

Analyzing Video Communication Strategies of Chinese International Student Vloggers from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract: The number of vloggers identified as “Chinese international students” on social media has been steadily increasing in recent years. This can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, the growth of the international education industry has provided more opportunities for Chinese students to study abroad and gain firsthand experience of foreign cultures. Secondly, the popularity of social media platforms in China has encouraged individuals to create diverse content, including vlogs. These Chinese international students have gained popularity as content creators on Bilibili. Through their vlogs, they act as cultural ambassadors, providing relatable guidance for audiences to explore and comprehend the similarities and differences between foreign cultures and their own. This study focuses on five influential vloggers who identify as “international students” on Bilibili, analyzing the language, themes, and characteristics of their top ten-ranked videos. The findings indicate that these vlogs utilize a combination of languages, tackle youthful themes, and explore socially relevant topics to elucidate cross-cultural content, and both highlight and bridge the challenges in cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Cross-cultural Communication, Chinese International Students, Vlogging, Social Media Platforms (Bilibili)

1. Introduction

The community of Chinese students studying abroad is expanding due to growth in the international education industry. New Oriental Vision Overseas Consulting Company predicts that over 500,000 Chinese college students will study abroad in 2023 [1], an increase of over 200,000 compared to the Chinese Ministry of Education's 2020 statistics of 703,500 [2]. This indicates a rapid increase in the number of overseas students.

Due to the widespread popularity of social media in China, an increasing number of Chinese students are pursuing careers related to social media. According to a report by CNNIC, the number of social media users in China exceeded one billion as of December 2022, representing a year-on-year growth rate of 3.4% [3]. This vast user base includes a significant number of international students. Additionally, a recent research study conducted by Nextech on the preferred career aspirations of international students discovered that a considerable number of students wish to establish themselves as professional creators of short videos after graduation, closely followed by a

focus on education and training, and financial investment [4]. This study also revealed that international students excel at managing social media accounts with the expertise they acquired from studying overseas. The justification for their interest in short video creation work is due to their requirement for expertise on various themes and topics, adaptability in completing the tasks, and the flexible nature of the work [4].

Based on the above perspectives, it can be concluded that with the increase in the number of international students and the strong interest of international students in media-related careers, new media vloggers with international student identities are rapidly emerging and attracting attention from a wide range of audiences. Some of their main activities and content include sharing daily experiences, promoting learning, illustrating native and foreign knowledge, and introducing folk customs and traditions. These activities are valuable to the promotion of cross-cultural communication and address the cultural gaps between nations. Given this, the study aims to deeply explore international student vloggers' strategies for video communication from a cross-cultural perspective. The study selected five prominent international student vloggers who attracted significant attention on the Bilibili, which is a popular video-sharing website in China, and conducted an in-depth analysis of their top 10 videos from the previous year, focusing mainly on theme-setting, content presentation, and narrative techniques. Finally, the study analyzes and sums up the common communication strategies used by these international student vloggers.

2. Literature Review

This literature review section examines the intersections of cross-cultural communication, video communication, the identity of international students, and the role of vloggers. It begins by exploring the importance of cross-cultural communication and the theories and frameworks that underpin it, emphasizing cultural sensitivity and overcoming barriers. The review then shifts to the unique characteristics and dynamics of video communication, including visual storytelling and non-verbal cues, as well as the role of social media platforms. It further delves into the identity of Chinese international students and the impact of video communication in sharing their stories and fostering cultural exchange. Lastly, the review investigates the motivations and strategies of Chinese international student vloggers, analyzing the impact of their vlogs in shaping perceptions, promoting cultural understanding, and influencing viewers' behavior and decisions. This comprehensive review provides the foundation for further analysis in this study.

2.1. Cross-cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication plays a crucial role in the well-being and success of international students. Previous studies have examined the impact of cross-cultural communication on various aspects of international students' lives. For example, Young and Schartner conducted a qualitative study exploring the experiences of international students in a multicultural university setting [5]. They found that effective cross-cultural communication facilitated better integration, increased social support, and improved academic performance among international students.

Similarly, Guo et al. conducted a quantitative study investigating the influence of cross-cultural communication on foreign social networking sites on the psychological well-being of Chinese international students [6]. Their findings indicated that higher levels of cross-cultural communication on social networking sites were associated with lower levels of stress and increased satisfaction with the international student experience.

