

Key Success Factors for SMEs in Building a Brand

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Abstract

In recent years, the advent of the digital age has provided unprecedented brand development for small and medium-sized enterprises; however, most enterprises still face challenges due to resource constraints. This study aims to explore how resource-constrained SMEs can develop effective branding strategies to successfully establish brands in a competitive market. This study analyzes six brands in the apparel, footwear, and food industries (“HiWalk /NIAN JI”, “D+AF/FUFA Shoes”, “QUEENSHOP/Forever 21 Taiwan”). The results of the study found that the key factors for the success of SMEs are establishing market uniqueness through product innovation or the launch of limited editions, establishing a clear brand positioning to attract target customers, and choosing influencers who align with the brand's style to effectively convert fans in the community into customers who actually make purchases. At the same time, the study also pointed out that the common challenges faced by enterprises are insufficient funds and manpower, and it is difficult to build consumer trust in a brand. In the use of digital media, an effective strategy is to guide customers from social platforms to a brand's own channels, thereby building long-term customer equity. This study suggests that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) first conduct market testing at low-cost, physical markets or their official website, focus on developing differentiated core products, and then use social media to guide new customers to the brand's owned channels. To sum up, this study helps new entrants who want to build a brand have a clear idea and plan to improve their competitiveness in the market.

Keywords: SMEs, brand building

中小企業建立品牌的關鍵成功因素

黃鈺琳 李建宏 王祖恩
文藻外語大學，2026 年

摘要

近年來，數位時代的來臨為中小企業的品牌發展帶來前所未有的契機；然而，多數企業仍因資源受限而面臨挑戰。本研究旨在探討資源有限的中小企業如何制定有效的品牌策略，進而在競爭激烈的市場中成功建立品牌。研究分析了服飾、鞋與食品三大產業共六個品牌（HiWalk /NIAN JI、D+AF/FUFA Shoes、QUEENSHOP/Forever 21 Taiwan）。研究結果發現，中小企業成功的關鍵因素包括：透過產品創新或限量款建立市場獨特性；形塑清晰的品牌定位以吸引目標客群；以及選擇與品牌風格一致的影響者，將社群中的粉絲有效轉化為實際購買的顧客。同時，研究也指出企業普遍面臨的挑戰是資金與人力不足，以及難以建立消費者對品牌的信任。在數位媒體運用方面，有效的策略是將顧客從社群平台導流至品牌自有通路，以此累積長期的顧客資產。基於上述發現，本研究建議中小企業可先在低成本的實體市集或官方網站進行市場測試，專注發展具差異化的核心商品，隨後利用社群媒體將新顧客導入品牌自有通路。總而言之，本研究有助於想要建立品牌的新進者釐清方向與行動計畫，以提升其市場競爭力。

關鍵詞：中小企業、品牌建立

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In today's highly competitive and rapidly changing market environment, branding has become a crucial tool for businesses to differentiate themselves, build customer recognition, and enhance brand value. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), branding is not merely a marketing tactic but a key to achieving long-term sustainability and competitive advantage. In Taiwan, large enterprises account for fewer than 2% of all enterprises, while small and medium-sized enterprises make up about 98%.¹ However, SMEs often face significant challenges in building a brand due to limited resources, a lack of professional expertise, and the absence of long-term strategic planning, which may hinder the development of a strong brand presence.

In the past, companies seeking to build brand awareness often had to allocate substantial budgets to mass media advertising, such as television and newspaper costs,

¹ 經濟部, "《2024 年中小企業白皮書》發布, 中小企業蓬勃發展、扮演臺灣經濟發展核心力量," (Nov 29 2024),

https://www.moea.gov.tw/Mns/populace/news/News.aspx?kind=1&menu_id=40&news_id=118040#:~:text=%E3%80%8A2024%E5%B9%B4%E4%B8%AD%E5%B0%8F%E4%BC%81%E6%A5%AD%E7%99%BD%E7%9A%AE%E6%9B%B8,%E8%87%BA%E7%81%A3%E7%B6%93%E6%BF%9F%E7%99%BC%E5%B1%95%E6%A0%B8%E5%BF%83%E5%8A%9B%E9%87%8F&text=%E7%B6%93%E6%BF%9F%E9%83%A8%E4%BB%8A%E6%97%A5%E7%99%BC%E5%B8%83%E3%80%8A2024,%E6%AF%94%E9%87%8D%E9%81%945%E6%88%90%E4%BB%A5%E4%B8%8A%E3%80%82.

which posed a barrier difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to overcome. With the rise of the digital era, communication costs and media barriers between brands and consumers have fallen sharply, opening new pathways for SMEs. According to data from Taiwan's Institute for Information Industry (III), Taiwan's online shopping market grew from NT\$134 billion in 2006 to NT\$358.3 billion in 2010, underscoring significant market potential.² Consequently, the focus of brand building has shifted from "budget size" to "product quality" and "customer relationship management." Against this backdrop, the rise of digital media, social platforms, and e-commerce has created unprecedented opportunities for SMEs: platforms such as Instagram and Shopee enable smaller firms to reach broader audiences at relatively low cost and interact directly with consumers. Nevertheless, while these tools lower the threshold for marketing, they also introduce new challenges—namely, maintaining consistent brand messaging across channels, sustaining the production of compelling content, and standing out in an increasingly saturated digital environment.

This study aims to examine the key factors that enable SMEs to effectively

² 黃哲盛, "購物網站自創品牌 PayEasy=Website Branding in Online Shopping: The Case of PayEasy," *中山管理評論* 20:1(上) 2012.03[民 101.03].

establish and manage their brands under resource constraints. The Taiwanese handmade snack brand HiWalk pursued product innovation (e.g., filled egg rolls) and effectively used the SHOPLINE e-commerce platform to establish a differentiated brand image despite limited resources. From 2023 to 2024, the brand reportedly achieved 50%–80% growth in e-commerce revenue and successfully expanded into Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Malaysia. This study seeks to help fill gaps in the academic literature on SME brand building and to offer actionable insights for both theory and practice.

Motivation

Brand building is a key strategy for enterprises to enhance competitiveness in the globalized economy. Prior literature has documented the benefits of high-quality brands (e.g., brand building helps improve firm performance), but few studies explain how to build a brand. To fill this research gap, this study aims to identify methods for brand building through case studies and to provide practical contributions.

In addition, previous branding studies are largely based on resource-rich large enterprises, whose size and resources differ substantially from those of SMEs. Consequently, when SMEs attempt to build brands, they often encounter a gap

between theory and practice and lack clear direction³.

Therefore, this study does not adopt existing theories of large enterprises. Instead, it used a case-study approach to analyze the successful development processes of resource-constrained SMEs to address the deficiencies of past research. On this basis, this study aims not only to identify key success factors but also to develop a prioritized, concrete action framework. In conclusion, this research aims to provide SMEs with a practical, sequential guide, offering a tangible contribution.

Research Purpose

This study aims to explore what exactly the key success factors are for SMEs to successfully build their brands. At the same time, the study also explores the key challenges and limitations commonly encountered in this process, in order to provide forward-looking insights for future entrepreneurs. Given the importance of the digital age, this study further focuses on how SMEs can effectively use digital media and e-commerce platforms to increase brand awareness and customer preference in a low-cost manner. Ultimately, this study provides a set of prioritized and concrete action frameworks for SMEs with limited resources.

³ 黃彥明, "中小企業品牌建立之程序與策略: 以核心競爭價? 為基礎" (撰者, 2005).

Research Question

1. What are the key factors for successful brand building in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)?
2. What are the main challenges and constraints that SMEs face during the brand-building process?
3. How can SMEs utilize digital media and social platforms to enhance their brand awareness and brand preference?
4. With limited resources, what actions should SMEs prioritize to build their brand effectively?

Contribution

This study aims to explore the key factors for SMEs to successfully build brands, and this study finds four key factors. First, product innovation: successful brands in this study develop unique and innovative products, such as "filled egg rolls" or "fast fashion co-branded models." This approach establishes distinct differentiation and creates memorable brand identities in highly competitive markets. Second clear brand positioning: by defining their brand as an "international souvenir" or "affordable light luxury," these companies used this positioning as the core foundation

to guide packaging design, pricing strategies, and marketing communications, thereby effectively enhancing product value. Third strategic offline layout: in the early stages of brand development, these brands directly engage with consumers through cost-effective methods like participating in local markets and setting up pop-up stores. This not only allows them to gauge market response but also helps build initial brand reputation and consumer trust. Fourth, an integrated digital ecosystem: successful brands focus on establishing their own official websites and membership systems. They strategically convert short-term traffic generated through social media communities or KOL collaborations into long-term customer assets, enabling continuous engagement and remarketing. For instance, QUEENSHOP's co-branded collection with Baixin effectively translates the KOL's distinctive style into its products, thereby converting fans' style identification into concrete purchasing actions.

Secondly, in view of the main challenges and limitations faced by SMEs in the brand-building process, this study summarizes three common challenges: first, resource and manpower constraints: limited advertising budgets and professional marketing manpower are the most fundamental difficulties for SMEs, which often make it difficult to scale marketing activities. Second, the slow pace of building brand

trust: especially in highly competitive industries such as food and clothing, where consumer trust requires long-term quality verification and word-of-mouth accumulation, making it difficult for new brands to establish customer loyalty in a short period of time. Third, high barriers to overseas expansion: entering foreign markets involves not only complexities in logistics and cash flow management but also the challenge of adapting to local cultures and consumption habits. Such expansion requires substantial investment, which is often prohibitive for SMEs.

Third, regarding how small and medium-sized enterprises used digital media and social platforms, research has found that effective application strategies include: first, refined multi-platform content management, where successful brands produce high-quality and differentiated graphic, audio, and video content based on the characteristics of different social platforms (such as Instagram's visual focus and Facebook's interaction focus). Second, accurate Key Opinion Leader (KOL) cooperation: the key to cooperation is not the number of fans, but whether the KOL's style is consistent with the brand's tone, as only highly compatible cooperation can effectively enhance the authenticity of marketing content. Third, the application of data-based tools involves making effective use of the built-in analysis tools of e-commerce platforms (such as SHOPLINE) to track the effectiveness of various

marketing activities and continuously optimize delivery strategies based on data feedback, thereby achieving more accurate resource allocation.

Finally, this study constructs a set of prioritized action frameworks for SMEs: the first step should start with product differentiation and low-cost offline activities (such as marketplaces) to complete the initial market validation and establish word-of-mouth; The second step is to establish its own channels that can accumulate data (such as official websites); After having a base, the third step is to strategically use the community and KOLs to attract traffic; Ultimately, the fourth step is to initiate membership operations to create buybacks, converting one-time customers into long-term assets for the brand, and forming a healthy business cycle.

Limits

This study used a case analysis method to focus on specific small and medium-sized enterprises, thus limiting the general applicability of the findings. The selected cases may be selectively biased due to industry categories and regional differences, resulting in the results not fully representing the overall SME population.

Delimits

In response to the selective bias and limited applicability of this study due to its focus on SMEs in specific regions and industries, this study expanded the scope of the study to include successful SME cases from three industries. In addition, the study also covered case studies from different social platforms and e-commerce platforms to capture the diversified brand management strategies with limited resources. To reduce the reliance on secondary sources, this study used cross-validation of multiple data sources, including public reports, media reports, and official websites, to enhance the integrity and objectivity of the data. Although this study did not include direct interviews and questionnaires, future studies suggest adding first-hand data collection methods to gain deeper first-hand insights.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resource Constraints and the Shift in SME Branding

In the traditional market, brand building was heavily dependent on capital investment, relying on mass media, such as TV, for one-way advertising. This created a high barrier to entry, putting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) at a

severe disadvantage due to resource constraints⁴. However, the digital age has shifted the focus from "budget scale" to "depth of trust"⁵. Digital tools enable brands to reach their target audiences accurately and more cost-effectively. ⁶Consequently, the key challenge for contemporary SMEs is no longer just gaining exposure but establishing two-way connections and deep trust with consumers. ⁷This context sets the stage for a new branding model where SMEs must leverage specific strategies to overcome their "liability of smallness."

Product Differentiation in Niche Markets

Despite the diversity of marketing tools, the core foundation for a brand's sustainability remains providing real "value." For SMEs, this value cannot be broad; it must be focused. Literature suggests that SMEs should not imitate market successes but discover their "core competitive value" from the inside out⁸. Specifically, a "niche

⁴ David A Aaker, *Managing brand equity* (simon and schuster, 2009).

⁵ Jennifer Rowley, "Online Information Review," *Emerald Insight logo* Volume 28, no. Issue 2 (Apr 1 2004), https://www.emerald.com/oir/issue/28/2?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

⁶ 周文卿, "2006 台灣網路購物行為分析," ITIS 智網 (July 09 2007), https://www2.itis.org.tw/NetReport_Detail.aspx?rpno=7D019360A9E991FC4825731000298BC3&utm_source.

⁷ Duncan Brown and Nick Hayes, *Influencer marketing* (Routledge, 2008).

