

A Comparative Analysis of Nike's Urban-Themed Online Advertising Communication in China

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Abstract: *The urban theme has once been one of the topics of Nike's online advertising in China, and there are differences in the feedback received by the advertisements in different cities. Based on this, the study selected two advertisements released by Nike in Beijing and Shanghai in 2019 and used case studies and comparative analysis to explain the value of the regional culture and humor behind them, based on the evaluation of the publicity effect. The study concludes that the reasons for the failure of the thematic advertisements in Shanghai compared to Beijing are: the misinterpretation of the city's culture and the humorous logic that the audience cannot understand. The study suggests implications for urban advertising and marketing based on this.*

Keywords: *Advertising Effectiveness; Regional Culture; Humor*

1. Background of the Study

Nike, as a well-known international sports brand, has a strong market influence and competitiveness. Since Nike set up its contact office in China in the 1980s, it has continued to deeply cultivate the sports brand market in China and has grown into the head of Chinese sports brands to date, of which Nike's successful advertising and marketing has played a crucial role as a boosting factor. If we focus on Nike's brand advertisements in China, from "Fear of Fighting Room" and "Anytime" in 2004 to "No need to wait for four more years" in 2016, Nike's advertising communication has always focused on a communication-based marketing strategy^{[1][2]}, spreading the social value of the brand and its own value. However, these commercials have received mixed reviews from users after being put on the market, and even "Fear of Fighting Room" was once taken down, reflecting the conflicts and challenges faced by the brand in cross-cultural marketing.

In 2019, Nike chose two key consumer regions in China (Beijing and Shanghai) as the theme, releasing two ad series, "Don't Believe Me, Admire Me" and "Good Enough to Have Style". And the series "Good Enough to Have Style" is another choice for the theme of Shanghai since the release of the advertisement "Shanghai is not Enough Yet" in November 2018. These two advertising series in 2019 have similar humorous styles and strong regional cultural characteristics. Nike intended to highlight the integration of cultural characteristics and sports of the two cities, but caused different comments from consumers on its Weibo platform: The "Don't Believe Me, Admire Me" series has been well received, while the ad clips in the "Good Enough to Have Style" series have received mixed reviews. This study will focus on Nike's 2019 online advertisements in two specific cities as described above, evaluate the differences in their marketing effectiveness, dissect the Chinese regional culture, humorous connotations, and causes of the differences in effectiveness behind the two, and provide insights for future urban advertising marketing for sports brands in China.

2. Research Overview and Research Methodology

Regarding Nike's advertising and marketing, researchers have mainly focused on its marketing strategy, brand positioning, brand culture, and other issues. In addition to communication marketing, some scholars have focused on Nike's communication of sportsmanship and the creation of a common identity based on sport^{[1][3]}. Similarly, for this successful sports brand, some scholars have paid attention to Nike's emphasis on brand life and brand transformation, making suggestions for Nike's marketing strategy^{[4][5]}. And many scholars focus on Nike's comparison with its competitors in the same market

(e.g. Li Ning, Anta, etc.), comparing their strategies in terms of business strategies, advertising, and marketing [6]-[8]. In addition, some scholars focus on the analysis of Nike's typical advertising events, such as the "Fear of Fighting Room" in 2004 and the "Liu Xiang withdrawal fiasco in 2008" [9][10]. From the study of the symbolic meaning of Nike's advertisements [11] to the study of the potential marketing effect of advertisements based on the two-level effect theory of communication [12], many scholars have carried out analyses of the commercial value of Nike's advertisements. In summary, although there is a wealth of research on Nike's advertising and marketing strategies, few studies have achieved comparative analysis based on specific Nike advertisements, and the advertising materials used are relatively outdated. The two advertising series selected for this study were both released by Nike China in 2019 and are humorous online ads, which, combined with different user feedback, makes them valuable for comparison. The study asks the following questions: What is the marketing effectiveness of Nike's two contemporaneous online advertisements? Are there differences in the regional culture and humor behind the two online advertisements? What can the reasons for the difference in communication effectiveness of the two advertisements reveal for Nike's future regional advertising and marketing?

