

Visual Culture and Brand Communication: How Chinese Beauty Brands Engage Japanese Consumers

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Abstract

With the acceleration of internationalization among Chinese beauty brands, the Japanese market, characterized by its mature consumer base and unique cultural context, has become a key strategic destination. This study analyzes short-video advertisements targeting the Japanese market on Instagram by three major Chinese beauty brands: Florasis, Flower Knows, and Perfect Diary. Based on visual social semiotics and employing multimodal discourse analysis, the current study examines their cross-cultural communication strategies across four dimensions: visual content, expression, context, and culture. Analyzing 46 advertising videos released in 2024 using quantitative and qualitative methods, this study reveals that the brands adopt differentiated visual positioning, leveraging Eastern aesthetic cultural symbols, scenario transplantation, and celebrity endorsements to enhance advertising effectiveness. Key findings indicate: Florasis's Eastern ritualistic expression, despite being highly distinctive, needs to balance "cultural export" and "local adaptation"; Flower Knows, albeit appealing to young Japanese consumers with dreamy elements, lacks cultural uniqueness; and Perfect Diary's celebrity strategy, although efficient, risks homogenization. Furthermore, given Instagram's algorithm favoring high-engagement content, optimizing multimodal elements (text, music, hashtags) is crucial for improving algorithmic visibility. This study finally recommends that Chinese beauty brands should deepen the visual translation of local cultural symbols, construct a dual "emotional-functional" narrative framework, and dynamically optimize multimodal expressions based on the data.

Keywords: Chinese beauty brands, visual culture, multimodal discourse analysis, cross-cultural communication, Japanese market, brand communication strategy

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Introduction

With the rapid internationalization of Chinese beauty brands, Japan has emerged as a vital target market, thanks to its highly developed beauty consumption landscape and unique cultural background. According to the data from China Association of Fragrance Flavor and Cosmetic Industries, the scale of the Chinese cosmetics market reached 1,044.525 billion RMB in 2023, making China the largest cosmetics consumer market in the world. In 2024, China's cosmetics export value was expected to reach 50.99 billion RMB, with Japan ranking among the top five export markets (Li, 2025). A survey conducted by Facebook Japan revealed that Japanese users were particularly enthusiastic about shopping on Instagram, with the proportion of users checking product details through posts with shopping tags being three times higher than in other countries (Sato et al., 2022). This creates expanded digital channels for cross-border communication for Chinese beauty brands. Current research indicates that social media has become an important platform for brands to engage in cross-cultural communication (Buzeta et al., 2023; Codignola, 2021; Thanasi-Boçe et al., 2023). Among these platforms, Instagram, with its visual orientation, particularly supports beauty brands in achieving market reach, shaping brand image, and driving sales growth (Lim & Lee, 2021; Wan et al., 2020). While short video advertisements are becoming increasingly significant in brand communication, their application in cross-cultural contexts still requires further exploration. Therefore, this study examines three representative brands—Flower Knows, Florasis, and Perfect Diary—focusing on the short video advertisements they released on Instagram for the Japanese market. The aim is to investigate the following key research questions:

1. How do Chinese beauty brands construct their brand image and attract Japanese consumers through the three layers of visual rhetoric (i. e. media texts, spatial texts, event texts)?
2. How can visual symbols such as “China chic” and “Kawaii aesthetics” be matched with the aesthetic preferences of Japanese consumers to strengthen emotional connections?
3. How can localized narratives and differentiated expressions be coordinated in short video advertisements to enhance market acceptance?

This study employs multimodal discourse analysis as the core method, systematically deconstructing the interplay of text, images, and sound. Meanwhile, it utilizes visual social semiotics to analyze the cultural coding and symbolic meanings of visual signs. By studying the patterns of cross-cultural visual strategies used by Chinese beauty brands, this study provides a theoretical framework and practical insights for optimizing international market communication strategies.

Methods

Theoretical Analysis Framework

Barthes (1977) posited that a “relay” relationship could form between text and images, mutually complementing each other's meanings. O'Toole (1997) analyzed visual art (images) using a systemic functional linguistics approach. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) proposed a framework for visual grammar analysis that encompassed representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning, providing a theoretical basis for image analysis. Chinese scholar Zhang (2009) introduced a comprehensive framework for multimodal discourse analysis, including four dimensions: culture, context, content, and

expression. This paper will draw on the visual grammar framework articulated by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) and Zhang's (2009) comprehensive framework for multimodal discourse analysis. By integrating these two frameworks, we, to some extent, will create a categorical construction divided into four levels: visual content, visual expression, visual context, and visual culture, as shown in Table 1. This study will focus on the analysis of visual modalities in short videos on social media (Instagram) and explore social visual signs.

