

Coexistent Perspectives (ADAA7000)

Question 6 – Design Thinking - From Process to Product

Research on personal brand IP image based on innovation diffusion theory

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1.Introduction

According to the Digital News Report released by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford in 2023, traditional print media is gradually declining as a result of the continuous development of digital technology. With the rapid advancement of internet technology, the dissemination of information no longer relies on traditional print media such as newspapers, magazines, and posters; instead, it leverages the internet and new technologies to spread through mediums like mobile phones and television. In light of this trend, self-media has emerged, providing individuals with content production, dissemination technology, platforms, and audiences, leading to the formation of influential personal IPs (Zhong Chuyi, 2020).

As a symbol of brand culture, IP image plays a key role in the process of brand construction and promotion. Looking back at history, we find that IP is mainly used in the production of products and services, in order to create a friendly character image, often choosing cartoon characters as a marketing tool.(Zhang Hanli,Bao Defu,Gao Ning.2023). However, with the progress of the economy, IP has penetrated into various consumer areas and has gradually been accepted by consumers of different ages, becoming a widely recognized cultural element. The proliferation of personal brand IP in recent years has revealed a shift in the design industry and the needs of the market. Personal brand IP is not only a logo or name, but also a complex of the designer's unique personality, design results, ideas and value orientation. This IP can help designers stand out in a competitive market environment, thereby gaining the trust and lasting support of consumers(Guo Yannan.2023) .

However, the current construction of personal IPs lacks order and standardization, requiring visual imagery to better assist in cultivating personal IPs. The lifecycle of personal IPs is typically short, with some quickly rising to fame and then rapidly declining. Additionally, commercial demands often steer designs towards market trends and standardization, leading to potential homogenization of personal IP image designs, resulting in a loss of uniqueness. Furthermore, in the evolving landscape of communication media, IP images face a lack of adaptability to different media platforms and a need to focus on the characteristics of diverse cultural groups among the target audience.

From the perspective of innovation diffusion theory, this paper makes an in-depth analysis of the IP design cases of MI XUE and SHIQI Group to solve the problem of brand IP positioning and dissemination. Innovation diffusion theory is highly relevant and applicable in understanding how innovation spreads and receives in the market. It can provide a systematic theoretical framework for analyzing the communication process of brand IP in the market and optimizing the communication strategy. It also helps designers gain insight into the characteristics of the audience and better understand the needs of the target audience, so as to optimize the design. Through this paper, we aim to provide designers with profound insights into the design of personal brand IP image, help designers position their brand IP in the market, find differentiated competitive advantages, make them stand out in a highly competitive environment, and explore new development directions in the ever-changing design field.

2. Theoretical perspectives

2.1 Brand IP

IP stands for Intellectual Property in English, a part of human material culture, where all cultures are symbols, making IP a form of symbol. In the era of comprehensive IPs, it can be understood as any intangible asset with cultural value and sustainable commercial development capabilities. Essentially, IP represents the property and revenue rights of intangible assets (Chen Gelei.2020). In the internet era, IPs are widely present in various cultural and entertainment fields such as literature, film, music, celebrities, games, animation, and brands. Over time, the definition of IP has surpassed its initial legal term, becoming a broad concept. Under this new definition, IP image design can be applied to create anything. Today, an IP image is defined as a work with independent intellectual property, high visibility, and strong derivativeness. It can be an abstract representation born of imaginative processing or a concrete, recognizable entity like animals, plants, or letter graphics. In the current internet environment, driven by structural issues in industrial development and market demand, the popularity of IPs is not expected to decline rapidly. With the development of the "pan-entertainment" concept, projects derived from IPs, including movies, TV shows, animations, games, etc., tend to collaborate for mutual benefit.

The IP image serves as the façade of a brand, undertaking the role of brand image representation and visual symbol(Rong Yujie. 2022).With the development of the internet and new media platforms, the dissemination of IP images has become increasingly diverse. It can engage with users through various means, enhancing its uniqueness and increasing user stickiness. Broadly speaking, an IP image can be understood as a mascot, while narrowly, it can exist independently, detached from the main entity. Therefore, IP images can achieve cross-domain extension and collaboration. In the new media environment, IP images exhibit strong expansiveness, leveraging online advantages to change traditional presentation methods and offer diversified sensory experiences to the audience. It can be said that IP image design has, to a certain extent, altered the specifications of business projects.

