

Research on Pathways and Mechanisms for National Sports Brand Cultivation

Shuo Jiao; Kecheng Yu; Mingyang Gao & Haibo Xu*

School of Healthy Aging, Shandong Women's University, Jinan, Shandong 250000, P.R. China

Received: 11.03.2026 | Accepted: 16.04.2026 | Published: 19.04.2026

*Corresponding Author: Haibo Xu

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.19650410](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19650410)

Abstract

Original Research Article

Against the dual backdrop of the rise of the "national trend" and the deepening implementation of the national fitness strategy, national sports brands have achieved a transformative leap from being "low-cost alternatives" to "value leaders", sparking a nationwide resurgence in support of national products. This paper takes benchmark national sports brands such as Li-Ning, Anta, and Hongxing Erke as case studies. Employing case study methods and inductive analysis, it systematically explores the core pathways of brand building against the backdrop of the national sports brand revival and deeply analyzes the intrinsic mechanisms of action among these pathways. The study reveals that the brand-building of national sports brands follows a four-dimensional core pathway of "technology as the foundation + cultural empowerment + emotional connection + channel innovation," with its internal mechanisms adhering to a closed-loop logic of "core value construction-reinforcement of market recognition-sublimation of brand value." This research enriches the theoretical framework of the national brand revival and provides practical guidance for national sports brands to achieve sustainable development and enhance their international competitiveness.

Keywords: National Sports Brands; National Brands Revival; Brand Building; Mechanisms; National Trend Culture.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

1. Introduction

As China's cultural confidence continues to grow and consumer attitudes evolve, coupled with the deepening implementation of the national fitness initiative and the strategy to build a sports powerhouse, the country's sports consumption market is entering a new era of development. National sports brands, which once struggled under pressure from international competitors, have

successfully disrupted the existing market landscape and achieved a strong industry-wide resurgence through product innovation, cultural empowerment, and comprehensive brand upgrades. The resurgence of national sports brands is not merely a short-term consumer trend, but rather the inevitable result of the combined influence of core brand values, robust product quality, and consumer cultural identification. Behind this phenomenon lies a unique logic of brand building and an intrinsic mechanism of operation.



Citation: Jiao, S., Yu, K., Gao, M., & Xu, H. (2026). Research on pathways and mechanisms for national sports brand cultivation. *GAS Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences (GASJAHSS)*, 4(4), 81-86

Currently, national sports brands have completely moved beyond a competitive model reliant solely on value for money, shifting instead to a phase of comprehensive value competition that integrates technological R&D, cultural creativity, and emotional marketing. Typical cases such as the “China Li-Ning” national trend series breaking into new markets, Anta’s global expansion of its multi-brand matrix, and Hongxing Erke’s viral success through public welfare marketing all demonstrate the diverse and innovative characteristics of national sports brand building. However, existing research largely focuses on the analysis and interpretation of individual brand marketing cases, lacking a systematic and integrated examination of the overall brand-building pathways and underlying mechanisms driving the resurgence of national sports brands. Based on this, this paper uses leading national sports brands as research samples to deeply explore the core brand-building pathways against the backdrop of the national sports brand resurgence and deconstruct their underlying mechanisms. The aim is to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for national sports brands to break through development bottlenecks and achieve high-quality, sustainable development.

2. Literature Review and Definition of Concepts

2.1 Research on the Resurgence of National Products

The “revival of national brands” refers to a market phenomenon in which local brands regain consumer favor and recognition through product quality upgrades and cultural innovation, thereby achieving a simultaneous resurgence in market share and brand influence [Zhang Y. 2024]. Academic circles have conducted extensive research on the drivers, pathways, and effects of this revival. Existing studies indicate that the awakening of national cultural confidence, generational shifts in the consumer base, and improvements in the quality of local products are the core drivers behind this trend [Zhou Y. 2022]. Other studies suggest that the empowerment of “national trend” culture, innovations in digital

marketing, and the implementation of corporate social responsibility are key measures for national brands to achieve a successful resurgence [Liu H. 2023]. In the field of sports brand research, existing studies have largely focused on single-dimensional analyses of marketing strategies and product design for national sports brands, lacking integrated research on the entire brand-building process and its underlying logic, which makes it difficult to fully explain the deep-seated drivers of the resurgence of national sports brands [Chen X. 2024].