⁸ 黃彥明, "中小企業品牌建立之程序與策略: 以核心競爭價? 為基礎."

market strategy" is crucial. As noted in studies on vertical e-commerce platforms, focusing on a specific field (women's beauty care) allows limited resources to be concentrated on a targeted customer group⁹. This aligns with the view that investing resources to enhance product value for specific segments is the primary prerequisite for brand success.¹⁰

In this study, 'Product Value' is not merely defined by quality, but by the degree of focus on a niche market. The study analyzed whether the companies succeeded by narrowing their target audience or failed by attempting to serve a broad market too early. Consequently, in the subsequent case analysis, the study used the degree of product specialization as a primary criterion to evaluate whether the SME successfully avoided direct competition with mass-market giants.

Trust Building via Intermediaries (KOLs)

In the online environment, consumers cannot physically touch products, making "trust" the most critical factor in purchasing decisions. ¹¹For new SMEs lacking

⁹ 黃哲盛, "購物網站自創品牌 PayEasy=Website Branding in Online Shopping: The Case of PayEasy."

¹⁰ 李蕙安, "女性意象與女性消費研究-以 PayEasy 電視廣告及購物網站為例," 淡江大學大眾傳播學系碩士班學位論文 (2010).

¹¹ Kevin Lane Keller, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand

brand history, building this trust from scratch is time-consuming. Collaborating with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) serves as an effective mechanism to accelerate this process. By partnering with credible experts or influencers, brands can leverage "borrowed trust"¹². The KOL acts as a trust intermediary, bridging the gap between the unknown brand and the consumer. This confirms that in the digital landscape, external endorsement is often more critical than self-proclaimed brand consistency for early-stage growth. This section establishes the framework to evaluate marketing strategies. The study analyzed the case data to determine if the brands utilized external intermediaries (KOLs) to overcome the "trust deficit," and whether the selection of these intermediaries aligned with their brand image. Therefore, this study defines 'effective trust building' not merely by the volume of exposure, but by the 'alignment' between the influencer's persona and the brand's niche products. This criterion used to assess whether the selected KOLs actually transferred trust or just provided empty traffic.

Equity," *Journal of Marketing* (Jan 1993),
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002224299305700101?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

¹² 張如嫻, "曾靠「美容教父」牛爾爆紅, 卻因紅海市場 7 年虧損...PayEasy 如何轉虧為盈? 故事要從他說起..." 今周刊 (Feb 1 2023),
https://www.businesstoday.com.tw/article/category/183016/post/202302010003/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Traffic Conversion and Data Ownership

While social media provides exposure, the ultimate goal of SME branding is "traffic conversion" and "retention." Relying solely on third-party platforms subjects brands to algorithm changes and rising costs. Literature emphasizes the importance of establishing an official website to master "data ownership".¹³ An owned platform allows brands to collect consumer behavior data, build an exclusive member database, and foster direct communication. This "private traffic" (membership) becomes a long-term asset, allowing for higher repurchase rates and reduced dependency on paid advertising.¹⁴ The study used this concept to assess the "Conversion" stage of the companies in cases. The analysis focus on whether the brands established independent channels (websites) to retain customers or remain dependent on external platforms. This study examines the case data to explore how data ownership strategies may contribute to an SME's long-term sustainability.

Gaps in Past Literature

A critical review of existing literature reveals a significant fragmentation in

¹³ Rowley, "Online Information Review."

¹⁴ 陳志勝 and 陳志勝, "女性線上購物商業模式之研究: 以 PayEasy 為例" (陳志勝, 2011).

current branding research. While past studies offer valuable insights into specific elements like social content or product value, they fail to provide a holistic, executable roadmap for SMEs.

There are two main problems in current research on brand building, which make it difficult to fully address the practical challenges faced by Taiwan's small and medium-sized enterprises. First, the contextual gap between theory and SME reality. Most classic branding theories and case studies focus on large enterprises with abundant resources (the Qiaoshan Health Technology case¹⁵). These studies often emphasize "brand benefits" or expensive mass media strategies, ignoring the severe resource constraints faced by SMEs. There is a lack of research specifically addressing how resource-poor enterprises can build brands without heavy capital investment. Second, the lack of a sequential execution process. Existing literature tends to analyze branding components in isolation, explaining *what* constitutes a good website or *how* to do advertising¹⁶—but rarely addresses the issue of prioritization. For SMEs, the main dilemma is not knowing "what is important," but "what should be done *first*." Literature fails to integrate product differentiation, trust-building, and

¹⁵洪順慶 and 吳長生, "台灣廠商自創國際品牌策略與行銷績效之關係研究," (中山管理評論, 2000).

¹⁶ 江義平 and 林志穎, "網路品牌個性對品牌權益影響效果探究," *管理學報* 27, no. 1 (2010).

traffic conversion into a step-by-step guideline that SMEs can follow sequentially.

Summary

In summary, the literature review highlights a critical shift in SME branding from resource-dependent models to trust-centric strategies. To address the identified gaps—specifically the lack of a sequential execution roadmap—this study constructs a theoretical framework based on three dimensions derived from the literature. First, Niche Focus evaluates whether the brand avoids mass competition by narrowing its target market based on Porter’s differentiation theory. Second, Trust Intermediation assesses the use of KOLs and content to overcome the online "trust deficit," drawing on the Borrowed Trust model. Finally, Data Sovereignty analyzed the transition from platform dependency to owned membership channels based on Customer Lifetime Value theory. These three dimensions serve as the primary analytical lenses for the cross-case comparison in the subsequent chapters, guiding the analysis of the strategic approaches adopted by these SMEs in response to market challenges.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study method to explore how small companies (SMEs) build successful brands despite limited resources. Instead of conducting interviews, the study used a "Comparative Approach" by selecting three pairs of companies from the same industries (HiWalk vs. NIAN JI in Food, D+AF vs. FUFA Shoes in Footwear, and QUEENSHOP vs. Forever 21 in Apparel) to identify why one succeeded while the other faced challenges. To ensure reliability, the study collected data strictly from verifiable public sources, including founder interviews in business magazines, official company websites, and customer reviews on social platforms. The analysis follows a clear three-step process: first, the study gathered all available information to build a timeline for each brand; second, the study used specific "Evaluation Criteria" derived from our literature review—focusing on whether they targeted a niche market, used influencers for trust, and owned their customer data—to filter the evidence; and finally, the study compared the pairs to pinpoint the exact strategies that led to success. This systematic process ensures that our findings are based on solid evidence rather than general assumptions. To ensure the analysis was consistent, the study categorized the brands' guiding based on

specific observable activities. When analyzing marketing approaches, the distinguished between 'Price-driven incentives' (such as direct discounts, free gifts, and shipping subsidies) and 'Trust-building content' (such as KOL endorsements, brand storytelling, and high-quality visuals). Similarly, regarding channel strategy, the differentiated between brands relying on 'Third-party Platforms' (like Shopee or momo) for traffic versus those investing in 'Proprietary Channels' (Official Website and App) to secure customer data ownership.

Sources of Data

The data was collected from online information and documents disclosed by each case brand, and it is accessible on the Internet. The company's official website, social media platforms (including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube), and e-commerce platform pages (such as Shopee) are the main sources of information, supplemented by credible news media reports, industry reports, and founder interviews. The above documents provide insights into the brand development process, operational strategy, digital marketing, membership management, and market performance of the selected cases. This study observed six Taiwanese small- and medium-sized enterprise brands across the food, footwear, and apparel industries. The

data is obtained by reviewing and cross validating the multiple secondary data sources mentioned above.

Data Collection

Qualitative Research

For the case study, we have collected the development history, brand strategy, and market performance of HiWalk, NIAN JI, D+AF Shoes, FUFA Shoes, QUEENSHOP, and Forever 21 Taiwan to explore their brand establishment and business models.

HiWalk collected information from 518 Workplace Bear News, Bear Hug Your Workplace Life, Common Wealth Magazine, HiWalk's official website, HiWalk's official Shopee store, HiWalk's Facebook, HiWalk's Instagram, NTPC eCommerce school, and Instagram account __yumi.1118, Instagram account supertastesupertaste.

NIAN JI collected information from NIAN JI's official website, NIAN JI's official Shopee store, and NIAN JI's Facebook.

D+AF collected information from D+AF official website, D+AF Instagram, Bello Store, Dcard, CIO Taiwan, D+AF YouTube, Business Today, Napoleon cat, Yahoo! Auctions, Mirror Media, MOMO Shopping, Yahoo! Shopping, and Shopee.

FUFA Shoes collected information from FUFA Shoes' official website, FUFA Shoes' Facebook, FUFA Shoes' YouTube, MOMO Shopping, Yahoo! Shopping, and Shopee.

QUEENSHOP collected information from the QUEENSHOP official website,
QUEENSHOP Instagram, the QUEENSHOP Facebook, QUEENSHOP official
Shopee store.

Forever 21 Taiwan collected information from the And ST TW official website,
Forever 21 Taiwan Instagram, and Forever 21 Taiwan Facebook.

DATA ANALYSIS

Note on Methodology: Before presenting the case analysis, it is important to note that this study relies primarily on secondary data sources. Therefore, the findings presented in the following sections should be interpreted as analytical inferences derived from the available evidence, rather than as confirmed causal relationships verified through direct experimental control. This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the research.

To ensure the analytical validity of our coding, we applied specific interpretive criteria to distinguish between similar marketing activities. For instance, when analyzing social media posts, we did not merely count the number of posts. Instead, we distinguished 'Trust-Building' from 'Sales Promotion' based on content intent: posts focusing solely on discounts, free shipping, or limited-time offers were coded as 'Sales Promotion,' whereas content featuring user stories, behind-the-scenes production processes, or objective third-party reviews (without direct purchase links) was coded as 'Trust-Building.' Similarly, for 'Data Ownership,' we differentiated between brands that merely used Facebook for communication (Platform-Dependent) and those that successfully guided users to register on an official site (Data-Autonomous). This distinction is crucial for answering our research question

regarding how SMEs accumulate long-term brand assets versus short-term sales.

Table 1 Coding framework

Theme	Theme 1: Niche Focus	Theme 2: Built Trust	Theme 3: Data Ownership
Code Definition	Targeting a specific, underserved market segment or focusing on a single "hero product" to avoid mass-market competition.	Using external experts, celebrities, or "relatable" figures to quickly build credibility for a new or small brand.	Directing traffic to self-owned channels to capture customer data, rather than relying solely on third-party platforms.
Sample Codes Indicators	Single Product Strategy Special Size Range Asian Fit / Localization	KOL / Influencer Endorsement Industry Awards (e.g., Golden Horse) YouTuber Reviews / Try-ons	Official Website Membership App Download Incentive Direct Marketing (Retargeting)

Case Study

HiWalk vs. NIAN JI

The comparison between HiWalk and NIAN JI highlights distinct approaches to brand scaling (Table 1). HiWalk adopts a systematic brand-building strategy, positioning itself as an 'international design souvenir' brand. Through product innovations like the 'filled egg roll,' HiWalk actively differentiates itself in a competitive market. Furthermore, the brand seeks to turn short-term traffic into long-term assets by integrating multi-platform content management, KOL collaborations, and a membership system. In contrast, NIAN JI maintains a relatively conservative strategy, focusing on 'local, traditional handmade egg rolls' and adhering strictly to traditional manufacturing processes. Regarding digital operations, NIAN JI relies mainly on a single platform (Facebook) and lacks the systematic membership management or cross-border planning seen in HiWalk. Overall, HiWalk represents an integrated, innovative model, whereas NIAN JI reflects a localized, production-focused approach.

Analysis of Brand Management Strategies: HiWalk vs. NIAN JI

1. E-commerce Revenue and Market Performance

In terms of e-commerce revenue growth, HiWalk demonstrated strong momentum, with revenue growing by approximately 50% to 80% between 2023 and 2024 (Figure 1). Conversely, NIAN JI has not publicly disclosed its revenue figures. Regarding sales performance on Shopee, HiWalk operates under the "Shopee Mall" model with 63,000 followers and has accumulated sales of approximately 5,000 egg rolls (Figure 4). In comparison, NIAN JI has accumulated a sales volume of approximately 2,000 units (Figure 5). This significant disparity highlights the importance of platform verification (Shopee) as a 'trust signal.' For SMEs lacking brand history, official verification reduces consumer risk perception, directly contributing to the higher conversion rates (This finding addresses RQ1 by identifying trust signals as a key success factor).

