

Rethinking Intercultural Communication in the Self-Media Environment—Based on “Chris the Foreigner”

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Abstract

This paper analyses the phenomenal communication of the popularity of the TikTok blogger “Chris the Foreigner”, combining the theory of use and satisfaction to obtain the underlying logic of its popularity and the effect of cross-cultural communication on the audience, so as to propose feasible opinions on the communication of cross-cultural communication in China.

Keywords: Chris the Foreigner, self-media, intercultural communication

1. Introduction

As China moves closer to the centre of the world stage, more and more foreigners are choosing to travel, study, work and settle in China. 2019 saw 670 million border crossings, 97.675 million foreigners entering and leaving the country, and 800,000 people resident in China. 2020 saw a high number of people entering and leaving the country, despite the impact of the epidemic. At the same time, the rapid development of Internet technology has revolutionised the means and efficiency of interpersonal and mass communication, making global communication and exchange direct and easy, and adding a pluralistic, open and inclusive platform for interaction between countries, making it possible for people to interact with each other on a daily basis.

“They are mostly foreigners who have studied, worked or lived in China, are proficient in

Chinese language, understand Chinese culture or are familiar with the daily life of Chinese people, and have dual life experiences and cultural experiences in China and abroad. With the support of new media technology and mobile internet, foreign netizens continue to post their original content on China’s open internet media platforms in the form of short videos, carefully selected topics and content production, sharing and presenting their insights, daily life or reflections at home and abroad, or even arranging fixed columns to discuss hot events and cultural differences between China and abroad, providing Chinese netizens with a unique “other” perspective. The unique “other” perspective has provided Chinese netizens with a relatively new way of looking at the world and China itself, attracting a large number of online fans.

One of them is a foreign netizen from Norway, @LaoForeignerChris, who has attracted a lot of

attention from Chinese netizens. After following Chris, his TikTok platform has released a total of 219 original short video works, each with more than 10,000 likes, including a video with the topic “Who is her grandma’s pizza” which has gained 3,529,000 likes. So far, Chris has gained more than 20,884,000 followers and 280 million likes on TikTok! Since 2020, Chris has been attracting audiences through his limited high-quality content, and this overseas ambassador for Chinese culture has attracted the attention of many authoritative media and the buzz of the general public. The series of short videos “Foreign families share stories of cultural differences between China and Norway” and “Exploring Chinese food and explaining Chinese life” have become popular and “long-lasting”, reflecting the strong national confidence and cultural identity of Chinese people. The series of short videos “Exploring Chinese Food and Explaining Chinese Life” have become popular, reflecting the strong national confidence and cultural identity of the Chinese people.

2. Analysis of Chris’s ‘Going Viral’

2.1 Fissionable Self-Publishing Methods of Dissemination

According to a statistic previously released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the number of Chinese citizens using the Internet in China reached 1.051 billion as of June 2022, with 99.6% of Internet users using mobile phones to access the Internet. Under the trend of continuous development of Internet applications, short video users in China contributed to the major increment of mobile Internet hours and traffic, with the scale of users leading the country, reaching 962 million, up 28.05 million from December last year, accounting for 91.5% of Internet users as a whole. This shows the popularity of short videos. In the age of short videos, visual communication is dominant in communication, and Chris’s presence on the TikTok platform has injected fresh energy into the spread of Chinese culture overseas. Chris’s successful exit from the circle is due to the global rise of Chinese social video platforms, relying on the rapid development of the domestic digital economy and the strong core strengths of the Chinese economy. The new media’s communication path is a fractured spread from point to point, from point to surface and from surface to network. Creators distribute short-form video content through multiple

channels and thus reach a wider audience.

Creating self-published media, helping to fracture the spread of phenomenal communication is through and with the advantage of the entire network of communication technology, resources and methods, can become the entire social public or the target group attention, discussion, forwarding, sharing popular communication events in a short period of time. Nowadays, in the context of the awakening of self-media awareness, along with the popularisation of mobile smartphones, short videos with fast updates, short duration and open-ended content are in line with the information receiving habits of users in a fragmented environment, becoming a position for the general public to pay attention to information, share life, interact and spread. The platform can reach a precise audience through accurate online diversion, and each user is both a receiver and a disseminator of information. As a result, short videos are gradually reshaping the attention structure of users as a cultural carrier that has emerged.

2.2 Be Guided by the Needs of the Audience

The key to creating a phenomenal communication is the ability to precisely meet the needs of the user. Audience behaviour theory ‘use and satisfaction’ studies view audience members as individuals with specific ‘needs’ and their media exposure as a process of ‘using’ the media based on the motivation of specific needs, so that these needs are met. “The study of audience behaviour ‘use and satisfaction’ views members of the audience as individuals with specific ‘needs’ and their media exposure as a process of ‘using’ the media based on the motivation of specific needs so that these needs are satisfied. Specifically, the creators need to provide content that is useful, entertaining, interesting, informative or resonant in order to satisfy the needs of the audience and gain the support of some of the most sophisticated Internet users.

