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Research on Cultural Integration and Consumer Experience of Generation Z in Shanghai Disney

Shuhan Yang

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China

Abstract. As a case of transnational cultural brand localization in China, dominated by Generation Z's demands for immersive experiences and cultural authenticity. Based on the field theory, this study explores the relationship between the localization strategy of Shanghai Disney and the experience of Generation Z consumers. Through a mixed research method, including capital analysis and 119 questionnaires, it is found that the superposition of cultural symbols and the lag of digital services are the main contradictions. Gen Z is pursuing both global IP and deep local narrative. In this competitive competition, Shanghai Disney needs to deepen its cultural narrative and counter the technology-driven strategy of Beijing Universal Resort. The study suggests optimization strategies, including stratified pricing, partnerships in augmented reality (AR) technology, and the reconstruction of cultural IP. Ultimately, it extends the application of field theory to transnational brand localization, providing insights into balancing cultural authenticity, technological innovation, and market competition in the evolving Chinese market.

Keywords: Field theory; Generation Z; cultural integration; differentiated competition.

1. Introduction

Under the background of economic globalization and cultural localization, the operation strategies of cross-border theme parks are facing dual challenges. They need to maintain the brand influence of global IPs and deeply integrate into local cultures to win the recognition of the local market. As an important consumer market, China's huge Generation Z group (mainly referring to those aged 18 to 28) is reshaping the consumption structure. They not only pursue technology-driven immersive experiences such as AR interaction and virtual socializing, but also are a generation of cultural confidence, longing to see the deep expression of local narratives in the symbols of globalization. As a typical case of the localization of a multinational cultural brand, Shanghai Disneyland has attempted to balance global IP and local elements through practices such as the "Twelve Friends Park" (reconstructing Disney characters based on Chinese zodiac signs) and the Chinese-style architecture "Man Yue Restaurant". However, its strategy has gradually revealed contradictions, such as the superimposition of cultural symbols and the lag in digital services. This highlights the problems that multinational brands still need to solve in the process of localization. How to transform symbolic capital into cultural capital? How can the immersive demands of Generation Z be met through technological capital?

Based on this, this study takes the field theory as the framework, aiming to reveal the interactive relationship among symbolic capital, cultural capital and technological capital in the cultural integration strategy of Shanghai Disneyland, as well as the contradiction with the experience demands of Generation Z [1]. Through a mixed research method (119 questionnaires, capital analysis and competitive comparison), an attempt is made to answer: 1) Why does the localization strategy fall into the predicament of "symbol superposition"? 2) How does technological lag weaken the efficiency of cultural capital? 3) How can the consumer experience be optimized through narrative reconstruction and technological collaboration? The research objective is to provide a localization path for multinational brands and expand the interpretation of field theory in the field of consumer culture at the same time.

2. Literature Review

Most studies on the localization strategy of transnational theme parks focus on the global operation mode, but the discussion on cultural integration and the needs of Generation Z is insufficient. Cullen's "Global-localization response model" emphasizes the importance of balancing local and global resources. Shanghai Disney preliminarily verified this theory through the practice of zodiac culture "Twelve Friends Park" and Chinese catering accounting for 70%. However, Fu pointed out that its localization mostly stays in "symbol superposition" [2]. For example, the narrative of Mulan's theme area is thin and difficult to trigger deep cultural resonance. As a core customer group, Generation Z has a significant demand for immersive experiences such as AR interaction and local IP LinaBell, while Shanghai Disney's digital services lag and it faces competitive pressure from Beijing Universal Resort' "technology +IP" strategy [2, 3]. Existing research gaps focus on three aspects, Firstly, the lack of integrated analysis of the needs of Generation Z and cultural narrative. Second, ignoring the competition between scientific and technological capital and cultural capital in the field of competition. Third, the theoretical framework of localization does not incorporate new perspectives such as field theory.