2. Brand Positioning and Pricing Strategy

The market positioning of the two brands differs significantly. HiWalk is positioned as an "international gift" brand with a higher price point, ranging from NT\$449 to NT\$620 (Figure 10). NIAN JI focuses on the local market with more accessible pricing, ranging from NT\$220 to NT\$420 (Figure 11). Regarding product technology, HiWalk developed the "Thick Egg Roll" technique (Figure 8) to reduce fragility and make the product suitable for pairing with milk (Figure 6), whereas

NIAN JI maintains traditional handmade production methods. This distinction illustrates that HiWalk's strategy relies on 'value innovation'—modifying the product to solve a consumer pain point (fragility)—rather than competing solely on the 'handmade' attribute. This aligns with RQ1, suggesting that product differentiation is essential for SMEs to escape price-based competition. Furthermore, HiWalk holds a competitive advantage in brand certification, having received the Silver Award at the 2018 Monde Selection (Figure 8), while NIAN JI has no mention of international certifications or awards.

3. Marketing Strategy and Social Media Management

HiWalk utilizes a multi-channel social media strategy to overcome the initial trust barrier common to food SMEs. As of 2024, the brand has aggregated over 100,000 followers across Facebook and Instagram. Rather than focusing solely on reach, their content strategy—characterized by high-quality close-ups and sensory-focused videography—aims to visually simulate the tasting experience, thereby reducing consumer hesitation for online purchases.

4. Data Application and Membership Management

Regarding data analytics, HiWalk utilizes the SHOPLINE analytics platform to conduct customer segmentation and targeted marketing (Figure 3). It also operates the

"HiFans Membership Program," which integrates online and offline activities with tiered rewards to encourage repurchases (Figure 2). On the other hand, NIAN JI has not implemented data-driven marketing tools, relying primarily on passive traffic and word-of-mouth. This reliance creates a vulnerability in long-term scaling, as the brand lacks direct access to customer data. In contrast, HiWalk's strategy supports the findings for RQ4, indicating that establishing data autonomy is critical for converting one-time buyers into long-term assets.

5. Product Packaging Design

HiWalk adopts a minimalist, modern packaging design with individually wrapped twin rolls, emphasizing convenience and gifting value (Figure 6). NIAN JI used traditional gift boxes without specific emphasis on individual wrapping (Figure 7). This difference further reinforces HiWalk's "souvenir" positioning compared to NIAN JI's "snack" positioning.

從實體跨足電商市場 海邊走走寫下連2年成長50%好成績

蛋捲是台灣相當常見的美食，路邊的超商超市，甚至網路上都可看到各種不同口味和品牌的產品，面對如此成熟的市場，新北市新創品牌「海邊走走」以初生之犢不畏虎的態勢積極搶進，挾手工製作、包餡、及文青風格包裝三大特色，在市場上塑造產品差異化特色，不僅成功取得台灣年輕消費者的肯定，也順利擷獲國外觀光客的心。在實體通路奠定好口碑，讓海邊走走跨足電商市場後，寫下連續兩年業績成長50-80%的好成績，目前消費者遍及香港、澳門、新加坡及馬來西亞等海內外華人地區。

Figure 1 E-commerce revenue grew by approximately 50–80% between 2023 and 2024

海粉會員制				
等級	海粉	鑽石海粉	金石海粉	鑽石海粉
資格條件	加入會員	一年消費滿9,000元	一年消費滿20,000元	一年消費滿100,000元
生日禮金	生日當天發送100元購物金（有效期間30天）			
回饋現金		1% 回饋現金	3% 回饋現金	10% 回饋現金
會員期限	永久有效	12個月	12個月	12個月

Figure 2 HiWalk Membership Program

從小小的家庭工廠起家的海邊走走，自 2014 年創立以來打拼出 8 家分店，更透過 SHOPLINE 的串接功能，將優質的產品推向線上與邁向國際。從簡易拖曳式官網製作，到客戶管理系統的串連，海邊走走透過 SHOPLINE 多元簡便的電商服務，成功從線下拓展到線上。

吸睛的官網不僅可以打響自己的品牌價值，累積新客源的速度更是傳統行銷無可比擬的。SHOPLINE 提供多語言、幣值以及匯差的轉換，國際金流、物流的串接，以及倉儲資源整合等完善服務，讓海邊走走在短短幾年便可拓展海外業務東亞，打造大東亞事業版圖，推動營收成長，大步邁向全球**跨境電商**的舞台。

SHOPLINE 助力店家開拓事業版圖已行之有年。網路無遠弗屆、人手一機的世代，曝光自有品牌變得容易；只要一個吸睛搶眼的網店，加上可以快速方便串接金、物流的後台功能，行銷品牌到全世界在彈指之間即刻完成。

Figure 3 Reasons for Choosing SHOPLINE

HiWalk’s adoption of SHOPLINE represents a strategic decision to prioritize

brand autonomy and data ownership over passive traffic acquisition. Unlike relying solely on third-party marketplaces (Shopee) where brand identity is often diluted by price-based competition, the use of a SaaS-based independent site allows HiWalk to maintain a premium 'gift brand' positioning. By leveraging SHOPLINE's cross-border infrastructure, HiWalk effectively overcame the 'resource liability' typical of SMEs, gaining enterprise-level capabilities—such as multi-currency support for Southeast Asian expansion—without the prohibitive cost of custom development. This choice demonstrates that for SMEs, the selection of an e-commerce platform is not merely technical but strategic: it enables the shift from a 'traffic-renting' model (marketplaces) to a 'customer-owning' Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) model, which is essential for long-term brand equity.

海邊走走的花生愛飽蛋捲，2018於西班牙瓦倫西亞榮獲「世界食品品質評鑑大獎」銀獎殊榮。
 本次獲得國際認可，為台灣MIT手工愛飽蛋捲揚名國際。



世界食品品質評鑑大獎源自於1961年，是個共同創立的獨立國際性組織，而每年都有來自88多國的3000種商品以上參加品質評鑒。

Figure 4 HIWALK received the Silver Award



Figure 5 HiWalk cooperates with KOL Super Taste

¹⁷ supertastesupertaste, "超夯蛋捲 #海邊走走 開冰店！," (Sep 15 2023), https://www.instagram.com/reel/CxMuB1OMsli/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

This video is a collaboration between HiWalk and the KOL Super Taste, a well-known food review program. The video has reached approximately 58,000 views, showcasing strong audience engagement. Since *Super Taste* specializes in introducing popular food brands, the collaboration aligns well with HiWalk's brand positioning and effectively enhances its visibility among target consumers.



Figure 6 HiWalk's¹⁸ and NIAN JI's¹⁹ marketing video

¹⁸ 海邊走走 HiWalk, "財蛇到！恭——迎——財蛇下凡 海邊走走 #財蛇到 2025 新年禮盒," (Nov22 2024), <https://www.facebook.com/share/r/17JzfhzCi5/?mibextid=wwXlfr>.

¹⁹ 咩記蛋捲, "#咩記陪你過中秋#中秋月圓人團圓," (Aug26 2024), <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/177WGiQ9fK/?mibextid=wwXlfr>.

Key Success Factors Identified from Comparison The comparison reveals three key success factors for HiWalk's brand building.

1. **Product Innovation:** As noted, HiWalk's 'filled egg rolls' created a unique category in a homogeneous market. This differentiation strategy allowed the brand to generate organic social media buzz, suggesting that innovation can serve as a cost-effective marketing lever (Addressing RQ1).
2. **Premium Brand Positioning:** HiWalk positions itself as a provider of 'international souvenirs' featuring 'local small farming' ingredients. This resonates with the growing trend of green lifestyles, allowing the brand to enhance perceived value.
3. **Data-Driven Marketing:** Unlike Nian Ji's reliance on third-party platforms, HiWalk directs traffic to its self-owned website (SHOPLINE) to accumulate first-party data. The manager of HiWalk noted that this 'Data Ownership' allows for precise remarketing. This data-feedback loop has reportedly driven performance growth of 10-30% during key festivals. This highlights the importance of the 'Traffic-to-Data' conversion discussed in RQ4.

科技人跨界成為蛋捲店頭家，研發首個包餡蛋捲

「我們是第一個研發出包餡蛋捲的品牌。」游盛凱驕傲地說。海邊走走掀起了包餡蛋捲風潮，隨後陸續有不少網路蛋捲品牌興起。

Figure 7 HiWalk developed a filled egg roll

第一試-黃金激厚蛋捲x牛奶



Figure 8 Thick egg roll²⁰

²⁰ 小牡蠣 Mooly, "海邊走走《肉鬆蛋捲 x 牛奶》網友超推薦的吃法，到底是什麼口感！," <https://www.hiwalk.co/pages/hiwalk-eggrollmilk?srltid=AfmBOowwywVosRqds4oT2hmhpHe9VDZ7c93M095S6J213OwUhvDiNrZ7>.

與在地小農的「有效連結」加值，成為品牌擴散加速關鍵

選定販賣充滿內餡的蛋捲為主打商品後，口味選擇也是成功品牌關鍵因素之一。因緣際會認識北港在地的花生供應商，正好符合公司講求天然食材、台灣在地的理念，將濃郁的花生餡料填滿蛋捲中，不只滿足消費者的味蕾，更滿足「海邊走走」想要扶植台灣小農的心。

在地小農的價值崛起，歸因於國人對於健康飲食的重視逐年攀升。在大超市含新鮮蔬果字眼的商品不再讓消費者感到安心，反而標榜「在地小農」的產品更讓人放心。天然、環保、愛地球等綠生活已在台掀起一陣潮流，海邊走走的品牌定位成功為自己加值。

Figure 9 HiWalk's brand position

善用數據行銷經營電商市場 打響網路品牌知名度

海邊走走行銷經理黃乙軒(Daniel)指出，自家產品與一般市面上機器蛋捲有很大差異，因此最初成立時是從實體通路先開始，希望讓消費者親自感受產品特色，沒想到很多顧客一試成主顧，紛紛詢問能否線上購買。於是在成立的第三年啟動電商經營之路，除了在Yahoo!、PChome、蝦皮等電商平台上架，也開設銷售官網，其中台灣站更深化國內市場的經營之外、港澳站用來跨境搶攻港澳客戶。

Daniel指出，由於海邊走走創辦人游盛凱非常熟悉數據行銷操作手法、也有豐富地投放廣告經驗，因此於SHOPLINE設置官網後積極應用各種數位行銷策略，如鎖定25-40歲的標記客戶投放廣告，或是針對顧客的消費行為推出專屬優惠，吸引客戶二次回購等，都讓海邊走走快速在網路上打開知名度。此外，海邊走走的商品包裝為禮盒形式且相當精緻，非常適合送禮，因此遇到像中秋節、雙11...等特殊節日，就會搭配台灣代工廠做的副食品，組合出不同形式的商品，強化消費者的購買意願。

Figure 10 HiWalk's data marketing

進軍星馬市場 針對網站與產品進行在地化

在台灣站與港澳站寫下好成績後，海邊走走決心擴大腳步，接開店平台設立星馬站，面向新加坡與馬來西亞的消費市場。Daniel表示，雖然新、馬與台灣一樣都訴求華人市場，但文化和語言仍有著極大差異，因此必須進行在地化設計。

以網站設計來說，內容以英文呈現之外，考量到星馬地區有許多不吃豬肉的回教徒，海邊走走也設計特別圖示，讓顧客第一眼就能辨別該產品沒有豬肉成份。產品設計方面，由於星馬地區的品牌知名度不若台灣港澳那麼高，因此海邊走走特別設計客製化套餐組合，結合多種口味在同一個禮盒中，讓當地民眾能夠更快找出符合自身口味的商品。在行銷上，除了結合數據分析投放廣告，也會直接進行導購連結，當客戶透過導購連結購買商品時，海邊走走就會根據客戶留下的資料進行分析，做為下一步廣告投放策略的參考依據。「目前星馬站主要在重要節日投放廣告，每一次投放都會帶動業績成長10~30%的成長。」Daniel說。

Figure 11 HiWalk data border marketing

Strategic Response to SME Challenges The study finds that HiWalk faces three primary challenges common to SMEs: Resource Scarcity, Market Saturation (Trust Latency), and Operational Risks in Expansion. To overcome these, HiWalk executes a

'Content-to-Commerce' strategy. Instead of generic advertising, the brand utilizes precise KOL collaborations to build 'Visual Trust' (see Figure 13). By selecting influencers whose image aligns with the brand's positioning, HiWalk leverages 'trust transfer' to enhance credibility. Furthermore, the brand effectively employs a 'Traffic Funneling' strategy. Social media platforms serve as entry points that systematically guide traffic to the official website. This integration ensures that social engagement is converted into owned member data, reinforcing the OMO (Online-Merge-Offline) loop. These strategies directly address RQ3 regarding the effective use of digital tools under resource constraints.



Figure 12 Various digital platform pages for HiWalk



Figure 13 Cooperate with KOL²¹

With the limited resources, strategically utilized pop-up markets as an initial entry point, and a crowded location could be selected for the market. A strategic offline layout is a shortcut to building trust and reputation early on. In the early stages of "HiWalk", by setting up stalls in venues that matched the brand tone, such as "Eslite Songyan" and Hong Kong markets, it not only effectively verified the market but also received spontaneous community sharing from celebrities due to the unique

²¹ __yumi.1118, " 中秋節沒人陪～ 有我來陪你 " (0819 2024), https://www.instagram.com/p/C-2JD6BS_c4/?img_index=2&igsh=MTlhNmdpeW1ucTMxdQ%3D%3D%22&.

products, bringing unexpected word-of-mouth effects. HiWalk's experience shows that participating in markets not only allows for direct product sales but can also generate free promotional exposure. For example, during the 2015 Pinkoi Good Goods Market in Hong Kong, the brand's unique and design-oriented products caught the attention of Wyman Wong, a well-known Hong Kong lyricist, who voluntarily shared HiWalk on Instagram.²² (Figure 14).

