Media Breakthrough and Visual Communication Strategies of Marvel from the Perspective of Chinese and American Culture

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Abstract:

With the advancement of the globalization wave, Marvel has successfully established a global cultural influence through its superhero series, becoming a typical case in the field of film and television media dissemination. China and the United States have significant differences in historical traditions, value systems and media ecosystems. Such differences not only pose challenges to the cross-cultural dissemination of Marvel works but also prompt it to constantly innovate media strategies to achieve breakthroughs. This article takes Marvel Studios as the research object, focusing on its media breakthroughs and communication strategies in the two core markets of China and the United States. By analyzing its construction of visual hegemony in the "hypermedia universe" in the US market, as well as the cultural challenges and localization attempts it faces in the Chinese market, this paper reveals the realization of cross-cultural communication by visual art as a carrier of cultural soft power. Through research on Marvel's media breakthrough and communication strategies, it provides strategic references for Chinese film and television enterprises to go global.

Keywords: Chinese culture; Marvel; media breakthrough; cross-cultural communication strategy

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Today, with the deepening of globalization, the cross-border dissemination of cultural products has become the norm. As one of the most influential cultural carriers, the dissemination effect of films is not only related to commercial success, but also an important window for the exchange and collision between different cultures. Marvel films, leveraging Hollywood's dominance in the global film production industry, have created a super-industrial landscape. This landscape is built on Marvel's own creation of

a massive IP model, comprising various superheroes [1]. Through its 23 core films, Marvel has constructed a superhero narrative system that has achieved sustained success in the North American market and extended its influence to emerging markets in Asia and Europe through a global strategy. As the world's second-largest film market, China has made significant contributions to the Marvel film industry, yet cultural differences still pose communication barriers.

Visual communication, as a core medium in cross-cultural communication, is embodied in Marvel films through special effects, character design, and scene creation. Stan Lee constantly breaks through the outdated value system that wraps around Marvel and insists on pursuing recognition from audiences of different ages. The superheroes under Marvel embody a vivid and life-like character setting that is close to the lives of the audience [2]. Regarding individual heroism versus collectivism, some Chinese viewers see this as a positive attempt at cultural alignment, while others view it as a result of cultural differences. This contrast highlights the need for visual communication strategies to balance global and local perspectives.

1.2 Related research

Several studies have analyzed Marvel films from various perspectives. Most of the articles in this field focus on discussing issues such as the cross-cultural communication strategies of Marvel movies and the influence of IP audiences. The vast majority of the articles find that Marvel has successfully built a global cultural influence through its superhero series of works, and the communication strategies vary for different countries. For instance, Li explored the booming global film and television industry by using 22 superhero films released over a decade by Marvel as case studies. By analyzing the values embedded in these films through the lens of cultural integration, she developed a global market-oriented operational mechanism, offering insights for the international expansion of Chinese films [3]. Qin used Marvel comic stories as a foundation, and through research on IP production and operations, discovered that the United States uses films as a promotional tool to infuse its cultural values and ideologies into Marvel's commercial blockbusters, promoting American culture globally [1]. Scholar Li, compared to scholar Qin, also considered Marvel's long-term development in the Chinese market, highlighting the correctness of Marvel's cross-cultural communication strategy.

1.3 Objection

This paper explores the visual techniques and narrative methods used in Marvel films, focusing on the optimi-

zation of Marvel's marketing strategies in the Chinese and American markets. The aim is to offer practical suggestions and strategies for film production and media innovation from a cross-cultural perspective. This study focuses on the core of visual communication strategies, delving into the cross-cultural communication practices of the Marvel Cinematic Universe in the two key markets of China and the United States. First, it analyzes the differentiated visual communication strategies Marvel employs for these markets. Second, it examines the differences and similarities in how audiences in China and the United States perceive, interpret, emotionally react to, and accept these visual expressions. Finally, it evaluates the current strategies' effectiveness and offers optimization suggestions, exploring how more precise visual communication strategy design can enhance the cultural recognition, emotional resonance, and market acceptance of Marvel films across different cultural contexts.

