

A Study on the Mechanism of Transmedia Storytelling Driving Brand IP Construction: Taking the Propagation of the Palace Museum's Cultural and Creative "National Trend" as an Example

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ABSTRACT

With the continuous development of the digital economy, transmedia storytelling has become a crucial approach in brand IP development. Drawing upon Henry Jenkins' theoretical perspectives on transmedia storytelling, this paper examines the Palace Museum's cultural and creative products as a case study in "national trend" dissemination. It explores concrete methods for traditional cultural IPs to achieve modern transformation in the contemporary context. Research reveals that the success of the Palace Museum's cultural and creative initiatives follows an inherent logic: it commences with the "modern reinterpretation of cultural symbols" as the foundational starting point. Subsequently, it leverages "multi-media narrative synergy" to continually expand the breadth of its dissemination reach. Concurrently, it establishes a virtuous value-circulation system through "audience participation, interaction, and emotional connection". This operational mechanism broadens the application scope of transmedia storytelling theory within traditional cultural IPs while providing a practical framework and theoretical basis for other cultural brands seeking innovative communication approaches.

KEYWORDS

Transmedia storytelling; Brand IP; Palace museum cultural creations; National trend; Mechanism research

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of digital technology and consumer culture increasingly converging, how to enable traditional culture to transcend temporal and spatial constraints and establish effective connections with contemporary society—particularly the younger generation—has become a significant contemporary issue. The rise of the "national trend" movement offers a vivid response to this challenge, reflecting the deep integration of cultural identity and consumer behaviour. The Palace Museum's cultural and creative products stand as a quintessential case study within this movement. Their successful transformation stems not merely from marketing tactics but from a systematic brand IP construction process, whose underlying communication logic warrants thorough analysis.

Transmedia storytelling theory offers a conceptual framework for this research, though most existing studies focus on fictional IP, with insufficient exploration of the systemic mechanisms underpinning cross-media strategies for authentic historical and cultural IP like the Palace Museum. This study uses the Palace Museum cultural IP as a case sample, examining how its transmedia storytelling activates traditional cultural heritage and constructs a powerful brand IP with vitality and emotional resonance. It aims to provide theoretical and practical references for the modern communication strategies of similar cultural institutions.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Development and Evolution of Transmedia Storytelling Theory

American communication scholar Henry Jenkins first systematically articulated the concept of transmedia storytelling in his work *Convergence Culture*. He defined this process as the deliberate distribution of elements from a narrative system across different communication platforms, aiming to create a complete and cohesive entertainment experience for audiences^[1]. The crux of this theory lies in "world-building," emphasising the need for multiple media to collaboratively unfold narratives, collectively expanding a grand story universe rather than merely repeating identical content.

Jenkins' theoretical framework has been continually enriched and refined in subsequent research. For instance, Scolari's theory of "narrative diffusion" emphasizes the audience's active participation and the role of secondary creation in expanding the story ecosystem. This has fostered an analytical perspective within transmedia storytelling studies that prioritises "user engagement"^[2]. Domestically, Cai Qi was among the earliest scholars to systematically introduce this theory, employing detailed and comprehensive analyses of specific cases such as Harry Potter to elucidate the operational mechanisms of multi-media collaborative narratives. In recent years, researchers such as Qin Man have shifted their focus to issues concerning the modern expression of traditional cultural IP. This has gradually formed a research pathway centred on "cultural translation," which primarily explores how traditional culture achieves modern transformation

through transmedia storytelling plots.

2.2 Theoretical Evolution of Brand IP Construction

The theoretical foundation for brand IP traces back to Aaker's brand equity theory. This framework positions the brand as the most critical intangible asset, advocating research into brand positioning, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations ^[3]. Keller's brand resonance model elaborates more comprehensively that brand building aims to establish profound resonance with consumers on both rational and emotional levels, providing a conceptual framework for exploring the emotional construction of brand IP ^[4].

Digital technology continually reshapes the communication landscape. Against this backdrop, Jenkins's transmedia narrative theory provides crucial support for brand IP development. This theory transforms brands from mere identifiers or value propositions into evolving "story worlds". Its core principle lies in co-creating, through diverse and continuously updated narratives, an engaging and relatable system of meaning with consumers. Domestically, numerous scholars have explored this field, such as Zheng Lingling et al., who have researched pathways for constructing traditional cultural IP tailored to China's specific context. These studies hold considerable practical significance.

