



Research on Cross-Cultural Communication Marketing of International Brands – Take Pepsi’s “Bring the Fun Home” Microfilm Commercial Series as an Example

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Abstract. The communication strategies developed by an international brand in different cultural contexts determine its survival and development in a foreign cultural environment. Among them, advertising, as one of the ways of communication between brands and consumers, largely influences the acceptance and reputation of a brand. To date, a number of well-known international brands have carved out a niche in the Chinese market with their successful cross-cultural communication strategies, Pepsi being one of them. This article combines the Best Global Brands 2020 report released by Interbrand with Pepsi’s “Bringing the Fun Home” series of microfilm commercials launched for ten consecutive years since 2012 as an example. Combining the data materials collected and using the case study method and literature method, we analyse and discuss the successes, risks and suggestions of its cross-cultural communication strategy, in order to provide lessons for how China’s domestic brands can better The study will provide reference for how China’s national brands can better reach out to the world.

Keywords: Pepsi · microfilm advertising · cross-cultural communication · brand IP

1 Introduction

In the face of the changing global market environment, many international brands have realised that a good grasp of the international market is the way to survive for sustainable development. According to Interbrand’s Best Global Brands 2020 report, more than half of the top 100 brands on the list have depreciated in value compared to last year. In such a competitive environment, how to better communicate across cultures is an important challenge for international brands to face in developing global markets.

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PepsiCo, the world's fourth largest food and beverage company, has subsidiaries in more than 100 countries around the world. Since its inception, PepsiCo has been searching for its own brand positioning and has successfully made 'youthfulness' its label, gradually gaining market share and becoming a soft drink brand alongside Coca-Cola. PepsiCo is ranked 26th in Interbrand's latest Top 100 Global Brands list. 2021 marks the 40th year of PepsiCo's roots in China, and its successful cross-cultural communication "strategy has been instrumental in establishing its presence in the market. The most iconic of these is Pepsi's series of microfilm commercials, "Bringing the Fun Home", which is launched every year as the Chinese New Year approaches, with a total of 10 films made so far (2021). Some netizens even quipped, "When Pepsi makes a commercial, you know it's almost Chinese New Year". As you can see, Pepsi today has successfully infiltrated this brand IP into the New Year memories of the Chinese people.

This study will take the Pepsi's "Bringing Joy Home" series of microfilm commercials as an example in conjunction with the Best Global Brands 2020 report, and use case studies and comparative methods to analyse and explore the success of Pepsi's cross-cultural communication strategy, taking into account the data collected.

2 Research Methodology

2.1 Online Literature Collection

Collect literature related to Pepsi's microfilm advertisements, including both published journals and academic papers, as well as existing industry report data and publicly available databases, and collate and categorise the collected literature and secondary data.

2.2 Case Study Method

10 microfilm advertisements launched by Pepsi from 2012 to the present were collected and watched, and key elements such as the main storyline, cast members and video copy were excerpted and collated, and textual analysis was conducted on them. On the other hand, the commercials are compared with specific cases to illustrate the differences between Pepsi and its rival Coca-Cola in terms of their Chinese New Year advertising and marketing.

3 Cross-Cultural Communication Strategy of Pepsi's Chinese New Year Microfilm

3.1 Affinity for Continuous Output

In Interbrand's Best Global Brands 2020 report, Affinity, one of the factors associated with brand strength, refers to the extent to which consumers have a positive connection to the brand based on functional or emotional benefits, or a sense of having shared values. The 10 microfilm commercials launched by PepsiCo, "Bringing Joy Home", show that the brand's localised communication strategy in China has always been based on "using stories to bring the brand closer together and create brand affinity":.

