

Study on the Application of Intercultural Communication in Apparel Cross-Border E-commerce Livestreaming

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Abstract: With the rapid growth of global cross-border e-commerce, the apparel industry, as a key sector, has broken traditional marketing boundaries through e-commerce livestreaming and gradually entered the international market. However, due to significant differences in consumer needs and preferences across different cultural backgrounds, intercultural communication skills are crucial in cross-border e-commerce livestreaming. Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, this paper explores the application of intercultural communication in apparel cross-border e-commerce livestreaming. It analyzes how six cultural dimensions—high-context vs. low-context communication, power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, indulgence vs. restraint—impact livestream communication and provides strategic suggestions for e-commerce livestream hosts to enhance communication in a cross-cultural context.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication; Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions; Apparel Cross-Border E-commerce; Livestream Marketing.

1. Introduction

With the ongoing advancement of globalization and rapid iteration of internet technology, cross-border e-commerce livestreaming is rising at an unstoppable pace. Through livestreaming, cross-border e-commerce sellers can directly showcase product features and company strengths, bringing more exposure and sales. However, significant cultural differences—ranging from thought patterns and behavioral norms to lifestyle habits—often create communication barriers. Each buyer represents their respective culture, making it essential for livestream hosts to not only possess knowledge, language skills, and marketing techniques but also to master intercultural communication. By understanding intercultural communication deeply, hosts can better interpret consumer intentions, build trust, improve communication efficiency, and increase conversion rates. Additionally, livestream hosts can leverage product marketing to export their native culture, imbuing shopping behavior with emotional and cultural significance to enhance the customer experience.

Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede's "Cultural Dimensions Theory" provides a framework for analyzing cultural differences between countries. According to Hofstede, culture is a collective mental programming shaped by shared environments that distinguishes one group from another.[5] His theory discusses cultural differences through six dimensions, covering various phenomena in intercultural contexts. This paper delves into this theory to better understand cross-cultural differences in cross-border e-commerce livestreaming and devise corresponding strategies to optimize communication and enhance livestream effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

(1) Basic Concepts and Theories of Intercultural

Communication

Intercultural communication refers to the process of communication and interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds through language, non-verbal symbols, and behavior. [9] It is not limited to cross-border communication but also involves exchanges between different cultural groups, such as race, religion, occupation, and region. The core of intercultural communication lies in understanding and effectively addressing differences in various cultural contexts to ensure smooth and efficient communication.

Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede proposed the Hofstede Cultural Dimensions Theory, which discusses cultural differences through six dimensions that explain all intercultural scenarios:

A. Power Distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept unequal power distribution. There are significant differences between countries in this dimension, depending on how they perceive power. Western countries do not emphasize power, focusing more on individual abilities, while Asian countries value the constraints of power due to systemic factors.

B. Uncertainty Avoidance refers to how a society deals with the threat of uncertain events and unfamiliar environments. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance emphasize authority, status, seniority, and age, attempting to avoid uncertainty through job security, formal rules, and intolerance for extreme opinions and behaviors. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more tolerant of unusual behaviors and opinions, have fewer regulations, and allow various philosophical and religious viewpoints to coexist.

C. Individualism vs. Collectivism measures whether a society prioritizes individual interests or collective interests. In individualistic societies, relationships between individuals are loose, and people focus on themselves and their immediate families. In collectivist societies, group relationships are emphasized, with attention given to

extended families, providing long-term protection in exchange for loyalty to the group.

D. Masculinity vs. Femininity assesses whether a society exhibits more masculine qualities like competitiveness and assertiveness, or more feminine traits like humility and care for others. The Masculinity Dimension Index (MDI) shows the extent of masculine traits within a society, with a higher score indicating a stronger masculine inclination, while lower scores signify more feminine values.

E. Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation reflects the extent to which members of a culture accept delayed gratification of material, emotional, and social needs. This dimension indicates the value placed on moral living, which does not require religious justification. Long-term orientation is strongly related to economic growth, as seen in East Asia's rapid development in the late 20th century, which scholars attribute to this cultural tendency.

