Interactive Ritual Chains and the Image of a Great Nation: an Analysis of the Effect of Foreign Netizen Reaction Videos on Young People's Sense of National Identity

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Abstract: From the rapid development of China's high-speed railway to the construction of Huoshenshan(Fire God Mountain) Hospital and Leishenshan(Thunder God Mountain) Hospital in a few days, the image of China's "infrastructure maniac" has been deeply rooted in the hearts of people throughout the world. Many young people have watched infrastructure videos and are eager to share and learn about the views of others, which is why reaction videos on infrastructure have become so popular. The reaction videos on Chinese infrastructure by foreign users have had an impact on the sense of national identity of Chinese youth. This study used questionnaires and in-depth interviews to investigate this phenomenon. The study found that the sense of national identity of Chinese youths who responded to the videos was not related to the nationality of the video recorder; the higher the sense of national identity of the youth audience, the stronger the willingness to participate in the interaction of the reaction videos.

Keywords: interactive ritual chain, national identity, infrastructure reaction video

1 Introduction

The construction of two hospitals, Vulcan and Thunder Mountain, in 12 days at the beginning of 2020 under the pressure of the new epidemic, has shown the world how fast China is an "infrastructure maniac". This has not only caused awe among Chinese netizens, but many foreign netizens have also uploaded reaction videos on Chinese infrastructure construction and Chinese buildings on foreign and Chinese social media platforms to interact with Chinese netizens. The reaction videos of infrastructure videos became explosive. We observed that the bullet screens and comment sections of foreigners' infrastructure reaction videos were full of content such as "Chinese cattle" and "How lucky I am to have been born in China", reflecting a strong sense of national identity. Also, the number of video views, bullet screens, comments and their content varied depending on the nationality of the recorder.

2 Review of the Literature

2.1 A Review of Research on Interactive Ritual Chain Theory and National Identity

In 2003, sociologist Randall Collins proposed the theory of interactive ritual chains, which suggests that interaction (i.e. ritual) is a source of social dynamics and that the image each individual presents in society is gradually formed through social interaction with others. Users develop emotional resonance in the process of participating in rituals, and participants in interactive rituals can generate a shared emotional experience and identity in the interconnection of concerns and emotions, which leads to the formation of a new social positioning and social image.

At present, domestic scholars have focused their research on interactive ritual chains in the fields of online fan communities and online live interaction. In 2014, Pan Shuya and Zhang Yuqi published "Virtual Presence: The Interactive Ritual Chain of Online Fan Communities", which explored three questions: "Where does the cohesiveness of online fan communities come from, why are online fan communities highly homogeneous in their actions, and what role does new media technology play in them? In 2022, Ding Xiaowen published "The Formation of Online Fan Communities: An Analysis of the Communication Influence of Online Anchors in the New Media Era Based on the Interactive Ritual Chain Theory", which explored the influence of online anchors in the new media era, explored the content, methods and approaches of online anchors in influencing their fan communities, and made suggestions on how to regulate the behavior of online anchors.

The sense of national identity refers to the recognition and acceptance of one's identity as a member of a country, the identity of the national culture and political proposition of the country in which one lives, and the sense of belonging that people who have the citizenship of a certain country feel. At present, domestic scholars' researches on young people’s sense of national identity are relatively scattered, mainly based on a certain video platform or a specific event. This includes the article "Exploring the influence of Jitterbug news-based short videos on young people's national identity" published by Wang Shihai in 2022, which explores the influence of Jitterbug news-based short videos on young people's national identity through interviews with 141 Jitterbug short video users. The article "Research on the media construction of national identity in the context of Sino-US trade frictions" published by Luo Wanli in 2020 selects "The People's Daily" in the context of the Sino-US trade war. In the context of the trade war between China and the United States, the People's Daily and its new media outlet "Chivalry Island" were selected as the research objects to explore how the party media constructs national identity, to reveal the ruling party's efforts to construct national identity in the context of the Internet. [6]The only study on young people’s sense of national identity using the interactive ritual chain is Jiang Ruixuan's "Contemporary Youth's Emotional Expression and National Identity Construction - An Examination of the Interactive Ritual Based on Bilibili's Interactive Short Video, <CHOICE>"

published in 2022, which takes the short red video "Choice" on the Bilibili as using the interactive ritual chain theory. The study explores the new path of shaping the sense of national identity among youth groups through emotional expression driven by interactive rituals.