Such "free influencer promotion" was not the result of a paid collaboration but rather stemmed from the on-site atmosphere and product distinctiveness, which naturally encouraged influential consumers to share their experiences—creating unexpected yet powerful marketing effects.

Founder Yu Sheng-Kai has repeatedly emphasized in interviews that his criteria for choosing market or store locations are not based solely on foot traffic. Instead, he first uses markets to test consumer reactions, then gradually expands into venues that align with the brand's positioning. (Figure 15)

During the early stage of entrepreneurship, he compared sales performances across various markets in Taiwan and, after confirming the product's popularity,

²² 王珣瑄, "香港人搶到手軟的台灣蛋捲 海邊走走如何賣到破億?," 文 趙曼汝 天下雜誌 642 期 (0130 2018), <https://www.cw.com.tw/article/5087946>.

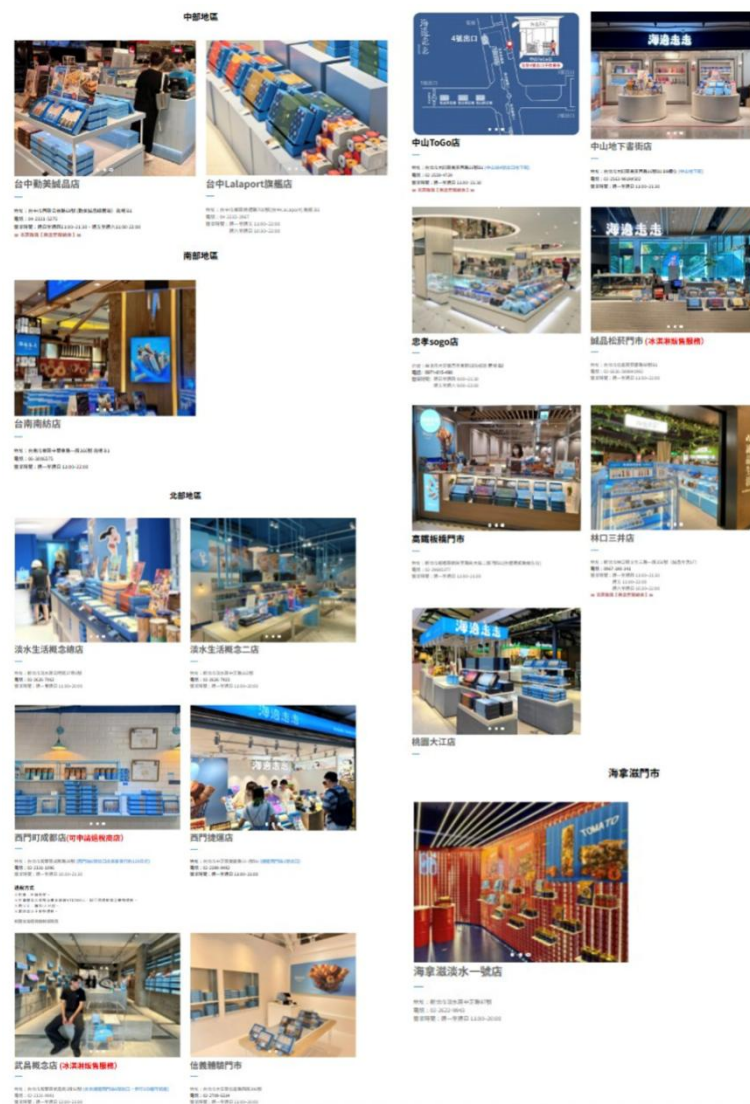
opened a store in Eslite Songyan Cultural and Creative Park in 2014. The area's cultural atmosphere and tourist presence helped shape the brand's image. In 2015, he participated in the Pinkoi Good Goods Market in Hong Kong, where the design-oriented audience resonated with HiWalk's brand concept — the brand sold 200–300 boxes within just 30 minutes. Later, HiWalk selected high-traffic tourist areas such as Ximending and offered tax refund services to cater to international visitors.

These location strategies reflect the brand's core positioning philosophy: HiWalk's goal is not merely to sell traditional snacks but to elevate egg rolls into creative, design-oriented gifts. Therefore, whether in packaging design, retail space layout, or market selection, the brand consistently reinforces its identity centered on “gifting” and “cultural creativity.” In the case of limited resources, HiWalk first identified low-cost e-commerce platforms with data capabilities (such as SHOPLINE) as the core, which can not only reduce product development costs but also maintain brand independence.



Figure 14 Free publicity by well-known lyricists in Hong Kong²³

²³ concertyy, "Update 一下所有從台灣回港並打算帶伴手禮給我的好友們：「洪 X 珍」已是前度，我的現任最愛是「海邊 XX」！?," (May 27 2015), <https://www.instagram.com/p/3K3CFcLnVi/?igsh=MTlmeGpvaTR1aDlpNg%3D%3D>.



Summary

The success of HiWalk can be attributed to three strategic pillars. First, through product innovations such as "filled" and "thick" egg rolls, it established a unique point of differentiation. Second, with precise positioning as an "international souvenir," it

successfully enhanced brand value. Third, it utilizes its official website for data-driven marketing, converting customers into loyal members.

In conclusion, the comparison between HiWalk and NIAN JI suggests that for resource-constrained SMEs, product innovation can serve as a substitute for large advertising budgets. While NIAN JI relied on traditional flavors, HiWalk's 'filled egg roll' generated organic traffic. Furthermore, this case supports the argument that data ownership distinguishes a local store from an international brand. HiWalk's early investment in its own e-commerce site allowed it to accumulate customer data and scale overseas, whereas NIAN JI's reliance on third-party platforms limited its reach. This indicates that 'owning the channel' appears to be a critical factor for SME scaling.

D+AF Shoes VS FUFA Shoes

Comparative Strategic Framework This section establishes a comparative framework focusing on channel construction, brand narrative, and membership management to highlight the fundamental strategic divergence between D+AF and FUFA Shoes (see Table 2). D+AF represents a "Data-Driven Branding" model, prioritizing aesthetic consistency and member retention. In contrast, FUFA Shoes

represents a "Product-Centric Manufacturing" model, emphasizing functional durability and cost-performance.

1. Brand Positioning and Product Strategy

Divergence in Value Proposition: D+AF positions itself on "Design Aesthetics and Everyday Wear," targeting young women who value visual style (Figure 16). The brand supports this through a high-turnover product strategy, frequently launching new styles and cross-industry collaborations. Conversely, FUFA Shoes positions itself on "Price and Practicality," emphasizing the durability of "Hand-stitched construction" (Figure 18) and utilizing a "Made in Taiwan" (MIT) narrative. **Strategic Implication:** This distinction illustrates two different paths for SMEs. D+AF's strategy relies on "Visual Differentiation" to create a premium feel, whereas FUFA competes on "Functional Value." This finding addresses RQ1, suggesting that while functional value (durability) appeals to pragmatic segments, aesthetic differentiation allows for higher brand affinity in the fashion sector.

2. Data Application and Membership Systems

From Traffic to Retention: A critical divergence appears in customer management. D+AF implements a "Multiple Welcome Rewards" strategy (Figure 19) and utilizes "3D Foot Scanning" (Figure 20) to collect precise physiological data. This

allows for personalized size recommendations, reducing return rates. Furthermore, D+AF employs a tiered membership system (Silver, Gold, Black) to create switching costs. Contrast with FUFA: In contrast, FUFA primarily relies on direct discounts and standard point accumulation without deep behavioral data integration. This limitation restricts FUFA's ability to conduct precision remarketing. This comparison supports RQ4, demonstrating that "Data Ownership" (via 3D scanning and tiered memberships) is the key mechanism for transforming one-time transactions into long-term customer lifecycle management.

3. Influencer Marketing: The 'Pyramid Influence Strategy'

D+AF executes a sophisticated 'Pyramid Influence Strategy' that contrasts sharply with FUFA's 'Founder-led Trust Model.'

- **Apex (Brand Equity):** D+AF leverages the 'Fan Economy' by appointing international celebrities—such as Song Ji-a and (G)I-DLE's Shuhua—as ambassadors. Strategies like offering "limited edition photocards" transform fandom enthusiasm into direct purchasing power.
- **Mid-Tier (Conversion):** The brand collaborates with high-conversion KOLs (e.g., Alisasa) to launch co-branded collections. Unlike simple endorsements,

these collaborations involve product co-creation, effectively turning social buzz into website traffic.

- **Base (Social Proof):** D+AF actively manages Facebook and Instagram to build a "Lifestyle Brand" image through fashion outfits (OOTD) and "Instagrammable" store designs that encourage User-Generated Content (UGC). Analytical Inference: While FUFA's founder-led livestreams build trust through transparency (Figure 17), D+AF's model constructs an aspirational lifestyle. This addresses RQ3 regarding resource allocation, suggesting that creating a multi-tiered influencer ecosystem is more effective for scaling brand awareness than relying on a single persona.

4. Overseas Expansion Models

D+AF has successfully expanded into 33 countries through a centralized cross-border e-commerce model, supported by a specialized "Overseas Member Order Process" on its official website (Figure 22). This allows the brand to retain control over customer data and pricing globally. In contrast, FUFA primarily operates through local wholesale and distribution partners in Southeast Asia. This highlights a trade-off: while distribution (FUFA) offers lower initial risk, the direct-to-consumer

model (D+AF) ensures data autonomy and brand consistency, which are crucial for long-term equity (Relating to RQ4).



Figure 16 D+AF is positioned as “Design Style and Everyday Wear”

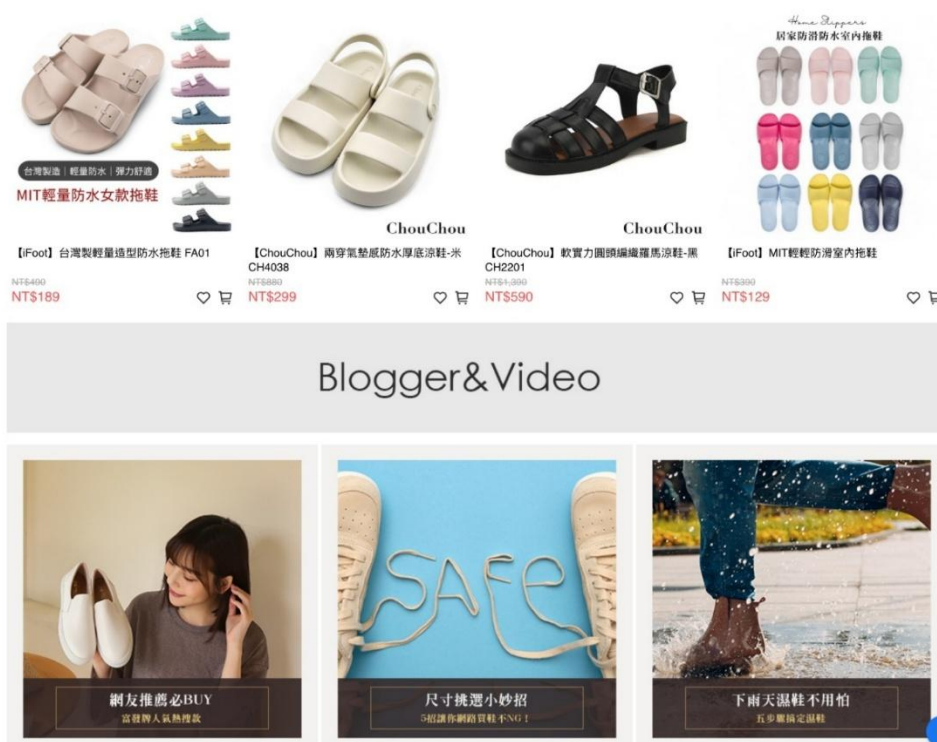


Figure 17 FUFA Shoes is positioned as “price and practicality”

