

Research on the Marketing Strategy of Commercialization of Cultural Heritage IP in New Media Environment

--Taking "Li Ning x Dunhuang Museum Ta Series" as an Example

Ruizhen Hu^{1,a,*}

¹ School of Pharmacy, Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Shanghai, China, 201203

a. gyyuestudio98@163.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: Dunhuang was a trading forefront along the ancient Silk Road and a hub for cultural interchange and integration. As the world's largest and best-preserved repository of Buddhist art, the Mo Kao Grotto at Dunhuang contains many valuable materials that reflect the mix of multiple cultures. This paper takes the "Li Ning x Dunhuang Museum Ta Series" co-branded new products launch as an example. Applying the communication theory of cultural symbols, two parts of 4R Marketing Theory and the theory of two-step flow of communication, this paper explores marketing strategies for commercializing cultural heritage IP in the new media environment. The purpose is to study how cultural heritage should be utilized for its profound cultural and artistic connotations to cooperate with brands ingeniously in cross-border business. This study finds that the unique historical connotations of cultural heritage can enhance consumers' cultural identity, thus enhancing user stickiness, expanding brand awareness, attracting potential consumers and promoting its own cultural values at the same time.

Keywords: cultural heritage, brand marketing strategy, Mo Kao Grotto at Dunhuang, IP marketing

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage is the legacy of history to the world. Dunhuang, a place where four of the world's most far-reaching cultural systems - Chinese, Indian, Greek and Islamic - converge, holds an important place and value in historical research. Current research in the field of cultural heritage marketing focuses on tourism development of heritage sites and marketing strategies for cultural and creative products, focusing more on their historical value. Cultural heritage should not be confined to small museums, they have unlimited potential and deserve to be explored in depth. This paper takes the "Li Ning x Dunhuang Museum Ta Series" co-branded new product launch as an example to study the advantages of IP-based cultural heritage marketing through cross-border cooperation in the new media environment. This paper explores the direction of cultural heritage out of the museum and discusses how brands should use the connotations of cultural heritage to enhance their brand value. Using the communication theory of cultural symbols, two parts of 4R Marketing Theory and the

theory of two-step flow of communication, this paper tries to provide a new path for the IP-based development of cultural heritage and some new ideas for its commercialization and marketing through the method of case study. In the future, cultural heritage will be more valued by society and its commercial value will be explored more. However, how to develop its commercial value while preserving its profound historical value is worthy of our continued exploration, to do more than simply borrowing the regimental pattern or style, but to integrate its cultural value and incorporate it into the brand.

2. Introduction of "Li Ning X Dunhuang Museum Ta Series" Marketing Campaign in the New Media Environment

On February 17, 2020, Li Ning official microblog on the network to preview Li Ning joint Dunhuang Museum's new Dunhuang - top series will soon be on sale for the first time. Then on March 2 of the same year, the first announcement of the new spokesperson for the series triggered 16,000 retweets and 28,000 likes. On April 17 of the same year, its spokesperson's personal Weibo posted a pre-release tweet for the new product launch, which received 1 million+ retweet and comments and 476,000 likes. The official microblog service maintains a steady flow of about 3 new product previews per month.

On August 15, 2020, Li Ning's official microblog released the topic of "Silk Road Exploration" for the first time, and previewed a large outdoor show to be held in Dunhuang Yadan Devil City on August 25, and released a trailer. This tweet has generated 28,000 retweets, and the topic of "Silk Road Exploration" has received 590 million reads and 9.1 million discussions so far. On August 25, the brand fashion show "Li Ning Thirty and Rising - Silk Road Exploration Theme Party" opened with the desert as the T-stage, camel bells and western theme music as the background music, leading the audience to immerse themselves in the charm of Dunhuang culture.

In addition to the hundreds of viewers at the site, Li Ning also conducted a live broadcast of the event for more than three hours at its Tmall flagship store, with a small live room dedicated to introducing new brand products and live marketing. The online live broadcast reached 630,000 views, and the entire event created 500 million+ discussions across the network, with its influence involving celebrities, fashionistas, sports athletes and many other fields [1].

The campaign was inspired by the cultural connotation of the Silk Road in Dunhuang and started with the story of a young man in Chang'an who traveled west on horseback, with the keywords of "Silk Road Exploration", "Youthful Spirit" and "New Life of Fusion", showing the legendary story of Li Ning brand which still has the youthful heart at the age of establishment. Mr. Li Ning said, Li Ning has always insisted on the responsibility of promoting China's excellent history and culture to the world, and adhered to the original intention of "anything is possible" [2]. At the end of the catwalk show, the T-stage was transformed into a stage for an exquisite musical performance.

