Analysis of self - presentation characteristics and communication effects of Chinese teenagers via short videos -- Taking TikTok as an example

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Abstract: As the network media keep prospering, short video platforms have emerged as a dominant social platform for contemporaries. This paper proceeds from the theoretical perspective of self - presentation to analyze self - presentation strategies and communication effects adopted by teenagers for their use of short videos. In this paper, teenager users of TikTok are chosen as research objects. Content analysis method is used to examine how adult - oriented short videos of teenagers on TikTok can influence communication effects and how adult-oriented self - presentation can influence communication. Research results suggest that the more mature the teenagers' self - presentation is, the better the communication effects can be achieved. But whether adult-oriented Internet memes are used or not will not influence the forwarding amount of videos. To sum up, this research aims at proposing suggestions for teenagers' reasonable use of short video platforms and socialized dominant values among teenagers by examining teenagers' adult-oriented short videos on TikTok.

Keywords: TikTok, short video, self - presentation, content analysis method, communication effect

1 Introduction

During the post-pandemic era, making short videos has been a one of the important entertainment paths entertainment for teenagers while studying at home. Statistics show that TikTok has been a dominant social media platform for Chinese teenagers to present themselves and interact with each other. An increasing number of teenagers have resorted to TikTok, Kwai, and other short video platforms for their self - presentation and content generation. Nevertheless, these teenagers' self - presentation is adult-oriented, which is characterized by adult-oriented makeup, language and dress-up. These adult-oriented characteristics have achieved extraordinary communication effects for their short videos. This phenomenon sets the author thinking about "How teenagers' adult-oriented short videos on TikTok affect communication effects of short videos?" and"How the adult-oriented factors influences communication effects of short videos? "
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2 Literature review

2.1 Literature review of short video research

Research into short videos originated from the United States in 2011. With the thriving of short videos, academic circles have studied short videos from different perspectives. Scholars abroad, such as Montag Christian, Yang Haibo, and Elhai Jon D. ,have made a comprehensive analysis of short video content from the theoretical perspective of uses and gratifications, pointing out that short videos can, to some extent, influence teenagers. Abby Ohlheiser (2021) studies short video from the technological perspective, holding that short videos, relying on advantages of its intelligent algorithms, can significantly influence the content appeal. Matthew Kirchner investigates into short videos from the data perspective, claiming that the most important role of the short video algorithm lies in its drawing of the user portrait, thus making it possible for the advertisement to reach the target audience. Guy Bunker discusses short video communication from the perspective of information security of short videos, and his research findings indicate that information security concerns arising from the communication process of short videos should not be ignored . In Content positioning and profit-making model of micro-videos, domestic scholar Dai Chunli (2013) put forward the concept of “micro”. She believes that “micro” in micro-videos can refer to the length of time or the span of time . In Analysis of short video fever in the era of social media, Fang Fang defines short videos as videos made by smartphones that were previous within 10s and then lengthened to 60s. In The short video era is coming, Li Xinyi (2016) thought hat the concept of “short video” is contrary to the traditional concept of “long video”, and that the former is within 30s. In Entry of social media into short video era, Hui Leipan defines the short video as a video that is made by the intelligent mobile terminal, such as the smartphone or the tablet PC, and lasts from 8s to 30s . Though the research above studies short videos from different perspectives, the influence of teenagers’ identity as the poster of videos has not yet drawn any research attention.

2.2 Literature review of self - presentation theory

Self - presentation theory, after being proposed, has gained wide attention from scholars both at home and abroad. So far, fruitful research findings have been achieved. Specifically, foreign scholars have examined self - presentation from the perspective of self - presentation strategies, types, influencing factors, results, etc . In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman develops “proposed theory”, a typical theory of self - presentation . Foreign scholars like Jones and Pittman first put forth the concept of self - presentation strategies in the 1980s. They thought that people tend to resort to five self - presentation strategies, namely ingratiation, threatening, competence, begging, and example setting, in their daily interpersonal communication . Kim and Lee classify self - presentation strategies into two types, namely the real type and the ideal

