

The Opportunities and Challenges of Short Video Platforms as a New Position in Public Diplomacy

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Abstract. In the current digital era, with the continuous popularity and development of short videos, those short video platforms have become a daily online living areas for internet users, like entertainment or even education. Leading short video giant firms like TikTok have already transformed the modes of communication and cross-cultural exchange in the digital age, through lightweight features, lower communication and dissemination barriers. This study focuses on the social phenomenon of intercultural exchange via short videos on the internet. By distributing questionnaires to users from different countries and regions and conducting multiple statistical surveys, it aims to verify and confirm that short video platforms, supported by government policies and strategies and driven primarily by the netizens, will become an important emerging arena for global communication and even for China's public diplomacy. After collecting and analyzing 200 questionnaires distributed in different platforms, the study demonstrates that the majority of netizens with diverse demographics recognize the increasing number of overseas users sharing videos of other cultures, such frequency to get access to those exotic culture records especially about Chinese ones has become apparently enhanced and they hold an open and positive attitude toward exchanges between users from different cultures. They also acknowledge the significant role of short videos in enhancing overseas audiences' understanding of Chinese civilization, corroborating the conclusion that under the reasonable guidance of governments, short video platforms will become a significant approach for public diplomacy.

Keywords: short video, cultural exchange, public diplomacy, international communication.

1. Introduction

The cross-cultural global communication nowadays has become the trend that can not be ignored by all the nations and the governments who want to enhance their soft power. And in the current digital era, the short videos have already been the media tools to promote one nation's culture or showcase the stories, and the features of the short videos can deeply improve the trend of democratization in public diplomacy. Facing such current trend, international short video platforms led by TikTok have become important arenas for national image branding and the transformation of public diplomacy due to their lightweight and highly penetrative communication characteristics [1]. As more and more nations recognize such significance, encouraging the netizens to promote and show their daily lives

or some traditional culture has been the approaches which can engage foreigners to enhance the revenue of the tourism or even as the methods to enhance the national images.

Although the relevant and previous studies have confirmed the value of short videos in cultural communication studies under the frameworks such as soft power theory, national images or digital communication, most of them focus on single-platform cases and static data analyses, while empirical explorations on the cross-platform differences, algorithmic mechanisms, and the actual perceptions of the overseas audiences still remain relatively inadequate. As the consequence, this study collected the data from users in both domestic and overseas short video platforms, tried to seek research attendees holding diverse perspectives, and conducts empirical investigations through questionnaire methods and quantitative analysis. The research approach broadens the user profile, covering users with different positions and cultural backgrounds, leading to more objective and comprehensive conclusions that are also easier to design and quantify. The research aims to fill the gaps in existing research and clarify the mechanisms and practical issues of how short videos empower China's public diplomacy. To provide supplementary evidence for the field of digital public diplomacy, our research conducted questionnaire analysis, offering practical references and decision-making suggestions for China to optimize its global communication strategies and enhance its cultural soft power.

Using cross-platform comparisons and algorithmic factor mechanisms as key approach to conduct our research, it aims to confirm the perspectives of short-videoization and democratization in public diplomacy and global communication. During the research process, our research found that cultural phenomena and narratives, even some serious themes, are being trivialized and distorted, new cultural stereotypes and communication barriers also occur due to conservative viewpoints, making the role of government supervision and regulation indispensable. The findings indicate that lightweight storytelling in short videos and an "official-democratic" collaborative model can obviously enhance communication effectiveness, but issues such as content homogenization and cultural discounting still remain.

2. Literature review

Currently, in the face of the digital wave of global communication, related research has developed rapidly under the theoretical support of soft power, becoming an urgent issue in exploring innovative paths for China's public diplomacy [2]. According to Manxi's research, various scientific advancements in the digital era have evidently promoted intercultural communication, but they have not conducted in-depth analyses of the short videos and their effects [3]. And previous research on short videos almost focuses on three major areas: first, the enhancement of cultural appeal by short videos, such as the cultural promotion value of the Li Ziqi case [4]; second, the communication effects of multi-modal content combinations, such as quantitative analysis based on TikTok [5]; and third, the correlation between local practices, urban development, and the city brandings [6]. The research methods primarily include cases studies, fsQCA quantitative analysis, and field surveys, theoretically integrating Joseph Nye's soft power theory with extended frameworks such as digital soft power and inclusive soft power, providing tools for the public diplomacy role of short videos [7,8]. Of course, those previous researches confirm that short videos can assist the audience reach public diplomacy through lightweight narratives, and the collaborative model can enhance communication effects, but there are also practical challenges such as content homogenization and cultural discounting [9,10]. Considering about the potential issues and challenges within the topic of cultural exchange through short videos, Agrawal's paper, for example, mostly focuses on the security and privacy of the platforms themselves, while lacking attention to those cultural level issues [11].

