

Intercultural Communication from the Perspective of Cultural Discount: The Development of K-Pop Groups Girls' Generation, BTS and Newjeans in China as Examples

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to explore the development and dissemination of K-POP in the Chinese market from the perspective of cultural discount, and to analyze and discuss the strategies and different stages of dissemination. Since the 21st century, K-POP culture has gained great success in China, especially among the Chinese young generation, with Girls' Generation, BTS, and NewJeans being the most typical ones. Taking the above three K-POP groups as samples, this paper analyzes the communication backgrounds, communication strategies, and communication effects of the three groups by using case study method, and explores the reasons why they are able to overcome cultural discounts and achieve good Intercultural communication effects in the Chinese market. The results show that cultural discount, as an inevitable phenomenon in the process of Intercultural communication, has been overcome to a large extent through different means in the process of K-POP's communication to China, and has even been effectively utilized in reverse. However, because of the popularity and homogeneity of K-POP content, as well as the high cultural priority and strong influence of China's own culture, the results of K-POP's communication in China have certain audience limitations and the durability and depth of communication are not guaranteed.

Keywords: Cultural Discount; K-POP; Intercultural Communication.

1. Introduction

In recent years, due to increased intercultural communication and the global spread of culture, there has been a growing interest in the cross-regional production, distribution, and consumption of cultural products. During this phenomenon, cultural appropriation has emerged as a primary method for creating cultural products. However, it has also led to a cultural depreciation, which in turn has become a hindrance to the effective functioning of cultural products.

As a latecomer in the cultural industry, Korea rose rapidly in the late 1990s and became a successful model of industrial transformation for Asian countries. After 1997, in China, Japan and its neighboring countries, popular culture such as movies, TV dramas, animation and games, popular music, food and other popular cultures have seen a surge of momentum of the "Korean Wave", which has created an image of Korea that is rich in modern charm, emotional charm and dynamic charm. The "Korean Wave" has created an image of Korea that is rich in modernity, emotion, and dynamism. In recent years, among the various cultural products that have been spread across cultures in Korea, K-POP music has achieved the most impressive results in the Chinese market by drawing on the strengths of global multiculturalism and the natural cultural similarities that have long existed in the East Asian cultural sphere. Amidst the constant change of the world's cultural products and the ever-changing trend of the times, what has enabled K-POP culture to overcome cultural discounts and achieve high-quality long-term development in the Chinese market.

2. Literature Review: Cultural Discount

The concept of "cultural discount" was originally introduced by Colin Hoskins and R. Mirus in their 1988 paper titled "The Reasons for U.S. Dominance in the International Market for Television Programs." It refers to the phenomenon where the value of a cultural product in the international market diminishes due to disparities in cultural backgrounds, causing it to be less recognized or

comprehended by audiences in different regions [1]. They put forth the argument that a cultural product, such as a television program, film, or video deeply rooted in a specific culture, may find success in its domestic market where viewers share a common understanding of norms and lifestyles [1]. However, its appeal tends to diminish in foreign markets where audiences struggle to connect with the cultural nuances, values, beliefs, histories, myths, social institutions, natural surroundings, and behavioral patterns. These differences in cultural structures are the primary drivers of the "cultural discount" phenomenon.

Cultural discount has a direct impact on the acceptance of the audiovisual audience and the realization of the market benefits of the product. A product with a high cultural discount is difficult to arouse the interest of the audiovisual audience, while a product with a low cultural discount is easy to be accepted by the people.[2]By extension, cultural discount can be found in any phenomenon of value loss due to differences in cultural structures: between generations, between superiors and subordinates, between Southerners and Northerners, and between dominant and subcultural populations, all of which experience varying degrees of cultural discount in their interactions. After more than 40 years of multifaceted research across three continents and more than 50 countries, Hofstede summarized five dimensions for measuring "cultural discount": Individualism/Collectivism, where members only care about themselves and their families or tend to emphasize their belonging to a certain group, Uncertainty and Uncertainty Avoidance (how strongly members feel a sense of crisis when confronted with unfamiliar situations), Power Distance (how accepting members are of unfair distribution of power), Masculinity/Femininity (how the society emphasizes Success or quality of life), and Long-/Short-term Orientation (members are more frugal and insist on planning for the future, or more concerned with living in the present), completing a pioneering work in the quantitative study of "cultural discount". --The "Five Dimensions of Culture Theory" [3].