The research mainly adopts three research methods: the literature method, the case study method, and the comparative analysis method. The two online advertising materials and related evaluations in 2019 were collected through Nike's official website and official microblog and public number. By consulting the Chinese academic journal network and China Knowledge Network (CNKI) for Nike brand marketing, regional culture (Shanghai, Beijing), advertising effect analysis of relevant works and literature to read and analyze, to use for the understanding and evaluation of the research advertising materials. The study selects two official advertisements released by Nike China in 2019, "Don't Believe Me, Admire Me" and "Good Enough to Have Style", as case studies, with the intention of analyzing the similarities and differences in the effects of their "city-driven" marketing strategies in online advertisements. By comparing and analyzing the two, the cultural and humorous values behind them are analyzed.

3. Evaluation of Nike's Two 2019 China Advertising Campaigns and Their Effectiveness

3.1 Explanation of the "Don't Believe Me, Admire Me" and "Good Enough to Have Style" Advertising Series

Nike released the ad series "Don't Believe Me, Admire Me" on April 8, 2019, featuring scenarios such as a basketball bet between two boys "eating the ball", beating the opponent on the football field "finding teeth on the ground" and "losing until nothing on the track field". A number of 15-30 second spots were created, Nike visualizes the "tough talk" of these games, i.e. the real sense of cooking a basketball in a restaurant and eating it ("eat the ball"), finding lost teeth on the green field ("find the teeth"), and athletics running in track field wearing only underwear ("losing with only your trousers left") are portrayed rather than being merely verbally coercive. The design of this de-symbolized stance of the advertising series exhibits the attributes of anti-conventionalism and shows a strong humorous connotation.

On 1 November 2019, Nike released an ad series on its official Weibo account, "Good Enough to Have Style", which highlights the theme that style is earned through strength, not superficiality, and cannot be bought through the purchase of "style" products by using the example of a boy shopping for "style" and the girl taking pictures with "style". In another clip, the rich man asks his butler to buy "a style", and the butler passes by a series of sports and life scenes in his search for "style", and finally the butler responds that "style" is in his own self. The exaggerated scenarios and the absurdity of the plot are a source of amusement.

3.2 Comparative Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Advertisements Based on Online Surveys

To evaluate the effectiveness of the two advertisements as described, this study proposes to adopt the behavioral model of advertising effectiveness (interaction model) of online communication proposed by Zhang (2012) and the index system used in studying the effectiveness of online video advertisements [13]. It proposes five dimensions in the interaction model, from the passive acceptance behavior of information participation (Click), to the subjective search (search), to the process of information processing and reproduction (process), to the redistribution of audience information (share), and to the action taken by the advertising audience (action). The five dimensions present a form of communication that can be transformed into each other, i.e. a cycle, and it is argued that the effectiveness of advertising today is no longer possible with a single linear, feedback advertising effect. In its research, it uses a three-

dimensional indicator system of “perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors”, on the basis of which it calculates the corresponding indicator effects. If we focus on Nike's two advertising materials in 2019, this study proposes a metric system as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative evaluation index system of the effectiveness of two Nike advertisements

Level 1 Indicators	Level 2 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators
Perceptions	Low engagement perceptions	Number of clicks
	High engagement perceptions	Number of searches
	Reach of communication	Number of shares & likes
Attitudes	Public statements	Number of evaluations and attitudes
	Non-public statements	Attitudes behind sharing
Behavior	*The urban consumption conversion behavior behind the ads is difficult to measure	

*The expected audience behavior created by the two advertisements is mainly the evolution of consumer conversion rates in the corresponding cities (Shanghai and Beijing) and the change of trust in the brand's reputation. This study focuses on the effects and attitudes of consumers towards the advertisements themselves, so no 'behavioral' evaluation is carried out.

As for the selection of websites in the online survey, Sina Weibo, Bili Bili (bilibili.com), and Tittok were selected as sample websites (the selection was based on a preliminary search, where the number of ads on the websites online for both samples was >0). Traces of click, share (or like), and rating behavior of the two advertisements in online communication were collected and analyzed. The number of clicks and shares were chosen as relatively objective dimensions of low and high audience engagement perceptions, respectively, at the cognitive level. And for the sake of content consistency, only videos with consistent ad content (excluding secondary creation videos under the same name topic, etc.) were counted in the calculation of the number of ad videos to obtain the following comparison of engagement cognitive effects in Table 2; Figure 1 was obtained based on the statistics of the position share of users' comments on each website.