F. Indulgence vs. Restraint refers to the degree to which a society permits the fulfillment of basic desires and the pursuit of enjoyment. Societies with high indulgence scores tend to allow more personal freedom and self-expression, while societies with higher restraint levels promote more control over desires. This is the latest dimension added to Hofstede's framework. [6]

(2) Current Status of Domestic and International Research

In recent years, the definition of "intercultural competence" has been a widely discussed topic among scholars, with various perspectives emerging as research deepened. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) explained intercultural competence from the perspective of cultural politeness, emphasizing the importance of achieving effective communication through intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2004). Bennett (1997) further elaborated on the relationship between language and intercultural communication, pointing out that language is not only a tool for communication but also a "representation system" for understanding and thinking. In intercultural contexts, it is crucial to understand the cultural dimension of language. Davis et al. (2005) expanded the definition of intercultural competence, emphasizing that this ability also includes adjusting personal attitudes, values, and behaviors to remain open and flexible to other cultures.

Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang (1999) proposed three major components of intercultural communication competence: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and strategic competence. She argued that intercultural competence also includes intercultural sensitivity, tolerance, and flexibility. With the rise of cross-border e-commerce livestreaming, intercultural communication has played an important role in this new field. The differences brought by various cultural backgrounds are manifested in communication styles, processes, and outcomes during livestreams. In recent years, scholars have explored cross-border e-commerce livestreaming from multiple angles. For instance, Wang Qiong (2022) studied the importance of intercultural psychology in cross-border e-commerce livestreaming, while Ji Xinrui and Li Wanli (2021) analyzed discourse phenomena in cross-border e-commerce livestreaming from a multimodal perspective.

In cross-border e-commerce livestreaming, hosts can learn from Geert Hofstede's "Cultural Dimensions Theory" to help them understand the cultural roots of foreign customers' thoughts and behaviors. This understanding enables them to explore topics such as Sino-Western business communication, differences in language expression (direct vs. indirect, high-

context vs. low-context, transparency), persuasion and influence, real-time communication, and trust-building in livestreams. Furthermore, they can propose strategies to address these challenges during livestreaming.

3. Characteristics, Advantages, and Challenges of Apparel Cross-Border E-commerce Livestream Marketing

The apparel industry is closely linked to cross-border e-commerce livestreaming. To achieve effective intercultural communication and good marketing results, it is essential to understand both the characteristics of cross-border livestreaming and the advantages and challenges of apparel livestream marketing.

(1) Characteristics of Cross-border E-commerce Livestreaming

A. Strong Real-time Interaction

The core advantage of cross-border e-commerce livestreaming lies in its high level of interactivity, which not only increases user engagement but also significantly influences purchasing decisions, thereby boosting product sales. During livestreams, hosts can demonstrate product usage, share their experiences in real-time, and respond to consumers' questions. Consumers, in turn, can express their thoughts, opinions, and emotions via comments. This instant two-way communication narrows the gap between the host and customers.

B. Prominent Challenges in Intercultural Communication

Cultural background differences inevitably create communication barriers in cross-border livestreaming, affecting communication effectiveness. Given that hosts and customers interact primarily through text, without non-verbal cues like facial expressions, gestures, or eye contact, the difficulty of intercultural communication increases, which directly impacts the livestream's success. Therefore, deeply understanding foreign consumers' culture and psychology to enhance the effectiveness of intercultural communication is key to conducting international business successfully, formulating effective market strategies, and meeting customer needs.

C. High Professionalism Requirements

Undoubtedly, cross-border e-commerce livestreaming demands a high level of professionalism from the hosts. They must not only have a solid understanding of the products and market insights but also possess excellent communication and on-the-spot adaptability. If hosts can provide professional product explanations while demonstrating the effects and real-life applications during the livestream, they can effectively stimulate consumer interest and prompt purchasing decisions. This in-depth product presentation increases consumer trust and provides a clearer understanding of the product's features and value.

(2) Advantages and Challenges of Apparel Livestream Marketing

1) Advantages of Livestream Marketing

A. Real-time Interaction and Trust-building

The immediacy and interactivity of cross-border e-commerce livestream marketing are its most significant advantages. During the livestream, consumers can ask questions at any time and interact directly with the host, receiving real-time answers. This instant communication greatly enhances consumer engagement and trust. Moreover, the host can demonstrate the product's usage and share

personal experiences and tips, offering consumers a more comprehensive understanding of the product. As a result, cross-border e-commerce livestreaming not only improves product sales efficiency but also fosters emotional connections between brands and consumers, further promoting market development.

