

Short Videos Promote the Cross-Layer Dissemination of Intangible Culture

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Abstract. The preservation and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the process of modernization have attracted more and more attention, but the traditional protection mode is difficult to meet the requirements of inheritance. The paper analyzes the contribution of short videos to the cross-circle dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, as well as their communication value and practical significance. The analysis shows that short videos give new choices to the wider dissemination of intangible cultural heritage in the digital age and provide important support for its inheritance and development. At the same time, the study identifies several obstacles, including cultural appropriation and the digital divide, which may affect the authenticity and effectiveness of cultural communication. Based on these findings, this paper proposes several suggestions, including strengthening cooperation with cultural practitioners and incorporating more local cultural context into communication practices. These measures may help achieve a balance between the authenticity and communication power of intangible cultural heritage and provide a reference for its inheritance in the digital age.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Short Video Platform, Cross-Circle Communication, Cultural Inheritance

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Intangible cultural heritage is the expression, tradition, and knowledge that show the cultural identity components of local communities. According to UNESCO statistics, by 2022, 584 intangible cultural heritages in 131 countries around the world had been added to the relevant list. However, with the development of global modernization, more and more intangible cultural heritages are facing the crisis of extinction. Research shows that it is estimated that 40% of intangible assets may disappear in the next 20 years [1]. Therefore, it is difficult for the traditional protection model to meet the needs of inheritance [2]. The popularity of short video platforms, it has brought a new opportunity for the protection and dissemination of intangible culture [3]. Take TikTok as an example, TikTok will have more than 1 billion monthly active users worldwide in 2023. The average daily usage time of users is up to 95 minutes. The duration of short videos is usually 15-60 seconds, which is visually in line with the habits of today's users and can make

intangible cultural content reach a range that is difficult to cover in the traditional protection mode [4].

1.2. Research significance

In the development of the digital era, intangible and short video platforms began to integrate, bringing new opportunities for cultural protection and dissemination [5]. This study focuses on how short videos can help intangible culture, limited to native communities, achieve cross-cultural communication and fill the gap in relevant research [3]. At present, about 600 intangible cultural heritages around the world are threatened by globalization, urbanization, etc. The core significance of this research is to expose how digital platforms turn these challenges into development opportunities and promote non-genetic inheritance and communication between different cultural circles [3].

The significance of this research is not only limited to the academic level, but also pays more attention to topics such as cultural identity, heritage protection, and cross-cultural exchanges [6]. With the advantage of a large number of users around the world, the short video platform can provide a new path for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage and value recognition [7]. The study analyzes the mechanism of the platform to promote the cross-cultural dissemination of intangible, which provides new ideas for the strategy of balancing the authenticity of intangible and digital innovation [5].

2. Difficulties in the cross-circle dissemination of intangible culture

2.1. Cross-layer definition

In the process of cross-cultural communication through the digital short video platform, traditional cultural practices and modern communication technology are combined to present a complex state of integration [4]. Before discussing the various challenges encountered in the process, it is necessary to sort out the relevant basic concepts first. Intangible cultural heritage is a cultural heritage part recognized by a specific community, which includes people's various practices, cultural expressions, and expressions, as well as various related knowledge and skills. Specific forms of expression are also very rich, such as word-of-mouth traditions, various artistic performances, as well as folk customs of society, sacrificial ceremonies, festivals, people's understanding of nature and the universe, and traditional crafts passed down. Cross-cultural dissemination refers to the spread of cultural elements between different cultural backgrounds [3]. This communication process not only requires the translation and adaptation of cultural content, but also needs to consider the acceptance of the target audience in different cultural contexts [7]. As a mainstream digital communication platform today, short videos are mainly used to create, share, and watch 15-second to 3-minute video content [8].

2.2. Traditional barriers to the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage

The dissemination of intangible cultural heritage has long faced multiple obstacles, especially in cross-cultural and cross-circle communication contexts. Before discussing the role of short videos in promoting intangible cultural heritage, it is necessary to clarify the traditional barriers that have already limited its wider transmission. These barriers mainly include language differences, cultural contextual gaps, the difficulty of preserving authenticity, and weak audience engagement in the digital environment.

2.2.1. Language and cultural context barriers

Language remains one of the major barriers in the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage across different cultural circles [4]. Even though visual presentation can reduce the need for verbal or textual explanation to a degree, many forms of intangible cultural heritage still rely on textual or interpretative support to effectively convey their cultural meanings. This is the case, for example, for the traditional Chinese tea ceremony, where the technical terms, ritual procedures, and philosophical context are difficult to communicate without ample explanation in advance [8]. Industry report data for 2021 indicated that short videos with non-English content can reach only about 35% of the world's potential users, illustrating the challenges of cross-language barriers [5].

