

The Mysterious Power from the East

-- Li Ziqi and the Development of Her Brand

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Abstract

Nowadays, the development of the short video industry is in full swing, and personal brand building has become a hot spot pursued by many people. This case describes the process of Li Ziqi's personal branding through short videos, including entering the short video field by accident, clarifying the positioning of the video content, improving the production of video by continuously deepening the content, buliding personalized IP, constantly enriching the brandand, operating professionally with the help of MCN, promoting and spreading the brand in many ways, realizing commercial realization, and consolidating the brand through Cross-border cooperation. Through the analysis and discussion of this case, it can help students integrate the relevant theories of brand management and marketing with the practice of Li Ziqi and her brand, and deepen students' understanding of knowledge and personal brand development.

Keywords

Brand Positioning; Personalized IP; Quality Content; Short Video; Commercial Realization.

1. Introduction

Li Ziqi, a post-90s girl born in Mianyang, Sichuan Province, is a well-known food video blogger on Weibo and a self-media contractor. She is known as an expert in Oriental cuisine. In 2015, she started the creation of short videos of ancient food. At first, she was just shooting promotional videos for her Taobao shop to make a living. Unexpectedly, no one paid attention to Taobao store, but these videos received attention. With the gradual rise of the short video industry, all major platforms, mainly Weibo, have launched plans to support content creators. Suddenly, there have been many "food bloggers" and "beauty bloggers". The styles and themes of their videos are similar, the content and quality of their videos are also uneven. Li Ziqi is different. She puts rural life on the Internet. Because of the exquisite composition and leisurely pace of life, her video is more like an idyllic documentary. Her unique personal charm and video style have made her sought after by countless people.

As of April 29, 2020, Li Ziqi's Youtube fans exceeded 10 million, and her cumulative global fans exceeded 100 million. Many people who are not familiar with Li Ziqi feel very puzzled: Why did Li Ziqi suddenly become popular? In fact, Li Ziqi's success was not achieved overnight, which is inseparable from Li Ziqi's emphasis on content and brand polishing. The unique positioning of the brand, the deep cultivation of content, the emphasis on brand communication, and Cross-border cooperation are all important components in the development of Li Ziqi and her brand.

2. Brand Birth, Unique Positioning

Li Ziqi's family is not very good. Her parents divorced when she was young, and her stepmother did not treat her well. When her father died, her grandparents took her back home. Although life is difficult, Li Ziqi learned a lot from her grandparents, such as working in the field, weaving

bamboo utensils, cooking and so on. These experiences have become important materials for her short video works in the future. When Li Ziqi was in the fifth grade of elementary school, her grandfather passed away. It was difficult for her grandmother to support her finish school. At the age of 14, Li Ziqi dropped out of school and went to work in the big city alone. During the eight years of working, Li Ziqi worked as a waiter, a nightclub DJ, slept on a park bench, and ate steamed buns for two months. When she thought that life would continue like this, Li Ziqi learned the news of her grandma's illness in 2012. She was anxious so that she abandoned her work and returned to her hometown quickly to take care of her grandmother. She tried to make a living by opening a Taobao shop, but it was too hard for her.

With the advice and help of her cousin, in order to make her Taobao shop's business better, Li Ziqi began to shoot promotional videos for Taobao and posted them on Meipai. After a period of exploration, short videos have attracted the attention of many people, and Taobao's business has also improved. But at the same time, due to lack of energy, she also faced the dilemma of whether to close Taobao shop to make short videos or continue to run her Taobao shop. Finally, Li Ziqi decided to make food videos because she felt that it was more meaningful to do something that she was really good at and enjoy, such as cooking. As a result, she began to use ancient food as the subject of her short videos, which are closely related to the "rural life" she is most familiar with, and it is easier to do. On March 25, 2016, Li Ziqi released the first video "Peach Blossom Wine" in the series of "Ancient fragrance and Ancient Food" on Meipai. Due to the rudimentary shooting equipment and rough picture quality, this video did not arouse much response. In order to make the videos better, Li Ziqi consulted the producers of short videos on Meipai specially, and learned a lot of shooting skills and editing methods. In the years since, Li Ziqi shot and uploaded videos such as "Sakura Wine" and "Raspberry". In November 2016, the food video "Lanzhou Beef Noodles" received 50 million views and more than 600,000 likes, thus establishing her status as a popular food blogger on the Internet[1].

