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Research on the design of virtual image spokesperson of national trendy brand under the concept of meta-universe

-- Taking Ling, a national style virtual idol, as an example

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Abstract: The contemporary value of traditional Chinese culture has been vividly reflected in the rise of the national trend in recent years. The emergence of the "national trend" is the result of cultural confidence and cultural return brought about by the rise of national power and the economy. As a form of Internet application, the metaverse has brought new possibilities for digital communication in the media. The virtual digital person is a product of the digital society and has gradually developed by the wind of the metaverse. Therefore, this paper takes the current concept of metaverse as an entry point, firstly introducing the concept of metaverse and virtual digital person, and secondly applying the case study method to study the way of digital communication of the national style virtual idol - Ling. This paper will analyse the reasons for its rapid emergence from two aspects: the design concept of multi-element IP collision, and the marketing strategy to meet the market demand. and a marketing strategy that meets market demand, which enhances the consumer experience, builds a new marketing ecology, strengthens user brand relationships, establishes stronger emotional connections and enhances brand value. The article concludes with an outlook on the future development of virtual digital spokespeople, aiming to provide a reference for the development and practical application of virtual digital people.

Keywords: Meta-universe; National Tide; Brand Design; Virtual Digital Man; Ling.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

In recent years, the concept of metaverse has already become a hot topic in major fields. Meta-universe refers to a collectively shared virtual online space, which is both an extension of the real space and an independent space parallel to the real world, where people can live in the meta-universe through their own virtual images. Ma Huateng, Chairman of Tencent's Board of Directors, has said: "This is a process that has gone from quantitative to qualitative change, it means the integration of online and offline, the fusion of physical and electronic means. The door between the virtual world and the real world has opened, whether from the virtual to the real or from the real to the virtual, and is working to help users achieve a more realistic experience." The metaverse has come to us, and in the face of this more complex and volatile market environment, it is a very important question as to how domestic brands, especially the national trend brands that are emerging today, need to respond in order to extend the life of their brands and withstand the test of the times.

1.2. Significance of the study

With the development of the economy, the consumption level and appreciation ability of the Chinese people have been upgraded, and the focus of many consumers has switched from the ordinary use value of products to whether they can bring emotional resonance and cultural belonging to them. The development of national trendy brands reflects the consumers' thirst for culture, and although the meta-universe has not yet completely penetrated into our lives, it is already changing the brand ecology in a subtle way, and brand communication from unclear audience groups to precise distribution, from fragmented online and offline to the integration of online and offline. Under this trend, the treatment of traditional culture should change and innovate the concept of communication, so that traditional culture can be combined with meta-universe technology to inject new energy into the national trend brand.

1.3. Research content

With the development of technology and the further development of the underlying technologies of the metaverse, such as blockchain, 5G mobile communication technology, virtual reality technology and augmented reality technology, the metaverse will gradually replace the Internet as a new brand marketing front. The revitalisation of national brands is an important means of enhancing the country's cultural soft power, and the rise of the "national trend" is seen as an important sign of national cultural confidence. The booming development of "national trend" brands has become a major highlight of the population's consumption upgrade. The "national trend" brand focuses on digging deeper into traditional culture, meeting the consumption needs of young people, enriching consumption scenarios and developing international markets. In the future, the "national trend" brand will integrate with new technologies and enter a new field. With the addition of virtual technology, the traditional brand can be improved as a whole, allowing consumers to better understand the brand culture and thus potentially become loyal fans of the brand. This thesis focuses on the following the application of metaverse technology in brand innovation in the context of the national trend is studied in depth in three aspects:

Firstly, the first chapter of the thesis explains the

emergence and background of the national trend, clarifies the background of the brand innovation of the research subject, and analyses the reasons for the emergence of the "national trend", which has fully exploited and activated the consumption ability of the new generation of consumers. It then presents the "national trend" brand and the "trendy" brand, and explains the meaning of each, as well as the similarities and differences between them. More and more brands are now becoming 'national', which means that consumers are increasingly identifying with national culture.

The second chapter explains the concept of metaverse, a newly introduced concept in the Internet field, which refers to a collective shared virtual online space that is independent from and influences the real universe, and helps users to achieve a more realistic experience. This is the starting point for linking the metaverse to the brand later on.