In addition, cultural context and interpretation difficulties of dissemination as well [7]. Many elements have a background in specific historical, religious, and social milieus, often unfamiliar to outsiders. Because of this, the implied or symbolic meanings of gestures, colours, costumes, and objects in much traditional performance may be impossible to perceive and can easily be misread [9]. For instance, the traditional African mask and the gestures of Indian classical dance are both heavily dependent on background cultural knowledge for their full comprehension. This knowledge becomes virtually absent in foreign audiences.

2.2.2. The tension between cultural authenticity and simplified communication

Another major barrier relates to the tension between preserving authenticity and adapting cultural content to wider communicability [1]. Many traditional rituals and practices are lengthy, context-bound, and complex - even lasting for hours, or, in some cases, days. In the process of communicating for modern ends (in particular digital communication), such content inevitably has to be compressed, screened, and simplified, potentially undermining and even distorting the original cultural practice altogether [6].

This has already become a cause for concern among practitioners and researchers. Experts on intangible cultural heritage have pointed out that about 68% of practitioners of traditional skills have expressed doubt about the authenticity of digitally adapted cultural content [5]. The question of how one can preserve the original meaning and value of intangible cultural heritage while also making this source more accessible to broader audiences becomes an important contemporary issue of cultural communication [3].

2.2.3. Low audience engagement in the platform environment

At present, traditional cultural content is also hindered by weak audience participation and low retention [4] in the context of the digital platform environment. Compared with entertainment videos, the interaction of traditional cultural content is usually weaker; the interaction volume of videos related to traditional culture is generally about 40% lower than that of entertainment videos [1]. This difference is mainly because the depth and complexity of traditional cultural content, as well as its relatively slow rhythm, do not match digital platform videos' fast pace and pleasure consumption habits [5].

Additionally, recommendation algorithms on mainstream platforms are generally geared towards engaging content that maximises user interaction [7]. Under this mechanism, videos associated with cultural heritage may be placed at a disadvantage in the competition with entertainment content for visibility and traffic [2]. This structural inequality further increases the difficulty of disseminating intangible cultural heritage effectively in contemporary media environments.

2.2.4. Summary

Overall, the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage has long been restricted by language barriers, differences in cultural context, and concerns over authenticity. These barriers explain why intangible cultural heritage often struggles to achieve broad and accurate communication in modern society. Against this background, short videos have gradually become a new communication form that may help address some of these problems. Therefore, the following section will examine the communication mechanisms of short videos and analyse how they contribute to the wider dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

3. The core communication mechanism of the short video platform

3.1. Visual narrative strategy

3.1.1. Narrative skills and cultural expression

Relying on highly concentrated narrative skills, short videos reconstruct the dissemination mode of intangible cultural heritage, which can efficiently convey cultural connotations in a short time [2]. Compared with traditional intangible records, which require a lot of elaboration, short video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube shorten the cultural narrative to 15–60 seconds while retaining the integrity of the core cultural content [4].

The successful intangible short video adopts a three-part micro-narrative structure. One is to capture the interest and attention of users with eye-catching visual images. The second is to show the core process of intangible cultural practice through lens compression. Finally, it ends with content that contains emotional value and educational significance [8]. Take the traditional Chinese paper-cutting theme video as an example, which often starts with folded paper, presents the creative process through quick cutting, and finally dramatically displays the finished paper-cutting product, restoring the essential characteristics of paper-cutting art throughout the whole process [7].

3.1.2. Symbolism and application of visual elements

The use of symbolic and aesthetic visual elements is the core means for international traditional medicine and other intangible content to use short videos to cross cultural boundaries [7]. When integrating visual symbols with cross-cultural resonance, the author still adheres to the real restoration of traditional practice, and uses ingenious visual composition and exquisite visual effects to balance traditional cultural aesthetics and modern visual language [8]. Specific skills include choosing cultural symbolic tones to enhance the impact of visual effects, using dramatic lighting to emphasize the core symbols, integrating cultural symbols into the composition in the traditional environment, and then allowing global users to be interested and attracted even if they do not understand the meaning of the symbols [4].