The Chinese New Year has a special meaning to the Chinese people, as it represents not only the farewell of the old and the welcome of the new, but also the reunion and the gathering together. For young people who have left their hometowns to work, this longing for home and reunion grows stronger every New Year's Day. It is based on the accurate understanding of people's psychological state of longing for hometown and reunion that Pepsi launched its first "Bringing Joy Home" microfilm commercial on the eve of Chinese New Year in 2012, using "home" and "joy" as emotional communication points to gradually build up an emotional connection with Chinese consumers. The film also features the first "Bringing Joy Home" microfilm campaign, which uses "home" and "joy" as emotional communication points, gradually establishing an emotional connection with Chinese consumers [1].

Even though times have changed, people's desire for home and happiness has never changed. As a result, PepsiCo has successfully built a strong brand IP by sticking to the core of its "Bringing Joy Home" story throughout this decade. "and "fun" are the constant elements of the story. In terms of content, Pepsi has been able to recognise the subtle changes in people's understanding of 'family' and 'happiness' each time, and has been able to capture these differences and iterate on the content so that this slightly homogeneous core can be brought to life each year. New ideas.

For example, in 2012, Pepsi launched its first 'Bringing Joy Home' microfilm ad, which recognises the social phenomenon that young people tend to neglect to care for and value their families because they are too busy with school or work, and uses 'coming home is the greatest joy for parents' as the core of its story. "The story focuses on the simplest but most important ritual of going home for Chinese New Year. In the commercial released in 2017, 'Pepsi cleverly used the national IP of "Family Guy" to stage a humorous and touching "family reunion", evoking the common memories of the post-80s and post-90s, drawing viewers back to more than a decade ago and creating a common theme for the family's New Year gathering; and in In the newly launched "Bringing Joy Home" 10th anniversary micro-film commercial, Pepsi seems to have noticed the power of those ordinary little people under the epidemic, focusing on ordinary people like delivery workers and teachers, telling the story of their hardships and hardships behind returning home for the New Year and paying tribute to those ordinary heroes. No matter how the story develops, it always comes back to a unifying theme – "Bringing joy home".

It is this accurate Chinese understanding of "home" that has brought Pepsi closer to Chinese consumers with "Bringing Joy Home", successfully creating a strong brand affinity. This is also confirmed by the comments from netizens. Take "17 Bringing Joy Home – "The Warmth of Reunion"" as an example, the relevant data shows that in terms of netizens' attitude, the microfilm advertisement received a positive rating of 96.67%, a neutral rating of 3.31% and a negative rating of less than 0.01% [2].

The author also summarised the topics that netizens were most concerned about from the information collected, and the emotional buzzwords discussed by netizens were mostly "warmth", "memories", "moving", "heart" and other positive words, The positive comments such as "heart", "children", "family", "pepsi", "17 Bringing Home the Fun" and so on, The words "17 Bringing Joy Home" and "advertising" were discussed the most, even more than those about the stars. This shows that the story content of the

microfilm is more attractive than the celebrities, and the interpretation and presentation of “home” in the ad has really won the consumers’ recognition, thus triggering emotional resonance and strengthening the brand affinity.

3.2 The Power of Innovation to Keep up with the Times

In addition to maintaining an emotional connection with consumers, the “Bringing Home the Fun” brand IP has been able to sustain its popularity for 10 years, relying on its continuous technical breakthroughs and innovations.

One of the highlights of Pepsi’s microfilm commercials is the combination with the “Chinese zodiac” element. In 2016’s “The Monkey King”, the film ended with a limited edition commemorative can of Pepsi’s Monkey King, an innovative adaptation of the Chinese zodiac’s “monkey” element in the packaging design; and in 2020’s “A Treasure in the Family” campaign, in addition to continuing the integration of the Chinese zodiac in the packaging design, Pepsi also In the 2020 “Family Treasures” campaign, in addition to continuing to combine the Chinese zodiac with the packaging design, Pepsi also added animation special effects technology, directly placing a running and moving “rat” in front of the public, which is very innovative. Many netizens have said that they are “so impressed by the cute little mouse Lele” after seeing it.