With the rapid development of science and technology and the great abundance of materials, people have become more impetuous in modern society. Individuals who are imprisoned in the city and under the pressure of work are eager to return to simple life. Comfortable and tranquil life is longed by countless people, but few people can really put it into action to pursue it. Li Ziqi saw this. She hoped to be able to poetic interpretation of pastoral life, arouse people's resonance for a better life, so that people's subconscious yearning for Tao Yuanming's poetic pastoral life would be greatly satisfied. Li Ziqi excavates traditional food and presents it to everyone with the experience, aesthetics, form, interaction and content that people like, so as to create a unique brand positioning-"the Expert of Oriental Food and life". At the same time, the Chinese traditional culture and skills contained in Li Ziqi's videos have become a part of her videos and brand gradually, so that people can feel the charm of traditio while watching the videos.

3. Deepen the Content, Enrich the Brand

3.1. Personalized IP

IP refers to an individual's possession of a certain result. The more fans an IP attracts, the greater its value and influence, and the greater the possibility and value of conversion. Internet celebrities and stars pursue the influence and sustainability of attention, as well as the value that such influence and sustainability can transform. Therefore, they attach great importance to the creation of personalized IP, and Li Ziqi is the same.

The positioning of Li Ziqi's video and brand is pastoral lifestyle. Based on this positioning, Li Ziqi focuses on food culture and interprets the simple and traditional life of the Chinese people around clothing, food, housing and transportation. Through the beautiful soundtrack and editing, Li Ziqi has shaped herself into a distinctive and recognizable IP[2].

3.2. Quality Content

In the era of "content is king", content is a key part of marketing, and marketing success can only be achieved by continuously polishing content. The content of Papi Jiang can be deconstructed as "collecting the most popular comments and jokes from netizens for a centralized interpretation in the videos"; Li Jiaqi's content can be deconstructed as "providing an outlet for the swollen consumption desire of contemporary exquisite boys and girls"; while Li Ziqi's content can be deconstructed as "looking for an ideal lifestyle that meets the expectations of the public".

Li Ziqi's emphasis on content can be seen in the quality of her videos and her attitude towards video production. The first video "Lanzhou beef noodle" that attracted widespread attention was that she went to a noodle restaurant in Gansu province to learn it. At first the master was reluctant to teach, she took a long time to get a chance. During the one-month practice, she pulled noodles every day until her arms became sore. When filming the video, a ramen shot was taken more than 200 times, and she ate the waste dough by herself for more than half a month. The video "the life of ginger" shot from the planting of ginger at the end of spring to the sprouting and harvesting, has gone through the long seasons of autumn and winter. The process of seeding, harvesting and making a delicious food can make people feel that it is particularly healed. People enjoy it more when they do it without the pressure of life, just for a full meal.

In addition, Li Ziqi's video content is also dedicated to promoting traditional Chinese culture. The strong Chinese style and mouth-watering food arouse people's interest in traditional culture, and feel the charm of traditional culture from it, so as to take the initiative to understand and promote excellent traditional culture. The continuation of traditional culture is also an important feature that distinguishes Li Ziqi's short video from other food bloggers. This feature gives the audience a strong identity, and the resulting emotional needs are spread by word of mouth in the circle, which gathers a group of highly sticky users for Li Ziqi.

Li Ziqi's videos always adhere to the content as the first, and continue to output high-quality content for a long time, ensuring the long-term continuous attention of the audience and eventually causing an outbreak.