With the deep penetration of the Internet and the widespread use of digital technology, brands have been able to use various channels to shape their public image. Personal websites, social networks and online portfolios have become key media for brand identity(WANG Danyang,JIANG Zaixin.2023) . For example, designers can take advantage of online platforms such as Instagram and Behance to actively display their creations to the public, spread their design concepts, and thus establish a close connection with audiences around the world. In addition, designers' personal branding is no longer limited to traditional ways such as print and web pages, but includes a variety of forms of expression such as videos, micro-films, lectures and so on. Through these diversified media means, designers can not only show their design process, but also share their innovative.

The design of personal brand IP images adheres to the following fundamental principles:

(1) Understand the target audience and market positioning. For designers, in-depth research on target consumer groups and market positioning is essential. Due to cultural differences and

emotional factors, popular IP characters in different countries are also diverse. However, it is worth noting that good IP characters attract a wide range of attention no matter where they are. Therefore, before creating a personal brand IP role, the designer must fully grasp the relevant information of the target audience, such as age, gender, geographical location, interests and consumer behavior. In addition, through in-depth research on market positioning, designers can clarify their own position and competitive advantages in the market, so as to further establish their brand image and style(Yao Yusheng,Li Min. 2023).

(2) Identify the Core Values and Unique Characteristics of the Brand: For shaping personal brand IP, the primary task of its image design is to determine the core concept of the brand and its unique personality traits. In the process, designers must dig deep into their own unique values and concepts in the design field, and skillfully integrate these elements into their brand image.

(3) Establish a Consistent and Differentiated Brand Image: It is essential to create a stable and unique brand image. For the visual design of personal brand IP, the key is to achieve a balance between consistency and difference. Consistency means that all brand elements should follow the same visual style and image, such as logo, color, font and typography. Differentiation means that through unique design techniques and styles, personal brands stand out in the competitive market environment and show their unique characteristics. In addition, innovative ways of expression are also an integral part.

(4) Develop Effective Communication and Promotion Strategies: This means that we need to use various channels, such as social media, exhibition events and trade media, to actively showcase and promote our personal brand IP. At the same time, we also need to establish effective communication and interaction with our target audience through these platforms.

2.2 Innovation Diffusion Theory

In the 1960s, renowned American communication scholar Everett Rogers and others published the book "Diffusion of Innovations" after investigating the adoption and dissemination of new things like new varieties and pesticides in rural areas. The Innovation Diffusion Theory became one of the most influential theories in the development of communication studies. This theory primarily explores the diffusion of new ideas, products, and phenomena within groups. Rogers suggests that when a group or individual perceives a certain viewpoint, technology, or object as "new," it becomes an innovation. The diffusion process is the spread of an innovation through specific communication channels within a social system's members over a certain period(E. M. Rogers.2016).

The four major elements of innovation diffusion are innovation, communication channels, time, and social systems. Among these, the relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability are the five attributes influencing whether a group accepts an innovation. Concerning communication channels, mass communication effectively spreads innovative information during the awareness stage, while interpersonal communication, particularly with opinion leaders, plays a crucial role in changing people's attitudes and behaviors during the persuasion stage. In the innovation diffusion process, the innovation decision-making process

usually undergoes five stages: awareness, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Diffusion occurs within a social system, where though internal members differ, some commonalities impact the innovation's diffusion.

After the proposal of the Innovation Diffusion Theory, it has been borrowed and applied by scholars in sociology, education, anthropology, marketing, communication, and other disciplines, resulting in the development of discourse systems for diffusion research in different disciplines. Additionally, there is a trend of interdisciplinary integration in the application of this theory.

In the design of IP images, applying the Innovation Diffusion Theory helps understand the varying levels of acceptance among different audiences and guides designers in formulating more effective design strategies.