Table 2: Comparison of the perceived effectiveness of two Nike advertisements

Website Name	“Don't Believe Me, Admire Me” Acceptance Rate			“Good Enough to Have Style” Acceptance Rate		
	Number of Clicks	Number of Shares	Number of Videos	Number of Clicks	Number of Shares	Number of Videos
Sina Weibo	1400	1	1	11710	25.618	3
Bili Bili	7.05	0.2	4	1.15	0.02	1
Tittok Video	276	4.05	5	26.2	0.1	6

Unit: per 1,000 views (Source: Sina Weibo, Bili Bili, Tittok Video by authors' own collecting)

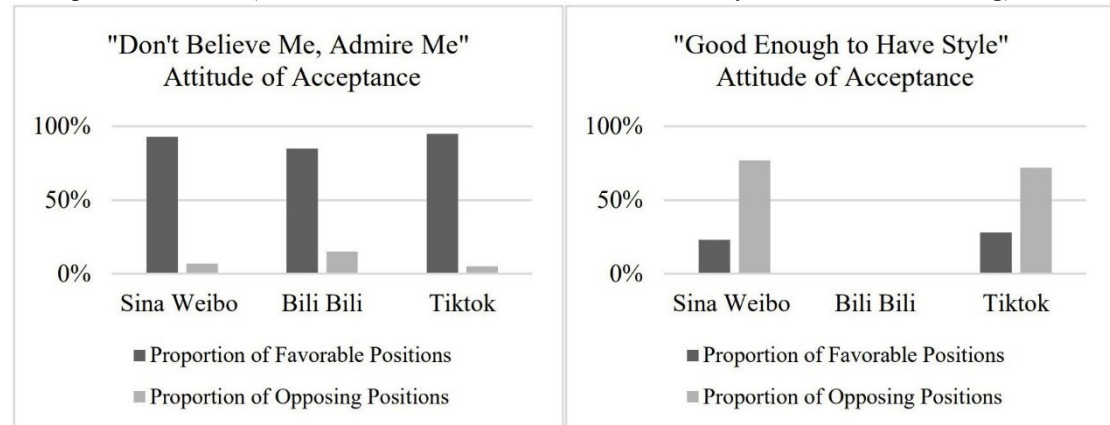


Figure 1: Comparison of the effect of two Nike advertising attitudes

As you can see from Figure 1, the two ads are concentrated on Sina Weibo and have significantly more video views on Tittok than on Bili Bili. In terms of the number of shares, the effect of the high level of engagement perceived by “Good Enough to Have Style” is more significant. Despite the fact that online public opinion is a sum of the opinions of a small number of audiences who are willing to make their views public, the attitude of the audiences towards the material of the two advertisements shows that the positive and negative stances of the advertisements are basically the same across the platforms:

“Don't Believe Me, Admire Me” received a wide range of positive stances, while “Good Enough to Have Style” received significantly more negative than positive stances.

4. Analysis of the Urban Culture and Humor Values behind the Two Advertisements

The two Nike advertisements focused on in this study are both humorous. Referring to Guo's (1997) commentary on the effectiveness of humor by Professor Weinberg (1992) of Arizona State University, which was introduced in the study, we can evaluate the success or failure of the humor effect of the two advertisements: humor does not impair the audience's understanding of the advertisement; humor can promote the audience's enjoyment of the advertisement and the product^[14]. In the Weibo comments of “Good Enough to Have Style”, there are several instances of audience feedback on their inability to understand the humor and criticism of the quality of the advertisement, which is sufficient to see the failure of the humor effect in practice. Using humor researcher Raskin's (1985) theory of the cognitive structure of language, the advert, based on the theme of “style” in Shanghai, creates incongruous scenarios (i.e. a rich man's exaggeratedly decorated house, a servant dressed in formal wear going to a sporting event), a non-realistic plot (looking for 'accent') and ultimately defeats the purpose of the advert. “), which is eventually resolved (the servants eventually take off their formal clothes and stop looking for "accents"). In contrast, in the “Don't Believe Me, Admire Me” series, the “Eat the Ball” ad, for example, features an unexpected situation (actually cooking a basketball) and a more lifelike setting (e.g. a restaurant in a drum tower, traditional Beijing music) to a character design that wins the audience's understanding and affection.