In the wider global cultural marketplace, strong and weak cultures are also shaped by the influence of culture and the combined power of nations. The advantage of a strong culture lies in the fact that it makes other regions understand and come into contact with its culture through continuous cultural export, and forms an internationalized discourse system, which means that "weak cultures" with different cultural backgrounds in different regions need to adopt an internationalized discourse system and a discourse logic that can be accepted by the international community when they carry out their external communication and cultural export. The logic of the discourse should be internationally acceptable. Once the rules are formulated by the strong culture, the weak culture will first need a process of adaptation, during which the brand message will be reduced, and then the interest of the consumers in the foreign culture will be reduced, which will ultimately affect the value of the products being discounted [4].

Studying the phenomenon of "cultural discount" and exploring the inner mechanism of its formation will help us to minimize and eliminate the loss of value due to "cultural discount" in transnational, cross-cultural, cross-border and cross-population communication, and to improve the effectiveness and quality of communication. It is of great theoretical significance and practical reference value for the promotion of social consensus. More specifically, it can help us to study the long-term process and strategy of K-POP culture dissemination in China. In terms of the logic of the communication process, the three key nodes in the whole process of communication, from "message reach" to "message awareness" to "message recognition", are crucial to the realization of the value of communication. are crucial to the realization of communication value.

3. K-POP Development History

In the 1960s, the Korean government began to implement a cultural policy centered on popular culture, initially aimed at enhancing the national cultural pride of the country's young people to counterbalance the impact of Western culture on Korean society [5]. After the cultural policy achieved better results domestically, the Korean government established the Korea Culture Industry

Promotion Agency (KOCCA) in 1998 to promote the export of cultural goods such as movies, games, art, music and animation to foreign countries [6].

Since 1998, South Korea has actively pursued its strategy of "building a nation of culture." Through concerted efforts from both the government and the private sector, the country has made substantial progress in cultural development and has successfully expanded into the international market [7]. The 1990s marked a significant turning point with the release of the groundbreaking album "I Know" by Seo Taiji & Boys, which held the number one position on the Korean music charts for an impressive 17 weeks. This album served as an emblematic representation of the emergence of contemporary K-POP. Seo Taiji & Boys fused American neo-jazz with modern pop music, effectively overshadowing the slow-paced ballads that were prevalent in Korea during that era. Their immense popularity led to the rise of numerous similar bands and gave birth to the idol culture. Towards the late 1990s, Korean entertainment organizations responded to the societal demand for new music idols by intensively recruiting and training young talents. This approach was influenced by the J-pop (Japanese pop) model. Consequently, this period witnessed the emergence of iconic groups like H.O.T, S.E.S, and Baby Vox. In the 2000s, K-POP transcended its Korean origins and made a significant impact on the international stage. The genre's influence continued to burgeon with the success of groups such as BigBang, which debuted in 2006 and subsequently garnered worldwide recognition.

The evolution of K-POP can be divided into several generations characterized by distinct strategies for international expansion. The first generation of K-POP stars predominantly adopted a localization strategy. They collaborated with local agencies and tailored their songs to incorporate local languages and stylistic elements, aiming to resonate with audiences in foreign markets. Subsequently, the second generation emerged, marked by the establishment of international branches by K-POP agencies. These branches were tasked with promoting the music of popular Korean idols locally and expanding their presence in overseas markets. The current third generation of K-POP stars has adopted a more direct approach to global outreach. Leveraging the power of social media platforms like YouTube, they have ventured into the international arena by presenting songs primarily in the Korean language.

4. Methodology

This paper takes three representative K-POP groups, Girls' Generation, BTS, and NewJeans, as cases for analysis, and analyzes the responses and evaluations of the consumer groups of the three groups in the Chinese market, and further deduces whether cultural discounts as an objective phenomenon can be overcome and analyzes how they can be positively utilized in intercultural communication, taking into account the overall cultural atmosphere and strategies of the Korean entertainment industry. In the light of the overall cultural atmosphere and strategies of the Korean entertainment industry, we will further deduce whether cultural discounts can be overcome as an objective phenomenon in intercultural communication and analyze how it can be positively utilized.

5. Results

5.1. Girls' Generation

As a pop girl group launched by Korean entertainment company SM Entertainment Ltd. in 2007, Girls' Generation's development path was not smooth. At a time when the general environment was "going out of Korea and focusing on the East Asian market," SM Entertainment, although already a leader in the K-POP industry, was still not favored because there was no precedent for creating a successful girl group. This situation has been broken by the emergence of Girls' Generation. In terms of running the group, the company created the debut documentary variety show "Girls' Generation," which changed the traditional image of a "finished" idol and allowed viewers to enter the idol's life as a participant. In addition, SM has made up for the lack of communication and interaction between idols and fans in the past, so that idols no longer only appear on the stage, launched a road to work

shooting, book signing meet and so on to bring fans closer to the idol. The company also created an innovative form of idol IP to create "idol small card" (i.e., the collection of cards printed with the idol's photo) and became very popular.

