

Research on the Brand Competitiveness Empowerment Path of Tencent's Silver-haired Service ESG Practices Driven by the Emotional Consumption of the Silver-haired Group in the Digital Era

Ke Mi*

School of Business, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an 710128, China

**Corresponding author: Ke Mi.*

Abstract

Against the dual background of a moderately aging society and digital consumption transformation, the consumption of the silver-haired group has shifted from function-oriented to emotion-oriented. Security anxiety, dignity pursuit, emotional loneliness, and communication barriers have become core emotional demands. Existing research insufficiently reveals the integrated mechanism among the silver-haired group's emotional consumption, ESG social dimension practices, and brand competitiveness, making it difficult to explain the value transformation logic of technology enterprises' silver-haired services. Taking Tencent's silver-haired service as a single case, this paper systematically analyzes the characteristics of the silver-haired group's emotional consumption, the ESG practice system, and the competitiveness empowerment path by adopting literature research, exploratory case study, and grounded theory methods, based on stakeholder theory, social exchange theory, and signaling theory. The findings show that: (1) The emotional consumption of the silver-haired group centers on security, respect, companionship, and smooth communication, characterized by emotion priority, low trial-and-error tolerance, high intergenerational transmission, and strong trust dependence; (2) Tencent has formed an ESG practice system responding to the emotional needs of the silver-haired group with the senior care exclusive hotline, AI invisible caregiver, silver-aged service base, and product-wide aging-friendly adaptation as the core; (3) Tencent's silver-haired service ESG practices transform into brand competitiveness through three paths: trust empowerment, word-of-mouth empowerment, and reputation empowerment; (4) Silver-haired ESG practices can achieve synergy between social responsibility and market benefits. This paper expands the theoretical boundary of emotional consumption, enriches the research on ESG value transformation mechanism, and provides a reference for technology enterprises to layout aging-friendly services and build brand competitiveness.

Keywords

silver-haired group, emotional consumption, ESG practices, silver-haired service, brand competitiveness, Tencent

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Research Questions

China has entered a moderately aging society, with more than 310 million people aged 60 and above, and the number of elderly internet users reaching 161 million. The popularization of digital technology has highly onlineized the life, consumption, social interaction, and health management of the elderly. However, prominent problems such as operational obstacles, fraud risks, information discrimination, and lack of access to help have triggered strong emotional demands. The upgrading of consumption structure has driven the market from functional consumption to emotional consumption. The silver-haired group is willing to pay a premium for security, respect, companionship, and smooth communication, making emotional consumption a new growth point of the silver-haired economy.

Against this background, internet enterprises have accelerated the layout of aging-friendly transformation and silver-haired services, and incorporated them into ESG social dimension practices. As the earliest technology enterprise in China to layout silver-haired services, Tencent has formed a complete system covering online products, manual customer service, AI security, and offline bases, ranking among the top in the industry in terms of service volume and satisfaction. However, the theoretical circle has not yet answered: How does the silver-haired group's emotional consumption drive enterprises' ESG practices? Through what mechanism do silver-haired service-oriented ESG practices transform into brand competitiveness?

Existing research has three shortcomings: first, emotional consumption research is overly concentrated on young groups, with insufficient attention to silver-haired scenarios and rigid emotional demands; second, ESG research focuses on environmental and governance dimensions, with weak research on the value mechanism of social dimensions, especially silver-haired services; third, silver-haired service research mostly focuses on technical aging-friendliness, lacking integrated analysis with emotional demands, ESG strategies, and brand competitiveness. In view of this, this paper puts forward the following research questions: (1) What are the core demands and behavioral characteristics of the silver-haired group's emotional consumption in digital scenarios? (2) What is the system composition and demand response logic of Tencent's silver-haired service ESG practices? (3) What are the paths and mechanisms for Tencent's silver-haired service ESG practices to empower brand competitiveness? (4) What are the implications for technology enterprises to promote silver-haired ESG and brand upgrading?

1.2 Research Significance

Theoretical Significance: Firstly, expand the theory of emotional consumption to the silver-haired group, propose the concept of “rigid emotional demand of the silver-haired group”, and fill the gap in group coverage; secondly, construct an integrated framework of “emotional consumption—ESG response—brand competitiveness” to fill the theoretical context gap; thirdly, reveal the triple empowerment path of “trust—word-of-mouth—reputation” and open the black box of the mechanism for ESG social dimension to transform into brand value.