Chapter 3: How can we get the 'national trend' brands to innovate using metaverse technology? The author proposes a few ideas. The first step is to focus on brand marketing and enhance the consumer experience. Brands need to focus more on interaction with consumers and increase their engagement with the brand. The second step is to strengthen user brand relationships and build emotional connections.

The third step is to create a brand virtual IP to enhance the brand premium. Through these three steps, it is believed that the brand can be brought to a new level of enhancement, which is also the focus of this research paper.

In conclusion, this paper analyses the current background of the "national trend" and takes it as a starting point to extend to the emerging technology - meta-universe, hoping to learn new technologies from it and apply them to the national trend brand, so as to propose countermeasures and suggestions for future brand marketing. We hope to learn from this new technology and apply it to national brands.

2. The emergence of the national tide

In the Xinhua Dictionary, the word "tide" originally means "the rise and fall of sea water", and is often used to describe large-scale social changes or the ebb and flow of a movement, with the corresponding English word being trend or fashion. In a broader sense, 'national trend' can refer to a social trend based on China's local culture and reflecting a broad cultural identity from ancient times to the present; in a narrower sense, 'national trend' refers to the trend of the times led by China's local culture, local brands and products. With the promotion of traditional culture and the rise of national self-confidence, local Chinese brands are incorporating traditional Chinese elements and culture into their brands to create unique national trends. With the brand as the carrier and Chinese traditional culture as the core, the national trend is both different and related to the domestic 'trendy' brands. It is a brand that is both different from and related to domestic 'hipster' brands. Behind National Tide is the development of culture, cultural confidence and cultural heritage.

2.1. Manifestations of the "nationalisation" of the brand

The emergence of national trends is the inevitable result of the rising cultural self-confidence of Chinese consumers and their focus on a sense of cultural belonging. Consumers have begun to shift their focus from major foreign brands to local brands, and the rise of national brands in various fields, especially non-heritage goods and traditional Chinese culture-related consumption, has begun to explode, demonstrating the cultural confidence of the Chinese nation. Although there has been a cultural discontinuity in our history for various reasons, the post-85s, post-90s, post-95s and post-00s who have grown up in the two decades after the reform and opening up have witnessed the development and strength of the country, and they are the generation that has gone out from childhood, witnessed the development at home and abroad, and gone through quality education, and this cognition derived from their own growing experience has fuelled the rise of national trendy brands. In recent years, more and more domestic brands have begun to seize the wind of this round of national trend, the main domestic label, shop design and brand design are inseparable from the traditional Chinese elements, for example, how can Cha Yan Yue Xue capture the hearts of many young people in just a few years? This is due to the Chinese style from the inside out, which not only makes it possible to take pictures in the shop, but also gives people a deep memory of the milk tea when they order it, and at the same time reveals the deep heritage of Chinese traditional culture, which is loved by the majority of young consumers.

So, we believe that the rise of the national trend will be lasting and is the beginning of the re-emergence of Chinese culture and heritage. The only way for brands to enter the market game is to make full use of traditional culture, to blend the trendy elements with traditional culture, and to reshape the image of the brand with modern techniques to bring consumers a new feeling.

2.2. The performance of the "national trend" of the brand

Although it was born and became popular in a relatively short period of time, it is a specific artistic style that combines trend and traditional Chinese culture in a unique artistic way, and promotes the designer's unique ideas, style and attitude towards life. "CLOT" (Figure 2-1) is the first self-made trend brand founded by Chen Guanxi as a Chinese icon in June 2003, and the earliest independently designed genre brand on the mainland. It marked the emergence of domestic trendy brands. The original intention of "CLOT" was to be a bridge between Chinese culture and the rest of the world, hence the name "Condensation Group". "CLOT has taken its place among the global trend brands, with its classic "Chinese elements" being the symbol of the brand. From the iconic "silk", "Tang costume", "terracotta warriors" and "yin and yang", to the "ancient Chinese currency", the "Chinese currency" and the "Chinese culture". The "CLOT" brand is a symbol of the brand, from the iconic "silk", "Tang costume", "terracotta warriors" and "yin and yang" to the detailed interpretation of "ancient Chinese currency", "Chinese characters" and "dragon totems". It has taken "CLOT" out of China and into the global trend scene. Under the influence of the success of Chen Guanxi's Chinese brand, in 2009, Li Chen and Pan Wei Bai collaborated on the trendy brand NPC, which means both "New Project Center" and "NIC PAN COOPERATE". "NPC was the first trendy shop in mainland China to host an international doll exhibition in its Shanghai shop. Many celebrity artists followed suit and set up their own NPC brands. In just three years, from 2011 to 2014, NPC's online sales were the main battleground for brands that seemed to have emerged from the domestic market, bringing vitality to the Chinese trend market.