3. Methodology

The field theory was proposed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, aiming to analyze the power relations, resource allocation and interaction patterns among different actors (individuals or institutions) in social space. This study focuses on the field capital analysis, including symbolic capital, cultural capital and economic capital. It reveals how consumers distinguish their identities in the field through cultural capital, or how brands use symbolic capital to strengthen their market positions. The research subjects are Gen Z consumers aged 18 to 28. The survey was mainly conducted by releasing questionnaires on online platforms such as wechat groups and Weibo (see Table 1). After one week of release, a total of 119 questionnaires were collected. Through a questionnaire survey, the consumption frequency, cultural identity rating and cultural demand were collected and the data of Beijing Universal Resort was compared. Data analysis identifies the types of consumers experience needs, such as symbolic consumption and deep narrative, to reveal the interaction between localization strategies and consumer habits.

Table 1. Questionnaire information

Consumption frequency	Cultural identity	Cultural demand
The frequency of visiting Disney	Notice whether Disney incorporates elements of traditional Chinese culture or not	The influence of integrating Chinese elements
	The observed Chinese elements	The appeal of localized activities
	The satisfaction of cultural integration activities	The attractions of localized products

4. Analysis of the Results

The findings are grouped under three themes: i) The field practice characteristics of Shanghai Disney's cultural integration strategy, ii) Experience perception and field habitus of Gen Z consumers and iii) Differentiation strategy and challenge under market competition.

4.1. The Field Characteristics of Shanghai Disney

4.1.1. IP Localization Strategy Led by Symbolic Capital.

The capital structure of Shanghai Disney field is dominated by symbolic capital. Attract consumers and form emotional connections through symbolic capital of global IP such as Mickey and LinaBell

[4]. According to the data, 52 respondents supported the global visibility of Disney's classic IP as its core strength. LinaBell is an IP image that officially debuted at Shanghai Disney on September 29, 2021 [5]. As a locally incubated IP character, it has successfully created a cute image that is loved by tourists through social media marketing. However, the visibility of its incubation strategy is poor. Although 57.14% of respondents noticed the local IP character incubation, only 26.89% of respondents said that it affected their consumption decisions. This shows that although symbolic capital has an advantage in brand recognition, there is still room for improvement in the deep narrative and communication efficiency of localized IP.

4.1.2. The Superposition and Surfacing of Cultural Capital.

Shanghai Disney has skillfully integrated many Chinese elements into the scenic area architecture and festival activities, such as the Chinese architectural style of "Manyue Restaurant", the Spring Festival fireworks show and the Mid-Autumn Festival Shanghai opera performance [6]. 83.19% of respondents noticed the integration of these cultural symbols, but 54 respondents believed that the cultural elements were superficial and lacked the core value of culture. For example, the Spring Festival limited products only simply add red, gold or zodiac patterns, lacking a narrative combination with Chinese customs. The Disney Bear Duffy in the Year of the Rabbit in 2023 wore rabbit ears, which did not link with the myth and folk story of the year of the Rabbit. Although the theme area of Mulan is set in a Chinese story, the very satisfaction rate of the daytime parade performance is only 21.01% and respondents reflect that its narrative is weak and fails to deeply integrate traditional culture with modern entertainment technology. This phenomenon belongs to the borrowing of symbols and does not represent capital transformation, which exposes the deficiency of cultural capital in narrative.

4.1.3. Contradictions in the Allocation of Economic Capital.

The structural contradiction of economic capital appears in the conflict between fare strategy and consumer habitus. The high ticket price of Shanghai Disney Park and the high price of the surrounding commodities have influenced the purchasing intention of consumers [7]. Only 35 respondents believed that localized goods were strongly related to traditional festivals, indicating that economic capital could not effectively transform into cultural identity.

4.2. The habitus and experiences of Generation Z

4.2.1. Symbol Consumption Driven by Digital Capital.

Gen Z's field engagement relies on digital capital. 73.95% of respondents were concerned about Disney's marketing in short video platforms such as TikTok, but only 30 respondents were very satisfied with LinaBell's AR interactive experience. This reflects the lack of investment in digital technology and user experience optimization.

4.2.2. The Contradiction of Local Cultural Needs.

Generation Z both pursues the emotional connection of global IP like LinaBell's social media heat and expects deep local narratives. 65 respondents purchased localized goods due to limited edition scarcity, while 54 criticized the superficial cultural elements and called for the development of more immersive experiences with traditional IP. This suggests that brands also need to transform cultural symbols into forms of capital that meet the narrative expectations of the younger generation.

