

How Localized Communication Breaks the Deadlock: BYD's Localization Strategy for Advertising in the Thai Market and Its Insights

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Abstract. The Southeast Asian new energy vehicle market continues to expand, and Thailand's successive electric vehicle support policies have attracted Chinese new energy vehicle companies to accelerate their deployment. However, Thailand's new energy vehicle market has long been dominated by Japanese brands and has formed a unique advertising ecosystem with emotional narratives and positive values at its core, posing a challenge to the cross-cultural communication of overseas brands. This study examines BYD's localization strategy in the Thai market through a case study, combining a literature review of Thai advertising culture characteristics with material analysis of BYD's advertising practices. The research finds that BYD has achieved rapid brand penetration in Thailand through strategies such as localized scenario marketing, online community operations, and offline outdoor media integration. However, the brand's advertising still primarily focuses on product functionality, thereby lacking depth in emotional narrative and alignment with core religious and cultural values. This study extracts BYD's experience and directions for improvement in localization communication, providing practical reference for Chinese new energy brands to shift from product export to brand culture export.

Keywords: Advertising localization strategy, BYD, Brand communication strategy, Cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

Current academic research largely focuses on the industrial, policy, and product strategies of Chinese automakers expanding into Southeast Asia. While there is considerable research on the local advertising culture in Thailand, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of cross-cultural adaptation of brand advertising, particularly through case studies of leading automakers, and a shortage of directly applicable theoretical analyses.

This study analyzes the core characteristics of Thai advertising culture, examines BYD's localization strategies for adapting to Thai advertising culture, and summarizes practical approaches, experiences, and areas for improvement in localized communication. This provides feasible suggestions for other Chinese automakers entering the Southeast Asian market to develop cross-cultural advertising communication plans.

This study primarily employs a case study approach to analyze the localization measures implemented by the BYD brand to adapt to the Thai market.

This study takes BYD's advertising and communication in the Thai market as a typical case, comprehensively reviews its advertising and communication strategies since entering the Thai market, analyzes the effectiveness and limitations of its localization measures in conjunction with market feedback, combines micro-level advertising text analysis with macro-level brand communication strategy, summarizes the innovative aspects of BYD's advertising in achieving cultural adaptation, and provides constructive suggestions for future overseas automotive companies.

2. Cultural characteristics of Thai advertising

Thai advertising exhibits five cultural characteristics: emotional storytelling, Thai humor, a down-to-earth perspective, a core value of kindness, and a short film-like production quality.

Sun Rui pointed out that in the process of brand advertising communication, China tends to choose positive and direct publicity, spreading positive energy with inspiration as the theme, while Japan and Thailand instill their brand core values in consumers through storytelling [1]. Thai advertisements tend to tell a complete short story, drawing the audience in by depicting the daily life of ordinary people. Zhou Zhiqing and Zou Wenbing pointed out that Thai public service advertisements are good at using both warmth and humor as emotional appeals, and touching the audience with a common perspective and story-based plot [2]. Taking the classic Thai life insurance advertisement "Nameless Hero" as an example, although the short film only tells the story of an ordinary office worker helping others in silence, it has accumulated more than 100 million views on video platforms, which fully demonstrates the communication effectiveness of emotional narrative.

Thai advertisements use a lot of exaggeration and personification to highlight Thai humor, combining product selling points with widely shared comedic elements. Li Yamei regards Thai humor as the core representation of the national cultural characteristics of Thai advertisements, pointing out that it has absorbed the production techniques of Western advertisements and fully explored the humor tradition of its own people [3]. In terms of narrative structure, Thai advertisements prefer non-linear narratives and suspense settings, and are good at using reversals to mobilize the audience's emotions.