(1) Attracting Innovators: Innovators are the initial individuals adopting new concepts or products. In the context of IP image design, this could refer to designers or brands daring to incorporate unique design elements. By integrating avant-garde and distinctive elements, this group can be attracted.

(2) Stimulating Early Adopters: Early adopters swiftly accept and adopt innovations after their introduction. In IP image design, incorporating novel and attention-grabbing design elements can attract this group, as they are willing to try trendy designs and become pioneers in setting trends.

(3) Catering to the Early Majority: Once the design gains approval from early adopters, it gradually attracts broader attention. At this stage, IP image design needs to be more appealing to the masses, considering the tastes and needs of a wider audience to better penetrate the market.

(4) Overcoming Late Majority Resistance: As the innovation is promoted in the market, resistance from the late majority may be encountered. In IP image design, this implies considering design adjustments to align with more conservative or traditional aesthetic preferences to gradually gain wider acceptance.

(5) Catering to Laggards: Laggards are the individuals who accept new ideas last. In IP image design, further adjustments may be needed to accommodate more traditional and conservative aesthetic tastes to ultimately achieve acceptance throughout the market.

3. MI XUE IP

Founded in 1997, MI XUE is a nationwide chain brand specializing in fresh ice cream and tea beverages. In 2018, the brand underwent a comprehensive upgrade, introducing the "Snow King" as its IP image and brand spokesperson. This case analyzes the MI XUE IP design from the perspectives of the relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability of

the Innovation Diffusion Theory.

(1) Relative Advantage

Relative advantage refers to the superiority of a new concept, thing, or technology. The higher the relative advantage, the easier the diffusion of innovation. Successful brand IPs integrate image, personality, and story; lacking any of these elements results in a flat representation. To deeply connect with the audience and establish an emotional relationship, a three-dimensional IP image is essential(Zixuan Chen. 2022).



Figure 1: MI XUE'S IP :Snow King

MI XUE's IP image is distinctive. Compared to other leading Chinese milk tea brands such as HEYTEA, Naixue's Tea, and Yi Dian Dian, MI XUE's IP design stands out. The "Snow King" is a snowman adorned with a crown, a red cape, and holding an ice cream scepter. The snowman's image corresponds to the "snow" and "ice" in the brand name. The ice cream scepter showcases the brand's signature product, allowing the audience to quickly identify the brand represented by the IP image. The "Snow King" IP has a round and playful appearance, aligning with the aesthetic preferences of the younger audience for "cute" and "adorable" things, swiftly gaining audience favor and affection. Whenever the "Snow King" appears, audiences associate it with MI XUE, creating a strong brand presence.

MI XUE's IP personality stands out. Traditional IP images often portray "nobility," "optimism," "courage," and "health" to craft a perfect brand image. However, with the current deconstruction of mainstream values and the demand for diverse personalities among young people, there is a desire for more relatable and down-to-earth brand IPs. MI XUE's "Snow King" breaks away from the flat character design, presenting a character with a contrastingly cute and sincere online personality like a working-class youth. This dual personality trait makes the "Snow King" more dimensional and interesting, meeting consumer preferences and emotional needs and earning

interaction and affection.

MI XUE's IP story is vibrant. The story is a crucial component linking the audience in IP images, inspiring cultural identification and emotional resonance. A quality IP story needs to be creative and emotionally rich. MI XUE built stories around the "Snow King" character, launching a comic book series titled "Snow King's Adventure" narrating the story of the "Snow King" leading a snowman tribe to save a magic castle and establish MI XUE. The webcomic series "Sweet Moments of Snow King and Snow Sister" details the struggles and love life of the "Snow King." In daily work life, the "Snow King" acts out stories of ordinary people, projecting the lives of regular individuals. Through these daily fragmented stories, netizens unconsciously personify the "Snow King," engaging in humorous interactions both online and offline and deepening the emotional connection between the audience and the brand.



