

From "Heritage" to "Trendy Products": The Commercialization Path and Communication Strategies of Suzhou Embroidery Cultural and Creative Products

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Abstract. This article focuses on the related content of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products, based on the current development status of the cultural and creative industry of intangible cultural heritage in the market context, studying its commercialization transformation mechanism, communication strategies, and problems when attracting young consumer groups. From the dual perspectives of cultural identity and consumption transformation, researching on commercialization methods and communication strategies: design innovation and product transformation of cultural and creative products of Suzhou embroidery, communication strategies in the new media environment, as well as opportunities and challenges in the process of marketization. Based on measures such as questionnaire surveys and text analysis, this paper studies consumers' understanding level of ICH cultural and creative products, and analyzes their application effects and market prospects. The results show that the consumption of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products is showing a trend of younger age, and the market size has been continuously expanding. This article clearly states that the development of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products should take cultural identity as the core and achieve the integration of culture and the market. To provide practical and feasible solutions for its transformation from heritage to trendy products, and to offer theoretical support and practical references for the sustainable development of ICH.

Keywords: Suzhou embroidery, digitalization, commercialization path, communication strategy.

1. Introduction

Industries of cultural creativity are becoming increasingly various and are deeply loved and favored by the public. Suzhou embroidery, as the top of the "Four Famous Embroideries" and one of the "Three Wonders of Gusu", has a history of over 2,500 years. It is renowned for its "fine, elegant and clean" quality. The current exploration of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products mainly focuses on three directions: Digital technology has injected new vitality into it. 3D modeling and digital pattern preservation have given traditional craftsmanship new forms of expression. The commercialization model of "ICH+IP" and "ICH+cultural tourism" has been put into practice. New

media are reshaping consumers' recognition of ICH through forms such as short videos and live streaming [1].

At present, relevant research adopts the methods of questionnaire survey and text analysis. This approach can clearly understand the current preferences of consumers and gain a deep understanding of the current development issues and prospects of ICH cultural and creative products. When discussing the development model of Suzhou embroidery, three consensus were reached: Firstly, consumers' recognition of cultural and creative products of ICH is the foundation for the development of ICH; Secondly, digital transformation is an inevitable outcome of the development of Suzhou embroidery. Ultimately, the construction of a brand and IP is the core to occupying the market [2]. However, the research also has some deficiencies: the analysis of the commercialization path of Suzhou embroidery remains superficial and does not delve deeply into the specific transformation mechanism: The research on communication strategies has not taken into account the media usage habits of different consumer groups and lacks specificity. Insufficient insight into the genuine demands of young consumers has failed to reveal the intrinsic logic behind the transformation of cultural identity into consumption behavior.

This study, from the perspective of cultural identity and consumption transformation, explores the transformation path of Suzhou embroidery towards the market and modernization. To analyze the intrinsic connection between the value reshaping, market selection and social acceptance of ICH represented by Suzhou embroidery, and to provide theoretical support and practical reference for promoting the development of ICH and creative industries. This research carries important implications for the innovative development and future direction of the ICH cultural and creative industry.

2. Literature review

As one of China's ICH, Suzhou embroidery is known worldwide as its breathtaking craftsmanship and delicate Suzhou embroidery works. Times are constantly changing, and cultural creativity is also evolving with The Times. Traditional Suzhou embroidery elements have gradually been widely applied in the design of various cultural and creative products. In recent years, the development and commercial transformation of its cultural and creative products have become hot topics in ICH protection and cultural industry research [3]. Nowadays, the exploration of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products mainly focuses on three directions: digital technology has enabled cultural and creative products to take on a wider variety of forms; Commercial cooperation models between ICH, IP and cultural tourism; Through a variety of methods, new media helps to raise public understanding of ICH.

The innovation of digital technology has injected new vitality into the design and innovation of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products. The academic circle generally pays attention to the integration and innovation of Suzhou embroidery elements in the design of cultural and creative products, attracting more consumer groups and making them a stable consumer base. Qian Jufeng and Wu Fanghui's research indicates that Suzhou embroidery has expanded from traditional calligraphy and paintings by famous people and royal clothing to lightweight products such as bookmarks, fans, and small display stands. In terms of themes, there have emerged younger expressions such as the "second dimension", and in terms of materials, new fabrics like wire mesh and eco-friendly cotton and linen have begun to be experimented with, and cross-border combinations have been made with other techniques such as French embroidery, ceramics, and velvet flowers, achieving an effect where 1+1 is greater than 2. This design translation is not merely a simple pattern transplantation, but rather a deconstruction and reorganization of traditional

craftsmanship in terms of "form, color, texture and application" [3]. Some scholars, from a cross-border perspective, have summarized the extensive subject matter and diverse expression techniques of Suzhou embroidery, which integrate the artistic features of both the East and the West. The research team outlined design frameworks for cultural and creative products based on Suzhou embroidery, creating new opportunities for their further development [4]. Under the background of modern cultural and creative industries, by exploring inheritance strategies such as digital inheritance, designer team cultivation, and cross-border cooperation, as well as innovative applications like material innovation, cross-cultural integration design, and personalized design, the inheritance and innovative development of Suzhou embroidery craftsmanship in the field of clothing have been promoted. This is not only the inheritance of traditional handicrafts but also a new attempt at the new connotations of The Times [5].