2.2. Video Communication

Video communication has distinct features that differentiate it from other forms of communication.

Visual storytelling is a crucial aspect of video communication, as it allows individuals to convey their experiences and emotions through visual elements. Non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, also play a significant role in video communication, as they enhance the understanding and interpretation of messages.

Social media platforms, such as the Red, TikTok, YouTube, and TikTok have further revolutionized video communication by providing a platform for individuals to share their stories and connect with audiences on a global scale. These platforms allow for direct interaction and engagement with viewers through comments, likes, and shares, thereby fostering a sense of community and belonging.

The effectiveness of video communication can be explained by theories and frameworks such as the dual coding theory and the social presence theory. According to the dual coding theory, combining visual and verbal information enhances memory retention and understanding [7]. The social presence theory suggests that video communication creates a sense of social presence by simulating face-to-face interaction, leading to increased engagement and emotional connection [8].

2.3. Chinese International Student

Chinese international students refer to students who are citizens of China and have chosen to study and live abroad, experiencing different cultures and perspectives. Chinese international students face unique experiences and challenges in adapting to a new cultural environment. They often struggle with language barriers, cultural differences, and a sense of homesickness. Video communication provides a platform for Chinese international students to express their experiences, share their stories, and shape their identity in the host country.

Previous research has investigated the effects of various media formats involving video, such as blogs and podcasts, on facilitating cultural exchange and enhancing interreligious understanding [9]. Additionally, employing videos in students' native languages to expand the scope of cross-cultural engagement in universities is considered a valuable and feasible approach [10]. Such videos enable international students to establish a sense of familiarity with their own cultural identity within an unfamiliar academic environment, thereby stimulating their curiosity to further explore the resources and services offered by the university.

2.4. Vlogging Trend and Motivations

Vlogging, short for video blogging, has emerged as a popular form of online content creation. Vloggers are individuals who create and upload videos to platforms such as YouTube, documenting their daily lives, experiences, and perspectives. The role of a vlogger extends beyond mere video production; it encompasses various tasks such as planning, scripting, filming, editing, and promoting content. Many vloggers have turned their channels into profitable ventures, earning income through brand collaborations, product endorsements, and advertising revenue [11].

The trend of Chinese international students becoming vloggers has gained significant momentum in recent years. A study by Wang and Picone explored the motivations, experiences, and layered identity structure of 16 Chinese vloggers on Bilibili [12]. They found that Chinese students are increasingly embracing vlogging as a means to express themselves, connect with their peers, and create self-identified branding. The study identified a growing interest among Chinese students in sharing their experiences under the tense dynamics of cultural motivations and students' future career and financial goals.

The vlogger identity of Chinese international students intersects with cross-cultural video communication in several ways. Through their vlogs, these students engage in visual storytelling, showcasing their experiences and perspectives to a global audience. Furthermore, the interactive nature of vlogging enables Chinese international students to connect with viewers from different

cultural backgrounds. Through audience engagement and feedback, these vloggers can engage in cross-cultural dialogue, answering questions, and sharing insights on culture differences.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study aims to analyze the communication techniques employed by international student vloggers in their videos and assess the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. A qualitative research design was utilized to gather data from a sample of international student vloggers who produce content related to their experiences studying abroad.

3.2. Data Collection

The data for this study was obtained through a systematic review of vlogs that were uploaded by international student vloggers on the popular video-sharing platform Bilibili. The search criteria used for selecting the vlogs included keywords related to “international students,” “cross-cultural experiences,” and “influential vlogger” (as reflected by the subscription numbers). Five vloggers, who have the highest number of followers on Bilibili and reside in different regions around the world, were selected for analysis. These five vloggers are “jia mei shi po zhu” (假美食 po 主), “peng jiang jiang LINYA” (彭酱酱 LINYA), “yu xi xi xi” (虞兮西西), “na dou nai nai” (纳豆奶奶), “yang yang yang PD” (羊羊羊 PD). Additionally, the top ten most viewed videos of each vlogger were carefully watched and categorized. In total, 50 videos were thoroughly analyzed to understand the video dissemination strategies employed by these vloggers.

