

Exploration of the Attitude towards Spring Festival Folk Customs among college students in Dalian, China

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Abstract. In the context of globalization, digitization, and cultural diversity, the study of the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture has received increasing attention. Referring to the social representation theory, this study takes college students in Dalian, China, as survey respondents and analyzes their attitudes toward the folk customs of the Spring Festival, the largest traditional festival in China, also known as the Chinese New Year, to provide a reference for research on the inheritance of traditional culture. The results of this study show that college students possess a high level of awareness of Spring Festival Folk Customs and have clear perceptions of their connotations and meanings. Affectively, they show a high degree of recognition and identification, and behaviorally, they show firm support and strong willingness to participate. Simultaneously, college students have rational thinking and suggestions for developing Spring Festival Folk Customs. This provides an advisory for the traditional culture represented by Spring Festival Folk Customs to be inherited among young people and for developing conventional culture categorization.

1 Introduction

In today's global cultural diversification, every country and nation makes no effort to preserve its cultural traditions, and traditional festival folk customs are an integral part of them.

However, with the development of society, the preservation of traditional festivals has encountered challenges. Lin, H. [1] analyzed the historical and social reasons for today's traditional festivals, arguing that rituals have been simplified or even forgotten. Laing et al. [2] explored the role of conventional events and rituals in the modern world based on the status quo, which is that traditional events and the identities they support are severely challenged by globalization and that rituals may be lost. On the other hand, Zhao et al. [3] estimated the impact of technological development. They argued that social media had won the hearts of young people by replacing the popularity of Chinese folk customs and that young people were spending more time on electronic devices, and the gradual decrease in their participation

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in cultural activities, such as the Chinese New Year, might have a significant impact on the disappearance of traditional practices. In the context of a heritage crisis, the role of young people, particularly college students, in passing festival folk customs is of utmost importance. Yamashita [4] concluded the diversification and innovation of the participants in traditional festivals, taking the Kumakabuto-Hatsuka-Matsuri in Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan, as an example, and interpreted whether local residents would welcome the participation of university students in the festival to become the heirs to the traditions of the local countryside. Clarke et al. [5] investigated attitudes toward the ethnic identity of students from higher education institutions in Sanuatu from the perspectives of harmonization of customs, communal lifelong learning, and colonial heritage.

For centuries, the Chinese New Year, with its rich folk customs, has been a cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture [6]. However, in the era of globalization and digitalization, this cultural treasure is facing a crisis of inheritance. The attitudes of young people, particularly university students, are pivotal in determining whether Spring Festival Folk Customs can be successfully inherited and developed. In this study, we focus on a group of college students from Dalian, Liaoning Province, China, to explore their attitudes toward the Spring Festival Folk Customs and provide suggestions for its sustainable inheritance and development.

2 Literature

2.1 Theoretical background

This study references the social representation theory. The term "social representation" was coined by Serge Moscovici [7] to explain how social groups co-construct and share understanding and interpretation of social reality, arguing [8] that social representations are formed through public discourse and social communication and that these representations reflect the collective memory and cultural context of the social group and are the mechanism by which community members in society understand social objects or socially critical phenomena. Many scholars have argued that social representations are dynamic elements of knowledge generated by social conflicts and debates, and continually elaborated and changed throughout history [9]. Pearc [10] separated social representations as a set of ideas, values, myths, images, and knowledge that influence our behavior; he emphasized that social representations are not static but evolve over time and with social change and examines how social change affects the beliefs and values of groups.

Previous studies have provided new perspectives for studying festival folk customs, helping to understand and explain the collective psychology and social values behind cultural symbols and folk customs. In psychology textbooks, 'attitude' refers to an individual's evaluative tendency toward an object, person, event, or situation. This evaluative disposition can be positive, negative, or neutral and is usually expressed through cognitive, affective, and behavioral [11]. The Chinese are a multi-ethnic country with the Han as the leading ethnic group, and the cross-ethnic and cross-regional character of traditional Chinese festivals is a product of the intermingling of the festive customs of various ethnic groups in the long term, which is in essence a result of the deep integration of regions in the fields of economy and culture [12]. Kim et al. [13] examined whether gender and prior experience influence attitudes toward using social media to participate in festivals and concluded that male and female consumers differ in their decision-making. In this new era, the Chinese New Year festival should be revitalized with the development of technology and platforms [3]. Based on this, two hypotheses are formulated.