Thai advertisements often feature ordinary people as the main characters, which reduces production costs and directs the audience's attention to the story itself. In addition, Thai advertisements are often set in familiar living spaces such as schools and streets, which shortens the psychological distance between the advertisement and the audience by telling the stories of ordinary people's daily lives. The cultural core of Thai advertising is deeply rooted in the Theravada Buddhist concepts of compassion and tolerance, and its content generally revolves around themes such as treating others kindly and giving back with gratitude. Guan Can pointed out that the reason why Thai advertising practitioners can create good works is to some extent due to the influence of Thailand's multiculturalism, and analyzed it from three aspects: Buddhist culture, Western culture and popular culture [4]. Liu Baolin and Shang Qing also pointed out that Thai advertising takes universal themes such as happy families as samples and has formed its own system of cultural communication logic. Its core value is highly consistent with the Chinese traditional cultural concepts of good deeds being rewarded and generosity in philanthropy. This is an important reason why Thai advertising can cross cultural boundaries and gain recognition [5]. Thai advertising often combines personal stories with social issues, telling individual destinies and prompting the public to think about social issues, thus achieving the unity of commercial value and social value.

Thai advertisements are crafted to cinematic standards in every aspect, including photography, music, and performance. In particular, the music often evokes emotional resonance at key moments in the plot, successfully elevating commercial communication into content products. This makes Thai advertisements, in the age of information overload, something that audiences actively watch and are happy to share.

3. Analysis of BYD's localization communication strategy in the Thai market

3.1. Localization of narrative strategy

Li Xi pointed out that "the construction of corporate identity discourse plays an important role in the overseas image communication of enterprises going abroad." [6]. BYD's advertising communication in the Thai market has undergone a transformation from functional appeal to emotional appeal. For example, the promotional video for BYD's core model Yuan PLUS (called BYD ATTO 3 in the Thai market) unfolds in three segments in a 60-second short film, respectively presenting the life scenes of commuting in Bangkok, family outings in Pattaya, and fashionable night market travel, integrating vehicle performance with the daily life of Thai people. This storytelling communication strategy corresponds to the cultural logic of building emotional identity in Thai advertising, enabling the BYD car brand to establish an "understands me" brand image in the minds of Thai consumers. Wang Dong and Shen Xuefeng pointed out that Thai advertising "uses small things to convey the connotation of Thai culture, triggering phenomenal communication and providing a reference for the external communication of Chinese brand advertising" [7].

3.2. Localizing value expression

In building brand communication scenarios, BYD moved away from a rigid cross-border marketing integration model, instead using local public cultural scenarios as a carrier to organically integrate brand value with Thai local social culture. BYD held a "Green Travel Festival" at Bangkok Station, enhancing brand awareness by providing test drive activities; it also organized the "BYD Thailand Green Tour" event, inviting Thai media representatives and opinion leaders to personally experience the Atto 3, successfully increasing brand influence by leveraging the reach of mainstream local media and opinion leaders. BYD's communication and marketing methods broke down the barriers of alienation associated with overseas brands, deeply integrating brand concepts into the local Thai consumer context and continuously enhancing brand awareness and credibility in the local market.

In addition to participating in travel-themed festivals and industry auto shows, BYD has proactively entered the Thai mass entertainment sector, collaborating with leading local film and television companies such as Sahamongkol Films International Ltd., and exclusively sponsoring the Thai premiere of the heartwarming film "Letters to Grandma." Unlike auto shows and test drive events that focus on vehicle performance, this sponsorship did not center on new energy vehicles. Instead, it leveraged the film's themes of family and gratitude to connect with the values of kindness and compassion widely valued in Thai society. This embedded the brand image within a familiar cultural context for Thai audiences, bridging the psychological gap with ordinary consumers and further reducing the sense of alienation associated with foreign brands. This is a significant example of BYD's approach of downplaying Chinese-style promotional language and implementing a Thai-style humanistic communication strategy.

3.3. Localized scenario-based communication

Online, BYD created dedicated Facebook groups for each model, where owners and potential customers exchange user experiences, technical questions, and event information. As of February 13, 2025, the amount of user-generated content in BYD Thailand's Facebook groups for each model exceeded 500. This high volume of content and high community activity directly demonstrates the significant effectiveness of the brand's localized community operations, completely overcoming the challenges of adapting overseas brands to local markets. Offline, BYD extensively invests in outdoor media such as bus body advertisements, subway posters, high-traffic areas in shopping malls, and roadside billboards, deeply integrating brand information into the daily lives of Thai people. This strategy of combining online community interaction with offline life scenario coverage perfectly aligns with the grassroots logic of Thai advertising, which focuses on the lives of ordinary people.