5.2. BTS

BTS debuted in June 2013, the original development strategy is also the traditional "Korean market - East Asian market - the world market", but due to the announcement of the United States in 2016 in South Korea to deploy the SAD anti-missile system triggered by China's boycott and enacted restrictions on South Korea turned to change the direction of the market into Europe and the United States. As far as the operation mode is concerned, BTS also broke the traditional K-POP group's usual mode of "the company arranges the songs - members sing", and the group's members created their own high-quality songs and eventually gained a high degree of recognition in the European and American markets. According to Billboard's official data, in 2019 BTS's world tour "Love yourself: Speak yourself" 12 box office reached 78.9 million dollars, the average of nearly 6.58 million dollars, the average score for the history of the sixth. BTS in Europe and the United States market popularity ultimately feeds the group's development in the Chinese market, by virtue of the performance of the European and American cultural circle, advertising endorsements and other activities continue to enhance the international community. With performances in European and American cultural circles, advertising endorsements and other activities, the group continues to increase its international influence, radiating into the Chinese market and gaining a large number of fans.

5.3. NewJeans

NewJeans debuted in July 2022 under the same company as BTS. Unlike BTS, whose popularity is based on their self-composed songs, NewJeans has reverted back to the business model of "company arranges the song and members sing it". However, the NewJeans production team broke away from the established idol group business model of having a fixed style, and instead chose to have each NewJeans album take on a different country's cultural and musical style (e.g., "ditto" is an East Asian school style documentary, "super-shy" is an East Asian school style documentary, "super-shy" is an East Asian school style documentary, "super-shy" is an East Asian school style documentary, and "super shy" is an East Asian school style documentary. "Super shy" has a strong American cheerleading style), which has enabled NewJeans to achieve excellent results in the global cultural market to this day.

6. Discussion

At the fundamental level, barriers to cross-cultural communication originate from three basic levels: at the bottom is the practical level, i.e., the different social practices and lifestyles carried out by different peoples and nations on the basis of the natural environment in which they live [8]. The second is the psychological and mental level, i.e., the different values and modes of thinking formed by different peoples and nations on the basis of their social practices and lifestyles. The most superficial level is the symbolic level. Cultural differences are firstly manifested in the differences in language and other symbols. Cross-cultural communication inevitably involves the translation of the languages of the two sides. Translation means that the concepts that express the social practices and lifestyles of one's own side are transformed into the concepts that express the related or similar social practices and lifestyles of the other side, which will create a huge communication obstacle due to the language differences between the two sides.

Theoretically, the formation of a content product is an information "encoding" process, and accordingly, the reception and interpretation of the content product is an information "decoding" process. An ideal information decoding process is one that can minimize the value depletion of the original content product and value reversal (misinterpretation) caused by users' "cultural discount"

and cognitive bias. In order to do this, the decoding process must be reduced to analyzing and exploring several influencing factors that play a key role in the user's decoding.

First of all, it is related to the cognitive carrier: the "discount" caused by language differences. strictly speaking, languages are fundamentally untranslatable. There is an obvious loss of information value in the process of conversion between different languages. To fundamentally solve this problem, there is only one way: to master the other side of the language and discourse, with the other side of the market language and thinking habits "speak". Therefore, we must realize that a content work has at least two value dimensions in the construction of the task: one is the vertical depth of the value of the operation and expression, so that the content and form of the work of expression in line with the requirements of profound, vivid, evocative and believable; the second is the horizontal width of the value of the ability to connect and the creation of resonance effects, that is the creation of the same cultural attributes of the same work can be used to achieve emotional resonance, emotional resonance, resonance effects, and the creation of the same work of art. The other is the ability to connect values and create a resonance effect in the horizontal width, i.e., the ability to create a resonance effect that enables people with different cultural attributes to realize emotional resonance and relational identity under the inspiration of the same content work. Our communicators are more familiar with the operation and expression of vertical depth values, while they are relatively weak in the creation of horizontal width values and resonance effects. This is the key to reducing the "cultural discount" in intercultural communication. For example, in today's cyberspace, we often see all kinds of "ugly" content, which, according to traditional concepts, we would classify as trash. However, why do many people, especially young people, think that these "ugly" contents are not ugly but beautiful, and even fanatically follow them and become their "fans"? Pragmatically speaking, it is because these so-called "ugly" contents have touched their inner identity, aroused their emotional resonance, and given them a great sense of empathy and identification, thus becoming their ethnic symbols and attachments for group catharsis. If we are good at grasping and utilizing these symbols and carriers to carry content that expresses mainstream values, isn't this precisely a kind of "connection" and synergy across cultural communities based on new carriers?

