

# Exploring the Localization Strategies of the International Brand KFC in the Chinese Market through Advertising

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## Abstract:

Since its establishment in 1987, KFC, one of the biggest fast-food franchises globally, has been a dominant force in the Chinese market. This study looks at how KFC maintained its worldwide identity while localizing its advertising tactics to better align its messaging with Chinese cultural values and achieve this kind of success. The study emphasizes how crucial it is for global firms expanding into new countries to use culturally aware advertising. The methodology involved a qualitative content analysis of 100 KFC advertisements from online and offline platforms over a three-year period (2021-2024). The ads were analyzed for their use of local cultural symbols, emotional appeal, influencer partnerships, and visual storytelling. The key findings reveal that KFC's localization strategies focus on cultural adaptation, emotional engagement, influencer collaboration, and visual narrative techniques. By incorporating Chinese cultural elements such as family values and traditional festivals, KFC has enhanced brand loyalty in China. However, the study also points out difficulties in striking a balance between localization and upholding a consistent worldwide brand. The discussion highlights the necessity of strategic refinement to successfully engage a variety of consumer categories and minimize the risks associated with over-localization.

**Keywords:** Localization Strategies, KFC, Advertising Strategies, Cultural Integration, Consumer Preferences

## 1. Introduction

Founded in 1952, KFC has expanded to become one of the biggest and most well-known fast-food companies worldwide. The brand has spread to more than

150 countries, and its success in the Chinese market is among its most noteworthy accomplishments. As of March 2023, KFC operates over 9,000 stores in China, a testament to its widespread popularity. Its rise in China hasn't, however, been without difficul-

ties. Chinese consumers are very different from those in Western countries, where KFC first appeared, in terms of their culinary tastes, values, and lifestyles. KFC's consistent success in this market can be attributed to its ability to embrace Chinese culture, adjust to local tastes, and create a brand that connects with the community.

A key factor in KFC's success in China is its localization strategy, particularly in advertising. KFC's campaigns in China reflect a nuanced understanding of local culture, values, and consumer behavior. By featuring local celebrities and highlighting traditional festivals and family-centered themes, KFC has consistently resonated with Chinese audiences. In contrast to Western ads that often focus on individualism and a fast-paced lifestyle, KFC's Chinese advertisements emphasize family, reunion, and harmony, which are deeply ingrained in Chinese society. Advertising plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving brand success in any market [1]. For international brands like KFC, advertising goes beyond product promotion; it involves crafting a narrative that aligns with local culture and fosters an emotional connection with consumers. The study of KFC's localization strategy offers valuable insights into how global brands successfully adapt their marketing to thrive in culturally diverse markets like China.

This study examines how advertising plays a critical part in assisting global brands in successfully localizing in culturally diverse markets. It also provides insights into how multinational corporations may adapt and prosper in other countries. Through an analysis of KFC's Chinese advertising approach, the study advances our knowledge of how multinational corporations can get beyond cultural obstacles and establish enduring bonds with local customers. As more businesses look to grow in China, successful localization of marketing is crucial. This study provides a framework for international businesses aiming to enter or strengthen their presence in China, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in advertising. In an increasingly globalized world, brands must balance establishing a global identity with adapting to the unique preferences of local markets. With China playing a pivotal role in the global economy, understanding how to engage Chinese consumers is vital for any international brand seeking long-term success.

## 2. Literature Review

Numerous academics have highlighted the significance of localization tactics for multinational corporations venturing into international markets, providing insightful perspectives on KFC's advertising achievements in China. Understanding KFC's strategy has been greatly aided by

research on marketing and advertising localization, particularly in the areas of cross-cultural adaptation, customer behavior, and brand loyalty. Zhou's work on advertising localization underscores the importance of cultural adaptation for international brands entering the Chinese market. He found that ads tailored to local values such as family, tradition, and social harmony resonate more with Chinese consumers compared to global campaigns that emphasize individualism and independence, typical of Western advertising [2]. This insight has directly influenced KFC's focus on family-oriented themes and traditional Chinese values in its ads. Zhou's study on Chinese consumer behavior also reveals that local values are a major influence on Chinese customers' brand preferences, which they use to make judgments about what to buy [3]. This is demonstrated by KFC's marketing strategy, which has been successful in creating an emotional bond with customers by incorporating traditional Chinese family values and symbols of unity. Zhou also underlined that customers are more likely to form strong brand loyalty when advertising respects and resonates with their cultural identity.