In recent years, with the rapid development of the cultural industry, "ICH +IP" and "ICH + cultural tourism", as important models for the commercialization of ICH, have become hot topics of concern in the academic circle. IP is the abbreviation of "Intellectual Property", meaning intellectual property rights. In the classification of ICH IPs, some scholars have proposed a two-tier classification system: classification based on the field of ICH resources and classification based on the field of cultural industries [6]. Zhang Jing further established a systematic transformation logic that starts from "value decoding" to extract cultural genes, "narrative reconstruction" to awaken emotional resonance, "cross-border collaboration" to expand application boundaries, and "brand building" to construct a commercial closed loop, exploring diverse practical strategies for the IPization of traditional handicrafts. He believes that to achieve IPization, it is necessary to take culture as the main body and fully utilize modern technologies such as digital technology in work [7]. The transformation of ICH IPs from cultural symbols to emotional IPs requires their interpretation through diverse carriers such as literature, animation, painting, music, film, games, theme performances, cultural and creative products, and digital products, thereby enhancing user stickiness [6]. Existing academic studies exploring the integration between ICH and tourism are primarily concentrated in three areas, including the motivational factors that promote such integration.; The path of integrating ICH with tourism Countermeasures for the Integration of ICH and Tourism. The integration of ICH and tourism is a dynamic development process in which the two industries permeate and intersect with each other, gradually forming new business forms. Weng Biyun proposed an innovative approach that integrates ICH and tourism based on traditional experience models both at home and abroad and in line with new consumption trends. At the same time, in response to the demand characteristics of the new consumer groups, four integrated and innovative directions, namely "ICH + new cultural tourism", "ICH + Trendy culture", "ICH + all elements", and "ICH + digitalization", have been proposed [8]. Research conducted by the UNESCO Creative Cities Network on cultural-tourism integration reveals that aligning ICH with creative industries opens up innovative avenues for the development of urban tourism resources. The experience of ICH is shifting from the traditional "gazing" to "participatory co-creation", and tourists are establishing emotional connections with local culture through immersive learning [9]. The systemic coordination and integration of ICH-related products with cultural tourism and the introduction of more forms through digital technology, such as Suzhou's collaboration with digital technology to launch immersive experience centers, can enable tourists to fully immerse themselves in them. This form emphasizes multiple aspects such as tourists' experience, privacy, interaction, participation, atmosphere, decision-making power, entertainment, and artistic sense. To enable tourists to have diverse experiences, it requires the joint collaboration of the tourism industry, the technology industry, the cultural industry, and the entertainment industry. At the same time, it also

needs the participation of various departments such as urban development planning and environmental protection [10].

The promoting effect of new media technology on the dissemination and innovation of Suzhou embroidery has received widespread attention. Fu Jian's statistics in the article show that through social media platforms, the exposure of Suzhou embroidery works has increased by nearly 300%, attracting the attention and it is highly favored by a large group of young enthusiasts. Meanwhile, the application of new media technology in Suzhou embroidery design is becoming increasingly widespread. For instance, CAD software can assist designers in quickly drawing patterns, and through the integration of virtual reality technology and VR enables the audience to experience the production process of Suzhou embroidery as if they were there [11].

3. Research methods

3.1. Questionnaire survey

This study adopted the questionnaire survey method. Huang Yijun and Lyu Qinghua pointed out in the research on cultural identity of ICH products that can operationalize cultural identity from the perspectives of cultural self-esteem, emotional commitment, and a sense of belonging to a group. Through the development of scales and questionnaire surveys, the degree of consumers' identification with ICH products and the effect on consumers' willingness to purchase can be effectively measured [12]. The questionnaire design of this study follows the theoretical logical framework of "cultural identity → consumption intention → purchase behavior", and questionnaires are distributed based on consumers' recognition and purchase awareness of experiential service products of ICH, as well as their consumption tendencies and cultural identity. The group of research subjects is extensive, with no gender restrictions. The age groups are further divided into under 18 years old, 18-25 years old, 26-35 years old, 36-45 years old, and 46 years old and above. The regions are mainly concentrated in Jiangsu Province. The question types include single-choice, multiple-choice and other forms, so as to ensure that the information needed for this research can be fully and effectively collected. For example, an understanding and exploration of the communication channels of ICH has set up online media platforms, e-commerce platforms, live-streaming sales, offline experience scenarios, etc. to investigate the channels through which consumers obtain knowledge of ICH in their lives. And focus on conducting cross-analysis of the data related to the cultural identity and purchase conversion of the respondents to analyze the interconnections and mutual effects between the two.

