

# Research on Translation Strategies for SHEIN's Cross-border E-commerce Advertising

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**Abstract:** *This research analyzes SHEIN's advertising translation strategies in cross-border e-commerce across China, the U.S., and Europe. The study explores three main strategies: literal translation, free translation, and localization. In China, SHEIN uses localization to evoke a festive shopping atmosphere. In the U.S., literal translation ensures clear, direct messaging, appealing to individualist consumers. In Europe, free translation emphasizes lifestyle and emotional appeal, aligning with local consumer values. The findings suggest that these strategies effectively cater to the cultural preferences of each market, enhancing SHEIN's global brand communication and market success.*

**Keywords:** *cross-border e-commerce, SHEIN's advertising translation strategies, cultural adaptation*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

With the continuous advancement of globalization, cross-border e-commerce has developed rapidly, and competition among Chinese brands in the global market has become increasingly fierce. SHEIN, as a global leading fast-fashion brand, has expanded its market to over 150 countries and regions. Unlike traditional retail brands, SHEIN relies on social media marketing and digital advertising to attract global consumers<sup>[1]</sup>. However, advertising translation is not merely the conversion of language but also involves brand tone, consumer psychology, and cultural adaptation. How to effectively convey brand information to consumers from different cultural backgrounds through translation strategies is an important issue for the internationalization of cross-border e-commerce brands translation purposes.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Cross-border E-commerce

With the rapid development of the digital economy, cross-border e-commerce has gradually become a popular new form of international trade <sup>[2]</sup>. Compared with traditional international trade, cross-border e-commerce relies more on electronic technology and logistics to break the barriers of space and time. Unlike traditional offline retail models, cross-border e-commerce has almost moved all sales and transaction links online. For merchants, this not only reduces intermediary links and trade costs but also provides the possibility of accessing larger markets, thus developing rapidly worldwide. From a trade perspective, cross-border e-commerce can be divided into cross-border import e-commerce and cross-border export e-commerce; in terms of trade forms, the more popular ones today are B2B, B2C, C2C, and O2O transactions.

The completion of cross-border e-commerce orders usually depends on cross-border e-commerce trading platforms. Generally speaking, these platforms provide a venue for buyers and sellers at home and abroad to negotiate and act as a bridge between the two parties. At the same time, the platforms also offer transaction services and security guarantees, and some even provide small-scale financial channels to facilitate transactions.

Cross-border e-commerce platforms can be categorized into self-operated, platform-based, and hybrid types<sup>[3]</sup>. Self-operated platforms are built by enterprises to open up sales channels for their products, making them more compatible with the enterprise's development strategy and plan. The enterprise's unique marketing strategies can also be better implemented on its own platform. Platform-based platforms refer to third-party platforms specifically built for cross-border e-commerce, which attract merchants to settle in, integrate information resources of buyers and sellers, and make profits by charging commissions after promoting transactions between the two parties. Hybrid platforms refer to those that have both settled enterprises or brands and self-operated brands and products on the platform. Most cross-border e-commerce enterprises usually choose third-party platform-based or hybrid platforms in the early stages of development, and then choose more autonomous platforms or build their own platforms in the middle and later stages.

## **B. Translation Strategies for Business Advertisements**

### **Literal Translation**

Literal translation refers to the process of maintaining the original vocabulary and sentence structure as much as possible, preserving the semantic meaning of the source language. This method is typically suitable for contexts with similar cultural backgrounds and minimal language differences. For example, advertisements for technological products often employ literal translation to ensure accuracy. The English phrase “Free shipping on orders over \$50” can be directly translated into Chinese as “订单满50美元免费送货”, with no significant linguistic or cultural conflicts, making it appropriate for literal translation. In the context of cross-border e-commerce advertising, literal translation can help convey clear and direct messages, especially in markets with minimal language differences.