type . But Kane (2008) thought that the status and strategy of self - presentation depended on the correlation between presentation and the purpose. Jung et al. (2007), after studying and analyzing users of Cyworld, find that self - presentation, killing of time, entertainment, self-improvement and interpersonal communication are five motives of network use . On the contrary, Chinese scholars' researched into users' self - presentation started relatively late, which was widely believed to be after 2000. The first research by Chinese scholars into this field is Reality in virtual mirror image by Liu Zhongqi and Feng Xiaotian (2002), who comprehensively explored the issue of individual self - presentation in the cyberspace. Their article states that, despite that the cyberspace is a virtual existence, the content of interpersonal communication online is still rooted in the real life. Self-molding of netizens in the cyberspace is subject to the restrictions of their knowledge structure, real lifestyles, values, and personalities . After comparing individual self - presentation in the real life and in the cyberspace, Qu Yong (2008) thought that individuals have more freedom to air their opinions online, which has enabled them to selectively or even recombine their real-life experience in the cyberspace. At the same time, the cyberspace makes individual image creation more controllable, autonomous and casual . Huang Shaohua (2006) pointed out that self - presentation in the cyberspace can not only avoid others' physical damage of the individuals, but also provide a platform for individuals to show the side that is suppressed by them from displaying in the real world. This allows individuals to create a brand-new self-image. The reality-based virtual role has blurred the boundary between the real world and the cyberspace, and also enhanced individuals' sense of self - identity and sense of belonging . However, the aforesaid research, though studying the theory of self - presentation in the cyberspace, has failed to examine self - presentation among teenagers. In response to this research gap, this paper focuses on Chinese teenagers' use of short videos, attempting to clarify the self - presentation characteristics of this special user group as well as the communication effects of their self - presentation behaviors.

2.3 Research questions

Proceeding from the self - presentation theory, this paper attempts to answer the following research questions. The first research question is how the adult-oriented short video creation tendency of teenagers on TikTok will influence the communication effect of short videos. The second research question is which adult-oriented factors can influence the communication effect of short videos.

3 Research methods

3.1 Content analysis

Through the dimension reduction of abstract indexes, the content analysis realizes scientific

analysis of quantitative data. The analytical results can reflect hotspot issues of the current society and help explore the era development trends. Considering that this paper aims at examining self - presentation characteristics and communication effects of Chinese teenagers' short videos, content analysis can be used to quantitatively reflect the aforesaid self - presentation characteristics and communication effectors. Therefore, this paper focuses on analyzing the adult-oriented short video creation tendency of teenagers on TikTok, targeting at clarifying its communication effects and which adult - oriented factors can influence communication effects of these short videos.

3.1.1 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are made in accordance with the research questions stated above:

H1: The more mature makeup of Chinese teenagers is in short videos, the better the communication effects of these short videos will be.

H1a: The more mature the makeup of Chinese teenagers is in short videos, the more likes the short videos will obtain.

H1b: The more mature the makeup of Chinese teenagers is in short videos, the more comments the short videos will obtain.

H1c: The more mature the makeup of Chinese teenagers is in short videos, the more the short videos will be forwarded.

H2: The more mature the dress-up of Chinese teenagers is in short videos, the better the communication effects of these short videos will be.

H2a: The more mature the dress-up of Chinese teenagers is in short videos, the more likes the short videos will obtain.

H2b: The more mature the dress-up of Chinese teenagers is in short videos, the more comments the short videos will obtain.

H2c: The more mature the dress-up of Chinese teenagers is in short videos, the more the short videos will be forwarded.

H3: Chinese teenagers'use of Internet memes in their short videos can achieve better communication effects for their short videos.

H3a: Chinese teenagers' use of Internet memes can achieve more likes for their short videos.

H3b: Chinese teenagers' use of Internet memes can achieve a higher forwarding amount of their short videos.

H3c: Chinese teenagers' use of Internet memes can attract more comments for their short videos.