To sum up, the current research on youth national identity using interactive ritual chain theory is not yet perfect, and there is a lot of room for exploration. While national identity is mostly studied with news-based short videos, there is a certain gap in the research on youth national identity with reaction videos.

2.2 Overview of Reaction Video Research

A reaction video is a video recording of people's attitudes and reactions to something. Reaction videos are divided into two parts: the material screens and the blogger who is reacting. In the video, the blogger reacts to the content of the footage, sometimes pausing to comment on it for the sake of expression.[8]The earliest reaction videos appeared on YouTube, and now there are many reaction videos on Chinese video sites such as Bilibili, Micro-blog and TikTok. In recent years, several scholars have studied reaction videos from different perspectives and in different fields.

Overseas research on reaction videos has mostly focused on the music sector, with the aim of exploring the economic effects behind the reactions. For example, in Byrd McDaniel's 2020 publication Popular music reaction videos: Reactivity, creator labor, and the performance of listening online, he analyses YouTube's reaction videos from a digital economy perspective. Popular music reaction videos are analyzed from the perspective of the digital economy, arguing how reactive videos can enable creators to counter traditional ways of listening to music, while also enabling creators to approach it as an act of consumption.[9] Swan Anna Lee's 2018 publication Transnational Identities and Feeling in Fandom: Place and Embodiment in K-pop Fan Reaction Videos examine the location and implementation of K-pop fans in reaction videos from an international communication perspective[10]. Yeran Kim's 2012 publication Reaction Video and its Attention Economy: Global Production and Consumption of K-Pop from an Attention Economy Perspective.

Domestic studies, on the other hand, do not have a specific division of categories, being a more generalized concept of the reaction video. Similarly, there is no obvious tendency for domestic scholars to concentrate on the purpose of research, and they have studied the interaction mechanism, viewing power, and emotional value of reaction. Including Zheng Jiannan, Zhang Yuyan in his 2022 paper 'Research on the Interaction Mechanism of B Station Reaction Video from the Perspective of the Interaction Ritual Chain', which examines the interaction mechanism of B Station Reaction video from the perspective of the interaction ritual chain, the study shows that B Station's reaction video has possessed the four key elements of interactive ritual initiation, while producing interactive results at the individual, platform community and The study shows that B website's reaction videos have the four key elements of interactive ritual initiation, while producing interactive outcomes at the individual, platform

community and video ecological levels.[12] Guo Lei's "Watching of Watching: The Emotional Value and Power Relations of Reaction Videos" published in 2022 analyses the emotional value and power relations in reaction videos from the perspective of viewing power, showing that reaction videos satisfy users' knowledge, social and identity consumption needs.

In summary, domestic and international research on reaction videos is mostly confined to the music and film and variety categories, with insufficient research on other categories of reaction. No scholars have yet used interactive ritual chain theory to study the influence of reaction videos on youth national identity.

3 Research Methodology

Based on the above findings, this paper will use the audience survey method and in-depth interview method from the theory of interactive ritual chain to try to answer the following questions: Do the reaction videos about Chinese infrastructure posted by foreign netizens on Chinese social media and their bullet-screens and comments have an impact on youth's sense of national identity? Is it that the higher the national identity of young people, the stronger their desire to interact under the REACTION recorded by foreign UP owners?

3.1 Audience Survey Method

The audience survey method was proposed for this study and the sample study started on 13 October 2022 with a nationwide youth cohort as the respondents, with a total of 449 respondents recruited for the questionnaire. Among the respondents, there were 226 men and 223 women, accounting for 50% each, with an equal gender distribution. Of them, there were 235 aged 18 to 25, accounting for 52%; There were 160 aged 26 to 35, accounting for 35%; There were 54 aged 35 to 45, accounting for 12%. Young people between the ages of 18 and 25 were the main members who completed the questionnaire.

The researcher administered a web-based questionnaire to the participants covering the type of questions related to the research topic and informed them that it was a questionnaire to explore the effect of foreign internet users' infrastructural reaction videos on the sense of national identity of the youth in China. The overall questionnaire took about 3-5 minutes to answer and the sample video took 20 minutes to watch, making a total of 23-25 minutes.