Figure 1. The "CLOT" brand

3. The concept of the Metaverse

The Metaverse is the newest concept in the Internet, consisting of the Meta and (uni)verse, which literally means beyond the universe, and is actually a concept used to describe future iterations of the Internet, in detail, the desire to break down the limitations of real life and develop a virtual shared space with the help of the Metaverse concept to create a new civilisation and consensus, equivalent to the sum of all virtual worlds, augmented reality and the Internet. The Metaverse is an expansion of the real world and is capable of constantly empowering humanity.

The author was first exposed to the concept of the Metaverse in a 2018 film, Top Gun (Figure 3-1), which brought the interpretation and imagination of the Metaverse to the big screen. The film seamlessly integrates the virtual by building a virtual world in the game called Oasis, in which the player can do almost anything, and when entering the game with VR glasses on, every movement of the body can be precisely defined. When wearing the VR glasses and entering the game, every movement of the body can be accurately reflected in the game character, and high-end players with the X1 body suit can really feel all the sensations in the game world. Top Gun shows audiences what a fully immersive, interactive virtual reality world can look like. Although it is only a film, it is not necessarily far from our future. The metaverse world is often mentioned as an anti-utopia, but it is not as scary for humans as other fictional digital worlds we could mention.



Figure 2. Top Gun movie poster

3.1. Avatars

When it comes to avatars, it is important to first talk about the concept of "avatars", which first appeared in the 1980s in the Japanese classic cartoon "Super Time Fortress", in which the virtual singer Akemi Hayashi was an important representative of "avatars". An "avatar" is a highly anthropomorphic virtual image created using a computer that has multiple human characteristics in terms of appearance, behaviour or interaction. As a new media character, it is widely present in the ecosystem of the metaverse, carrying out the task of making and delivering information. In recent years, as virtual idols have become increasingly popular, many brands have started to use 'avatars' as spokespeople, especially for brands targeting the 'Generation Z' consumer demographic, and the boom in virtual spokespeople for brands is in line with the rapid growth of the digital economy.

In this context, many new digital marketing tools have been created, such as "virtual idols" and "virtual bloggers". The core of the metaverse infrastructure is virtual technology, which has three characteristics: interactivity, imagination and immersion. The virtual image spokesperson has already shown its great potential. The emergence and success of Ling, a national style virtual idol, is proof of this, and her emergence represents a new world we are rapidly moving into.



Figure 3. National style virtual idol Ling

3.2. The success of virtual image spokesperson Ling

On 18 May 2020, Ling, China's first virtual national style idol, was officially launched. The virtual idol was created by Magic Enamel Technology and Second World Culture. She is different from both Moe and Japanese and Korean avatars, Ling has a face with oriental characteristics, positioned in personality and mystery, likes Peking Opera, brush writing and Tai Chi, netting the development of traditional Chinese cultural attributes in the direction of contemporary and futuristic elements, representing the style and attitude of contemporary Chinese youth and conveying traditional Chinese culture and values.

3.2.1. Cultural identity brought by the national trendy style

As the global market for avatars has gradually matured, avatars are entering our vision in a rapidly spreading way. At a time when national pride and a sense of national honour are at an all-time high, localised Chinese avatars have both an introverted nature that we are proud of, as well as representing a symbol of traditional Chinese culture and a trendy attitude to speak out for the times. Ling was born amidst such new trends and movements. The word "Ling" refers to bird feathers in general, and also to the "plume" of the Peking Opera flower plume, which refers to the important headdress in Peking Opera. She is the first national style avatar, with an oriental air and a pair of phoenix eyes that make her very recognisable. She also has a distinctly oriental look, with delicate features and an elegant, cool demeanour. All of these settings are in keeping with the current trend of Chinese culture.

