Intercultural Communication Research about a Foreign Online Celebrity "I am Jerry Guo"

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Abstract: In the context of new media, "I am Jerry Guo", a foreign online celebrity, has successfully practiced intercultural communication between China and the United States as a folk individual. This case can provide experience for the effective development of intercultural communication in the wave of globalization. This study argues that the success of Jerry Guo lies in the combination of hard discourse and soft forms. Jerry Guo tells cultural connotations in a firm and objective discourse and presents cultural information in vivid and lively images by videos. This communication path effectively crosses cultural borders between countries, breaking down the prejudicial elements contained in cultural stereotypes, and promoting audiences to build a deeper knowledge of foreign cultures.

1. Introduction

Under the wave of globalization, more and more cultures are spreading around the world across nationalities. On this basis, social media has facilitated the development of intercultural communication with its advantages of openness, broad compatibility, interactivity, and retrieval convenience. It has promoted cultural communication and integration at both official and private levels. However, there are still many problems in intercultural communication, such as prejudice and misunderstanding between countries, and symbolization and fragmentation of national images. In this context, "foreign online celebrities" have achieved more effective intercultural communication by virtue of their individual power. "I am Jerry Guo" is one of the most representative foreign online celebrities. Jerry Guo is an American Jew who became interested in Chinese culture when he went on an exchange program in Taiwan, China, during his college years. As a result, he adopted the authentic Chinese name "Jerry Guo" as his online nickname. He began posting videos on major social media platforms around the world in 2017, telling stories of what he saw firsthand both in China and the US. After nearly five years of posting videos. Guo has gained many fans in China, and has arguably become one of the most well-known "foreign online celebrity" on Chinese online platforms. Therefore, this study explores the key points of Jerry Guo's intercultural communication practice, aiming to provide experience for more effective practice of intercultural communication in the new media era.

2. Literature review

2.1 Intercultural Communication in the New Media Era

As an important branch of communication, the development of intercultural communication has closely followed the changes of the times. The wave of globalization has promoted changes in social interaction and relations. New media platforms have increased in the new media technology environment. Cultural communication has become more frequent, cultural discussion has become more diverse. Invisible intercultural communication subjects have incubated simultaneously ([1]Ji, 2020).

In the current context of globalization, researches on the relationship between new media and intercultural communication focus on three aspects: the influence of national or ethnic culture on the development of new media; the impact of new media on cultural identity; the impact of new media (social media) on intercultural communication, such as intercultural relations, adaptation, and conflict ([2]Chen, 2012). The following section will highlight the current state of research on "the impact of social media on intercultural communication".

The emergence of social media has facilitated the formation of many virtual communities, and individuals' cultural identity presents dynamicity and multiciplity in different virtual communities, seriously challenging the stability of individuals' cultural Structures. In addition, virtual communities also show certain power tendencies, and Western culture breaks the cultural neutrality of

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cyberspace with its implicit power advantage ([3]Chen, 2012). At the same time, social media gives people a unique way to display their culture, and based on the openness and flexibility of new media, people can form connections and freely form "virtual communities". However, in the "virtual community", there are both resonance of identities and the possibility of division. On the one hand, the Internet enhances the degree of cultural integration, and research has shown that online support communities formed by Chinese students, when fully utilized, can help them gain more emotional support and significantly reduce cultural pressures when fully utilized ([4]Ye, 2005). On the other hand, although intercultural communication has become more fluid and efficient, people do not have a deeper understanding of different cultures. Factors such as the language and geography of the communicator will significantly affect global cultural flows. In addition, the large number of people have involved in online communication. The frequent presence of noise in the process of conversation has led to the loss of meaning, divergence of opinions in some cases of cultural conflicts ([5]Xiao & Hu, 2021). But as Hall says, culture is, at its core, a communication process ([6]Edward, 1966). Social media enables more people to engage in cultural presentations and image performance. As intercultural communication promotes dialogue among more cultures in the midst of conflict, how to avoid cultural conflict and promote adaptation will become one of the key issues in intercultural communication research.

As regards the practice of intercultural communication, the current situation of overseas communication of mainstream media has triggered scholars' research on official foreign communication. Both the communication effect topics, such as image construction, and communication issues, such as cultural bias, have aroused the attention of scholars. Liu Yang and Xu Jia use Facebook and Twitter as the background to study the current situation of the operation of mainstream media in China. They point out that although the operation of mainstream media on overseas social networks is more normatively and highly concerned, it still needs to be improved in terms of indigenization ([7]Liu, Xu, 2013). Intercultural communication mainly reflected in the increased opportunities for individual voices and frequent individual interactions at the civil level. For example, the popularity of Li Ziqi overseas in 2019 is an excellent success of folk intercultural communication practice, which has been studied by many scholars. Cao Xiankun analyzes the reasons for Li's overseas explosion in terms of video content, audiovisual language, narrative techniques, and Chinese cultural elements ([8]Cao, 2021).

