

Intercultural Empathy in New Media Communication of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: Grandpa Amu's videos have gained sustained attention from many overseas audiences on international social media platforms, becoming a representative case of cross-cultural communication. The article takes the comments on Grandpa Amu's videos on the YouTube platform as the research object and uses keyword analysis, sentiment analysis, and co-occurrence network analysis to analyze text data from overseas users. The goal is to study the effects of cross-cultural empathic communication. It found that Grandpa Amu, ICH skills, and Chinese traditional culture are the focus. Emotional perception is primarily neutral and positive, involving emotional bonds between people, human wisdom embodied in skills, and the human spirit encapsulated in traditional culture being the main objects of empathy. Based on the communication effect and overseas user feedback of Grandpa Amu's videos on the YouTube platform, this article provides practical insights for cross-cultural communication from the perspective of empathy.

1 Introduction

In this era of global cultural dialogue, innovative cross-cultural communication is crucial. However, challenges such as cultural misunderstandings and power imbalances hinder effective communication. Chinese culture needs to tell its stories well in the cross-cultural communication era. China is actively exploring new pathways to internationally disseminate its excellent traditional culture. Previously, China focused on a national and ethnic narrative, lacking multidimensional understanding. However, individuals like "Li Ziqi" and "Grandpa Amu" have emerged, showcasing Chinese stories through cultural scenes and emotional storytelling. They inject vitality into cross-cultural dissemination and create a grassroots window for dialogue.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a vital part of Chinese culture. According to UNESCO's definition, ICH encompasses intangible expressions deeply connected to people's lives, passed down through generations. Feedback on overseas ICH videos reveals that "Chinese craftsmen," "artworks," and the "craftsmanship spirit" are common keywords in public sentiment evaluation (Si & Song, 2023)^[1]. This indicates the recognition of overseas audiences toward ICH and its inheritors. Chinese woodworker Grandpa Amu has gained millions of YouTube subscribers. His top five videos have reached 108.4 million views. Through emotional narratives, his works showcase the empathetic essence of Chinese culture, evoking resonance and positive feedback. This study focuses on comments from Grandpa Amu's popular YouTube videos, employing data mining and quantitative

analysis to explore empathetic narratives, and communication effects, and provide insights into cross-cultural ICH communication.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Empathy and Empathic Communication

Empathy is an emotional response dependent on the interaction between trait capacities and state influences (Cuff et al., 2016)^[2]. Ivey et al. (1997) define empathy as seeing, hearing, and experiencing the internal world of others^[3]. Barrett-Lennard (1981) proposes five stages of empathy, including conditions, resonance, expression, acquisition, and feedback, confirming its transactional nature^[4]. Positive interaction enhances empathic expression and emotional feedback. Empathy communication is commonly used in interpersonal and doctor-patient communication. It involves appreciating patients' feelings, supporting their actions, and ensuring they feel understood (Suchman et al., 1997)^[5].

With the increasing attention of the academic community in China to the concept of empathic communication, Wu (2019) took the lead in exploring the practical path of it, pointing out that when understanding is hindered and the consensus is difficult to reach, humans should first establish a concept of shared existence with others and strive to develop empathic care, which will help solve the communication dilemma of speaking into the void in global communication^[6]. However, we must admit a fact that there is still theoretical controversy surrounding

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the concept. Empathic communication can be understood in the following two ways (Zhong et al., 2022)^[7]. Firstly, empathic communication is seen as a communication method based on empathic abilities. This understanding considers empathy as a specific communication strategy, emphasizing its role in enhancing communication effectiveness and influence. Secondly, empathic communication is regarded as a phenomenon and pattern in social communication. From this perspective, many scholars focus on the social characteristics and mechanisms of empathic communication, emphasizing empathy in the process of social interaction.

2.2 Cross-cultural empathic communication

The intensification of global cultural dialogue has made cultural identification between different cultures more important than ever before (Fan & Cui, 2023)^[8]. Therefore, cross-cultural empathic communication has become a natural extension of empathy communication in cross-cultural contexts. Research on global cross-cultural empathic communication also predominantly focuses on the field of interpersonal communication. There is a significant amount of research dedicated to measuring individuals' cross-cultural empathic abilities (Zhu, 2011)^[9], enhancing personal skills in cross-cultural empathic communication (González et al., 2015)^[10], and related topics.