Figure 2: Snow King's Adventure

(2) Compatibility

Compatibility refers to the relevance of innovation to the values, background experiences, and needs of potential adopters. The higher the compatibility, the easier the innovation is accepted. MI XUE, based on the values, interests, and communication methods of young people, has created a friendly and positive "Snow King" image. This facilitates equal dialogue with the audience. After a long period of contact and interaction, the audience establishes a "quasi-social interaction" relationship with the "Snow King," forming an intimate relationship similar to that of friends.

(3) Complexity

Complexity refers to the difficulty in understanding and accepting innovation. The lower the complexity of innovation, the easier it is accepted. Successful IP images often possess easily

recognizable features. The main body of MI XUE's "Snow King" IP is a snowman, a familiar and down-to-earth image that inherently carries a sense of familiarity, making it easy for the audience to accept and remember. Simultaneously, the joyful values conveyed by the "Snow King" in its daily life, presented both online and offline, are also easily understood by the audience, promoting rapid recognition of the "Snow King" IP.



Figure 3: MI XUE ip image offline application effect

(4) Trialability and Observability

Testability refers to the likelihood of an innovation being tried, while observability is the extent to which the results of the innovation are seen by the potential accepting audience. The higher the testability and observability of innovation, the more likely it is to be adopted by the public. For brands, testability and observability are mainly reflected in the accessibility of the IP image – whether the IP is easily visible, and whether the audience is willing to approach it. According to the psychological "endowment effect," when a person truly owns an item, their evaluation and expectations of the item's value significantly increase compared to before ownership.

MI XUE emphasizes the standardization and maximization of symbols, comprehensively transforming the entire store system from roller shutters to storefronts, ensuring that passersby can prominently see the "Snow King." In addition to advertising-related brand content, MI XUE continues the consistent production of the "Snow King." The related IP image is uniformly used in brand information, such as offline store materials, online apps, official websites, and official social media accounts, where the presence of the "Snow King" can be observed. Through repeated recognition and memory, users naturally establish an associative relationship between the "Snow King" and the MI XUE brand.

4. SHIQI Group IP

SHIQI Group, as a leading design entity in China, revolves around design and creativity as its core, upholding a comprehensive development philosophy. The group encompasses various sub-brands such as SHIQI University, SHIQI TOYS, SHIQI Business Services, SHIQI Co-Creation, forming a complete ecosystem covering talent introduction, talent cultivation, content creation, and full-process solutions for content output. Simultaneously, SHIQI Group focuses on providing comprehensive services for creative enterprises, including talent development, content consulting, value refinement, design production, injecting continuous vitality into the industry's development.



Figure 4: SHIQI Group founding team ip image

The founder of the group, Xiaotian Xianren, with years of experience in game creativity, 3D design, and design management, has successfully built SHIQI Group's unique brand charm. Guided by the theory of innovation diffusion, the dissemination channels become crucial. In the early stages, communication channels mainly included mass communication, interpersonal communication, and early forms of internet communication. However, with the continuous development of media, new media communication has become the core medium for rapid information dissemination. Additionally, the internal evolution of the business market has expanded the channels for IP image communication beyond new media and interpersonal communication.

This case study delves into an in-depth analysis of SHIQI Group's IP in four aspects: new media communication, cross-industry integration, peripheral products, and festival communication, revealing its successful experiences and innovative strategies in multidimensional communication.

(1) New Media Communication

New media is a user-centric, content personalized, and interactive form of communication. Its characteristics include fast speed, wide reach, significant impact, rich information, and high engagement. In China, major new media platforms are primarily based on mobile internet applications, including Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, Kuaishou, Tencent Video Number, Zhihu, Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, and more. The forms of communication are continually evolving, transitioning from the initial combination of text and images to primarily short videos.