Table 1

Category Construction and Analysis Framework of This Study

First-Level Coding	Second-Level Coding	Third-Level Coding	Initial concept
Visual content	Visual Theme	Theme style	The overall visual style characteristics presented by the advertisement
		Background Environment	Solid Color Background, Arranged Environment, daily environment.
		Character behavior	product description, usage process, image display, content script
		Character gender	Male, female
		Contact	provide, request.
		Shot size	close-up, medium close-up, medium shot, long shot, wide shot
		View Types	low angle, high angle, eye-level angle
		Structure	narrative representation, conceptual representation
		Rhetorical devices	Condensation, Transplantation
		Metaphorical rhetoric	Opposition, Domestication
Visual Expression	Rhetorical Structure		Object metaphor
Visual Context	Rhetorical context	Rhetorical context	Dynamic analysis of communication context
Visual Culture	Rhetorical culture	Critique of Ideas	Critique of Cultural Values

This framework is particularly suitable for analyzing the flow of visual information in short videos and helps to reveal how Chinese beauty brands establish cultural identity in the Japanese market through visual strategies.

Research Design

Sample Selection

The research objects are short video advertisements from three major Chinese cosmetic brands—Florasis, Flower Knows, and Perfect Diary—targeting the Japanese market on Instagram. The selection criteria are as follows:

- * Clearly targeting the Japanese market (including Japanese text and Japanese cultural elements).
- * Having clear brand communication objectives.
- * Published between January 2024 and December 2024 to ensure timeliness.
- * Possessing engagement data (over 10,000 views).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection Process:

- * Searching for target content through the brands' official Instagram accounts.
- * Filtering short video advertisements that meet the selection criteria.
- * Collecting basic video information (publication date, video length, engagement data).
- * Conducting preliminary classification of video content.

Data Analysis Methods

Following the multimodal discourse analysis framework in Table 1, we will systematically encode visual symbols and extract themes, focusing on:

- * The selection and combination methods of visual content elements.
- * The integration and expression of traditional Chinese aesthetic elements with local Japanese aesthetics.
- * How brand cultural values are effectively conveyed through visual symbols.

This study combines quantitative statistics and qualitative coding methods. Through multimodal interaction analysis, it reveals the visual communication strategy patterns and cultural adaptation mechanisms of Chinese cosmetic brands in the Japanese market.

Results and Discussion

This study conducts a systematic analysis of short video advertisements released by Chinese cosmetic brands (Florasis, Flower Knows, and Perfect Diary) targeting the Japanese market on the Instagram platform, based on the aforementioned multimodal visual analysis framework. In the process of this study, the character video content from the three brands in 2024 was used as the data foundation, and a total of 46 videos were screened; thus, there were 12 videos from Florasis, 9 from Flower Knows, and 3 from Perfect Diary. The results and discussion are explored from four dimensions: visual content, visual expression, visual context, and visual culture.

Analysis and Discussion of Visual Content

Presentation of Visual Themes and Symbols

The study finds that the three brands exhibit significant differentiation in visual themes based on their respective market positioning, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Comparison of Visual Theme Characteristics Across Different Brands*

Brand	Theme Style	Background Environmental Characteristics	Character Behavior	Character Gender
Florasis	Eastern Aesthetics and Cultural Heritage	Solid Color Background (75%), Everyday Environment (17%), Staged Environment (8%)	Content Script (25%), Image Display (67%), Usage Process (8%)	Female (100%)
Flower Knows	Combination of Girlhood Dreams and Japanese Aesthetics	Solid Color Background (22%), Everyday Environment (22%), Staged Environment (56%)	Content Script (22%), Image Display (67%), Usage Process (11%)	Female (100%)
Perfect Diary	Celebrity-Driven and Pragmatism	Staged Environment (100%)	Product Narrative (100%)	Male (100%)

The results of the visual theme analysis indicate significant differences in the visual theme strategies of the three brands.

Florasis employs solid color backgrounds (75%) to highlight elements of Eastern aesthetics, with character presentation (67%) reflecting cultural heritage. Flower Knows tends to create environments (56%) that cultivate a dreamlike atmosphere for young women, also placing emphasis on character presentation (67%) while increasing interactivity. Perfect Diary relies entirely on environmental arrangements (100%) and product narratives featuring Japanese male celebrities (100%), adopting a localization strategy with celebrity endorsements.