Practical Significance: Provide an operable path for technology enterprises to optimize silver-haired services, improve ESG efficiency, and build differentiated brand competitiveness; provide a “responsibility + profit” model for enterprises to enter the silver-haired economy; provide decision-making reference for building a digital society friendly to the elderly.

1.3 Research Content and Methods

Research Content: Define core concepts and theoretical basis; analyze the demands and characteristics of the silver-haired group's emotional consumption; sort out Tencent's silver-haired service ESG practice system; extract the triple empowerment path; form conclusions and implications.

Research Methods: (1) Literature Research Method: Systematically sort out literatures on emotional consumption, ESG, silver-haired economy, and brand competitiveness; (2) Exploratory Single Case Study: Follow the Eisenhardt and Yin paradigm, taking Tencent as a typical case; (3) Grounded Theory: Construct a theoretical model through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding; (4) Triangulation Verification: Cross-check with ESG reports, user comments, interviews, and media reports.

1.4 Innovations

(1) Innovation in Research Object: Incorporate the silver-haired group into the research framework of emotional consumption, making up for the deficiency of existing research biased towards young groups; (2) Innovation in Research Framework: Integrate emotional demands, ESG practices, and brand competitiveness, and establish a logical chain from micro-motivation to macro-strategy; (3) Innovation in Path Mechanism: Propose and verify the triple empowerment model of “trust—word-of-mouth—reputation”, and clarify the brand value transformation path of silver-haired ESG; (4) Innovation in Perspective: Start from rigid emotional demands, break through technology and function orientation, and fit the real decision-making logic of silver-haired consumption.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Basis

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Research on Emotional Consumption

Emotional consumption emphasizes that consumers conduct consumption behaviors to meet emotional needs. Holbrook & Hirschman proposed the paradigm of experiential consumption, and Wang Ning pointed out that digital consumption is turning to emotion orientation. Existing researches focus on Generation Z, self-pleasing consumption, live broadcast rewards, and fashion toy markets, lacking research on the emotional motivation, behavior, and decision-making of the silver-haired group.

2.1.2 Research on ESG and Enterprise Competitiveness

Most studies confirm that ESG is positively correlated with enterprise performance, but there are obvious biases: emphasis on environmental (E) and governance (G) dimensions, neglect of social (S) dimension; emphasis on overall correlation test, neglect of user psychology and emotional intermediary mechanism; emphasis on financial performance, neglect of the transformation of intangible assets such as brand trust, word-of-mouth, and reputation.

2.1.3 Research on Digital Consumption and Aging-friendly Services for the Silver-haired Group

Existing researches focus on digital divide, technology acceptance, anti-fraud security, and aging-friendly design. Studies by Shen Qi et al. pointed out that the elderly have strong emotional and companionship needs for smart products, but relevant researches have not yet risen to the theory of emotional consumption, nor combined with ESG and brand competitiveness.

2.1.4 Research on Tencent's Silver-haired Service and ESG

Existing achievements are mostly practical introductions and news reviews, lacking academic and mechanistic analysis of practices such as the senior care exclusive hotline, invisible caregiver, and silver-aged service base, especially failing to explain the transformation path of silver-haired services from social responsibility investment to brand competitiveness.

2.1.5 Literature Review

Existing researches are obviously fragmented: emotional consumption is separated from the silver-haired group; ESG practices are separated from emotional mechanisms; silver-haired services are separated from brand competitiveness. This paper aims to connect the logic of the three to form an integrated analysis framework.

2.2 Theoretical Basis

Stakeholder Theory: Enterprises can build long-term competitive advantages by meeting the demands of elderly users, families, society, and the government. **Social Exchange Theory:** Enterprises provide emotional value (security, respect, companionship), and users reward with trust, loyalty, and recommendation, forming a stable exchange and transforming into brand assets. **Signaling Theory:**

Enterprises send signals of responsibility, trustworthiness, and warmth to the market through silver-haired ESG practices, reducing information asymmetry and improving brand trust and reputation.