4.3. Differentiation Strategy and Challenge under Competition

4.3.1. The Cultural Aesthetic Advantage of Symbolic and Cultural Capital.

Shanghai Disney has an advantage with the emotional connection of classic IP and the uniqueness of holiday marketing. The Chinese architectural style of "Manyue Restaurant" makes the design of the park closer to the Chinese aesthetic. Shanghai Theatre and Shanghai Disney cooperated on the Mid-

Autumn Festival to combine classic Shanghai opera art with Disney performances. This cultural fit enhances consumers' emotional affiliation.

4.3.2. Impact of Technology and Localization Narrative.

Universal Beijing is reshaping consumer expectations with AR or VR technology [8]. For example, the Harry Potter AR reality scene and the Transformers 4D theater have attracted a large number of young consumers. By contrast, Shanghai Disney's technology experience is less dominant. In addition, the shallow localization of the narrative is like the Mulan theme area, which weakens the competitiveness of Cultural capital to some extent.

5. Discussions

The localization practice of Shanghai Disney reveals the optimization strategies and contradictions of global brands in cultural integration. Firstly, the symbolic superposition and narrative lack of cultural capital have become the core issues. Although the park incorporates Chinese elements through Chinese architecture and festivals, some respondents felt it remained superficial. For example, although the theme area of Mulan borrows a Chinese story background, due to the thin narrative and lack of cultural core, tourists are not very satisfied with its daytime cruise [2]. This contradiction highlights the insufficiency of cultural capital transformation and the visual accumulation of symbols fails to transform into narrative capital with emotional resonance. At the same time, there is a significant gap between Gen Z's expectations for immersive experiences and existing strategies. Although LinaBell has attracted attention through social media marketing, its satisfaction with AR interactive experience needs to be improved, and technical capital investment and user experience needs should be optimized.

To overcome the above difficulties, Shanghai Disney needs to shift from cultural borrowing to cultural reconstruction. The development of immersive theater with the theme of "The Book of Mountains and Seas" or "Journey to the West", combining traditional myths with Disney technology, can realize the deep transformation of cultural symbols into narrative capital [9]. For example, the theme tour of Journey to the West can present the interaction between Sun Wukong and Disney characters through AR technology, which not only satisfies the technological preferences of Generation Z, but also strengthens cultural identity. In addition, the upgrading of digital services, such as virtual character customization and real-time queuing system optimization, is the key to adapt to the habits of Gen Z. By partnering with local technology companies to introduce advanced AR technology, brands can enhance the immersion of interactive experiences and expand the spread of local IP through mainstream social media partnerships to make up for the lack of attention.

In the market competition, differentiated positioning is the core of Shanghai Disney's technology-driven strategy against Beijing Universal Resort. On the one hand, it is necessary to strengthen the emotional capital advantage, deepen the "home culture" narrative of the Spring Festival fireworks show and incubate more local IP characters, such as the development of the "Chinese dragon" theme image. On the other hand, the adaptation of economic capital, such as tiered fares and membership systems, can alleviate the price-sensitive contradictions of Generation Z. In addition, cross-field cooperation strategies, such as the joint development of cultural and creative goods with the Palace Museum, can enhance cultural authority with the help of policy capital, while supplementing competitiveness through scientific and technological cooperation.

6. Conclusion

It is found that the symbolic capital of Shanghai Disney is significant, but the insufficient transformation of cultural capital, economic imbalance and digital lag are the main challenges. The contradictory demands of Generation Z highlight the complexity of the field. It is suggested that through narrative reconstruction, technological supplement and hierarchical fare optimization practice. Limited by the number of questionnaires collected, the sample size is small and may not fully reflect the characteristics of the wider population. The study design was constrained by realistic conditions and some potential variables were not included in the analysis. Future studies will be refined by increasing the sample size, extending the tracking period and optimizing the measurement tools. In the future, the study will continue to promote theoretical construction and method innovation in this field.

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