2. The Comparative Analysis of Visual Communication Strategies Between Chinese and American Markets

2.1 The US Market: Holding the Visual Hegemony of the Hypermedia Universe

The American Marvel films are not merely a form of artistic expression. They also embody the mainstream ideology of the United States. Each screening of these films subtly shapes the values of audiences worldwide [4]. The key to the Marvel Cinematic Universe's success lies in the creative team's ability to achieve an excellent balance between forward-thinking innovation and continuity. In the U.S. market, Marvel has developed a comprehensive system that integrates visual dominance with cross-media storytelling. This system centers on film, leveraging cross-media narratives, technological advancements, and the subtle influence of cultural values to create a synergistic effect across the film, television, gaming, and merchandise industries.

2.1.1 Cross-media narrative system

Marvel has gained international recognition through its cross-media narrative system, consistently setting new box office records for films, a result of the evolving media landscape and audience engagement driven by technological advancements [5]. The Avengers film series has created a highly integrated and interconnected superhero universe in this domain, presenting audiences with a cohesive and continuously evolving storyline.

2.1.2 Technology-driven visual innovation

Marvel has a unique and comprehensive special effects production system for creating films. From pre-production shooting previews to post-production compositing, the process is standardized. Before filming begins, the director and producer teams select high-tech, visionary, and box office success-oriented talents with strong backgrounds. Marvel excels at using motion capture and digital double technology to create character images. By integrating James Cameron's team's motion capture technology, they achieved the first realistic portrayal of the antagonist's emotions in The Avengers, particularly in the creation of Thanos.

2.1.3 Hidden output of film values

As a crucial component of the superstructure, films reflect the values of different cultural backgrounds. In American culture, concepts such as 'democracy,' 'freedom,' and 'human rights' are highly valued by the public [6]. Marvel uses visual symbols and heroic character designs to showcase the mass cultural spirit under American values. Marvel's iconic heroes, such as Iron Man, Captain America, and Spider-Man, symbolize America's role as the world's savior. This symbolic narrative approach makes value transmission more subtle, avoiding direct moralizing that could lead to cultural resistance.

Despite its dominance in film visuals, Marvel doesn't just focus on promoting its own culture. While maintaining the core narrative framework, it constantly adjusts the characters' backgrounds and cultural elements to suit different markets. In Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings, elements of Eastern mythology are ingeniously introduced.

2.2 Chinese Market: Visual Breakthrough of Localization Transformation

The Chinese market has long been the main battlefield for providing significant sales and attention to various industries worldwide. Over the years, Marvel Group has made continuous efforts, gradually winning a large number of loyal fans in the Chinese market. Significant breakthroughs have been achieved in localized visual transformations, particularly in scene presentation, character design, artistic style integration, and promotional material customization. These efforts have made Chinese audiences feel a greater sense of familiarity and uniqueness in the audio-visual experience, showcasing Marvel's exceptional visual creativity.

2.2.1 The orientalized expression of dynamic narrative

Marvel films leverage visual spectacles and commercial strategies to construct a cross-media narrative matrix and a multi-dimensional dissemination network, transforming superheroes into cultural symbols with global appeal. Amid the dual waves of globalization and digitalization, the differences in Eastern and Western narratives in films have become increasingly apparent [7]. Building on the success of its cross-media narrative system in the U.S. market, Marvel has tailored the Chinese special screening version of Black Widow to cater to the preferences of Chinese audiences by increasing the editing speed of action scenes by 20% and adding 15% more close-ups and close-ups of Scarlett Johansson. This technical reconfiguration of narrative pacing better aligns with local audiences' preference for fast-paced storytelling while maintaining the visual impact of superhero films.

The plot structure of films often reflects the creators' ideal localized narrative system, catering to the diverse spiritual needs of different national markets. In Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings, Marvel combines a three-act structure with Eastern martial arts, seamlessly blending the Western superhero origin story with traditional Chinese martial arts themes such as master-apprentice relationships and feuds in the martial arts world. This dynamic, Eastern-inspired narrative approach not only preserves the continuity of the Marvel Universe but also creates a storytelling style that resonates with Chinese audiences.