2.3 Definition of Core Concepts

Silver-haired Group: Users of digital products and services aged 60 and above. **Emotional Consumption of the Silver-haired Group:** Digital consumption choices and behaviors generated to meet emotional demands such as security, respect, companionship, and smooth communication. **ESG Practices for Silver-haired Service:** A series of social responsibility practices carried out by enterprises under the ESG social dimension, including aging-friendly transformation, protection of elderly rights and interests, digital inclusion, security protection, and emotional companionship. **Brand Competitiveness:** The sum of brand trust, word-of-mouth communication, social reputation, user stickiness, market expansion capability, and differentiated competitive advantages brought by silver-haired ESG practices.

3. Research Design

3.1 Case Selection

This paper selects Tencent's silver-haired service as the case based on: (1) Typicality: the earliest layout, the most complete system, the largest investment, and the widest coverage in China; (2) Enlightenment: serving more than 32 million person-times annually with 99% satisfaction, strong demonstration effect; (3) Data Availability: ESG reports, SSV reports, media reports, and user data are fully public.

3.2 Data Sources

Multi-source data triangulation is adopted to improve reliability and validity. **Secondary Data:** Tencent ESG reports (2020—2024), sustainable social value reports, official announcements, authoritative media reports, and industry data. **Primary Data:** Semi-structured interviews (elderly users, adult children users, customer service personnel, community workers); more than 300 online user comments; product experience and scene observation records.

3.3 Data Analysis Process

Follow the three-level coding process of grounded theory: (1) Open Coding: Label and conceptualize texts to form initial concepts; (2) Axial Coding: Summarize categories and logical relationships to form main categories; (3) Selective Coding: Refine core categories and construct a model of “emotional consumption → ESG response → competitiveness empowerment”; (4) Theoretical Saturation Test: Stop coding when no new categories and relationships appear.

4. Emotional Consumption of the Silver-haired Group: Demands and Characteristics

4.1 Core Emotional Demands of the Silver-haired Group

4.1.1 Security Anxiety

The elderly are highly sensitive to property risks, operational errors, and information leakage, fearing being deceived, misled, or deducted, and pursuing a traceable, confirmable, and accessible security experience.

4.1.2 Dignity Pursuit

The elderly are prone to frustration in complex operations, eager for patient, equal, clear, and non-discriminatory services, and refuse to be disliked, despised, or “labeled”.

4.1.3 Emotional Companionship

With the rising proportion of empty-nesters and solo-living elderly, the elderly seek social connection, emotional comfort, and value recognition through digital products, and companionship directly affects their willingness to use.

4.1.4 Smooth Communication

Dialect, hearing, and expression ability limitations make it difficult for the elderly to ask for help, requiring human services that can understand, answer patiently, assist, and are warm.

Table 1: Core Emotional Demands and Performance of the Silver-haired Group

Core Emotional Demands	Typical Performance	Impact on Consumption Decision
Security Anxiety	Fear of fraud, misoperation, information leakage, property loss	Prefer reliable, traceable platforms with customer service
Dignity Pursuit	Fear of discrimination, neglect, complex operations, misunderstanding	Value patient service, simple interface, equal communication
Emotional Companionship	Strong loneliness, narrow social circle, need for comfort	Prefer products with companionship and humanistic care
Smooth Communication	Dialect barriers, hearing decline, difficulty in expression	Rely on manual service, dialect support, one-to-one assistance

4.2 Behavioral Characteristics of Emotional Consumption of the Silver-haired Group

(1) Emotion is prior to function: security, convenience, and warmth are more important than technical parameters; (2) Low trial-and-error tolerance: a negative experience easily leads to long-term loss, and the cost of trust reconstruction is extremely high; (3) High intergenerational transmission: the evaluation of the elderly affects the choice of adult children, and the recommendation of adult children determines the acceptance of the elderly; (4) Strong trust and loyalty: high retention, repurchase, and recommendation after trust is established.

5. ESG Practice System and Demand Response Logic of Tencent's Silver-haired Service

5.1 Core ESG Practices of Tencent's Silver-haired Service

5.1.1 Senior Care Exclusive Hotline

Provide exclusive manual customer service, dialect support, patient response, and full-process assistance to solve difficulties in seeking help and communication barriers.

5.1.2 AI Invisible Caregiver

Realize fall detection, abnormal call for help, and emergency linkage based on vision and voice recognition, alleviating home security anxiety.

5.1.3 Silver-aged Service Base

Provide offline community teaching, one-on-one accompanying guidance, and social activities to improve dignity and integration.

5.1.4 Product-wide Aging-friendly Transformation

Launch senior mode on WeChat, QQ, payment, map, etc., with large fonts, simplified interfaces, voice guidance, and anti-misoperation.