H1: The cognition of Spring Festival folk customs is influenced by gender, age, region, ethnicity, and professional orientation.

H2: The cognition of Spring Festival folk customs is influenced by the digitalization of society.

2.2 Sources of Spring Festival Folk Customs Knowledge

Gu et al. [14] divided knowledge into endogenous and exogenous knowledge. Endogenous knowledge stems from educational attainment, birth and upbringing experiences, exogenous expertise from the media, interpersonal communication, and so on. Šaknys [15] prioritized the influence of family factors on traditional festivals, with the popularity of festivals usually rooted in their family related nature, while other important factors include centuries-old traditions and the perceived significance of festivals. Festival participation is often a distinct social act, usually performed with family, friends, and acquaintances [16]. Regarding how traditional festivals are passed down, internet channels accounted for 61.43%, television for 50.15%, and movies for 55.28% [12]. Traditional Chinese festivals are being increasingly recognized and deeply explored online. It is concluded that digitalization is not sustainable as a substitute for festivals and celebrations, and that digital activities may be convenient for those who cannot be physically present. Still, the authors recognized the existence of digital exclusion and proposed the concept of "digital fatigue" [14]. Based on this, H3 is formulated as

H3: The source of acceptance of Spring Festival Folk Customs influences cognition.

3 Data collection

This study used a questionnaire to collect data for college students in Dalian City, Liaoning Province, China, which was designed concerning the scale of Zhang, J., & Dai, G.[28], with changes made according to the actual situation of the respondents and the content of the survey. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: demographic variables, age, gender, ethnicity, place of birth, and type of major studied ; the second was the source of knowledge about Spring Festival Folk Customs, which allowed the respondents to rank the items in order of importance, with items such as family, school, socialization, traditional media, and the Internet; and the third section used a 5-point Likert scale. Based on the channel of the questionnaire, we used willingness to participate instead of actual behaviors.

The questionnaire was professionally translated from English to Chinese and published on the Chinese survey platform <https://www.wjx.cn/>, and the URL and Q.R. code of the questionnaire were established and newly pushed to the respondents through email and WeChat, and collected from June 21, 2024, to July 17, 2024. Finally, 203 samples were recovered, and after checking and deleting samples with missing items (mainly due to the incompleteness of the source sorting questions), 144 valid samples were obtained. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistical results of demographic information. This inclusivity ensures that the study is representative of a broader population, making the findings applicable to a wide range of college students.

4 Results

To assess the quality of the questionnaire, scale questions were tested for reliability and validity. Cronbach's α value of the questionnaire was 0.893, reflecting good internal reliability. The suitability of the data was checked (KMO and Bartlett's test), with a KMO value of 0.838 and a significance probability value of <0.001 for Bartlett's spherical test; the data were suitable for factor analysis. We tested the observed variables for each factor—Cognition, Affection, and Behavior—with good internal consistency.

Table 1. Correlation between Demographic Variables and the Cognition of Spring Festival Folk Customs

	Gender	Hometown	Nationality	Age	Major
Pearson Correlation	-0.094	0.104	-0.176	-0.019	0.01
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.262	0.215	0.035	0.821	0.908
N	144	144	144	144	144

4.1 Correlation between demographic variables and Spring Festival Folk Customs cognition

We examined the correlation between demographic variables and Spring Festival Folk Customs Cognition, and the results (Table 1.) show that, except for the ethnicity variable, the correlations between all other variables and cognitive dimensions were weak and non-significant. The Pearson's correlation coefficient between the ethnicity variable and cognition was -0.176, a weak correlation, indicating that there was a small gap between ethnic minorities and Han Chinese in terms of Spring Festival Folk Customs cognition (significance = 0.035, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that ethnicity has a specific effect on the cognitive dimension. This confirms that part of H1 (Cognition of Spring Festival Folk Customs is influenced by gender, age, geography, ethnicity, and professional orientation) involving ethnicity is true, and the rest is false. There is no correlation between gender, age, region, and major and college students' Cognition of Spring Festival Folk Customs, and only the nationality factor has a weak negative correlation.