Table 1: Basic information of five selected international student vloggers’ Bilibili social media accounts (as of September 9, 2023)

Account Statistics (million)	“na dou nai nai” (纳豆奶奶)	“jia mei shi po zhu” (假美食 po 主)	“yang yang yang PD” (羊羊羊 PD)	“peng jiang jiang LINYA” (彭酱酱 LINYA)	“yu xi xi xi” (虞兮西西)
Total Followers	4.28	3.77	1.41	1.32	0.40
Total Likes	33.33	23.79	8.00	4.57	0.82
Highest Video View Count	10.66	1.54	10.96	2.57	2.18
IP Geolocation	Japan	UK	Korea	UK	US

4. Analysis Results and Findings

4.1. Bilingual Expression

The analysis of the selected vlogs revealed several video communication techniques employed by international student vloggers to facilitate cross-cultural communication. Language expression played a crucial role in effectively conveying their experiences and engaging with their audience. Vloggers utilized a combination of English and their native language to cater to viewers from different cultural backgrounds.

The viewpoint of Samovar et al. emphasizes the relationship between language expression forms and the effectiveness of video content communication [13]. International students, who are typically proficient in the language of the host country while also being familiar with their native language and cultural environment, tend to employ various languages flexibly to seek more advantageous ways of presenting video content. For instance, vlogger LINYA, known as “peng jiang jiang - 彭酱酱”,

sometimes utilizes Chinese homophones, a combination of Chinese and English, to explain Chinese items to her foreign peers that pose translation challenges. For example, in one of her video, she showcased a famous dish from Hunan, China called “Lei Jiao Ban Pi Dan” (擂椒拌皮蛋) to foreigners. Firstly, during the cooking process, she explained the difficulty of directly translating the verb “lei” (擂) into English. This verb refers to the action of grinding food into fine powder using a special Chinese kitchen utensil called “chong” (舂). In order to help foreigners understand the concept of “擂”, she compared the step of “擂椒” to the scene of crushing potatoes when making mashed potatoes, commonly done by British people. She demonstrated the shape of the utensil and the specific action required to complete this step. As for “皮蛋”, this traditional food was translated and explained as “preserved egg”, “smelly egg”, and “processed egg” to emphasize its appearance and production process.

In addition, Vlogger “na do u nai nai - “纳豆奶奶” created a video in which she re-presented captivating scenes from Chinese traditional skits, mainly famous skits performed by Zhao Benshan in the Spring Festival Gala, in a Japanese dubbed format, catering to domestic and international audiences. Due to the different linguistic context, the Chinese skits dubbed in Japanese became more dynamic, humorous, and gained over 5 million views and thousands of comments.

Based on the above, the research findings suggest that international student video vloggers are adept at using multiple languages and linguistic expressions in their videos to attract viewers. This also reminds us that in cross-cultural communication, the choice of language and expression style is crucial as it can enhance the appeal and impact of cultural exchange.

4.2. Youthful Video Themes

According to the “2022 China Short Video Industry Analysis Report - Market Status and Development Trends Analysis”, the majority of short video users in China are concentrated in the age group of 15-30, primarily consisting of young users [14]. These young users tend to prefer content related to food, leisure entertainment, and knowledge and skill sharing. Overseas students who are content creators on short video platforms also focus on these themes and incorporate elements of foreign culture to satisfy the curiosity and thirst for knowledge of their audience about the host country. For instance, “jia meishi po zhu” (假美食 po 主) would film local people, museums, and food in the streets of London. On the other hand, “yu xi xi xi” (虞兮西西) and “peng jiang jiang LINYA” (彭酱酱 LINYA) would share their entertainment methods and daily study routines between the canteens, classrooms, and dormitories of foreign campuses.

