

A Study on Cross-Cultural Interaction Methods Driven by Digital Media Technology: The Case of Li Ziqi's YouTube Channel

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of deep integration between globalization and digitalization, digital media technology has emerged as a core driver of cross-cultural communication. This study examines the YouTube channel of Li Ziqi, a phenomenally popular short-video creator, to analyze how digital media technology specifically facilitates and shapes cross-cultural interaction. Employing a combination of case study, literature review, and content analysis methodologies, this paper systematically investigates the application characteristics of digital media technology in Li Ziqi's videos and the resulting interactive responses from overseas audiences. Findings reveal that digital media technology effectively constructs a "shared meaning space" transcending cultural barriers through visual storytelling, enhanced use of nonverbal symbols, and platform-adaptive optimization. Specifically, high-caliber cinematography and editing rhythms cultivate a pastoral poetics with universal aesthetic resonance. Comprehensive visual representations of food preparation processes and traditional crafts deliver rich information easily comprehensible to low-context audiences. Meanwhile, multilingual captions and nonverbal communication strategies minimizing dialogue significantly reduce cultural discounting. Ultimately, these techniques collectively stimulate cross-cultural interaction centered on emotional resonance, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. This study provides theoretical references and technical pathways for cross-cultural communication practices in the new media era, emphasizing that while deepening content is crucial, the narrative potential of digital media technology and platform logic must be highly valued.

Keywords: Digital Media Technology; Cross-Cultural Communication; Short Videos;

Li Ziqi; YouTube

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

The revolutionary advancement of the internet and digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the communication ecosystem. Digital media has evolved from a simple tool for information transmission into a critical arena that shapes cultural perceptions and constructs social relationships [1]. Within the globalization context, the goal of cross-cultural communication no longer limits itself to one-way information dissemination but pursues deeper understanding, dialogue, and interaction. Global short-video platforms like YouTube and TikTok, characterized by their intuitiveness, immersive nature, and high interactivity, offer unprecedented possibilities for communication across geographical and cultural boundaries. They not only lower barriers to content creation and distribution but also leverage algorithmic recommendation systems to precisely deliver local cultural content to global interest communities, fostering entirely new models of cross-cultural interaction.

Amid this wave, Chinese creator Li Ziqi stands as an iconic case study. Her YouTube videos-centered on traditional Chinese rural life, culinary arts, and handicrafts-have achieved cross-cultural success beyond cultural boundaries. As of the study's timeline, her channel boasts over 10 million subscribers, with individual videos frequently garnering tens of millions of views. The comment sections gather multilingual feedback from around the world, forming vibrant spaces for cross-cultural dialogue [2]. This phenomenon demonstrates that content creation empowered by digital media technology can effectively stimulate broad engagement and emotional investment from international audiences, serving as a vivid practice of "telling China's stories well."

This study holds both theoretical significance

and practical value. Theoretically, existing research on Li Ziqi or cross-cultural communication primarily approaches the subject from perspectives such as cultural semiotics, narrative strategies, or communication effects [3-5], while systematic exploration of how digital media technology itself, as an active factor, specifically drives interactive processes remains relatively scarce. Technology is not merely a medium; it actively participates in constructing the meaning of content, audience perception patterns, and interactive behaviors. This paper centers digital media technology in its analysis, aiming to bridge communication studies and technological research to enrich theoretical perspectives on cross-cultural communication. Practically, Li Ziqi's success offers a highly valuable model for Chinese culture's global outreach. Deeply analyzing the underlying technological applications and interactive generation mechanisms can provide actionable strategic insights for content creators, operational agencies, and international communication platforms. For instance: How can audiovisual language overcome linguistic barriers? How can editing rhythms adapt to cross-cultural audiences' cognitive habits? How should interactive elements be designed to stimulate deeper community engagement? Addressing these questions holds significant practical implications for enhancing cross-cultural communication effectiveness and building positive national cultural images in the digital age [2].

1.2 Research Questions

Against this backdrop, this study aims to address the following core questions:

- (1) Which specific digital media techniques (e.g., visual storytelling, editing, sound effects) are prominently applied in Li Ziqi's YouTube videos?
- (2) How do these technical applications influence and facilitate cross-cultural interaction among overseas audiences (manifested across cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and other dimensions)?
- (3) What effective pathways and mechanisms for digital media technology-driven cross-cultural interaction can be summarized from this case study?