After the event, the next day, August 26, Li Ning's official microblog released a review of the show in the form of pictures, which received 9,000+ retweets. The show review video was released on August 29, and the video was viewed 38,000 times. Two months later, using the afterglow of the Silk Road Exploration Party, Li-Ning launched the LI-NING X MAC Dunhuang Culture Limited Makeup Gift Set in conjunction with MAC. Once again, the cross-border cooperation maximizes the value of Dunhuang culture, helps Dunhuang culture get out of the museum and shows more possibilities for Dunhuang cultural IP.

3. Analysis of Marketing Strategy of "Li Ning X Dunhuang Museum Ta Series" in a New Media Environment

3.1. Analysis of Marketing Strategies Based on the Communication of Cultural Symbols

Semiotics is a scientific method used in modern society to study the humanities and social sciences. Ernst Cassirer The famous cultural philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, proposed the conception of human beings as most fundamentally "symbolic animals," showing that humans can use symbols to convey culture [2]. Cultural symbols are the carriers of excellent cultural connotations and their external representations in the long history [3]. Cultural symbol communication is actually a kind of "encoding-decoding" process mediated by symbols. The semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure proposed that a symbol consists of a "signifier" and a "signified" [4], which is the primary referential system. In other words, in the process of communication, symbols are first given meaning through coding, forming primary symbols. Subsequently, Roland Barthes proposed the theory of the secondary referential system, in which the primary symbols are encoded again as "signifier" to form new "signified", i.e., secondary symbols [5]. That is to say, symbols can be extended forward through the decoding-encoding process again and again to create new connotations applicable to various fields.

"Li Ning x Dunhuang Museum Ta series" has created a new idea for clothing design. Li Ning chose "Dunhuang", which is rich in cultural connotation and history, as the first level symbol, and combined with its own brand values to carry out secondary coding. In other words, it has created three parts of thematic clothing: "Silk Road Exploration", "Youthful Spirit" and "New Life of Fusion", combining the primary symbols with the brand design concept to create secondary symbols that fit the characteristics of the brand. For example, "Silk Road Exploration" is inspired by the caravans on the Silk Road. In ancient times when transportation was scarce, the caravans on the Silk Road were resolute and brave, they were hardworking, and they were not afraid of hardships. To highlight this quality, Li Ning used the tie-dye process in the design, creating the feeling of patches through irregular color patchwork, and adding Dunhuang fresco patterns [6]. This part of the costume gives a youthful and energetic spirit. The brand's positive and daring personality of "anything is possible" is transformed into a brand culture symbol.

Of course, in the process of communication, the source symbols are passed to the recipients, who decode the symbolic information according to their own personalities and the knowledge background they possess, so the decoding results may be different. Therefore, whether the meaning embedded in the symbolic message can be transmitted to the recipient depends greatly on whether the recipient's perception of the symbol is consistent [3]. Dunhuang culture has been passed down in China for thousands of years, and its cultural connotation has long been written into textbooks. Together with the introduction of the background story in Li Ning's design concept, both guide the recipients in the same decoding direction and cause the recipients to resonate with the brand spirit, thus stimulating consumers' purchasing behavior. Consumers not only buy brand products but also pay for the culture behind them. As a historical and cultural powerhouse, China has much of the same cultural heritage as Dunhuang to explore. The symbolization of Dunhuang culture can also be said to form a cultural IP that will help cultural heritage explore more possibilities for cross-border cooperation.

3.2. Analysis of Marketing Strategy Based on 4R Marketing Theory

DonE Schultz, an American scholar, proposed the 4R Marketing Theory, which refers to Relevancy, Reaction, Relationship and Reward. According to the 4R Marketing Theory, consumer demand is not only limited to the need for material products, but also the demand for a comprehensive experience in the whole process from purchase to use. In the following, this paper will analyze the advantages of

commercializing cultural heritage IP based on the two aspects of 4R Marketing Theory, Relevancy and Reaction.

Relevancy. In this competitive market, consumer loyalty is changing. To increase consumer loyalty, we need to establish a relationship with consumers in all aspects of business, products, etc., forming a relationship of mutual assistance, mutual demand and mutual need [7]. With the improvement of people's consumption level, consumers will now more often pursue high-level, cultural-level products or services.

In January 2022 the Jingdong Institute of Consumer and Industry Development released the 2021 "IP Co-branded Consumption Report", which showed very rapid growth in IP co-branded merchandise purchase users and sales. In the first three quarters of 2021, the year-over-year growth rate of the number of users who purchased IP co-branded products and sales rose to 65.7% and 91.8%. This shows that consumers' love for products with cultural connotations is soaring.

Li Ning's co-branded cooperation with Dunhuang is actually an injection of the value concept contained in Dunhuang culture into its own products. Consumers are attracted by the splendid culture of Dunhuang when choosing products, and they also feel the efforts made by Li Ning in spreading the culture of Dunhuang, which in turn makes them feel good about Li Ning. Li Ning then used this to establish a stable and long-term connection with consumers, increasing consumer loyalty to itself.