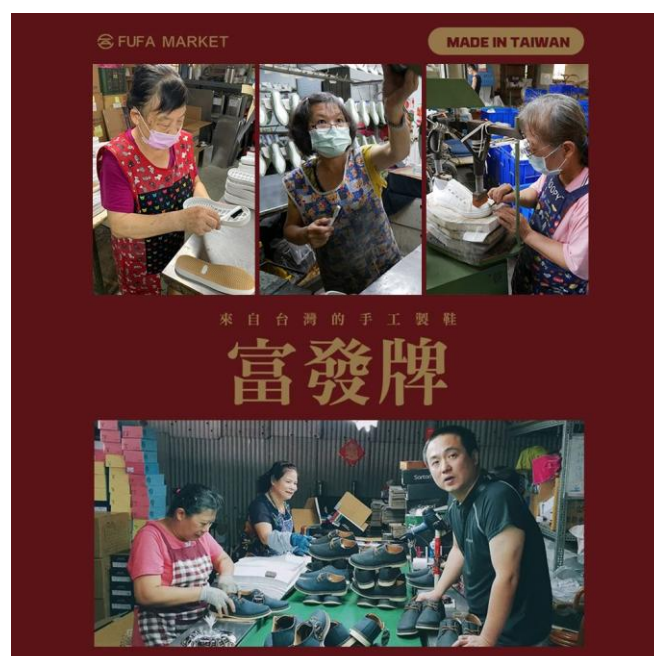


Figure 18 FUFA Shoes are hand-stitched²⁴

關於VIP

如何成為SILVER銀卡/GOLD金卡/BLACK黑卡會員

會員等級	WHITE 一般會員	SILVER 銀卡會員	GOLD 金卡會員	BLACK 黑卡會員
會員資格	免費註冊	一年內 累計消費 滿2,000元	一年內 累計消費 滿5,000元	一年內 累計消費 滿15,000元
D幣 回饋優惠	完成首次消費 送10,000D幣	消費即享 D幣2倍回饋	消費即享 D幣5倍回饋	消費即享 D幣10倍回饋
D幣 折抵上限	訂單金額 30%	訂單金額 30%	訂單金額 30%	訂單金額 50%
生日禮	-	500元 折價券乙張	500元 折價券乙張	500元 折價券兩張
免運門檻 (台灣本島)	599元	500元	500元	500元
來店禮	-	-	不定期發放	不定期發放

Figure 19 Membership System



Figure 20 D+AF develops a 3D foot scanning service.²⁵

²⁴ 富發牌 "來自 #台灣的手工製鞋，你體驗過了嗎？楠哥哥用行動支持台灣??，邀您一起一同支持！," (Oct 15 2021), <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1G5d76xdvh/>.

²⁵ POPDAILY, "信義區美拍地標再+1「全台最美鞋店-D+AF 信義門市」仲夏絕美登場！," 波波異想假期 (June 24 2022), <https://www.popdaily.com.tw/press/1294936>.



Figure 21 Influencer Marketing Model

海外會員訂購流程

• 加入D+AF會員

點選右上角【MyAccount / 加入D+AF會員】填寫基本資料並送出資料，即可成為會員。



• 快速登入註冊會員

使用FACEBOOK或是LINE帳號登入，系統將自動將您加入會員。



• 第一次購物

您可將商品直接加入購物車，完成訂購後，系統將自動將您升級為會員。



Figure 22 D+AF Overseas Member Order Process²⁶

²⁶ D+AF, "海外會員訂購_Overseas Shopping," <https://www.daf->

Deep Dive: D+AF's Strategic Pillars

Based on the analysis, this study identifies three strategic pillars that explain D+AF's market leadership:

1. Visual Operationalization of Positioning:

D+AF translates abstract concepts like "effortless beauty" into concrete visual cues. By focusing on "visual proof"—such as before-and-after leg proportion comparisons (Figure 24)—the brand effectively triggers purchase motivation. This strategy is further extended offline through OMO (Online-Merge-Offline) stores, which are designed specifically for social sharing (Figure 29).

2. Data-Centric Retention :

Unlike competitors focusing on price wars, D+AF employs a gamified membership structure to build an "exit barrier." By leveraging first-party data for precision remarketing via App push notifications, D+AF reduces reliance on paid external traffic. Financial reports indicating revenue growth from NT\$500 million (2020) to an estimated NT\$700 million (2022) suggest that this integration of visual differentiation and data ownership significantly contributes to operational efficiency.

3. Traffic Consolidation Strategy:

D+AF demonstrates a clear "Traffic Renting to Owning" roadmap.

Phase 1 (Acquisition): Initially utilizing high-traffic platforms (Yahoo Auctions) to capture volume.

Phase 2 (Migration): Strategically guiding this traffic to a proprietary official website using "new member gifts" as incentives.

Phase 3 (Activation): Using the accumulated member list to drive sales during key festivals (e.g., Double 11) via low-cost email/App notifications (Figure 35).

This roadmap provides a practical answer to RQ4 for SMEs: the priority is to use platforms for awareness, but ultimately migrate customers to owned channels.

D+AF女鞋品牌介紹 | 韓系時尚舒適女鞋推薦

D+AF 以韓系時尚為靈感，將舒適與設計融入每雙鞋。從樂福鞋、瑪莉珍鞋到瘦瘦靴與休閒鞋，提供 34~44 全尺碼，照顧不同需求。MIT 國民鞋系列更結合在地工藝與流行設計，成為台灣女孩最信賴的女鞋推薦品牌。穿上 D+AF，美得毫不費力！好穿，一直穿！

Figure 23 Brand Positioning — “Comfort + Aesthetics”

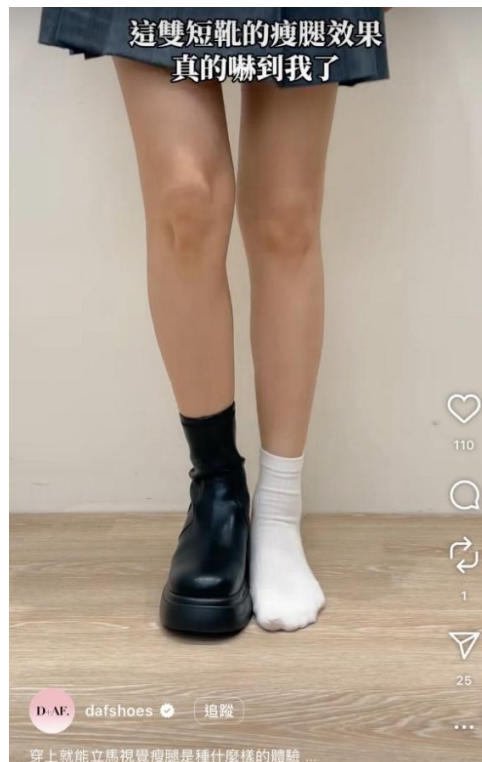


Figure 24 Comparison of D+AF Height-Increasing Boots²⁷



Figure 25 FUFA Shoes Visual Strategy

²⁷ dafshoes, "穿上就能立馬視覺瘦腿是種什麼樣的體驗 就靠這雙厲害的短靴?美腿濾鏡," (Sep 11 2025), https://www.instagram.com/reel/DOdT5zJEzbn/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.



Figure 26 “Weekly New Arrivals” and “Core Items in Multiple Colors



關於VIP

如何成為SILVER銀卡/GOLD金卡/BLACK黑卡會員

會員等級	WHITE 一般會員	SILVER 銀卡會員	GOLD 金卡會員	BLACK 黑卡會員
會員資格	免費註冊	一年內 累計消費 滿2,000元	一年內 累計消費 滿5,000元	一年內 累計消費 滿15,000元
D幣 回饋優惠	完成首次消費 送10,000D幣	消費即享 D幣2倍回饋	消費即享 D幣5倍回饋	消費即享 D幣10倍回饋
D幣 折抵上限	訂單金額 30%	訂單金額 30%	訂單金額 30%	訂單金額 50%
生日禮	-	500元 折價券乙張	500元 折價券乙張	500元 折價券兩張
免運門檻 (台灣本島)	599元	500元	500元	500元
來店禮	-	-	不定期發放	不定期發放

Figure 27 Membership System

The study identifies primary challenges faced by D+AF during its brand-

building process. The first challenge is Resource Scarcity. The brand initially operated with minimal manpower and limited capital. This constraint (addressing RQ2) forced the brand to differentiate through strict 'design aesthetics' rather than engaging in volume-based price competition. Facing a market saturated with homogeneous, easy-to-imitate products (Figure 28), D+AF had to establish a unique visual style to secure a market foothold.

The second challenge is the High Barrier to Digital Transformation. To differentiate itself from generic marketplace sellers (Figure 29), D+AF required significant capital and time to construct a proprietary official website and implement data systems. Furthermore, the strategic move to establish physical stores—essential for solving the 'fitting' pain point in the footwear industry—imposed substantial financial pressure, illustrating the high threshold for SMEs attempting OMO (Online-Merge-Offline) integration.

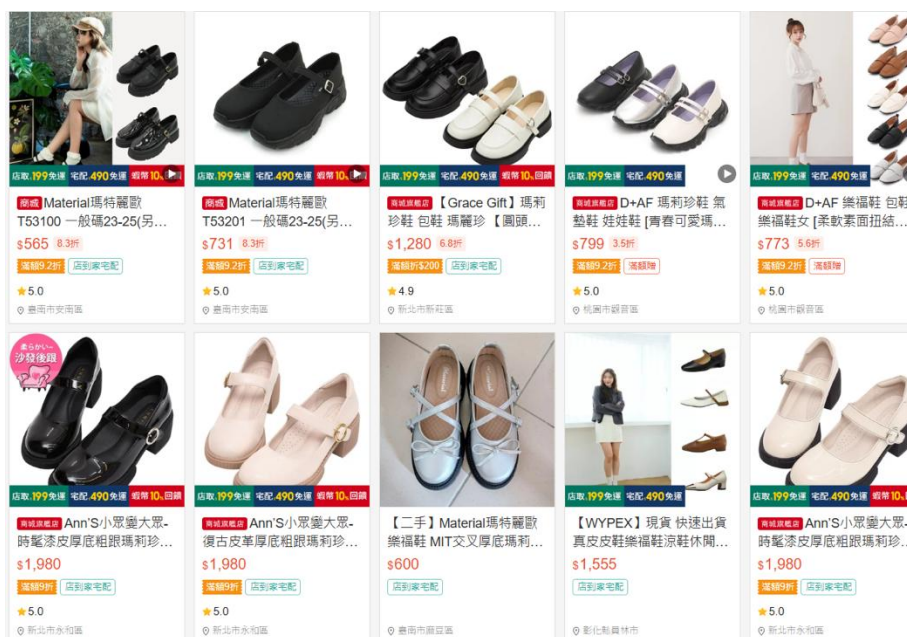


Figure 28 The high degree of market homogeneity





Figure 29 In-store Experience & Virtual Shopping

To address dynamic market trends, D+AF employs a multi-layered strategic framework focusing on 'Data Ownership' and 'Tiered Influence.'

First, regarding channel evolution: D+AF demonstrates a strategic transition from 'traffic renting' to 'traffic owning.' Initially leveraging high-traffic third-party auction platforms for rapid customer acquisition, the brand systematically migrated this audience to its proprietary official website. This pivot was critical for establishing a member database, allowing the brand to shift from a transaction-based model to a retention-focused CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system.

Second, regarding its promotional ecosystem: The brand executes a 'Pyramid Influence Strategy' to counter advertising fatigue. At the foundational level, D+AF incentivizes KOCs (Key Opinion Consumers) to generate User-Generated Content

(UGC), providing authentic social proof. In the mid-tier, collaborations with high-conversion KOLs utilize 'co-branded collections' to drive Average Order Value (AOV) through exclusive bundling. At the apex, partnerships with international celebrities leverage the 'Fan Economy,' using collectible incentives (limited photocards) to elevate brand equity and expand market reach.

Finally, regarding platform precision, D+AF achieves 'Channel-Market Fit' by concentrating resources on Instagram, whose demographics closely align with the brand's young, trend-conscious target audience. This contrasts with competitors who rely on broader but less targeted platforms (Facebook). By integrating this channel strategy with cross-category partnerships (offering 'one-stop' styling solutions for weddings), D+AF effectively shortens the consumer path-to-purchase and optimizes conversion efficiency.



Figure 30 D+AF X Dora Shoes Clearance Sale²⁸



Figure 31 'D+AF GIRL' outfit submission contest

²⁸ D+AF, "D+AF x 嗶鞋朵拉 2012-2013 出清特賣會," (Mar 8 2013), <https://www.facebook.com/share/1aPakX7XHs/>.

