

Research on the Communication Mechanism and Influence of Ethnic-themed Short Videos on Community Consciousness from the Perspective of Symbolic Interactionism

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Abstract: Based on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, this paper summarizes the digital presentation characteristics of cultural symbols in the communication of ethnic-themed short videos, including shared cultural symbols, distinctive cultural symbols, and the narrative transformation from "symbol splicing" to "meaning integration". This paper analyzes that in the process of short video communication, ethnic minority groups in China realize the transition from "individual identity" to "group cohesion" through the interaction and meaning negotiation between the self and others, which can be divided into superficial interaction, in-depth interaction, and creative interaction. Through the communication mechanism of "emotional resonance - social needs - cultural identity", this paper explores effective communication mechanisms and paths for promoting cultural cognition among all ethnic groups, stimulating emotional identity of all ethnic groups, constructing a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation, adhering to a correct view of the history of the Chinese nation, and forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

Keywords: Ethnic Groups; Short Videos; Symbols; Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation

1. Introduction

Ethnic unity and harmony have become a solid foundation for realizing China's socialist modernization. As the main line of the ethnic work in the new era, existing studies have discussed this theme from macro perspectives such as theory, culture, and education. However, it is still necessary to pay attention to the guidance of public opinion communication, especially the practical analysis of emerging media, so as to strengthen the communication effect.

With its intuitive, vivid, and convenient characteristics, short videos have broken down geographical, linguistic, and cultural barriers. As a new media that has risen rapidly in the mobile Internet era, they are reshaping the narrative and interaction patterns of people of all ethnic groups with strong influence. Users can easily shoot and produce videos with their mobile phones, and can also record or share their lives on short video platforms. These video contents cover various aspects of the daily life, traditional customs, costumes, and cuisines of ethnic minorities. The short video texts, which are full of symbols and meanings, not only serve as a medium for conveying the aspirations and ideas of people of all ethnic groups but also promote the understanding and integration among them.

Symbolic interactionism originated from American pragmatist philosophy and gradually took shape after the theoretical integration and development by many scholars. Among them, George Herbert Mead is the founder of symbolic interactionism. He systematically expounded the core idea of this theory, that is, the core media of human social interaction include symbols such as language, gestures, and cultural symbols. Self-cognition originates from the interaction process between individuals and others, and social order and identity are constructed in continuous symbolic interaction by learning. Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead, put forward the term "Symbolic Interactionism" for the first time and further refined Mead's theory. He believed that meaning arises from the social interaction between individuals and others, and it will be continuously revised and interpreted in the interaction.

Based on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, this paper summarizes the symbolic presentation characteristics in the communication of ethnic-themed short videos, and analyzes how ethnic minority groups realize the identity of ethnic images through the interaction and meaning

negotiation between the self and others in the process of short video communication, so as to explore effective communication mechanisms and paths for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

2. Digital Presentation of Cultural Symbols in Ethnic-themed Short Videos

2.1 The Commonality of Cultural Symbols Shared by Various Ethnic Groups

Commonality refers to the characteristics shared by different subjects. Through the narrative of grand national feelings, the cultural symbols of China's 56 ethnic groups are harmoniously integrated into the country's major celebrations and traditional festivals, which can continuously shape and strengthen collective memory. For example, the official account @People's Daily released a short video celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. With the song "I Love You, China" as the main melody, the video focuses on the panoramic display of 56 ethnic groups. The shots not only show the rich and unique local customs but also present the scenes of people of all ethnic groups living and working in peace and contentment, and being united and harmonious under the leadership of the Communist of China. More than 600 comments also show that users fully recognize that people of all ethnic groups are one family, and they have a sense of love and pride for the country. Although self-media creators focus more on local human and geographical characteristics, they also express their understanding and recognition of the sense of community for the Chinese nation through shared cultural symbols such as raising the national flag and using the meaning of "pomegranate seeds clinging tightly together" in the copy.