5.1.5 Anti-fraud and Digital Inclusion for the Silver-haired Group

Strengthen security and fairness through anti-fraud science popularization, rural elderly assistance, public welfare training, and aging-friendly standard construction.

Table 2: Correspondence Between Tencent's ESG Practices and Emotional Demands

ESG Practice	Corresponding Emotional Demand	Value Orientation
--------------	--------------------------------	-------------------

Senior Care Exclusive Hotline	Communication barriers, dignity pursuit	Patient service, equal assistance
AI Invisible Caregiver	Security anxiety, health concerns	Safety protection, risk early warning
Silver-aged Service Base	Emotional companionship, digital isolation	Accompaniment, social connection, dignity
Product-wide Aging-friendly Adaptation	Dignity pursuit, operation anxiety	Simplified, low-threshold, user-friendly
Anti-fraud & Digital Inclusion	Security anxiety, information disadvantage	Risk prevention, equity, rights protection

5.2 Core Characteristics of Tencent's Silver-haired ESG Practices

(1) Centering on emotional demands, shifting from functional aging-friendliness to emotional aging-friendliness; (2) Full-scenario coverage of online products + offline services + AI security + manual companionship; (3) Perceptible, experienceable, and traceable practices that directly respond to emotional pain points; (4) Incorporated into the company's ESG and sustainable social value strategy with long-term investment.

5.3 Demand Response Logic

Security anxiety ← Invisible caregiver, anti-fraud mechanism, security risk control
 Dignity pursuit ← Senior care exclusive hotline, patient service, aging-friendly simplification
 Emotional companionship ← Silver-aged service base, social connection, offline activities
 Communication barriers ← Dialect customer service, manual assistance, full-process operation on behalf of users

6. Triple Paths for Tencent's Silver-haired Service ESG Practices to Empower Brand Competitiveness

6.1 Trust Empowerment: Basic Level

Mechanism: ESG practices accurately respond to emotional pain points → meet emotional demands → user satisfaction → brand trust → user loyalty and repurchase. **Logic:** Security guarantee → peace of mind; patient service → warmth; easy to use → convenience; reliable solution → trust. **Results:** Improved satisfaction, increased retention, enhanced active choice, and reduced risk perception.

6.2 Word-of-mouth Empowerment: Extension Level

Mechanism: Positive experience of elderly users → intergenerational transmission in families → recognition and recommendation of adult children → user scale expansion and scenario penetration. **Logic:** Silver-haired experience → family word-of-mouth → social diffusion → new users and package transformation. **Results:** Significant intergenerational recommendation, growth of family users, and breakthrough of brand word-of-mouth.

6.3 Reputation Empowerment: Sublimation Level

Mechanism: Sustainable and systematic silver-haired ESG practices → social recognition and positive communication → improved brand reputation → policy support, industry demonstration, and capital favor. **Logic:** Responsibility investment → social identity → reputation capital → long-term brand barrier. **Results:** Improved ESG rating, selected into sustainability indices, increased policy cooperation, and solidified brand image of goodness.

6.4 Integrated Model of Triple Paths

Trust is the foundation, locking core silver-haired users; word-of-mouth is the diffusion, connecting family and intergenerational markets; reputation is the barrier, forming sustainable brand advantages. The three reinforce and synergize each other, jointly completing the transformation from social value to brand competitiveness.

Table 3: Triple Paths of ESG Practices Empowering Brand Competitiveness

Empowerment Path	Level	Core Transmission Mechanism	Final Effect
Trust Empowerment	Basic Level	Emotional satisfaction → Satisfaction → Trust → Loyalty	High retention, low churn, strong dependence
Word-of-mouth Empowerment	Extension Level	Senior experience → Intergenerational transmission → Family recognition	Customer expansion, brand penetration
Reputation Empowerment	Sublimation Level	ESG practice → Social recognition → Brand reputation	Long-term brand barrier, policy support

7. Research Conclusions and Management Implications

7.1 Research Conclusions

(1) Digital consumption of the silver-haired group has entered a stage driven by rigid emotional demands, with security, respect, companionship, and smooth communication as core demands; (2) Tencent's silver-haired service ESG practices are a systematic responsibility supply oriented to emotional demands, realizing the upgrade from functional aging-friendliness to emotional aging-friendliness; (3) Silver-haired service ESG practices transform into brand competitiveness through the triple path of “trust—word-of-mouth—reputation”, forming a replicable mechanism; (4) Silver-haired ESG practices are not cost investment, but an important strategic direction for technology enterprises to build differentiated brand assets.