2.2 The Core Essence of Building National Sports Brands

The brand-building of national sports brands refers to a systematic process in which local sports brands leverage their inherent resources, align with market demand and contemporary trends, and engage in multi-dimensional innovation across products, culture, marketing, and distribution channels to establish a unique brand image and enhance brand awareness and consumer loyalty [Liu H. 2023]. Unlike ordinary consumer goods brands, the branding of national sports brands possesses dual attributes of professionalism and cultural significance: on the one hand, it must rely on cutting-edge technological R&D to ensure professional athletic performance and meet the functional requirements of sports equipment; on the other hand, it must deeply integrate local culture to create a distinctive brand identity, while aligning with the spirit of sports and consumers’ emotional needs, ultimately achieving a dual enhancement of brand value and market competitiveness [Chen X. 2024].

3. Core Strategies for Brand Building Amid the Resurgence of National Sports Brands

3.1 Building a Foundation through Technology: Strengthening the Brand’s Professional Foundation through Cutting-Edge R&D

Technology R&D serves as the cornerstone for building national sports brands and is a key driver for

breaking the technological monopoly of international brands and enhancing core product competitiveness [Zhao T. 2023]. Leading national sports brands have been increasing their investment in R&D funding and personnel, establishing independent R&D systems, focusing on breakthroughs in core areas of sports technology, and achieving leapfrog upgrades in product performance. Li-Ning has invested over 3.5 billion yuan in R&D over the past decade, independently developing core sports technologies such as “Beng Technology” and “Light Bounce Technology,” with the energy return rate of its running shoes now on par with international top-tier standards [Li-Ning Co.,Ltd 2025]. Anta has established a national-level sports science laboratory, leveraging its proprietary R&D to create professional-grade sports equipment, while also integrating advanced international technologies through overseas brand acquisitions to enhance its full-category product portfolio [Anta Group 2025]. Brands such as Xtep and 361° have deepened their R&D in niche sports segments like running and basketball, establishing unique technological advantages. Through continuous technological empowerment, national sports brands have completely shed the stereotype of “poor quality,” winning consumer recognition with professional product performance and laying a solid professional foundation for their resurgence [Chen X. 2024].

3.2 Cultural Empowerment: Creating a Distinctive Brand Identity Through Chinese-inspired Elements

Cultural empowerment is a key strategy for national sports brands to achieve competitive differentiation and ignite a resurgence in the market [Zhang Y.2024]. These brands delve deeply into the core essence of China’s outstanding traditional culture, revolutionary heritage, and sporting spirit, organically integrating “national trend” elements into product design and end-to-end brand communication to forge a brand image with distinct local characteristics. Li-Ning took the lead in launching the “China Li-Ning” national trend series,

combining traditional cultural symbols such as Chinese characters, ink wash paintings, and intangible cultural heritage crafts with modern sports fashion design. By showcasing these collections at international fashion weeks, the brand successfully transformed itself from a traditional sports brand into a benchmark for the national trend movement [Zhang Y.2024]. Anta deeply integrated the Olympic spirit with Chinese cultural elements to create the Winter Olympics medal ceremony attire and professional competition gear, showcasing China’s national sporting prowess [Zhao T. 2023]. Hongxing Erke combines traditional Chinese aesthetics with the public’s demand for mass sports, launching multiple “national trend” collaboration products to continuously reinforce its cultural positioning as a “national sports brand.” Through cultural empowerment, national sports brands transcend the mere utility value of their products, becoming tangible carriers of national cultural confidence. By precisely aligning with the cultural aspirations of young consumer groups, they have rapidly ignited market enthusiasm [Zhou Y. 2022].

3.3 Emotional Connection: Building Brand Loyalty through Responsibility and Empathy

Emotional connections serve as a crucial foundation for national sports brands to maintain consumer loyalty and achieve sustained market growth [Wang X. 2022]. By actively fulfilling their corporate social responsibilities and creating heartfelt emotional marketing content, these brands establish deep emotional resonance with consumers and build a stable system of brand trust. Hongxing Erke gained widespread attention for its low-key yet substantial donations during the Henan flood disaster. Through its deep sense of patriotism and proactive sense of responsibility, the brand garnered massive emotional agreement and spontaneous support from consumers, achieving a double success in both brand reputation and market sales [Wang X. 2022]. Leading brands such as Li-Ning and Anta continue to support sports philanthropy and foster the development of local youth sports, conveying the

core value of “building a sports powerhouse” to society [Zhao T. 2023]. At the same time, major brands leverage social media platforms to launch co-creation activities with users, listening to consumers’ genuine needs, bridging the psychological gap between brands and consumers, and converting short-term traffic into long-term brand loyalty [Zhou Y. 2022]. The deep infusion of emotional value allows national sports brands to form a spiritual connection with consumers, effectively enhancing brand stickiness and market reputation.