B. Dynamic Product Presentation

Apparel livestreaming provides a dynamic display of products, showing customers the fabric, style, texture, cut, and how to wear the clothes. This dynamic presentation not only effectively conveys product details and features but also demonstrates how the apparel can be worn in different settings, helping consumers make more informed purchasing decisions. Additionally, live demonstrations of styling and pairing suggestions by the host significantly increase consumers' positive perceptions and trust in the product. This sense of personal experience makes the product more relatable to their daily lives, further driving purchasing decisions.

C. Urgency and Promotional Effect

In cross-border e-commerce, consumers typically take longer to make purchasing decisions for overseas products. However, livestreaming, as an efficient promotional tool, significantly accelerates this decision-making process. Through limited-time discounts, flash sales, and other short-term promotions during livestreams, sellers can effectively create a sense of urgency, stimulating consumers' desire to buy. Furthermore, the direct visual presentation and emotional appeal of livestreams allow consumers to see the product's quality, design, and real-life effects, especially in the case of apparel. This immediate dynamic display helps consumers better understand product details, reducing hesitation and uncertainty, and encouraging a quicker transition from consideration to purchase.

2) Challenges of Livestream Marketing

A. Obstacles in Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is an unavoidable issue in cross-border e-commerce livestreaming. If the host fails to understand and adapt to cultural differences, communication may break down or even lead to cultural conflicts, negatively affecting sales. For example, in the Asian market, hosts may need to be more humble and polite, while a more direct style may be preferred in Western markets. Since consumers from different countries and regions have diverse cultural backgrounds, language habits, and purchasing preferences, hosts must have strong intercultural communication skills to attract consumers from various cultural backgrounds effectively.

B. Technical and Equipment Requirements

The success of cross-border e-commerce livestreaming relies heavily on technical and equipment support, as well as the professionalism of the hosting team. Issues like network delays or poor video quality can affect the viewing experience and reduce conversion rates. Therefore, ensuring smooth livestreaming through high-quality video equipment, stable network connections, and strong platform support is crucial. With this in place, consumers can clearly see product details, such as fabric texture and color accuracy, while also experiencing a more professional shopping atmosphere that boosts trust and purchase intention.

C. Logistics and After-sales Issues

Although livestream marketing can rapidly drive sales, logistical and after-sales issues remain challenges. Cross-border logistics often involve long-distance transportation,

customs inspections, and additional fees, potentially causing delays or unexpected costs for consumers. Additionally, impulse purchases driven by livestream promotions may lead to higher return rates, as consumers might not fully consider logistics times, potential fees, or after-sales support. Therefore, only by establishing a robust logistics and after-sales system can businesses truly achieve long-term market expansion and ensure the sustainability of the cross-border e-commerce livestreaming model.

4. Application of Intercultural Communication in Cross-border E-commerce Live Streaming for Apparel

In cross-border live streaming, hosts share information and emotions with consumers, but due to cultural differences, both sides may exhibit behaviors or thought patterns that the other may not fully understand. Cross-border e-commerce hosts not only need to thoroughly understand the features and performance of products and possess high-level marketing skills, but also, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, they must gain deep insights into micro-level differences in individual identities and cultural values. These include high-context vs. low-context communication, power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, and others. They must analyze cultural differences deeply and devise strategies to address them.

(1) Differences between High-context and Low-context Cultures

There are clear differences in communication styles between high-context cultures (e.g., China, Japan) and low-context cultures (e.g., the U.S., Germany). High-context communication typically relies on background information, non-verbal cues, and context, while low-context communication is more direct, with information clearly expressed and focused on the content itself. In cross-border e-commerce live streaming, hosts must adjust their communication style according to the cultural background of the target consumers.

High-context Cultures: For audiences from high-context cultures, factors like body language, facial expressions, tone, and background environment impact understanding and trust. Subtle expressions during interactions (e.g., indirect hints and implicit communication) can enhance consumer identification. These audiences might judge the host's credibility and product value based on non-obvious signals. Therefore, hosts need to focus more on emotional exchanges and non-verbal communication, emphasizing storytelling and emotional connections rather than overt sales tactics.