3.3. Use Short Videos as a Carrier

In the context of platforms, users, and advertisers attending a short video feast, short video marketing has ushered in a multiple growth, which is strongly harvesting users' time and attention. The pace of life is getting faster, and people don't have extra time and energy, while short videos can well meet the audience's fragmented reading needs in both form and content. Compared with texts and pictures, videos are easier to watch and understand, have a greater impact on the audience, and leave a deeper impression.

Li Ziqi caught the trend of short video. In the content marketing of the "Li Ziqi" brand, short videos are the carrier of content and a means of dissemination. In the short videos, Li Ziqi pays attention to the aesthetic conception of the picture, and the composition is mostly close-up to clearly show the natural ingredients. The shooting method is mainly overhead shot, which fully shows the types of ingredients and the process of food production. In the editing, the transition of the picture is natural and smooth, and the scene switching is emphasized. The choice of soundtrack is mainly based on classical pure music. The picture and the soundtrack complement each other, showing the beautiful state of rural life, hiding Chinese culture between food, clothing, housing, and transportation, making the video content both rich and artistic.

For a short five-minute video, it may take more than a year to shoot and edit. It often takes hundreds of shots to obtain a satisfactory shot. Only in this way can the quality of the video and content be guaranteed. As the content continues to be enriched and updated, Li Ziqi increased

the length of her videos from about five minutes to ten minutes after careful consideration to ensure that the content is better presented to every viewer.

4. Promote and Spread the Brand in Many Ways

4.1. Contract with MCN for Professional Operation

After the video "Lanzhou Beef Noodles" released in November 2016 attracted many people's attention, Li Ziqi received a message from Mr. L, saying that he and his wife saw her video by accident and liked them very much. Mr. L also mentioned that his company and Sina Weibo headquarters have in-depth cooperation and can help her. Mr. L is actually Mr. Liu Tongming, the legal representative of Hangzhou Weinian Technology Co., LTD. This company is an MCN organization that extends to new consumer brands through incubation and deep integration of KOL network.

In an interview, Li Ziqi once said that the reason for choosing Wei Nian is that this organization understands and tolerates her and is willing to give her more time to grow together. It also can accompany her to decline tens of millions of advertisements and do something more meaningful [3]. Li Ziqi's achievements are also inseparable from the MCN behind her-Wei Nian. For Li Ziqi, taking advertisements is obviously the fastest and easiest way to cash in, but the goals of her and Weinian are much more than that. Many advertisements and commercial activities came to her, but they were rejected by her and Weinian. They choose to continue to cultivate in the content field, put content polishing and focus on the brand itself in the first place, gather fans through high-quality and high-vertical content, and build the brand with a strong personal style. Facts have proved that this brand operation path is feasible. At the same time, as Weinian received multiple rounds of financing to complemented communication and incubation capabilities outside of new media, also provide more resource support for the development of Li Ziqi and her brand.

4.2. Distribute Video Across Multiple Platforms

There are many media platforms, so accurate targeting is important. How to choose the right platform has become another difficult problem for Li Ziqi and her brand. After considering the characteristics, user groups and advantages of each platform, Li Ziqi choose to put videos on WeChat, Weibo, BiliBili, Meipai, Miaopai, etc.

Meipai is the earliest platform for Li Ziqi to launch content. Compared with other platforms, the marketing content of the WeChat is more detailed, enabling users to have a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the content production and increasing user stickiness. Brand communication on Weibo includes short videos, interaction with fans, and lottery to build brand loyalty.

The characteristics of BiliBili and Miaopai platform is popular among young people, which is consistent with the characteristics of vertical users of Li Ziqi and her brand. People who pay attention to Li Ziqi's are mainly concentrated in first- and second-tier cities. People here have a lot of pressure. However, Li Ziqi's videos convey the concept of slow life is just right. In terms of age, Li Ziqi's fans are mainly in the 20 to 40 years old. This is because people in this age are at the beginning or rising period of their careers, and they are more likely to feel anxious about gains and losses [4]. Li Ziqi's videos can help them stay away from reality for a while and enter a pleasant mood.