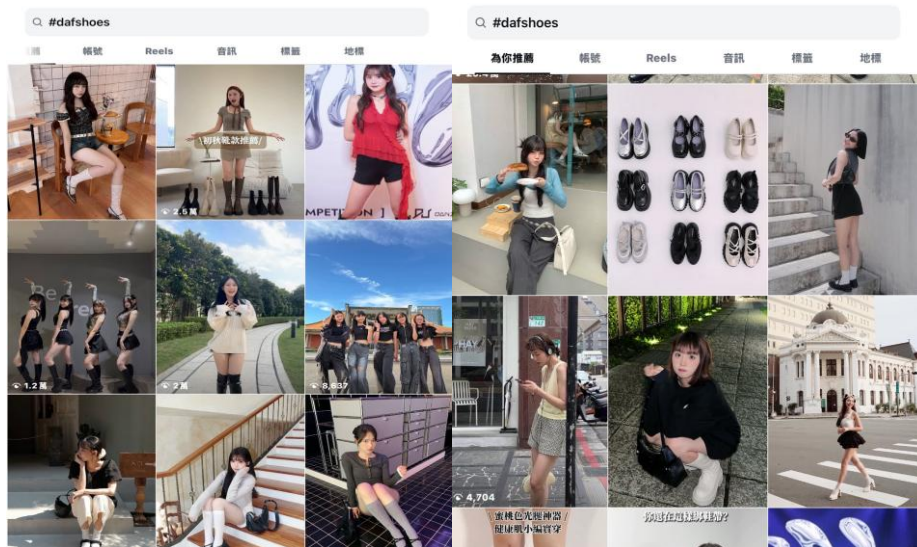


Figure 32 #dafshoes outfit photos shared by KOCs



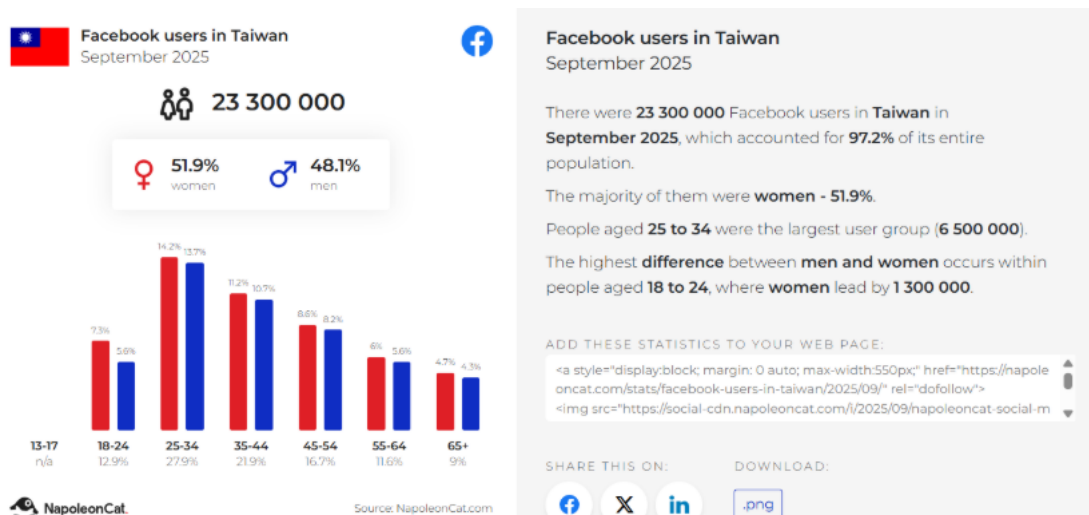


Figure 33 Instagram and Facebook age demographics and usage frequency.

In the case of limited resources, D+AF's approach provides a set of easy-to-execute priorities: first, establish the brand's core messaging (e.g., "Beautiful is effortless") and ensure that consistent tone and voice are used across its official website, social media posts, product pages, and even in-store marketing materials (Figure 34). This high degree of "brand consistency" significantly reduces the consumer's memory cost, quickly establishing a clear and memorable brand identity.²⁹ Secondly, in its "traffic consolidation" strategy, D+AF demonstrates a clear two-phase approach. The starting point of this approach is in the brand's initial "customer acquisition" phase: D+AF strategically chose to sell products on the high-traffic

²⁹ Kevin Lane Keller, "Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity," *Journal of marketing* 57, no. 1 (1993).

Yahoo Auctions platform³⁰ and held a joint auction promotion³¹ to efficiently capture the platform's traffic and exposure, attracting its first wave of potential customers. Subsequently, D+AF recognized that customer loyalty on the platform was difficult to maintain and strategically guided this accumulated traffic to its newly established "lightweight official website."³² The core functions of this website are "member registration," "collecting Email/LINE," and "easy checkout." D+AF directs all channel traffic back to this "Private Traffic" official website and uses "new member initiation gifts" or "points" as key incentives to motivate consumers to complete their registration, achieving the benefit of "turning every touchpoint into a list." This list is the brand's most important asset, allowing D+AF to re-engage customers in the future at an extremely low cost (e.g., via email)³³. Next, in content production, D+AF adopts a "streamlining" strategy. The team selects an easy-to-remember "named hero product" (e.g., "Proportion-Perfect Boots"), consistently

³⁰ 簡鈺璇, "同樣賣女鞋, 台灣電商 D+AF 靠什麼做到年收 5 億、會員數破百萬? 老闆親揭背後的行銷思維," 經理人 (Apr 22 2021), <https://www.managertoday.com.tw/articles/view/62757>.

³¹ D+AF, "D+AF x 嗑鞋朵拉 2012-2013 出清特賣會."

³² 王筱君, "台灣名店】8 千元創業拚出 5 億年收 1 秒賣 1 雙電商女鞋搶攻實體店 朵芙時尚國際專訪," 鏡周刊 (0218 2022), https://www.mirrormedia.mg/story/20220207bus001?utm_source.

³³ D+AF, "VIP 專屬好康來敲門! 記得打開信箱、LINE、APP 推播 收信啦?," (Feb 20 2025), <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17JeCbQJCn/>.

produces weekly outfit posts (graphics and text) and short videos in a consistent style, and ensures all posts link back to the official website's product page. This approach not only improves internal efficiency through "standardization" but also, through "content consistently driving traffic," continuously accumulates potential customer leads daily. Finally, the effectiveness of this approach is reflected in its healthy sales rhythm. D+AF no longer bets its performance on the success or failure of a single livestream event; instead, it has formed a model of "daily accumulation and scheduled amplification" (Figure 35). When encountering major promotional periods like 618³⁴ or Double 11, D+AF can centrally "awaken" the large volume of members accumulated on its official website, executing a highly efficient and low-cost mass conversion to achieve steady performance growth.



³⁴ D+AF, "D+AF 618 夏日購物節 折扣碼大放送！," https://www.daf-shoes.com/product/pageSet/1955?srltid=AfmBOopnMG597onOrbL1gzoVxO1r-j604Kmia-GSiPc2agJjnSDMM87&utm_source.

Figure 34 The slogan on the ‘Song Ji-a Brand Ambassador’ page is: ‘Wear D+AF—
beautiful without effort.’³⁵



Figure 35 Seasonal campaign discounts to re-engage members and boost sales

Summary

This study uses D+AF as a case study to delve into the key factors for SMEs to build successful brands, the challenges they face, and the priority strategies under limited resources. The key to success lies in integrating three major factors: First, establishing a clear and perceptible brand positioning, such as D+AF condensing its

³⁵ D+AF, "D+AF X freezia 2023 品牌代言人 宋智雅," https://www.daf-shoes.com/product/pageSet/3134?srsltid=AfmBOoozV-IEH_ayOcMvIOVxVUPf2aVmTV0KOteNY-hPot1x7f_0sf_1&utm_source=chatgpt.com.

core value into "effortlessly beautiful" and ensuring its consistency across all channels; second, this positioning needs to be realized through a tightly integrated product strategy. The brand not only maintains freshness with "weekly new arrivals" but, more critically, differentiates itself through the product itself: D+AF offers "multi-color extensions" for popular best-sellers and provides a wide range of sizes from "EU 34 to 43" to satisfy diverse customer needs, transforming the brand promise into a tangible benefit consumers can perceive; finally, and most critically, the brand must be dedicated to funneling marketing traffic to its official website, converting it into its own member data, and establishing a business model that encourages customer return. However, D+AF faces severe challenges in brand building: intense homogeneous competition stemming from resource scarcity, high digital transformation costs (such as building an official website and OMO physical stores), and shifting marketing trends driven by consumer fatigue with traditional advertising.

To address these challenges and enhance brand preference, D+AF showcases a multi-layered digital media strategy. In customer acquisition, the brand initially used high-traffic platforms like Yahoo Auctions to acquire new customers, then strategically funneled this traffic to its own official website to build a member database. In influencer marketing, D+AF adopted a complete "KOL pyramid": top-

tier ambassadors (like Shuhua) used "limited photocards" to convert the fan economy, mid-tier KOLs (like Alisasa) used "exclusive gifts" to increase average order value (AOV), and base-tier KOCs are used to acquire authentic word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the brand also expands its scenario-based customer segments through "cross-category collaborations" with brands like WAVE SHINE and flexibly uses "livestream + flash sale" tactics to create FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and stimulate sales.

For resource-limited SMEs, D+AF's model provides a clear set of priorities: First, establish brand identity and core products; second, use large-scale traffic platforms to acquire initial traffic and immediately funnel it to their own official website; next, use incentives like "new member gifts" to convert anonymous traffic into first-party data (a member list) that can be managed long-term; finally, establish a customer retention mechanism such as a "points or VIP system." This strategy, focused on converting traffic into owned assets and encouraging repeat purchases, appeared to be the most effective path for SMEs to achieve steady growth (such as D+AF's NT\$700 million annual revenue). This prioritized roadmap provides a comprehensive answer to RQ4 regarding the optimal sequence of actions for resource-constrained enterprises. This case study utilizes D+AF to explore the optimal

growth path for SMEs under resource constraints. The analysis reveals that success relies on integrating three factors: Clear Visual Positioning, Product Variety as Content, and Data Ownership. While FUFA Shoes demonstrates the viability of a product-focused, pragmatic approach, D+AF's model illustrates the scalability of a brand-focused approach. The brand's ability to convert "Social Traffic" (from influencers like Shuhua) into "Owned Data" (Membership IDs) appears to be the decisive factor in its rapid revenue growth. In conclusion, the comparison explicitly answers RQ4: For SMEs, building an independent traffic pool (official site/App) is not merely a technical choice but a strategic imperative. It insulates the brand from platform algorithm changes and allows for the Customer Lifecycle Management necessary for long-term survival.

QUEENSHOP VS Forever 21 Taiwan

This section presents a comparative analysis between QUEENSHOP (an SME) and Forever 21 Taiwan (a global giant) to examine the effectiveness of "Localization" strategies against "Global Standardization." As shown in Table 3, QUEENSHOP adopts a "Taiwan Original" strategy, focusing on Asian fit and affordable fashion. In contrast, Forever 21 operated on a "Global Fast Fashion" model, applying

standardized styles without significant local adaptation.

1. Brand Positioning: Localization as a Defensive Moat

Divergence: QUEENSHOP actively positions itself as "Taiwan Original," specifically designing apparel for Asian body shapes (e.g., modifying sleeve lengths and waistlines). Forever 21, conversely, imposed standardized global styles (US/Euro fit), which often presented sizing discrepancies for local consumers. Strategic

Implication: This comparison highlights the critical advantage of 'Localization' for SMEs. While global giants rely on economies of scale, they often lack flexibility. This finding addresses RQ1, suggesting that focusing on 'local relevance' (e.g., specific fits, local trends) acts as a powerful defensive strategy for SMEs to neutralize the scale advantage of international competitors.

2. Digital Marketing and Channel Autonomy

Platform Strategy: QUEENSHOP operates a proprietary official website and mobile app with a clean, user-centric interface (Figure 39). This allows for direct membership management and data collection. In contrast, Forever 21's operations in Taiwan (prior to exit) lacked a dedicated localized digital ecosystem, relying mainly on third-party platforms and lacking a clear categorization system (Figure 40). Data

Implication: The lack of a localized membership system prevented Forever 21 from

accumulating high-quality user data in Taiwan. This contrast supports RQ4, indicating that owning the digital channel (App/Web) is essential for sustaining long-term customer relationships, whereas reliance on global or third-party infrastructure limits local retention.

3. Social Media Influence and Engagement

Interaction Model: QUEENSHOP utilizes highly interactive tools such as live streaming, short videos, and outfit competitions to maintain high engagement. As of 2025, the brand has approximately 970k followers on Facebook and 298k on Instagram (Figure 37). The content is tailored to local festivals and weather, strengthening consumer resonance. Conversely, Forever 21 Taiwan's social media management was largely one-way and promotion-oriented, failing to build a community connection (Figure 38). Trust Building: This difference addresses RQ2 regarding trust-building. QUEENSHOP's interactive approach fosters a sense of community, whereas Forever 21's transactional approach failed to build brand loyalty in a competitive market.