In “Good Enough to Have Style”, Nike wanted to fit the style and personality of Shanghai (i.e. the “tone or style”), with “Laisai” referring to the Shanghai dialect for “powerful, capable”. The spirit of Shanghai is supposed to be a blend of East and West, a convergence of immigrants, and a distinctive Shanghai culture^[15] that reveals a refined, delicate, and elegant urban “style”. In contrast, the Shanghai “style” portrayed in the advertising material is too superficial, absurd, and pompous. In the “Don't Believe Me, Admire Me” series, Nike has captured the humorous language style of Beijingers, as stated on the official website of the series, “When you think Beijingers are arrogant and talk big, they are practicing hard day and night, breaking through and challenging themselves again and again”. The spirit of hard work and breakthroughs underneath the “talk big” language style. From “Believe me”, which is characterized by Beijing's eloquent language ability^[16], to “Admire me”, which is about real ability, Nike has grasped the characteristics of Beijing's urban culture and used the unexpected humor of life scenes and realistic characters to realize the success of Beijing's urban character promotion strategy. The success of the campaign.

5. Implications for Sports Brands' Future Advertising and City Marketing in China

5.1 Selection of Regional Cultural Values

When sports brands choose important consumer cities for their advertising campaigns, they need to ensure that the culture of the cities they choose is understandable and typical and that they do not create 'unlikeable' advertisements based on superficial cultural perceptions. For example, in “Don't Believe Me, Admire Me”, capturing the humorous language style of Beijing and the true character of the city behind the struggle and enterprise, provides a good platform for consumers to form an advertising value and even brand identity. A good selection of regional cultural values can empower brand values and enhance consumers' brand identity, while a bad selection of cultural values can also have the opposite effect.

5.2 Use Humor in Advertising and Marketing to Win User Preference

Humor is an important strategy in advertising and marketing. Using humor to create “sensible but unexpected” advertisements, rather than just pursuing absurdity and pomposity, will better win consumers' preference. A counter-example to this can be found in “Good Enough to Have Style”, where absurdity and pompous humor have long failed to attract enough enthusiasm from users, and even the addition of star power can be uninteresting. True humor relies on careful observation of every day, extracting the values behind the surface, and building a coherent communication scenario. More importantly, such humor must not undermine the user's comprehension of the advertisement, it must empower the love of the product, creating a positive effect of “humor plus the product itself over the love of the product”.

5.3 The Organic Integration of Communicative Advertising and Situational Immersion Marketing

Advertising does not need to be all about product promotion, but about designing sensible use scenarios and realistic use environments for consumers, integrating communicative advertising language into advertising scenarios so that consumers can immerse themselves in them and form brand love. If you look at Nike's advertising over the years, you can see that the sports brand rarely produces marketing content that focuses on the introduction of its products, but mostly builds scenarios that are related to sports and inadvertently “implant” its brand products. Nike has found the marketing angle of a sports brand well and has always applied a marketing narrative model of consumer communication, creating a unique integrated ecology of situational immersion marketing.

6. Conclusion

Looking at Nike's marketing advertising history up to today, it seems clear that city-themed ads only appeared briefly as a flash in the pan three years ago, and the same case has happened to many brands: whether it is Nestle's 2019 “Beijing Sense - Sense Café” flash shop and Anhui Huangshan “Sense of Nature” or Coca-Cola's “City Can” series in 2018, such packaging and design seem to have disappeared from the public eye as China's urban economy has taken off in full force. However, the study has always considered such personalized marketing for cities to be unique and strategically appealing, and Nike has joined other brands in creating another classic and communicationally significant marketing event.

Based on an evaluation and humorous analysis of the communication effects of Nike's city-themed online advertising, this study interprets the successes and failures of Nike's two geographic marketing campaigns for Beijing and Shanghai through case comparisons and offers insights into possible future advertising city marketing in China by sports brands. The study argues for the need to make clever use of humorous advertising to choose the right cultural values of the city and to combine a communicative and situational immersion. The study suggests that the use of humorous advertising, the selection of appropriate cultural values for the city and the combination of communication and situational immersion are needed to create the ultimate brand communication success.

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