In the process of marketing and promotion of Li Qi and her brand, Weibo and WeChat are the mainstays, and other media platforms are used as auxiliary. Each platform is connected to each other, and the communication matrix is formed through continuous sharing by the audience, so that achieving better communication effects.

4.3. Establish Reputation

Li Ziqi is constantly accumulating reputation while cultivating content. When Li Ziqi releases videos, she often carries out lottery activities on platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Bilibili. Such activities can arouse users' participation and enthusiasm to a large extent. After Li Ziqi publishes her microblog, she will first forward it once, and write the description of the lottery in the forwarding and message, including the prize, the quantity, the method. She encourages users to forward, comment, and finally the platform randomly selects the winners. After the lottery, Li Ziqi will forward the original lottery and announce the information of winners, so that the published content can get more forwarding. The lottery on Li Ziqi's WeChat mostly introduces the lottery description in articles, and then interacts with users by writing messages and replying to keywords to achieve active word-of-mouth communication.

By forwarding lottery, it is possible to drive fans to share and forward spontaneously on Weibo, WeChat and other platforms at the fastest speed, so as to spread to more people, carry out secondary dissemination and attract more users to participate. Most of the prizes provided by Li Ziqi are hand-made food such as chili oil, pear paste, ginger tea with brown sugar, etc., turning the content of videos into reality and sending it to users to form a reputation among fans. Accumulate popularity through word-of-mouth communication, tap more potential users, and achieve better publicity effects. In the gap between the updates of short videos, it communicates with fans by actively setting up hot topics and managing fan communities, actively interacting with each other, and enhancing user stickiness.

4.4. Spread Overseas

Li Ziqi once said that she wants more people to appreciate the unique charm of traditional cuisine. She said that she would be satisfied if more people like traditional culture. With the idea of spreading Chinese traditional culture to more audiences, Li Ziqi entered the overseas short video platform YouTube on August 25, 2017. Unexpectedly, such a unique ancient style has attracted a large number of overseas fans. Clicking on Li Ziqi's YouTube videos, from the characters, the pictures, the music, and the plot, there is a kind of tranquility that causes extreme comfort. Although there are few subtitles and words in the videos that make it difficult to understand, many overseas audiences are still deeply attracted by the Chinese traditional culture and food, as well as Li Ziqi's poetic life.

In less than a year, Li Ziqi's YouTube fans exceeded one million, and then she became one of top Internet celebrities in China. On April 29, 2020, Li Ziqi's YouTube fans exceeded 10 million, the total number of videos played exceeded 1.33 billion, and the cumulative number of fans worldwide exceeded 100 million [5]. It is also Li Ziqi's popularity overseas that has triggered a heated debate about whether she is a cultural export.

5. Gradually Mature, Strengthen the Brand

5.1. Commercial Monetization

Monetization is the survival mode of Internet celebrities, and Li Ziqi is no exception. After careful consideration, Li Ziqi chose a slower and longer but steady path of e-commerce realization. In October 2017, the trademark "Li Ziqi" was registered. On August 17, 2018, Qixi Festival, a Chinese valentine's Day filled with romance, the brand "Li Ziqi" was born and the small flagship store of Li Ziqi was officially opened. The only five kinds of products launched in the stores set a sales record of tens of millions in three days, becoming a sales story in the e-commerce business [6].

Before the store opened, Li Ziqi took short videos of the production process of several products to be launched and posted them on various platforms such as Weibo and Wechat. The process is full of antiques and the finished product is mouth-watering. Before opening a branded store,

Li Ziqi's food was irresistible but impossible to buy. Now that they can taste the food made by Li Ziqi, so that the enthusiasm of fans is unprecedentedly high.