Figure 1*Screenshot of a Florasis Video Featuring a Modern Cheongsam Female Image*

Figure 2

Screenshot of a Flower Knows Video Featuring a Pink Dreamlike Scene

**Figure 3**

Screenshot of a Perfect Diary Video Featuring a Product Demonstration by a Japanese Male Celebrity



The visual theme analysis reveals that Florasis emphasizes cultural uniqueness and artistry, Flower Knows pursues youthfulness and emotional resonance, while Perfect Diary focuses on the star effect and rapid market penetration. Each of these three different strategies has its strengths: Florasis's cultural heritage approach establishes a unique brand identity; Flower Knows's fusion strategy broadens acceptance among younger consumers; and Perfect Diary's celebrity strategy effectively reduces barriers to cross-cultural communication. Comparative analysis shows that background environment and character actions are key visual elements for brand differentiation. Florasis creates a sense of sophistication with solid color backgrounds (75%), Flower Knows generates a dreamlike atmosphere through environmental arrangements (56%), and Perfect Diary fully employs environmental setups (100%) to ensure professionalism and localization. This differentiated strategy enables each brand to carve out its position and audience within the highly competitive Japanese beauty market.

Interaction Rules and Cinematic Language

Table 3

Brand Interaction and Camera Language Analysis

Brand	Interaction Types	Shot Scale Distribution	Perspective Types	Interaction Effects
Florasis	Providing Type (75%), Requesting Type (25%)	Medium Shot (45%), Long Shot (35%), Close-up (20%)	Eye Level (60%), High Angle (25%), Low Angle (15%)	Emphasize the brand's aesthetic and elegant character through cultural ambiance and a sense of distance
Flower Knows	Providing Type (56%), Requesting Type (44%)	Close-up (53%), Medium Close-up (23%), Medium Shot (14%), Long Shot (7%), Wide Shot (2%)	Eye Level (92%), High Angle (5%), Low Angle (3%)	Focus on intimacy and immersive interaction, providing the audience with a relaxed and enjoyable experience
Perfect Diary	Providing Type (67.7%), Requesting Type (32.3%)	Close-up (64.4%), Medium Close-up (13.6%), Medium Shot (17.3%), Long Shot (2.6%), Wide Shot (1.1%)	Eye Level (81.5%), High Angle (13.8%), Low Angle (4.8%)	Focus on details and realism, enhancing persuasion through clear product presentation

The three domestic Chinese beauty brands exhibit distinct visual communication strategies. Florasis creates an aesthetic distance rich in cultural connotation through provided interaction and a combination of medium and long shots; Flower Knows employs a balanced interactive approach with numerous close-ups to foster an intimate yet non-intrusive relationship; and Perfect Diary focuses on solicited interaction and a combination of medium shots and close-ups to directly capture audience's attention and establish an immediate connection, forming a differentiated brand visual identity system.

Narrative Structure and Information Transmission

Table 4

Narrative Structure and Information Delivery Analysis

Brand	Narrative Type	Narrative Representation Ratio	Concept Representation Ratio	Narrative Example
Florasis	Cultural Depth Narrative	64%	36%	Visual Linear Presentation of Nomadic Aesthetics
Flower Knows	Contextualized Concept Narrative	35%	65%	Sweet Girly Party Scene with Context Switching
Perfect Diary	Celebrity Recommendation Narrative	21%	79%	Celebrity Directly Stating Product Features