1.3 Research Methodology and Approach

This study primarily employs a case study approach, using Li Ziqi's YouTube channel as a

representative case for in-depth analysis. Specific methodologies include literature review, content analysis, and textual analysis. The literature review systematically organizes and critiques relevant theories on digital media technologies, cross-cultural communication, and their intersection, establishing the theoretical foundation for this research. Content analysis examines representative video samples from Li Ziqi's channel, focusing on technical features such as cinematography, editing logic, and symbol usage, supplemented by quantitative metrics like views, likes, and comments. Text analysis qualitatively examines highly-rated and multilingual comments in her video comment sections to discern audience cognition, emotions, and behavioral responses. The research approach follows the logical sequence of "theoretical framework construction – case empirical analysis – mechanism synthesis": First, analytical dimensions are established through literature review. Second, in-depth case analysis examines specific technical applications and interactive manifestations. Finally, comprehensive discussion synthesizes the core mechanisms by which digital media technologies drive cross-cultural interaction, proposing practical recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Media Technology Research

Digital media technology broadly refers to the collection of technologies that create, process, store, and disseminate information in digital form. Its core characteristics lie in interactivity, hypermedia properties, and virtuality. Within the field of communication studies, research focuses on how these technologies transform content production (e.g., UGC generation), narrative modes (e.g., non-linear and immersive storytelling), and audience experiences. For short videos, key technical dimensions include: visual storytelling and cinematic language (e.g., composition, camera movement, color grading); editing and pacing control (montage, time compression); sound design (synchronized audio, background music, sound effects); and platform adaptation (duration, subtitles, thumbnail design). These technical elements collectively determine a content piece's aesthetic quality, information density, and emotional impact.

2.2 Cross-Cultural Communication Research

Cross-cultural communication theory examines information exchange processes between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. Classic theories like Edward Hall's high-context/low-context cultural theory suggest that high-context cultures (e.g., China) communicate implicitly, relying on shared background knowledge, while low-context cultures (e.g., the United States) communicate explicitly, relying on the literal meaning of language [4]. This difference constitutes one of the primary barriers in cross-cultural communication. Framing theory emphasizes that communicators construct reality by selecting and emphasizing certain facts, thereby influencing audience comprehension [1]. Additionally, the "uses and gratifications" theory, grounded in audience motivation, posits that audiences actively choose media to satisfy specific needs [3]. These theories provide a foundational framework for analyzing the effects and obstacles of cross-cultural communication.

2.3 Digital Media and Cross-Cultural Communication Research

In recent years, scholars have increasingly focused on the intersection of digital media and cross-cultural communication. Research indicates that digital media can partially circumvent language barriers through visualization and connect universal human emotions via emotional narratives. For instance, studies highlight the significant "nonverbal communication" advantage of short videos, where symbols like visuals, music, and actions directly convey emotions and aesthetics [3, 5]. Li Yong et al.'s empirical research further demonstrates that video's "nonverbal symbolic system" excels at presenting deep cultural connotations like traditional virtues and life philosophies, thereby reducing "cultural discounting" [1]. While these studies provide a crucial starting point for this research, most treat technology as a background or instrumental prerequisite. Further exploration is warranted regarding its active, constructive role. Furthermore, Xiao Jun's research on semiotic narratives in short videos provides a theoretical framework for understanding how visual symbols construct meaning in cross-cultural contexts [6].

2.4 Literature Review

In summary, existing research has fully

recognized the potential of digital media in cross-cultural communication and has interpreted the success factors of the Li Ziqi case from multiple angles, such as the conversion of cultural symbols, the construction of pastoral poetics, and the stimulation of emotional resonance [3-5]. However, most studies still treat "technology" as a black box or homogenized backdrop, failing to dissect how different specific technological means differentially impact various stages of cross-cultural cognition and interaction. This research aims to bridge this gap by focusing analysis on the concrete application forms of digital media technology, systematically exploring its underlying mechanisms for driving cross-cultural interaction.

