Cultural Adaptation and Identity: A Review of Short Video Usage among Chinese Minority College Students

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Abstract: This research paper examines the use of short videos by ethnic minority college students in China, reviewing research efforts on this topic since 2013 from the perspective of cultural adaptation and identity recognition. It has been found that, although ethnic minority college students play a pivotal role in advancing the development of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics, they continue to experience marginalization in media and sociological research. In addition, there are gaps in academic focus, academic community building, research theories and methodologies, and research perspectives and content that need to be addressed. In light of these findings, future research should consider the emerging stage of development as an opportunity to enhance the media environment and social welfare of ethnic minority college students through scholarly exploration.

1. Introduction

China, as a multi-ethnic, unified nation, has always displayed a distinct feature of diversity and unity. The representation of ethnic minority college students within China's higher education system is an especially unique and significant demographic segment. They serve as not only the progenitors and trailblazers of their own ethnic culture, but also the fundamental underpinning for the evolution of the socialist national cause with Chinese characteristics.[1] Social media short video platforms provide a technological environment for ethnic minority college students to understand others, as well as a stage for self-expression. Zoonen promotes the view that media symbols, rather than merely duplicating reality, actively reconstruct it.[2] Through the filming of short videos, ethnic minority college students reconstruct and convey the culture and landscape of their respective ethnic minority regions by immersing themselves in the urban environments they encounter as university students. The discourses and representations of mobile college students' social and cultural experiences in ethnic minority areas of China are not only a manifestation of the influence of urban civilization in the logic of modernity, but also an intricate reflection of historical and political processes in the multi-layered social context. The analysis of these media discourses and representations further provides an in-depth understanding of the complex socio-cultural transformations taking place in the process of China's social progress.

In the light of cross-disciplinary research, the cultural adaption and identity status of Chinese ethnic minority college students in the use of short videos should be a topic of academic interest.

However, what progress has been made in these fields? What are the limitations of existing research? In the current historical period, how should future research on this topic be deepened and expanded? This paper focuses on the Chinese ethnic minority college students, and based on an in-depth analysis of literature since 2013, aims to provide a preliminary response to the aforementioned issues.

2. Literature review

2.1. The use of short videos by ethnic minorities

Media society has entered a "visual" postmodern society, where visual phenomena and visual life constitute our visual landscape in this world.[3] One of the recent developments in mobile Internet technology is the emergence of short videos, which have become embedded in various social media platforms due to their features of real-time shooting, straightforward production, rapid dissemination, and emphasis on audiovisual elements. By building virtual environments, these platforms facilitate the seamless travel of individuals with different identities across space, facilitating shared experiences and diverse, complex, and practical behaviors.

As "Internet plus" permeates various sectors of society, novel content formats and media technologies, such as short videos, have emerged as a pivotal medium for disseminating ideas and culture. Xiao Yanlian provided critical commentary on research on new media and ethnic minorities in China prior to 2015. She highlighted the pivotal role of new media in the dissemination and transformation of minority cultures, and highlighted the inherent challenges and potential solutions. Xiao Yanlian observed, however, that the existing research mainly emphasized the phenomenon of generalization and lacked a solid theoretical framework to support their claims.[4] Yunshan Chen extensively discussed the advancement of the national standard language and script through the deployment of short-form videos in ethnic minority regions in the context of new media. Chen was convinced that the use of short-form video platforms for Mandarin promotion in ethnic regions was not only pragmatic, but also offered distinct advantages that could not be parallel to other conventional methods.[5] Sun Xinru's view on the influence of mass media on rural culture was comprehensive and collective in nature. The role of mass media as a mediator and conduit in the evolution and transformation of traditional minority village culture was significant. Under the influence of the media, the human-machine relationship and cultural forms of traditional ethnic minority villages faced new challenges.[6] From an embodied perspective, Li Jing used We Media of the ethnic floating population in the Yangtze River Delta region on the Kwai platform as her research object. She examined the multi-level physical manifestation of We Media's ethnic floating population within the personal sphere of short video. While making an optimistic observation from a broad perspective of ethnic integration, she failed to recognize the dynamic and multidimensional process of individual media interaction.[7] In the field of micro, Sun Xinru and Qian Hao proposed novel perspectives to understand how advanced media technology influences personal life and societal evolution through their investigation of Dulong women's distinctive comprehension and emotional manifestation of mobile phone use.[8]