SHIQI Group fully recognizes the importance of new media. It has established official accounts

on major Chinese new media platforms such as Bilibili video creation platform, Zcool, Xiaohongshu, and others. A professional team is responsible for operating and creating content. Actively leveraging the power of new media, SHIQI Group focuses on enhancing the influence of its IP. Starting from January 2022, SHIQI Group began offering courses on 3D cartoon character design on the Bilibili platform, encouraging designers and viewers to actively learn and practice through imitation. Designers, through learning, imitation, and even secondary creation shared on Xiaohongshu, SHIQI Group accumulated a large number of fans on Bilibili and attracted attention on Xiaohongshu, gradually solidifying people's awareness of SHIQI Group's IP in the design field. This series of new media promotional activities allowed SHIQI Group to stand out in the vast design domain, gaining broader attention and recognition.



Figure 5: SHIQI Group's home page at bilibili

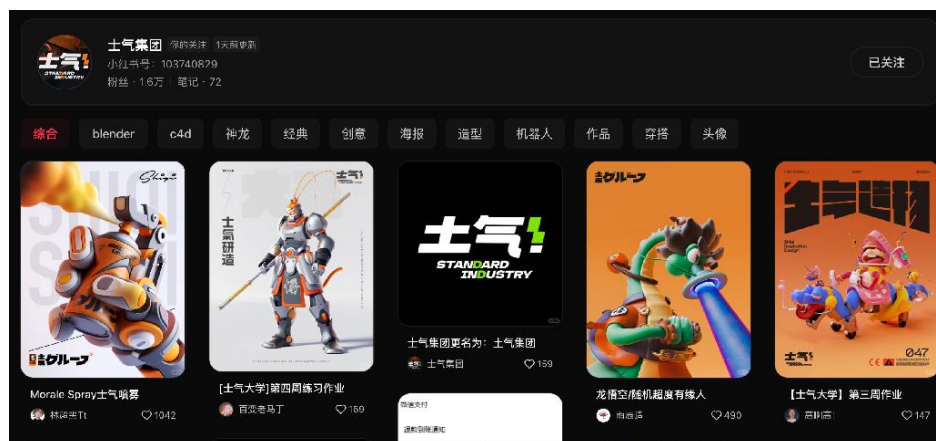


Figure 6: SHIQI Group is on the home page of Red Book

(2) Cross-Industry Integration

Cross-border collaboration refers to different brands jointly launching products that fit their respective characteristics. It aims to achieve strategic cooperation for fan interaction, traffic exchange, and increased brand exposure. SHIQI Group collaborated with numerous well-known brands such as BOE, Zotac, and Bubble Mart, conducting cross-border cooperation to create unique IP images for major brands, thereby expanding SHIQI Group's brand influence. In the

process of cross-border collaboration, SHIQI Group designed eye-catching pixel sprites IP for BOE, created a charming Lida IP for Zotac, and crafted a unique SHIQI Group-style IP for Bubble Mart. These collaborations are not just product launches; they represent strategic coordination between brands, fully utilizing each other's strengths to showcase remarkable design capabilities and creative potential. Through these collaboration opportunities, SHIQI Group, with its unique design philosophy, bestowed unique brand images upon its partners, creating a win-win situation for both parties. These series of cross-industry collaborations are not only about product integration but also about coordinated actions in market communication. SHIQI Group highlights the results of cross-border cooperation in its brand promotion, widely disseminating them through various channels, making the cooperation between brands not only a combination at the product level but also leaving a profound impression in consumers' minds. Through these cross-border collaborations, SHIQI Group successfully penetrated a wider audience life circle, continuously bringing freshness and surprises to consumers, effectively promoting brand development, and enhancing market positioning.