Multinational firms, according to Vrontis, should balance their strategy to preserve global brand consistency while simultaneously making adjustments for local markets [4]. This strategy is embodied in KFC's Chinese commercials, which maintain the company's reputation as the world's largest fast-food chain while fusing aspects of Chinese culture, such as honoring regional holidays and customary cuisine.

The wider impact of brand localization on business success is further highlighted by research. According to research on Asian multinational businesses, larger acceptance and profitability are attained by those who adjust their marketing tactics to local consumer behavior [5]. KFC has demonstrated its commitment to cultural relevancy in its advertising and menu adjustments. This approach has helped the fast-food chain maintain its popularity in the very competitive Chinese market.

The use of Internet marketing in KFC's localization plan is a significant yet underappreciated component. KFC has adopted digital advertising in response to the growth of social media platforms like WeChat and TikTok, utilizing influencers and user-generated content to connect with younger customers. Consumer preferences, particularly those of Generation Z, are greatly influenced by social media influencers, according to Comendulli's research on digital marketing in China [6]. This tactic is demonstrated by KFC's most recent commercials, which involve partnerships with Chinese influencers and celebrities and help the company stay current and appealing to younger consumers.

Chinese culture is highly collectivist, according to Hofst-

ede, emphasizing family, social cohesiveness, and group harmony over individualism in contrast to the Western emphasis on individual accomplishment and freedom [7]. Consumer behavior in collectivist societies is strongly influenced by social cohesion, familial bonds, and the community. KFC has successfully integrated this cultural orientation into its advertising campaigns in China by focusing on themes of togetherness, group meals, and family bonding regularly. For example, KFC promotes eating meals with loved ones during Chinese New Year promotions, in line with the cultural value of getting together and forming bonds with others [8]. The deep-rooted collectivist attitude, in which one's individual identity is tightly related to one's role within a family or group, is reflected in this advertising's usage of conventional family arrangements.

Despite the popularity of this emphasis on family and unity, KFC may have trouble attracting younger, more globally-minded Chinese customers. Urbanization and the rise of individualistic tendencies—particularly in young people influenced by Western media—make it crucial to strike a balance between collectivist themes and messages that support self-actualization and independence. This change emphasizes the necessity for KFC to better target its audience segments to appeal to Chinese society's developing individualism as well as its traditional collectivist principles.

KFC has also made use of influencers and celebrity endorsements to capitalize on Chinese cultural values. KFC capitalizes on the hierarchical respect ingrained in Chinese society by linking its products to well-respected individuals like Olympic athletes or online personalities like Li Jiaqi. These influencers serve as reliable sources, boosting customer loyalty and trust while confirming the caliber of KFC's products and services. While using influencers and celebrities is an effective strategy in high power distance cultures, it also carries risks [9]. The reliance on authority figures means that the brand's reputation is closely tied to the personal reputations of these influencers. If a celebrity associated with KFC were to face controversy or public backlash, this could negatively impact the brand's image. Additionally, with China's growing digital landscape and democratization of content creation, KFC might benefit from balancing its focus on traditional hierarchical influencers with more grassroots, peer-level influencers who represent a more egalitarian and relatable voice for consumers, especially among Gen Z.

KFC's adoption of digital marketing trends, including live-streaming commerce, short video content, and influencer collaborations, has played a pivotal role in maintaining its relevance and success. Live-streaming commerce has quickly become a dominant force in China's digital

economy, platforms such as Taobao Live, Kuaishou, and Douyin have popularized real-time, interactive shopping experiences, allowing brands to engage directly with consumers. According to a report by iResearch, China's live-streaming e-commerce market was valued at over \$339 billion in 2022, reflecting its massive influence on consumer purchasing behavior [10]. KFC has effectively leveraged this trend by collaborating with prominent live-streamers and key opinion leaders to promote limited-time offers and new menu items. This digital strategy takes advantage of the growing desire for rapid satisfaction among Chinese consumers by using live streaming to facilitate impulsive, quick purchases during the broadcast. The need for individualized, engaging experiences and social validation while making judgments about purchases is satisfied by live-streaming commerce [11]. Influencer endorsements, time-limited deals, and real-time feedback all work together to generate exclusivity and urgency, which increases customer engagement. This tactic has helped KFC build long-term relationships with customers who value the transparency and immediateness of live-streamed conversations in addition to increasing short-term sales. This strategy demonstrates how KFC has effectively personalized its marketing to suit China's rapidly changing digital environment and to take advantage of the customs associated with live-streaming culture.

