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DIGITALIZATION IN CULTURAL BRANDING MANAGEMENT: ADAPTING BRAND STRATEGIES TO THE REGIONAL CONTEXT OF CHINA AND KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. The relevance of the work is determined by the importance of increasing the effectiveness of promoting national cultural brands in the context of the digital economy and globalization. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of digitalization on cultural branding management and the adaptation of branding strategies to the regions of China and Kazakhstan. The novelty of the study lies in its comprehensive comparative analysis of the digital cultural strategies employed by China and Kazakhstan. An adapted digital cultural branding model was developed that considers regional cultural traditions and modern digital technologies. Additionally, recommendations were made to enhance digital infrastructure and strengthen legal support for cultural promotion. During the study, various digital platforms and cultural branding practices were analyzed, their advantages and disadvantages were identified, and a comprehensive approach to the digitalization of cultural brands was developed, taking into account the interests of local communities. As a research methodology, a qualitative analysis of specific cases was conducted, along with a comparative study of international and national strategies. Statistical data and regulatory legal acts of both countries were used as an information base. The study's results showed that achieving effective digital cultural branding requires combining modern technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, multilingualism, and interactivity, with the active participation of local communities and consideration of regional identity. The study's results contribute to the development of digital management theory and practice for cultural brands, with practical significance for enhancing the international competitiveness of national cultures.

Keywords: Digitalization, cultural branding, strategy adaptation, regional context, China, Kazakhstan, digital technologies, virtual reality, multilingualism, cultural identity.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, digital technologies play a crucial role in shaping the image of nations, regions, and cultures (Levin & Mamlok, 2021). The evolution of digital communication, social media, interactive platforms, and multimedia content has significantly altered the way cultural values are perceived and disseminated. In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, conventional methods of cultural branding are being gradually replaced by novel digital formats, necessitating a reevaluation of brand positioning and management approaches (Wan F., Li J., 2024). This is particularly evident in countries situated in areas of intense cultural and economic interaction.

China and Kazakhstan are prime examples of such nations. Their collaboration spans a broad spectrum, encompassing economic and infrastructural aspects, as well as educational and tourism endeavors. Simultaneously, the cultural facet of cooperation takes center stage, necessitating the development of a potent and regionally attuned branding strategy. In this context, digitalization serves not merely as a technological trend but as a strategic asset for intercultural communication and the creation of a resilient image for countries and regions. The significance of this research topic lies in the necessity for a holistic approach to cultural brand management, one that considers both the distinctive characteristics of national identity and the potential of digital tools.

The importance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach and practical relevance.

From a theoretical perspective, the work deepens our understanding of cultural branding in the era of digital transformation and cross-cultural communication. On a practical level, the findings of this study can be applied by government agencies, tourism organizations, cultural centers, and companies operating in the field of international marketing and communication. The creation of effective digital cultural branding strategies tailored to regional characteristics enhances international appeal, strengthens national identity, and fosters cultural tourism in both China and Kazakhstan. The objective of this research is to examine and develop efficient methods for the digital transformation of cultural brand strategies, taking into account the regional and cultural peculiarities of China and Kazakhstan. To accomplish this objective, the following tasks have been identified, as to:

- * explore the theoretical and methodological foundations of cultural branding and its evolution in the context of digitalization.
- * investigate the unique aspects of cultural brand perception in the context of national and regional identity in China and Kazakhstan.
- * analyze the existing digital tools and platforms used in cultural brand management.
- * conduct a comparative analysis of successful digital cultural branding initiatives in both countries.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in proposing an innovative approach to adapting a cultural brand in a digital environment, tailored to the specific regional and cultural context of China and Kazakhstan. The research has identified and systematized the disparities in the digital perception of cultural brands in the two countries, as well as the level of audience engagement in digital communications related to cultural branding. The study has also explored the role of digital platforms, such as social networks, multimedia services, and interactive communication technologies, in shaping and managing the cultural image of the region. Based on this analysis, recommendations have been formulated for developing flexible and adaptable digital cultural branding strategies that can be used in strategic communications and cultural policy. The research contributes to the advancement of scientific and practical understanding of digitalization as a crucial resource in the field of cultural branding. It can serve as a foundation for the creation of contemporary and effective brand strategies that consider both global trends and the local cultural peculiarities of China and Kazakhstan.

