

CASE STUDY

A Case Study of the Brand Translation of Coca-Cola: Based on the Cultural Adaptation Theory

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Abstract: Translation is an important form of intercultural communication. Brand translation is a key access for foreign customers to know the product. This paper chooses the brand translation of Coca-Cola as the research object, pointing out that Coca-Cola once experienced culture shock due to its brand translation. However, Coca-Cola eventually overcame the culture shock by adopting the strategy of integration put forward by Berry. What's more, Young Yun Kim's "stress-adaptation-growth" model helps us analyze each dynamic process of how Coca-Cola adapted to the Chinese market successfully. This paper not only enriches the application of cultural adaptation theory, but also stresses the importance of brand translation in modern international business world.

Keywords: *Brand Translation, Coca-Cola, Cultural Adaptation Theory.*

Article Received: 04 April 2019

Revised: 15 April 2019

Accepted: 27 April 2019

Introduction

Intercultural communication is becoming more and more pervasive as the development of international business. Guo-ming Chen has given a wide accepted concept of intercultural communication, which refers to the communication among people from two or more cultures. Different from communication among people from same cultural background, intercultural communication always involves two or more languages, making the communication challenging.

However, through translation, 'a form of intercultural communication, a notion referring to the enormous variety of ways by which members of different linguistic, cultural and ethnic groups communicate and interact with one another [1]. This problem could be more or less solved into a smaller one. Brand translation, works as an intermediary between a company and the target customers, is one of the extremely important types of translation, especially

when more and more foreign companies have invested in China since the opening-up policy carried out 40 years ago. A good brand translation is the first window for the target customers to know the products. Intercultural adaptation is an infinite game process led by communicators with cultural spirit [2]. In other words, as a dynamic process, intercultural adaptation is used to enhance mutual understanding of each culture, trying to extend acceptable space of each culture.

This paper studies the brand translation of Coca-Cola, pointing out that Coca-Cola once experienced culture shock due to its brand translation. However, Coca-Cola eventually overcame the culture shock by adopting the strategy of integration put forward by Berry. What's more, Young Yun Kim's "stress-adaptation-growth" model helps us analyze each dynamic process of how Coca-Cola adapted to the Chinese market successfully.

Literature Review

In 1959, Edward Hall 'built up the concept of intercultural communication and made a theoretical analysis to non-verbal communication in his book, *The Silent Language*, which has been regarded as the ground breaking work of intercultural communication [3]. Since then, the development of intercultural communication has developed greatly.

Intercultural adaptation, one of the most significant concepts, has been widely studied among various disciplinary in the past decades. The representative theories include culture shock raised by Kalvero Oberg, acculturation stages put forward by Gullahorn, cultural adaptation theory by Berry and intercultural adaptation theory by Young Yun Kim. In 1960, Oberg used the concept of cultural shock to express a series of symptoms of the overseas sojourners, like alienation, terror, annoyance and upset.

On the basis of the classical U-Curve model raised by Lysgaard in 1955, Oberg [4] improved the model and thus built up the cultural adaptation cycle theory. This model indicates four stages of intercultural communicators, the honeymoon stage, crisis stage, recovery stage and full adaptation stage. Gullahorn [5] paid attention to how sojourners readapt to the original culture when back to hometown and expanded the U-Curve into W-Curve model, showing the intercultural adaptation process more comprehensively.

However, some scholars like Kim [6] commented the previous adaptation theories a lack of system and scientific analysis. While in the 1970s, Berry [7] explored the cultural adaptation strategies and came up with four strategies on how immigrants adapt to mainstream society. 1) Integration is chosen if immigrants not only want to maintain the original culture, but are also willing to adapt into the new society; 2) assimilation strategy

is adopted if immigrants choose not to maintain their original culture; 3) separation happens when immigrants are only willing to keep the original culture instead of getting involved in the new society; 4) marginalization strategy refers to indifference to both original culture and adaptation to new environment.

Berry [8] also pointed out that among the four strategies; immigrants are more willing to choose integration, which is a strategy that immigrants undertake less social pressure than other strategies. Berry's theory has been highly approved of by the academic world, which made Berry a leading scholar in the field of cultural adaptation study. Intercultural adjustment theory raised by Young Yun Kim is built up on the pressure brought by cultural differences. From her point of view, the pressure caused by cultural differences pushes communicators to self-adjustment. With a certain period of adjustment and changes, the communicators would become mature to deal with various kinds of cultural situations and ultimately be an intercultural person beyond self [9].

There are two research levels of intercultural adaptation, individual and group level, as raised by Young Yun Kim. Individual level often pays great attention on the psychological adjustment of the sojourners in a new or unfamiliar culture. By observing the self-reaction and interpersonal processes of individuals in a new environment, we could explain and understand the problem-solving process of new-comers, including immigrants, travellers, refugees and members from different ethnical groups.

The intercultural adaptation study in group level was firstly led by scholars on the field of anthropology and socialist. In anthropology, a major common focus in academics is the acculturation for groups of people from different cultural backgrounds; this communication may make both parties change their cultural values.

There are five common modes of intercultural adaptation study: the recuperation model, the learning model, the recovery model, the dynamic tension reduction model and the dialectical model. As for the brand translation, up to 2017, there are 1,352 papers concerning brand translation on CNKI database. Many brand translation paper focus on the method of translation, Li [10], started the study with Nida's theory of "Functional Equivalence", interprets the fundamental principles of brand translation and further discusses from semantic and pragmatic perspectives, tries to realize this equivalence in translation practice. Hu & Li [11], studied translation of luxury brands from domestic luxury fashion website (MEICI.com).