Table 2: Selected vloggers and their top ten viewing videos categorized as follows

Specific Content	“na dou nai nai” (纳豆奶奶)	“jia meishi po zhu” (假美食 po 主)	“yang yang yang PD” (羊羊 PD)	“peng jiang jiang LINYA” (彭酱酱 LINYA)	“yu xi xi xi” (虞兮西西)
Food (total of 16)	0 time	7 times	9 times	0 time	0 time
Leisure Entertainment (total of 21)	10 times	3 times	1 time	1 time	6 times
Knowledge/skill Sharing (total of 13)	0 time	0 time	0 time	9 times	4 times

Youthful themes are typically presented in a high-context environment. High-context refers to a communication process in which the transmission of information relies on non-verbal factors, context, and shared background knowledge [15]. Due to the shared cultural and educational background

between international students and the audience, certain videos have gained widespread popularity by using non-verbal communication. Taking “peng jiang jiang LINYA” (彭酱酱 LINYA) as an example, she focuses on sharing her learning experiences. She recognizes that young people today often struggle with distractions and have difficulty setting and completing learning tasks. Many of her recorded videos, such as the highly viewed "A Day in the Life of an Overachieving Girl Waking Up at 5 AM" and "24 Hours of Non-stop Learning," solely convey her learning state and personal journey through written reflections on paper or gestures in the videos. This form of expressing emotions and insights without relying on language resonates with the contemporary scenario of young individuals studying and working alone. It also effectively utilizes the characteristics of low-context communication, where verbal communication is not present, but the content is effectively conveyed to the audience, allowing them to have a more immersive experience.

4.3. Meeting Needs and Breaking Stereotypes

According to the Uses and Gratifications theory, audiences are seen as individuals with specific needs, and media consumption is the process of fulfilling these needs [16]. At the same time, there exists the attention economy in modern society. In the attention economy, various media compete for the limited attention resources of the public, leading to the scarcity of such resources [17]. Therefore, in order to effectively acquire these limited attention resources, content creators and marketers must design diverse, innovative, consistently updated, and widely exposed information [18].

The videos created by international student vloggers meet the audience's demand for exploring foreign scenery and satisfy their interest in this aspect. For example, “na dou nai nai” (纳豆奶奶), based in Japan, recently released a video about the “truth of nuclear wastewater” in Japan, providing a timeline of the decision to release nuclear wastewater and showcasing the perspectives and suggestions of Japanese people on this issue. During the past COVID-19 pandemic, UK-based “jia mei shi po zhu” (假美食 po 主) and US-based “yu xi xi xi” (虞兮西西) have also created videos about lockdowns and how residents in their respective countries obtained essential supplies. Therefore, international students utilize their location advantage to share the most up-to-date experiences and perspectives, connecting the audience to global events and keeping them informed about happenings worldwide.

The role of titles that involve stereotypes is significant in capturing the attention of audiences within the attention economy. Vloggers can effectively attract and maximize their appeal by skillfully crafting video titles and utilizing various rhetorical devices. Titles that incorporate regional attributes, gender connotations, and consumer concepts tend to garner more attention. For instance, titles such as “Cambridge Ball” and “London Street” clearly indicate their regional affiliations, whereas titles like “British Socialite,” “Cambridge Academic Genius,” and “Japanese Street Girls” possess distinct identity references. Audiences often hold stereotypes and gender biases towards the identity labels that emerge on the internet [19]. For example, “British Socialites” are often portrayed as living in castles and exclusively using luxury brands, and “Academic Geniuses” from Cambridge are assumed to be exclusively male. However, the reality may differ from the perceptions of the general public. International student vloggers frequently assume these appealing identity labels as the main characters in their videos, conducting interviews with individuals who are not easily accessible in everyday life. Their aim is to challenge the stereotypes and preconceptions we hold about these people.

5. Conclusion

The international student vlogger has attracted the attention of a large audience interested in cross-cultural content due to their unique cross-cultural experiences and insights. Due to differences in language, beliefs, and upbringing, domestic viewers often cannot personally experience foreign

cultures. The international student vlogger deeply understands this predicament and strives to help domestic viewers better understand cross-cultural aspects.

Firstly, in terms of language expression, the international student vlogger makes efforts to improve their language skills by combining both foreign and native languages as well as body language. Secondly, in selecting themes, they tend to choose topics that are popular among young people, such as food, leisure activities, and knowledge sharing, and present them in a casual and enjoyable manner. Due to the similarity in age and cultural background between the creator and the audience, this low-context communication environment allows the vlogger to effectively communicate with the audience through the videos themselves, without the need for voice-over translations. Additionally, the international student vlogger excels at capturing social hot topics and existing stereotypes, leading the audience to explore the real foreign cultural environment. Overall, the videos of international student vloggers enhance the efficiency of cross-cultural communication and provide inspiration for overcoming cross-cultural barriers.

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