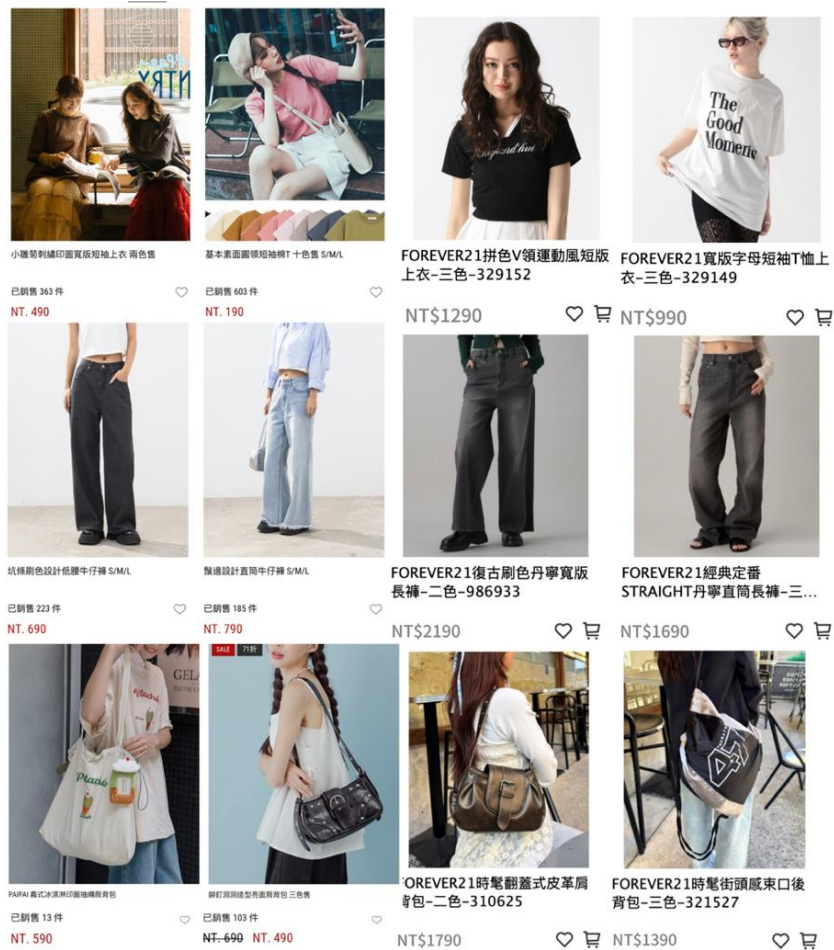


Figure 36 QUEENSHOP vs. Forever 21 Taiwan Price difference

Table 2 QUEENSHOP vs. Forever 21 Taiwan Price difference

QUEENSHOP	Forever 21 Taiwan
TOP : NT\$190 ~ NT\$490	TOP : NT\$990 ~ NT\$1290
BOTTOMS : NT\$690 ~ NT\$790	BOTTOMS : NT\$1690 ~ NT\$2190
Accessories : NT\$490 ~ NT\$ 590	Accessories : NT\$ 1390 ~ NT\$ 1790

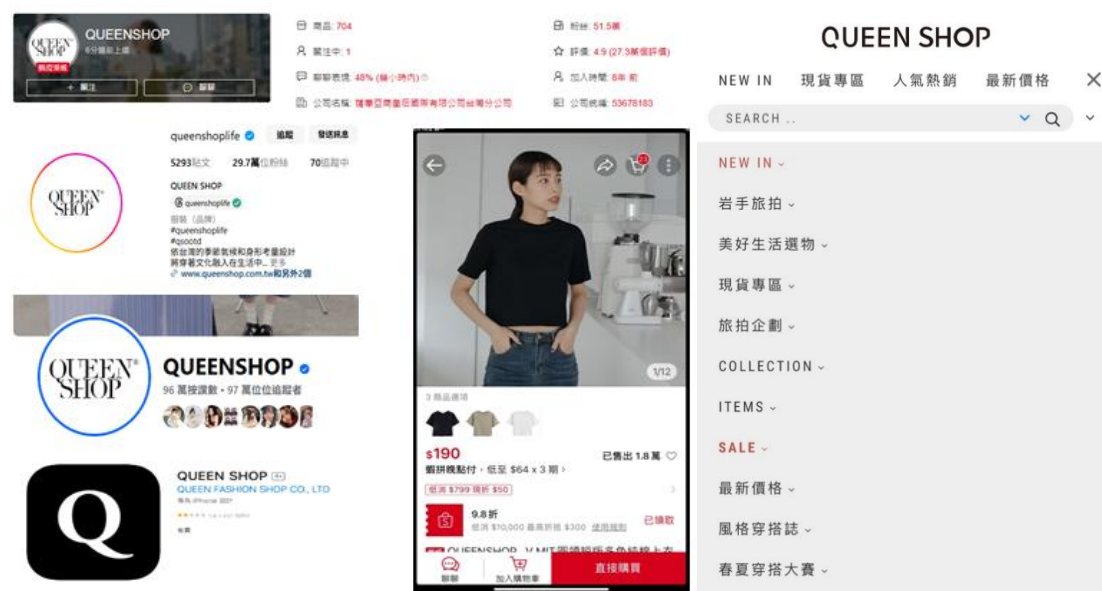


Figure 37 QUEENSHOP has its own website and app; is active on social media; and also operates an official Taobao store.

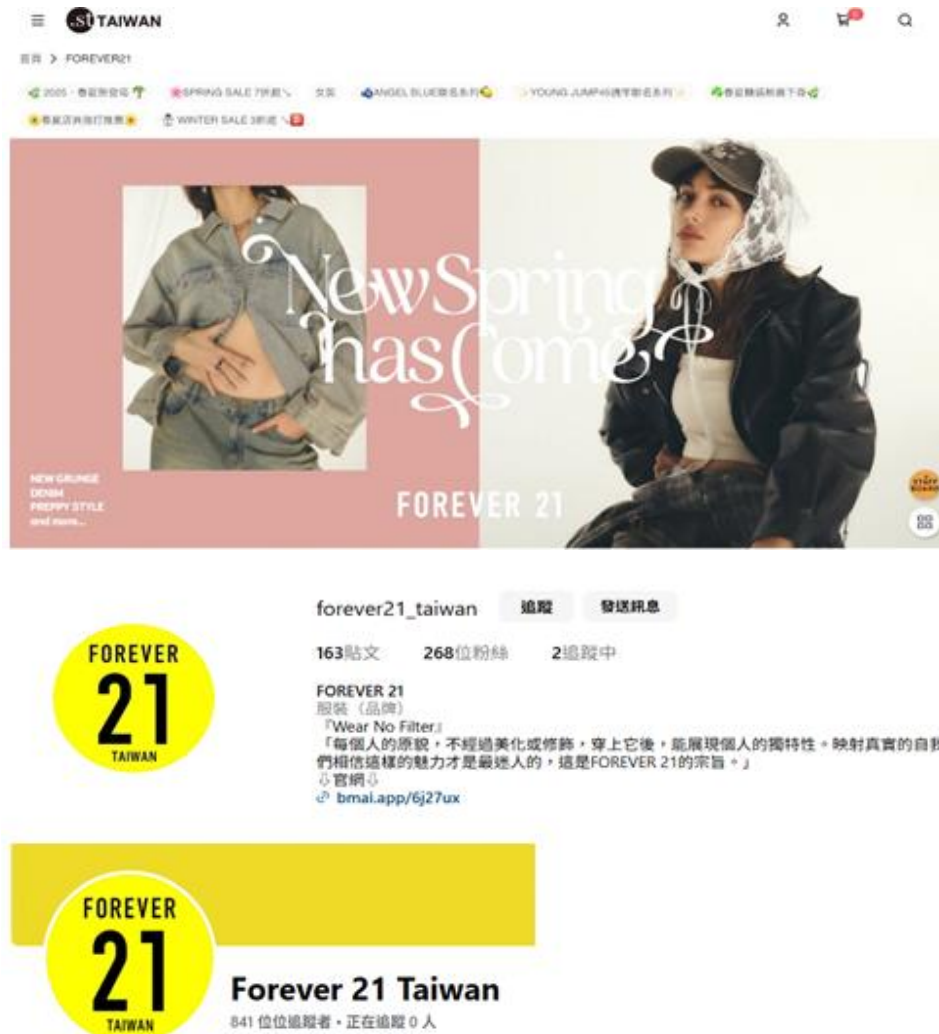


Figure 38 Forever 21 Taiwan lacks a dedicated local website, relies on the third-party platform and ST TAIWAN, and is not active on social media.



Figure 39 The QUEENSHOP's official website has a clear layout and subdivides

various styles, making it easy for customers to meet their style needs

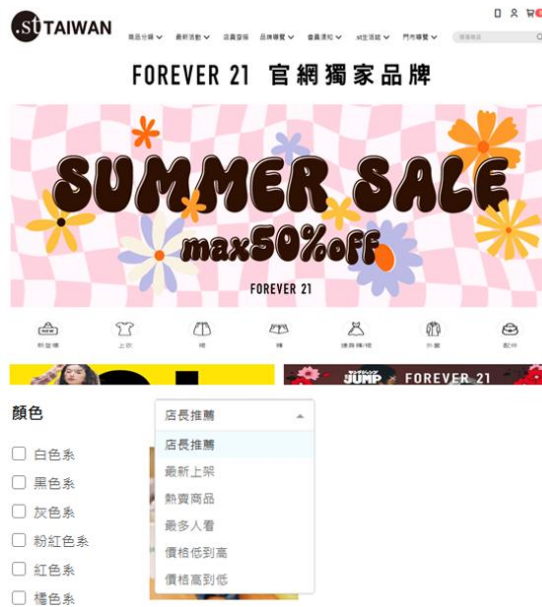


Figure 40 Forever 21 Taiwan does not have a clear style classification and has disorganized product categories.



Figure 41 QUEENSHOP First-time Customer Discount

Table 3 QUEENSHOP First-time Customer Discount

First-time Customer Discount	NO First-time Customer Discount
Attracting new customers	Reduce incentives to attract new customers
Increase brand first-time attempt rate	Reduce your brand's first-time attempt rate
Enhance brand competitiveness	At a disadvantage in the competition
Collect customer information effectively	Reduce the efficiency of customer data collection
Enhance brand image and favorability	The brand image is seen as not valuing customers

TAIPEI 台北 ^	TAICHUNG 台中 ^	TAINAN 台南 ^	YILAN 宜蘭 ^	PINGTUNG 屏東 ^
忠孝復興形象概念店	站前秀泰門市	FOCUS百貨	新月廣場門市	環球門市
南西中山捷運門市	育才門市	旗艦門市	TAOYUAN 桃園 ^	HUALIEN 花蓮 ^
新店裕隆城門市	文心門市	KAOHSIUNG 高雄 ^	統領門市	形象概念店
敦南門市	廣三SOGO百貨門市	夢時代門市	大江門市	中正門市
南西門市	新時代門市	新光三越高雄左營門市	環球A8門市	TAITUNG 台東 ^
蘆洲門市	逢甲門市	岡山門市	中壢中原門市	秀泰門市
南港CITYLINK門市	一中門市	SKM Park Outlet	HSINCHU 新竹 ^	
新北永和門市	CHIAYI 嘉義 ^	新崛江新田門市	巨城快閃店	
統一時代門市	耐斯購物中心門市	新崛江文化門市	新竹門市	
新莊宏匯門市	秀泰門市			
新莊輔大Life Store	嘉義門市			
南西形象概念店				
樹林秀泰門市				

Figure 42 QUEENSHOP successfully established physical stores. (42 stores)



Figure 43 QUEENSHOP actively expanding its physical stores and online shop in Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan, and held a pop-up in Japan in 2025.



Figure 44 Collaborate with Internet celebrities <Baixin (柏心)> to launch co-branded models

Deep Dive: QUEENSHOP's Market Resilience This study identifies three

operational pillars behind QUEENSHOP's ability to thrive despite resource constraints.

1. **Private Traffic Pool Strategy:** To counter rising ad costs, QUEENSHOP leverages high-engagement formats like live streaming and short-form video on LINE and social platforms. The brand has accumulated over 4.5 million members and 5.3 million LINE friends. This indicates a successful shift from paid traffic acquisition to owned audience retention, allowing the brand to reduce dependency on external algorithms.
2. **Seamless OMO (Online-Merge-Offline) Model:** Unlike Forever 21, which relied on massive flagship stores, QUEENSHOP integrates its proprietary App with a network of 42 smaller, community-based physical stores (Figure 42). This integration allows for real-time data synchronization—where points can be earned online and redeemed offline—creating a unified user journey.
3. **Gamified Retention System:** In the fast-fashion sector where customer loyalty is low, QUEENSHOP implements a structured tier-system (e.g., exclusive benefits and birthday rewards) to create 'switching costs.' This mechanism transforms sporadic purchasers into habituated members.

The Efficient Conversion Logic: From Live Stream to Membership QUEENSHOP

demonstrates a highly efficient conversion funnel:

- **Trust Building (Top Funnel):** Live streaming sessions feature hosts personally trying on products and answering questions about sizing in real-time. This significantly reduces pre-sale inquiries and builds initial trust. This supports RQ3, demonstrating that live streaming serves a dual function: it is both a promotional tool and an operational solution for manpower-constrained SMEs.
- **Traffic Driver (Mid Funnel):** The brand collaborates with style-aligned KOLs (e.g., Baixin) for co-branded collections (Figure 49). This approach funnels fans from social media directly to the official website.
- **Asset Conversion (Bottom Funnel):** Through exclusive incentives like "website-exclusive gifts" (Figure 50), the brand systematically guides social followers to register on its official website, transforming general social traffic into controllable first-party data.