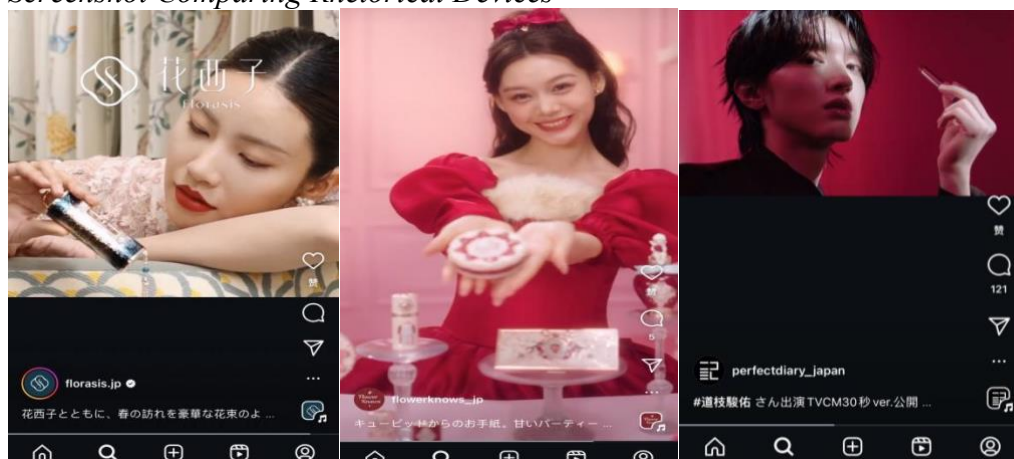
Narrative structure analysis reveals that Florasis primarily uses cultural depth narratives, conveying the brand story and reinforcing memory points through the linear presentation of cultural symbols such as cheongsams and nomadic aesthetics. Flower Knows employs contextualized conceptual narratives, integrating dreamy scenarios such as sweet Lolita parties into the storytelling, balancing product display with context building. Perfect Diary, moreover, mainly uses celebrity recommendation narratives, directly explaining product features to simplify the information delivery process and enhance consumers' rapid understanding of product functions.

Visual Expression Analysis

Comparison of Rhetorical Devices

Analysis of the Instagram short videos of the three makeup brands reveals distinct differences in their rhetorical strategies. Florasis is dominated by condensation rhetoric, merging multiple traditional Chinese elements and product features into a single frame or short period, establishing brand recognition through high-density information delivery. Flower Knows favors transplantation rhetoric, placing products in dreamy scenarios with a cute, girly style, creating an approachable brand image full of affinity and attracting emotional resonance from young female consumers by fusing a youthful atmosphere with product features. Perfect Diary, however, emphasizes a strategy combining domestication and transplantation rhetoric, transforming professional makeup concepts into easy-to-understand language through male celebrity advertising, while also integrating product features into consumers' daily scenarios through celebrity influence, achieving a balance between professionalism and approachability, and enhancing brand authority and accessibility. It is worth noting that the three brands have chosen differentiated rhetorical strategies based on their respective positioning, effectively differentiating themselves in the market and building a unique brand language system.

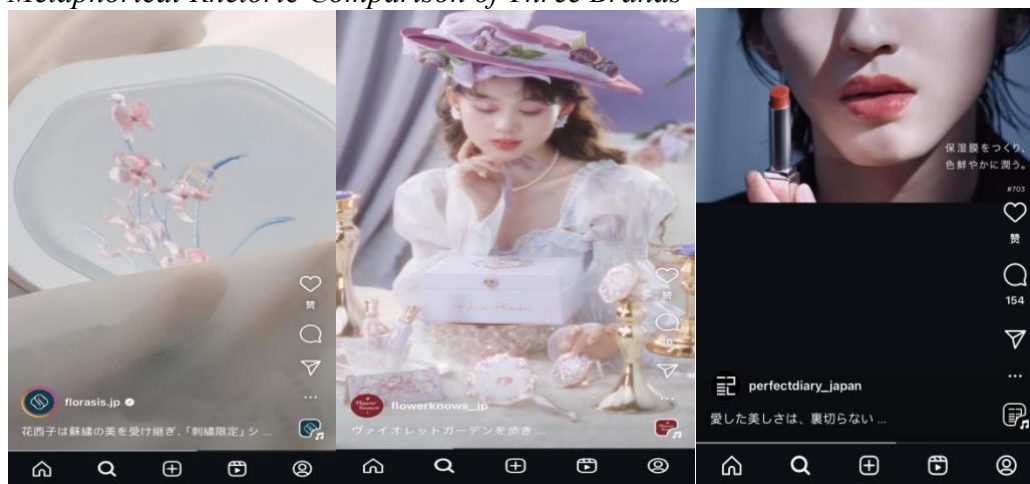
Figure 4
Screenshot Comparing Rhetorical Devices