To verify the aforesaid hypotheses, this research employs content analysis, samples all research objects, then makes a questionnaire.

3.1.2 Sampling methods

Content generation by Chinese teenagers on the short video media, TikTok, is the research object. First of all, we sample teenagers' content on TikTok, with the popular teenagers' content selected for analysis. The popular teenagers' content is chosen because content of the kind is more likely to gain more attention and has more typical characteristics, so the content will also be representative enough for this research.

Second, short videos posted by teenagers on TikTok are studied. With "senior high school student" as the keyword, we search for corresponding videos. The videos consistent with the research requirements are coded. After deletion of repeated videos or invalid videos, 200 short videos are coded at last.

3.1.3 Coding list

This research aims at analyzing self - presentation characteristics and communication effects of Chinese teenagers' short videos online. The self - presentation characteristics and communication effects of teenagers' short videos are analyzed in terms of the number of likes, forwarding amount, and number of comments, respectively. The independent variable, "adult-oriented tendency", after dimensional reduction, includes "hairstyle", "makeup", "dress-up", "movement", "content", "language" and "meme". The short videos consistent with the research conditions are analyzed and the coding list of the chosen video samples is established.

4 Main research findings and suggestions

This content analysis collects 200 short video samples by Chinese teenagers in total. After summation of categories under each dimension upon data analysis, we obtain variables, including dress-up, make-up, and video content. The value of variables ranges from 0 to 1. The closer the value of these variables is, the more obvious the adult-oriented characteristics of a video will be. This conclusion can clearly shed light on self - presentation characteristics and communication effects of Chinese teenagers' short videos. To address research questions proposed above, we discuss research questions and hypotheses in accordance with data results, and summarize the research findings.

4.1 Analysis of Chinese teenagers' short video self - presentation characteristics and communication effects

4.1.1 Analysis of data findings

Pearson correlation analysis shows that the more obvious the adult orientation of teenagers'

make-up in their short videos is, the more likes the videos will obtain (r=0.203, P=0.004), the more comments the videos will obtain (r=0.358, P=0.004), and the higher the amount of forwarding the videos can achieve (r=0.295, P=0.004). This suggests that, the more mature the make-up of teenagers is in a short videos, the more effective the video will be all right. This can provide solid evidence for H1a, H1b, and H1c.

Similarly, Pearson correlation analysis verifies H2a, H2b and H2c, suggesting that the more obvious the adult orientation of teenagers' dress-up is in their short videos is, the more likes the videos will obtain (r=0.148, P=0.037), the more comments the videos will obtain (r=0.284, P=0.000), the higher the amount of forwarding the videos can achieve (r=0.218, P=0.002). This means that, the more mature the dress-up of teenagers is in their short videos, the better the communication effects of the short videos will be.

The independent sample "t" tests observes that teenagers' use of Internet memes or not can influence the number of likes and comments of their videos (t=-2.232, P=0.027; t=-2.282, P=0.024). But no such influence is found with the amount of forwarding (t=-1.3, P=0.195). So the research hypotheses, H3a and H3b, are substantiated.

4.1.2 Analysis of adult-oriented phenomenon in teenagers' short videos

In this research, content analysis is used for an investigation of the adult orientation of Chinese teenagers' short videos on TikTok in accordance with the theory of self - presentation. By doing so, we try to answer the question why Chinese teenagers' self - presentation follows an adult orientation in the era of network media. Research indicate that, the more mature the make-up of teenagers in their short videos is, the better the communication effects of their short videos will be. The same correlation is found between the dress-up and the communication effects. However, whether teenagers use Internet memes or not in their short videos can influence the number of likes and comments for their short videos, but no such influence is observed with the forwarding quantity of videos, because people tend to share memes made of visual elements with a stronger visual impact and calling for no thinking efforts rather than memes made of auditory elements.