Besides, those researches mostly focus on the instances and effects of single platforms, lacking cross-platform comparisons or merely showcasing some application cases of short videos. For example, in her article, Yan Lin primarily analyzes how to use short videos for urban branding, taking Manzhouli as a case study. However, she lacks an in-depth analysis of the underlying communication logic. Another problem needed to be mentioned is that most studies adopt static samples. These static comments struggle to reveal the long-term impacts and the changes in the altitude, underlying connections between algorithmic mechanisms and public diplomacy effects also remain to be explored [6]. The research will focus on multi-platform comparisons and algorithmic influence mechanisms, aiming to fill the gaps and blanks in existing studies. And the following research will uncover the more profound theoretical logic behind short video cultural exchanges, and provide more targeted practical paths for the digitization of China's public diplomacy.

3. Research method

The research adopted a questionnaire survey method, posting the questionnaire in diverse platforms to collect participants' thoughts about the role of the short video platforms in boosting China's public diplomacy. Primarily targeted users for research are netizens in international short video platforms such as TikTok, combined with some domestic users in the Red Note. And a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and through content quality filter and analysis, 200 valid responses were recovered, supplemented by a one-month follow-up channel to obtain dynamic samples. Based on Joseph's soft power theory, a method widely used in previous research, the theory part was built. But compared to the former ones, broader coverage in user diversity was achieved and progress was made in obtaining dynamic comments. Meanwhile, the questionnaire contents were designed to cover three components: user profiles, related short video content, and changes in altitudes of Chinese culture and national image. The profiles were used to ensure that audiences of different ages, regions, and cultural backgrounds, were covered, ensuring the sample representativeness. And the questionnaire also questioned about the related short video content that they shared, to get access to the cultural meanings and the contents. Besides, the altitudes changes are the key part to confirm the effects and show the dynamic datas. Additionally, quantitative methods were supplemented to analyze the communication mechanisms and effectiveness of short videos in promoting public diplomacy.

4. Research findings

After collection and filtering, 200 valid surveys were deeply reviewed, with results showing that 40% of respondents first encountered native China's cultural content through short videos, not created by foreign users with lifestyle videos demonstrating the most prominent cultural penetration effect, and 67% of users consequently improved their positive images for China and the culture. Approximately one month after completing the questionnaire, 8% of participating users responded, among whom 70% indicated that this affinity will further impact on their thoughts. For instance, overseas users with a certain level of cultural affinity will hold an inclusive attitudes when encountering news or news-related short videos about China within the following month. Meanwhile, correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between user exposure frequency and positive national image perception. Platform algorithmic recommendations enhanced the reach efficiency of China's cultural content by 45%, while, interactive engagement with content from independent creators was 50% higher than that of official accounts, ($r=0.62$, $P<0.01$, $R^2=0.384$) facilitating greater emotional resonance and dissemination of Chinese culture.

The study also revealed that 10% of respondents primarily domestic users, highlighting some problems like homogenization issues which means the cultural contents that shared in platforms tend to become identical. Besides, 24% of the respondents thought for the sake of traffic or profit, vlog creators tend to exaggerate content, while cultural dissemination experiences discounting phenomena. For instance, this process distorted cultural values and essential meanings, making profound Chinese culture to one-dimensional cultural symbols or behaviors, like making the moral meanings behind getting together become just gathering to enjoy delicious food. Besides, even new cultural stereotypes can be created that mentioned by the users, like more and more global users label Chinese as drinking hot water instead of cold drinks. And around 8% of user groups showed negative attitudes toward the cultural exchanges, even involving cultural biases, regional discrimination, racial prejudice, influenced and formed by conservative views. They were worried that interactions and communication might undermine Chinese cultural heritage and deconstruct serious historical topics through entertainment-oriented interpretations and narratives.

5. Discussion

The research found that the unique algorithmic mechanisms of short videos, through profile analysis and precise content delivery, can enhance dissemination efficiency and generate long-term impacts. For example, platforms analyze users' daily watching habits to determine whether they have a certain interest in international cultural exchanges, enabling long-term content delivery. Taking tourism enthusiasts or language learners as examples, platforms will increase intercultural contents in their interested topics, such as China tourism or life in Chinese-speaking communities. Moreover, since compared to those official accounts or mainstream media, recreation-toned contents are easier for overseas users to accept, the recreation feature of short videos can more effectively bridge the gap between overseas audiences and Chinese culture, increasing the possibilities of their understanding or even developing a favorable image. Short video platforms, with their unique strengths of lightweight dissemination, algorithmic precision in content delivery, and popular storytelling, have effectively bridged cultural divides and overcome internal and external communication barriers. They have become a crucial emerging platform for China's public diplomacy and the international dissemination of Chinese culture to show China's open and inclusive government and national image, as well as its people's willingness to engage in the global communication and cultural exchange. These platforms serve as vital vehicles for enhancing China's cultural soft power and have become important channels for foreign audiences to get access to Chinese culture and interact with Chinese. By effectively breaking through the traditional communication barriers, those short videos have successfully enhanced the international appeal of Chinese culture and the positive national image, while countering distortions created by some media, and the cultural stereotypes popular among the overseas public.

