



# Application of Emotion-Based Design in Brand Communication—Taking KFC as an Example

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**Abstract.** Emotion can span the gap of human cognition, bridge cultures and enhance ties. This paper starts with the definition and understanding of emotion-based design, and analyzes the emotion-based design in KFC's online and offline localized brand communication from perspective of instinct, behavior and reflection through literature research method, case analysis method, naturalistic observation method and interdisciplinary research method. The research covers interdisciplinary subjects, including marketing, design, psychology, etc., and analyzes the integration of disciplines embodied in emotional design, analyzes emotional conveyance and emotional appeal behind marketing in a more perceptual manner and pursue a new perspective for design and explore the reason for successful localization of a brand from connection between the emotion of users and communication of brand.

**Keywords:** Emotionalization · Emotional design · KFC · Localization · Brand communication

## 1 Function and Method of Emotional Design

### 1.1 Function of Emotional Design

The word “emotional design” invented by Donald A. Norman in *Emotional Design* in 2005 opens a gate for design from a new perspective. It is mentioned in the book that in the early 1990s, Masaaki Kurosawa and Shikashimura Xiang found in their experiments that emotion could change the way cognitive system works, i.e., “beauty can remedy the deficiency of people's function” [1].

The author thinks this theory actually proves that the sense of aesthetics embodied in design can transform rational emotion into perceptual emotion, and directly create an intersection between design and emotion, which is beyond the boundary between designers and users and narrows the gap between them. Owing to this theory, it is extremely urgent to study emotional design. At present, any successful design cannot be realized without emotional research. Almost all designers are intentionally or unintentionally exposed to emotional design although they don't have such idea. A wider theoretical popularization can greatly improve the utilization and inheritance of design.

Emotional design has permeated into all walks of life and appeared in every meaningful design and communication. In the Industrial Age, it is no longer a trend for machine to replace human being in future, but science and technology will collide with the horizon of mankind. However, only design cannot be replaced, because emotion is the soul of design. Only by creating resonance can “we remember forever, and there must be echoes.” The machine may probably make design by instinct - a delicious fried chicken, but it cannot bring us a reflective design - a memory of enjoying KFC in childhood. In KFC, what can be achieved is far from everything that remains the same on the menu. A delicious meal may be impressed deep in mind for a month. However, the memory with friends and family members as well as the moment of laughter and reunion in the restaurant are the highest design. It is emotional and permanent, regardless of race and country.

Under the trend of start-up venture, the transnational catering industry is developing rapidly. The originally dominant catering brands are now exposed to great challenge from the emerging brands. However, still on the top of list in 2020, KFC shows its unshakable position in the community of catering brands across China. This essay is designed to analyze the emotional design method adopted in KFC’s existing marketing strategy, highlight its role in localized communication of brand, and draw lessons from it. It is expected to apply it to the overseas communication of domestic brands, and finally convey Chinese culture through the media of emotion.

## 1.2 Methods of Emotional Design

Based on the reflection on emotional design concluded by Norman, it is well known the emotional design is associated with consciousness, feeling, emotion and perception, and for different groups of people, only by designing of various products can we manage to satisfy their extensive demand. In emotional design, a designer should not seek to satisfy the emotion of everyone, and should try to adopt analogy in multiple situations.

In design, it is essentially important to give priority to emotional value of product. For instance, in the opinions of later generations, diamond is “the largest marketing fraud in the 20th century”. For people in modern times, a diamond can signify faithful love. A diamond is more an emotional gift and sincere dedication than a stone. In addition to the classic advertising slogan, in fact, the presence of diamond is also a means of marketing. Motivated by De Beers’ advertising campaign in 1980s, the binding between diamond ring and surprise has once again stimulated the rising sales of diamond. When we think of diamond, the wonderful occasions, weddings and delight will flash into our mind, as if the peak of emotional advertising marketing design. Emotional design gives products emotional value beyond the commercial value of products, and bring us miracles [2].

For the same purpose of emotional marketing, it is necessary to capture emotion accurately among some groups of people. When diamond is out-of-stock, challenge against each other to occupy the stores has become more and more fierce. But in recent years, DR diamond ring has stood out above all the other competitors. When you visit its official website or enter its store, you will catch sight of an advertising slogan “Only one diamond customized for a man in his lifetime”. On the basis of love implied by diamond ring, a word “unique” is added to the advertising design to arouse customers’ aspiration for consumption. In the light of new idea, fast food love and materialistic

desires are increasingly popular and the demand for security and the expectation for love are getting stronger and stronger. According to the marketing philosophy of DR diamond ring, emotion design is followed for advertising slogan to emphasize women's yearn for security. With the emotional core, follow-up promotion and marketing will get twice the result with half the effort.