The ways in which fast-food franchises such as KFC have especially localized their advertising in China have received very little attention, despite a wealth of study on localization and advertising techniques in international markets. In addition, although research has been done on digital marketing in China, nothing is known about how digital marketing and localized advertising work together for fast-food companies. To close that gap, this study looks at KFC's Chinese advertising tactics and analyzes how the company has modified its messaging to appeal to Chinese consumers while preserving its worldwide identity.

### 3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology, analyzing KFC's Chinese advertising localization strategy through content analysis. To understand how KFC modifies its messaging to appeal to Chinese consumers while preserving its worldwide brand identity, the research focuses on both online and offline channels. The main goal is to examine the advertising's content and determine how Chinese cultural values, symbols, and consumer preferences are reflected in them. A thorough comprehension of KFC's localization approach is provided via a three-year (2021–2024) systematic observation of 100 of the fast-

food chain's advertisements across many media channels. The research focuses on multiple important areas. First, because they have a significant impact on China's younger consumer base, online platforms like Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) and Douyin (TikTok) are examined. Given that they frequently include influencer collaborations and brief video advertisements, these platforms are crucial for comprehending KFC's interactions with this particular group. The analysis of these advertisements reveals how KFC uses tailored and culturally appropriate digital marketing to engage younger people. Analysis is also done on physical advertising, such as television ads and billboards, in addition to online media. KFC can attract a wider demographic through these conventional channels, which include families and senior citizens. This multi-channel strategy offers a comprehensive understanding of KFC's marketing strategies for different Chinese consumer segments.

The study further examines KFC's official WeChat account and website to understand how the brand communicates directly with consumers through its media. These platforms offer insights into how KFC manages its digital image and maintains consumer engagement through targeted messaging and localized promotions.

The study primarily focused on identifying Chinese cultural elements in KFC's advertisements, examining how the brand integrated traditional Chinese symbols, family values, and local customs, such as Chinese New Year, into its messaging. It also considered how KFC adapted its product offerings to local tastes, such as promoting localized menu items in its ads. A significant area of observation was the emotional appeal of the advertisements, particularly how they evoked sentiments of family unity, social harmony, and togetherness—core values deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. This emotional tone was often enhanced through the strategic use of colors, music, and language. For instance, KFC's "Crazy Thursday" campaign tapped into contemporary internet-driven humor, leveraging the "Insanity Philosophy" to create a strong emotional connection with younger consumers, making the brand more relatable [12]. The study also examined KFC's usage of influencers in its online marketing activities, specifically on Douyin and Xiaohongshu. It looked at the reasons behind the selection of particular local influencers and celebrities to represent the brand, the audiences they drew in, and how their personas complemented KFC's messaging. Through an examination of the influencers' interactions with KFC goods in brief video formats, including their expressions, words, and actions, the study investigated how their endorsements influenced followers to comment on and share the content. In addition, a thorough analysis was conducted of the advertisements'

visual and behavioral elements, such as body language, gestures, and facial expressions, to pinpoint important themes that connected with the audience.

A comprehensive and current review of KFC's advertising strategies was intended to be provided by the three-year period (2021–2024), considering the changing consumer landscape and the growing influence of digital marketing. KFC made an attempt to appeal to a broad population with the characters in the advertisements, which included local celebrities, young influencers, and multigenerational family members. Families and younger, tech-savvy customers were KFC's target markets, and these characters were essential in portraying both groups. The purpose of this study is to show how KFC has effectively localized its content to appeal to the Chinese market while preserving its unique global identity. The study provides a thorough understanding of KFC's advertising strategy in the context of a multicultural and dynamic consumer base by a close examination of the company's offline and online advertisements.

## 4. Results

Several crucial localization tactics were found via a qualitative content study of KFC's advertising from the previous three years, and these tactics have greatly aided KFC's commercial success in China. These tactics center on matching consumer preferences and regional cultural values with the brand's messaging. Four key components were identified from the research of 100 ads from both online and offline platforms: influencer cooperation, emotional resonance, visual storytelling, and cultural adaptation.

KFC's use of Chinese cultural themes in its advertising was one of the most noteworthy tactics. Traditional Chinese symbols and customs were regularly used by the company, especially during significant holidays and festivals. For instance, KFC's annual Chinese New Year advertisements consistently showcased images of gatherings with family, eating together, and exchanging gifts—essential customs during this celebration. In a 2022 commercial, KFC unveiled a specially localized menu with items like "K Kee Xiaolongbao," which were created with Chinese palates in mind. This showed the brand's flexibility and recognition of the value of tradition in Chinese consumer behavior. To further support its localization efforts, KFC has modified its product offerings in commercials to suit regional preferences. For instance, the Guangdong province limited menu of the "Hong Kong style French Toast", which is a favorite dessert for Cantonese afternoon tea, the content advertisement is also displayed in Cantonese. This cultural adaptation not only made the brand

more relatable but also strengthened its position as a local favorite.