Low-context Cultures: For low-context audiences, logical and fact-based communication resonates better. Direct language expressing product functions and characteristics, with specific product data and comparisons, is more effective. Hosts should use concise and efficient language to ensure that audiences receive sufficient product information quickly.

(2) Differences in Power Distance

Power distance refers to the degree to which members of a society accept unequal distribution of power. Different cultures have varying levels of tolerance for power distance, which can influence the interaction patterns in cross-border live streaming.

High Power Distance Cultures (e.g., China, India): In these

cultures, customers tend to respect authority. Hosts may be seen as professionals, and should thus display professional authority, creating a trustworthy expert image. Using authoritative or formal language to emphasize expertise and knowledge can increase trust. Customers in these cultures often rely on the host's recommendations.

Low Power Distance Cultures (e.g., Nordic countries, Australia): Customers prefer equal and open communication, often questioning the host's opinions. In live streams, hosts should adopt a more approachable and interactive style, encouraging viewers to participate in discussions and express their thoughts. Humor, transparency, and honesty are key to establishing close relationships with viewers, making them feel more comfortable and enhancing marketing effectiveness.

(3) Collectivism vs. Individualism

Collectivist cultures (e.g., China, South Korea) prioritize group harmony and cooperation, while individualist cultures (e.g., the U.S., U.K.) value independence and autonomy. These cultural differences need attention in cross-border e-commerce live streaming.

Collectivist Cultures: Consumers in these cultures often identify as part of a group or community. Hosts can increase purchase intent through emotional resonance, highlighting the product's applicability in family or social settings. Emphasizing the product's impact on group benefits, family usage, or recommendations from friends or communities can appeal to consumers.

Individualist Cultures: Consumers from individualist cultures focus more on how the product meets their personal needs. Hosts should emphasize the unique characteristics of the clothing, the individual experience it provides, and how it enhances personal image or status.

(4) Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance (e.g., Greece, Portugal) tend to be more cautious about new products or models, while cultures with low uncertainty avoidance (e.g., Singapore, Denmark) are more open and adventurous. Hosts must adapt communication and marketing strategies based on the cultural background.

High Uncertainty Avoidance: In apparel live streaming, hosts need to provide clear return and exchange policies, customer feedback, and ratings, while emphasizing product safety and reliability. Highlighting product transparency and providing detailed information can alleviate uncertainty and encourage purchases.

Low Uncertainty Avoidance: Consumers in these cultures are more willing to try new experiences. Highlighting innovative products, unique designs, and features can stimulate their curiosity.

(5) Masculinity vs. Femininity

Masculinity (e.g., Japan, U.S.) emphasizes competition, achievement, and success, while femininity (e.g., Sweden, Netherlands) focuses on cooperation, relationships, and quality of life.

Masculinity Cultures: Consumers in these cultures may be more attracted to high-end quality, durability, and brand reputation. Hosts should highlight product performance, value returns, and provide competitive promotions like exclusive discounts.

Femininity Cultures: Hosts should emphasize design aesthetics, material sustainability, and the product's positive impact on personal life.

(6) Indulgence vs. Restraint

Indulgence cultures (e.g., Latin America, U.S.) encourage immediate gratification and personal enjoyment, while restraint cultures (e.g., China, Japan) promote self-discipline and restraint.

Indulgence Cultures: Consumers in these cultures may be attracted to novel designs, and hosts should emphasize the pleasurable experience or unique style the clothing offers.

Restraint Cultures: Hosts should focus on product practicality, durability, and long-term value.

By applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, hosts can better understand the behavioral patterns and values of consumers from different cultural backgrounds, adjust communication strategies, and increase sales conversion rates. Understanding and adapting to cultural differences is key to successful cross-border e-commerce live streaming.

5. Conclusion

The application of intercultural communication in cross-border e-commerce live streaming for apparel holds both theoretical and practical significance. Cultural differences in consumer perceptions, habits, and preferences are critical, making intercultural communication a vital skill for hosts. By analyzing Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, this paper explores how cultural differences influence communication in apparel live streaming and provides corresponding strategies. As cross-border e-commerce continues to evolve, it offers a broader platform for the application of intercultural communication studies, ultimately promoting sustainable international trade and global economic cooperation.

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