Finally, a successful emotional design is not once for all. Although the sales of diamond has already shown the marketing is driven by successful emotional design, the sales of crude diamond dropped by 26% in 2019, with little prospect of recovery in 2020 after the rise of artificial diamond and the disclosure of marketing fraud. It is obvious that one-sided emotional design seems weak for different groups of people, changes of times and updating of ideas, so we should constantly change our brand concept and communication means based on emotional design.

From the perspective of emotional design, the performance is not limited. It either reflects human nature to induce contemplation, sets up circumstances to increase sense of substitution, raises spiritual height to arouse resonance, or involves national background to stimulate cultural pride, etc. There remain many undiscovered subjects worthy of our exploration, and the most importantly, it is necessary to establish the personality of brand, build emotional connection with customers, and give value beyond brand products. In the trend of emotional design, we can predict that the audience of marketing will become younger and younger in the future, and the burden of pressure nowadays is required to be released through emotion. At the same time, the accelerated rhythm will lead to less individualized communication. It is necessary to enhance self-affirmation and identity. Therefore, emotional design is not only the first step for business planning, but also the second step for pressure relief and soul therapy [3].

## 2 Emotional Design in KFC's Communication

According to "Internet Weekly & eNet Research Institute Selection Ranking List", Tricon Global Restaurant, Inc., to which KFC is affiliated, ranks first in the 2020 China Catering Service Ranking List. In the shadow of pandemic, KFC managed to rank the third after Starbucks and McDonald's in the "2020 Most Valuable Catering Brand in the World" released by Brand Finance, a British organization, in August 2020. KFC can be found everywhere in Shanghai, at least one KFC in almost every large and medium shopping mall. As a successful localized enterprise in China, the emotional design is indispensable when you keep your eyes on its development history and marketing strategy. This essay is designed to analyze the outstanding aspects of KFC's brand from Norman's three levels.

### 2.1 Emotional Design Based on Instinct Level in KFC Communication Process

The instinct level is aroused based on human physiology. In a KFC store, it refers to food taste, appearance, etc. At the instinct level, customers prefer the purpose demand, i.e., "what to eat". Therefore, the empathy and localization of KFC's emotional design is reflected during brand communication in this stage.

In China, breakfast is the most important. After the changes of times, breakfast has been diversified upon evolution. After KFC entered China, it was keenly aware of distinctive preference of local people and offered to serve the KFC breakfast from 6: 00 to 10: 00. When developing new products, KFC set up the China Health Food Advisory Committee to integrate Chinese traditional elements into Western food and beverage, and add Chinese characteristics while retaining the original style of KFC brand. In 2002, KFC introduced porridge for the first time. With emphasis on nutrition, KFC breakfast package is combined with Western breakfast to win high praise by shaping difference from other breakfast stores and embodying local Chinese culture. Encouraged by the previous foundation, KFC launched “Old Beijing Chicken Roll” in 2003, which is a wonderful combination of sauce of Old Beijing Roast Duck (a famous local delicacy in capital of PRC) and chicken, with a Chinese regional name added to highlight its localization charm. When they hear the word “old Beijing”, customers will recall a familiar taste that can be traced back to their childhood, even reunion of their families to eat roast duck in Beijing quadrangle courtyard. To achieve such effect, KFC must have concentrated its efforts on field investigation for emotional design. It cannot be realized without a profound understanding of local culture and life. In the light of successful emotional design, KFC has diversified tastes to satisfy different groups of customers. So far KFC has launched breakfasts favorite to customers from all walks of life, such as “stuffed pancake rolls”, “big rice balls”, “breakfast panini”, etc. They are all popular breakfast to local residents and can wake up their memory of breakfast [4].

The most important Chinese festivals include Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Spring Festival and other auspicious days that convey a message of reunion. KFC launched new products for these festivals with traditional cultural significance, such as the fresh meat moon cakes first launched in Mid-Autumn Festival in 2017. Moon cake is a snack with Chinese characteristics that is not available in the West, but it is an extremely important implication in China. KFC well knows the value and embarks on its marketing campaign. The brand is gradually localized and deeply rooted in the hearts of people one festival after another. From initial surprise to familiarity, and then to habits, even when the festival is approaching, customers will expect KFC’s new holiday products that year, wait for the festival, look forward to KFC, and finally bind KFC with the festival, and get engrossed in their emotion.

Only with emotional products can emotional marketing be launched based on the original factors of products. KFC fills emotional connotation into its products to enhance the emotional value in the heart of customers. The customers will naturally pay extra “emotional expenses” for KFC products. Meanwhile, food is already the carrier of emotion, arousing resonance from customers and increasing KFC’s “native” cognition [5].