Some scholars have also studied the communication practices of foreigners in China from the perspectives of intercultural communication and semiotic theory. But the attention to the successful cases of folk intercultural communication practices is not enough. There is still room for further exploration and research.

2.2 Concept and researches of foreign online celebrities

The term "online celebrity" refers to a person who becomes popular online because of an event or behavior noticed by netizens, or because of long-term and continuous output of expertise. Wang Guohua, Gao Wei, and Li Huifang ([9]2018) borrow the definition of "online celebrity" and define "foreign online celebrities" as "foreigners who have become popular on Chinese online platforms because they have been noticed by the majority of domestic netizens".

In terms of international communication, Du believes that "foreign online celebrities" have the advantages of expanding communication subjects, enriching communication content, and innovating methods. Still, there are also problems such as homogenization and vulgarization of content ([10]Du, 2019). Xia and Pan ([11]2020) analyze the content of videos about China by blogger "Korea Dongdong" on Bilibili, and suggest that Chinese media should create more grounded content to bring them closer to the audience and improve the international communication ability of China ([12]Zheng, 2019).

Zheng and Jin analyzed the video content characteristics of five "foreign online celebrities", who came from different countries. Still, their videos had certain common features, including structure, theme and opinion tendency. Liang ([13]2020) screened out five head "foreign online celebrities" and analyzed three aspects of their videos: the theme type, content characteristics and narrative style. She pointed out that the value of "foreign online celebrities" should be full played in intercultural communication.

The current research on "foreign online celebrities" is not sufficient, and most of them are comprehensive or group studies, lacking detailed analysis of individual cases. This paper analyzes the videos created by Jerry Guo, starting from the specific case of him, using the textual analysis method. This method can not only enrich the theoretical content of "foreign online celebrities" research, but also further broaden the research horizon.

3. Research Methodology

This paper uses the case study method to analyze the intercultural communication practices of contemporary folk, taking video blogger "I am Jerry Guo" as an example. Since releasing videos in 2017, Jerry Guo and his team have produced 472 videos. From 2018 to 2020, Jerry Guo was selected as one of the top 100 Uploaders of the year for three consecutive years on Bilibili. On October 17, 2022, he had 7.055 million fans, 44.141 million likes, and 930 million total video views on Bilibili. Among the many bloggers practicing intercultural communication, Jerry Guo has become one of the most famous "foreign online celebrities" on Chinese and global online platforms, making this case representative and typical.

472 videos posted by Jerry Guo in the past 5 years were selected in this paper. 465 videos with distinctive content and complete structure were screened out as

research objects, excluding 4 videos in which Guo simply interacted with his fans and 3 videos in which he cooperated with CCTV News. By watching these videos, the category construction was completed based on the specific contents, with ten indicators in three dimensions. Then, based on the above data and semiotic theory. I analyzed the content characteristics of videos, exploring the connection between the video symbols and the cultural connotation behind them. Through analysis, I summarized the characteristics of videos in the process of dissemination and the reasons for the successful intercultural practice of the account "I am Jerry Guo".

