Analysis of Transcultural Communication of Eastern Brands Based on Encoding and Decoding Theory-Taking Issey Miyake for Example

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Abstract. With the globalization of communication nowadays, the needs of fashion brands are also increasing especially for those eastern brands, which appeared less in the global fashion stage before. This paper focuses on and explains how to conduct transcultural communication successfully for eastern brands based on the encoding and decoding theory proposed by Stuart Hall. Taking three cases of Japanese brand Issey Miyake for examples, this research analyzes how the brand encoded information in the advertisements and designs and then concludes three aspects of problems, different social contexts, orientalism stereotype and fashion system leaded by the west, to dig into the flash point of strategies of an eastern brand that is seen as successful internationally. Then universal implications matching with the problems, which are concluded in concrete cases, are provided for eastern brands to use for reference. The essay strives to explore for eastern brands in the cultural integration process of fashion industry.

Keywords: Transcultural communication; encoding and decoding; Issey Miyake.

1. Introduction

As the international situation changes, there has been a trend in these years that more and more eastern fashion brands showing up in the international market. However, from many conflicts in brands' transcultural publicity and communication in social medias, it's apparent that it difficult for an eastern fashion brand to enter western markets. One of effective ways to solve the problem is to resort to a certain theory, and encoding and decoding theory is chosen for its clear illustration of a new framework of a communication process.

Encoding is the process of putting a message into the form in which it will be communicated. The process of decoding starts when the receiver goes through in trying to interpret the exact meaning of the message [1]. Stuart Hall proposed the theory at first in 1970s to explain the communication process between television programs makers and their audiences, offering a theoretical approach of the way media messages are produced, circulated, interpreted and reproduced. These four stages are relatively autonomous from each other, so that the coding of information controls its receptions but not transparent [2]. The theory has been used in many communication subjects, mainly in three directions in related researches before.

The first main direction is about investigating the process of mass-media communication. such as magazines [3] and films [4]. Decherney is intended to claim the changing of mass-media when it entered into the digital age [5]. The second main direction focuses on the linguistic subject perspective, including course teaching [2], translation [6] and so on. The third main direction researches on macro-cultural phenomenon. For example, Liu and Qin illustrate the problem of Japanese idols culture communication with the theory [7]. However, the researches on luxury brand transcultural communication based on encoding and decoding theory are scarce.

The article focuses on the problems of eastern fashion brands when entering western markets and the following paragraphs will introduce the three common dimensions of the problems that eastern brands would meet when communicating transculturally:

Firstly, there are significant differences in eastern and western culture. It's hard for consumers in western countries to grasp the point which eastern brand really wants to express. In theory, the information receivers may misunderstand or even miss the code of senders.

Secondly, due to certain historical origin, there is always existing the stereotype of orientalism in western countries, which can be a double -edged sword for eastern brands. For the negative aspect, this kind of behavior may cause controversies in topics like national self-confidence and so on if carelessly.

Finally, fashion, as a stable industry and system, has been occupied by western brands who had made rules for fashion field hundreds of years. As a result, there is little space left for eastern brands becoming a leading or even coming in. Through the analysis of the above three issues, this paper aims to explore the ways of communication of Oriental brand culture and the experience that can be learnt.

Issey Miyake brand is chosen to be an example because it is famous as a Japanese style brand around all the world. The example based on the encoding and decoding theory can make the problems and solutions in transcultural communication aspect more concrete and understandable.

When it comes to the writing structure, the article would match the three problems mentioned before with a concrete publicity or communication case of Issey Miyake respectively. By understanding how Issey Miyake handle these problems, solutions can be concluded in every section and refined in the end of the article as the conclusion part.

2. Brand Infromation

Issey Miyake brand was built by a Japanese designer Issey Miyake in 1970 in Tokyo. Although the brand's core idea is related closely with Japanese traditional culture and philosophy, it gained its real success in Paris fashion show initially in 1973. And from then on, Issey Miyake's design collection has never been absent in Paris fashion show constantly for nearly fifty years. The article goes into seriously how the brand overcome the cultural differences and get accepted by western consumers.

