

A Comparative Study of the Publicity Strategies of the Japanese Animated Film “Suzume” from the Perspective of Cross-cultural Communication

Jinbo Wang *

Japanese Department, Fuzhou University, Fuzhou, Fujian, 350108, China

* Corresponding author Email: Bobofu1128@163.com

Abstract: As a special narrative medium, films play an indispensable role in cross-cultural communication of excellent local culture and obtaining cultural identity. From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, this paper compares and analyzes the content of the publicity of the Japanese animated film “Suzume” in Japanese and Chinese media platforms, and explores the characteristics of the film's publicity in China. By comparing the publicity bias in different countries, this paper looks at the way the film is publicized, and ultimately analyzes the appropriate path for the film's transnational cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: “Suzume”; Film Publicity; Cross-cultural Communication; Intercultural Adaptation.

1. Introduction

With the wave of globalization and the development of Internet media technology, the boundaries between countries are becoming increasingly blurred, and cross-cultural communication is becoming more and more frequent among countries and peoples all over the world. As one of the carriers of communication, film is an art, a language, and a culture that plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. On May 3, 2023, the Chinese box office of the Japanese animated film “Suzume” exceeded 800 million yuan, making it the No. 1 Japanese animated film box office in the history of Chinese cinema, and the animated film not only achieves excellent results locally, but also achieves remarkable results in the dissemination of the film overseas in China.

The principle of “good wine needs no bush” is not entirely applicable to the film industry, in addition to the content of the film, the publicity to a certain extent determines the future of a film's market. How do Japanese animated films create a cultural fit with foreign cultures in the process of cross-cultural communication across contexts and cultural concepts? This paper analyzes the success of the Japanese animated film “Suzume” in intercultural communication in China, and explores the methods that can effectively promote the cross-cultural communication of animated films in China. Through this study, it can provide a reference experience for the cross-cultural communication of foreign animated movies and the cross-cultural communication of Chinese animated movies when they go abroad and make cross-cultural communication in the international arena.

Intercultural adaptation is one of the earliest and most important concepts in the field of cross-cultural communication. It was proposed by American anthropologist Robert Redfield and others. In anthropological and sociological research, cross-cultural adaptation is the process of examining cultural change in society caused by cultural interaction at the group level, while the field of psychology pays more attention to the psychological reaction and social integration of foreigners in new cultural environments, and focuses on the study of changes in individual values and

attitudes, as well as behavioral changes. With the deepening of globalization, the theory of intercultural adaptation has been extended to the field of communication.

The issue of intercultural adaptation in films is based on the purpose of cultural communication and exchange. Chen, X. analyzes the possibility of intercultural adaptation theory in the field of intercultural communication in its application to films. As an important mass communication tool, films, in order to successfully communicate across cultures, must understand the cultural background of the other side and adapt to certain characteristics and acceptance of the other culture [1].

2. Analysis of the Publicity Content on Chinese and Japanese Microblog Platforms for “Suzume”

This section analyzes the contents and methods of the publicity of “Suzume” on the microblogging platform. Quantitative analysis will be conducted by recording and collecting the publicity content related to the official account of the Chinese “Weibo” platform of “Suzume”, “电影铃芽之旅”, and the official account of the Japanese local twitter platform, “映画『すずめの戸締まり』公式”. Quantitative analysis of the content of the relevant publicity was carried out for the period from 2023.2.1 to 2023.4.24 for the former and from 2022.9.1 to 2022.12.11 for the latter. “Suzume” was released on 2022.11.11 in Japan and on 2023.3.24 in China. Although the official twitter account was registered on 2021.12.15, the promotional activities for the animated film “Suzume” were concentrated after 2022.9.1, and in order to ensure the objectivity of the study and to form a control of the corresponding publicity period, the time interval from about 60 days before the film's release to about 30 days after the movie's release was consistently selected as the sample.

The data are content analyzed, categorized, and summarized for the entire content of microblogs. Regarding the setting of the analysis framework, this paper focuses on four dimensions: Film publicity, Film content, Film activities, and Relationship interactions. The details are as follows:

Table 1. Analyzing Dimension

	Definition
Film publicity	Release information, Box office figures, Creator information, etc.
Film content	Theme songs, Trailers, Film posters, Film plot, etc.
Film activities	Premiere events, Screening events, Theater promotions, Peripheral merchandise, Sweepstakes and other event participation, etc.
Relationship interactions	Emotional feelings, story interactions, and other content for communicating with users outside the film.

Table 2. Content posted on the official “Weibo” account of “Suzume” “电影铃芽之旅”.