4.2 Impact of Digitization on Chinese New Year Folk Cognition

We examined the relationship between Digitization and Spring Festival folk cognition from the perspective of cognitive sources and behavioral willingness. Regression analysis was performed with Internet sources and willingness to participate in online Spring Festival Folk Customs activities as independent variables, and Spring Festival Folk Customs cognition as dependent variables. In Table 2, the regression coefficient of Internet sources is -0.079, $t=-0.942$, and $sig.=0.348$. Since the significance level was more significant than 0.05, this indicates that the effect of Internet sources on the cognitive dimension was insignificant. The regression coefficient of willingness to participate in online Spring Festival Folk Customs activities was 0.152, with $t=1.831$ and $sig.=0.0691$. Although the significance level is slightly greater than 0.05, it is close to being significant, suggesting that willingness to participate in online Spring Festival Folk Customs activities may positively impact cognitive dimensions. $R=0.152$, indicating that the independent and dependent variables have a weak positive correlation. The adjusted R^2 suggests that the model explains 1.6% of the variance in the dependent variable, after accounting for the number of predictor variables. The model had a weak explanatory power for the data. This negates H2: The perception of Spring Festival Folk Customs is influenced by the digital development of society.

Table 2. Regression of the Impact of Digitization on the Cognition of Spring Festival Folk Customs

S5= Source: internet; B3=I am willing to participate in the online Spring Festival folk activities.		S5	B3*
Model Summary	R	0.079	0.152
	R ²	0.006	0.023
	Adjusted R ²	-0.001	0.016
ANOVA Regression	Sum of Squares	0.888	3.299
	Mean Square	1	1

	F	0.888	3.299
	df	0.887	3.354
	Sig.	0.348	0.069
Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients Beta	-0.079	0.152
	t	-0.942	1.831

4.3 Correlation between sources and knowledge of Spring Festival Folk Customs

First, we describe the sources from which college students acquired knowledge of Spring Festival Folk Customs (Table 3). The results show that the data from family sources are higher in terms of mean, median, plurality, and sum, indicating a higher concentration of influence and distribution; the mean and sum of school and social contact are lower, indicating a relatively minor influence; the mean and sum of Internet and traditional media are in the middle, indicating a moderate influence, but showing a higher concentration in some aspects (e.g., plurality).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics from cognitive sources

	Family	School	Social contact	Traditional media	Internet
Mean	4.44	3.4	3.44	3.6	3.79
Median	5	4	3	4	4
Mode	5	4	3	4	5
Skewness	-1.933	-0.811	0.044	-0.586	-0.702
Sum	639	490	496	519	546

Second, we conducted an ANOVA on sources and cognition. The significance level of all sources is higher than 0.05, which means that none of these sources have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, and all have weak explanatory power. This negates H3: The source of reception of Spring Festival Folk Customs influences cognition.

Table 4. The variance of the knowledge source and cognition in Spring Festival Folk Customs

	*	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Family	1	1.846	5	0.369	0.269	0.93
	2	189.591	138	1.374		
	3	191.438	143			
School	1	7.354	5	1.471	1.12	0.353
	2	181.285	138	1.314		
	3	188.639	143			
Social contact	1	5.298	5	1.06	0.901	0.482
	2	162.258	138	1.176		
	3	167.556	143			
Traditional media	1	3.274	5	0.655	0.598	0.702
	2	151.163	138	1.095		
	3	154.437	143			
Internet	1	11.405	5	2.281	1.343	0.25
	2	234.345	138	1.698		
	3	245.75	143			