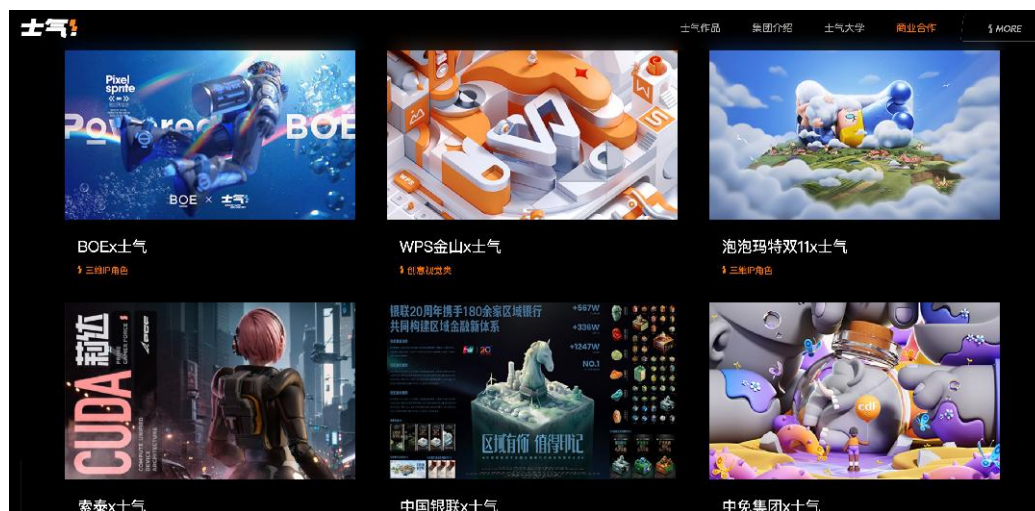


Figure 7: SHIQI Group's Cross-Industry Integration

(3) Peripheral Products

Peripheral products refer to derivative products developed based on animated characters, comics, and other character images. They are a concrete manifestation of the extension and perfection of brand culture. These products, deeply associated with the brand image, not only achieve the organic expansion of brand culture but also maintain a close connection with consumers, forming a strong brand stickiness. In this field, SHIQI Group leads the trend with its unique and innovative approach, turning the development of peripheral products into a feast of co-creation for designers. This allows SHIQI Group's students and fans to actively participate in the creative ideation and actual production of peripheral cultural products. These peripheral products are not just simple derivatives; they incorporate conceptual products enriched with the imagination of designers, and some even have the potential for actual production. This innovative approach not only aligns with SHIQI Group's overall tone but is also highly creative. Therefore, it quickly gained popularity among consumers and the market, especially on social platforms, particularly Xiaohongshu. Apart from integrating into consumer scenarios, SHIQI Group also produced many products filled with IP elements, encouraging fans to use them in their creative processes, meeting various design

needs in different scenarios. Through the organic combination of peripheral products and IP elements, SHIQI Group successfully and cleverly showcased and reinforced its brand image on social platforms, injecting sustained momentum into the enhancement of SHIQI Group's brand IP communication.