4. Analysis of this research
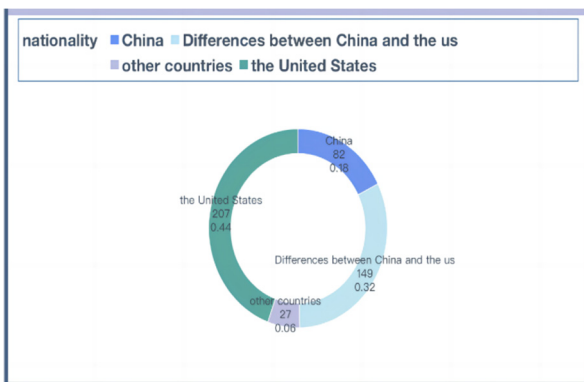
4.1 Theme content

FIG.1 Nationality of selection of Jerry Guo's videos

In terms of nationalities, most of Jerry Guo's videos are about the differences between China and the US. As an American, he exported American native culture in a down-to-earth way, showing the world in the eyes of Americans. As a Chinese student, he explored the novel elements of Chinese culture as an explorer. But in any case, he always faces cultural differences and answers people's doubts. He conveyed the differences he felt through video, which greatly satisfied the public's demand for information from other countries and eliminated misunderstandings.
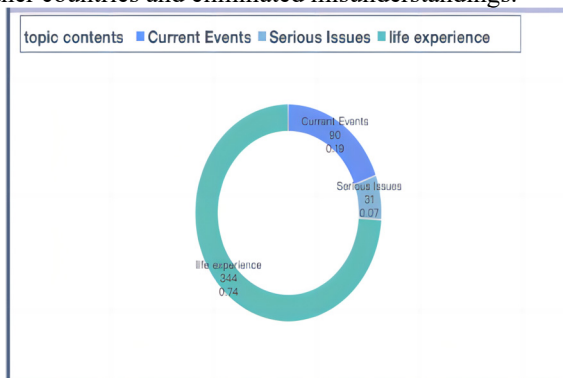

FIG.2 Topic contents of Jerry Guo's videos

In terms of contents, as an intercultural short video blogger, although his main content is about relaxing life experiences, he has increasingly preferred hot topics that are generally concerned by international audiences around the world, such as "U.S. Police Violent Law Enforcement", "Hong Kong Violent Assault on Police" and "Mumbai Wealth Gap". Jerry Guo closely follows the hot topics of

current affairs, discussing serious and sensitive issues. As a neutral person, he tries to show and introduce these marginal and sensitive events, making up for the silence in the marginal discourse.
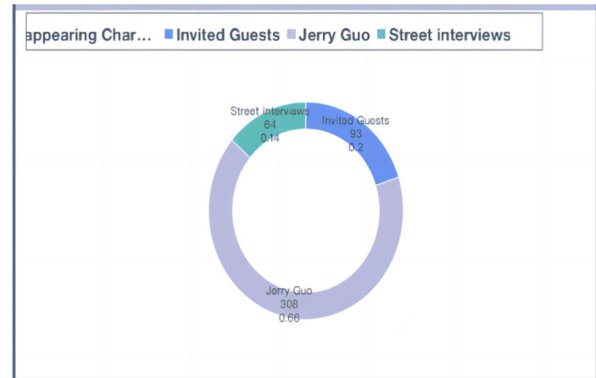
4.2 Values

FIG.3 Appearing Characters of Jerry Guo's videos

First, most of Guo's videos adhere to an objective position, rarely pre-set positions and emphasize the principle of truth. Among the 465 videos, 89% of the videos are field visits, and each video is produced by himself. The primary editing method is a one-way, linear time mode, and insists on recording the experience process with a straightforward and clear narrative structure. Based on the above three points, his videos use the subject's "sense of presence" and coherent narrative logic to embody a documentary creative method. Besides, Guo's videos focus on street interviews, while inviting guests as auxiliaries. 20% of them answer questions and explain viewpoints. Taking the perspective of primary position culture as the starting point, the cultural holders speaking out in person can make the content more credible and appealing. 14% of them use the method of inviting guests to lead audiences from different cultural backgrounds to better enter the cultural environment.

Second, Guo's videos try to maintain the value orientation of equality, tolerance and openness. In the process of showing different cultures, he always insists on cultural dialogues and promotes consensus. While exploring Chinese culture, he went to Guizhou, Chongqing and other places to talk face-to-face with the locals and listen to his cultural views. He also cooperated with other Chinese bloggers, such as Jing Hanqing and Huanong Brothers, to promote the formation of the understanding of Chinese and American folk culture, trying to establish a cultural model of "solidarizing the other". Meanwhile, as a communicator, when Guo entered other cultures, he chose to abandon the inherent thinking brought about by his own cultural accumulation, actively considered the experience of the local culture, and expressed his views with a neutral attitude toward the other, showing an excellent cultural transference and empathy ability. For example, he was once challenged to survive a night in an Internet cafe in China, eating snacks and screaming while playing games like other netizens.

Based on the above analysis, I believe that the videos of Jerry Guo adopt a rigid discourse, taking a firm and objective stand to confront sensitive topics and marginal

issues, outputting content with the values of equality and tolerance.

4.3 Narrative features

First, as a nonverbal symbol, Jerry Guo constructed the role of a "stranger". For Chinese audiences, he is a stranger from a different culture. For foreign audiences, he is a communicator of different cultures with ethnic closeness. This identity makes Jerry Guo "others" on two levels. The first-person perspective of "cultural other" can quickly shorten the distance between the cultural recipient and itself in the same context, and the communication relationship no longer appears as a binary between subject and object, but transforms into inter-subjectivity. Through the intermediary of "stranger", the self and the other are each other's subjects in the communication process, and can promote cultural development with an equal interactive relationship. The blending has made the audiences in China and the US show more gestures of dialogue when facing culture.