The questionnaires were distributed on the afternoon of 13 October 2022, using the "Questionnaire Star" online questionnaire platform.

3.2 In-depth Interview Method

The aim is to explore the effect of foreign netizens' infrastructure reaction videos on Chinese youth's sense of national identity through in-depth interviews, and to provide a reference for

enhancing Chinese youth's sense of national identity and new forms of international exchange.

In-depth interviews of approximately 30 minutes were conducted with each of the 16 youth interviewers in this study. The interviews began on 13 October 2022 and ended on 18 October 2022. The interviewees included, firstly, friends and family close to the researcher, and secondly, a larger research sample was recruited via the internet.

According to the maximum sampling principle of the qualitative research method, by the time the 16th interviewee was recruited, the entire interview was sufficient to answer the research questions and the sample collection was closed. The respondents had low levels of homogeneity because they varied in major, level of education, and location.

The interviews were conducted in a variety of ways, including telephone interviews, text interviews on WeChat and one-to-one, face-to-face interviews. The results of the interviews were collated into verbatim transcripts, with a total of 22876 words in the interview transcripts.

The interview questions were divided into two main sections.

The first part mainly involves the interviewee's understanding of China's infrastructure.

In the second part, the research questions were dimensionality reduced into interview questions. The questions included respondents' knowledge of infrastructure reaction videos, their liking of infrastructure reaction videos by foreign netizens and their specific performance, the differences in comments or bullet-comments on infrastructure reaction videos by netizens from different countries, and the visualization of the impact of watching videos on national identity.

During the interviews and the conduct of the study, the researcher tried to avoid the four ethical issues and transgressions highlighted by scholar Alan Bryman: (1) causing harm to the research participant; (2) not using informed consent documents or materials; (3) invading the privacy of the research participant; and (4) deceiving the research participant. Interviewees were also allowed to remain silent or withdraw from the interview if they had any questions they did not wish to answer or if they were unhappy. Interview materials that the interviewees declared that they did not wish to be disclosed were not included or quoted in this study.

4. Research Findings

4.1 The Sense of National Identity of the Youth in the Reaction Video was not related to the Nationality of the Recorder

A total of 449 questionnaires were collected in this survey. From the descriptive analysis, it can be seen that after viewing the two videos of foreigners' reactions to China, the mean values of respondents' sense of national identity were 4.09 and 4.06 respectively, which were at a high level overall, but there was no significant difference. In the in-depth interviews, respondents generally indicated that they would take a more tolerant attitude towards various types of national communication interactions and receive foreign netizens' comments on Chinese infrastructure, and would not change their attitude towards the videos based on their country's

relationship with China. In other words, for both the Japanese and Russian reaction videos, as long as the content of the video is a positive reaction from foreigners to Chinese construction-related videos, the audience's sense of national identity is relatively high and is not influenced by the international relations between the country of the video's publisher and China. Research hypothesis H1 was not supported.

4.2 The Higher the Sense of National Identity of the Youth audiences, the Stronger the Willingness to Participate in the Interaction of the Reaction Videos

From the Pearson correlation analysis, there was a significant positive correlation between the audience's sense of national identity and their willingness to like, re-tweet, send bullet screens and comment on Japanese reaction videos (r=0.334, p=0.000; r=0.298, p=0.000; r=0.336, p=0.000; r=0.296, p=0.000), which indicates that the stronger the audience's sense of national identity, the stronger the willingness to disseminate reaction videos to Japanese people. And looking at the reaction videos of Russians also showed consistent results: audiences' national identity showed a significant positive correlation with their willingness to like, re-tweet, send bullet screens and comment on the reaction videos of Russians (r=0.445, p=0.000; r=0.434, p=0.000; r=0.471, p= 0.000; r=0.473, P=0.000), and research hypothesis H2 was supported. In in-depth interviews, respondents generally indicated that the country's strength provided them with confidence and courage to interact with comments and bullet screens, and that foreign netizens' recognition of China's infrastructure prompted Chinese youth to take on the responsibility of "telling the Chinese story". This suggests that audiences' sense of national identity positively influences their willingness to disseminate foreigners' reaction videos, and that this influence varies by video content or by video publisher - Young people's identification with Russian reaction videos has a stronger impact on their willingness to spread videos than Japanese reaction videos.