Reaction. In competitive markets that interact with each other, the most important thing in marketing is not how to make a plan, but to discover the needs of consumers and listen to them in time, that is, to improve the speed of market response [7]. As China's cultural strength grows, the Chinese people are becoming more and more culturally confident and demanding of material products, and consumers are more willing to pay for the cultural connotations behind the products. Brands have to respond quickly in order to cater to this consumer demand. The most important feature of the 4R Marketing Theory is that it is competition-oriented, adapts to changes in demand, establishes multiple associations, and achieves a win-win situation while sublimating the brand culture [8]. Hearing consumers' demands, Li Ning combined its products with cultural heritage and made adjustments to the products, shifting to a more personalized direction, combining Dunhuang culture and responding to consumer demand.

3.3. Analysis of Marketing Strategy Based on the Theory of Two-step Flow of Communication

The theory of two-step flow of communication was first developed from the study of political elections, which found that voters' attitudes are greatly influenced by those who are passionate about politics, and in this case, interpersonal communication is very effective [9]. Later applied to the field of communication, these influential people are called "key opinion leaders"(KOL). In the process of information dissemination, the information from the media is first passed to the opinion leaders, who then pass on the information they have obtained to the public, a process known as the "two-step flow of communication" [10]. The model is shown in Fig. 1.



Figure 1: Two-step flow of communication model.

The "Li Ning x Dunhuang Museum Ta series" has made use of the influence of KOL both in the pre-release publicity and post-release marketing activities. Under the topic of "Silk Road Exploration" on Sina Weibo, there are a total of 14 microblogs on the first page of the popular section,

of which only 2 are released by Li Ning, while the rest are released by celebrities or related marketing account. The one with the highest number of retweets, likes and comments was posted by Hua Chenyu, a popular Chinese singer who is also the spokesperson of Li Ning Ta series. The blog received 1 million+ retweet and comments, as well as 1.29 million likes. As a young Chinese singer, Hua Chenyu has won the hearts of many young people with his unique singing style and strong vocals. His songs have a wide range of styles, most of which are full of fervor and madness and contain elements of Chinese style. This fits the magnificence and cultural deposits of the Dunhuang desert and Li Ning's brand value of "anything is possible". KOLs add their own understanding and combine it with their own persona image when delivering their message. Through the fan effect, not only enhances the influence of the event but also strengthens the cultural connotation of the event and enhances the cultural identity of consumers, achieving a win-win situation. The old-fashioned cultural heritage, which was originally difficult for young people to accept, has also come alive to the public through cross-border cooperation and through two-step flow of communication.

4. Conclusion

This paper explores the marketing strategy of commercializing cultural heritage IP by taking the "Li Ning x Dunhuang Museum Ta Series" co-branded new product launch as an example. Through the co-branding of cultural heritage IP with brands, on the one hand, capitalizing on consumers' love for cultural heritage and cultural identity can enhance consumers' willingness to buy, increase product premiums and boost sales. On the other hand, IP co-branded products, as a derivative of cultural heritage connotations, attract more consumers while also promoting their own cultural values and making more people aware of the historical and cultural heritage embedded in cultural heritage. This thesis is limited by the use of case studies, and the number of blogs under the topic is too huge for a complete count, so there is a certain regret. Future research can focus on exploring more possibilities of commercializing cultural heritage IP, breaking the limitation that cultural heritage exists only in museums, and finding more possibilities for cross-border cooperation.

References

- [1] Ouyang Yu& Hanwei Kong. (2021).Research on brand communication of Dunhuang Museum's cultural and creative products. *Old Brand Marketing* (08),13-14. doi:CNKI:SUN:LZHP.0.2021-08-007.
- [2] Cassirer, E. (2021). *An essay on man*. In *An Essay on Man*. Yale University Press.
- [3] Yuanyuan Shang.(2021).Research on the Innovative Communication of Excellent Chinese Traditional Culture under the Perspective of Cultural Symbols--Take "National Treasures" as an Example. *Dissemination and Copyright*(10),46-49.
- [4] De Saussure, F. (2011). *Course in general linguistics*. Columbia University Press.
- [5] Barthes, R. (2015). *Mythologies*. Média Diffusion.
- [6] Huanqiu Web. Li Ning become independent at thirty years old, in the desert Gobi staged fashion show. 27/08/2020. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1676147908949595847&wfr=spider&for=pc>
- [7] Sufen Liu.(2005).Marketing innovation in Chinese companies from the relationship of 4P, 4C and 4R. *Business Economy*(02),118-120.
- [8] Xiaozhong Yu,Shan Feng.(2002).Comparative analysis of 4P, 4C and 4R marketing theories. *Productivity Studies*(03),248-249+263.
- [9] Dayong Yang, Zujue Wang, Xulan Cheng. (2001). A preliminary investigation of the theory of two-step flow of communication. *Journal of Henan Vocational and Technical College* (02), 52-54+58.
- [10] Yu Li. (2013). The strategy of "two-step flow of communication" in external communication: Taking CCTV as an example. *External Communication* (02), 30-33+1.