3.2.2. Creating an immersive visual experience for brands

As people increasingly pursue immersive entertainment consumption, they have higher and higher requirements for life entertainment, consumption and other related experiences, and one of the characteristics of the metaverse is that it is extremely immersive, and people pursue an immersive entertainment consumption experience. The virtual spokesperson is a product of the metaverse, where brands have made a huge difference in creating immersive experiences.

Ling is a virtualised image. Under the concept of meta-universe, virtual image spokespersons are more controllable compared to real stars, and their persona can change according to the brand image, allowing them to continuously output diverse marketing content for brands. Although the meta-universe is very hot at the moment, people don't know much about the concept, but the cyberpunk image of the virtual image spokesperson is different, it can let the audience directly feel what kind of experience it is to integrate real scenes with reality, which is also enough to attract the audience's attention.

The national hair care brand 100 Years of Hair has officially announced its newest virtual spokesperson - Ling. In this new campaign, a sense of Americana flows out, with Ling retaining her iconic bun and showing off for the first time in a wholesale image, with her dark, glossy hair as the brand incarnation of 100 Years of Hair. The story carefully creates an oriental aesthetic, not only in terms of beautiful artwork, but also from the concept of the story - a drop of water is also like the origin of all things, when it meets with the main character Ling, it transforms into the world, and in an instant, heaven and earth are beautiful, water and plants are rich and beautiful, achieving the transformation from a water drop to a plant essence. This is the cultural core of the 100-year old R&F brand "R&P Oriental Beauty". In this cross-border collaboration, time and space are broken, giving the brand a meaning that goes beyond mere advertising creativity.



Figure 4. Plume x 100 Year Runner Poster

3.2.3. Marketing strategies to meet the market and enhance the consumer experience

Virtual brand spokespeople are characters with technological features such as the internet and computer art, and correspond to the characteristics, stories and personal preferences of real people who exist in real life. The emergence of virtual spokespeople is in line with the preferences of the 'Generation Z' young people who have grown up with technology and the Internet, and it includes an all-ages audience, meeting the needs of both men and women.

This time, from a virtual idol, a Chinese style commercial and a series of posters, to the secondary fermentation on Weibo, ShakeYin and WeChat's circle of friends, and then the whole network, this successful promotion has made many young people think about "Oriental aesthetics". The cooperation between 100 Years of R&F and Ling has created a strong sense of presence at this stage. For the target consumers, Ling represents the direction that young people of today prefer, and with the connotation image of Ling, 100 Years of R&F has opened up the market for young audiences, further realised the output of brand values, inspired a new generation of users to resonate with the brand, and refreshed consumers' every perception.



Figure 5. Plume x 100 Year Runner Poster

3.3. Problems encountered by domestic brands

The traditional Chinese form of commercial mark design mainly served the ancient natural economic background by taking charge of the commodity trade activities. After the reform and opening up, our motherland is getting stronger and stronger, the domestic economy is getting better and better, there are more and more enterprises, and brand design is getting more and more attention from enterprises. Many domestic brands are scrambling to improve the dilemma faced by their enterprises through virtual brand spokespersons, but few of them are excellent cases.

There are currently many problems in the development of domestic brand design, such as limited thinking, unable to attract a new generation of eyeballs; marketing aging, the same routine over the years, these phenomena often occur in domestic enterprises, largely due to the imbalance in the use of new technologies and tools, and the problem of old-fashioned thinking. Only by planning the development of the enterprise from a long-term perspective, improving the construction of the brand's corporate image and taking the right approach can we ensure the stable upward development of the Chinese brand.