	Category	Volume	Ratio (%)	Volume	Ratio (%)
Film publicity	Release Information	19	5.44	83	23.78
	Box Office Figures	41	11.75		
	Creator Information	23	6.59		
Film Content	Theme Song	16	4.59	44	12.61
	Trailer & Poster	17	4.87		
	Movie Content	11	3.15		
Film activities	Theater Promotions	12	3.44	118	33.81
	Online Event Participation	83	23.78		
	Movie Offline Events	23	6.59		
Relationship interactions	Story Interaction	48	13.75	104	29.80
	Emotions	56	16.05		
	Total	349		349	

Table 3. Content posted on the official twitter account of “Suzume” “映画『すずめの戸締まり』公式”

	Category	Volume	Ratio (%)	Volume	Ratio (%)
Film publicity	Release Information	50	15.43	120	37.03
	Box Office Figures	11	3.40		
	Creator Information	59	18.20		
Film Content	Theme Song	20	6.17	74	22.84
	Trailer & Poster	15	4.63		
	Movie Content	39	12.04		
Film activities	Theater Promotions	27	8.33	108	33.33
	Online Event Participation	27	8.33		
	Movie Offline Events	54	16.67		
Relationship interactions	Story Interaction	17	5.25	22	6.80
	Emotions	5	1.55		
	Total	324		324	

The volume in the table refers to the total number of microblogs in the corresponding category, and the ratio is the ratio value (%) of the category to the total number of microblogs.

From the table, it can be seen that during the time interval of “Suzume” in the Chinese “Weibo” platform, the four contents with the highest number of 349 postings were Event Participation, Emotion, Story Interaction, and Box Office Figures, each of which accounts for 23.78%, 16.05%, 13.75%, and 11.75% respectively, suggesting that in China's promotional process, it is more important to promote the communication and interaction with the audience through various activities to create a connection between the movie and the audience.

In the promotion process of “Suzume” on the Japanese twitter platform during the time interval, the four contents with the highest number of 324 postings were Creator Information, Movie Offline Events, Release Information, and Movie Content, with their respective proportions accounting for 18.20%, 16.67%, 15.43%, and 12.04%, which indicates that the promotion process in Japan tends to be based on the traditional method of publicity, which relies on the creators of the film to visit the screening locations in various cities for face-to-face communication and promotion with the audience.

The comparison also shows that the ratio of the movie activity category is basically the same (33.81% vs. 33.33%), but since it is an imported film from Japan, the Chinese and Japanese regions tend to participate in Online Event

Participation (23.78%) and Movie Offline Events (16.67%), respectively. In addition, there is a wide gap in the relationship interaction category (29.80% vs. 6.80%).

3. Cultural Adaptation Theory and Localized Marketing

American scholar Samovar, L. A. points out that the cross-cultural communication model is characterized by the fact that communication has cultural overtones, and since there are differences in cultures, individuals from different cultures have different communication practices and ways of behaving [2]. As an important mass communication tool, for films to successfully communicate across cultures, it is necessary to understand the cultural background of the other side and adapt to certain characteristics and acceptance of the other culture. The comparison of the contents of the Chinese and Japanese promotional campaigns shows that the entire promotional process of “Suzume” closely followed the characteristics of the movie to formulate a creative promotional strategy:

3.1. Localized Publicity through “Integration”

“Integration” is one of the four cultural adaptation strategies in Berry, J. W.'s model of cultural adaptation theory, which aims to obtain a cultural recognition and cultural integration, so that the two parties in the communication process can produce a kind of spiritual resonance. Based on the two-dimensional model theory in intercultural adaptation, Berry, J. W. argues that integration occurs when the two communicating parties converge in some ways, sharing some traits while retaining their uniqueness [3].

This was also reflected in the publicity process for “Suzume”. In terms of the film's subject matter, the film “Suzume” is different from many of Makoto Shinkai's previous works that are mainly fictional in nature, as the story framework is constructed on the real-life events of a major earthquake disaster that has occurred in Japan over the course of a century. In the film, the main male character, Sota, works as a shut-in master to guard the real world by sealing off the hidden power of earthquakes -“Mimizu”. The Japanese audience's shared experience of the 2011 earthquake of the Pacific coast of Tōhoku forms the common emotional basis for watching “Suzume”. However, the vast majority of Chinese viewers outside of Japan do not share this emotional foundation, and if this is not taken into account during the publicity process, it could cause a serious disconnect for Chinese viewers.