This survey was conducted from January to March 2026, and questionnaires were distributed through online-offline integration. Online promotion will be carried out through the Wenjuanxing platform on social media, Wechat official accounts, Wechat group chats, etc. On-site interception and interviews were conducted offline at Suzhou Museum, Pingjiang Road Historical and Cultural Block, ICH Experience Hall and other Suzhou embroidery cultural Spaces. Sample size: the survey covered 500 respondents; 500 questionnaires were issued and 432 valid ones were retrieved. Gender structure: There were 126 male respondents and 306 female respondents, with a relatively high proportion of females. Age distribution: 62 people under 18 years old, 168 people aged 18 to 25, 85 people aged 26 to 35, 61 people aged 36 to 45, and 56 people aged 46 and above. The overall consumer group tends to be younger.

3.2. Text analysis

Adopting the method of text analysis, the study investigates the commercialization path of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products, as well as the discourse construction and symbol application during the dissemination process. It mainly focuses on platforms such as short videos, Wechat official accounts, and video websites, with the main research objects being brand official introduction materials, video materials, live-streaming oral broadcasts, and comments from netizens on social media. For instance, the video of the Suzhou embroidery production process posted by the Douyin account "Xu Xiaoxiao" has received 1.9 million likes and 33,000 fan comments in the comment section due to its exquisite craftsmanship, allowing the general public to understand ICH in depth.

4. Research results

This study explores the intrinsic correlation between consumer characteristics, market performance, cultural identity and consumption behavior of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products in the commercialization process through questionnaire surveys and text analysis. Firstly, it can be concluded that consumers are getting younger and younger. In 2023, the number of consumer users reached 249 million. The 80s and 90s generations are the main consumer groups, while the 00s generation is gradually expanding. Secondly, there is the online transformation of channels, with e-commerce being the main battlefield. The transaction value of ICH items on Taobao reached a historical peak in 2023, breaking through the 100-billion-yuan mark for the first time and registering a year-on-year growth rate of 37.7%, and the growth rate of platforms such as Douyin was significant. At the same time, the market size has expanded and the growth rate has been rapid. In 2024, the number of registered enterprises related to ICH will increase by 34% year-on-year, and the market size will reach over 580 billion yuan. It is expected to reach the trillion-yuan level by 2030. The average growth rate over the past five years has reached over 8%, and the proportion of Chinese tourism integration has exceeded 60%.

However, during the research process, it was discovered that there is a development crisis for ICH (ICH) cultural and creative products: commercialization is unbalanced by 80%, the annual operating income of ICH is less than 500,000 yuan, and the annual derivative development income of top IPs exceeds 1 billion yuan, with a significant two-tiered differentiation. Finally, this research identifies the relationship between cultural identity and purchase conversion. Consumers' cultural identity with Suzhou embroidery is positively correlated with their purchase intention and actual consumption behavior. The willingness to pay and repurchase rate of People with a strong positive attitude toward Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products are significantly higher than those of the group with low cultural identity. Moreover, cultural identity promotes the conversion of purchase behavior through dimensions such as emotional resonance and value recognition.

5. Discussion

This study, from the dual perspectives of "cultural identity" and "consumption transformation", reveals the inner logic and practical measures for the restructuring of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products from "heritage" to "trendy products". The trend of the consumer group of ICH (ICH) cultural and creative products getting younger and younger is no accident. It is the result of the increasing recognition of ICH culture and the combination of contemporary advanced digital technology. Cultural identity is an inevitable prerequisite for the development of Suzhou embroidery

cultural and creative products, and also the foundation for the development of all cultures [13]. Research shows that cultural identity not only influences consumers' attitudes towards culture and products but is also directly linked to their purchase intentions. Torelli and Guo's research further indicates that in an increasingly globalized market, culture plays a fundamental driving role in the formation of consumers' identities, and the shaping of consumers' cultural identities directly affects their perception, evaluation, and behavioral patterns [14]. Therefore, the dissemination of Suzhou embroidery and other ICH creative products should not be confined to their aesthetic appearance, but rather should build a cultural narrative that resonates emotionally. Short videos and other social media platforms precisely disseminate information through such visualized videos, enhancing consumers' understanding and recognition of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products, and thereby transforming this recognition into purchasing power. The market size is continuously expanding, but the problems within the industry cannot be underestimated. How to achieve large-scale expression while maintaining the "authenticity" of traditional craftsmanship is the core challenge currently faced by Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products. Meanwhile, digital technology has injected new vitality into its development. However, the integration of technology can also lead to cultural "deterioration", weakening the original cultural depth [15].

6. Conclusion

This study found that Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products have begun to transform from "heritage" to "trendy products". Based on the development of the modern market, it is further concluded that ICH cultural and creative products must center on cultural identity, match culture with market demand, and on the premise of maintaining their own core aesthetic skills, innovatively transform the form, usage scenarios and promotional language of the products, and spread them on multiple media platforms through emotional and story-telling narrative methods to resonate emotionally with consumers. This research provides a great deal of valuable reference significance for future studies in this direction, and it constructs a theoretical logical framework from cultural identity to consumption willingness and then to purchasing behavior. Secondly, this study sorted out the commercial models of the sequential combination of ICH and IP, as well as the combination of ICH and cultural tourism. Future research should focus more on the development of Suzhou embroidery cultural and creative products in emerging fields and how to achieve a balance between commercialization and cultural authenticity for in-depth study.

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