Kannan, 2020; Ying Lin, 2024)
- **Direct-to-Consumer model:** The DTC model allows brands to interact directly with consumers, gather feedback, and adapt quickly to market trends. This model is particularly effective in eCommerce, as it enhances consumer experience and fosters brand loyalty which large well-established brands may not be able to perform well. (Allison, 2021; Aspilla et al., 2021; Jung and Shegai, 2023; Mu and Yi, 2024; Qu, 2024)
- **Innovative Product Offerings:** Chinese brands can leverage their manufacturing strengths to produce innovative, cost-effective products. This helps them compete with established brands by offering unique value propositions. (Li, 2023; Lin and Siu, 2020)
- **Build Strong Brand Identity:** Creating a unique brand identity is crucial for Chinese brands. This involves communicating their values and heritage effectively to global consumers and building trust through consistent customer experiences. (Allison, 2021; Batra et al., 2012; Rua and Santos, 2022)

3.5 Refine timetable & action plan

As a practical next step, below sets forth a finetuned and clearer outline of the research plan and timeline to ensure that the research can be completed as planned without significant delays or resource constraints.

Duration	Particulars
Months 1-6	Conduct a thorough review of strategies used by successful companies through a comprehensive literature review, which can provide valuable guidance for young Chinese consumer brands seeking to compete globally in eCommerce. This process will involve a closer examination of previously reviewed articles and an exploration of new, relevant reports to uncover additional insights that can help these brands navigate the global market effectively.
Months 7-9	Detail analysis for the case study
Months 10-12	Finalise the survey for both the qualitative and quantitative approaches.
Months 13-15	Start the interview process for both qualitative interviews and quantitative approaches.
Months 16-18	Start drafting of the thesis.
Month 19	Continue to adjust and submit the final draft upon agreement with the supervisor.

4. EXPECTED FINDINGS: ENHANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE, PRACTICE AND MANAGEMENT

The research proposal aims to explore the strategic elements that enable young Chinese brands to excel in cross-border eCommerce and become their “Bible” when considering their action plans. The expected findings of the study can significantly enhance knowledge, practice, and management in the field of international eCommerce and brand expansion, especially how to mitigate the typical challenges faced by smaller and younger brands when facing the challenges from larger well-established brands. It will particularly enhance the following three areas:

4.1 Enhancement of knowledge

Understand consumer behaviour from a global perspective. The study will provide insights arise from the TPB theory into how consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence purchasing decisions related to young Chinese brands which will have a balance between academic theories and actual market practice. This understanding can help them refine marketing strategies and improve brand engagement, which is essential when targeting different groups of consumers in the international market compared to their domestic consumers in China.

Enhance existing academic research. The study will highlight the key success factors for young Chinese brands, the study will contribute to the existing literature on eCommerce and global brand expansion. This knowledge can guide future research on emerging markets and digital platforms and is important given most of the existing studies and theories are developed based on Western culture which may lack the view from Eastern culture.

Inspire innovation and disruption in new business models. The study will highlight how young Chinese brands can leverage innovation and digital marketing tools such as DTC strategies to disrupt traditional markets, making it possible for them to compete against well-established brands. This can inspire new business models and strategies for both Chinese and international brands by studying the research outcomes.

4.2 Enhancement of practice

Guide young Chinese brands to “Go Global”. The study will offer actionable recommendations for young Chinese brands looking to expand globally via eCommerce. This includes strategies for building brand recognition, leveraging eCommerce platforms, and implementing the DTC model that could turn their typical weaknesses into new competitive strengths.

Improve brand identity and consumer trust. The study will provide insights into how young Chinese brands can establish a strong brand identity and build trust among global consumers, a market in which they currently have limited presence. This is crucial for overcoming the "Made in China" stereotype that Chinese brands typically offer only low-end products, allowing them to compete effectively against established brands.

Optimize the advantages in supply chain and manufacturing. The study will highlight the advantages of China's manufacturing network, the research can help brands optimize their supply chains and production processes to respond quickly to market trends, similar to the strategies employed by SHEIN that can decrease its Minimum of Quantity (“MoQ”) and manufacturing time significantly through its network of third parties suppliers.

4.3 Enhancement of management

Strategic decision making. The research can inform strategic decisions for brand managers and policymakers. This includes understanding the importance of targeting niche markets, leveraging social media, and utilising Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) for brand promotion in eCommerce, which typically could also lower the overall marketing costs significantly.

Investment and funding. The research can attract investors by demonstrating the potential of young Chinese brands in eCommerce. This includes highlighting successful fundraising strategies and the growth potential of these brands, which is important for young brands to perform fundraising in the capital markets.

Policy development. The research can provide insights to policymakers to develop related policies concerning crossborder eCommerce activities. This could involve regulations that facilitate cross-border eCommerce and considerations of the existing tariffs plan.

4.4 Practical Applications

Market entry strategies. The study will guide young Chinese brands on how to enter new markets using eCommerce platforms effectively. This includes strategy for navigating local regulations and adapting products to meet consumer preferences.

Digital marketing strategies. The study will discuss various successful digital marketing strategies employed by young Chinese brands. The research outcome can help young brands develop their online marketing plans effectively, engaging global consumers — a distinct skillset compared to targeting domestic consumers in China.

Cultural adaptation and localisation. The study will emphasise the importance of cultural adaptation and localisation when targeting global markets. This involves understanding local consumer behaviours and tailoring related marketing campaigns accordingly.

4.5 Conclusion

The expected findings of the research study aim to significantly enhance knowledge, practice, and management in the field of eCommerce and global brand expansion for young Chinese brands. By providing actionable insights and strategic recommendations, the study can support the growth of young Chinese brands and contribute to the broader understanding of digital marketing and consumer behaviour in global markets.

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