### **Free Translation**

Free translation, also known as paraphrasing, focuses on conveying the meaning of the original text rather than translating word for word and sentence for sentence. In this process, the translator may adjust the sentence structure or replace certain words to make the message more accessible and appealing to the target language audience. Free translation is often used to maintain the attractiveness and cultural adaptability of advertisements<sup>[4]</sup>. For example, Nike's slogan “Just Do It” is translated into Chinese as “想做就去做” or “做就对了” instead of a literal translation like “只是去做它.” In business advertising, free translation can help tailor the advertising copy to fit the cultural and consumer psychology of the target market, thereby enhancing the appeal of the advertisement. For instance, many brand slogans are freely translated to meet the demands and linguistic habits of the target market.

### **Localization**

Localization refers to the process of deeply adapting advertising content to fit the cultural, customary, and preference aspects of the target market. Compared to free translation, localization involves not only linguistic conversion but also cultural adaptation of design, imagery, and color elements<sup>[5]</sup>. For example, the global fast-food brand McDonald's avoids pork and beef elements in its advertisements in India, promoting chicken or vegetarian products instead to cater to the dietary habits of Hindus and Muslims<sup>[6]</sup>. In the context of advertising translation, localization takes into account consumers' cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, and values. For example, when SHEIN enters the Middle East market, it may adjust the imagery of women's attire in advertisements to comply with local cultural norms.

## **III. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR SHEIN'S ADVERTISING IN DIFFERENT MARKETS**

### **A. Translation Strategy for SHEIN's Advertising Copy for the Chinese Market**

夏日狂欢，折扣不停！

Summer Fun, Non-stop Discounts!

The translation of this copy employs a localization, which goes beyond simple literal translation. It is adjusted according to the cultural habits and linguistic characteristics of Chinese consumers<sup>[7]</sup>. The phrase “Summer Fun” conveys a strong seasonal atmosphere, catering to Chinese consumers' expectations for summer promotions and reflecting the festive shopping atmosphere.

The copy uses familiar promotional language and style that resonate with Chinese consumers. Chinese consumers are accustomed to seasonal promotions that attract attention, and the use of the word “fun” helps convey a lively and joyful shopping experience. This aligns with the trend of “festive marketing” in the Chinese market, where large-scale promotions like “Singles' Day” (Singles' Day, originally a day for people celebrating their single life, falls on November 11th and has evolved into a massive online shopping carnival in China.) and “618” (The 6.18 Festival, initiated by JD.com for its founding anniversary, has become China's major mid-year shopping event with significant discounts.) are very common.

### **B. Translation Strategy for SHEIN's Advertising Copy for the U.S. Market**

Shop Now and Save Big!

The above advertising can be rendered into Chinese language as “限时特惠，立省大额”.

The translation of this advertising copy employs a literal translation. The phrase “Shop Now and Save Big!” is almost unchanged and directly conveys the promotional message. This straightforward and concise language is well-suited to the U.S. market.

The United States is a typical low-context culture, where consumers prefer direct and clear information in advertisements. In this cultural context, the directness of the advertising copy reflects American consumers' emphasis on immediate benefits. By highlighting “Save Big,” the advertisement appeals to consumers who value

instant discounts and promotions. U.S. consumers are generally highly sensitive to immediate benefits and discounts, making this advertising strategy effective in driving purchasing decisions.

### **C. Translation Strategy for SHEIN's Advertising Copy for the European Market**

SHEIN Summer New Arrivals, Enjoying Sunny Moments Together

The above advertising can be translated into Chinese as “清爽来袭, 希音夏季新品抢先入手”.

The translation of the copy employs a free translation, not only conveying the promotional message but also incorporating more culturally emotional elements. The original “summer discount” is transformed into “summer new arrivals,” emphasizing the launch of new products rather than direct discount offers. In the European market, especially in Northern and Western Europe, consumers tend to focus more on product quality and brand value<sup>[8]</sup>. The original “夏季新品抢先入手” is transformed into “Enjoying Sunny Moments Together” emphasizing the chill of lifestyle. Therefore, SHEIN's advertising copy emphasizes a warm and pleasant lifestyle experience. This expression aligns with European consumers' attention to lifestyle and emotional experiences, rather than just promotional discounts. European culture generally avoids aggressive promotional language, preferring a softer approach to convey the value of products.

