

The Application of Brand Narrative in Advertising Communication: The Case of Pantene's Human Hair Embroidery

Jinyi Chen

*Suzhou Science and Technology Town Foreign Language High School, Suzhou, China
yjc_8185@163.com*

Abstract. Based on the fundamental concept of brand narrative, information presented in the form of a story tends to be more memorable to individuals. Through captivating storytelling and continuous innovation, brands can secure long-term success and foster deep emotional connections with consumers. The story behind a brand plays a key role in how consumers understand and assess its products, and delivering information through storytelling is more likely to resonate with them on an emotional level. As a result, storytelling has emerged as a pivotal strategy for brand development, maintaining long-term customer relationships, and engaging potential consumers. This paper aims to explore the application of brand narrative in advertising communication via a case study of Pantene's human hair embroidery, which is recognized as an intangible cultural heritage in China. Through the analysis of relevant literature and a specific case, the use of brand narrative in advertising communication is examined, with large data sets leveraged to boost resource and time efficiency. The results show that Pantene's incorporation of hair embroidery into its advertisements significantly enhances its brand narrative and boosts consumer brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brand narrative, Advertising communication, Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), Hair embroidery.

1. Introduction

Brand narrative, as a core element of modern marketing, has been widely employed in advertising communication. As consumer demands evolve, brand narratives enhance the relatability of brand messages and evoke emotional resonance, helping build long-term relationships with consumers [1]. Existing research primarily examines the impact of brand narratives on brand image and consumer loyalty, with most studies focusing on large brands and traditional advertising formats. However, there is limited exploration of how brand narratives are employed in creative advertising. Thus, this paper, through a case study, aims to analyze how Pantene's human hair embroidery advertisement conveys brand narrative through its unique creative format and explore how this advertisement contributes to brand loyalty and its emotional impact on consumers. In particular, it reveals how creative advertising enhances the effectiveness of brand narrative dissemination, strengthening the emotional connection between the brand and consumers and boosting the brand's competitiveness in

the market. To this end, an in-depth analysis of Pantene's advertisement is conducted to explore the influence of combining brand narrative with creative advertising formats on enhancing brand communication effectiveness. This study not only provides new insights into brand narrative strategies in advertising but also holds significant practical value in demonstrating how innovative advertising formats can enhance brand loyalty and emotional recognition.

2. The role of brand narrative in advertising communication

2.1. The core concepts and functions of brand narrative

Pfannes et al. define brand narratives as ways that brands convey their culture, values, mission and personality to consumers through storytelling [2]. Specifically, brands create compelling stories that resonate with the audience at an emotional level. Compelling stories can leave a lasting impression in an age where consumers are bombarded with information. As a result, brand narratives differ from traditional advertising. While traditional advertising is static and keeps sharing the same message over and over again, brand narratives enable brands to highlight the people, values and mission behind their products [3]. There are multiple core functions of brand storytelling. This includes creating an emotional connection between consumers and brands. As a result, consumers are easily persuaded and more likely to lower their defenses. While consumers buy products that convey meaning and emotions behind the brand through storytelling, they are also emotionally connected with the brand. Consequently, brand storytelling is key in shaping brand identity and personality [4]. This can be attributed to how it helps brands communicate stories in ways that consumers can easily understand. It provides an effective way for brands to differentiate themselves from competitors. Further, cultural transmission is the other core function of brand storytelling. It deepens the cultural connotation of a brand when combined with local culture or tradition. Multiple people get to see and know about a specific brand, together with the integrated culture.

2.2. The application of brand narrative in advertising communication

The relationship between brand narrative and advertising communication is essential, as advertising serves as a primary channel for conveying brand stories to the audience. Advertising goes beyond mere product promotion by creating compelling narratives that draw consumers in through the use of plot, characters, and emotional engagement. It is highlighted that advertising captures consumer attention while also persuading them by emphasizing the product's appeal and creating memorable experiences [5]. In advertising, the narrative structure typically consists of an introduction, conflict, climax, and resolution, which organizes the advertisement and reinforces the brand's core values at each stage [6]. The introduction sets the stage for the story, presenting the brand's message. The conflict introduces the problem the product or service seeks to solve, while the climax highlights the product's solution, culminating in the resolution that reinforces the brand's promise. These stages create a coherent narrative that aligns with the brand's identity and resonates with the consumer's needs and desires. Emotional appeal shapes perceptions and purchasing decisions, with emotions like joy, nostalgia, and empathy creating lasting connections [7]. By engaging emotions, brands are able to forge stronger emotional ties with their audience, beyond mere transactional relationships. This emotional resonance fosters long-term loyalty and trust, essential for a strong brand presence.