2.2 The Distinctiveness of Cultural Symbols Shared by Various Ethnic Groups

This paper selects the top four topic words with the highest total playback volume on Douyin: #Ethnic Characteristics and Ethnic Culture (71.86 billion views), #Ethnic Minority Customs (37.44 billion views), #Charm of Ethnic Minorities (11.1 billion views), and #Ethnic Minorities (10.24 billion views) (as of February 10, 2025). The top 50 short videos in the popularity list of the above four topics, totaling 200 short videos, are selected as research samples. This paper uses a word cloud tool to analyze the titles of these topics and generates a word cloud map (Figure 1). It is found that the topics mainly involve folk culture, ethnic costumes, ethnic dances, folk sports, rural cultural tourism, and food, and mention very specific ethnic minority symbols such as Torch Festival, hydrangea, grassland, reindeer, Lusheng, Miao people, and Matouqin. In the videos, the distinctive visual symbols used include: unique characters, costumes, decorations, festivals/life scenes of various ethnic groups; the distinctive auditory symbols used include: ethnic languages or dialects, music, etc.[1]. At the same time, short videos focus on presenting daily life scenes with the characteristics of "ritual sense" through the editing of lens language, such as close-up shots and group portraits tied to festival scenes. These unique distinctive ethnic symbols attract audiences to express amazement and praise, and such short videos have high popularity and interaction.

2.3 Narrative Transformation from "Symbol Splicing" to "Meaning Integration"

Short videos provide more convenient communication channels for ordinary creators. With their delicate presentation, they complement the grand narrative of official media and help audiences gain a deeper understanding of the narrative logic from "ethnic symbols" to "emotional resonance". The narrative of official media often needs to consider the overall situation. Therefore, although they strive to present the rich and colorful cultural symbols of all ethnic groups, they can only carry out fast-paced flash splicing due to the limitation of length, which makes it difficult to present the life logic and cultural connotation contained in them and easily falls into the misunderstanding of "spectacle" display. However, ordinary creators, starting from their own experiences, take the initiative to deeply depict the life scenes of their own ethnic groups, get rid of the object status of "being watched", and shift from "being shaped by others" to "self-shaping", which increases the authenticity and appeal of ethnic culture and provides a daily perspective for the mutual understanding between different ethnic groups.

The individual narratives of the distinctive cultural symbols of all ethnic groups, like drops of water, continuously flow into the grand narrative of shared cultural symbols, and finally converge into a large river, integrating into a profound understanding and group identity of the sense of community for the Chinese nation[2].

3. Communication Mechanism of Short Video Users Based on Symbolic Interaction and Meaning Negotiation

3.1 Three-level Interaction Characteristics of Users

The symbolic interaction of short video users can be divided into three levels: superficial interaction, in-depth interaction, and creative interaction, which confirms the view put forward by symbolic interactionism that social order and identity are constructed in continuous symbolic interaction.

Superficial interaction refers to the interaction that users have when they initially come into contact with relevant ethnic symbols and gain an understanding of them. They interact in simple ways such as liking, collecting, and forwarding to express their support and approval for ethnic-themed short videos.

In-depth interaction is based on users' learning, which improves their cognitive understanding of ethnic symbols and their cultural connotations. Thus, users express their identities, interpret meanings, or discuss cultures on the content they are interested in and have some understanding of, so as to deepen their understanding and consolidate consensus.

Creative interaction is based on users' recognition and praise of the ethnic cultural symbols they have learned. Thus, they spontaneously re-create the ethnic cultural symbols, and actively participate in the reproduction of meaning through deconstruction, reconstruction, and other methods, helping ethnic culture achieve greater communication momentum and effects.

3.2 The Process of Meaning Negotiation and Consensus Formation

In the symbolic interaction of ethnic-themed short videos, creators and users are not in a one-way relationship of "communicator-receiver", but in a two-way relationship of continuous interaction, meaning negotiation, and final consensus formation in the communication process.

Creators first select ethnic symbols for localized narration according to their own awareness, and users express their positive attitudes through interactive behaviors such as liking, collecting, and forwarding. In addition, users can also conduct third-party interpretation, questioning, or supplementary expansion in the comment area, so as to further interact and negotiate meanings with creators and other users, break cultural barriers, and shift from stereotypes and curiosity to in-depth cross-ethnic cultural exchanges[3].