2.3 Literature Review and Research Approach

Presently, transmedia storytelling and brand IP construction have each developed relatively comprehensive theoretical frameworks. However, research effectively integrating these two approaches and systematically applying them to the modernisation of traditional cultural IP remains notably scarce, representing a prominent academic gap. Existing research generally exhibits three limitations: Firstly, studies predominantly focus on fictional IP, with insufficient attention paid to the narrative particularities of IP rooted in authentic cultural heritage, such as the Palace Museum. Secondly, research perspectives are often confined to single media or specific dissemination stages, failing to comprehensively and systematically examine the entire operational mechanism of traditional cultural IP—from value extraction and multi-channel dissemination to audience engagement. Thirdly, existing discussions remain relatively weak on deeper issues such as the specific methods of modern reinterpretation of traditional cultural symbols underlying the "national trend" phenomenon and the logic governing audience cultural identity formation.

Consequently, this study employs Palace Museum cultural products as a case analysis, integrating transmedia storytelling theory, semiotics, and brand management theory to construct a "transmedia storytelling-Driven Model for Cultural IP". This aims to elucidate in detail how traditional cultural IP achieves brand transformation and modernization reshaping through transmedia storytelling.

3 Case Study: A Transmedia Storytelling Analysis of the Palace Museum's Cultural and Creative Products in the "National Trend" Movement

The Palace Museum's cultural and creative products' journey towards "national trend" transformation constitutes an integrated transmedia storytelling project. Its success stems not from chance but from a thorough understanding of its cultural resources and an accurate grasp of the contemporary communication landscape.

3.1 Starting Point: In-Depth Exploration and Modern Adaptation of Cultural Symbols

The construction of the Palace Museum IP is grounded in its profound historical heritage and cultural essence. While meticulously excavating these foundations, it innovatively adapts them to contemporary societal realities. As a repository of profound historical and cultural traditions, the Palace Museum houses nearly 1.86 million artifacts alongside an immensely vast and magnificent complex of ancient architecture – an irreplicable repository of unique cultural symbols. The success of the Palace Museum's cultural and creative products lies in its refusal to confine these cultural symbols to paper or vintage photographs. Instead, through "symbolic decoding" and "modern recoding," it bridges these symbols with contemporary aesthetic sensibilities ^[5].

(1) Symbolic Extraction and Refinement: Commencing with representative motifs such as the sea-wave and cliff patterns found in imperial garments, the process involves extracting and refining elements from traditional architectural components—including glazed tiles, ridge ornaments, and the colour palette of treasured collections like the Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains scroll. This yields highly recognisable, aesthetically valuable quintessential elements.

(2) Modern Design Adaptation: Integrating traditional symbols with contemporary consumer goods. For instance, traditional patterns are printed on adhesive tape, notebooks, and mobile phone cases; or drawing inspiration from ancient imperial cosmetics to launch the "Palace Museum Lipstick" series. Colour names like "Langyao Red" and

"Tourmaline Green," alongside the lipstick's form, draw inspiration from cultural relics. This approach carries cultural resonance while aligning with contemporary trends. Crucially, this adaptation avoids direct replication; instead, it captures the aesthetic essence of traditional culture while meeting modern industrial design standards and aesthetic demands^[6].

3.2 Core: Narrative Synergy and World-Building Across Multi-Media Platforms

The Palace Museum has established a multidimensional cultural dissemination matrix—commonly referred to as the "Forbidden City Universe"—through diverse channels including film, social media, physical spaces, and collaborative partnerships. Each medium serves a distinct content delivery function, working in concert to form a cohesive force propelling cultural dissemination.

(1) Documentary programmes adopt an equal yet respectful perspective in portraying each artefact conservator, showcasing the spirit of craftsmanship to a broad audience. The series *I Repair Artifacts* at the Palace Museum has imbued the Palace Museum IP with a core of "rigour," "professionalism," and "artisan dedication," establishing the IP brand's expertise and authority. For television dramas exceeding 30 minutes in length, the content of long-form video serves as a profound refinement of the IP culture, facilitating the cultivation of a more profound and enduring cultural resonance. For a film or television production exceeding 30 minutes in length, the content of long-form video serves as a deeper refinement of the IP's cultural essence, aiding in the establishment and consolidation of the brand's soft cultural construction.

(2) Short videos represent a crucial approach to engaging younger audiences. The Palace Museum releases short videos on platforms like Weibo, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu. Content includes anthropomorphising artifacts, showcasing the Forbidden City's seasonal landscapes, and creating distinctive characters like the "Palace Museum Cats". These lightweight formats bridge the gap between the Palace Museum and younger audiences. Through user engagement, public interest and affection for the Palace Museum have notably increased, with interaction rates on certain accounts even doubling.

(3) Physical products and spatial experiences deliver more intuitive feeling. Cultural and creative merchandise acts as mobile cultural carriers, weaving Palace Museum heritage into everyday life. Offline exhibitions or digital experiences like VR tours of the Hall of Supreme Harmony transform flat displays into immersive three-dimensional encounters, allowing visitors to tangibly appreciate the institution's brand appeal.

