

The Impact of Short Videos on the Creation and Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: Intangible cultural heritage serves as a vital repository of national and ethnic history and culture, playing a crucial role in preserving cultural diversity and fostering cultural exchange. In recent years, the evolution of digital media has opened up new avenues for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. This shift has profoundly influenced the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, particularly with the widespread adoption of short video platforms altering the landscape of heritage transmission. This study examines and analyzes the creative attributes of short videos focused on intangible cultural heritage, revitalizing otherwise static cultural assets. Practical challenges encountered during the dissemination process, such as low content quality and audience engagement, have contributed to a lack of public attention towards these videos. In response, this research proposes effective development strategies aimed at safeguarding and perpetuating intangible cultural heritage, with a focus on leveraging short video platforms to foster the healthy evolution of heritage transmission.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage, Short videos, Communication impact, Development strategies

1. Introduction

The emergence of short video dissemination in the digital age has swiftly transformed the landscape of content sharing on the Internet. As a medium for disseminating content, short videos offer dynamic aesthetics, heightened dissemination potential, increased content density, and stronger infectivity compared to static forms such as text, images, or audio [1]. Moreover, owing to their concise and convenient format, short videos align well with the pace of the Internet era and have garnered favor among numerous Internet platforms and audiences [2]. This surge in cultural video creation incentives has led to the rapid proliferation of various short video platforms focusing on intangible cultural heritage themes, encompassing realms such as traditional attire and rituals, culinary traditions, folk craftsmanship demonstrations, and the production of traditional musical instruments. Individuals who disseminate intangible cultural heritage through these platforms have amassed substantial viewership and earned recognition as online authorities in heritage propagation [3]. According to recent statistics, by the end of 2023, China boasted over 1600 national-level intangible cultural heritage projects, in addition to countless provincial and municipal-level initiatives [4]. Confronted with this vast and diverse reservoir of intangible cultural heritage, leveraging the advantages of short videos for “short, succinct, and swift” dissemination enables the integration and widespread sharing of these resources.

By ensuring viewer engagement and enriching the cultural depth of dissemination content, this approach not only fosters interaction but also advances the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage within contemporary society [5]. Consequently, optimizing the dissemination methods of the mobile short video era to enhance the reach, impact, and cohesive force of intangible cultural heritage imagery, thereby sustaining their cultural legacy and social significance, has emerged as a pivotal research agenda. In addressing these concerns, this study initially analyzes the creative attributes of China's intangible cultural heritage short videos, proceeds to identify prevailing practical challenges in their dissemination, and ultimately proposes targeted development strategies.

2. The Creative Characteristics of “Intangible Cultural Heritage + Short Videos” in China

2.1. Transitioning from “Static Aesthetics” to “Dynamic Aesthetics”

Traditionally, intangible cultural heritage predominantly existed in static forms, exemplified by traditional crafts such as Paper Cuttings, embroidery, and clay sculpture. However, communication through these mediums had limited audience reach, particularly struggling to capture the attention and interest of younger generations [6]. The advent of short videos has transformed the presentation of intangible cultural heritage, ushering in a more vibrant and engaging mode of dissemination, thereby shifting from static aesthetics to dynamic aesthetics. Previously, heritage inheritance primarily relied on oral tradition or documentation through text, images, audio, and video recordings [7]. However, these methods often suffered from incomplete content, singular formats, and restricted dissemination conditions, hindering the effective transmission of intangible cultural heritage [8]. Short videos, with their enhanced flexibility, transcend temporal and spatial constraints, reintroducing intangible cultural heritage into everyday life. No longer confined to a niche audience, intangible cultural heritage now seamlessly integrates into mainstream entertainment, making it more accessible and relatable to the masses.