On the other hand, the use of big data and the introduction of technologies such as VR/AR and H5 have also provided more diverse ways and channels for the dissemination of IP. For example, in 2020’s “There’s a Treasure in the Family”, Pepsi for the first time adopted the form of an interactive drama, turning the commercial into a microfilm that could be “played”. Through cooperation with Tencent, the interactive in-frame technology and multi-line video technology were applied to set up interactive sessions at important points in the story. In this way, the viewer is transformed from a mere watcher to a player in the drama, who decides the subsequent plot development together, which not only strengthens the user’s sense of immersion, but also increases the fun of the microfilm itself [3].

3.3 A Growing Sense of Engagement

In the Best Global Brands 2020 report, it is also stated that a sense of engagement (Participation) is one of the key external factors of brand strength. Participation here refers to a brand’s ability to create a sense of dialogue, encourage participation and collaboration, and thus engage consumers and partners. A review of Pepsi’s previous campaigns during the Chinese New Year shows that the “Bringing Joy Home” microfilm campaign helped users to push the emotional button of “Chinese New Year mode”, and then opened up a full range of social interactions to enhance the sense of engagement and experience of users.

After telling a story about “home” and “fun”, Pepsi didn’t stop there, but released as much brand momentum as possible through various forms of interaction and cooperation. In the past, celebrity promotion was the main focus of Pepsi’s advertising campaigns, but the increasing influence of self-media KOLs over the past few years has prompted Pepsi to change from a single celebrity promotion to a joint promotion by celebrities and self-media KOLs. At the same time, Pepsi has also actively cooperated

with Meipai, Tencent, Ali Travel and Jingdong in recent years, using technologies such as VR/AR and live-streaming, with a focus on the Internet and new media, also catering to the changing media habits of the younger generation.

On the Weibo end, the overall amount of interaction on the marketing topics launched by Pepsi during the Chinese New Year has shown a trend of increasing year on year, the most obvious of which is the change in readership. 2016 saw the first breakthrough in readership from 10,000 to 100 million for the topic of Liu Xiaolingtong Le Monkey King, which was closely related to the forwarding and dissemination of official media, including @People's Daily, and a large number of self-published KOLs; the 2019 micro-film *The film's touching plot* was accompanied by the powerful traffic generated by the current affairs hotspot, adding more fire to Pepsi's Chinese New Year marketing, with the film's viewership exceeding 400 million in less than two weeks and the Weibo hashtag #2019 The movie was broadcasted for more than 400 million in less than two weeks, and the Weibo hashtag #2019BringingLeisureHome was read by 430 million people, achieving the highest level of attention for this brand IP since its inception (on Weibo).

Secondly, it is also worth noting the changes in secondary communication in terms of hashtag marketing. As you can see from the table above, the number of original participants in the topic of 17 Take Home has exceeded 10,000 for the first time, which is not only brought about by a number of celebrities and media KOLs with their own hot traffic, but also by its clever combination with the national IP "Family Guy". As a common memory of three generations of post-80s, post-90s and even post-00s people, this kind of sentimental marketing has successfully aroused positive discussions, thus bringing about a large number of spontaneous retweets and secondary dissemination. It is clear that choosing the right subject matter plays a very important role in enhancing the brand's interactive engagement.

4 Pepsi and Coca-Cola's Chinese New Year Advertisement Comparison

Coca-Cola, Pepsi's old rival, has been around for over 130 years. Before World War II, Coca-Cola dominated the soft drink market in the United States and had a solid position. After the emergence of Pepsi, it has been developing different market positioning and communication strategies from Coca-Cola in terms of price, channels and target consumer groups in order to capture more market share. Some scholars have pointed out that Coca-Cola has always emphasised the word "all" in its positioning, not easily letting go of any existing or potential consumer groups, while Pepsi began to develop a positioning strategy for young people in the 1960s and has continued to do so to this day, with Pepsi still following a bias towards "specialization" to this day. "Pepsi, on the other hand, started to develop a targeting strategy for young people in the 1960s and has continued to do so to this day.