Traditional Chinese handicrafts such as embroidery, ceramics, and lacquerware have advantages in the visual presentation of short videos [9]. The details captured by the lens can show the essence of skills that words cannot describe [8]. According to the industry research data of the China Cultural Heritage Administration, the international communication effect and the traditional recording method of the traditional craft content using the visual narrative method have increased by 78% [1].

3.1.3. The stimulation of emotional resonance

Short videos have great advantages in emotional resonance, making them the main carrier for cross-circle cultural dissemination of intangible culture [7]. Emotional resonance can break down the barriers of language and culture, allowing users from different cultural backgrounds to recognize and understand a strange culture [3]. Excellent intangible cultural short videos use emotional narrative skills adapted to the compression format of short videos, such as combining traditional customs with the context of modern life, so as to tell the humanistic story behind it [5]. Seize the precious moments of non-genetic inheritance, and also add background music in line with the content to enhance the impact of visual expression and stimulate the emotional resonance of users [8].

3.2. Algorithm-driven content distribution

3.2.1. Personalized recommendation system and cultural contact

The algorithm structure of the short video platform provides a new channel for the cross-circle dissemination of intangible culture and the expansion of diverse audiences [2]. The platform's intelligent recommendation system optimizes the recommended content according to the analysis of users' viewing time, interaction frequency, and preferred content data, so as to help intangible culture reach different cultural circles [4]. For example, on TikTok, after people watch traditional craft content such as Chinese paper cutting, the system will automatically intelligently recommend relevant cultural content from different regions and even other countries, building a bridge for cross-circle cultural dissemination [7].

3.2.2. Virus dynamics and cross-border transmission

The short video platform accelerates the viral cross-border dissemination of intangible cultural content through a short visual format and convenient sharing functions [2]. The platform will give priority to displaying highly interactive videos, regardless of their source, so that cultural content can quickly cross geographical restrictions [4]. According to data, successful cross-cultural intangible short videos can often spread to international users 48-78 hours after publication. It may take months or even years for the traditional media to achieve this effect [1].

The classic case is a short video of the demonstration of the traditional Chinese tea ceremony. The 60-second video clip focuses on the aesthetics and meditation characteristics of the tea ceremony. The number of cross-cultural views exceeded 12 million times in a week [9]. The video released in Chinese for the first time quickly crossed the language barrier and formed an audience focus area in Europe, Southeast Asia, and North America [10]. According to the data of the short video platform, the sharing rate of non-Chinese users reached 18.7%, and the sharing rate of local users reached 21.3%. There is not much difference between the two datasets, which also shows that if the intangible content is of high quality, it can break through the cultural barrier with the help of visual attraction and platform algorithms to achieve the transformation of the communication mode [3].

4. Enlightenment

4.1. Obstruction

4.1.1. Cultural appropriation and misunderstanding

When the short video platform disseminates intangible culture, there are cases of cultural appropriation and mistransmission [6]. Many traditional arts on TikTok, Kuaishou, and other platforms are out of the original context, and cultural elements are extracted from historical and spiritual connotations, and only packaged as entertainment content [5]. Take Chinese paper cutting and shadow puppetry as an example; these traditional crafts are often taken out of the context. The author only emphasizes the aesthetic value and ignores key information, such as the meaning of the ceremony and the historical background [3]. Data from the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Association shows that about 67% of relevant short videos lack sufficient cultural background information, which may lead to wrong perceptions for international users [1].

In order to pursue a high interaction rate, the author usually only highlights the elements with strong visual sense and exotic style in intangible cultural heritage, ignoring the core cultural values [7]. Some authors filmed and disseminated the sacred rituals of ethnic minorities in southwest China without permission, which triggered a controversy over intellectual property and cultural rights [11]. Because many intangible cultural heritages lack formal copyright protection, their knowledge systems are divided into fragmented entertainment content. It does not mark the source and does not respect the cultural root, which eventually leads to users' misunderstanding of traditional cultural cognition [4].

4.1.2. Digital divide and platform access inequality

Despite the popularity of mobile technology in China, the digital access gap still affects the fair dissemination of intangible cultural heritage content [12]. According to the data of the China Internet Information Center, the Internet penetration rate in urban areas exceeds 76%, but only about 54% in rural areas [1]. This gap is not good for inheritance. Many traditional skills, such as folk songs of ethnic minorities in Guizhou and farming techniques in remote areas, come from communities with insufficient network coverage [11]. A study by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences shows that the exposure of non-material cultural heritage content in developed eastern provinces on short video platforms is 3.8 times that of western provinces [12].