In addition to the release of the product introduction videos, she used long pictures and texts to describe the establishment of the store, including how the brand grew out of nothing, the concepts contained in it, and her efforts to narrow the distance between the brand and fans. In addition, she also prepared a variety of elaborate gifts, such as custom-made oiled paper umbrellas, folding fans, mouse pads and so on. This is not only her feedback to fans, but also invisible to strengthen the fans for the brand recognition and recognition, so that the fans spontaneously promote.

5.2. Cross-border Cooperation

On May 24, 2018, Li Ziqi and Forbidden City Foods signed a cooperation ceremony in Beijing. Through the combination of content and products, Li Ziqi hopes to output more professional and rich traditional cultural content, jointly create healthy food products that meet the current consumer needs, narrow the distance between traditional culture and young people, and further promote and inherit Chinese traditional culture. In August of the same year, the "Su Zao Jiang" jointly created by Li Ziqi and Forbidden City Foods became the first product of her brand. The product sold 150,000 bottles on the first day of launch, ranking first in the sales of cereals, oils and condiments on Tmall [7].

On May 14, 2019, the brand "Li Ziqi" reached an IP cooperation with National Treasure | Hello History and launched a joint mooncake on the Mid-Autumn Festival. The gift box presents the beauty of traditional culture by selecting paper reliefs of traditional folk skills of thousands of years and combining the shadow play of Sichuan intangible cultural heritage. The mooncake, with its unique beauty of folk art, has been a hit with users and sold out within 33 minutes of its launch [8].

The brand "Li Ziqi" has always adhered to the oriental life concept of "new tradition, slow life", and pays tribute to the five thousand years of Chinese traditional culture with the way of food. So far, the brand has joined hands with many partners in the food industry to inject new vitality into traditional culture and create products that are in line with contemporary consumer needs. The brand "Li Ziqi" cooperates with crossover IP, while achieving commercial goals, it is more able to realize the social value of the brand.

6. What is the Brand's Future in the Face of Controversy

As Li Ziqi became popular, various curses and doubts followed. Some say that Li Ziqi's videos are "not real enough", "too far away from the real village and life". Others say that the pastoral life of Li Ziqi's videos are produced by the team after operation and packaging. Some even say that Li Ziqi is not a cultural export, but a way to show the backwardness of Chinese society to other countries.

There was a period of time when Li Ziqi, who had suffered various criticisms, chose to suspend her work. When she was ready again, she became braver and more determined in the face of doubts. She no longer takes care of the groundless rumors and people's ridicule of her. She chooses to take every video production more seriously and continuously output better content. The reason why Li Ziqi can maintain a good reputation is because she has always had high requirements for content and merchandise. However, with the help of e-commerce to realize step by step, brands cannot control all the processes of production, so it may be difficult to guarantee the quality. At the same time, some consumers feel that the prices of products are inflated. Although the level of playback, likes, comments, and reposts of Li Ziqi's video is already very high, there is still a phenomenon that the conversion rate is low and it is difficult to

maintain for a long time in the process of commercialization. Fans love her and may be more yearning for her lifestyle than the goods in her Taobao store.

In addition, Li Ziqi's success caused others to imitate. There are even some foreign bloggers who directly transferred her videos and matched them with languages of other countries, thus gaining a lot of attention. Recently, a Vietnamese blogger, whose clothes, hair style and shooting techniques are all identical to Li Ziqi's video, has been viewed more than a million times. This not only involves the issue of copyright protection, but also caused many foreign netizens to mistakenly believe that Li Ziqi is the Vietnamese blogger. Li Ziqi also specifically clarified this.

How to achieve better conversion and ensure quality? How to make good content while realizing business? In the face of copycats, can Li Ziqi keep her original intention and create every delicacy and video with heart? These are all issues that Li Ziqi and her brand should consider in the future.

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