From the perspective of dynamic aesthetics, the utilization of short videos to showcase the artistry of intangible cultural heritage primarily involves four key points. Firstly, it enables the capture of captivating moments depicting intangible cultural heritage techniques, thus showcasing the intricate details and textures of heritage works, while also augmenting their artistic allure through techniques such as close-ups and slow motion. Secondly, short videos incorporate music and sound effects to cultivate a unique atmosphere and evoke emotions, thereby enhancing the artistic appeal of intangible cultural heritage. For instance, traditional instrumentals or distinct sounds derived from intangible cultural heritage techniques immerse viewers in the essence of heritage, facilitating a profound connection with its significance. Thirdly, short videos employ dynamic visual effects to craft artistic imagery, utilizing editing, transitions, and other methods to not only elevate the viewer's visual experience but also accentuate the inherent charm of intangible cultural heritage. Finally, short videos narrate the stories of intangible cultural heritage inheritors or capture emotional exchanges within heritage activities. Through nuanced cinematography and compelling storytelling, viewers are afforded a deeper understanding of the cultural and artistic value inherent in intangible cultural heritage.

2.2. Transition from “Communicator-Centered” to “Receiver-Centered”

In the creative realm of “intangible cultural heritage + short video,” audiences assume the role of content producers, signifying a shift from a “communicator-centered” to a “receiver-centered” dissemination approach. This transition is underpinned by four influential factors. Firstly, there is an imperative to be audience-oriented. Creators of intangible cultural heritage short videos must possess a profound understanding of viewers' interests and preferences, tailoring content accordingly. In this paradigm, creators must diligently heed feedback and evaluations from viewers, continually refining

and optimizing the content of intangible cultural heritage creation to elicit greater attention and participation. Consequently, this metamorphoses inheritors from traditional custodians to interactive guides engaging with viewers. Secondly, there is a heightened emphasis on fostering audience participation and interaction. Viewer engagement through social functions such as liking, commenting, and sharing constitutes vital components of short videos. These interactions facilitate profound communication and engagement between creators and viewers, broadening the scope of inheritors to encompass roles beyond preservation, extending to guidance and collaboration with the audience. Thirdly, there is a diversification of communication channels. Leveraging platforms like short video platforms, social media, and various communication channels enables the broader dissemination and promotion of intangible cultural heritage. This diversification also compels communicators to prioritize viewer experience and feedback, further propelling the transition to a “receiver-centered” approach. Lastly, there is a redefinition of the creator’s role. Unlike traditional inheritors who passively preserve intangible cultural heritage, creators in the contemporary “intangible cultural heritage + short video” model must demonstrate initiative, actively exploring and innovating display methods and dissemination strategies. This proactive approach prompts inheritors to accord greater attention to viewer experience and feedback, thus fostering a transformation in inheritance methods. In summary, the evolution of intangible cultural heritage dissemination from “communicator-centered” to “receiver-centered” places greater emphasis on viewer experience and feedback, infusing new vitality into the creation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage.

2.3. Transitioning from “Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage” to “Cultural Experts”

Historically, despite possessing remarkable skills, many folk craftsmen in China remained relatively obscure. However, the fusion of intangible cultural heritage with short videos has provided a broader platform for these artisans dedicated to honing their craft, elevating them to the status of “cultural experts” in the realm of intangible cultural heritage preservation. Nevertheless, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has significantly disrupted global economic development, profoundly impacting the creations and livelihoods of traditional craftsmen involved in intangible cultural heritage projects [9]. In this challenging environment, on a particular short video platform, Lin Xiaojie, the fourth-generation inheritor of the Shandong Line Cutting Enamel Making Technique’s intangible cultural heritage, manages the “Jingyun Ge Gou Enamel” account. Upon inheriting her father’s legacy, Lin Xiaojie confronted the pandemic’s repercussions by transitioning from brick-and-mortar stores to e-commerce platforms, concurrently leveraging short video platforms to showcase her craft. Harnessing her rich expertise in film and television production alongside the unique artistic allure of enameled wire, Lin Xiaojie adeptly navigates her dual roles as an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage and a short video creator [10]. This exemplifies how the convergence of “intangible cultural heritage + short videos” injects fresh vitality into endangered intangible cultural heritage, fostering its development and perpetuation amidst contemporary challenges.

