

Analysis of Tik Tok User Behavior from the Perspective of Popular Culture

Hui Zuo, Tongyue Wang

School of Humanities, Tianjin Polytechnic University, Tianjin, 300387, China

**Corresponding Author*

ABSTRACT. *Tik Tok is an emerging cultural form in popular culture. Through analyzing the user behavior of Tik Tok , this paper explores the motivation of user behavior as a participant in popular culture, and constructs user behavior's self-identity, group identity and cultural identity.*

Keywords: *popular culture; Tik Tok platform; user behavior*

1. Introduction

The Tik Tok short video platform was born in 2016 and is a mobile client that can shoot, publish and share content. At present, Tik Tok has covered 150 countries and 75 languages, ranking in the top of the app store list in more than 40 countries and regions. As of December 2018, Tik Tok had more than 250 million active users per day and 500 million active users per month in China[1]. The global growth of Tik Tok users can be said to be a typical phenomenon of popular culture .

2. Popular Culture Participant: Tik Tok User Behavior

Tik Tok community with social attributes, its user groups are not only producers of popular culture, but also disseminators and consumers. This paper divides users into three roles according to their different behaviors.

2.1 Users as popular culture producers

UGC mode represented by Tik Tok platform has changed the traditional production mode of popular culture. Every user can produce content as a production unit of independent cultural value. In 2018, the total number of videos released by Tik Tok users in China reached 250 million, which includes foods, cosmetics, funnies, cute pets, and Internet celebrities etc[2]. Among these users, based on the difference of production form and production goal, they are divided into three categories: one is Ordinary persons; the other is the opinion leaders dominated by internet celebrities and famous stars; and the third is the business organizations.

For the ordinary users, they find an outlet for their display desire. Daniel Bell pointed out that the characteristic of popular culture is “to continuously express and rebuild oneself in order to achieve self-realization and self-satisfaction[3]. The mode of UGC on Tik Tok platform is that the platform empowers each ordinary user to produce content to meet the psychological needs of their self-presentation. For the internet celebrities, in order to realize the commercial value, they precisely divide their fan groups, and carry out professional content planning, so as to get attention on Tik Tok platform, and gain network traffic monetizing. For example, the stars use Tik Tok platform to publicize film and television works, sell endorsement products and realize fan economy, which is an extension of star manufacturing in the whole field of popular culture. Fans chase idols to the new media platform and bring more users to Tik Tok. Tik Tok is also regarded as stars' other production platform by relevant stakeholders. Some business organizations have also become the main users of Tik Tok. They produce content on Tik Tok platform to close the gap with young users, based on the consideration of the younger users of Tik Tok.

2.2 Users as Popular Culture Disseminators

Based on the transmission mode of Tik Tok, users will consciously or unconsciously become the disseminators of popular culture. There are two ways for users to disseminate: First, when users have a desire to share a video, they can share it directly on social media through Tik Tok's one-click forwarding function, which is the way users consciously disseminate. Secondly, Tik Tok has a unique traffic algorithm for video recommendation. Traffic distribution is mainly about neighborhood and attention. Users have participated in the dissemination of popular culture when they Hit the like button or make comments on videos. Tik Tok users have three characteristics in content dissemination as communicators: Firstly, Tik Tok users are not necessarily directly involved in content production for content dissemination, but Tik Tok platform will guide users to carry out cultural dissemination according to recommendation algorithm. Secondly, users can obtain information without restriction, but based on the limitation of Tik Tok, users can only disseminate the information provided by the platform. Thirdly, due to the scarcity of attention, information disseminated by users may be commercialized.

2.3 Users as popular culture consumers

Popular culture has commercial characteristics, and Tik Tok has also created a short video platform with commercial value. In the Tik Tok platform, users' consumption patterns include: Firstly, when the platform is taken as the object of consumption. users buy video promotion function “shake +” at their own expense to enable video traffic, in order to get more attention. Secondly, users can purchase advertisements embedded in videos by watching videos, which is similar to the consumption behavior of advertisements in popular cultural phenomena. Third, users pay for their favorite live broadcasters. Such consumption behavior can be understood as “fans' consumption”, which is a self-presentation of fans to the object

of consumption, and also a de-economic emotional condensation. In fact, with the development of popular culture, people's consumption of goods is not limited to the pleasure of material, but also includes additional attributes brought by material, such as status, interest, identity, honor and so on.

3. Motivation Analysis of Tik Tok User Behavior

3.1 Entertainment Pursuit and Self-expression

The main function of popular culture is entertainment. Tik Tok Platform was born with entertainment purposes. Most of the short videos on Tik Tok platform are mainly exaggerated, witty and humorous. Users find fun in Tik Tok by taking a short break from real life emotions in fragmented time. At the same time, for users who want to express themselves, the process of making short videos is a pleasure in itself. Tik Tok's "de-centralization" operation allows users to create short videos anytime, anywhere, and express themselves and show their personality through the production and sharing of short videos.