The interaction and meaning negotiation based on symbols not only help creators understand the meaning of their own ethnic symbols in the eyes of others and think about how to more effectively present their own ethnic culture but also help users gain a deeper understanding of the cultures of different ethnic groups and enhance their understanding and tolerance of ethnic cultures. Finally, ethnic cultural symbols are understood and recognized by each other, and the core value behind ethnic cultural symbols - the pattern of the Chinese nation as a community of pluralistic integration - moves from "individual display" to "identity cohesion".

3.3 The Communication Mechanism of Ethnic-themed Short Videos Based on Symbolic Interactionism

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the occurrence of interaction has the inevitability of users' psychological needs and cultural communication laws. Emotional resonance provides the driving force for interaction, social needs provide the continuity for interaction, and cultural identity sublimates the depth and height of interaction. These three elements are interrelated and jointly construct a complete short video communication mechanism of symbolic interaction and meaning negotiation.

Emotional resonance is based on the emotional connection of cultural memory. Emotions have strong arousal power. Short videos with abundant emotional content are not only more likely to stimulate the cultural memory of the ethnic group itself but also easier to make users feel common emotions. For example, short videos about the Dai Water-Splashing Festival, the Zhuang San Yue San (March 3rd Festival), and the Yi Torch Festival can make users feel the scene personally because of their cheerful festival scenes, unique celebration methods, and highly infectious on-site atmosphere. The interaction data of these types of short videos are very active.

Social needs refer to the pursuit of group identity and belonging. Maslow's hierarchy of needs shows that after human beings meet their basic needs for survival and safety, they will have a desire for love and belonging, and identity recognition, and look forward to the ultimate realization of self-worth. For ethnic minority creators, the creation of short videos can highlight their individual identities, and they can gain social attention and recognition through interactions such as comments. They can even realize self-worth through the success of short videos. Therefore, they are motivated to continuously create and interact to meet their own social needs. For users, they can interact with creators in the comment area to gain a deeper understanding of the ethnic minority cultures they are interested in. They can also forward the videos or even create related topics themselves to attract more people's attention, and gain a sense of satisfaction by converting these behaviors into social currency.

Cultural identity promotes the value consensus of ethnic unity. For ethnic minority creators, they can assume the role of cultural inheritance. For users, they can deepen their understanding of the cultures of different ethnic groups, gain a deeper understanding and recognition of the Chinese culture of "plurality and unity", and more easily understand and accept the importance and necessity of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, thus generating a strong sense of identity and pride and enhancing the cohesion of all ethnic groups[4].

For example, a TikTok creator once launched a series of special topics "Let the World See the Beauty of China". By wearing the beautiful costumes of various ethnic groups in China and walking on the streets of foreign countries, the creator attracted local people to stop, take photos, and learn about the costumes. The creator would uniformly introduce that "it (the ethnic costume) comes from China" and further introduce the colorful ethnic minorities in China. Each special topic received more than 100,000 likes and thousands of comments in the comment area. Some comments thanked the creator for introducing the costumes of their own ethnic groups, some expressed the expectation that their own ethnic groups could also be recommended, and more comments discussed the ethnic costumes and expressed pride in China's numerous cultural treasures of ethnic groups and the prosperity and unity of the motherland. It is obvious that the communication mechanism of "emotional resonance - social needs - cultural identity" provides an effective practical reference for the communication of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

4. The Empowerment of Ethnic-themed Short Videos to Community Consciousness

4.1 Promoting Cultural Cognition Among All Ethnic Groups

Due to the development of technology, the creation of short videos has broken the limitation that ethnic minority cultures could only be presented from a third-person perspective through official media in the past, enabling more ordinary people to present the true appearance of their own ethnic cultures with daily symbols, thus breaking stereotypes. Among the 200 short video samples in this paper, they cover various themes such as ethnic costumes and beauty, ethnic unity and communication, ethnic spirit stories, daily life and food, modern development and changes, art and performance, and nature and environment. Through the careful selection of these life scenes, creators condense the in-depth connotation of ethnic culture into concrete images, which become the basic elements for showing themselves to the outside world.

For example, the scenes of Mongolians brushing their horses and preparing dairy products in the early morning, and the Yi girls in grand costumes showing the flowing beauty of their pleated skirts in front of the camera. When the interaction scenes of different ethnic groups are captured by the camera, they can comprehensively and three-dimensionally present the cultural identity and life experience of ethnic minority creators and build a cultural bridge for communication with the audience.