Materials and methods

The current study is founded on a multifaceted approach that integrates legal, cultural, sociological, and marketing perspectives. The primary objective of this approach was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the digital transformation of cultural branding in the regional context of China and Kazakhstan.

To achieve this goal, we employed a range of methodologies. The comparative legal method was employed to examine the disparities and similarities in the regulatory frameworks of the two countries regarding the digital environment and cultural policy. This allowed us to identify the institutional characteristics that form the foundation for digital cultural branding at the national level.

Utilized social media platforms such as WeChat, Instagram, and YouTube to analyze official digital platforms, websites of cultural ministries, and travel agencies. These platforms serve as channels for the dissemination of cultural branding elements from both countries.

The case study approach offered a chance to examine concrete instances of successful digital strategies employed by cultural brands, such as the Digital Silk Road Initiative in China and the Visit Kazakhstan project. The systematic and structural-functional approach allowed for the examination of branding as an interconnected system, encompassing digital infrastructure, government assistance, creative industries, and audience perception. The comparative analysis method enabled a comparison of digital practices in the two countries to assess their effectiveness and adaptability to the regional cultural context.

The theoretical and methodological framework for this research was drawn from the works of domestic and international scholars in the fields of branding, digital communication, intercultural

communication, and creative economics. The research drew upon the insights of scholars such as S.Hanna, J.Rowley, B.Keegan, who proposed the concept of a national brand(Hanna S., Rowley J., Keegan B.:107); X.Wu, F.Zhang, Y.Zhou, who developed the brand's structure and strategy (Wu X., Zhang F., Zhou Y.,2022:5350); and N.Kervyn, T.S. Fiske, C.Malone, who specializes in consumer perception of the brand(Kervyn N., Fiske S. T., Malone C.,2022:53). Additionally, the research incorporated the work of Chinese and Kazakh scholars, including Guan X. (Guan X.,2024:), Li S.(Li S. et al.,2023:1486), A.Zhanibek, R.Abazov, A.Khazbulatov (Zhanibek A., Abazov R., Khazbulatov A.,2022:72) and others, who have explored topics related to digitalization, national image, and the development of cultural strategies.

A significant portion of the research was dedicated to the examination of international documents, including UNESCO's recommendations on the digital transformation of cultural heritage, reports from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and the Digital Development Strategy of Kazakhstan, as well as strategic documents from China, such as the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, which emphasized cultural collaboration. These sources provided a framework for global guidelines and standards in the realm of digital cultural engagement.

Moreover, the study employed official statistical data provided by the Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, the World Bank. These sources served as the empirical foundation for analyzing the level of digitalization and public engagement in cultural digital practices.

Furthermore, the study examined regulations and laws governing cultural policy, digital transformation, and branding in both countries. These included the PRC Law on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the ROK Law on Culture.

The combination of methods and sources employed ensured the scientific rigor, comprehensiveness, and practical applicability of the research. It also allowed us to achieve the objectives set for studying digital cultural branding strategies in the context of China and Kazakhstan.

Discussions

The concept of cultural branding, its evolution in the digital age, and the adaptation of branding strategies to regional contexts have been extensively explored in both Western and Eastern academic circles over the past two decades. In the scholarly discourse on this subject, several research areas can be identified: the evolution of the theory of national branding, the exploration of digital tools for cultural promotion, the examination of intercultural communication in the context of globalization, and the examination of specific examples of national and regional brands.

The foundation of the scholarly debate was laid by S.Hanna, J.Rowley, B.Keegan, who introduced the notion of "nation branding" and emphasized the significance of managing a country's image as an asset in the global arena. They concept posits that culture is a crucial factor in shaping a nation's enduring perception, yet his writings do not sufficiently address the digital environment, which today wields a decisive influence on how a brand is perceived abroad.