Moreover, the brand is famous for its designer, but it cannot be neglected that publicity and communication of this brand are excellent too, at least in a certain period of time. The BAOBAO serious, the A-POC collections, the Pleats Please series and so on were popular and left a vivid impression on consumers all over the world. In a word, Issey Miyake brand is a rare and typical successful example in solving the difficulties in the encoding process when communicating transculturally for those eastern brands to research and study.

3. Different Social Contexts

Different contexts in different cultures are common but intractable problems in many transcultural communications. Stuart Hall said every visual sign in advertising connotes a quality, situation, value, or inference, which is present as an implication or implied meaning, depending on the connotational positioning [8].

Almost all fashion brands are aware of the significance of visual signs. However, when communicating transcultural, the encoding and decoding process of visual signs is more difficult. There are many failed cases in even luxury brands like Dolce Gabbana that misused chopsticks which have a long history and profound cultural connotation in China, impeding its market expansion towards the east.

3.1 Case Analysis

To better communicate the brand concept, Issey Miyake Inc. came up with a fun idea to promote the launch of their limited-edition product range MESSAGE for the "special" season. Christmas is one of the most traditional festivals in western countries, therefore, the Issey Miyake brand created a nifty online messaging tool. Upon entering some text, the tool will generate the whole message in an alphabet created from the product photos, which can be shared or downloaded [9]. The same design was also used to decorate the window of the brand's London flagship store in Brook Street, where it

was possible to buy limited-edition products from six Issey Miyake brands, all in the shape of the animated typography.

In this case, Firstly, the Issey Miyake brand advertised its products through the western alphabet and added the optimistic feelings which were brought by the Christmas atmosphere to its products association, integrating its own products and brand into local Western culture.

Moreover, instead of making use of detailed points of Christmas traditional customs or diverting Christmas elements in a visual advertisement, Issey Miyake chose a way that celebrate the festival with its consumers, reducing the risk of violating the cultural dignity of other countries. The interactive advertisement form was novel until nowadays for the two kinds of attributes that the alphabets worked as not only advertisements for the products but also a medium for consumers to use to express their wishes in the festival.

Finally, the concrete design of the alphabet is related closely to its brand style and Japanese culture, like the Japanese lacquerware colour Arai-shu used in almost every alphabet, which is meaningful. For one thing, it maintains Issey Miyake's brand identity which contains Japanese culture. For another, through using this alphabet, western consumers could be influenced by Japanese culture unconsciously but profoundly, which enhanced the acceptance of Japanese style in a gentle way.

In summary, in this alphabet interactive website, Issey Miyake encoded its products in a funny and safe way.

3.2 Implications

Through the combination of Eastern and Western cultures, Issey Miyake has achieved excellent marketing, which has given the following insights. The first point is that eastern brands need to make use of western culture. It requires them to consider and identify what kind of information could be decoded in a dominant or negotiated position by means of learning more about the cultural context in certain western countries. In the alphabet's website case, whether western consumers have the festival customs to send blessing messages at Christmas is vital. What is more, whatever kinds of culture and spirits an eastern brand wants to express, they need to encode it into a western code. Not only the languages but also the cultural aspects.

Secondly, more creative ways should be come up with by the brands to decrease the risk of misunderstanding, like making the message itself become the medium. At the symbolic level, the kind of advertisement confirms the four stages of encoding and decoding theory structure that Stuart Hall said. The structure contains how the messages are produced, circulated, interpreted, and reproduced. However, at the same time, as a medium, the tool traits of this advertisement form would be changed less due to its practical function in consumers' decoding, which ensures the value of the advertisements.