4.2 Stimulating Emotional Identity Among All Ethnic Groups

Through the ROST CM6 software, this paper conducts an emotional analysis of more than 16,000 comments of the sample videos. It is found that 57% of users hold positive emotions and have an accepting and appreciative attitude towards ethnic minority cultures. This positive emotion can create a good atmosphere for the construction of the sense of community for the Chinese nation. Neutral emotions account for 35%, mainly manifested in the frequent appearance of knowledge inquiry and popular science texts, which indicates that the public has a strong desire for knowledge about ethnic minority cultures and is eager to gain an in-depth understanding of those unfamiliar and unique cultural phenomena. Such comments can eliminate misunderstandings and construct a sense of community for

the Chinese nation based on rational cognition.

The interaction between creators and different users in the comment area not only leads to the collision and integration of ideas but also deepens understanding and friendship. For example, creators invite each other to visit, and users express their love and praise for ethnic cultural symbols, which injects warm emotional strength into the construction of the sense of community for the Chinese nation.

4.3 Constructing a Shared Spiritual Home for the Chinese Nation

Ethnic-themed short videos can strengthen shared emotions, activate spiritual consensus, and realize shared values through vivid and concrete symbolic interaction and meaning negotiation. They provide a digital path for constructing a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation through the shared cultural symbols of all ethnic groups. For example, the combination of Zhuang costumes and cultural confidence, the combination of Tajik border guards and national feelings, and the scenes of people of different ethnic groups singing "I Love You, China" together and showing rural revitalization, harmonious coexistence, and common prosperity present the realistic picture of "in promoting Chinese-style modernization and realizing common prosperity, no ethnic group can be left behind". Especially on important time nodes such as National Day and New Year's Day, the celebration videos showing people of all ethnic groups blessing the motherland for prosperity and prosperity can often stimulate a strong emotional identity of the public and make them feel the spiritual resonance of "beauty in diversity and shared prosperity".

4.4 Adhering to a Correct View of the History of the Chinese Nation

A correct view of the history of the Chinese nation scientifically answers the major questions of where the Chinese nation comes from and where it is going. The history of China is a history of the Chinese nation formed as a pluralistic and integrated community with shared weal and woe, which has strong cohesion and vitality. Under the guidance of this core idea, through the strong productivity of many short video creators, the long-term communication and integration of the Chinese nation are vividly presented from multiple perspectives, and an efficient interactive communication path is constructed.

For example, the presentation of historical scenes, including the migration and integration of ethnic groups, the resistance against foreign enemies, and cultural exchanges; the interactive interpretation of history, where creators clarify cognitive misunderstandings based on historical research and guide users to participate in discussions; the realistic presentation of history, through showing the practical practices of ethnic unity, border development and people's prosperity, and people living and working in peace and contentment, the abstract ideological concepts are transformed into concrete cognition, which lays a solid historical foundation for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

Although ethnic-themed short videos have effectively spread the cultural symbols of all ethnic groups, deepened mutual understanding, and provided an effective communication path for forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, we must also recognize the existing shortcomings.

In terms of content production, ethnic cultural symbols should avoid homogenization, stereotyping, and spectacle. Relevant departments and platforms should strengthen the support for high-quality themes, train creators, avoid short-sighted behaviors of creators in pursuit of traffic, and attach importance to exploring and presenting the depth and beauty of ethnic cultural symbols.

In terms of platform algorithm recommendation, appropriate preference should be given to high-quality ethnic-themed short videos to enhance the visibility of the content. In addition, platforms should strengthen content supervision to avoid the superficial communication of the abuse of ethnic symbols and the repeated recommendation of similar themes.

All parties should pay attention to the symbolic interaction and meaning negotiation after the communication of short videos. They can not only help the positive interpretation of ethnic cultural symbols by strengthening the guidance of interactive discussions in the comment area but also promote the cultural linkage between official media and self-media, between the academic circle and the public, and between online and offline, so as to realize the common prosperity of the cultures of all ethnic groups, enhance the sense of ethnic identity and pride, and forge a strong sense of community for the

Chinese nation.

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