### **D. Cultural Adaptation Differences**

#### **The Chinese Market**

SHEIN's advertising language in the Chinese market reflects the characteristics of collectivist culture and high-context culture. Through phrases such as “Summer Fun” and “Non-stop Discounts”, the advertisement caters to Chinese consumers' preferences for festive atmospheres and collective shopping experiences. Chinese consumers tend to engage in large-scale promotional activities that create a social atmosphere, making this type of group-oriented advertising copy highly effective.

#### **The U.S. Market**

Unlike the collectivist culture in China, the U.S. advertising copy “Shop Now and Save Big!” focuses more on individualist culture, directly and clearly conveying consumer benefits and discounts. The advertising language in the U.S. market is typically concise and straightforward, aligning with the characteristics of low-context culture. Consumers in this market prefer to quickly understand the specific benefits they can gain from the advertisement. Therefore, SHEIN's use of literal translation in this market ensures that the advertising message is clear and unambiguous.

#### **The European Market**

The advertising copy in the European market employs a gentler cultural language, focusing on lifestyle and emotions. This aligns with the European market's emphasis on quality, brand image, and emotional resonance. Unlike the direct promotional language used in the U.S. market, European advertisements emphasize an ideal lifestyle through phrases such as “Enjoying Sunny Moments Together.” This not only involves free translation but also meets the emotional needs of European consumers.

In Summary, through comparative analysis of SHEIN's advertising copy in the Chinese, U.S., and European markets, it is evident that SHEIN employs different advertising translation strategies to adapt to the cultures and consumer preferences of each market<sup>[9]</sup>. Each market's advertising strategy is closely integrated with cultural dimension theories, using localization, literal translation, and free translation to effectively disseminate advertisements across different cultural backgrounds globally. This cross-cultural adaptation has contributed to SHEIN's global success, demonstrating the brand's profound understanding and effective response to different cultures<sup>[10]</sup>.

## **IV. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Through analysis, we may find some advantages and limitations in the choice of strategies for translating SHEIN'S advertising copies designed for different markets.

### **A. Advantages**

SHEIN's advertising translation strategies have demonstrated significant advantages in cross-cultural communication across global markets. Through precise market positioning and localized advertising language, SHEIN has achieved culturally adaptive advertising communication in the Chinese, American, and European markets. Specifically:

**Localization in the Chinese Market:** By incorporating festive elements (e.g., “Summer Fun”) and promotional language familiar to Chinese consumers, SHEIN effectively stimulates purchasing desires. This alignment with local culture helps evoke emotional resonance among consumers, thereby enhancing brand affinity.

**Clarity of Literal Translation in the U.S. Market:** In the U.S. market, SHEIN's use of concise and straightforward literal translation, such as "Shop Now and Save Big," ensures direct and clear message delivery. Consumers in low-context cultures typically prefer to quickly understand the specific benefits they can gain from advertisements. Therefore, this strategy effectively drives consumer behavior.

**Emotional Resonance of Free Translation in the European Market:** In the European market, SHEIN employs free translation to transform direct promotional messages into emotionally charged advertising copy (e.g., "Enjoying Sunny Moments Together"). This strategy caters to European consumers' focus on lifestyle and emotional experiences, helping to establish a warm and high-end brand image.

Overall, SHEIN's advertising translation strategies, based on cross-cultural communication theories, accurately grasp the cultural dimensions of different markets and adapt to consumer psychology, achieving significant success in global market promotion.

## **B. Limitations**

Despite its successful advertising translation strategies, SHEIN still faces some limitations<sup>[11]</sup>:

**Over-localization May Cause Cultural Conflicts:** While localization effectively caters to target market demands, excessive localization may sometimes neglect the brand's global consistency. For example, when entering the Middle East market, SHEIN may need more cultural sensitivity. If the translation and advertising content overly cater to local needs, it may weaken the brand's global consistency and lead to unclear consumer perception of the brand.