The ‘use and satisfaction’ theory of audience behaviour focuses on people’s motivation and satisfaction in using media and participating in media activities. The theory suggests that people are motivated to use the media to meet specific needs and expectations, and to derive satisfaction from their media use. The main points and principles of the Use and Satisfaction theory are:

Needs and fulfilment: People use media to satisfy a variety of needs, such as access to information, entertainment and social connection. Media use and engagement can help meet these needs by providing emotional satisfaction and a sense of identity.

Motivations and goals: People's motivations and goals for using media vary from individual to individual and from situation to situation. Some common motivations include seeking entertainment, acquiring knowledge, satisfying social needs, self-expression, etc. These motivations drive people to choose specific media content and media activities.

Engagement and interaction: Media use is not just about receiving information, but also about the process of active participation and interaction. People can interact with media through commenting, sharing and participating in social media groups to gain a deeper level of satisfaction.

Satisfaction and Effectiveness: The theory of 'use and satisfaction' emphasises the satisfaction and effectiveness of media use. People's satisfaction comes from the experience, emotional resonance and social interaction that media use brings. The level of satisfaction influences people's preferences and continued use of the media.

The Chinese positioning of the themes activates a strong sense of cultural pride among the Chinese people, and every retweet means that we love our own culture more deeply, and the netizens have become more confident in their cultural identity. The lifestyle themes are often based on Chinese folk cuisine, which is more "grounded" and "popular", and the affinity, spread and penetration of food can also promote intercultural dialogue and intermingling. Food is one of the most enjoyable aspects of everyday life for Chinese netizens, reaching a wide audience and meeting the content preferences of the general public, and having foreigners produce Chinese food and promote local snacks keeps the video fresh and appealing.

1) Focusing on Chinese culture, Chris has a passion for Chinese culture and his videos are mostly about Chinese life, showing Chinese culture through details of life. For example, the videos with the highest number of likes are Can you eat sprouted beans? The charm of square dance, who is the grandma of the pizza? and so on. This life expert will personally unlock all the seemingly ordinary cooking skills, and with

some decent actions, the charm value is instantly full, capturing the hearts of millions of fans. One netizen commented, "I feel like a foreigner since I follow him." Other topics in the piece are also Chinese in character, such as Chris's promotion of hot water for the whole family to convey the concept of "hot water for health" to the family. The Chinese are keen to drink more hot water, and behind this seemingly stubborn habit is actually a set of Chinese ideas about health, and the topic of "drink more hot water" fits in with the current mentality of young people who are widely complaining about the "drink more hot water" internet stigma. As soon as the work was released, it became a hot topic of interest to users.

2) The videos are funny and short, with a 'segmented' approach to life. The videos are high quality, short in length and have a clear topic. In terms of language, Chris often uses Chinese poetry in his videos, and in a video about teaching his family how to make dumplings, he uses a Chinese saying such as "It's better to teach your dad how to fish than to teach him how to fish". When his dad doesn't know how to eat a skinny egg and teases the guest, Chris spits out that his dad is "laughing at 50 steps." Such use of Chinese poetry, proverbs and idioms in the video made Chinese netizens marvel at their Chinese language reserves and follow them. In lieu of a straightforward presentation, the creators have paved the way for an illogical reversal of the ending, thus creating a comical and natural comic effect. The family works in perfect harmony and the questions they throw out always amuse the audience. The short 20 seconds of the video had the audience laughing out loud, and they couldn't get enough of it. This way of presentation brings the audience closer and satisfies the strong demand for "fun and short".

3) Communicating value identity and triggering emotional resonance Cultural heritage is about cultural emotions. Chris seeks to find a kernel of sustainable appeal between foreigner identity and Chinese culture, paying attention to the emotions and attitudes of current Chinese netizens, and the cultural emotions conveyed in his works are more likely to reach the depths of people's hearts. Through his works, Chris seeks to convey his identification with Chinese culture, build emotional resonance with Chinese users, and achieve a fit with their values and spirit, thus

triggering empathy and retweets from Chinese netizens. Chris' work also pays tribute to his handmade predecessors, and a short video posted at the beginning of 2022, with the theme "Grandpa turns his face around faster than a book", garnered 2.06 million likes in a matter of days. In the video, Chris makes a pair of shoes for his grandfather with a thousand soles, and the family exclaims how nice they are! A pair of finely cut, comfortable and well-fitting thousand-layer soles put the Chinese to shame, marvelling at Chris's craftsmanship in embroidery, stitch by stitch. In the comments section, netizens remarked that the "foreigners" had stolen our ancestral craftsmanship. For the Chinese, the distinctive oriental flavour of the thousand-layer base, apart from its natural simplicity and beauty, is also a work of art branded with cultural symbols. Chris's work is a true expression of the heart of the craftsmen and evokes a common memory from a time when material life was not so rich, helping many Chinese people to retain their nostalgia.