3. The Realistic Dilemma Of Disseminating Intangible Cultural Heritage Short Videos

3.1. Low Quality of Communication Content

Intangible cultural heritage represents the distilled wisdom of diverse communities spanning millennia, boasting richness and diversity [11]. The advent of short videos has significantly expanded the avenues for disseminating intangible cultural heritage. However, this phenomenon also confronts several challenges, notably the pressing issue of substandard dissemination content quality. On one hand, a considerable number of short videos showcasing intangible cultural heritage excessively prioritize entertainment over the nuanced essence and value inherent in such cultural expressions. Driven by the dynamics of the attention economy, some content creators simplify and trivialize

intangible cultural heritage for commercial gains, thereby compromising the overall quality of dissemination content. On the other hand, while governmental bodies and certain heritage custodians actively endeavor to promote intangible cultural heritage through various media, many lack the requisite professional expertise in content creation and dissemination. Moreover, the absence of dedicated teams among heritage custodians results in a self-operated communication model that often lacks the finesse required in aspects such as narrative perspective, filming techniques, and editing methodologies, consequently leading to subpar communication content and limited engagement metrics.

The ramifications of substandard short video dissemination content are manifold. Primarily, it tarnishes the image and reputation of intangible cultural heritage, diminishing its recognition and appreciation among the public. Secondly, it hampers the broader dissemination and preservation efforts of intangible cultural heritage, impeding its widespread promotion and, in severe instances, precipitating the erosion of invaluable cultural skills and practices. Thirdly, the proliferation of low-quality intangible cultural heritage short videos engenders resource wastage, encompassing human, material, and financial resources, thereby thwarting the realization of their intended cultural and educational value.

3.2. Lack of Sustained Innovation

The surge in popularity of intangible cultural heritage short videos featuring elements such as ethnic costumes, Peking Opera, and porcelain has attracted numerous Multi-Channel Network (MCN) organizations to adopt the “intangible cultural heritage + short video” model. However, these entities often prioritize marketing and revenue generation through live streaming, consequently marginalizing traditional handicraft intangible cultural heritage products or those lacking significant profit potential. As a result, public awareness of intangible cultural heritage remains limited. Furthermore, the current landscape of intangible cultural heritage short videos predominantly revolves around traditional handicrafts. The proliferation of homogeneous content on short video platforms lacks innovation, thus risking viewer aesthetic fatigue. Prior research has highlighted the potential of the “intangible cultural heritage + short video” model in advancing the tourism industry. However, traditional development processes have been hindered by issues such as monotonous formats and a dearth of content innovation [12]. Specifically, professional media outlets often sacrifice the depth of intangible cultural heritage in favor of sensationalism, thereby reducing investment in innovative content creation. Creators, driven by the pursuit of traffic and attention, frequently overlook the significance of original works. Instead, they tend to emulate and plagiarize high-traffic content frameworks from others, neglecting genuine exploration of intangible cultural heritage. Consequently, progress in innovation within the “intangible cultural heritage + short video” model is impeded. Research indicates that digitization serves as the primary method for safeguarding and transmitting intangible cultural heritage. However, challenges such as limited resource sharing, ambiguous property rights, and an imperfect long-term value mechanism persist [13]. Therefore, addressing the superficiality and entertainment-centric nature of dissemination content within the “intangible cultural heritage + short video” model, while enhancing innovation and long-term value, remains a critical area of study.

4. The Development Strategy of “Intangible Cultural Heritage + Short Video”

4.1. Increasing Government Support

As an integral aspect of public culture in China, the protection and development of intangible cultural heritage have garnered robust governmental support. With the emergence of the short video era, it is imperative for government departments to bolster their backing for the advancement of intangible cultural heritage + short video initiatives. To enhance the inheritance and dissemination of intangible

cultural heritage, local government bodies should allocate financial resources to support disseminators and short video platforms focused on promoting “intangible cultural heritage + short videos”. Additionally, the government can actively encourage the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage within universities, prompting institutions to establish relevant media programs or integrate “Intangible Cultural Heritage + Short Video” courses into communication curricula, thereby fostering awareness among college students. Moreover, government departments and cultural centers should regularly organize workshops to provide short video creation skills training for inheritors of intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, there should be stringent regulation of “intangible cultural heritage + short videos”, with a focus on strengthening oversight of disseminators’ practices. This includes ensuring the quality of content in “intangible cultural heritage + short videos” and urging short video platforms to fulfill their responsibility as gatekeepers.