4.1.3. Platform governance and content review

There are differences between the commercial interests and cultural protection demands of short video platforms, which bring difficulties in content review to the dissemination of intangible culture [6]. The platform mainly adopts algorithms for automatic audit. Although it can identify copyright infringement and other issues, it is difficult to grasp cultural sensitivity, and there are loopholes in dealing with cultural nuances [7]. For example, it is impossible to reasonably judge the boundaries of the use of sacred cultural elements, and it is also difficult to identify the wrong mark of cultural origin [3]. Some cultural content and traditional skills may also be warned because of the misjudgment of the algorithm itself [5].

The realization of the platform and changes in business policies also bring challenges to the orthodox dissemination of intangible cultural heritage [4]. If cultural practitioners do not create according to the platform's fast-selling entertainment format, its content may be blocked or restricted

[1]. According to a 2023 study by the China Association for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 62% of the authors changed the traditional display form in order to meet the requirements of the platform. Even adjust the practice to increase the number of plays and avoid restrictions [2]. This situation is likely to lead to the commercialization of cultural practice and damage the integrity of intangible cultural heritage in cross-circle cultural dissemination [6].

4.2. Suggestion

4.2.1. Cultural practitioners and community cooperation

To improve the quality of short-video dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, platforms and creators should establish stable cooperation mechanisms with cultural practitioners and local communities [3]. The first step is to involve inheritors, local artisans, and community representatives in content planning, script design, and visual presentation, so that the core cultural meanings can be checked before publication. Research shows that the cultural accuracy and cross-circle cultural resonance of videos directly cooperated on by creators and inheritors have been significantly improved [1]. For example, on TikTok and other platforms, the interaction rate of international users is 287% higher for videos co-created with paper-cutting and embroidery masters than for non-cooperative videos [4].

This cooperation should move beyond symbolic participation and develop into a co-creation model in which cultural guardians can supervise how cultural heritage is represented [6]. Platforms should therefore create formal recognition mechanisms, such as credit attribution, co-authorship labels, and benefit-sharing rules, to acknowledge the contributions of cultural workers [7]. A sustainable cooperation model can also allow cultural communities to retain intellectual property rights together with digital creators, thus protecting cultural heritage while adapting to platform needs [5]. This model has already shown positive results in the dissemination of regional operas, folk dances, and similar forms of intangible cultural heritage [2].

4.2.2. Integrate local culture into digital narrative

To enhance cross-circle dissemination further, creators need to engage more thoroughly with local cultural knowledge in their short-video storytelling rather than settling for mere visual presentation [3]. This means they should embed local content into the visual presentation, rhythm, narrative structure, subtitle design, and soundtrack selection so that the form of short-video representation itself expresses the logic of culture [8]. For instance, a 60s short video recording of Yi traditional music can utilize circular narrative form to express the Yi concept of cyclical time, thereby helping users access a deeper cultural context [9].

4.2.3. Join the cultural context

In addition, when short-video platforms distribute intangible cultural heritage content, the mechanisms for explaining cultural background and attributing sources should be improved [5]. The creators of the videos need to provide necessary information, such as cultural origin and core meaning, etc., so that audiences can better understand the content. At present, they tend to pay attention to shortness and entertainment, rather than cultural accuracy and attribution [3]. Research shows that 73% of intangible-cultural-heritage-related content lacks sufficient background information, and 62% does not correctly identify cultural sources [1]. This weakens cross-circle cultural understanding and may also lead to cultural appropriation [6].

Platforms can address this problem by building special data frameworks for cultural content [4]. For example, interactive overlays and expandable information panels can be used to provide users with deeper cultural knowledge without greatly affecting the viewing experience [8].

5. Conclusion

In summary, this article mainly studies the relevant content of short video platforms to help the cross-circle dissemination of intangible culture. The study found that short videos provide convenience for the cross-circle dissemination of intangible culture with the help of visual narrative and algorithm distribution, so that more intangible cultures can come out of the native area. However, at the same time, it faces the problems of cultural appropriation, digital gap, and imperfect platform audit. In response to these difficulties, through cooperation with cultural practitioners, adding local cultural knowledge, supplementing cultural background explanations, and other methods, the balance between the authenticity and communication power of intangible cultural communication has been solved to a certain extent. In the future, I hope to further explore the better combination of short videos and intangible communication with the help of the platform. Let more intangible cultures break through the restrictions of the circle and be better disseminated in the digital age.

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