BYD's localization strategy in the Thai market has achieved a conscious shift from product export to brand localization. However, it still lacks a certain degree of cultural integration in its advertising. On the one hand, BYD's advertising still focuses on showcasing product functions and lifestyle scenarios, lacking the strong emotional stories or dramatic plot twists often found in Thai brand advertisements. On the other hand, BYD's core value of "goodness" is reflected more in industrial and social aspects such as factory investment and public welfare activities than in directly echoing local ethics such as compassion and gratitude in the advertising content itself. In short, BYD has achieved a superficial adaptation in localization, but its advertising still has room for further breakthroughs in achieving a deeper resonance with the emotional core of the Thai people.

4. Recommendations

As Yu Yan said, localization strategies can not only improve advertising companies' understanding of the target market, eliminate national barriers, and formulate effective advertising communication strategies in cross-border advertising, but also enhance their core competitiveness in global economic integration [8]. To achieve effective localized communication, companies should make full use of local resources rather than simply exporting content from their home country. BYD chose to cooperate with local advertising teams in Thailand, use local artists to participate in the promotion, and build local social communities for operation. It relied on local practitioners to complete the content creation, reduce the cultural differences of cross-border brands, and make the visual presentation and narrative style of the advertisement more in line with the aesthetic habits of Thai audiences.

In addition, localized communication requires integrating various communication channels and permeating into the real-life scenarios of local people. BYD combines offline outdoor advertising with online community operations, integrating brand information into the daily commutes, shopping, and travel of Thai people. This aligns with the characteristic of Thai advertising that leans towards narratives of ordinary people's lives. In this way, it can maintain young users on social media platforms and maintain brand exposure in the offline environment, building a relatively complete closed loop of localized communication.

Based on BYD's experience and shortcomings in localizing its advertising in Thailand, the following three insights can be summarized for reference by domestic brands going global.

First, to effectively localize communication, companies need to shift their mindset from simply exporting products to building local brands. They cannot simply copy or transplant cultural symbols

from other countries; they must incorporate the cultural logic of the target market into their communication strategies.

Secondly, the depth of localization depends on the company's understanding of the core of local culture. Only by respecting local values, aesthetic preferences, and emotional habits can advertising content more easily resonate with the audience.

Finally, localization communication should strike a balance between globalization and localization. Wang Haizhong pointed out that "global localization" is the way to international marketing success. Its essence is the strategy of "global thinking and localized action" [9]. Companies must maintain the core positioning of the brand itself while adapting to the local market, so as to achieve what Roland Robertson called "global localization" [10].

5. Conclusion

This paper adopts a cross-cultural localization communication perspective, using BYD's Thai market as a case study. Combining local cultural characteristics such as emotional narratives, a grassroots perspective, and a benevolent core message in Thai advertising, it systematically analyzes BYD's localization strategies from the dimensions of narrative, symbolism, content, and channels. This analysis addresses core issues faced by Chinese automakers going global, including superficial communication, insufficient cultural adaptation, and difficulty in establishing local brand recognition. The research shows that BYD has broken away from the rigid model of simply copying domestic promotional content. Through a combination of product and service localization, localized scenario-based cultural marketing, and a comprehensive online and offline channel layout, BYD has effectively adapted to the Thai market's communication ecosystem, breaking the market monopoly of Japanese brands and providing a practical model for Chinese new energy vehicle companies' overseas communication in Southeast Asia.

This study still has certain limitations. It uses only a single case for qualitative analysis, lacks multi-case comparisons and quantitative data support, and focuses solely on the Thai market, so the generalizability of the conclusions is limited. Future research can expand the research sample, incorporate quantitative analysis, and broaden the research scope in Southeast Asia. In the future, it can further explore the logic of deep cultural adaptation of overseas brands and new media communication paths, so as to provide a more comprehensive reference for Chinese car companies to go global and promote their culture overseas.

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