4.2. Strengthening Control Over “Intangible Cultural Heritage + Short Video” Content

The proliferation of short videos and the integration of new media and technology have catalyzed significant transformations in the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, providing audiences with rich and efficient information resources while simultaneously disrupting traditional modes of communication. The “gatekeeper” theory underscores that societal information flow is channeled through specific avenues, with only information aligning with group norms and “gatekeeper” value standards being included in communication channels. Consequently, in the execution of “intangible cultural heritage + short videos”, short video platforms must recognize their responsibilities and roles therein, prioritizing and valuing the dissemination of “intangible cultural heritage + short videos”. Primarily, short video platforms should facilitate the flow of “intangible cultural heritage + short videos”, cultivating a conducive ecosystem for their creation and dissemination. Secondly, these platforms should acknowledge their function as “gatekeepers” in the dissemination of “intangible cultural heritage + short videos”, thereby intensifying their control over content quality. This entails ensuring the accurate portrayal of intangible cultural heritage by employing advanced artificial intelligence technology to monitor and identify low-quality dissemination, enhancing content review mechanisms, and implementing automatic screening of subpar short video content. Lastly, short video platforms should leverage their inherent advantages by regularly facilitating online and offline exchanges between inheritors of intangible cultural heritage and “intangible cultural heritage + short video” disseminators. This collaborative approach serves to continually elevate the dissemination efficacy and creative standards of intangible cultural heritage short videos.

4.3. Accurately Targeting the Audience and Enhancing User Engagement

The fusion of intangible cultural heritage with short videos offers a unique opportunity to maximize the inherent advantages of intangible cultural heritage dissemination. By leveraging personalized recommendation technology grounded in artificial intelligence and harnessing big data algorithms, precise distribution and targeting of audience groups can be achieved. This entails dividing the overall audience into distinct segments and adopting tailored dissemination strategies to enhance user engagement and encourage active participation. The process begins with new users joining a short video platform, where content recommendation algorithms initially suggest popular short videos. Concurrently, a dedicated database is established based on the new user’s video browsing history, facilitating future recommendations of related content. For video creators, upon publishing a new short video, the platform grants initial recommended traffic. Continued support for traffic is contingent upon subsequent videos demonstrating higher interaction and completion rates compared to the initial recommendation. Furthermore, as user engagement increases, emphasis should also be placed on enhancing communication and interaction between “intangible cultural heritage + short

videos” and the audience, thereby encouraging active participation in dissemination. Utilizing the social functionalities of short video platforms, disseminators can engage directly with the audience, gaining insights into their preferences and refining dissemination methods and content accordingly. This personalized approach ensures that videos are tailored to meet audience needs, thereby facilitating secondary propagation. Finally, the implementation of a new recommendation model based on big data analysis further enhances the user experience and fosters trust in short video platforms. Research underscores that in the era of big data, supported by technological innovation, the integration of digital technology with intangible cultural heritage creativity, and driven by display support mechanisms, can revitalize the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage and products, while simultaneously enhancing user engagement [14].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the advent of the short video era heralds significant opportunities. In the realm of inheriting and disseminating intangible cultural heritage, it is imperative to transcend previous communication barriers. Leveraging short video platforms enables broader societal engagement, fostering direct interaction between the masses and intangible cultural heritage. This facilitates a firsthand experience of the unique allure of intangible cultural heritage, thereby enticing more potential inheritors to join the ranks of heritage custodians and addressing the looming crisis facing certain intangible cultural heritage projects on the brink of extinction. In the creation of “intangible cultural heritage + short videos”, it is essential to establish a profound connection between intangible cultural heritage and everyday life. This entails bridging the gap between intangible cultural heritage and the general public, thereby fostering increased audience involvement and participation. As Shandong Province endeavors to vigorously develop “intangible cultural heritage + short video” initiatives, it is incumbent upon relevant local government departments to ramp up support and institute effective market supervision measures. Such actions are pivotal in driving the high-quality development of “intangible cultural heritage + short video” endeavors, ensuring their enduring success.

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