In the above studies, there has been an increased focus on elucidating the role of short videos as a macro concept of technological media. These studies have shown that short videos have a profound impact on the media behaviour of ethnic minority groups, as well as the way in which diverse ethnic groups interact. They also highlight the significance of short videos in empowering ethnic minority groups to reshape their interpersonal and self-efficacy, and the beneficial impact of these videos on enhancing the sense of community among the Chinese nation. Nevertheless, there is a lack of discussion about the relationship between short videos and the daily practices of ethnic minority groups. Therefore, it is essential to examine the specific media processes that facilitate the

conduct of authentic communication activities in real-life contexts.

2.2. Cultural Adaptation of Ethnic Minority College Students

The term "cultural adaptation" refers to conscious and inclined behaviour adjustments in behaviour that individuals make as a result of their cognitive and emotional connection to two cultures, after they have transitioned from a familiar cultural environment to a new and diverse cultural context.[9] In the era of globalization and informationization, immigrants and diverse populations face challenges of cultural adaptation through mass media. They operate within a bi-cultural network, facing potential identity gaps.[10] Despite their different approaches, both groups use the media for various purposes, but their ultimate goal remains the same – the pursuit of cultural affirmation and identity.[11] Chen Ying paid considerable attention to the changes in the social landscape of urban ethnic minority migrant populations during the modernization process, recognizing that as a result of internal competition and exclusion, individuals were segregated into distinct groups. This ongoing process was undermining the ethnic distinctiveness of urban minority migrant populations, raising serious concerns about the methodology used to manage ethnic integration. This is a prominent problem that China's urban ethnic minority migrant population needs to face in the reconstruction of social relations.[12] Wang Xin thoroughly evaluated the various methodologies used in past empirical studies on cultural adaptation and posited that the oversimplified categorization of "segregation" or "integration" fails to account for the complex nature of the phenomenon. Consequently, he advocated a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that would allow for the development of pragmatic strategies to facilitate immigrants' cultural adaptation.[13]

Ethnic minority college students are a distinct population of young individuals who have achieved a higher level of educational attainment within their respective ethnic minority communities. Compared to their non-minority counterparts, they exhibit a distinct cultural, linguistic, traditional and regional identity, often possessing a heightened cultural capital and an increased capacity for value adaptation and flexibility. Nevertheless, in the field of academic research on the use of media by ethnic minority groups, there is a general emphasis on the concept of "backwardness". This indicates an emphasis on ethnic minority groups with high illiteracy rates and relatively low average education years. Moreover, the exploration of media utilization by ethnic minority college students usually revolves around ideological and political education.[14-16] Suo Xingmei and Teng Xing used the theoretical framework of cultural adaptation theory to investigate the factors affecting information literacy among ethnic minority college students. This survey identified limitations and potential gaps within the traditional Western cultural adaptation theory model in explaining the challenges faced by ethnic minority college students in China during higher education.[17] Zheng Xin and Ciren Qunzong conducted an in-depth and unique case analysis based on the personal life experience of a university student named "Zhaxi", who spent a significant 14 years studying in the Han ethnic region of China. This case analysis focused on the influence of various types of media on Zhaxi's outlook on life, values, cultural adaptation, national identity, and other aspects during different stages of his life. On the one hand, Zhaxi expressed anger or concern about the pervasive influence of consumerism and materialism on traditional Chinese homes. On the other hand, he also showed a high level of appreciation for the materialistic lifestyle and culture of Chinese mainland cities.[18] However, Zheng Xin and Ciren Qunzong mainly elucidate the process of fostering "cultural identity" in transcultural scenarios from the perspective of face-to-face interpersonal interaction, with less emphasis on the use of new media. In addition, Zhu Lili pointed out that a comprehensive account of individual narratives should not be limited to the specific data or facts presented about an individual, community, event or scene, but should rather include a

detailed exploration of the culture, customs and social norms of others through the use of detailed description and in-depth analysis.[19]