This is also the case with the Chinese New Year advertisements, as competitors Pepsi and Coca-Cola have taken a different approach to tell the story of "reunion" from a different perspective. In the 2017 Chinese New Year campaign, for example, Coca-Cola and Pepsi showed different characteristics in their marketing strategies.

In the “17 Bringing Fun Home” microfilm campaign, Pepsi continued the IP trend from the previous year, bringing along members of the national TV series “Family Guy” to continue to play the sentimental card. This time, Pepsi reunites Song Dan Dan, Gao Yalin, Zhang Yishan, Yang Zi and You Haoran, a representative national family, hoping to share the true meaning of “love is family” and “being together is the meaning of family” through this hard-earned reunion. The film is a true “bring home the joy” with Chinese people around the world. This microfilm is not a mere sequel to Family Guy, it is a story of “Bringing Joy Home” after 12 years, with a mysterious new character, Lin Renren, added to it. However, compared to the shock of the previous year’s “The Monkey King Family”, the plot of this microfilm is slightly less compelling, but still brings back a lot of memories and emotions to the post-80s and 90s audience [4].

Coca-Cola’s creative director explained the theme of the campaign, “New Year is a family ritual that brings us together with our families, despite all the difficulties. The simple pleasure of sharing a bottle of Coca-Cola makes the moment of reunion even more special, allowing us to celebrate this inseparable emotional bond with the ones we love.” The storyline of the ad is very simple; a young boy is reunited with his family for the festive season when he sees a lonely snowman outside his window, at which point two Fuwa, a man and a woman representing traditional Chinese New Year culture, appear to form a beautiful family for the little snowman and reunite his family. The cute and witty image of the Fuwa is enough to capture the hearts of the elderly, children and youngsters alike. The two Fuwa also strung together Coca-Cola’s Chinese New Year marketing for the year, appearing on TV, packaging, in-store ads, outdoor ads, in cinemas and online. Coca-Cola also partnered with Alipay to create New Year wishes tailored to users’ purchasing habits, and by scanning the Fuwa graphics, they would instantly ‘move’ and deliver New Year reunion wishes to users.

The same Chinese New Year campaign, with the same theme of reunion, used a cartoon image for Coca-Cola and the national IP “Family Guy” for Pepsi, although they are two very different styles, the core of the story is the same. Pepsi is better at moving the audience, while Coca-Cola is better at integrated marketing, so to speak, each has its own strengths [5]. However, in my opinion, for the young post-80s, 90s and even post-00s consumer groups, the celebrity flow and national IP that comes with the Pepsi ad seems to be better than the cartoon images that are also common in other brands launched by Coca-Cola, and is more likely to win the hearts of the target consumers.

5 Chinese New Year Advertising or Other Cross-Cultural Communication Marketing Risks

Cross-cultural marketing helps companies launch more diverse products and services to meet the needs of consumers in various regions, which can help companies expand into global markets and increase global market share and brand awareness. Successful cross-cultural marketing can also help companies to become more globally competitive and stand out in the face of fierce competition through unique marketing strategies and brand images. However, cross-cultural marketing is more of a double-edged sword. Due to cultural differences and misunderstandings, cross-cultural marketing may lead to consumer resentment towards advertisements or products, triggering cultural clashes and

resistance, resulting in a damaged brand image and reduced consumer trust and loyalty. Therefore companies also need to be aware of the following risks when marketing cross-cultural communications:

5.1 Cultural Sensitivity Risks

Inaccurate cultural presentation: Advertisements may fail to accurately present local culture and traditions, for example, if the Chinese New Year customs, festive food, costumes and gifts in the advertisements do not match the actual Chinese traditional culture, or even if the advertisements have misinterpreted Chinese festive customs, it may trigger viewers to question the level of understanding of Chinese culture by the producers of the advertisements, which may in turn make consumers familiar with Chinese traditional culture turn off the advertisements and brands. This can in turn turn consumers familiar with traditional Chinese culture against the advertisements and brands. For example, in 2018, Coca-Cola released a Chinese New Year ad that showed a young man serving Coca-Cola to an elderly relative at a family gathering. Although the original intention of the ad was to convey a warm family reunion atmosphere, some viewers would question the content of the ad. They believe that the young man in the ad giving Coca-Cola as a gift to his elders is not in line with traditional Chinese etiquette, as during the Chinese New Year, people usually give more traditional gifts such as red envelopes, fruits and candies.