X.Wu, F.Zhang, Y.Zhou examined the structure and perception of a brand through the lens of consumer logic, but their theories primarily focus on commercial brands. This limitation becomes apparent when applying these approaches to cultural, regional, and national brands, particularly in the context of digital transformation.

In recent times, there has been a surge in research exploring the integration of digital technologies into cultural brand management. The work of B. Ajitoni specifically focuses on digital storytelling, social media, and virtual reality as means of creating a cultural image(Ajitoni B.,2024:90). The authors highlight that digitalization makes cultural content more accessible, yet it also intensifies global competition for audience attention. However, these studies often overlook the nuances of regional cultural contexts and fail to account for the varying cultural sensitivities of audiences, such as those in Central Asia and East Asia.

The Chinese scholarly community is actively exploring the impact of digital diplomacy and

cultural soft power on China's international image. He Y. for instance, have examined the digital initiatives of the Chinese government, including the Digital Silk Road strategy, the Douyin platform (a Chinese version of TikTok), and digital museums and national archives(He Y.,2024:97). These studies provide a comprehensive view of China's cultural promotion strategy, but they often overestimate the level of international engagement and fail to adequately analyze the adaptation to foreign contexts.

In Kazakhstan, the issue of cultural branding is approached in a fragmented manner. The works of A. Zhanibek, R.Abazov, A.Khazbulatov highlight the importance of creating a positive image of the country through tourism, art, and cultural events. However, these works do not sufficiently address the impact of digitalization, and there is a lack of in-depth analysis of how digital platforms can be integrated into the strategy for promoting the Kazakh cultural brand. This indicates a significant gap that requires a more systematic and practical approach, particularly in the context of competing for online attention.

Several studies focus on branding on a global scale, but they often overlook local cultural codes, language barriers, and political and economic differences. This is evident, for example, in the universalization of recommendations aimed at countries with a high level of digitalization, which may not be applicable in Kazakhstan.

The research conducted has demonstrated that digitalization is indeed a crucial element in the development of a cultural brand. However, its effectiveness is contingent upon the ability to tailor digital strategies to the cultural context of a particular region. China boasts a well-developed digital infrastructure and a state-controlled approach to cultural expansion, while Kazakhstan is still in the early stages of this process. However, it is precisely the process of regional adaptation and consideration of local cultural perceptions that is essential for building a sustainable and authentic brand. Thus, within the framework of this, the following points can be emphasized:

The existing scholarly literature provides a solid theoretical foundation, but it requires further empirical research to be conducted in specific regions. Foreign approaches often lack cultural sensitivity and fail to account for the unique cultural identity of Central Asia. The field of Kazakh historiography on this subject necessitates the active integration of the digital dimension into cultural branding. There is a pressing need to develop practical recommendations for adapting cultural strategies through the use of digital tools.

This research contributes to the scholarly discourse by proposing an integrated approach that combines elements of digital marketing, cultural policy, and intercultural adaptation. Through the application of comparative analysis, case studies, and content analysis, it has been demonstrated that the key to successful digital cultural branding lies not only in the availability of technology but also in the ability to communicate with the audience in their cultural "language" — both literally and metaphorically.

Results

The research conducted has yielded important insights into the characteristics of digitalization in cultural branding management and the processes of adapting brand strategies to the regional context of China and Kazakhstan. The research was conducted using a comparative approach, system analysis, content analysis of digital platforms and regulations, and a qualitative analysis of successful cultural promotion cases. These methods allowed us to identify both similarities and differences in digital cultural branding strategies in these countries.

One of the key findings was the divergence in the approaches of the two countries, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 – Comparative analysis of digital cultural branding strategies in China and Kazakhstan

Indicator	China	Kazakhstan
Level of Digital Infrastructure	High, state-supported	Medium, fragmented digitalization
Strategy Centralization	Centralized through government programs	Decentralized, often project-based approach
Platforms Used	WeChat, Douyin, Baidu, digital museums	Instagram, YouTube, "Kazakh Tourism" website
Audience Engagement	Gamification, AR/VR, storytelling	Photos, videos, participation in festivals
International Positioning	Active promotion via cultural diplomacy	Limited, targeted initiatives
Regulatory Framework	Well-structured, strategic	Limited, mostly protective

According to Table 1, both countries are successfully using digital strategies. However, China demonstrates a more systemic, centralized approach to digital branding, relying on state support and its own platforms. And Kazakhstan uses a more fragmented and project-based approach, relying on international platforms.