3.2 Following the trend and pursuing social intercourse

The behavior of a single individual is highly susceptible to the behavior of the surrounding crowd. In order to keep in line with the group, the individual will constantly adjust his behavior in the feedback of the group, so as to follow and imitate the group behavior. Tik Tok's short videos spread on social platforms, allowing most mobile internet users to learn and use Tik Tok, especially those who prefer to pursue popular culture. They will follow their friends or opinion leaders into Tik Tok to create a sense of belonging to the trend. Because of the low imitation threshold of Tik Tok content, users will follow the trend in content production. For example, the popular "seaweed dance" with brainwashed music has become the object that Tik Tok users compete to imitate. The more satisfied the media users are, the more dependent they are on the media. Tik Tok not only meets the user's entertainment needs, but also meets the user's social needs. Users rely more and more on Tik Tok for online activities, so as to improve their own use of the platform viscosity.

3.3 Obtaining Benefits and Consuming Commodities

Popular culture is a daily cultural form that adapts to the development of market economy, produces according to the law of market economy and takes the public as the main consumer. From a production perspective, for those internet celebrities who have millions of fans, the high revenue of advertising and e-commerce are the motivation for their production. Li Jiaqi, a makeup blogger who became popular in China's Tik Tok in 2019, has 20 million fans and now receives 500,000 yuan in one of her advertisements. Many ordinary users will also produce content for the

purpose of obtaining commercial value. With the involvement of e-commerce platforms such as Taobao or Jingdong, users see more possibilities to benefit from Tik Tok, so more and more users begin to produce content in line with market demand. From a consumer point of view, Tik Tok's advertising products and e-commerce services provide users with unlimited choice, from daily cosmetics, diet to educational travel and so on. Users meet their diversified needs through personalized consumption on Tik Tok platform. It can be said that this kind of consumption is not only an economic phenomenon, but also a cultural phenomenon.

4. Identity Construction of Tik Tok Users

4.1 Self-Identity: Reflection and Interaction

Giddens believes that self-identity is achieved through self-reflection and reference to others[4]. In the process of building self-identity, Tik Tok users first understand and reflect on themselves. Users can make or share short videos based on their personal experience, get opportunities to show themselves in reality that they don't have, and experience self-worth, which is a sense of recognition for what they think and do. At the same time, Tik Tok users use the evaluation and interaction of other users to complete the construction of self-identity after their self-presentation. Users not only consolidate self-confidence and self-esteem from this sense of identity, but also do not blindly submit to the public opinion of society and others.

4.2 Group Identity: Reality and Virtual

Modern psychology holds that the herd mentality is often transformed into a collective unconsciousness, which affects people's speech and behavior. This is the psychological mechanism of group identity. According to the analysis of the following behavior of Tik Tok users, the construction of Tik Tok users'group identity can be divided into two ways: One is the identification of Tik Tok user groups in reality, and the other is the identification of Tik Tok user groups in cyberspace. Individual users will identify with their own social groups. On the contrary, the use of Tik Tok by social groups will also affect individual users' judgments on the Tik Tok platform. Because of group identification, individual users will be interested in the majority, so that real social interaction will continue in cyberspace. The interaction on Tik Tok platform is fast and convenient, which makes it easier for users to find group identity. On the one hand, Tik Tok users have a unique discourse system when they interact, and the mutual understanding among users deepens the construction of group identity. On the other hand, based on the vertical segmentation of the Tik Tok platform, Tik Tok users are divided into different groups according to their interests. They initiate challenges based on the platform and gather with groups with similar hobbies, so that users can find their own group affiliation again under the precise subdivision of the field, so as to strengthen the sense of group identity.

4.3 Cultural Identity: Youth Culture and Mass Consumption Culture

The initial product orientation of Tik Tok platform is intended to cater to the habits of contemporary young users. Through participating in the activities of the exclusive youth groups provided by the platform, users can identify with the youth culture of Tik Tok platform. The concrete content of youth culture mainly includes clothing, language, fashion, consumption mode, leisure pursuit, marriage and love mode, which is in line with the “beauty, fashion and funny” of Tik Tok platform. The users of Tik Tok are mainly young people under 24 years old with high school or higher education. Their identification with Tik Tok's youth culture is a positive judgment of cultural value. At the same time, as a consumer of popular culture, when users consume on Tik Tok platform, they actually identify with popular consumption culture. The way users choose to consume is mainly determined by the user's identity. There are two main ways to construct the identity of popular cultural consumption: One is to focus on consumption itself. When users see a product they are interested in and meet the economic budget, they will buy it. In this way, users have immersed consumption experience on the platform, which greatly enhances the user's recognition of consumption. The second is focusing on consumers who advocate consumption. They use the consumption of Tik Tok platform to identify themselves, and at the same time construct the identity of the popular consumer culture.

5. Conclusion

With the development of technology, Tik Tok short video has become a popular new media and a new cultural form. Users display, share, comment and consume through Tik Tok, and become participants in popular culture. This kind of participation is not only a special expression of culture, but also an important reflection of the current user's sense of belonging dilemma and emotional catharsis.

Acknowledgement

Fund project: Tianjin Art Science Planning Project(E18045) .

Reference:

- [1][2] Xinhua Client(2018). Tik Tok Big Data Report.
<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1624056978562218695&wfr=spider&for=pc>,2019. 1.3
- [3]Daniel Bell1989. Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism. Translated by Zhao Yifan. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore.
- [4] Jenkins Richard(1992). Social Identity.London:Routledge.