4.1.3 Teenagers'self - presentation trends in network media environment

By analyzing self - presentation characteristics and communication effects of teenagers on the short video platform, TikTok, we well shed light on the development of self - presentation theory in the era of network media. On the other hand, this research can provide empirical evidence for the development of teenagers in China's current network media context. Based on the evidence, the Chinese authorities can better cope with the negative phenomenon of teenagers' adult-oriented self - presentation in network media, particularly short video media. Of special note is that an increasingly obvious adult orientation is found with Chinese teenagers' self - presentation characteristics in pursuit of likes, comments and quantity of forwarding under the

influence of network media. However, this trend will not only cause the negative phenomenon of amusing oneself to death, but more seriously the distortion of teenagers' values and even teenagers' perishing.

4.2 Exploration of development path for teenagers' short videos

4.2.1 .Strengthening industry self-discipline of we-media platforms to weaken adult orientation of teenagers

With the constant development of network media, social media dominated by short videos have gradually emerged as the primary channel for teenagers' information acquisition. Nevertheless, capitals have caused homogenization and adult orientation of teenagers' content generation. Content of the kind is recommended in the hot list without any screening, which is adverse to the socialization process of teenagers. This has made self-discipline of we-media platforms an imperative.

Short video platforms, while enjoying rapid development, should also undertake their social responsibilities. First of all, short video platforms should strengthen supervisor of short video creators. The personal data of short video platform applicants should be reviewed to hold video posters accountable for illegal content. Second, content supervision of short video platforms should also be reinforced. Currently, short video platforms represented by TikTok generally resort to machine-based content supervision. Artificial supervision serves as a supplementation only. It is self-evident that machine-based supervision cannot avoid loopholes. This necessitates increasing the percentage of artificial supervision of content posed by users so as to effectively screen out or delete videos with misleading content for teenagers and to create a favorable short video environment for teenagers.

4.2.2.Seeking diverse development of teenagers'short videos

The era of intelligent media has ushered a large amount of fragmented entertainment content into network media, but the short videos with an adult orientation have been constantly spread under the big data algorithm of TikTok. Though TikTok has developed the teenager model, the so-called protective model mainly limits the time use and limitation of paid services. As to the content limitation, the teenager model keeps the documentaries, animations, and scientific knowledge popularization accessible to teenagers, which is not appealing to teenagers at all. So the teenager model exists in name only.

Hence, TikTok should seek diverse development of teenagers' videos. Those screened out by the algorithm and consistent with requirements can be mutually recommended among teenager users to form a diverse short video closed loop with enriched content. Second, the content accessible for teenagers can be extended by promoting positive vlogs which teenagers are interested in, such as tourism, sports, and disciplined senior high school life, and recommending

short vloggers posting high-quality learning experience and other relevant content.

4.2.3.Improving heteronomy at system level

An effective supervisory mechanism and legal system have not yet been put in place to effectively monitor the content of short video social media in China. Standards on Management of Network Short Video Platforms and Detailed Regulations on Content Review of Network Short Videos have not yet realized substantial standardization of content of short video platforms.

In terms of the threshold, enterprises marching into the short video industry should pass the strict registration and permission procedures of the government. The regulations, including Methods on Management of Internet Information Services, Regulations on Interim Management of Internet Culture and Regulations on Management of Internet Visual and Audio Programs, should be effectively implemented. In terms of content supervision, administrative departments should tighten content supervision and enhance heteronomy of content on short video platforms. Negative adult-oriented content with sexual implications and encouraging smoking, drinking and gambling should be immediately deleted by platforms, and platforms spreading content of the kind should be held accountable. At the same time, policies and regulations should identify the bottom line for content generation.

To sum up, this paper analyzes the influence of teenagers' self - presentation characteristics on communication effects of their short videos. It is believed that the adult-oriented self - presentation characteristics can influence communication effects of teenagers' short videos in terms of the number of likes and comments as well as of the quantity of forwarding. However, this paper has one major research limitation. It only proceeds from teenagers' perspective to examine their self - presentation trends, thus failing to consider the influence of the social environment on teenagers' self - presentation strategies.

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