7.2 Management Implications

(1) Anchor rigid emotional demands: take security, respect, companionship, and good communication as the core design principles of silver-haired products; (2) Promote the scenario-based implementation of ESG: transform responsibility into perceptible, experienceable, and measurable services; (3) Build a value closed loop: emotional satisfaction → trust → word-of-mouth → reputation → sustainable growth; (4) Adhere to long-termism: incorporate silver-haired services into strategies and ESG systems for continuous investment and iteration.

7.3 Research Limitations and Prospects

Limitations: Single case study, the universality of conclusions needs to be tested by multiple cases; quantitative data and large-sample empirical research can be further strengthened. **Prospects:** Carry out multi-case comparison; conduct questionnaire empirical testing; study the application of AI and large models in silver-haired emotional services; promote cross-cultural and cross-enterprise comparative research.

8. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of a moderately aging society and digital consumption upgrading, the emotional consumption of the silver-haired group has become a critical driver for enterprises to carry out ESG practices in elderly-oriented services. Taking Tencent's silver-haired service as a typical case, this study explores the formation mechanism of emotional consumption demands, the construction of ESG practice systems, and the triple empowerment paths of brand competitiveness through grounded theory and case analysis. The findings confirm that responding to the rigid emotional needs of the elderly—security, respect, companionship, and smooth communication—can effectively transform social responsibility investment into sustainable brand competitiveness through trust, word-of-mouth, and reputation empowerment. Such a model not only helps technology enterprises achieve the integration of social value and economic benefits but also provides a replicable framework for digital inclusion and age-friendly construction.

In the future, with the accelerated integration of AI, big models, and elderly-oriented services, the emotional interaction between enterprises and the silver-haired group will become more intelligent and precise. Subsequent research can expand to cross-enterprise comparisons, large-sample empirical tests, and cross-cultural contexts, so as to further improve the theoretical system of emotional consumption, ESG, and brand competitiveness in the silver-haired economy, and provide more systematic support for digital enterprises to fulfill social responsibilities and build long-term competitiveness.

References

- [1] Holbrook, M. B., & Hirschman, E. C. (1982). The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(2), 132–140.
- [2] Wang, N. (2021). Emotional turn in digital consumption and its sociological implications. *Sociological Studies*, 36(3), 21–38. (in Chinese)
- [3] Singh, S., & Verma, R. (2025). Building brand reputation and fostering customer loyalty through ESG practices: A strategic imperative for competitive advantage. In *ESG Frameworks for Sustainable Business Practices*. IGI Global.
- [4] Lin, J. (2024). ESG performance, corporate reputation, and brand valuation: Evidence from Chinese listed firms. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 187(3), 789–806.
- [5] Zou, Y. (2024). How ESG practices enhance brand equity: The mediating role of consumer trust. *Sustainability*, 16(12), 5123.
- [6] Kim, J., Kim, M., Im, S., & Choi, D. (2021). Competitiveness of e-commerce firms through ESG logistics. *Sustainability*, 13(20), 11548.
- [7] An, S., & Li, M. (2024). An SOR theory perspective on consumption alienation of silver consumers in emotional marketing within e-commerce live streaming. *ACM International Conference Proceedings Series*.
- [8] Jiang, Y., & Pan, C. (2025). Age-inclusive digital responsibility: A new form of responsibility in the resonance of aging and digitalization. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 35(2), 1–26.
- [9] Ng, C. J., Teo, C. H., & Wattanapisit, A. (2026). Digital health for the ageing population. In *Handbook of Public Health in the Asia-Pacific*. Springer.
- [10] Wang, Z. Y. (2025). Research on the influence of emotional support on the purchase intention of the elderly in live e-commerce. *E-Commerce Letters*, 14(4), 1843–1849.
- [11] Zhang, Y., & Liu, H. (2025). Understanding the purchase decisions of silver consumers in short-form video platforms from the perspective of ERG needs. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 27(6), e10741116.
- [12] Tencent Holdings Ltd. (2024). *Tencent ESG Report 2023–2024*. Shenzhen: Tencent Sustainability Office.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author (s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).