



Analysis of Cross-Cultural Marketing Strategies for International Brands: The Example of Canon's "Digital Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage" Project

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Abstract. In the wake of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, Canon discovered that a large number of folk artisans who knew the language and history of the Qiang people had been killed and countless Qiang cultural heritage destroyed. As a result, Canon decided to use its core imaging technology to help preserve intangible cultural heritage in impoverished areas through its "Image for Good Strategy". In the following years, the Canon project team documented the intangible cultural heritage projects of dozens of ethnic groups, including the Qiang, Miao, Bai, Dai, Yi, Zhuang, Li, Naxi and Han Chinese. This paper takes the digital preservation project of intangible cultural heritage initiated by Canon in China as the object of study, and adopts a textual analysis method to analyse the brand's cross-cultural marketing strategy by summarising Canon's intangible heritage preservation projects, so as to provide indicative suggestions for Chinese enterprises' cross-cultural marketing.

Keywords: cross-cultural marketing · Canon · intangible cultural heritage · digital preservation

1 Introduction

Firstly, the development of economic globalization has contributed to the breakthrough of national cultural boundaries in economic production activities and the integration of content and form in space and time, which also brings new opportunities and challenges for the cross-cultural communication of brands. Huawei is the only Chinese brand on the "Best Global Brands 2020" list, according to Interbrand, a brand consultancy. What is stopping Chinese brands from growing into international brands? The fundamental reason is that most companies in China lack cross-cultural marketing awareness.

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Secondly, the protection of intangible cultural heritage is gradually being taken seriously by countries worldwide. As of December 2020, China has 42 items on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List (roster), ranking first in the world in terms of the total number. With the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, intangible cultural heritage has opened up a window for international cooperation and exchange [1]. Although China has always advocated the protection of intangible cultural heritage, domestic companies are unaware of this opportunity. Canon, as a Japanese brand, has been able to develop a digital preservation project for intangible cultural heritage in China with its keen market insight, and this cross-cultural marketing strategy is worth learning from Chinese companies.

2 Significance of the Study

Firstly, it fills a gap in the existing research. While most of the existing academic studies on Canon have focused on Canon’s advertising creativity and comparative analysis between Canon and other brands, the existing literature has not fully investigated Canon’s cross-cultural marketing communication, especially the digital preservation project of intangible cultural heritage initiated by Canon in China [2]. Therefore, this paper explores Canon’s cross-cultural marketing strategy by taking Canon’s digital preservation project of intangible cultural heritage as a research object, which can add perspectives to the existing literature.

Secondly, it answers the practical question. As globalization deepens and competition between brands gradually intensifies, it becomes increasingly difficult for Chinese companies to go abroad. By analyzing Canon’s cross-cultural marketing strategy, this paper can provide indicative suggestions for Chinese companies to carry out cross-cultural marketing.

3 Research Methodology

This paper will adopt a case study approach, with the idea of analyzing Canon’s cross-cultural marketing strategy by summarizing the brand’s intangible cultural heritage digital preservation project, and providing reference suggestions for Chinese companies’ cross-cultural marketing.

4 Analysis of Canon’s Cross-Cultural Marketing Strategy

4.1 Image Public Welfare Strategy

After the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, Canon found that the earthquake had killed a large number of Qiang folk skill inheritors who knew the Qiang language and history and culture, which had a great impact on the cultural heritage of the Qiang people, and that uncountable Qiang cultural heritage, such as towers, ancient burial sites and earthenware, had been destroyed in the earthquake. As a result, Canon established the “Image for Good Strategy”, using its core image technology to help protect the non-traditional heritage in poor areas, develop non-traditional tourism resources and cultivate

talents, and establish the first database for the protection of Qiang culture in China, which will be donated to the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Centre, as well as other institutions and organisations engaged in the protection of non-traditional heritage and scientific research [3]. In 2009, Canon's "Image - Cultural Footprints" project was officially launched. According to the Economic Times, Canon's performance in China grew by 20% in 2009, with digital SLR cameras achieving a 45% market share and compact digital cameras gaining 25% market share, both ranking first. It is clear that Canon's digital preservation project for ICH in China is not a gimmick, but has a market and economic return.