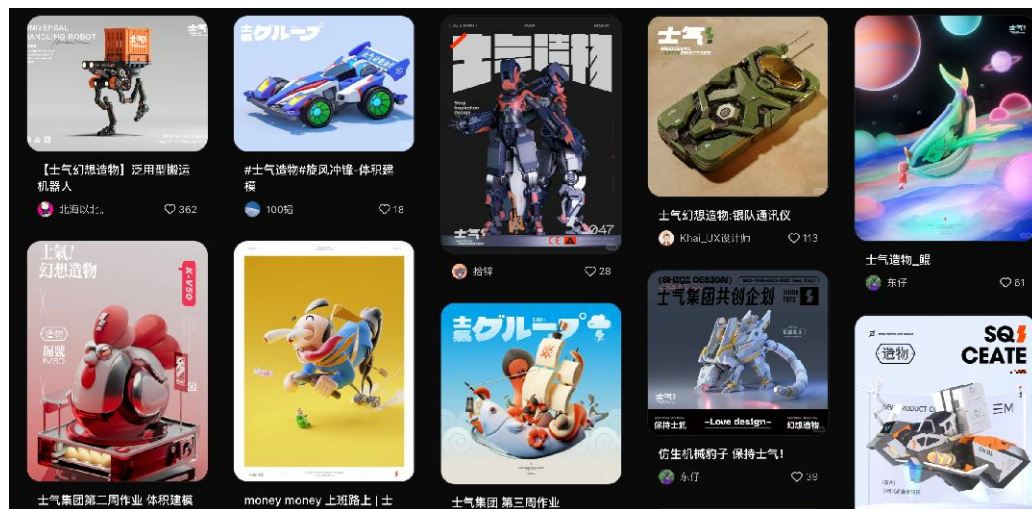


Figure 8: SHIQI Group's Peripheral Products

(4) Festival Communication

The essence of festivals lies in the collective subconscious behavior patterns of humanity. Festivals are a means of brand promotion, aiming to use the cultural archetype of creating festivals, employing nouns, symbols, designs, etc., reflecting the brand's personality perception. This drives the target audience to generate corresponding automatic behavior patterns, cultivating audience preferences and trust. On April Fools' Day, SHIQI Group renamed itself "Tuqi" Group because in Chinese characters, "Shi" (士) and "Tu" (土) are similar but have vastly different meanings, attracting a wave of attention. During Christmas, SHIQI Group launched the "SHIQI Explosion Christmas Plan," calling on design enthusiasts to create works themed around Christmas, incorporating SHIQI Group's design language. Additionally, as the Year of the Dragon approached, SHIQI Group announced the "24-Hour Dragon Hunt Plan," urging designers to find objects similar to dragons in daily life, create secondary works, and submit them to SHIQI Group's official account for promotion. By planning SHIQI Group's periodic and fixed marketing activities, gradually accumulating and forming a year-long marketing calendar, a biological clock is established in the viewers' minds. This cultivates a cultural recognition of SHIQI Group's festival activities and a profound understanding of SHIQI Group's image.



Figure 9: SHIQI Group's poster of April Fool's Day, Christmas Day and New Year of the Dragon

Conclusion

In this article, our main goal is to explore and dissect how designers shape and build their personal brand IP image, and make recommendations on how to promote it in the commercial market. According to the innovation diffusion theory, relative superiority, compatibility, complexity, experimentability and observability are the five attributes that influence whether a group accepts innovation. In terms of communication channels, through new media communication, cross-border integration, peripheral products, festival communication four aspects, to achieve brand communication and even value-added, enhance brand competitiveness.

At the innovation end, there are five levels of advice: At the level of comparative advantage, designers should make sure they are differentiated from their competitors. This can be achieved by offering unique design concepts, innovative product features, or solutions that are highly aligned with the needs of the target audience. At the compatibility level, designers should ensure that the personal brand IP is compatible with the values and lifestyles of the target audience. This means that the brand image and communication content should be aligned with the needs and preferences of the target audience to enhance the brand's appeal and recognition. At the complexity level, designers can achieve this through diverse design elements, a deep brand story and a rich brand experience. At the experimental level, designers need to let the target audience experience and feel the unique charm of the brand. This can be done by offering free trials, experience events, or opportunities to interact with users. At the observable level, designers should display the advantages and characteristics of personal brand IP in an observable way to enhance the credibility and perceptibility of the brand. This can be done by showcasing the brand's success stories, user reviews and relevant data on a public platform.

At the diffusion end, there are four levels of advice: In the design of personal brand IP image, communication channels that incorporate the theory of innovation diffusion are crucial. For new media communication, designers can use Weibo, wechat, Douyin and other platforms to display brand stories and product features to attract audience's attention. In terms of cross-border integration, cooperate with other industries or brands to create IP products that meet the characteristics of both parties and expand brand influence. In addition, the development of peripheral products is also important, designers should pay attention to the core concept of the brand fit, enhance the overall value of the brand. Finally, in terms of festival communication, designers can use special moments to design creative activities to attract the attention and participation of more target audiences. Through these suggestions, designers can make full use of the communication channel advantages of innovation diffusion theory, create personal brand IP image design, and maximize brand communication and influence.

In general, the design process of creating a personal brand IP image is challenging, but it also contains great potential. Through in-depth research and practice, designers can break through traditional limitations and create a unique and influential brand image. In the future, we will continue to seek innovation to respond to changes in the market environment and provide designers with broader development opportunities. The continuous exploration and practice in this

field will undoubtedly become one of the important factors for their success in the field of modern design.

List of Illustrations

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Figure 9: SHIQI Group's poster of April Fool's Day, Christmas Day and New Year of the Dragon.Available at:https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ZCmZ3rUmKeFY_c0F0vx5YQ

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