3.4 Channel Innovation: Expanding the Reach of Brand Communication through a Comprehensive Strategic Approach

Channel innovation is a key factor enabling national sports brands to precisely reach consumers and expand their market reach [Li Z. 2025]. These brands are breaking away from the single-channel model of traditional offline retail and proactively adapting to digital consumption trends by building an integrated “online-offline” channel system. On the online front, they are comprehensively deploying diverse channels such as e-commerce platforms, live-streaming sales, and private-domain communities, while leveraging short-video and social media platforms to conduct targeted content marketing, thereby rapidly expanding their brand reach beyond their core audience. Offline, they are upgrading the visual identity of physical stores to create experiential and immersive shopping environments, while simultaneously deepening their presence in lower-tier markets to continuously expand coverage in smaller cities and rural areas [China Sports Goods Industry Association 2025]. Anta and Li-Ning have achieved sustained sales growth through a synergistic model of “online traffic acquisition + offline conversion.” Hongxing Erke leverages the buzz generated by online sentiment to rapidly drive traffic back to its physical stores, forming a closed-loop communication system that empowers both online and offline channels. This omnichannel distribution strategy enables national sports brands to precisely reach consumer groups across different demographics and regions, further

driving the widespread adoption and deepening of the “national brand revival” trend [Li Z. 2025].

4. The Underlying Mechanisms of Brand Building in the Resurgence of National Sports Brands

The brand-building behind the resurgence of national sports brands is not the result of a single, isolated pathway, but rather the outcome of the synergistic, progressive, and organic integration of four dimensions: technology, culture, emotion, and distribution channels. Together, these four dimensions form a closed-loop mechanism of “value creation—identity reinforcement—value elevation,” which continuously drives national sports brands toward a sustainable resurgence and high-quality development [Chen X. 2024].

4.1 Core Drivers: Technology and Culture Shape the Brand’s Core Values

Technological R&D and cultural empowerment are the core drivers behind the development of national sports brands. Working in tandem, they jointly establish the differentiated core value of these brands [Liu H. 2023]. Technological R&D provides brands with professional product support, addressing the fundamental question of “usability” from a technical perspective and laying a solid material foundation for the brand’s survival and growth. Cultural empowerment endows brands with unique spiritual significance, addressing the critical question of “distinctiveness” from a conceptual perspective and creating a brand’s exclusive competitive edge in the market [Chen X. 2024]. Technology and culture intertwine and mutually empower one another: technology grounds cultural elements in product design and functionality, making cultural significance tangible and experiential; culture infuses technological R&D with a human touch and local character, ensuring that technological breakthroughs better align with consumers’ cultural and emotional needs. Together, they construct a dual brand core value of “professionalism + culture,” providing the foundation for consumer brand

identification and serving as a prerequisite for the resurgence of national sports brands in the market [Zhao T. 2023].

4.2 Key Support: Emotional and Channel-Based Strengthening of Market Brand Identity

Emotional connection and channel innovation serve as the key pillars for building national sports brands, embodying the brand's core values and continuously strengthening consumers' brand loyalty in the market [Wang X. 2022]. Emotional connection transforms the brand's core values of "professionalism and culture" into emotional content that consumers can perceive and resonate with, breaking down communication barriers between the brand and consumers, and stimulating their purchasing intent and brand affinity. An omnichannel strategy provides consumers with convenient and diverse consumption and experience scenarios, enabling the brand's core values to precisely reach different target consumer groups and converting consumer brand affinity into actual purchasing behavior [Li Z. 2025]. The synergistic combination of emotional engagement and channel strategies enables the efficient transmission and implementation of core brand values from the "brand side" to the "consumer side," facilitating consumers' transition from brand awareness to recognition, and from recognition to identification. This is a critical step for national sports brands to achieve a resurgence in the market [Wang X. 2022].