Content analysis of digital platforms, including official websites, social media accounts, mobile apps, and media projects, has shown that China is actively incorporating digital technologies, such as augmented reality, virtual reality, digital exhibitions, and cultural content gamification, into its cultural diplomacy efforts(Zhang A. et al.,2025:314). In contrast, Kazakhstan primarily relies on visual and event-based formats, often without digital support or localization.

By examining the laws and international agreements, including UNESCO directives, the Digital Silk Road initiative, and documents from the Ministries of Culture of both countries, it has become evident that China has a well-established legal framework for the digital transformation of culture. In contrast, Kazakhstan's regulatory framework is limited to supporting heritage and does not encompass branding strategies in the digital realm. This disparity is evident in practice, as Chinese cultural content is tailored to various international markets, while Kazakh content is limited to the Russian-speaking and English-speaking segments.The study conducted a detailed analysis of several important examples of creating cultural brands using digital technologies in China and Kazakhstan. This allowed us to determine how to adapt branding strategies to the specifics of the region and modern digital trends.

The Digital Gugun Palace Museum in Beijing is a remarkable example of how digital technologies can be seamlessly integrated into Chinese culture(Luo K., Khalis F. B. M., Guo M.,2024:4). The museum offers virtual tours using virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) technologies, allowing users worldwide to explore the Imperial Palace and its collections without physically visiting. The visual style is carefully aligned with traditional Chinese cultural codes, and the platform supports multiple languages, expanding its international audience.

The museum places a strong emphasis on storytelling, using interactive elements to engage visitors emotionally and intellectually. The museum actively engages with visitors through social media and interactive exhibitions, contributing to the dissemination of cultural content. This case study demonstrates the successful combination of technology and cultural heritage, resulting in a recognizable and sustainable brand.

The China Cultural Center serves as a digital hub, bringing together a variety of cultural initiatives and projects aimed at promoting Chinese culture abroad(Minglei W.,2024:97). The platform offers multilingual access, helping to overcome language barriers and facilitating international collaboration. A key aspect is the centralized management and support provided by

government agencies, which enables the coordination of efforts between different institutions and artists. The platform employs innovative methods to engage audiences, including online lectures, virtual exhibitions, interactive workshops, and digital cultural festivals. This approach enhances China's cultural diplomacy and contributes to the creation of a positive image of the country on the international stage.

This Kazakh initiative aims to showcase the country's cultural heritage and history through digital media. Uly Dala Eli employs contemporary digital tools to create visual content, videos, and interactive materials that introduce viewers to the rich history of the Kazakh people and the steppe region (Nurbossynova B. A., 2024:4). Despite having fewer resources compared to their Chinese counterparts, the project emphasizes local cultural symbols and national identity, which helps to strengthen the domestic cultural brand. However, the digital platform of the project still has limitations in terms of multilingualism and does not always utilize interactive technologies to their full potential, which hinders its broader international promotion.

The EXPO-2017 in Astana was a significant event for Kazakhstan's international promotion (Zh S. S. et al., 2021: 012020). The digital strategy involved the creation of a comprehensive online platform with a multilingual interface, the integration of social media, and the use of videos and interactive maps to showcase the country's cultural and technological achievements. A key aspect of the strategy was to engage the local community, including artists, musicians, and activists, to produce authentic content. The use of digital technologies not only helped to capture the attention of international visitors but also contributed to the long-term cultural image of Kazakhstan. However, after the exhibition, the support and development of the digital platform declined, limiting its potential for lasting impact.

These examples showcase various strategies for digital cultural promotion, ranging from the centralized government and extensive digital infrastructure in China to local initiatives and event marketing in Kazakhstan. By examining their strengths and weaknesses, we can develop a flexible framework that considers regional nuances and leverages contemporary digital tools.