Through in-depth analysis, it reveals that the free comments in short video platforms and the entertainment storytelling tone produce a series of issues worthy of attention and regulation. For example, at present, China's and even overseas short video social media are still facing a certain negative impact of cultural conservatism and nationalism. Some users are full of cultural prejudice and even cultural discrimination when expressing communication, and even inappropriate comments showing nationalism, cultural superiority and inferiority. Short video content creation is also facing the entertainment and deconstruction of Chinese culture and Chinese lifestyle, such as reinterpreting some serious historical events in an entertaining way, or distorting history with historical nihilism, or even creates new cultural stereotypes, which are formed by users overemphasizing those details to get attention, thus creating a new cultural stereotype. Although the push mechanism of the short

video platform can expose interested people to more vivid and authentic cultural content and deepen the platform interaction and cultural dissemination between this group, it is essentially an information cocoon mechanism. On the other hand, for some audiences who are prejudiced or like to read controversial content, such the algorithm mechanism will only further strengthen the dissemination of these errors. Based on opportunities and challenges, the future public diplomacy practice should build a collaborative communication system of "official guidance + private leadership", continue to cultivate life-oriented content creation, display the vivid real Chinese culture and Chinese life, and rely on algorithms to optimize and improve the adaptability of communication; find the reality path to better the information cocoon issues, and in response to the problem of content homogenization and even the stereotype of new culture, establish a diversified content incubation mechanism, encourage users to publish more innovative content, and adjust narrative strategies according to different cultural contexts, and carry out accurate video push delivery. At the same time, in the face of opposition at home and abroad, China should stick to its position, based on Chinese civilization, resolutely oppose the disassembly of historical nihilism on China's history, adhere to the historical red line, and strengthen supervision in principle. Meanwhile, it is necessary to broaden the national international horizons and enhance the awareness of international exchanges.

6. Conclusion

Through questionnaire research and quantitative analysis, this study confirms that the short video platform has become an important carrier of China's public diplomacy. Lightweight narrative, algorithm push and folk content have had a significant effect on improving the national image and cultural attractiveness. The short videos effectively demonstrate the broad and profound and long-standing Chinese culture, so that more overseas users can break cultural stereotypes, let Chinese culture break through the cultural filter blocked by some mainstream media, and show the inclusive and open real Chinese image and government image through non-government exchange and short video content creation. At the same time, this study also reveals that there are certain real problems such as homogenization and new cultural stereotypes in the content of short video creation. The research enriches the empirical results and provides data support for cross-platform communication and research. At the practical level, the study confirms the necessity of the dual-subject model of "official guidance + private leadership", which provides operational inspiration for China's international cultural communication and public diplomacy.

There are still some limitations in this research. First, due to the limitations of research conditions and resources, the scale of the effective sample is relatively small, and the coverage is not comprehensive enough in terms of geographical distribution, cultural background, age structure and usage habits, resulting in certain limitations in the representativeness and universality of the research conclusions. Geographically, overseas participating users mainly come from Asian civilizations that are more familiar with Chinese culture, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, etc., among which Chinese people account for a relatively large proportion. In addition, it is mainly American users, and there is a lack of data on users with more diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds. And in terms of age, most of them are teenagers and young people aged 14-28. They grow up in the digital age, obtain information, and are mostly open to exotic cultures. Secondly, the research method is mainly questionnaire method and quantitative analysis. The data is relatively single. There is a lack of in-depth interviews, such as interviews with some transnational short video platform bloggers or related experts with large amount of followers. Supplementary support for qualitative data is also not enough such as case analysis and content analysis, and it is difficult to fully reveal the audience's

cognition, emotions, behavior and the deep motive behind it. In addition, although considering the dynamic view of the research, the cross-sectional research design of the questionnaire itself is still difficult to reflect the long-term dynamic effect of short video public diplomacy, and the role of the feedback mechanism is not obvious, the number of replies is not enough, and the cycle time is relatively short, which lacks Continuous tracking on influence on algorithm iteration, platform policies, changes in the international public opinion environment and other factors.

Future research can achieve multi-dimensional expansion on the basis of this research: first, expand the sample size, optimize the sampling scheme, and improve the balance and representativeness of samples in terms of countries, cultural backgrounds, ages, educational backgrounds, etc.; second, use multi-method integrated research design to combine questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus groups, content analysis and big data mining to realize the mutual verification of quantitative and qualitative data; third, introduce vertical tracking research to dynamically examine the long-term effect and changing rules of short video public diplomacy; fourth, further subdivide cultural contexts and communication scenarios, and deeply explore the differences in narrative strategies, algorithm logic and communication effects in different cultural backgrounds, so as to provide a more systematic, scientific and feasible theoretical reference and practical path for the civilian, digital and accurate development of China's public diplomacy.

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