4.2 Launching a Digital Preservation Project for Intangible Cultural Heritage Images

In May 2010, Canon launched the "Miao Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection" project, and in the following two months, the project team travelled more than 10,000 kms to 16 counties and cities in the southeast of Guizhou, using cutting-edge video technology to comprehensively and thoroughly record the Miao silver forging techniques, Miao embroidery, Lusheng production and Lusheng dance [4]. In late July, the Canon "Digital Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Bai, Dai and Yi Peoples" project team went to more than 30 cities and counties in four autonomous prefectures in Yunnan Province to comprehensively record the most representative Bai tie-dye, Dai peacock dance and Yi cigarette box dance, and the Torch Festival, all of which are on the national intangible cultural heritage list of the Bai, Dai and Yi peoples. The project team's video recording lasted for more than two months. After the post-compilation process, the project team finally formed the "Bai, Dai and Yi Dynamic and Static Intangible Cultural Heritage Image Database", and Canon donated all the precious image data to the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Centre and the Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture free of charge.

From 2009 to 2013, the Canon ICH Protection Project Team used advanced imaging technology to record 21 ICH items of the Qiang, Miao, Bai, Dai, Yi, Zhuang, Li, Naxi and Han peoples, taking more than 78,000 photos and 1,300 h of video, with a cumulative data volume of 7 TB, leaving valuable ICH image data for future generations [5].

Canon has seen a significant increase in brand attention following its cross-cultural marketing efforts in China. According to the data of the 2013 China Digital Camera Market Research Annual Report published by the Internet Consumer Research Centre, Canon ranked first with 36% of the attention in 2013.

4.3 Image Discovery Silk Road Project

In 2014, Canon responded to China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative by launching the "Images Discovering the Beauty of the Silk Road" project in Xi'an, the starting point of the Silk Road, with the aim of recording and passing on the precious cultural imprints along the Silk Road with images. In the same year, Canon also produced a micro-documentary on the Huayin old cadence shadow [6]. By 2016, the Canon project team had travelled to Shaanxi, Henan, Gansu and Xinjiang, carrying out cultural visits, cultural image exchanges and image collection activities, collecting more than 30,000

photos and over 300 outstanding works, recreating the humanity and history of the new Silk Road with images, interpreting the beauty of Silk Road culture, and protecting and promoting the cultural heritage shared by all mankind.

4.4 Integrating Multiple Platforms for Dissemination

In the process of cultural preservation, Canon understands that it cannot achieve the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage by its own efforts alone, and that the establishment of an image cultural database is not enough [7]. For this reason, Canon has provided a platform to integrate the power of the government, inheritors, the public, media people and companies, and provided imaging technology and equipment to contribute to a benign ecosystem for the protection of intangible cultural heritage in China.

In its cross-cultural marketing to China, Canon has accurately grasped the timing, the current social situation in China and the emotions of its users. After the Wenchuan earthquake and the launch of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, Canon used images to document the artistic and cultural values of China’s intangible cultural heritage, creating an emotional connection with Chinese consumers [8]. Canon has brought its digital strengths to the forefront, and even as a Japanese brand, it has not been boycotted by Chinese consumers because of the history of the two countries.

5 Risk Issues in Cross-Cultural Marketing for International Brands

Cultural risk refers to the risk of misunderstanding, conflict, or even failure in cross-cultural communication due to differences between countries and cultures, including differences in language, values, social norms, management styles, beliefs and religions, food habits, social structures, etc. These differences may lead to differences in consumer demand for products and services, purchasing behavior, and consumer psychology as well, which may affect the development and implementation of marketing strategies [9]. Multinational enterprises need to face up to the fact that cultural differences are universal and that cultural risks inevitably arise in the course of business, and realize that cultural differences need to be treated with caution and that a proper understanding and systematic analysis of cultural risks is required in multinational operations:

5.1 Language Barriers

In cross-cultural marketing, expressions and contexts in different language environments may be misunderstood in the communication process, and these differences may lead to inaccurate delivery of marketing messages, resulting in negative effects [10]. For example, when Chevrolet introduced its new model “Nova” to the Latin American market, it did not realize that “Nova” means “no” in Spanish. Due to the misunderstanding of the language, consumers may have a negative perception of the product, which affects sales performance.

5.2 Cross-Cultural Team Communication and Coordination Issues

In cross-cultural marketing, team members come from different cultural backgrounds, which can lead to communication barriers and coordination difficulties. This can stem from differences in values, beliefs, and habits between cultures. For example, when IKEA entered the US market, it tried to bring the Swedish corporate culture and management style to the US. However, there are significant differences in the attitudes and values that American employees have toward their work compared to their Swedish counterparts. For example, American employees place more value on individual achievement and competition, while Swedish employees place more emphasis on teamwork and shared success; American employees generally believe that they should have more say and opportunities to participate in decision-making, while Swedish employees are usually more willing to follow management's instructions. These cultural differences led to communication barriers and coordination difficulties, which affected the productivity of IKEA's US team and employee satisfaction. To address these issues, IKEA has had to adapt its management strategy and corporate culture in the US to better suit the needs and expectations of its US employees through improved communication and coordination mechanisms.