Metaphorical Rhetoric Analysis

All three brands cleverly employ differentiated visual symbols to construct distinct metaphorical systems, effectively conveying their core values and emotional appeals. Florasis utilizes the metaphor of cultural heritage by selecting representative traditional cultural symbols such as the concentric lock and embroidery as visual elements, artfully blending them with modern makeup. This design strategy not only successfully conveys a profound Chinese traditional aesthetic but further communicates the brand values of “artisan craftsmanship” and “cultural confidence,” making Florasis products more than just makeup. They embody a cultural depth and historical heritage that transcends the surface, thereby evoking a sense of cultural identity in consumers. Knowing that Florasis focuses on the excavation and presentation of traditional culture, it is safe to say that Flower Knows concentrates on creating a visual world full of dreamlike colors. By using a large number of soft and romantic elements such as bows and flowers, Flower Knows successfully metaphorizes the emotions of youth and innocence, accurately grasping the psychological needs of young women. Its visual language is dedicated to evoking young women’s aspirations for a beautiful and ideal life, cleverly positioning makeup products as a medium for realizing girlish dreams, thus establishing a deep emotional resonance in the minds of consumers and stimulating their desire to purchase. Different from the previous two, Perfect Diary adopts a more direct and effective strategy. Through visual symbols such as male celebrity endorsements and facial close-ups, they construct a dual metaphor of professionalism and user experience. The image of celebrities not only directly implies the authority of the products, quickly establishing consumer trust, but the close-ups of lips also visually demonstrate the product’s usage effect, enhancing persuasiveness. This combination of strategies emphasizes the reliability of product effects while enhancing the brand’s recognition and influence among diverse audiences through celebrity endorsement. Through these three ingeniously designed, distinct metaphorical strategies, each of them demonstrates unique brand charm in the fierce market competition, successfully conveying their respective brand philosophies and emotional values, thereby winning the favor of consumers.

Figure 5
Metaphorical Rhetoric Comparison of Three Brands



Visual Context Analysis

This section mainly explores the communication context and rhetorical strategies of the three beauty brands in Instagram short video advertisements, covering the rhetorical situation, rhetorical context, and the dynamic process of the overall communication path.

Table 5
Comparison of Brand Visual Context Characteristics

Brand	Rhetorical Situation	Rhetorical Context	Communication Path
Florasis	Integration of Eastern Rituals and Daily Life	Eastern Aesthetic Colors + Everyday Life Representation + Emotional Resonance	Cultural Context → Emotional Resonance → Aesthetic Identification
Flower Knows	Sweet Rituals and Product Display	Sweet Style + Lifelike Characters + Emotional Resonance	Contextual Embedding → Emotional Resonance → Direct Conversion
Perfect Diary	Neutral Rituals and Authoritative Interpretation	Neutral Color Palette + Authoritative Presentation + Interpretive Interaction	Authoritative Endorsement → Rational Cognition → Functional Identification

Florasis integrates Eastern rituals with everyday scenes, constructing a cultural atmosphere through aesthetic colors and lifelike representations. Flower Knows focuses on sweet rituals and product displays, skillfully using emotional resonance to achieve direct conversions. Perfect Diary employs neutral rituals and authoritative interpretations, emphasizing functional cognition and rational persuasion. In terms of interaction, Florasis emphasizes culture and emotion, Flower Knows relies on a sweet atmosphere, and Perfect Diary emphasizes functional orientation. Platform algorithm matching influences the breadth of dissemination, while cultural fit determines the strength of recognition. Each has its characteristics: Florasis is culturally unique but has a high barrier to entry, Flower Knows is emotionally strong but lacks differentiation, and Perfect Diary is efficient but has limited cultural depth.