3.3.1. Limitation of thinking, unable to attract attention

Many companies are in the practice of "national trend". The brand has a long history of culture and emotional recognition; however, it also leaves a symbolic and stereotypical

impression on consumers. What can be done to keep the brand alive? Firstly, we need to tap into the richness and diversity of traditional culture and select the cultural essence that is applicable to our brand. Secondly, as the main consumer group, young people, are keen to express themselves and pursue identity and social bodies, so they will pay more attention to the value that can be brought beyond the materiality of the goods. The virtual characteristics of brand avatars are like a blank sketch paper. Brand image designers can add some IP personas to the brand avatars so that they can be closer to the core of the brand, but the current designs of brand avatars are derived from the most popular art styles of the moment, which will make it difficult for consumers to distinguish the qualities of the brand and lead to similarities among brands.

3.3.2. Marketing is ageing and the formula has remained the same over the years

In a rapidly iterating consumer environment, if products are marketed solely on the basis of traditional culture to create a brand spokesperson to attract consumers to buy them, then the 'national trend' brands are bound to exit this unpredictable consumer market. Although at the moment, virtual spokespeople have saved many moribund brands, in essence, many of the so-called virtual images are simply a superficial appropriation of traditional culture, which brands hope to use to market their products, without taking into account the essence of 5,000 years of Chinese culture. In order to continue the trend of "national trend", it is necessary to base the brand on its own characteristics and combine it with the traditional culture that echoes it, in order to bring sustainable vitality to the brand.

4. Future development of virtual spokespeople

A number of Chinese brands have emerged from the Internet, and many others have found new opportunities by creating virtual spokespeople, attracting young consumers who seek individual expression and providing a new path for the future of Chinese brands.

4.1. Attracting a younger audience and "rejuvenating" the brand

The youngest generation, the post-90s, the post-00s and even the post-10s, have gradually become familiar with the concept of the meta-universe, which represents the future direction of the consumer market as an emerging consumer group, and their perception of the brand will influence the future development and fate of the brand. However, the current lack of innovation in the marketing methods and the form of routine of many national brands has brought consumers a fatiguing visual experience, while the emergence of virtual image spokespersons has solved this problem, which is conducive to the brand shaping a distinct personality and enhancing the consumer experience.

Last year, the Chinese beauty brand Baizhuo Antelope announced that Ling would be the "frame" face future recommendation officer. As a national brand with unique characteristics in China, Baicholang joined forces with the virtual idol, who has a natural advantage in the national style track, to create a groundbreaking fusion of technology and beauty. The social media platform has started the hashtag a double entendre, injecting a sense of future technology into the national brand, bringing the unique oriental flavor of the beauty brand Baizhuo to consumers in a fashionable and technological way, creating a new world.



Figure 6. The future recommendation officer of the "frame" face of Partridge - Ling

4.2. Creating a virtual image spokesperson to enhance brand value

Brand personification in the traditional sense is the transformation of consumers' understanding of the various characteristics of a product into human characteristics through personification. Simply put, it means that the characteristics of a personality are given to operate as a person on a brand, and different personality traits will form different values, which makes the brand interesting. Nowadays, brands can create their own virtual spokespeople to interact and communicate with consumers up close and personal, enhancing the stickiness between the brand and the consumer.

Brand virtual spokespeople are an important emotional link between brands and consumers. Virtual digital people are never a one-way output result, in addition to a lot of preliminary market research, from name, personality, to hobbies, daily activities, to worldview and values, virtual spokespeople need to be defined, and their development process is inseparable from the participation and accompaniment of users.

For brands, whether they choose to work directly with head digital personalities who have already gained traffic, or through understanding consumers' aspirations, combining the brand's own tone, market demand, and incubating a virtual image spokesperson that is unique to the brand, this will bring the brand closer to consumers. Virtual spokespeople build bridges between brands and consumers, giving brands a sense of authenticity and vitality, making them more receptive to the brand's message and resonating with them emotionally, making the brand "dynamic" and thus enhancing its value.

5. Conclusion

The concept of metaverse has brought unlimited imagination, and the emergence of brand virtual image spokespersons has built a bridge between consumers and brands. With the growth of the "Generation Z" and the emergence of new generations of consumers, there will be more diverse forms of brand virtual image spokespersons and a broader market outlook. But at the same time, domestic brands are currently encountering some problems such as

limitations in thinking and technical challenges. The emergence of Ling represents a new beginning, and I believe that more and more brands will use virtual idols for endorsement in the future, and the future is infinitely promising.

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