Figure 45 QUEENSHOP's new product live stream



Figure 46 QUEENSHOP's reels



Figure 47 Clear website product categories and simplified checkout Process

1. Strategic Response to Challenges:

The Singapore Case The core challenges QUEENSHOP faces are limited internal resources and fierce market competition. These are particularly evident in cross-border operations. When expanding into Singapore and Malaysia, the brand identified that the market was dominated by Korean-style apparel.

- Differentiation Strategy: Instead of competing directly, QUEENSHOP adopted a "Japanese-style" differentiation route. They actively "educated"

local consumers on styling through regional social media (*queenshoplife_my*).

- **Localization:** The brand adapted to local habits by extending promotional periods (two-stage models) and incorporating local festivals like "Hari Raya" to create buzz.
- **Outcome:** This strategy achieved NT\$1 million in sales within the first three months. This finding directly addresses RQ2, illustrating that for SMEs, cross-border expansion requires not just capital, but a 'localized content strategy' to overcome cultural barriers.

2. The Efficient Conversion Logic:

From Live Stream to Membership QUEENSHOP demonstrates a highly efficient digital media utilization strategy that serves dual functions under resource constraints.

- **Operational Efficiency (Top Funnel):** In live-stream sessions, hosts' real-time Q&A regarding sizing and materials significantly reduces pre-purchase inquiry time and lowers customer service labor costs. This supports RQ3 regarding digital media utility, demonstrating that live streaming is both a promotional tool and an operational solution for manpower-constrained SMEs.
- **Traffic Driver (Mid Funnel):** For short-form video (Reels), the brand focuses

on "one-item-multiple-ways" demonstrations to leverage algorithms. Clear traffic-driving mechanisms (e.g., links in Stories) efficiently channel traffic to the official website.

- **Asset Conversion (Bottom Funnel):** To transform vast social traffic into long-term assets, QUEENSHOP uses "new user incentives" (Figure 48) to encourage registration. This allows the brand to conduct precise remarketing through newsletters and App notifications, thereby strengthening customer relationships.

3. **Precision Influencer Collaboration** Finally, for traffic guidance, QUEENSHOP adopts a "Deep Collaboration" strategy. For example, in the co-branded collection with KOL 'Baixin' (柏心), the brand selected her because her "Japanese-inspired, sweet" style aligned perfectly with the target audience.

- **Execution:** Rather than simple product placement, they launched a deep "co-branded collection" (Figure 49).
- **Strategic Value:** This approach funnels fans from social media directly to the official website via specific items, successfully transforming social engagement into long-term brand equity and establishing a stable repurchase cycle.



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Figure 48 QUEENSHOP's new customer welcome offer



Figure 49 Collaborate with KOL

Under resource constraints, QUEENSHOP prioritizes building trust through social media. During live commerce sessions, hosts personally try on products and answer questions about sizing, materials, and fit in real time—effectively reducing the uncertainty that often deters online shoppers, while simultaneously building initial trust and driving early sales. The next and most crucial step is to convert public traffic into private assets. Through exclusive incentives, particularly "website-exclusive" promotions like a "gift with purchase for single orders exceeding a certain amount" (Figure 50), the brand systematically guides these hard-earned social followers to register on its official website or app, transforming general social traffic into controllable brand membership data. Finally, QUEENSHOP strengthens emotional engagement by organizing activities such as the “Outfit Styling Contest” (Figure 51), encouraging customers to share their own looks on personal social media and tag the brand. By regularly featuring and reposting user content, the brand allows consumers to become co-creators of its visual identity, elevating them from mere buyers to active participants in shaping the brand’s style and community.



Figure 50 "Website-exclusive" promotions like a "gift with single purchase over a certain amount"

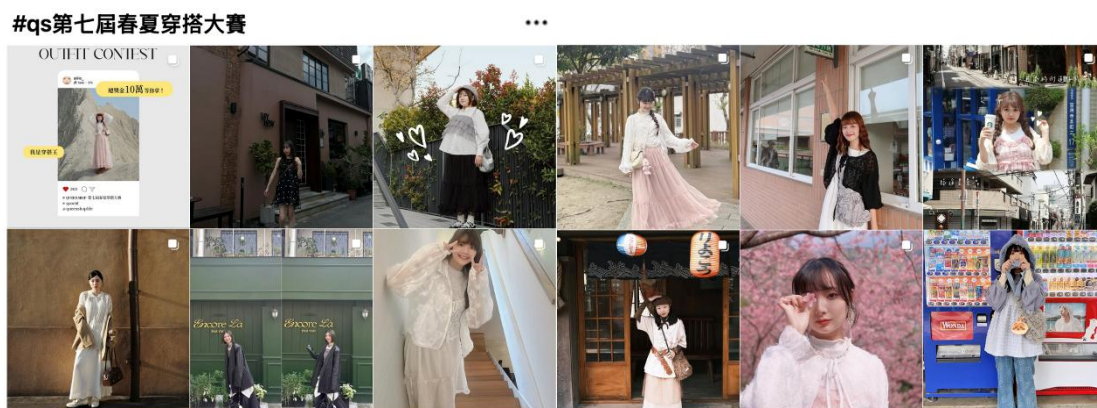


Figure 51 QUEENSHOP 7th Spring/Summer Outfit Styling Contest (UGC)

Summary

QUEENSHOP's success is built upon three key operational strategies: First, it leverages low-cost social media marketing (such as live streaming and short-form videos) to effectively amplify brand influence. Second, it focuses on a seamless OMO experience, specifically enabling loyalty points to be redeemed across both online and offline channels. Finally, it maintains customer stickiness through a sophisticated tiered membership system. However, the brand also faces challenges during its operations, including limited internal resources, as well as external factors like fierce competition, rising e-commerce technical barriers, and inventory risks. Its methods for overcoming these dual challenges include internally compensating for budget shortages with labor-intensive social media operations, such as live streaming and content creation, and externally conducting market research in overseas markets (such as Singapore and Malaysia) to adopt a Japanese-style differentiation strategy, thereby avoiding the Korean-style trend. It also actively "educates local consumers on how to style" through QUEENSHOP's regional social media (queenshoplife_my), while simultaneously adapting to local countries' "longer promotional periods" and "Hari Raya" as part of a localization marketing strategy to face the competition.

In terms of specific digital media application, QUEENSHOP's strategy

demonstrates a highly efficient conversion logic. They utilize live streaming with hosts' try-ons and real-time Q&A to build trust and stimulate sales, while also significantly reducing pre- and post-sale customer service labor costs. In addition to using short-form videos, they collaborate with style-aligned KOLs for co-branded collections to precisely drive traffic to their official website for orders. They also collect first-party member data through an on-site new customer reward mechanism for subsequent push notifications. Their priorities under resource constraints are, first, to build trust. Next, they convert public traffic into controllable private-domain members using "website-exclusive" incentives (e.g., "gift with single purchase over a certain amount"). Finally, they strengthen emotional connection and expand exposure through activities like "Outfit Styling Contests," elevating consumers to brand co-creators. To summarize, this case study suggests that QUEENSHOP successfully transforms short-term social buzz into long-term brand assets and loyal members through this complete conversion process.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Cross-Case Synthesis

To move beyond individual case summaries, this study conducts a cross-case analysis to identify recurring patterns of success among HiWalk, D+AF, and QUEENSHOP. Despite operating in different industries (Food, Footwear, Apparel), all three SMEs share a common trajectory of digital transformation, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 Cross-Case Comparison of Strategic Dimensions

Dimension	HiWalk (Food)	D+AF (Footwear)	QUEENSHOP (Apparel)	Common Strategic Pattern (SME Success Factor)
Trust Building	Visual Content (Product Close-ups) & Pop-up Stores	Influencer Pyramid (Celebrity to KOC)	Live Streaming (Real-time Try-on)	From "Buying Traffic" to "Building Trust": SMEs substitute ad budget with content that reduces purchase anxiety.
Data Control	OMO (Online-Merge-Offline) Membership	App-based Membership & Tiered Rewards	Private Traffic Pool (LINE/App)	From "Traffic Renting" to "Data Owning": All three shifted from platforms to proprietary sites to own customer data.
Value Proposition	Product Innovation (Filled Egg Rolls)	Aesthetic Utility (Comfort + Fashion)	Lifestyle Scenarios (Camping/Work)	From "Price War" to "Category Innovation": Avoiding direct price competition by creating a specific niche or usage scenario.

What are the key factors for successful brand building in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)?

This study identifies three strategic pillars for SME brand building, supported by evidence from HiWalk, D+AF, and QUEENSHOP. First, regarding Defensible Niche Positioning, unlike large enterprises that compete on scale, successful SMEs must establish a clear, defensible niche. As evidenced by HiWalk redefining egg rolls from "snacks" to "premium souvenirs" and D+AF differentiating through "inclusive sizing" and visual effects, a focused value proposition—whether functional or aesthetic—is the prerequisite for brand survival. Second, to overcome the "trust deficit" inherent to online brands, successful SMEs utilize Content-Driven Trust Building to simulate physical experiences. For instance, QUEENSHOP's live-stream try-ons and HiWalk's close-up videography do not merely promote products but functionally resolve consumer anxiety regarding size, material, or taste, thereby accelerating the decision-making process. Finally, the most critical factor is Data Sovereignty, marking the transition from "traffic renting" to "data ownership." All three cases demonstrate a strategic refusal to rely solely on third-party marketplaces; instead, they leverage SaaS platforms or OMO integration to funnel traffic into proprietary membership systems, ensuring long-term customer value accumulation.

What are the main challenges and constraints that SMEs face during the brand-building process?

The cross-case analysis highlights four systemic challenges faced by SMEs.

First, the primary constraint is Resource Liability, where limited capital and manpower force brands to prioritize "high-efficiency" channels like social media over traditional mass media. Second, brands must navigate Market Homogeneity in highly saturated sectors, necessitating continuous "micro-innovation" (e.g., D+AF's weekly new arrivals) to sustain attention against the constant threat of imitation. Third, SMEs encounter Trust Latency, as building awareness is slow and requires significant upfront investment in "social proofing" (e.g., KOL reviews) before seeing conversion results. Finally, expansion brings Operational Risks, particularly in cross-border logistics and technical barriers, confirming that success depends not just on marketing but on the stability of backend supply chain management.

How can SMEs utilize digital media and social platforms to enhance their brand awareness and brand preference?

The study identifies three effective mechanisms for digital leverage. First, by Reducing Information Asymmetry via Multimedia, SMEs should tailor content

formats to platform strengths—such as D+AF utilizing Instagram Reels for aesthetic impact versus QUEENSHOP employing Facebook Live for functional sizing Q&A—to actively facilitate the purchase journey. Second, Trust Transfer via "Audience Homophily" suggests that collaborating with KOLs is not merely for exposure but for precise targeting; by selecting influencers whose lifestyle aligns with the brand (e.g., D+AF's partnership with Song Ji-a), SMEs can project the influencer's credibility onto the brand, rapidly lowering psychological barriers for new customers. Finally, digital media must function as a "Social-to-Member" Conversion Loop, serving as a funnel where strategies like "Outfit Contests" migrate users from public platforms to private websites, effectively converting anonymous "likes" into identifiable member data.

With limited resources, what actions should SMEs prioritize to build their brand effectively?

Based on the synthesis of the three cases, this study proposes a "Prioritized Action Framework" for SMEs, progressing from survival to sustainability. First, during the Market Validation phase, firms must prioritize product-market fit over platform building; as seen with HiWalk, SMEs should validate demand through low-

cost pop-up markets or simple landing pages, focusing on a single core product to conserve resources. Subsequently, the focus shifts to Trust Construction, where establishing a distinct visual identity (like D+AF) and collaborating with micro-influencers are essential to build a library of social proof, emphasizing content quality over ad volume. Finally, the framework culminates in Asset Accumulation, where the priority is establishing a proprietary data hub; by implementing a "First-Purchase Membership" mechanism (like QUEENSHOP) to capture customer data immediately, SMEs can shift from expensive paid acquisition to low-cost retention, thereby securing long-term profitability.

Suggestion

Based on the synthesis, this study proposes a "Prioritized Action Framework" for SMEs with limited resources, progressing from survival to sustainability. Initially, in the Market Validation (Survival) phase, firms must prioritize product-market fit over platform building by conducting low-cost validation via physical marketplaces or simple landing pages, focusing on a "single core product" to confirm demand before scaling. Subsequently, as the firm enters the Trust Construction (Growth) phase, the focus shifts to differentiation; here, SMEs should collaborate with style-aligned KOLs

to build social proof, effectively transferring credibility to the brand to overcome the online "trust deficit." Finally, the framework culminates in Asset Accumulation (Sustainability), where the priority is establishing a proprietary data hub. By implementing OMO (Online-Merge-Offline) mechanisms and membership tiers, SMEs can capture customer data immediately, shifting the business model from expensive paid acquisition to low-cost retention to secure long-term profitability.

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