4. Orientalism Stereotype

The orientalism stereotype was first stated by Edward Waefie Said in his book "Orientalism", that Orientalism reflects the construct of Eastern societies by the West, which depicts the East as "Other" [10], meaning that there is an imaginary image of eastern societies in the west. The stereotype was shown inevitably in fashion in many ways, like the show "China: Through the looking glass," which was held in 2015 by Met Gala in New York, causing lots of debates around the world. From the encoding and decoding view, orientalism is caused by systematically distorted communication. Unlike the misunderstanding situation in a certain context, orientalism is a macroscopic cultural misunderstanding, which can be contained in the social contexts, affecting encoding and decoding processes constantly.

Orientalism has been paid attention to by many western luxury brands during the world expansion strategy. Meanwhile, more eastern brands have attached great importance to it because this kind of problem relates not only to the brand interest but also to the country esteems. Fashion, as an area

dependent on country power mostly, seems to have the mission to establish an exact and optimistic image of a particular region.

4.1 Case Analysis

A video of the A-POC series called "ISSEY MIYAKE A-POC INSIDE" is presented as a classic case of facing up the challenge. It was issued in 2007 but has been thought of as avant-garde until now. Black background and music with drums are throughout the whole video, with the white alphabet of the brand name "Issey Miyake" transforming towards a figure which is dotted with the alphabet in its joints and keeps walking. The number of figures turns to three and then turns to more after a few seconds. The concrete alphabets change into abstract dots linked by straight lines at the same time. At the end of the video, the figures turn back to the brand name gradually. The whole video shows a kind of Zen thought that everything in the world is "homologous" [11].

Another video, "Issey Miyake 'L'Eau 'd'Issey Pour Homme" issued in 2020, compared with the "A-POC INSIDE", presenting in a different style totally. This video uses many close-up shots of the waterfalls from different angles in the first half of the video. When it is close to the end, an image of a man suddenly shows up and together with the natural scene image transforms into the shape of the product, a perfume bottle. The conception of nature in Zen thought is expressed through the video ingeniously.

Issey Miyake brand uses two different ways of encoding to express a similar message. It's obvious that instead of claiming the Japanese culture in words or images straightly, Issey Miyake chooses to create a video realm to express the eastern philosophy "Of Zen". Actually, "Zen" philosophy was spread in western and had a profound influence in the 1960s and 1970s. To a certain extent, the "Zen" philosophy in the west, which has been naturalized by some western countries, is also part of orientalism.

Nevertheless, Issey Miyake brand takes advantage of the optimistic part of Orientalism to build a recognizable brand image, which means it has realized the dialectical thought in the Orientalism stereotype and wanted to change it artfully. During the age of cultural fusion and reflection, owing to the identity of the founder of Issey Miyake, westerners would tend to think what the video presents must be authentic Zen thought. Meanwhile, easterners would acknowledge the video for its advocation for traditional eastern culture.

4.2 Implications

On the one hand, for fashion brands entering the western market, they can try to resist the orientalism stereotype by advertising the authentic eastern culture, but it is crucial to be careful with oppositional position decoding appearing. As a result, the sense of propriety needs to be held because the orientalism roots in the social contexts, influencing the encoding and decoding process.

On the other hand, Issey Miyake teaches that brands can also make use of the type of stereotype, intriguing western consumers by encoding the eastern culture and spirit based on common sense. Not only meet their curiosities towards eastern but also create audiences' involvement.

5. Fashion system

Fashion is an area which attaches importance to history origin and county power, and has been almost occupied by western countries. For one thing, the hegemony of French fashion is a function of the fashion system that emerged in the mid-19th century. Building on a fashion culture dating to the 17th century, the French fashion system emerged in the mid-19th century with the couturier Worth. With the institutionalization of Haute Couture under semi-governmental regulation in the 20th century, France offers the model of the fashion system [12]. Overall, countries with profound cultural history like France, Italia and London own a large number of international famous brands, such as Chanel, Dior, Gucci and so on.

For another, fashion field relating to culture and economic field closely, becomes a means to represent the whole power of a country. America is a typical example whose fashion power is supported greatly by its national power. In years before, western countries generally had an edge over eastern countries in comprehensive national strength.