3. Case Analysis

3.1 Overview of Li Ziqi's YouTube Channel Development

Li Ziqi began systematically publishing videos on YouTube around 2017. Her channel features highly specialized content centered on traditional rural life in Sichuan, China, primarily divided into three categories: traditional food preparation (e.g., soy sauce, mooncakes, cured meat), craftsmanship inheritance (e.g., papermaking, ink production, weaving and dyeing), and seasonal agricultural activities (e.g., sowing, harvesting). By 2022, her channel had surpassed 17 million subscribers, establishing it as one of the most influential Chinese-language channels on the platform [2]. Videos typically run 10-20 minutes—significantly longer than typical short-form content—yet their meticulous production ensures sustained viewer immersion. Most videos feature bilingual Chinese-English titles and descriptions, though some early videos were exclusively in Chinese.

3.2 Application of Digital Media Technology in Videos

3.2.1 Visual narrative and cinematic language
Li Ziqi's videos extensively employ cinematic cinematography. Close-ups meticulously showcase the texture of ingredients, the flickering of flames, and intricate craftsmanship (such as noodle-pulling and embroidery), creating a strong sense of tactility and immersion. Wide shots and establishing shots outline mist-shrouded mountains and forests, as well as pastoral landscapes through seasonal changes,

constructing an idealized "utopia" removed from modern clamor. This visual style transcends mere documentation; it is an aesthetically crafted presentation with cross-cultural appeal, directly satisfying the aesthetic demands of a global audience [3, 5].

3.2.2 Video editing and rhythm control

The video employs a "time-compression" montage technique, condensing lengthy natural growth cycles (from crop sowing to harvest) or artisanal processes (such as soy sauce's year-long fermentation) into mere minutes. This editing not only resolves the conflict between real-world duration and viewing time but also creates a "rhythm of life" and an "epic sense of labor," emphasizing the integrity of the process and the hard-won value of the outcome. The pacing is well-balanced, alternating between the intensity of labor and the relaxation of leisure, aligning with universal human expectations for narrative rhythm.

3.2.3 Sound design and atmosphere

The video places extreme emphasis on the use of synchronous sound and natural ambient effects. The sounds of chopping wood, flowing water, slicing vegetables, and crackling firewood are clearly captured, creating a unique "ASMR" (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) effect that greatly enhances the sense of presence and healing. Background music predominantly features soothing Chinese-inspired instrumental tracks that align seamlessly with the visual mood. This sound design, centered on non-verbal auditory elements, effectively bypasses language barriers to directly engage viewers' senses and emotions, cultivating an overall atmosphere of tranquility, focus, and harmony [1].

3.3 Cross-Cultural Interaction Performance

Li Ziqi's videos demonstrate cross-cultural interaction across multiple dimensions, including comment engagement, international feedback, and social media dissemination. The comment section serves as the primary arena for cross-cultural exchange, featuring not only massive volumes (often tens to hundreds of thousands of comments) but also linguistic diversity and multi-layered content. At the cognitive level, numerous comments express recognition of specific cultural symbols, such as "So this is how soy sauce is made!" or "What kind of plant is this?". Differences emerge between high-context and low-context cultural audiences: high-context viewers (e.g., Southeast

Asia) more readily grasp collectivist values and filial piety, while low-context audiences focus on individual skills and narratives (Li Ziqi herself). At the emotional level—the most intensely interactive dimension—comments brim with expressions like "peaceful," "healing," and "this calms my anxiety," reflecting the video's universal therapeutic effect on modern urban anxiety. The portrayal of intergenerational affection also sparked widespread emotional resonance. At the behavioral level, engagement extends beyond comments to include user dialogues (e.g., resolving cultural queries), spontaneous translations, and expressions of intent like "I want to try this" or "I want to visit China." Furthermore, mainstream international media outlets like The New York Times have covered the Li Ziqi phenomenon, describing her videos as "cultural exports." Her content has also been widely shared and discussed on platforms such as Reddit and Twitter, creating secondary dissemination. This diffusion network, driven by both platform algorithmic recommendations and organic community sharing, significantly broadens the scope of engagement [2].