*1=Between Groups; 2=Within Groups; 3=Total

5 Discussion

5.1 Factors Related to College Students' Perception of Spring Festival Folk Customs

Digitization caught our attention based on the transformative impact of the Internet on how people live and work and the fact that contemporary university students have grown up with the Internet. We tested the effect of digitization on the perception of Spring Festival Folk Customs in terms of both the source of perception and participation in online activities, and the results needed to be more significant to see a direct effect. This is different from the study in Wang, C., Zhang, Y., Ding, H., Z. [12]. From the perspective of cognitive sources, after family comes the Internet with a mean value of 3.79, surpassing school, social activities, and traditional media. From the perspective of willingness to participate in folk customs activities, offline activities (mean = 4.74) and online activities (mean = 4.61) did not open a large gap. Therefore, the impact of Digitization on Spring Festival Folk Customs activities is still worth studying in the future.

The survey data shows that the mean value of cognition originated from family = 4.4, which is in the absolute leading position among the five sources, which verifies the conclusion of Šaknys, Ž.[15]. College students mainly obtain knowledge related to Spring Festival Folk Customs from their families and the annual Spring Festival Folk Customs activities that family members participate in reinforcing college students' understanding of Spring Festival Folk Customs. The experiences of birth and growing up belong to the endogenous knowledge sources mentioned in the research of Gu et al. [14].

5.2 Analysis of Spring Festival Folk Customs under Social Representation Theory

In their formal model, Bauer and Gaskell involve three elements of social representation: the subject, the object, activity, or idea being represented, and the projection of the social group [15]. For Spring Festival Folk Customs, the subject refers to families, communities, local governments, the media, etc., representing Spring Festival Folk Customs in various ways. The represented objects, activities, or ideas refer to the festival itself and its rituals and activities, which also involve the concepts and meanings behind them. Social group projection refers to how social groups project their values and identities through Spring Festival Folk Customs.

Social representation is dynamic and changes over time. Social representations are dynamic and change over time. Bauer et al. [18] added a temporal dimension to the triangular model of social representation (which emphasizes the interplay of social representations on the three central dimensions of cognition, emotion, and society), including the past and future, to represent implied or supported items that connect subjects and objects. Spring Festival Folk Customs is not static; it evolves and innovates. The open-ended questions of this study's questionnaire addressed the dynamic nature of social representations from a perceptual perspective. The responses compare the present with childhood experiences to feel the similarities and differences while expecting to be inherited in the future and continuously innovated with technology and trends.

6 Conclusion

This study takes college students as the object of investigation to study the cognition, affection, and behavior of folk customs in the traditional Chinese festival of the Spring Festival. The high awareness and positive attitude of college students towards the folk customs of the Spring Festival provide us with an opportunity to inherit the traditional culture. We propose the following: First, government departments protect the development of

traditional culture, take its essence and dross, and advocate a benign human-centered tradition. Although the family is the first communication channel, it can also give full play to the role of grassroots communities and lead the way of civilization inheritance. Second, it attaches importance to the supporting role of school education in the inheritance of traditional culture. Young people will become the leading carriers of traditional culture in the future, and regular and systematic planning of conventional cultural activities will make inheritance a habit. Third, it utilizes digital platforms and young people's interest in smart devices to develop suitable traditional cultural games, courses, and films and television works.

7 Contributions and limitations

Contribution: This study verifies college students' attitudes toward traditional culture through empirical analysis. Theoretically, it provides empirical evidence for the study of social representation theory and visualizes the research process of social representation. Practically, this study serves as a case study for subsequent research on traditional culture through the perception of specific festivals by specific groups.

Limitations: The sample was limited to college students in Dalian, Liaoning Province, China, and the findings may need to be generalized. People from different regions and cultural backgrounds may perceive Spring Festival Folk Customs differently; therefore, caution is needed when generalizing the findings to other areas and populations.

Future studies: Future studies can expand the sample range to further verify the applicability and generalizability of the model. By comparing the results of studies in different regions, a more comprehensive understanding of people's cognition of traditional culture can be achieved.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study may be obtained from the authors upon reasonable request. This data is not publicly available for privacy reasons.

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