5.3 Legal and Policy Differences

Laws, regulations, policies, and standards in different countries and regions may affect cross-cultural marketing. The reason for this is that governments have different regulations and requirements for business operations and marketing activities [9]. For example, Europe has much stricter requirements for data privacy protection than the US, and companies need to comply with the relevant regulations when conducting marketing. If companies fail to comply with the laws and regulations of their target markets, they may face legal disputes and potential risks that could affect their company's reputation and business development.

5.4 Social Responsibility and Ethical Issues

Consumers in different countries and regions have a different social responsibility and ethical requirements for companies, so in cross-cultural marketing, companies need to pay attention to social responsibility and ethical issues. For example, some multinational companies operating in developing countries have been accused of labor exploitation, resulting in damage to their brand reputation. In such cases, companies need to take ethical responsibility and address the issues involved in order to eliminate the negative impact.

5.5 Differences in Consumer Behavior

Cultural differences such as cultural backgrounds, values, beliefs, and habits can influence consumer needs and purchase decisions, so consumers in different countries and regions may have different purchasing behaviors and brand preferences. For example,

in India, many consumers prefer to buy products manufactured by family-owned companies rather than those by multinational companies. This may result in foreign brands facing greater competitive pressure and reduced market share in the Indian market. If companies fail to accurately capture consumer behavior in their target markets, this may have a negative impact on marketing strategies and product promotion.

5.6 Differences in Price Sensitivity

As consumers' purchasing power, the standard of living, and consumer attitudes vary from country to country, price sensitivity may also vary from country to country and region to region [10]. For example, in markets with high price sensitivity, such as India, companies may need to adopt a low-price strategy to attract consumers. If companies fail to adequately consider the price sensitivity of consumers in their target markets, this may result in inappropriate pricing of products and affect sales performance.

5.7 Differences in Marketing Channels and Approaches

The channels and ways in which consumers access information and purchase products may vary in different countries and regions. The reason for this is that countries have different levels of internet penetration, consumer habits, and the development of marketing channels. For example, in China, e-commerce platforms and social media play an important role in marketing, while in some countries in Africa, traditional retail channels still dominate. Companies that fail to accurately grasp the marketing channels and approaches in their target markets may lead to ineffective marketing strategies and reduced marketing effectiveness.

6 Cross-Cultural Marketing Advice for International Brands

“Going global” is increasingly becoming the consensus for Chinese companies to unlock their growth potential. But going global is not only about facing the same fierce international competition, it is also about communicating and cooperating with people from other cultures, and therefore avoiding negative impacts and crises caused by cultural differences. The ultimate goal of intercultural marketing is to enable companies to succeed in markets with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, in the context of globalization, companies need to have flexible marketing strategies, sharp market insight, and a high degree of cultural sensitivity to adapt to various complex market environments. Chinese companies going global can reduce or even avoid the cultural risks associated with cross-cultural marketing by taking into account the following recommendations:

6.1 Focus on Cultural Differences

Cultural differences are one of the biggest challenges faced by companies in the global marketplace. As different countries and regions have unique histories, languages, religions, and values, consumers' needs and expectations will also vary. Companies need to

understand and respect these differences and avoid using their own culture as a measuring stick, thereby reducing the risk of cultural misunderstandings and communication barriers. This requires companies to conduct in-depth market research into their target markets to understand local consumers' buying behavior, consumption habits, and consumer psychology. For example, when IKEA entered the Chinese market, it adapted local furniture sizes and functions to suit the living environment and habits of Chinese consumers. This cultural sensitivity has enabled IKEA to achieve success in the Chinese market.

6.2 Strengthening Cross-Cultural Training

The success of companies in foreign markets depends to a large extent on the intercultural communication skills of their employees. By providing cross-cultural training to employees, companies can improve their understanding and adaptability to the culture of the target market, help employees better cope with cultural conflicts, improve cultural sensitivity and facilitate effective communication with local governments, organizations, or individuals. For example, when P&G entered the Indian market, it trained its employees on Indian culture so that they could better understand the needs and expectations of Indian consumers,

6.3 Active Integration into the Local Culture

Companies in foreign markets can actively integrate into the local culture and take up social responsibilities such as participating in local public welfare activities, supporting education and environmental projects to enhance their reputation in the local area, and building a good corporate image. For example, Coca-Cola launched a limited edition red New Year packaging in China to cater to Chinese consumers' Chinese New Year customs, and this cultural integration strategy helped to increase the buzz and influence of Coca-Cola in the Chinese market. Another example is the US multinational Apple, which has undertaken a series of environmental projects in China, such as using renewable energy to power its Chinese production sites and recycling old equipment, which has enhanced its brand image in the Chinese market.