Based on a qualitative case study (for instance, the Gugong Digital Museum in Beijing, the China Cultural Center platform, as well as the Kazakh project “Uly Dala Eli” and the digital strategy of Astana EXPO-2017, a digital cultural brand model was proposed, comprising the following elements:

- * A unified platform or digital hub;
- * A tailored visual style and symbolism;
- * A multilingual interface;
- * User engagement (through storytelling, interactivity, and feedback);
- * Local community participation in content creation and dissemination.

The analysis of systems has demonstrated that effective cultural branding management is impossible without coordination at all levels, from the strategic (governmental) to the operational (museum, artist, blogger). In China, this is achieved through centralized efforts, while in Kazakhstan, it is achieved through spontaneous and deliberate efforts, which limits the stability of the country's digital image in the global context.

Furthermore, the analysis of statistical data, including reports from organizations such as the World Bank, UNESCO, Google Trends, We Are Social, and the Digital 2024 Report, revealed that the level of digital cultural engagement in China, including digital museum visits, cultural content consumption, and online tourism, is significantly higher than in Kazakhstan. This underscores the need for a review and enhancement of digital strategies in the Kazakh cultural sector.

The findings of the study support the hypothesis that successful digital cultural branding requires not only technological advancement but also a deep understanding of the local cultural context, including the region's cultural codes and historical significance. As a result of the analysis of practical examples, the theoretical conclusions of the study become more specific and complete. This confirms the need for a comprehensive and flexible approach to creating a digital cultural brand. This

approach should combine modern technologies, take into account the cultural characteristics of the region and actively involve local communities. Based on these results, an adaptive digital brand model was created that takes into account the regional cultural code. Recommendations on legislative and digital support for the promotion of cultural brands were also developed. The scientific value of the study lies in a systematic comparison of the experience of China and Kazakhstan. As a result, an adaptive digital brand model was developed and recommendations were proposed to improve the effectiveness of digital cultural promotion, taking into account regional specifics.

Conclusions

It is worth emphasizing that the use of digital technologies in cultural branding management plays a crucial role in the successful promotion of national culture on the world stage. After conducting a detailed analysis and comparing the experiences of China and Kazakhstan, we identified the characteristic features and methods of adapting brand strategies to regional conditions, taking into account digital technologies and cultural characteristics. The following results were obtained in the course of the study/ It was:

- * found that modern digital technologies such as virtual and augmented reality, multilingual platforms and interactive formats play an important role in the formation of recognizable and sustainable cultural brands.

- * confirmed that centralized government management and coordination are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of digital cultural promotion, as is the case in China.

- * revealed that local initiatives and event marketing in Kazakhstan have the potential for development, but require further development of the digital infrastructure and legislative framework.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that it conducted a systematic comparative analysis of the digital strategies of China and Kazakhstan. Based on this analysis, an adaptive digital cultural branding model has been developed that takes into account regional cultural characteristics and digital opportunities. Recommendations were also formulated to improve the legal and digital provision of cultural promotion. As a result of the conducted research, a comprehensive approach has been developed that can be applied to increase the competitiveness of national cultural brands on the world stage. This approach contributes to the theory and practice of cultural branding management in the era of digital transformation.

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ЦИФРОВИЗАЦИЯ В УПРАВЛЕНИИ КУЛЬТУРНЫМ БРЕНДИНГОМ: АДАПТАЦИЯ СТРАТЕГИЙ БРЕНДА К РЕГИОНАЛЬНОМУ КОНТЕКСТУ КИТАЯ И КАЗАХСТАНА