Chinese researchers primarily focus on public communication areas, examining the roles of government, organizations, and media in international communication. Tang (2019) argues that enhancing empathy in Belt and Road international communication facilitates mutual understanding among people. Li & Peng (2021) define "cross-cultural empathic communication" as the skillful cultivation and application of empathy in cross-cultural communication to elicit resonance and action feedback from diverse audiences^[11]. However, it's important to note the risk of empathic communication becoming superficial without an immediate perception of empathy behaviors and feedback. More attention should be given to the delivery, receiver feedback and depth of interaction. Further exploration, case studies, and empirical research are needed to quantify the effects and mechanisms of empathy in different communication scenarios and cultural backgrounds.

3 Methods

Popular ICH short videos generate more user engagement, reflecting the effectiveness of cross-cultural dissemination. Python software was used to extract real-time comments from Grandpa Amu's top five trending videos on May 16, 2023. The videos' themes include "Wooden Arch Bridge," "Spiritual Waterwheel," "Earth-built Stove," "Luban Stool," and "Bird-Scaring Device." A total of 41,713 comments were collected, excluding Chinese and non-English comments. After text cleaning, 29,945 English comments remained. Keyword extraction, sentiment analysis, and co-occurrence network analysis were conducted to identify overseas users' focal points and

empathic aspects. Representative comments were analyzed to explore the path of cross-cultural empathic dissemination of ICH.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Focus of Overseas Users

After analyzing 29,945 English comments, a word cloud graph was created using the top 50 keywords based on their frequency (Figure 1). The graph reveals frequent positive sentiment words such as amazing, beautiful, great, good, and thank. This indicates the recognition of Grandpa Amu in the international dissemination of Chinese ICH. The study further identified key focuses of overseas viewers, including Grandpa Amu, videos, skills, bridges, tools, Chinese culture, and craftsmen (Figure 1). Overall, the audience's attention can be categorized into three main areas: Grandpa Amu, ICH skills, and Chinese traditional culture. Comments expressing genuine admiration for Grandpa Amu's workmanship and appreciation for the skills, such as "Fantastic workmanship.... Grandpa is a master craftsman.... hats off to the brilliant design and perfect execution". This confirms the effectiveness of Grandpa Amu's videos in the cross-cultural dissemination of ICH.



Fig. 1. The top 50 high-frequency words in the comments

4.2 Emotional Orientation of Overseas Users

Sentiment analysis and scoring were conducted on 29,945 user comments using Python's VADER to obtain a sentiment index. Matplotlib library was employed to create a density plot (see Figure 2) for better visualization. The x-axis represents the index, and the y-axis represents the sentiment score, with each dot representing a comment. VADER's scoring range is from -1 to 1, indicating extremely negative, neutral, and extremely positive sentiments. Figure 2 shows a higher density of points in the positive and neutral range, reflecting the overseas audience's neutral and appreciative attitudes. The study examined texts with scores close to 1 and found viewers sharing similar memories related to their own experiences, such as "I Remember my dad building a small bridge, thinking the same thing...Made me miss my dad also". This demonstrates emotional resonance tied to personal experiences and cultural backgrounds.

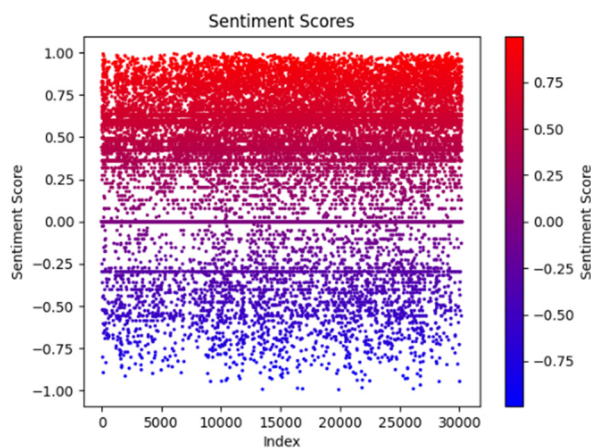


Fig. 2. Density Plot of User Comment Sentiment Orientation

4.3 Main Objects of Empathy for Overseas Users

The study employed NumPy and NetworkX, Python libraries, to conduct co-occurrence network analysis on 29,945 user comments, aiming to explore the empathetic