2.3. Short videos and identity

Identity is a cognitive process that encompasses an individual's ability to recognize their personal self-identity and their perception of group membership. It is a dynamic process that interweaves personal emotional experiences and behavioral patterns.[20] As the pervasive influence of the media on diverse aspects of personal daily activities and the significant impact of social interaction become increasingly apparent, a growing body of scholars are devoting their attention to the field of research concerning the use of new media and identity. The New Media Cross Cultural Research Center at Northwestern University in the United States conducted research on various cross-cultural phenomena in the digital age, especially new media users represented by immigrant groups who crossed multiple cultural boundaries. It explored the landscape of mobile populations using new media represented by the Internet, covering new media usage patterns, motivations, and specific usage behaviors of immigrant groups, and several specific research directions, including the role and impact of new media in mobile life.[21] Miller broadened his comprehension of the distinctive functions of contemporary media, highlighting the intricate interaction between user intent and media information technology. Specifically, consumers select specific media based on their distinct goals, while media technology creates new spaces for identity building.[22]

Zhu Jingjiang and Gao Dongjuan used the anthropological research paradigm to examine the mechanisms by which Kwai users constructed and identified their reflexive self-identity within this virtual community.[23] The interpersonal "realism" inherent in video-based social interactions requires adaptation to reflect the unique realities of the individual's local context, thus facilitating the integration of personal experiences and future aspirations, thus facilitating the completeness of self-narrative. The findings of Xu Jing and Wang Tiantian's research indicated that "Kwai", as a technical intermediary, provided a basic framework for rural youth to understand their world, fostering a connection between China's urban and rural areas, and constructing rural youth's perception of their identity, sense of belonging, and representation in rural China.[24] Cai Qi and Zhou Qing argued that mediated identities, constructed through various media channels, not only symbolize diverse action orientations, value orientations, and behavioral norms, but also emphasize the fluidity, strategic, and dialectical nature of worker identity within the contemporary social context.[25] From the perspective of cultural participation, an individual's self-identification is achieved through their active or passive involvement in cultural practice activities. As such, Zheng Xin and Ciren Qunzong delineate the specific practices of "Youth Zhaxi" across various stages of media exposure, regardless of whether the exposure is positive or negative in nature.[18] The above studies focus on the perspective of individuals as active media participants. However, it is important to recognize that passive media engagement often serves as a significant element that cannot be overlooked in everyday life. With the rapid advancement of personalized algorithms and artificial intelligence technology, social media has significantly outperformed the robust capabilities of traditional media, subtly influencing the subjective values and behaviors of the audience.

3. Conclusions

Extensive literature review and systematic sorting have revealed that extensive research has been conducted in the areas of ethnic minorities, short videos, cultural adaptation, and identity. However, the significance of the use of short video media among ethnic minority college students in specific contexts has not received adequate attention from interdisciplinary scholars. Moreover, research exploring the intricate interplay between "people, technology, and society" is still in its infancy.

Consequently, the academic community faces challenges in understanding the true evolution of short video usage among ethnic minority college students, and thus in devising decision-making practices to enhance individual well-being and group development.

Given the dynamic and evolving nature of ethnic minority college students, the multifaceted complexities of their cross-identity require a diverse and comprehensive theoretical framework for academic research. Currently, the predominant approach is rational research, followed by qualitative research, demonstrating the use of short videos by ethnic minority college students through ethnographic and oral history methodologies. In most cases, these studies tend to focus on specific ethnic groups or regions, lacking an objective and comprehensive assessment of the overall, representative, and comparative basic characteristics of the target group. Conversely, quantitative research on multiple ethnic groups focuses primarily on data description, neglects potential correlations with other relevant issues, and lacks a comprehensive comparative perspective. As a result, the underlying reasons for the popularity of short videos among ethnic minority college students remain understudied.

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