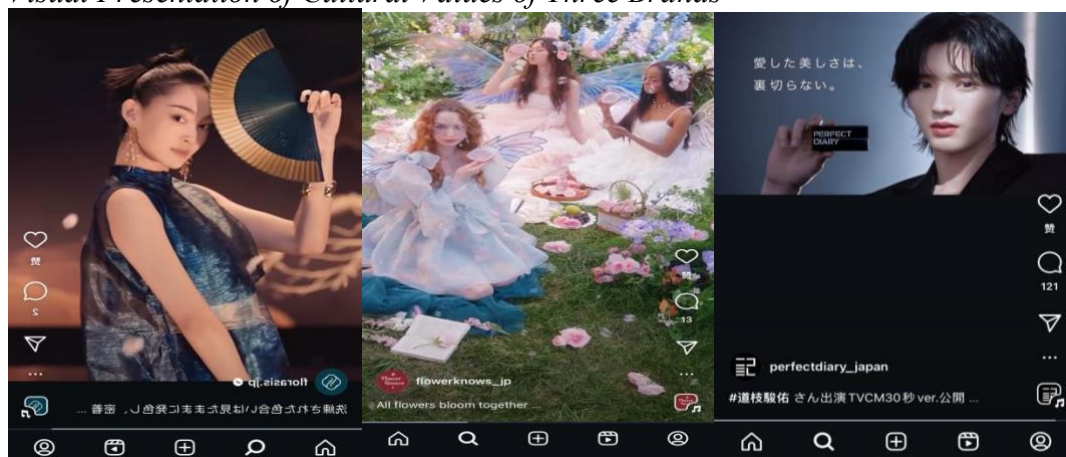
Visual Culture Analysis

Critique of Cultural Values

In cross-cultural communication, brands convey unique cultural values by deeply exploring visual symbols and rhetorical methods. Florasis uses traditional cultural symbols such as the concentric lock, embroidery, and folding fan to reconstruct Eastern aesthetics in a globalized context, promoting cultural export and exchange from the perspective of cultural confidence. Flower Knows, in addition, integrates global aesthetic trends, combining pink, dreamy, and other Japanese “kawaii” styles with local creativity, showcasing an aesthetic view that combines local innovation with an international perspective. Perfect Diary, then, conveys inclusive and function-oriented values by balancing global makeup trends with local consumer demands (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Visual Presentation of Cultural Values of Three Brands



Consumer Culture and Resonance

In short videos, Florasis strengthens the symbolic output of Eastern aesthetic symbols, emphasizing the brand’s cultural recognition and differentiated perception in the international market, forming emotional resonance by highlighting “artisan craftsmanship” and “cultural depth.” Flower Knows breaks through cultural boundaries by expressing a relaxed and joyful aesthetic pursuit through universal aesthetic language and exaggerated dreamlike scenes, attracting young consumer groups. Perfect Diary, then, focuses on the expression of functional value, showcasing its inclusiveness and professionalism through celebrity endorsements and detailed close-ups, quickly reaching diverse audience needs. The three brands demonstrate different visual culture strategies. Florasis impresses with cultural heritage and sentiment; Flower Knows creates a dreamlike atmosphere with integrated innovation; but Perfect Diary satisfies diverse consumer demands with a function-oriented approach, presenting differentiated competitiveness and market positioning.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the visual communication strategies employed by three major Chinese beauty brands on the Japanese Instagram platform, examining them through four dimensions: visual content, visual expression, visual context, and visual culture, with the aim of revealing the effectiveness of their cross-cultural communication. The

findings indicate that each brand exhibits significant differences in visual themes, expressions, contexts, and cultural strategies, resulting in varying trade-offs between “cultural depth” and “market efficiency.” Specifically, Florasis opts for a minimalist style to highlight Eastern cultural aesthetics, conveying traditional aesthetics through rhetorical techniques such as condensation and transplantation, constructing a unique cultural atmosphere, and reinforcing Eastern aesthetic symbols. Flower Knows, then, builds dreamlike scenes to evoke emotional resonance, integrates Chinese and Japanese elements using domestication and transplantation strategies, focuses on emotional resonance, and merges global aesthetics with Japanese “kawaii” style. Meanwhile, Perfect Diary relies on celebrity endorsements to emphasize product functionality and localized identity, constructs brand authority through celebrity influence, focuses on functional cognition and rational persuasion, and balances global makeup trends with local consumer demands. Through differentiated visual positioning, these brands conduct advertising and marketing in the Japanese market; they, to some extent, enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. However, we also observe that while Florasis’s ritualized Eastern expression is highly recognizable, it needs to balance “cultural output” with “local adaptation.” Flower Knows’s integration of dreamlike elements, while appealing to young Japanese consumers, may lack cultural uniqueness. Perfect Diary’s celebrity strategy, although efficient, is also prone to falling into homogenized competition. From an algorithmic perspective, Instagram’s recommendation mechanism favors high-interaction content, suggesting that brands need to optimize multimodal elements to enhance algorithmic visibility. For example, Flower Knows’s immersive close-up videos, due to their high interaction, achieved 1.5 times compared with the average viewership. Therefore, this study offers strategic recommendations for the international communication of Chinese beauty brands: deepen the visual translation of local cultural symbols, construct a dual-narrative framework of “emotion-function,” and dynamically optimize multimodal expressions based on the data. Unfortunately, this study is primarily based on visual content analysis and does not fully encompass consumer behavior insights or interaction metrics outside of the Instagram platform. Future research could more comprehensively explore consumer attitudes and preferences in different cultural contexts to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of cross-cultural communication.

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