As a result, it is a common sense that western counties have more power than eastern in fashion field, which adds difficulty to eastern brands to communicate transculturally.

5.1 Case Analysis

Issey Miyake is most famous for its design all over the world. It broke the "design rules" of western fashion fields in 1970s by its collection showed in Paris fashion show and gained great success for the huge positive reactions by the fashion field, which is also the beginning of the brand's development.

Issey Miyake refused the western garments that enhance the body shape through skilled tailoring and also the western clothes, which were constructed as structural packages [13]. For example, the A-POC series uses only one piece of clothes to wrap bodies softly. The A-POC technique creates fabric, texture and fully-finished garments in a single process [14] and it is successful enough in western market to even opened offline stores in 1990s in New York.

As stated by Stuart Hall, when something beyond a person's cognition, he or she may detotalize the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference [8]. It seems a magic thing that Issey Miyake attracted the western audiences' attention firstly, but actually the miracle can be analyzed in a realistic way.

Firstly, there was a cultural background. As is illustrated before, "Zen" philosophy thoughts had been popular in western for years in 1970s. Western consumers were curious about eastern culture. Meanwhile, represented by Dior, the kind of exaggerated design was losing its attraction, so the fashion field needed new elements to take part in.

Secondly, Issey Miyake didn't break the logic of Paris fashion, he attended the fashion show then presented his design to get acknowledgement from western people, building a foundation for his success in Japan. The behavior itself was part of his encoding of his designs. The clothes shown in the show are totally different from those presented in roadside market, which were added artistry by people's imagination, causing a positive encoding of western people.

Therefore, positive encoding about the design of Issey Miyake formed and spread widely. Many fashion journalisms about Issey Miyake were written in western, expanding the brand's influence.

5.2 Implications

From the case, it is reasonable that eastern brands can do subversive designs or conduct publicity strategies internationally to appeal focus from consumers all over the world, especially those in the west. The main point is that breakthrough ideas and acute insights are of equal significance. The creative ideas contribute to the content of transcultural communication and the insights help reflect the feasibilities of contents and help decide the means of communication at most time.

However, a kind of garments, a style, and even a traditional design way are all changing more and more quickly in nowadays society, featuring multi-cultural mostly. It's hard to invent a totally new style that arouse the whole markets' interests, so almost all subversive things need to be limited to conduct in a niche market.

Last but not least, it's crucial for brands to understand that they cannot destroy the whole system which has been constructed for hundreds of years, so they need to confirm to certain logic in principle which existed now.

6. Conclusion

For eastern fashion brands' transcultural communication, the research puts forward three dilemmas and provides three main suggestions based on cases of brand Issey Miyake and encoding and

decoding theory of Stuart Hall. In conclusion, in the first place, different social contexts in different countries can be solved by taking advantage of western culture and thinking out more creative communication ways. Secondly, orientalism stereotype has always been existed between western and eastern and eastern brands can resist it by their own authentic eastern culture. Meanwhile, it's also feasible to make use of the stereotype, intriguing more interests of western consumers. Thirdly, how to enter the existed Paris fashion system for eastern brands, which has been in a weak position, is discussed and the solution is to do subversive designs or conduct publicity strategies in a limited structure.

There are many researches about how to enter eastern markets for western brands, so the research focuses on the ways to expand western markets for eastern brands, providing a reference for eastern brands to communicate transculturally. Anyway, the future of eastern brands is uncertain but predictable to some extent. The covid-19 seems to impede the process of globalization, but more digital and technological means come up and the metaverse concept is put forward frequently since Zuckerberg, the facebook founder, mentioned it in public. It's obvious that eastern brands have more avenues to be seen by the whole world. Overall, the cultural integration is unavoidable in the fashion field.

In the end, there are still some boundedness of the research. Above all, the consumers' reactions lack exact data, making all illustrations abstract relatively. Moreover, the encoding and decoding theory is insufficient in the aspect of how the anticipation of decoding of receivers can affect the encoding process, which may be of great importance in brand communication strategies based on consumers.

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