Second, Guo's videos are used as context symbols to create a "communal meaning domain". The flow of meaning in communication activities requires such a domain for both the sender and receiver. For intercultural communication, smooth communication between the sender and receiver requires an intercultural "common domain". Most of Guo's videos are records of real life, covering a large number of daily scenes that everyone has experienced, such as Internet cafes and communities. These scenes easily evoke viewers' memory about their own clothing, food, housing and transportation, and reproduce the "common reality" of the public. In the process of reappearing, many close and life-like scene symbols have opened up the common meaning space of intercultural communication among foreign people. The supplement of appropriate comparative information, such as the comparison of Chinese and American Internet cafes, has broadened the extension of the "common sense domain", providing a broader window for deepening cognition for both parties across cultures, promoting the circulation and sharing of meanings between the two cultures.

4.4 Manifestations

FIG.4 The comments word cloud of Jerry Guo's videos

Jerry Guo's videos are good at using down-to-earth expressions to get closer to the audience. As a long-time

"Chinese netizen", Guo is good at making fun of network memes on social media, such as "dogsbody". I randomly selected 10% (47) from 465 videos, sorting the comments of each video according to their popularity. After crawling the top 30 respectively, I obtained 1410 samples, using Python to perform word segmentation and vocabulary statistics, and using FineBI to make the above word cloud map. It can be seen from the figure that the audience is also keen to joke with Guo: "Guo Zhui" for his unclear Chinese pronunciation, and "Not spicy" for him always challenging spicy food. It can be seen that Jerry Guo takes the local cultural symbols as the entry point, the communication effect as the purpose point, and the audience's satisfaction as the foothold. Not only did he not marginalize his "different culture" status, but it strengthened the foreign audience's appreciation for him. The understanding of cultural symbols has also enhanced the local audience's trust in "I am Jerry Guo".

Guo's account focuses on showing individuality and creating a differentiated visual identity. His video cover design is relatively uniform. Generally, a small number of keywords are placed in the middle of the picture, mainly in yellow, and the visual focus is deliberately set to bring a strong impact. At the same time, Jerry Guo always takes the phrase "Hello everyone, I am Jerry Guo" as a fixed opening remark, straight to the point. The features at the end are also prominent. Jerry Guo usually ends the video with the sentence, "Then let me go now". The black background and the fixed expressions of "I am Guo Jerry" in five noticeable white characters are repeated, creating a very engaging scene and symbolic rituals. And this ritualized behavior not only enhances the audience's sense of identity with Jerry Guo, but also makes the main symbol "Jerry Guo" deeply rooted in people's hearts.

Based on the above analysis, this study believes that the video "I am Jerry Guo" adopts a soft form and conducts communication based on the audience's perspective, thus constructing a new communication strategy that is more flexible than serious news.

5. Conclusions

For a long time, there have been problems in worldwide intercultural communication, such as symbolization, fragmentation, etc. These problems are not conducive to international cultural integration. The successful practice of short video blogger Guo Jerry provides a reference for contemporary intercultural communication. Comprehensive analysis of the video content of the short video account "I am Jerry Guo", I found that the key to Guo's success lies in the combination of hard discourses and soft forms.

In terms of "theme content" and "values" of his videos, Jerry Guo adopts hard discourses to respond to sensitive topics and hot current affairs actively. Cultural differences are faced, and the content through on-site experience and interviews are highlighted. It is accurate and objective, showing Guo's own cultural value orientation of "equality, tolerance and openness", bringing a "hardcore" texture to the audience. In terms of the "narrative features" and "manifestations", he adopts a soft form to improve the

communication effectiveness through the construction of characters and scene symbols, to gain audience's experience with the grounded personality expression, and to tell culture more softly.

To sum up, as a private "foreign online celebrity", Jerry Guo has explored a more effective path to reduce transmission resistance: "resolutely convey the true content with hard discourse narrative, and make it easy for the audience to accept it with soft communication". Through this path, the role of the "bridge" of foreign online celebrities is activated. They transcode the information of one country and then disseminate it to other countries. By creating coequally shared values among cultures and effectively bridging the cultural gap with soft narratives, the foreign online celebrity may have achieved the maximum effect of intercultural communication under the current situation.

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