## **2.2 Emotional Design Based on Behavior Level in KFC Communication Process**

Please check that the lines in line drawings are not interrupted and have a constant the behavior level is based on human behavior. KFC’s efforts on marketing are visible both online and offline. The emotional design at behavior level is mainly composed of keynote and small details.

The main audience of KFC's offline stores are young people, followed by middle-aged people. KFC's marketing strategy aims to build localized image of its stores in China. Contrary to McDonald's marketing strategy, KFC is working hard to highlight kinship, family and friendship in all round manner. Based on the original audience, the old aged customers ignored by Western restaurants have been attracted in an effort to avoid competition with other Western catering brands.

In KFC's offline environment, doors are available everywhere to present open space, creating a relaxed, transparent and positive atmosphere emotionally, so that customers can enjoy KFC foods without restraint. In the space design, the semi-curved shape is employed to create the lightness of space. In the flexible proportion of space, sofa seats and hard seats, counter seats and square tables are available for customers to choose at their discretion. There is no partition between most seats to improve the utilization of space and the convenience for people when they are walking. The layout of tables and chairs lays a good foundation for audience of all ages. The tables and chairs in KFC stores are made of wood and mostly decorated black and white to avoid the monotonous space. The contrast between black and white enhances the pleasure of color indoors. The decorative elements are oriented by mostly images of food and slogans about food to give customers emotional hints when they enter KFC stores. The illustrations and carefully designed words can add color to interior space, increase the inner charm and human touch, and improve the relations with customers. The illustrations and slogans are all titled in English to adapt customers consciously to western dining atmosphere and convey brand culture.

One of the disadvantages of fast food restaurants is that there is significant customer flow at noon and evening, so it is easy to cause crowding and dissatisfaction when customers are ordering food. KFC has found three particular solutions as follows: First, the screen menu above head is used to display the food to be served, some food packages and some orders in an effort to offer more options for customers, imperceptibly promote new products and improve the efficiency of ordering. When customers look up at the screen, they not only know current discount campaign but also kill their time and reduce the anxiety of waiting. Second, customers can directly see what happens in the kitchen behind counter when they order food. It is helpful to assure safety and enhance the interest and appetite of customer when they wait in line. Third, in addition to ordering at the counter, self-service ordering is available to make it convenient for customers to order and take food. The new products, promotions and other advertising message are displayed on the screen homepage of automatic ordering machine. It will give double impression on customers effectively once again and enable some customers to order food on their own from an emotional point of view so as to strengthen their self-identity. There is a sauce and straw self-service area beside the counter to reduce the workload of KFC staff and complaints against them, give customers a sense of trust, and enable them to choose for themselves, thus enhancing their favorable impression.

KFC's online ordering is also outstanding. Unlike "McDonald's+", "i McDonald Ordering" and "i McDonald", KFC has only one main applet and one key software to significantly reduce the impatience and psychological burden of customers. For many brands, the decision made by a customer is complicated and important. By virtue of a

psychological process, few online software can guide customers to have simpler psychological expectations. In the online ordering interface, KFC selects red to keep harmony with overall tonality and atmosphere of offline brand. There is only the largest buttons of “deliver to home” and “pick it up at store” in homepage. The ordering interface gives priority to discount products. The smooth and simple process can satisfy the emotional appeal of customers for “one for all”, so that customers will have a good first impression on KFC. At the connection of different interfaces, KFC adopts hamburger production process as its waiting icon. The design style of skeuomorphic icon will prompt customers to associate it with food in the store, reduce the impatience of customers in ordering, and give customers pleasure and familiarity. When customers order food, there will be interactive design of small icons, i.e. a ball will hit into the box in the lower left corner to show that the food is ordered. The dynamic process will enhance customers’ sense of pleasure and accomplishment, and create an easy-to-understand and easy-to-use interface in sensory experience to make customers prefer to accept and depend on it [6].

At the behavioral level, KFC manages to address the problems faced by customers in ordering, optimize the emotional experience of customers, and establish a good emotional foundation for KFC brand. In this way, localized marketing is not obvious, but a good foundation can move customers deeply and carry out localization-oriented emotional marketing in a step by step manner.

### **2.3 Emotional Design Based on Reflection Level in KFC Communication Process**

The reflection level is affected by emotion, and the changes at reflection level should follow up on the aesthetics, interests, identities, pursuits and morals embodied by the audience of brand. In different native places, it is necessary to deal with the bottom line of different groups of people through cross study in domain of sociology, psychology and other disciplines. The emotional design made by KFC at this level is composed of brand image design and brand marketing design. The brand marketing design can be further divided into advertising design and user experience design.