The second important finding was the emotional appeal of KFC advertising, especially around the themes of family, unity, and reunion. Chinese culture takes these concepts very seriously, and KFC cleverly uses this emotional connection to resonate with consumers. For example, in an advertisement for the 2022 Chinese New Year, several families gather around KFC during the Spring Festival to symbolize unity and reunion. The AD's message focused on the joy of reunion and featured Olympic gold medalist Wu Dajing, bringing a positive energy that Chinese culture values as popularity and honor. Moreover, KFC used emotional marketing to connect with younger audiences through humor and contemporary trends. The "Crazy Thursday" campaign, launched on social media, used playful and humorous content to attract attention. The campaign leveraged internet slang and quirky "insanity philosophy" to appeal to Gen Z consumers. In one video, the ad humorously depicts a series of funny, exaggerated reactions to KFC's deals, which resonated with younger viewers familiar with this type of internet-driven humor.

The use of local influencers and celebrities on platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu was another effective strategy. KFC frequently collaborated with well-known Chinese influencers to endorse its products, and these collaborations played a pivotal role in engaging younger consumers. For example, in a 2019 campaign, KFC partnered with well-known idol Lu Han and famous e-commerce anchor Li Jiaqi to launch a limited-time product. In the advert, Li Jiaqi engaged the audience in his signature way, tasting and evaluating the new "Crispy Chicken with Seaweed Chips". His enthusiastic recommendation, coupled with his famous catchphrase "Buy it", created a huge response online, with 554,000 likes on the Douyin platform. This type of influencer endorsement enhanced the product's visibility and credibility, especially among younger, tech-savvy consumers.

KFC has effectively utilized its official website and mobile applications to enhance consumer convenience and engagement [13]. Through these platforms, KFC offers services such as online ordering and delivery, providing a seamless and convenient purchasing experience. The mobile app further enhances customer loyalty by offering personalized recommendations and reward systems. Additionally, KFC leverages its e-commerce presence to run promotions, such as discounts and bundles, attracting more consumers. Regular promotional activities, including discounts, gifts, and collaborations with other brands for limited-edition products, also help increase brand visibility and sales.

The advertisements also made effective use of visual sto-

rytelling, facial expressions, gestures, and body language were key to communicating the warmth and joy associated with sharing a KFC meal. In a 2020 commercial, friends get together and display their astonishment upon seeing the meal, as well as their delight and inebriation while devouring it, all of which highlight the delectable KFC cuisine and the joy of spending time with friends. By paying close attention to behavioral clues, the ads were able to establish a stronger emotional bond with viewers, which increased their relatability and engagement. Furthermore, KFC frequently employed warm colors like red and gold in the visual composition of the advertisements—colors that are typically connected to luck and happiness in Chinese culture. Holiday-themed commercials routinely employ these visual cues to accentuate the holidays' cultural significance and elicit happy feelings.

## 5. Discussion

The study's conclusions demonstrate that KFC has effectively customized its advertising tactics in China by considering local customs and tastes while maintaining its worldwide brand. This success has been attributed to several important variables, each of which presents KFC with possibilities and difficulties as it works to maintain its position in the Chinese market.

KFC's success can be attributed in large part to its ability to include aspects of Chinese culture in its commercials. KFC has made a name for itself as a brand that understands local culture and is relevant to the community by coordinating its messaging with holidays, traditional values, and local preferences. Because Chinese consumers value traditions and family-friendly experiences, KFC has been able to establish a deep relationship with them thanks to this cultural adaptation, which has greatly improved the company's brand image. KFC showed its respect for regional traditions by emphasizing Chinese New Year in its advertising, for example, and gave its consumers a sense of community. Localized products have also increased the brand's appeal to a wider spectrum of customers. Examples of these include menu items that are customized to regional preferences.

But there's a chance that the problem of over-localization will weaken KFC's worldwide brand recognition. Should KFC concentrate too much on local modifications, it might lose the unique qualities that draw in foreign customers looking for a more "Western" fast-food experience. Furthermore, younger, more cosmopolitan consumers who choose contemporary, international businesses may not connect with ads that are deeply ingrained in local customs. KFC should maintain its use of regional components in its marketing while making sure that its

basic global values—like high-quality food and prompt service—are upheld in every region to achieve balance. Additionally, KFC could segment its advertising strategies to target different demographics, using localized campaigns for older or family-oriented consumers and more globalized, trend-driven campaigns for younger, cosmopolitan audiences.