Secondly, it has to do with the cognitive frame of reference: resolving the "discount" caused by prior experience. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, the process of "cognition-understanding" is a process of categorizing, matching, integrating and structuring a foreign information with one's own cognitive structure based on one's existing cognitive system (structured knowledge, experience, etc.). From the perspective of cognitive psychology, the process of human "cognition-understanding" is the process of categorizing, matching, integrating and structuring a foreign information with one's own cognitive structure based on one's existing cognitive system (structured knowledge, experience, experience, etc.). Therefore, people's existing experience plays an important role in the process of users' "decoding" of foreign content works. For example, the main contradiction of social problems in developed countries in the West focuses on the balance of interests among horizontal groups of people and their participation in decision-making, so their interpretation of relevant social problems is generally based on the paradigm of "democratic participation"; while for developing countries like China, the paradigm of "democratic participation" is generally based on the paradigm of "democratic participation". For developing countries like China, "development" itself constitutes the most important path and program for solving social problems, therefore, we tend to "decode" social problems from the perspective of the "development" paradigm. Therefore, we tend to use the "development" paradigm to "decode" social problems. When communicating across cultures, people from different cultural backgrounds face the same events, the same phenomena and the same problems, but they will come to different conclusions based on different "paradigms" of understanding, and sometimes their perceptions may even be very different. Similarly, the reason why dialogues and communications between different cultural groups often fail is largely due to the different socio-cultural references of the communicating parties. Therefore, in order to minimize the compromise and enhance the effectiveness of communication, it is necessary to pay attention to the differences in cognitive frames of reference and make efforts to build up a "consensual space" (i.e.,

to find out the common parts of each other's socio-cultural cognitive frames of reference) between the two parties in order to serve as a foothold of communication and a point of influence for both parties to exert. (i.e., to find common parts of each other's socio-cultural cognitive reference system) as a basis for communication and influence. Generally speaking, there are three levels in the mental structure of people's social cognition: deep value psychology, basic social attitudes and specific social opinions. The more the latter, the greater the differences; the more the former, the more the commonalities (i.e., overlaps) between different cultural groups. Therefore, avoiding specific social opinions and seeking common ground in basic social attitudes and deep value psychology is a key operation to solve the problem of "value discounting" in communication due to differences in cognitive frames of reference.

At the same time, the French theory of cultural rebound believes that "if a foreign shallow culture deeply infringes on another rich culture, after a certain stage and to a certain extent, the culture will implement rebound"; that is people will re-recognize and recognize the original rich culture [9]. Since K-POP industry chooses popular culture as the main content of propagation in the process of propagation, from the perspective of advantage, the speed of propagation is very fast; however, from the perspective of disadvantage, the durability and depth of propagation are difficult to maintain, and a more solid social support is needed [10]. Although China has a strong cultural inclusiveness towards foreign cultures in the process of cultural development, it still upholds the cultural development concept of "take me as the main, use for me", and the traditional Chinese culture that has been passed down for thousands of years in the country has a far-reaching influence, so the soil of K-POP culture is still not deep enough for its cultural dissemination in China.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, it is not difficult to find that K-POP culture industry specialize in intercultural communication by utilizing various cultural phenomena to carry out communication that meets the national conditions of the target market and grasps the trend of cultural trends: whether it is the use of cultural "homologous differences" to dismantle the basis of identity, which is represented by Girls' Generation to dissolve the foundation of identity to realize the ice-breaking of intercultural communication, or the reverse use of cultural discounts backed by the already mature resources of the European and American markets to successfully introduce to the Chinese market as represented by BTS, and Mix-POP based on the global multiculturalism as represented by NewJeans, the smart use of "cultural appropriation" to break the fixed conceptual program to really break the cultural trend. The Mix-POP, represented by NewJeans, is based on global multiculturalism and skillfully utilizes "cultural appropriation" to break the fixed conceptual program to truly realize the locally adapted dissemination of "thinking in the way of the target cultural market and speaking in the way of the target cultural market". TV dramas, movies and K-POP music are the three carriages that drive the spread of K-POP culture, and "globalized thinking, localized action" is the inherent concept of the spread of K-POP culture in China. As far as the Chinese market is concerned, the K-POP industry has accurately targeted the young generation in China, utilizing young people's sensitivity to and following of fashionable trends and culture, cleverly utilizing cultural discounts, cultural appropriation, etc., to create a peripheral industry that conforms to the popular trend (such as mini-cards, random dances, etc.), and producing explosive products with a wide range of circulation and a very fast spreading speed to establish a position in the market. It has created a situation where K-POP culture is widely spreading in China and the entire East Asian cultural circle.

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