5 Summary and discussion

This study theorized the ritual chain of interaction in the infrastructural reaction videos by using hand surveys and in-depth interview methods, trying to answer the question of whether youth national identity is related to the nationality of the reaction video uploader and the willingness to interact. The study found that the higher the sense of national identity of the youth audience, the more willing they were to participate in reaction video interactions, while the sense of national identity of the youth audience was not related to the nationality of the reaction video uploader.

5.1 Clear identity divisions and cognitive base models lead to a simple division of the viewer's identity as a foreigner

Collins proposes the element of 'setting boundaries on outsiders' in interactive rituals, which excludes heterogeneous groups from the interactive process, thus letting participants know who is participating in the interactive field. Based on the specific preconditions of the infrastructure reaction videos recorded by foreigners, the main audience for the videos is Chinese citizens. When participating in the interaction of the reaction videos, the participants are naturally divided into two groups, the creators as performers (foreigners) and the users as viewers (Chinese). The division between the two identities is so clear that the subdivision of foreigners' identities becomes less necessary. This was also mentioned by several interviewees in the in-depth interviews, who were not concerned with the nationality of the creators of the reactions, as their basic identity as 'foreigners' was the same.

Secondly, in the process of socialization of domestic users, the domestic media tend to use general terms such as "foreign friends" to construct the identity of ordinary foreign citizens, and the distinction between nationalities is mostly found in negative reports or the construction of the government's image. This is where the cognitive matrix of citizenship is formed. Fundamental model theory suggests that in order to cope with the massive amount of information in the media, audiences use knowledge shortcuts to process information and make news comprehension manageable. If not specifically needed, there are two types of distinctions between individual identities in the eyes of domestic audiences, namely Chinese and foreigners. In in-depth interviews, interviewees further explained why they did not distinguish between the status of "foreigners", arguing that it was not necessary to make a detailed distinction between the status of ordinary citizens of countries other than China, and that the only detailed information needed was when referring to a certain government and its attitude.

In conclusion, the media can use the perspective of the foreigner 'others' to construct the national image of China without regard to their nationality, and this variable does not have an impact on the sense of national identity of young people.

5.2 Interaction is facilitated by the emotional energy transmitted through the chain of interactive rituals

There is a high degree of emotional connection in the infrastructure reaction videos recorded by foreign creators - the viewer's identification as 'Chinese' in a clear identity dichotomy, i.e. a sense of national identity. It brings emotional energy to each video viewer, giving them the confidence and enthusiasm to interact, support and celebrate China's architectural achievements. In this type of reaction video, the emotional energy of the country is the image of a great nation and its cultural identity, reinforced by its growing comprehensive national power. In the in-depth interviews, a number of interviewees spoke of how the rise of China's comprehensive national

power in recent years has greatly increased their cultural confidence and sense of national identity, and how their strong sense of national identity has prompted them to interact with bullet screens and comments, and express their emotions when watching such reaction videos. The higher the emotional energy of "national identity", the higher the emotional drive for viewers to interact, and the more likely it is to generate interactive behavior.

In addition, the interactions left by early viewers and their content can also have an impact on those who come after them. In the in-depth interviews, a number of interviewees indicated that existing bullet screens and comments influenced them when they were watching the video. The herd mentality reinforces the desire of later viewers to interact and to some extent influences the content of their interactions. Later viewers are influenced by the content of existing interactions and tend to align themselves with the content of existing interactions that share their views, and the introduction of features such as "+1" for bullet screens on the Bilibili also facilitates later viewers to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors.

Therefore, in the construction of the national image, if you want to obtain better interactive effects, you can arouse the audience's sense of national identity in terms of content and other aspects, thereby causing interaction.

6 Research limitations and outlook

The in-depth interviews for this study were mostly focused on people aged 18-25 with a bachelor's degree. This had an impact on the representativeness of the sample. However, due to time and capacity constraints, the author is currently unable to find a larger and more representative range of subjects to conduct in-depth interviews. In the future, the interviewees can be further expanded to enrich the variables such as their education and work, to consolidate the research results.

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