4.3 Closed-Loop Sublimation: Co-Creating Value to Drive Sustainable Brand Growth

Driven by technology and culture, and supported by consumer sentiment and distribution channels, brands and consumers engage in deep value co-creation, driving the continuous elevation of brand value [Chen X. 2024]. Through purchasing products, sharing content organically, and participating in brand co-creation, consumers provide brands with authentic market feedback that informs R&D and innovation efforts, prompting brands to continually

optimize product performance and enrich their cultural significance. Brands, in turn, continue to meet consumers' diverse needs through higher-quality products, richer cultural significance, and more personalized service experiences. This further strengthens emotional connections with consumers and optimizes the channel experience, ultimately forming a complete closed-loop cycle of "value creation—reinforcement of identity—value feedback—value enhancement" [Chen X. 2024]. This closed-loop mechanism enables the resurgence of national sports brands to avoid short-term traffic traps, achieve sustained growth in brand value and market competitiveness, and drive these brands toward long-term, healthy, and high-quality development [Zhao T. 2023].

5. Research Findings and Implications for Practice

5.1 Research Findings

Drawing on case studies of leading brands such as Li-Ning, Anta, and Hongxing Erke, this article reaches the following core conclusions: First, the resurgence of national sports brands requires a coordinated effort across four dimensions—technology, culture, emotion, and distribution channels—to build a comprehensive brand-building system. Second, brand-building exhibits a closed-loop characteristic, with technology and culture serving as core drivers and emotion and distribution channels providing support, thereby elevating brand value through co-creation. Third, the resurgence of national sports brands is the inevitable result of a precise alignment between brand strength, consumer cultural identity, and market demand. Only by adhering to four-dimensional synergy and a closed-loop development model can a sustainable resurgence be achieved.

5.2 Lessons from Practice

Stay committed to R&D, increase investment, achieve breakthroughs in core technologies, enhance

product performance, and reduce reliance on external technologies; Deepen cultural empowerment, explore the intersection of traditional culture, the spirit of sports, and modern fashion to create a distinctive brand image; Strengthen emotional connections, fulfill social responsibilities, create marketing content with a human touch, and build brand trust through user-generated content; Advance omnichannel integration, optimize online and offline strategies, focus on emerging markets, and expand the brand's reach.

5.3 Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

This study selected only three leading brands as case studies; given the limited sample size, the generalizability of its conclusions remains to be verified. Furthermore, since it did not compare differences in brand building across various market segments or stages of development, it fails to reflect the diversity of brand development. Looking ahead, the study should expand its sample scope to include different types of brands; employ quantitative methods to empirically test the relationship between each pathway and brand performance; and, in the context of globalization, explore the link between brand building and international competitiveness to provide support for brands seeking to expand into international markets.

References

- Zhang Ying.(2024) A Study on the Transformation and Upgrading Pathways of National Sports Brands Against the Background of the “Guochao” Trend . Journal of Sports Culture, (02):76-81.
- Liu Hao.(2023) A Study on the Development of National Sports Brands Driven by Dual Engines of Technological and Cultural Empowerment . Research on Business Economics, (18):112-115.
- Wang Xue.(2022) Strategies for Cultivating Consumer Loyalty for National Sports Brands from an Emotional Marketing Perspective. China Business Review, (16):89-91.
- Li Zequn. (/2025)A Study on Channel Innovation Models for National Sports Brands under the National Fitness Strategy. Sports Science and Technology, 46(01): 102-103.
- Chen Xi.(2024) From Budget Alternatives to Market Leaders: The Logic and Pathways of Value Transformation for National Sports Brands. Consumer Economics, 40(03): 56-63.
- Zhao Tianyu. (2023)Strategies for Enhancing the International Competitiveness of Chinese Sports Brands Against the Background of Building a Sports Powerhouse. Journal of Wuhan Institute of Physical Education, 57(08): 45-51.
- Zhou Yi.(2022) A Study on the Selection Preferences of Young Consumers Toward Sports Brands in the Context of the Resurgence of National Brands. Youth Studies, (05): 67-75.
- Anta Group.(2025) Anta Group 2024 Annual Financial Report.
- Li-Ning Co., Ltd.(2025) Li-Ning Co., Ltd. 2024 Sustainability Report. .
- China Sports Goods Industry Association. (2025) 2024 White Paper on the Development of China's Sports Goods Industry.