3.4 Emotional Resonance Mechanism

Digital media technology fosters deep emotional resonance through the following mechanisms: First, the visually crafted world of "returning to simplicity" resonates with the universal longing for slow living and harmony between humans and nature in the age of globalization—a "survival motif" transcending specific cultures. Second, "food" serves as humanity's most fundamental universal language. Videos' extreme visualization of food from source to finished product satisfies human curiosity and reverence for food's origins, readily sparking resonance. Finally, sophisticated audiovisual techniques have forged a "universal language" that requires minimal linguistic translation. Even non-Chinese speakers can grasp the process and feel the emotions through images and sound, bypassing cultural interpretation barriers to enter direct emotional resonance.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Discussion of Findings

A comprehensive case analysis reveals that digital media technology in Li Ziqi's case is not a neutral tool but an active constructor. First, technology constructs "accessible" narratives:

through high-definition imagery, close-up editing, and time compression, it transforms the high-context, implicit culture of rural China into visual sequences and emotional atmospheres that low-context audiences can intuitively perceive and comprehend. Second, technology amplified the communicative efficacy of "nonverbal symbols": it maximized the "low-level framework" identified in research findings through technical means, vividly presenting abstract concepts like "traditional virtues" and "wisdom and simplicity" through concrete audiovisual symbols such as labor actions, focused expressions, and human-environment interactions [1]. Finally, technology adapts to a "dual-path" processing model for platforms and audiences: exquisite visuals and soothing sounds serve as "peripheral path" cues to rapidly attract and retain viewers; while in-depth displays of complete production processes and traditional crafts provide "central path" content for cognitive engagement, satisfying audiences seeking deeper cultural understanding. This facilitates multi-level interaction, evolving from superficial likes to substantive comments.

This study validates and deepens prior findings. For instance, Liang Ying's observation of high-context/low-context audience differences manifests here: digital media technology (especially intuitive visual presentation) provides crucial "scaffolding" for low-context audiences to comprehend high-context cultures [4]. Simultaneously, the study reveals potential contradictions in technological application: while extreme aesthetic processing enhances communicative power, it may also construct a "spectacularized" or "utopianized" image of rural China that diverges from complex realities. This dimension warrants reflection in future cross-cultural communication practices. Furthermore, while Li Ziqi's videos foster active engagement, interactions remain predominantly horizontal-between audiences and the content, or among audiences themselves-with virtually no direct vertical interaction between the creator and viewers. This "one-way broadcasting + community discussion" model represents a typical form of cross-cultural interaction in digital media, whose long-term impact and depth warrant further observation.

5. Conclusions and Outlook

5.1 Research Findings

Through analyzing the case of Li Ziqi's YouTube channel, this study concludes that digital media technology serves as the key engine driving effective contemporary cross-cultural interaction. Its mechanism lies in transforming local cultural resources into media texts with high aesthetic universality, low contextual cognitive barriers, and strong emotional resonance through professional audiovisual production techniques. Specifically, technology achieves three bridges: overcoming language barriers (via nonverbal symbols), bridging cognitive differences (by reducing comprehension costs through process visualization), and spanning emotional distances (by evoking universal emotional resonance). Ultimately, on global platforms like YouTube, this fosters vibrant transnational online communities centered around shared aesthetic experiences and cultural interests.

5.2 Research Recommendations and Outlook

Based on these findings, both creators and platforms should adhere to the principle of "content is king" at the content level. However, they must recognize that "content" in the digital age encompasses its technological presentation form. This requires deep engagement with local culture and identifying connections to universal human emotions (such as family, nature, labor, and food). Technologically, they should elevate audiovisual production professionalism, mastering cinematography, editing rhythms, and sound design to craft narratives beyond mere documentation. Consciously strengthen nonverbal storytelling capabilities to translate abstract cultural values into tangible, sensory symbols. Strategically, attention should be paid to "peripheral path" variables such as video duration and multilingual adaptation [1]. Platform features (e.g., community posts, subtitle collaboration tools) should be actively leveraged to encourage audience participation and interaction, shifting from mere "dissemination" to "cultivating a dialogic cultural space" [4].

This study has limitations, such as focusing on a single successful case. Future research could conduct comparative studies analyzing technical application differences between successful and unsuccessful cross-cultural short video cases; employ long-term tracking and larger-scale audience surveys to quantitatively assess the specific impact weights of different technical

elements on interaction outcomes; and explore how emerging digital technologies like AI-generated content (AIGC) and virtual reality (VR) may transform cross-cultural interaction patterns.

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