KFC's focus on emotional appeal, particularly themes of family, unity, and social harmony, resonated deeply with Chinese consumers. The emotional narratives in their advertisements—whether through family gatherings during festivals or humorous internet campaigns—helped KFC form a strong bond with its audience. This emotional connection translated into greater brand loyalty and customer retention. The use of family-oriented themes was particularly effective in China, where family is central to social life. Campaigns such as “Crazy Thursday,” which used humor and internet culture, also allowed KFC to engage with younger audiences in a relatable and contemporary way. However, an over-reliance on emotional appeal might overshadow the product itself. If consumers become more attached to the emotions conveyed in the ads rather than the actual quality of the food, it could lead to dissatisfaction if the product fails to live up to expectations. Emotional appeal, while effective in building short-term connections, may also limit KFC's ability to shift focus to more functional or product-based advertising when necessary. KFC should balance emotional appeal with product-specific messaging to ensure that consumers remain engaged with both the brand's emotional narratives and its food offerings. Highlighting product quality alongside emotional content will help maintain consumer trust and satisfaction, even after the emotional appeal fades.

The use of local influencers and celebrities was another effective strategy for engaging younger, digitally savvy consumers. By collaborating with figures like Li Jiaqi and other popular influencers, KFC was able to capitalize on the trust and engagement that these influencers have cultivated with their followers. Influencer marketing, especially on social media sites like Douyin and Xiaohongshu, has been essential in raising KFC's profile among younger customers. Influencers' relatability and genuineness have allowed KFC to reach a wider audience, particularly among consumers who are more affected by recommendations from their peers than by traditional advertising. However, there are hazards associated with depending too much on influencers. KFC may suffer from association if an influencer is involved in a scandal. Furthermore, KFC runs the danger of losing audience engagement if it continues to work with the same influencers without revising its approach because influencer trends change frequently. To reduce these risks, KFC should broaden the scope of

its marketing initiatives by collaborating with influencers from a variety of sectors and keeping an open mind to adjust to changing market trends. Investing in long-term brand ambassadors who consistently reflect the company's values could also provide more stability than relying solely on short-term influencer campaigns.

Warm hues, expressive faces, and body language are all important components of KFC's visual narrative, which is used to promote family unity and cultural celebration. These components have increased the commercials' emotional resonance and level of engagement. Furthermore, comfortable actions like sharing food and smiling enhanced the audience's emotional connection. Over-reliance on recurring graphic themes, however, runs the danger of making customers weary. Should KFC persist in employing the same narrative strategies without any innovation, its advertisements might eventually lose their impact.

To sustain customer interest, KFC ought to modernize its visual storytelling by introducing fresh cultural trends and symbols that speak to contemporary audiences. The advertisements will continue to be powerful and new if they experiment with different visual styles while sticking to fundamental themes like family and unity.

## 6. Conclusion

This study shows that KFC's successful localization of its advertising methods is responsible for its success in China. KFC has not only gained a footing in a competitive industry but also built itself as a brand that connects culturally with Chinese consumers by adopting digital marketing, leveraging emotional appeals, and aligning its marketing with Chinese cultural values. KFC's ability to strike a balance between localization and globalization exemplifies the cautious approach that multinational companies must take to be successful in international markets. The results highlight how crucial cultural sensitivity and flexibility are for multinational corporations. Strong emotional ties and enduring customer loyalty can be fostered by culturally relevant advertising, as demonstrated by KFC's emphasis on themes like family unity and traditional holidays.

Additionally, KFC has positioned itself as a contemporary brand that is sensitive to changing consumer preferences thanks to its incorporation of digital influencers and tailored involvement. Nonetheless, the dangers of excessive localization and inconsistent branding point to the necessity of constant strategic improvement. Although KFC's strategy has proven successful, it is imperative to strike a balance between local relevance and global coherence. To be competitive, KFC needs to be adaptable in

modifying its marketing techniques as customer behavior and internet trends change over time. In the end, KFC's experience provides insightful guidance for multinational corporations traversing challenging cultural environments. This study demonstrates how businesses may use locally relevant advertising to engage customers while tackling the difficulties associated with cultural adjustment. In an increasingly interconnected global market, the lessons from KFC's success in China extend beyond the fast-food industry and provide guidance for any international business seeking long-term growth in foreign markets.

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