5.2 Social Values Risk

Advertisements may convey negative messages or stereotypes, such as sexism, ageism, racial discrimination, etc., which may trigger social opinion and lead to damage to the brand image. In addition, advertising is often perceived as a representation of commercialisation, for example, Chinese consumers may perceive the simple cultural connotations of the Chinese New Year as being overly commercialised and ignored or undermined by a series of advertisements, which may in turn turn audiences against the advertisements and thus affect the brand's reputation.

5.3 Creativity and Innovation Risk

The advertisements may lack uniqueness and novelty, causing consumers to become aesthetically tired of the advertisements, which will reduce the appeal of the advertisements and affect their effectiveness. For example, Pepsi's New Year's Eve microfilm series has been themed on warmth and reunion every year, which will gradually make consumers tired of it. In addition, the advertisements may not make full use of new technology and presentation methods, resulting in poor advertising results, which may make the advertisements fail to stand out from the competition and reduce the competitiveness of the brand in the market. For example, during the Chinese New Year period, all brands are preparing activities and advertisements around the New Year, which are highly homogenised. Brands need to constantly innovate in order to stand out and sustain their brand buzz.

5.4 Brand Image Consistency Risk

The content of the advertisements may not be consistent with the brand image, making it difficult for consumers to resonate with them, leading to confusion in their perception of the brand and affecting brand loyalty. Advertisements may also fail to adequately highlight the core values and characteristics of the brand, or go against the brand values previously expressed by the brand itself, resulting in a blurred brand image, which may also reduce consumers' identification and trust in the brand.

5.5 Communication Channels and Audience Risk

Advertisements may not be effectively tailored to different audience groups in terms of communication strategy and content [6]. This may result in the advertisement being poorly communicated to specific audience groups and failing to achieve the desired marketing effect. For example, advertisements may not make full use of multiple communication channels, such as social media and video platforms, thus limiting the reach of the advertisements. This may prevent the ad from reaching more potential consumers and reduce the brand's competitiveness in the marketplace.

6 Suggested Solutions to Cross-Cultural Communication Marketing Risks

It is true that intercultural marketing is a double-edged sword, but by anticipating possible problems in advance and taking appropriate measures, companies can avoid most of the risks of intercultural communication marketing [7]. In general, when carrying out cross-cultural marketing, companies need to fully understand the cultural characteristics and consumer needs of their target markets in order to avoid negative impacts such as cultural clashes and damage to their brand image. At the same time, it is important to focus on adapting marketing strategies to suit consumers from different cultural backgrounds so that the advantages of cross-cultural marketing can be fully utilised. The following are some specific recommendations for risk-risk solutions:

6.1 Conduct In-Depth Market Research

Before creating an advertisement, conduct in-depth market research to understand local culture, customs and habits. Companies can actively work with local experts and marketing teams to ensure that advertising content is culturally appropriate. For example, when conducting research into the Chinese market, you can gain an in-depth understanding of Chinese New Year customs and folk traditions to ensure that the content of your ad truly reflects Chinese culture.