(4) Collaborative partnerships have expanded the Palace Museum's cultural outreach. Collaborations with international brands like Cartier and domestic partners such as Nongfu Spring have fostered mutual commercial growth while facilitating cross-cultural exchange. The partnership with Cartier, for instance, integrated Eastern aesthetic elements into Western jewellery design, elevating the Palace Museum's cultural symbols on the global stage while enriching the concept of mutual cultural appreciation.

3.3 Driving Forces: Audience Engagement, User-Generated Content, and Emotional Resonance

The ultimate goal of transmedia storytelling lies in co-creating value with audiences. The Palace Museum's cultural and creative initiatives demonstrate a profound understanding of this principle. Through diverse mechanisms, it actively encourages audiences to transcend passive observation, transforming them into proactive participants and disseminators.

(1) Stimulating User-Generated Content (UGC): Phenomena such as "Palace Museum check-in photos" and "Palace Museum lipstick swatches" on social media represent audiences actively joining the narrative. To harness this, the Palace Museum organizes cultural design competitions and online H5 interactive games, guiding users into UGC production and making them co-creators of IP content.

(2) Building Community and Emotional Belonging: Sustained engagement cultivates shared recognition and appreciation for Palace Museum culture among audiences. Purchasing cultural products is not merely about spending money; it signals to others, "I am a young person who appreciates traditional culture and possesses good taste." This emotional resonance and the sense of belonging within a community are key to a brand's enduring popularity. The surge in sales of related cultural products during the popularity of the documentary series *I Repair Antiques* at the Palace Museum serves as excellent evidence of this phenomenon.

4 Mechanism Construction: A Model for Transmedia Ttortelling-Driven Brand IP Development

Through meticulous analysis of the Palace Museum's cultural and creative initiatives, this study has distilled a "Mechanism Model for transmedia storytelling-Driven Brand IP Construction." This framework encompasses three cyclical stages that form a continuous, spiralling closed-loop system:

(1) The foundation of this model lies in the excavation and transformation of cultural symbols. At this crucial initial stage, traditional cultural resources must be systematically organized to identify and refine the most representative elements. These are then creatively transformed using contemporary design language. For instance, the Palace Museum extracts iconic Palace pattern from its artifacts, deconstructs and redesigns them, transforming them into practical, aesthetically contemporary lifestyle products. This approach preserves core cultural gene while infusing it with modern vitality, accumulating rich material for subsequent transmedia storytelling.

(2) Cross-media collaborative storytelling is paramount for expanding influence. Leveraging the distinct characteristics of various media platforms and the varied habits of their respective audiences, diverse narrative approaches are deployed across channels such as film and television, social media platforms, and physical spaces. The documentary *Forbidden City: A Dream* and the "Digital Forbidden City" mini-program exemplify such complementary relationships, maintaining narrative consistency while maximising each medium's strengths to construct a multidimensional IP identity.

(3) Audience engagement and emotional resonance drive sustained IP value appreciation. Through open participation mechanisms like UGC creation and interactive exhibitions, users transition from passive recipients to active co-creators. For instance, the Palace Museum's "600th Anniversary of the Forbidden City" themed creation contest attracted substantial user participation. Such interactions deepen emotional connections while generating content that nourishes the IP ecosystem, providing fresh inspiration for symbol exploration.

These three elements form an organic cycle: successful symbol transformation lays the groundwork for narrative development; extensive narratives attract audience participation; and deep engagement in turn sparks new cultural demands, propelling the IP forward. It is through this dynamic mechanism that the Palace Museum has achieved the modern reimagining and value enhancement of traditional cultural IP.

5 Conclusion

By analyzing the Palace Museum's cultural and creative practices, this paper distils a closed-loop operational model: "Cultural Symbol Transformation – Multi-Media Synergy – Audience Engagement". This model systematically demonstrates how traditional cultural IP leverage transmedia storytelling to evolve holistically from resource discovery and value extension to emotional connection. Research indicates its fundamental success lies in transforming static cultural heritage into a dynamic, co-constructed narrative model capable of continuous evolution.

The Palace Museum's approach further reveals that the most critical aspect of constructing traditional cultural IP lies in achieving an organic fusion between cultural essence and contemporary expression. For other cultural brands, when referencing this operational mechanism, it is essential to conduct more meticulous and comprehensive exploration of their unique cultural gene. Within the context of transmedia storytelling, they should actively seek pathways aligned with their intrinsic characteristics. Such exploratory endeavours serve a dual purpose: on one hand, they unlock the commercial potential inherent within IP; on another, from a deeper perspective, they contribute practical models of reference value to the dual innovation and entrepreneurship development of China's outstanding traditional culture and the cultivation of cultural confidence in the new era.

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