2.3 Presenting Dramatic Conflicts Based on Cultural Differences

Hegel once suggested that "the clash of personalities and purposes is the central problem of the drama". If we compare Chris's self-published content to a mini-drama, then most of the foreign Netflix content also often presents a "dramatic conflict", that is, a conflict of cultural differences. Apart from presenting the social, economic, customary and cultural aspects of different countries, directly verifying the differences and gaining an understanding and evaluation of each other from the mouths of random "others" is also a way of presenting cultural differences and theatrical conflicts. "How different states, understandings or attitudes are presented in China and abroad in relation to the same thing", "how widely popular Chinese culture and products are received abroad and how they are evaluated by foreigners", "how foreign things are perceived by Chinese people", etc. are some of the topics that are discussed, and other topics are all high-frequency themes in their communication content.

3. The Impact of Cross-Cultural Communication in Self-Media on Chinese Audiences

3.1 Revisiting One's Own Culture Through the Lens of the 'Other'

By extension, many foreign netizens, including Chris, often try out new and interesting things in China and incorporate them into their original content, based on their curiosity and interest in Chinese society and culture, as well as their own creative needs. This experimentation and presentation of content has, to some extent, bridged some of the existing 'cognitive blind spots' that Chinese audiences have about our own country.

In the process of getting to know a country and the world, the scope of what each individual can see and understand is after all limited, and there are certain blind spots. The lack of knowledge of Chinese audiences about their own society and culture.

On another level, the American psychologist Cooley has suggested that one's perception of self determines one's behaviour to a large extent, and that this perception comes mainly from one's social interactions with others. People can use other people's attitudes and evaluations of themselves as a "mirror" from which they can learn about themselves and look at themselves again. In the process of communication by foreign netizens, the content of their communication is also a "mirror" for Chinese audiences to re-examine themselves and the image of the country. They use text, pictures and short videos to reproduce the image of the "other" - China - in front of their eyes, and to reproduce the Chinese society, culture and customs they see and understand on the Internet media platform.

3.2 Broadening International Perspectives and Information Channels

Based on the different management systems of the Internet, Chinese audiences currently mainly obtain information about overseas through mainstream media in television and the Internet, and form their perceptions of the social and cultural and developmental status of other countries overseas based on this access to information. The development and growth of the foreign Netflix community has broadened the horizons and channels for Chinese netizens to learn about real information overseas. They use their cameras to record the actual situation of foreign countries in terms of food, education, culture, technology and institutions, and share them with Chinese netizens, helping Chinese audiences to form a more objective and realistic perception of the society and culture of overseas

countries.

3.3 Deepening Friendship Between Nations in Intercultural Exchange

Against the backdrop of globalisation as one and multi-cultural differences, there is a need to strengthen communication and interaction between countries and between people, and to make China known to people overseas and for Chinese people to understand overseas. This is also highly compatible with the development vision of many self-published media. In the process of getting to know each other, people from different countries gradually move from unfamiliarity to understanding, from vague concepts to mutual familiarity. In the practice of cross-cultural communication, foreign netizens accelerate the process of people from different countries experiencing and perceiving each other, exchanging and appreciating each other, and being close to each other, promoting the establishment of understanding and tolerance concepts and the diversified development of civilisation and culture, and transmitting peace and friendship between countries.

4. Feasible Paths for Cross-Cultural Communication of Chinese Culture

Culture is a pluralistic symbiosis, and for Chinese culture to reach out to the international community, it needs to reach out to a general audience overseas. If China is to meet the social and cultural needs of foreign countries in the international community, it must first conduct a socio-cultural analysis of the international differences in social and cultural factors. Cultural communication needs to build up a content matrix that matches the foreign country, both by throwing up common topics of popular interest and by adding some distinctive and nationally distinctive content expressions to the popular ones.

Chinese calligraphy and painting, Chinese medicine, ethnic architecture, long-standing agronomy, there is a vast array of cultural achievements that carry the people's deep-seated need for history and culture. In order to achieve a stable and sustainable transmission of traditional culture overseas, a long-term process of cultivation is needed to uncover the true cultural connotations, and on this basis, to give culture a new scale of communication and cultivate valuable cultural content with online characteristics that meet the unique needs of the Internet users.

In such a globalised communication landscape created by Internet technology and new media, the new generation has made traditional culture young. This has inspired us to encourage young communicators to rediscover, rethink and reinterpret classical Chinese culture, to orient themselves towards the interests of young people, to continue to make research achievements, and on this basis to strive to create a circle of cultural interests where the Internet users gather, and at the same time to proactively create opportunities for young people from all countries to participate, to highlight the talent and energy of the new generation of young people, and to pursue self-innovation in enhancing the attractiveness of intercultural communication.

5. Concluding Remarks

Chinese culture is being given a new form of communication in the Internet environment, which is a new creation in the process of reconstructing the contemporary values of Chinese culture. This is a new creation in the process of reconstructing the contemporary values of Chinese culture. By promoting traditional culture to young people and promoting Chinese culture in a youthful way, it will make distant memories more vivid, national centripetal force more cohesive, different civilisations more tolerant, and the world better understand Chinese culture today and in the past.

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