According to the data in the table, the publicity content of Weibo platform is Relationship interaction (29.80%) and Film content (12.61%), while the publicity content of twitter platform is Relationship interaction (6.80%) and Film content (22.84%). Therefore, the focus of the publicity process of “Suzume” in China is different from that of the local publicity in Japan, it is more focused on attracting more users by communicating with the audience emotionally and creating an atmosphere of emotion-oriented marketing than publicizing the theme, characters, plot and other contents of the film as much as possible to let the audience get involved with the film content.

There are also many people in China who have suffered psychological trauma due to the disaster brought about by the COVID-19. The film's publicity focuses on the recovery of psychological trauma from the disaster, which is a common human point. Therefore, what is presented to the audience is

a reflection on many social disasters, including earthquakes. By seizing the common emotional factors such as “courage”, “love” and “hope” not limited to Japanese audiences, setting social issues and vigorously creating a healing and warm atmosphere, Chinese audiences in the post epidemic era can also find their own Cultural identity and reduce the sense of separation in cross-cultural communication.

3.2. Developing Cross-cultural Sensitivity and Promoting Localization of Emotional Resonance

Intercultural Sensitivity is an important competency in the process of intercultural adaptation. It was conceptualized by M. J. Bennett in 1984 and refers to the ability of people to cope with cultural differences in a flexible manner in situations where different cultures meet. It is considered one of the best indicators of success in multicultural work teams [4].

Generally speaking, different cultural traditions have a great influence on the receiving subject, and the receiving subject often can only understand the other's culture from the cultural concepts and habitual modes of thinking that he or she is familiar with. The cross-cultural publicity process of “Suzume” gives full play to intercultural sensitivity, and the awareness of actively comparing with the local Chinese culture is reflected in the following two points:

First, although the content of the Creator Information (6.59%) on the Chinese Weibo platform was lower than that (18.20%) on the Japanese twitter platform, the keyword “Three-year promise” of director Makoto Shinkai appeared very frequently throughout the whole publicity process. It refers to the fact that when “Your Name” was released, director Makoto Shinkai wrote the words “Let's watch it together” in a thank-you letter to Chinese audiences, meaning that they would meet up to watch Makoto Shinkai's film together three years later. After “Your Name” and “Weathering with You”, by the time “Suzume” was released, director Makoto Shinkai had already accumulated a huge fan base and was well known to Chinese audiences. And due to the voice actors and the rest of the creative team in China is not well known and not involved, so in the Chinese region throughout the publicity process for the film director Makoto Shinkai's publicity efforts is not low.

Secondly, the studio invited famous Chinese singer Shen, Zhou to adapt the Chinese theme song of the same name, “Suzume”, which not only reduces the cultural gap caused by language, but also arouses the audience's interest in watching the film. The highest number of retweets and comments (3,494 comments on 3.13 and 22,000 retweets on 3.14) were about Shen, Zhou's performance of the movie theme song. In the process of publicity, the audience was made to feel the epitome of Chinese pop culture, and good publicity results were achieved.

On the one hand, it can be said that it relies on director Makoto Shinkai and singer Shen, Zhou's fan base in China to leverage the celebrity effect for sentimental marketing, and on the other hand, it can also be seen as a way to strengthen the audience's sense of closeness and identity, and to promote the localization of emotional resonance in a way that is familiar to the Chinese audience.

4. Conclusion

By comparing the proportion of content posted on the

official accounts of “Suzume” in China and Japan, we can find that “Suzume”, as an imported anime movie from Japan, has a different marketing strategy for the publicity of the film in China. Generally speaking, the publicity strategy of the Chinese “Weibo” platform focuses on the word-of-mouth marketing oriented to fans, while the twitter platform focuses on the traditional marketing method oriented to the content of the film.

In the publicity of “Suzume” in China, cross-cultural sensitivity was fully utilized, and the local culture was actively integrated through the “integration” strategy. The film's official microblog pushes out information at a high frequency to attract the audience's attention; it hides the issue in the topic of “getting out of the haze of disaster” to trigger the audience's resonance; it plays on the celebrity effect to attract microblog followers to forward the film's information to achieve a fission-type dissemination effect; and it plays on the convergence of the group's communication psychology to play the role of word-of-mouth marketing to achieve good dissemination effects, thus ultimately influencing the movie-watching behavior of the audience.

New media has accelerated the development of globalization. At present, Chinese films are facing the problem of “Difficulty in domestic films overseas” precisely

because of the lack of an international perspective and the awareness of learning from different cultures. In order to find a place on the stage of world cinema and spread a strong Chinese voice to the world, it is necessary not only to learn from the successful cross-cultural communication experience of foreign countries, but also to fully explore the connotation of Chinese culture, look for the fit between internationalization and localization, and seize the immediate needs of the audience by tapping their interest and emotion points.

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