2.3. The value of intangible cultural heritage in brand advertising

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) encompasses folk arts and crafts with historical and cultural value, passed down through generations worldwide [8]. Pantene's hair embroidery, inspired by intangible cultural heritage, is a prime example of ICH elements. As a folk handicraft, it follows the law of plastic art, uses an individual's natural color as the material, uses the needle as a tool and creates an artistic image by applying threads and needles on the smooth cloth. Hair embroidery has become more widespread in the Ming and Yuan dynasties having originated in the Tang Dynasty [9]. ICH plays a key role in the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage and brand integration. Brands can enhance their own cultural value with the help of intangible cultural heritage elements. These entail the expressions, practice and knowledge recognized by communities as part of their cultural identity alongside associated spaces and objects. Brands can pass on culture to consumers through intangible cultural heritage stories or skills, which not only enhances the brand's sense of social responsibility but also establishes the brand's uniqueness and depth. Consequently, ICH promotes the market value of products. In commercial communication, intangible cultural heritage can help brands and consumers establish a sense of cultural identity [10]. It adds cultural and historical depth to the brand, particularly when its products or services are closely tied to traditional culture. This not only promotes the brand's history but deepens consumers' understanding of different cultures.

3. Integrating brand narrative with intangible cultural heritage: a case study of Pantene

3.1. Advertising context and creative concept

Founded in 1945, Pantene has grown into a global leader in hair care, renowned for its innovative advertising that uniquely incorporates intangible cultural heritage into its brand storytelling [11]. Its advertisements creatively use cultural symbols and imagery to celebrate both beauty and tradition. For example, its campaigns incorporate intricate accessories and floral elements, evoking historical representations of femininity across various cultures. By integrating these cultural symbols with modern hair care products, Pantene reinforces its brand identity, thus underscoring the significant role women have played in storytelling throughout history. The fusion of heritage and contemporary beauty standards in Pantene's advertising connects with diverse audiences, elevating its products from simple hair care essentials to symbols of cultural appreciation and personal empowerment. Through this creative integration of intangible cultural heritage, Pantene highlights the beauty of tradition while emphasizing the evolving narrative of femininity, thereby making its advertisements a powerful medium for cultural appreciation and modern empowerment.

3.2. The integration of brand narrative and intangible cultural heritage

Pantene's advertising seamlessly blends intangible cultural heritage with its brand narrative, using storytelling to create a deep emotional and cultural connection with its audience. The advertisement blends evocative music with compelling visuals, immersing viewers in a transformative journey that is both personal and symbolic. And the storyline follows a journey from hair damage to renewal, reflecting themes of empowerment, resilience, and self-discovery. Through this narrative, Pantene portrays hair care not only as a process of restoration but also as an artistic expression grounded in cultural heritage and creativity.

Traditional Chinese hair embroidery techniques, a form of intangible cultural heritage, serve as a key element in this advertisement. The ad features women adorned with intricately embroidered

hairstyles, inspired by ancient traditions, linking modern hair care with historical craftsmanship. This combination elevates Pantene's brand by portraying its products as not merely solutions for hair repair, but as instruments that preserve and reinterpret tradition in a modern context. The depiction of women with flowing hair, adorned with floral patterns and embroidery, strengthens the link between beauty, heritage, creativity, and feminine strength. The ad's narrative structure also plays a critical role in integrating brand values with cultural symbolism. The use of music, visuals, and the characters' journey creates a cohesive storytelling experience that highlights Pantene's cultural depth. The music, with its gentle yet powerful undertones, evokes feelings of renewal and growth, while the imagery of women styling their hair reflects both traditional beauty and modern femininity. These elements convey the brand's cultural commitment and emotional connection with its audience. Moreover, Pantene's advertisement effectively blends cultural symbols with product functionality [12]. The theme of hair embroidery metaphorically represents Pantene's repairing power, with delicate and intricate threadwork paralleling the process of restoring hair strand by strand. This symbolic approach enhances the brand's cultural depth while highlighting the blend of tradition and modern innovation, positioning Pantene as a brand that honors cultural heritage while embracing cutting-edge technology. Through this integration of intangible cultural heritage and modern hair care, the advertisement strengthens Pantene's emotional appeal and deepens its cultural connotation, resonating with consumers who value both beauty and heritage.