Semiotics theory indicates that consumption in any civilized society is not only material consumption, but also the possession of symbols and the consumption of meaning, i.e., goods can be regarded as symbols, and symbols can replace goods. In the framework of KFC brand image, Colonel Harland Sanders is the image and symbol of KFC. KFC has made full use of it in brand communication. Since Harland Sanders became its logo in 1952, the purpose of change is to transform complication into simplicity to effect deep impression on customers in brand communication [7].

Colonel Harland Sanders of KFC lost his wealth and lived in absolute poverty after World War II, but he did not give up until he succeeded again in 1952. The effort and hardship in the story became the best brand culture and background of KFC. When we look at the white-haired and smiling old man in the logo, it conveys the emotional interaction embodied in the brand, which adds inspirational and positive cultural tonality to KFC. The apron in the brand image represents the cooking style of KFC. It enhances the affinity of the image while spreading the local culture to convey fresh and delicious emotional hints to customers.

In the emotional design of advertising, it can be categorized into copywriting and film video. From 2010, KFC’s slogan “Life is so charming” is inspired by “Qinyuanchun

Snow”, a famous poem of Mao Zedong, in which the original text is “The landscape of our motherland is so charming”. All Chinese customers are familiar with the slogan and well understand the connotation. Close to Chinese culture, it is highly identified and interesting. In the advertising, KFC engages Chinese popular stars and sports elites to represent KFC. Among them, the popular stars in China are mostly young men, such as TFBOYS, who are highly appreciated by teenagers, to narrow the gap from young customers, and reveal excellent appeal and inspiration. For sports elites, the world champions, such as Lin Dan, are invited to enrich the brand image and positioning, reinforce the cultural pride of customers and enhance the favorable impression on local customers in China. Owing to its outstanding spokespersons, KFC manages to satisfy extensive hobbies and needs of different customers. In movies and TV shows, the background of “Life Theater” is often adopted to, in which ordinary families play a leading role with their daily life as main topic, to bring KFC closer to the public and evoke their special memories and associations with KFC brand. According to Norman’s theory, it is emphasized that reflection level is the meaning and feeling of people who are infatuated with the object. It is a continuous interaction. KFC constantly refreshes customers’ memory, cognition and understanding of KFC in video advertising to make KFC brand more representative in communication. Through emotional maintenance, KFC localization is further realized, and customers change from “forced acceptance” to “active understanding” and finally become a part of communication [8].

In the design of user experience, KFC has adopted a variety of schemes to keep pace with the progress of times. For instance, the “Pocket Fried Chicken Store” launched in 2018 is a successful emotional design. As planned, KFC payed attention to the spread of WeChat platform. In this scheme, customers can have their own KFC stores without any entry barrier on WeChat platform, and can get popularity and coupons when someone else buy something in such store. Both customers and buyers can get a lot of discounts by using pocket fried chicken, and friends can buy and sell freely, share stores, create their own store style, and earn popularity. There is ranking of pocket fried chicken stores as well. Emotionally, it opens a window for customers to have pride and interactive experience, so the emotional maintenance between KFC and its customers is enhanced and the competitiveness is significantly improved to make the scheme last forever.

### 3 Research Conclusions and Future Prospects

From KFC’s emotional design, it is not difficult to realize KFC’s profound understanding of Chinese local culture. In other brand communication, it is also necessary to take grasp of the tonality of communication area. Emotional design can be applied in many aspects. Brand communication is only the integration of emotional design. It is actually reflected in graphic design, packaging design, store design, film video design and other design applications of mature marketing for top fast food brand. It is possible for all the interdisciplinary subjects involved in the research to be integrated individually or as a whole, so it is worth studying.

There is still room for KFC to improve emotional design online, such as the construction of social culture. Only Pocket Fried Chicken Restaurant remains monotonous. On this basis, comments, messages, likes, evaluation videos and other communities in applet

and APP that allow customers to express themselves and accept others' expressions. It is conducive to boosting aspiration for social communication. The customers would like to open KFC software to check messages even if they have no need to order. However, in offline stores, the restaurant aisles are still crowded at noon and evening on weekends. In the overall construction of store, we can refer to Starbucks' horizontal queuing to give more opportunity for customers to contact with each other and prevent the aisles from being occupied by crowds. At the same time, we can offer more preferences for customers if they prefer to use self-service ordering machines. KFC's prospects are still promising. In a short time, the food quality control of KFC will be well performed and will not be caught up or surpassed by other brands.

For other multinational brands, we can reflect on the flaws of brand's emotional design at three levels, recognize and understand the cultural gap in different countries, establish emotional ties to investigate the demand of audiences and customers, and enhance customers' awareness and impression of the brand in an effort to achieve success for KFC in communication.

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