**Literal Translation May Ignore Subtle Cultural Differences:** Although the translation for the U.S. market is concise and powerful, overly direct advertising language may overlook subtle cultural nuances. For example, some U.S. consumers may find it too blunt, lacking an emotional connection with the brand. Emphasizing "savings" in advertising messages may not be as effective as highlighting "personalization" and "uniqueness" in appealing to younger American consumers.

**Over-emotional Free Translation May Reduce Marketing Effectiveness:** In the European market, SHEIN's advertisements, which employ free translation to create more emotionally charged copy, may sometimes dilute the strength of promotional messages. If the advertising copy overly focuses on lifestyle expressions, consumers may overlook the actual discounts or purchasing motives, thereby affecting the advertisement's sales conversion rate.

## **C. Optimization Suggestions**

1. **Strengthening global brand consistency:** While localizing translations to meet different market cultural demands, SHEIN needs to ensure the consistency of its global brand image. Customized adjustments can be made to ensure that advertising translations are both culturally relevant and aligned with SHEIN's global image. For example, in the Middle East market, attention should be paid to cultural and religious adjustments while ensuring that the brand image and values conveyed do not deviate significantly.

2. **Balancing literal and localized translation:** In the U.S. and European markets, SHEIN could adopt a more flexible strategy, combining literal and free translation to ensure that advertisements convey clear promotional messages while maintaining cultural adaptability. For example, in the U.S. market, the "hard-sell" aspect of advertising language could be reduced by incorporating more emotional elements to make the copy more approachable. Meanwhile, in the European market, in addition to emotional resonance, elements such as "quick purchase" and "instant discounts" could be emphasized to enhance the effectiveness of promotional messages.

3. **Enhancing cultural sensitivity in advertising copy:** Throughout the global translation process of advertising copy, SHEIN can further understand the subtle cultural differences in various countries, such as festivals, taboos, and aesthetics, to avoid cultural conflicts or misunderstandings. For example, when entering certain markets, SHEIN could involve cultural experts to carefully adapt the language and visual elements of advertisements, ensuring that the audience's perception is both culturally relevant and consistent with the brand's core values.

4. **Combining data analysis with consumer feedback:** SHEIN can systematically use data analysis and consumer feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of advertising translation strategies and optimize the precision of these strategies. Regular market surveys and consumer behavior studies can help understand how advertising language performs in different cultures, allowing for timely adjustments to translation strategies. Future efforts could combine AI translation with human refinement for more accurate cultural adaptation. Enhancing the involvement of local marketing teams can also optimize localization strategies.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

This study, through a case analysis of SHEIN's advertising copy in the Chinese, American, and European markets, has explored its advertising translation strategies and cross-cultural adaptation methods. The findings indicate that SHEIN employs strategies such as literal translation, free translation, and localization to effectively

disseminate advertising messages across different cultural contexts. These strategies have successfully demonstrated SHEIN's profound understanding and mastery of different market cultures.

Specifically, literal translation in the U.S. market effectively meets the demand of low-context cultures for direct and concise information; localization in the Chinese market creates a festive shopping atmosphere through a combination of seasonal and promotional language, attracting a large number of consumers; and free translation in the European market highlights the brand's lifestyle and values through emotionally charged language, promoting emotional resonance and enhancing the brand's high-end image.

However, despite the significant success of SHEIN's advertising translation strategies in multiple markets, there are still some limitations. Over-localization or overly direct translation may affect the cultural adaptability of advertisements and the global consistency of the brand image. Therefore, in future advertising translations, SHEIN should pay more attention to subtle cultural differences, maintain the consistency of the brand image, and continuously optimize its advertising translation strategies through data analysis and consumer feedback.

In summary, advertising translation is not merely a conversion of language but also a transmission of culture. SHEIN has accurately understood and applied cross-cultural communication theories in its global advertising campaigns, providing strong support for the brand's internationalization. Future research could further explore SHEIN's advertising translation strategies in other emerging markets, such as Latin America and Africa, to investigate the impact of cultural differences on advertising effectiveness and how to achieve better cross-cultural communication in a global context.

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