focal points of overseas users. By focusing on cross-cultural empathic communication, the study identified frequently occurring positive emotion words and associated object words. These were visualized in a network graph, showcasing objects perceived with positive emotions (see Figure 3). The graph reveals that overseas audiences express positive emotions towards grandson, grandpa, craftsman, craftsmanship, skills, China, and Chinese. It indicates that the video space created by content creators has become an emotional platform for cross-cultural dialogue and communication with the audience. Empirical evidence suggests that individuals utilize their own experiences to understand and empathize with others, emphasizing shared past experiences, similarity, and familiarity (Preston, 2007)^[12]. Thus, to foster emotional resonance among viewers with diverse backgrounds, enabling them to engage with different cultural contexts, understand, accept, and appreciate other cultures, and ultimately elicit positive feedback, expressing universal human emotions, showcasing common human wisdom, and conveying shared human spirit have become the objectives of cross-cultural empathic communication.

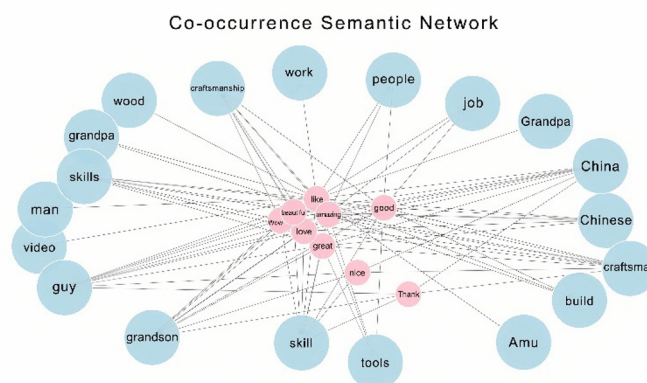


Fig. 3. Network Graph of Objects Perceived with Positive Emotions

Expressing similar emotional experiences can facilitate individuals within a group to quickly accept and interpret the emotional signals sent by others, strengthening mutual understanding and trust. His videos effectively convey one of the most universal human emotions - familial love - through the depiction of affectionate interactions between Grandpa Amu and his grandson. Therefore, integrating emotions that are universally shared among humans, such as affection and love, into cross-cultural empathic communication can help individuals overcome the limitations of language and cultural differences. It establishes a foundation for deep dialogue.

ICH carries a precious wealth of human wisdom. Under new media, visual representations depict the physical world and reflect the spiritual realm. In his videos, the rustic rural scenes, ancient tools, and traditional craftsmanship serve as visual representations that evoke familiarity among the audience with certain aspects of their own culture. Therefore, presenting the achievements of different cultures helps individuals transcend surface-level cultural differences and build the identity of different cultural groups.

The shared human spirit encompasses universal values and emotional experiences transcending cultures and borders, such as love, kindness, and peace. When audiences realize the shared human spirit across different cultures, they become more open and receptive to other cultures. His videos showcase many aspects of it, such as valuing the worth of labor, preserving ICH, protecting the natural environment, and fostering group cohesion. Therefore, it is important to delve deeper into the ethical and moral concepts, national spirit, and humanistic sentiments inherent in China's outstanding traditional culture. It is also necessary to showcase the distinctive characteristics in an easily accepted way. This can promote global harmonious integration.

5 Conclusion

This study utilized keyword extraction, sentiment analysis, and co-occurrence network analysis to quantitatively analyze the cross-cultural empathic communication effects of Grandpa Amu's videos. The aim was to provide insights and guidance for quantitative

research in this area. The findings revealed that Grandpa Amu, ICH skills, and Chinese traditional culture received significant attention from overseas users, indicating broad interest. The sentiment analysis indicated a generally neutral and positive attitude. The study identified emotional bonds between people, human wisdom in skills, and the human spirit in traditional culture as the main objects of empathy. To enhance the cross-cultural empathic communication effects of ICH, it is important to express universal human emotions, showcase human common wisdom, and convey shared human spirit. However, the study's limitation was its focus on positive emotional perception, neglecting the potential impact of negative emotional perception. Future research should consider both positive and negative emotions and incorporate qualitative methods for deeper insights into cross-cultural empathic communication.

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