3.3. Advertising communication strategies and market response

Pantene effectively used social media, especially Tencent Video, to expand its reach and influence. With over 430 million monthly active users, Tencent Video, as China's leading video platform, helped Pantene target its audience, including fans of master artist Zhou Yinghua, the creator of the embroidery featured in the ad [13]. This strategic platform choice maximized exposure and directly engaged the right consumer group. By aligning its strategy with the platform's strengths, Pantene optimized its messaging, reaching viewers who valued both cultural heritage and innovation. And this tailored method boosted the brand's visibility and connection with its audience. The market response was positive, with consumers showing increased purchase intentions, driven by the ad's emphasis on sustainability. Its use of modern technology to restore damaged hair resonated with consumers, as 77% of Chinese consumers prioritize sustainability in personal care products [14]. The ad reinforced Pantene's social responsibility, strengthening brand recognition and fostering positive emotional connections, ultimately leading to greater consumer trust and loyalty.

4. The impact and effectiveness of brand narrative

4.1. Consumer emotional connection and brand loyalty

Pantene effectively establishes an emotional connection with consumers through its brand narrative, particularly by weaving cultural stories into its advertisements. For example, the ad featuring intangible cultural heritage hair embroidery evokes cultural resonance, helping viewers emotionally connect with the brand's message [15]. The portrayal of traditional craftsmanship and feminine strength in the ad taps into consumers' cultural pride and evokes feelings of nostalgia and respect for heritage. These emotional triggers enhance brand connection, increasing loyalty as consumers build trust and attachment. The Pantene advertisement, by aligning its narrative with cultural values, strengthens consumer trust, making them more inclined to not only purchase but also remain loyal to the brand. Market data shows that emotional appeal significantly influences purchase decisions, with

consumers expressing a higher intent to buy Pantene products due to the brand's alignment with their cultural values and emotional experiences. This emotional recognition fosters a sense of belonging, making consumers more likely to stay committed to the brand in the future.

4.2. Transmission of cultural values and shaping of brand image

Pantene expresses the values of traditional culture through its advertisement featuring intangible cultural heritage hair embroidery. For example, the advertisement uses storytelling and symbolic imagery to highlight the value of traditional culture. The storytelling approach shows respect for cultural heritage, increasing the audience's willingness to purchase Pantene products since they feel more invested in the cultural narrative. Besides, the advertisement creates the image of an ancient maiden via the use of traditional hair embroidery techniques, conveying the values of traditional culture. Also, the intangible cultural heritage successfully shapes Pantene's cultural image in the minds of consumers. This can be attributed to its key role in enhancing the company's competitive edge. Leveraging science-backed features, most companies in the beauty industry demonstrate the effectiveness of their beauty products [16]. However, Pantene's intangible cultural heritage gives it a deep cultural connotation, attracting customers to focus on culture. Additionally, the integration of intangible cultural heritage effectively boosts the uniqueness of the Pantene brand and differentiates it from other brands in the market. While most beauty brands emphasize modernity and science-backed features, Pantene stands out by blending advanced hair technology with national intangible cultural heritage. By collaborating with traditional artisans, Pantene not only creates a deeper, more meaningful brand image but also reinforces its commitment to cultural preservation and social responsibility.

4.3. The role of brand narrative in market competition

Brand narrative plays a crucial role in helping Pantene differentiate itself in the highly competitive beauty market. By blending modern hair technology with the cultural richness of intangible cultural heritage, Pantene offers consumers more than just a product for hair care. It presents a story of tradition and innovation. The incorporation of hair embroidery, a key cultural element, provides Pantene with a unique market position, attracting consumers who value both hair health and cultural heritage. Furthermore, brand narrative influences consumer purchasing behavior by tapping into emotions and desires through compelling storytelling. Pantene's emotional appeal, combined with cultural resonance, impacts consumers' attitudes and purchasing decisions. Research shows that consumers are more likely to purchase products that evoke emotional connections and align with their values [17]. Its narrative fosters a positive brand perception, enhancing consumer awareness and favorability, which drives higher purchase intentions, stronger market demand, and strengthens Pantene's presence in a competitive market.

5. Conclusion

The paper examines the use of brand narrative in advertising communication, focusing on Pantene's intangible cultural heritage hair embroidery campaign. It finds that Pantene's integration of hair embroidery in its advertisements greatly contributes to its brand narrative and helps build brand loyalty by fostering emotional connections with consumers. The ad effectively captured attention by emphasizing the brand's transformative power and was widely shared across social media platforms by beauty enthusiasts and influencers, further promoting its message of empowerment. However, a

key limitation of this study is the reliance on a systematic literature review, which lacks empirical evidence. Empirical research is vital for validating theoretical insights and provides a more robust understanding through direct data collection and analysis. Future research should focus on empirical studies to improve the broader applicability of the findings. Besides, comparing Pantene's branding strategies with those of its competitors would provide more nuanced insights into their effectiveness.

Thus, a competitive analysis is needed to examine real-world case studies from other beauty brands to understand different strategies and provide actionable recommendations for improvement.

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