2.2.2 Localization and reconstruction of visual symbols

Character design is the most direct manifestation of visual symbols. In Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings, Marvel first integrated Chinese martial arts philosophy into the superhero visual system. Shang-Chi's costume features a traditional Chinese stand-up collar and button elements, paired with modern functional materials, which not only retain the martial arts essence but also align with the superhero's futuristic technology. The design of the ten-ring weapon of the villain Wen Wu draws inspiration from the patterns of the Sanxingdui bronze wares. Through the combination of metallic luster and flowing energy special effects, it endows the ancient cultural relics with a futuristic technological feel.

Visual language is a crucial element in conveying the emotions of films to the audience, and the aesthetic of color coordination and matching serves as the blueprint for the film's expressive impact. Marvel employs a blue-green landscape color system in its visual storytelling, using low-saturation blue-gray and vermilion red contrasts to evoke the ambiance of traditional ink paintings. Moreover, Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness highlights the neon-lit streets of Hong Kong, China, and features a "Kama Taj Hong Kong Sanctuary" inspired by

the Kowloon Walled City, creating a striking contrast with its warm color tones.

2.2.3 Cultural communication under visual technology

Marvel's heroes often have their own distinctive visual symbols. For example, Captain America's shield resembles the American flag, and Spider-Man's webbed suit. These iconic elements make these characters focal points in cross-media communication. Captain Marvel and Captain America are both iconic American characters, but the stars on their costumes blend elements from the flags of both countries, symbolizing the concept of international cooperation. In the Avengers series, Marvel integrates China's collectivist spirit of the world belongs to all into the narrative of the superhero team through the main storyline of 'defeating Thanos.

The key reasons for Marvel's success in achieving sustainable development are as follows: Firstly, it has built a fan base that is highly engaged, creative, loyal, and financially supportive; this active fan participation facilitates the cross-media dissemination of film content [8]. In terms of cultural promotion, Marvel excels at leveraging new media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Sina Weibo to engage a global audience through extensive new media campaigns. By constructing a content ecosystem across films, games, and comics, Marvel ensures the continuous exposure of its superhero IP. Despite the quota system, 19 films over the past decade have sparked a catch-up 'viewing craze through online channels, reinforcing Chinese audiences' emotional connection to the Marvel Universe.

Marvel's success in China is not solely dependent on technology, but rather it uses visual technology as a carrier, embedding it into the Oriental narrative structure and localization strategy, thus forming a communication path of "visual as the surface and cultural as the core".

3. Future Outlook: Visual Revolution from the Perspective of Media Management

3.1 Visual Communication Optimization Measures from the Perspective of Media Management

3.1.1 Visual communication optimization measures in the Chinese market

In recent years, the Marvel market has seen significant advancements in communication strategies and visual optimization. In the Chinese market, it is essential to balance Eastern and Western aesthetics and narrative integration. For instance, Nezha: The Rise of the Devil Boy achieved a top-ten spot on the global box office chart by integrating the growth of its hero with Eastern collectivist values. This was achieved through scene designs like ink-wash style armor and symbolic transformations, such as using Five Elements Energy to replace Western magic systems, which subtly conveyed these values. Marvel's superhero series has sparked ongoing discussions in China, affirming the importance of technical aesthetics in modern sci-fi films and indicating that the Chinese audience is embracing some American values and culture [9]. Building on this, it is crucial to avoid strong individualistic themes, increase the visual emphasis on teamwork and local characters (such as the combination of superpowers in Avengers: Endgame, where Thor inherits Captain America's hammer), and enhance the visual presentation of multiple characters working together, aligning with Chinese audiences' appreciation for collective spirit.

Douyin in China and TikTok on the Internet use big data algorithms to push a large number of short videos within three minutes, creating a visual "short video effect". For the above-mentioned platforms, Marvel should develop fragmented visual content (such as "timed short videos" of hero skills, wonderful clips of movie trailers, humorous interviews with main actors, etc.). Collaborate with high-tech companies like Apple, Huawei, and Xiaomi to invest in the production of AR interactive devices. Develop and creat plot developments different from those of movies and TV series, and expand the types of communication media. Further achieve a sense of closeness and interaction with fans.