6.2 Respect Traditions and Customs and Integrate Local Elements

Follow local cultural traditions in your advertising to ensure that the content truly reflects local customs and traditions [8]. For example, when conducting Chinese New Year-themed marketing campaigns abroad, it is important to respect and understand the customs, festive food and costumes of the Chinese New Year to avoid misunderstanding

or misleading the traditional Chinese culture. For example, Apple's 2019 Chinese New Year ad "Three Minutes" successfully showcased the traditional culture and family values of Chinese New Year by telling a uniquely Chinese story about reunion, which gained great buzz. In the creative design of cross-cultural marketing, companies can also make their advertisements unique and novel by incorporating local cultural elements and a certain unique perspective. For example, Pepsi combined traditional Chinese cultural elements such as paper-cutting and Chinese New Year paintings with the Pepsi brand image through collaboration with local artists.

6.3 Deliver Positive Messages and Reflect Social Responsibility

Emphasis is placed on conveying positive values, such as respect, unity and affection, to avoid the spread of negative messages or stereotypes. Take Pepsi as an example, its advertisements can emphasise positive messages such as reunion, family togetherness and festivity, which fits in well with the Chinese New Year atmosphere [9]. The brand image can also be enhanced by the willingness of the brand to take social responsibility, such as supporting environmental protection and public welfare activities, as shown in the advertisements. For example, Pepsi can emphasise its efforts to support sustainable development and reduce plastic pollution in its advertisements, showing its concern for environmental protection.

6.4 Try to Use New Technologies

Use new technologies and presentation techniques, such as AR, VR and interactive experiences, to improve the appeal of the advert and audience engagement. For example, an interactive game based on AR technology can be developed to allow consumers to experience the Chinese New Year atmosphere in the game and enhance brand interaction.

6.5 Highlight Brand Values and Strengthen Brand Characteristics

Companies can reveal their brand values in their advertisements so as to attract loyal customers who share their values. For example, Pepsi emphasises the values of happiness and sharing conveyed by Pepsi by showing family members sharing a happy time together during the Chinese New Year in their advertisements. Companies can also subtly incorporate brand features into their advertisements so that consumers can clearly sense the uniqueness of the brand when viewing the advertisements [10]. For example, Pepsi commercials emphasise the taste and characteristics of the product, allowing consumers to imagine the unique feelings brought about by the brand when watching the commercial.

6.6 Targeted Communication Strategies

According to the characteristics of the target audience, targeted communication strategies and content adjustments can be made. For example, for young people, trendy elements and internet buzzwords can be added; for family audiences, the theme of family harmony

and reunion can be emphasised. This will ensure that different audience groups can resonate with the campaign and improve its effectiveness. Companies also need to make full use of various communication channels, such as social media, video platforms, outdoor advertising, etc., so as to expand the advertising coverage and allow more target audiences to be exposed to the brand message.

6.7 Continuously Optimise Marketing Activities Based on Feedback Information

After the launch of an advertisement, companies need to continuously collect feedback from consumers and industry experts to understand the actual effectiveness and impact of the advertisement. For example, by following social media and online reviews to get first-hand audience feedback. Companies can also set clear metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of their ads, such as brand awareness, ad reach and purchase intent, in order to better measure the success of their ads. Based on the evaluation results and feedback, advertising strategies and content can be continuously optimised to improve the quality and effectiveness of advertising. For example, the cultural elements of the advertisements can be adjusted to address cultural sensitivity issues, and the communication strategy and content can be adjusted to address communication channel and audience issues.

7 Conclusion

Pepsi has spent 10 years successfully winning the recognition and love of Chinese consumers with a series of “Bringing Joy Home” microfilm commercials. Behind this powerful brand IP is the strong support provided by the continued output of affinity, innovation with the times and an ever-increasing sense of engagement. The comparison with competitor Coca-Cola’s Chinese New Year advertising strategy also further shows the efforts made by Pepsi in gaining insight into its target consumers. Therefore, when developing cross-cultural communication strategies, international brands must, on the one hand, take the initiative to understand and adapt to the local culture and understand “what kind of story to tell” in order to obtain a cultural license for brand communication. On the other hand, it is also necessary to constantly innovate and understand “how to tell a good story” to motivate users to participate in order to achieve sustainable and effective brand communication.

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