Through quantitative analysis, they analyzes the characteristics and problems of foreign luxury brand translations. Based on the situation of "high demand, low output" in domestic luxury goods market, the authors put forward a new translation strategy: combination of domestication and foreignization in the gradient continuum, to make Chinese local brands and culture more familiar to consumers of other countries.

The paper of Wang [12] is from the international brand's trans-culture, consumer's esthetic psychology obtains, through to be listed in the international market competition the success or failure example, had proven the brand translation's importance, and the question which must consider on the translation brand name's method and the actual translation has made the discussion. Even though the studies of adaptation theory and brand translation are abundant, there's a lack of study to combine both together, in other words, use the adaptation theory to analyze the translation of a brand, and that's what this paper is working on.

Analysis and Discussion

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lack of study to combine both together, in other words, use the adaptation theory to analyze the translation of a brand, and that's what this paper is working on. Coca-Cola is one of the most well-known companies in the world. It successfully entered Chinese market and won large number of loyal Chinese customers. Like all companies in the world, the main purpose of Coca-Cola is to gain profit by providing goods and services to customers.

To this end, Coca-Cola need to satisfy the customers in the target market, which indirectly reveals Coca-Cola, keeps a positive attitude towards Chinese market. However, the beginning is not always easy. Like many foreign companies entering Chinese market, Coca-Cola experienced the period of cultural shock and gradually adopted the integration strategies. What Coca-Cola experienced is a typical example of how a company adapts to foreign environment.

Introduction of Coca-Cola

Set up in 1886, the Coca-Cola is a leading corporation in the field of soft drinks. Its mission is "to strive to refresh the world, inspire moments of optimism and happiness, create value and make a difference." It often tops the list of being the world's most recognizable brand. Its iconic Coca Cola drink, also known as Coke, was initially produced into a kind of medicine. Nowadays, this company is one of the biggest selling products on the planet. It sells 1.6 billion drinks a day and employs 100,000 members.

'Coca-Cola system' and eye-catching advertising slogans are the secrets for Coca-Cola to success. Coca-Cola is one of the best brand translation in advertisement field, it not only maintains the syllables of English, but also represents the core concept of branding, delicious and happiness. More importantly, it's easily remembered by the customers. However, the brand name Coca-Cola was not the original translation of Coca-Cola.

Cultural Shock of Coca-Cola

Culture shock is an experience a person may have when one moves to a cultural environment which is different from one's own; it is also the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life due to immigration or a visit to a new country, a move between social environments, or simply transition to another type of life. From the common definition of cultural shock, we know that this concept is often used to describe the emotions of a group of people exposed in a new environment.

However, the mechanism of cultural shock works the same on a company entering a total new market. The time when Coca-Cola enters Chinese market in 1927, Coca-Cola was translated directly based on the pronunciation, “Kedoukenla” (蝌蚪啃蜡), which meaning nothing particular in Chinese expressions. To be honest, if only look at this brand translation, no people understand what Coca-Cola is selling. What's more, the dark color of Coca-Cola, which is similar to that of traditional Chinese medicine, terrified Chinese customers at the very beginning.

This weird brand translation indirectly pushed Coca-Cola Company a dilemma in Chinese market. Gaining very little profit and winning no loyal customers, Coca-Cola faced cultural shock and the whole company invested in China was a total failure at that time.

Analysis: Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model

On the basis of studying the process of cultural adaptation, Kim put forward the Stress-adaptation-growth model. In this model, Kim regards the cultural shock as a challenge. And this kind of challenge eventually leads to stress, which evokes pain, despair and anxiety of individual to some extent. However, stress is regarded as a normal emotion instead of a failure performance, which thus brings about

adaptation. This dynamic process of stress and adaptation gradually enhances growth and innovation. Coca-Cola was in face of heavy stress when it failed to catch the sight of Chinese customers. What was worse, the company even faced with the threat of exiting Chinese market. Just as Kim pointed out, stress can sometimes be pushing forces. Coca-Cola acted positively while facing the heavy load of stress.

Instead of exiting Chinese market, this company started to figure out a fatal mistake of the brand translation. With the adaptation of the bad operating situation, Coca-Cola found out a new direction for the whole company, to change the brand translation into an easily understood and accepted one.

Integration Strategies

As Berry put forward, integration is chosen if immigrants not only want to maintain the original culture, but are also willing to adapt into the new society. What's more, integration is the best strategies among the four. Likewise, the strategy adopted by Coca-Cola is similar to integration:

Having realized one of the major obstacles for Coca-Cola to win in Chinese market is the inappropriate brand translation, Coca-Cola decided to make a difference. By the year of 1930, Coca-Cola decided to recruit a new Chinese brand translation with a prize of three hundred and fifty pounds. Among a great many participants, Jiang Yi, a Chinese scholar who lived in England, translated into “Kekoukele” (Coca Cola), indicates Coca Cola drink is not only delicious but could also gain happiness from drinking it.

On one hand, the brand translation “Coca Cola” maintains a similar pronunciation in English; on the other hand, this translation adapts to Chinese market successfully, as Chinese customers feel happy to consume Coca Cola, which could bring them good blessings.

Conclusion

Translation is an important form of intercultural communication. Brand translation is a key access for foreign customers to know the product. This paper chooses the brand translation of Coca-Cola as the research object, pointing out that Coca-Cola once experienced culture shock due to its brand translation. However, Coca-Cola eventually overcame the culture shock by

adopting the strategy of integration put forward by Berry. What's more, Young Yun Kim's "stress-adaptation-growth" model helps us analyze each dynamic process of how Coca-Cola adapted to the Chinese market successfully. This exploration not only enriches the application of cultural adaptation theory, but also stresses the importance of brand translation in modern international business world.

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