Аннотация. Актуальность работы обусловлена важностью повышения эффективности продвижения национальных культурных брендов в условиях цифровой экономики и глобализации. Целью данного исследования является изучение влияния цифровизации на управление культурным брендингом и особенностей адаптации стратегий брендинга к регионам Китая и Казахстана. Новизна исследования заключается в комплексном сравнительном анализе цифровых культурных стратегий Китая и Казахстана. Разработана адаптивная модель цифрового культурного брендинга, которая учитывает как региональные культурные традиции, так и современные цифровые технологии. Предложены рекомендации по улучшению цифровой инфраструктуры и совершенствованию правового обеспечения культурного продвижения. В ходе исследования были проанализированы различные цифровые платформы и практики культурного брендинга, выявлены их преимущества и недостатки, а также разработан комплексный подход к цифровизации культурного бренда, учитывающий интересы местных сообществ. Методология исследования. Проведен качественный анализ кейсов, а также сравнительный анализ международных и национальных стратегий. Источниковой базой послужили статистические данные и нормативно-правовые акты двух стран. Результаты исследования показали, что для эффективного цифрового культурного брендинга необходимо сочетание современных технологий — таких как виртуальная и дополненная реальность, мультязычность и интерактивность — с активным вовлечением местного сообщества и учётом региональной идентичности. Выводы исследования вносят вклад в развитие теории и практики цифрового управления культурными

брендами, а также имеют практическое значение для повышения международной конкурентоспособности национальных культур.

Ключевые слова: цифровизация, культурный брендинг, адаптация стратегий, региональный контекст, Китай, Казахстан, цифровые технологии, виртуальная реальность, многоязычность, культурная самобытность.

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МӘДЕНИ БРЕНДИНГТІ БАСҚАРУДАҒЫ ЦИФРЛАНДЫРУ: БРЕНД СТРАТЕГИЯЛАРЫН ҚЫТАЙ МЕН ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ АЙМАҚТЫҚ ЖАҒДАЙЫНА БЕЙІМДЕУ

Аннотация. Жұмыстың өзектілігі цифрлық экономика мен жаһандану жағдайында ұлттық мәдени брендтерді ілгерілету тиімділігін арттырудың маңыздылығымен айқындалады. Зерттеудің мақсаты – цифрландырудың мәдени брендингті басқаруға әсерін және Қытай мен Қазақстан өңірлеріне бейімделген брендинг стратегияларын зерттеу. Зерттеудің жаңалығы Қытай мен Қазақстанның цифрлық мәдени стратегияларын кешенді салыстырмалы талдауында жатыр. Аймақтық мәдени дәстүрлер мен заманауи цифрлық технологияларды ескеретін бейімделген цифрлық мәдени брендинг моделі әзірленді. Сондай-ақ, цифрлық инфрақұрылымды жетілдіру және мәдени ілгерілетуді құқықтық қамтамасыз етуді жақсарту бойынша ұсыныстар берілді. Зерттеу барысында түрлі цифрлық платформалар мен мәдени брендинг тәжірибелері талданды, олардың артықшылықтары мен кемшіліктері анықталды, сондай-ақ жергілікті қауымдастықтардың мүдделерін ескеретін мәдени брендті цифрландыруға кешенді тәсіл әзірленді. Зерттеу әдіснамасы ретінде нақты кейстерге сапалы талдау, сондай-ақ халықаралық және ұлттық стратегияларға салыстырмалы талдау жүргізілді. Ақпараттық база ретінде екі елдің статистикалық деректері мен нормативтік-құқықтық актілері пайдаланылды. Зерттеу нәтижелері тиімді цифрлық мәдени брендингке қол жеткізу үшін заманауи технологияларды — виртуалды және кеңейтілген шындықты, көптілділікті, интерактивтілікті — жергілікті қауымдастықтардың белсенді қатысуымен және өңірлік бірегейлікті ескере отырып біріктіру қажет екенін көрсетті. Зерттеу қорытындылары мәдени брендтерді цифрлық басқару теориясы мен практикасын дамытуға өз үлесін қосады және ұлттық мәдениеттердің халықаралық бәсекеге қабілеттілігін арттыруға практикалық маңызға ие.

Кілт сөздер: цифрландыру, мәдени брендинг, стратегияларды бейімдеу, Өңірлік контекст, Қытай, Қазақстан, цифрлық технологиялар, виртуалды шындық, көптілділік, мәдени бірегейлік.

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