6.4 Seeking Common Ground While Reserving Differences

Companies should strive to integrate and root their corporate culture in the local culture. Based on recognizing cultural commonalities, a new type of corporate culture should be constructed according to the requirements of the environment and the company's strategy. This culture should be both inclusive and innovative, retaining the characteristics of the company's own corporate culture while adapting to the local cultural environment, and achieving effective integration between the corporate culture of the country and that of the target country. For example, McDonald's promotes its fast food culture globally, but when it enters different country markets, it also introduces special dishes for local tastes, such as vegetarian burgers in India and takoyaki burgers in Japan. This strategy of seeking common ground while reserving differences has enabled McDonald's to achieve success in the global market.

6.5 Choosing the Right Cross-Cultural Marketing Strategy

When choosing an appropriate cross-cultural marketing strategy, companies need to weigh their brand position, cultural differences, and market environment. Companies can choose to passively adapt to the local culture, or they can actively communicate their corporate culture or home country culture to the local market without clashing with the local culture. The former proposed strategy is generally suitable for situations where the local culture differs significantly from the corporate culture, or when the company has not yet established sufficient awareness in the target market and the company needs to pay close attention to the local culture to better integrate into the local market. The advantage of this strategy is that it greatly reduces the risk of culture clashes, but may weaken the company's core competencies and unique selling points.

The latter, on the other hand, applies when the company has already established a certain level of awareness in the target market, or when the company's culture has a strong appeal and influence. In these cases, the company may attempt to spread its culture and values to the target market, thereby increasing its brand influence and market position. This strategy can show that a company respects the local culture while spreading its values and philosophy to a degree that not only gains loyal consumers who identify with its corporate culture but also differentiates the brand from competing products. For example, Apple promotes its innovative, minimalist design philosophy globally, but when it entered the Chinese market, it also gave due consideration to the preferences of Chinese consumers by launching a red version of the iPhone to cater to their aesthetics. However, this strategy may also lead to communication barriers and misunderstandings if the corporate culture is too different from that of the target market.

6.6 Active Communication and Cooperation with the Local Market

In addition, companies can build good relationships with local governments, industry associations, and other partners to leverage local resources, obtain policy support, and share market information to better understand the local market, lower market entry barriers, enhance brand image, and access resources. Establishing joint ventures or strategic partnerships with local companies can effectively help companies gain access to shared resources, technology, and market information. For example, when German automaker Volkswagen entered the Chinese market, it established joint ventures with China's SAIC Group and FAW Group respectively to jointly develop and produce cars, achieving successful growth in the Chinese market. And establishing good relationships with local governments can help companies understand local policies, regulations, and market conditions and access significant policy support and incentives. For example, when Tesla set up its factory in Shanghai, China, it established a good relationship with the Shanghai government and obtained preferential policies in terms of land and taxation, and this helped Tesla to expand faster in the Chinese market.

6.7 Using AI Tools to Reduce Cultural Risk

AI can help businesses communicate and translate more efficiently and accurately across languages by translating conversations between languages in real-time using natural

language processing technology. For example, businesses can use AI translation software to translate their emails and documents with foreign customers to better understand their needs and cultural context. In addition, AI can also help businesses understand consumer needs and behavior in different cultural contexts through data analysis to better tailor their products and services. For example, companies can use AI to monitor remarks and comments on social media to help them understand how people perceive and react to products or services in different cultural contexts, and analyze consumer preferences and buying habits in various markets so that they can better warn of cultural risk events promptly, or adjust their marketing strategies based on consumer feedback.

7 Conclusion

Cultural differences are a huge obstacle for a company in cross-cultural marketing. After China's accession to the WTO, it has become more closely involved in trade with other countries and has inevitably integrated into the world economic market, competing with foreign companies in the market. This competition is not only reflected at the technical level but also includes the competition of brand culture, which is the soul of an enterprise. Therefore, when carrying out cross-cultural marketing, Chinese enterprises should pay attention to the creation of brand culture. Chinese companies need to implement differentiated marketing strategies in response to the cultural characteristics and audience preferences of each country, and thus expand the influence of their brands internationally.

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