3.1.2 Visual communication optimization measures in the US market

The franchise model in the film industry has a long history in Hollywood. Disney is a pioneer and leader in this field [10]. Marvel and Disney have collaborated to achieve a win-win situation: Through the Disney+ streaming platform and offline comic conventions, they highlight the visual identity of the "multiverse", maintaining fans' expectations for the continuity of the film's narrative. Additionally, adding Marvel hero character IP to Disney's global amusement parks and selling co-branded derivative products can not only enhance Marvel's global popularity but also increase Disney's overall economic revenue.

With the conclusion of the Avengers series, Marvel began developing a new generation of superhero IP. The introduction of Captain Marvel and Iron Man's daughter signals the evolution of Marvel's first-generation superheroes. Audiences have higher expectations for new charac-

ters and stricter demands on plot control, leading to some box office losses. To improve continuity between films, seamless transitions between characters, and the fluidity of storytelling, further integration and innovation in visual technology are needed. It is worth mentioning that Spider-Man 3: No Way Home is a key breakthrough for Marvel to solve this problem, and the positive response from the audience indicates a new trend.

As a multi-racial and multi-ethnic integrated country, how to bridge cultural differences and reducing the possibility of cultural conflicts has always been the focus of American social and cultural research [3]. The communication demands of films often reflect some social issues that the public is concerned about. Nowadays, the United States should pay attention to conveying positive, free, just and progressive values through visual contrast techniques, which is in line with the correct demands of American society for diverse politics.

3.2 Optimize the Communication Direction of Common Features between China and the United States

Marvel excels at blending Eastern and Western cultures, successfully attracting a global fan base. Compared to the United States, China has advantages in market size, the number of screens, and audience numbers, but it lags behind Hollywood in film production technology. Marvel's team has introduced the most advanced post-production techniques, and major Hollywood film and television production companies have gathered top talent in post-production from around the world, ensuring high-quality films [3]. China should actively learn from visual production techniques, introduce high-quality overseas talents, and combine Eastern traditional culture with Western progressive ideas to produce films that realize the Chinese Dream. In contrast, Western countries also have their own dreams. As the representative of Western culture, the United States must achieve prosperity through its own diligence, courage, creativity, and determination, rather than relying on specific social classes or external assistance to improve their lives, which is the dream and ideology they hold [6].

At the management and coordination level of the film, Marvel should conduct more in-depth calculations of the preferences and behaviors of audiences in both China and the United States, dynamically adjust the placement strategies of visual elements, and refine the details of hero character development, etc. Embedding metaphors of technical reflection in the production of special effects scenes (such as the design of the robot villain Ultron, highlighting the possibility of human-machine symbio-

sis) not only conforms to China's regulatory orientation towards technical ethics but also responds to the public concern of the United States over technological risks. China and the United States have jointly established a visual asset management platform supported by blockchain technology to achieve cross-border copyright monitoring and authorization tracking, and prevent infringement or plagiarism of innovative derivative content.

4. Conclusion

This article, by comparing Marvel's visual communication strategies in the Chinese and American markets, discovers that in the US market, it focuses on visual innovation driven by film technology and cross-media narrative. While in China, it emphasizes the localization of Eastern aesthetics, integrating narrative and visual symbols. From a media management perspective, Marvel should deepen fan acceptance and counteract stereotypes in the U.S., and enhance cultural integration and content innovation on social media platforms in China. The common optimization directions for both markets focus on data-driven dynamic adjustments, balancing technical ethics, and global copyright collaboration.

This study offers a strategic framework for the media penetration of cross-border intellectual property within the intricate cultural landscapes of China and the United States. It uncovers how visual communication can attain cross-cultural recognition by adapting to cultural nuances and leveraging technological advancements. The research provides practical insights into the localization strategies of multinational corporations. Due to the timeliness of the case (such as not fully incorporating recent policy changes between China and the United States). In the future by integrating the impact of generative artificial intelligence on visual content production and emerging media scenarios such as the metaverse. The iterative mechanism of communication strategies in a dynamic cultural context can be further explored.

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