A Preliminary Study on the Influencing Factors of Visual Communication of Rural Culture: Based on Grounded Theory

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Abstract

Visual communication has an important impact on revitalizing rural culture, but its implementation still lacks empirical research support. Based on the grounded theory, this study conducted a coding analysis of the data collected in Shuikou Town, Yunyang County, by research method of field investigation. Relevant research shows that: Shuikou Town, Yunyang County, has a positive role in promoting cultural revitalization in terms of content consciousness, villager consciousness, media consciousness, subject environment, and object environment of visual communication. The analysis of the influence mechanism of visual communication on the "consciousness-environment" of rural cultural revitalization from an empirical perspective can also provide a closer look at the current status of rural cultural revitalization to provide a reference for visual communication to promote rural cultural revitalization.

Keywords: rural culture, visual communication, influence mechanism

1. Introduction

The ratio of the amount of information obtained by the vision in the five senses is about 75%-80%, and the amount of information obtained is the largest. In the current era of "reading pictures" and "reading videos," "visual communication has unique advantages in creating visual persuasion, forming people's creative imagination, and generating and expressing emotions. Vision has become the core element of contemporary social-cultural life." (Liu Nan & Zhou Xiaopu, 2019) Heidegger said that the core cultural mechanism of modernity is that vision has become the most important force that dominates our perception system. (Wu Jing, 2012) As an important way of life for people to perceive, understand and participate in society, vision constructs the social cognition and subjectivity of the participants. In the era of new media, with the popularization of hardware such as images and videos and the lowering of technical thresholds, visual culture, and communication in a broad sense cover the cultural forms formed through the communication activities of audio-visual media. The methods are more diverse, the performance is more intuitive, the information is more three-dimensional, and the social interaction is stronger. Visual culture and communication have become an important link in rural cultural communication.

Rural culture is a culture with peasants as the main body relying on specific rural social production methods. To a certain extent, it reflects the behavioral habits and cognitions expressed by peasants' way of life and communication, norms of behavior, ideological and moral concepts, and cultural qualities. It is a reflection of the deep psychological structure and also an expression of the peasants' personality characteristics and spiritual world. Media development greatly impacts the living habits, cognitive abilities, ideas, and ways of thinking of rural residents. New media visual communication platforms such as Douyin positively affect policy propaganda and the establishment of villagers' consciousness. It breaks the binary opposition between urban and rural areas and promotes the rise of peasants' subjectivity and public consciousness. Rural communication takes rural

residents as the main body of communication, the community as the main carrier, and the external communication organization as the additional carrier, using a combination of various information communication media. Most researchers study how to use rural communication to effectively promote the development of rural culture from the five elements of communicator, media, information, feedback, and receiver. The research focuses on the recipients' social role, social identity, and individual and group power. It analyzes the "internal change mechanism, change trend and external influence and driving force of rural society in the information age." (Li Hongyan, 2008)

In general, based on the background of the rural revitalization strategy, there are not many empirical studies on rural culture from the perspective of visual communication, and fewer are based on grounded theory to analyze its influence mechanism. Therefore, this study tries to reveal the internal mechanism and external influencing factors of visual communication in the revitalization of rural culture, as well as the interaction mechanism and typical relationship structure of these factors, through field investigation in Shuikou Town, Yunyang County. And it aims to provide theoretical support and suggestions for the in-depth implementation of rural revitalization, improve villagers' cultural literacy and moral accomplishment, and realize rural civilization.

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Methods

Currently, there is no mature variable category and measurement scale for the research on the influence mechanism of visual communication in rural culture. Therefore, this study is based on grounded theory, a qualitative research method, to explore its influence mechanism and improvement path more intuitively.

Grounded theory was proposed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967. It is a more practical and effective qualitative research method. Journalism and communication studies also often use grounded theory to build theoretical models, forming a relatively mature operational paradigm. Research based on grounded theory focuses on the interpretation and understanding of recurring daily events and social phenomena in natural situations and can more firmly grasp the appearance of "real life." Before the research, there are generally no theoretical assumptions. However, in-depth scenarios are advocated, and original data are collected through open (semi-structured) interviews, focus group interviews, and participatory observation. Then, the researchers compare, summarize, classify and code the recordings, notes, and other materials, extract core concepts and categories, establish connections, and generate theories that can reflect the nature and meaning of phenomena. In short, grounded theory is a bottom-up approach to building substantive theory, the core of which is the process of sorting and analyzing data. In terms of specific operations, it generally includes three stages: open coding, correlation coding, and selective coding. Following this basic operating procedure, this study conducts a grounded investigation of rural cultural revitalization in the context of visual communication.

2.2 Data Collection

Shuikou Town, Yunyang County, is located in the Three Gorges Reservoir region and is the main battlefield for revitalizing rural culture in Chongqing. Based on obtaining the consent of the respondents and promising to keep personal information confidential, the researchers conducted focus group interviews, in-depth interviews, and participatory observations with ordinary villagers, village cadres, and township cadres, with a total of 15 respondents (as shown in Table 1), age ranging from 20 to 65 years old.

In this study, an in-depth interview was first conducted with Mr. Wang, a township cadre, and an interview outline was formulated. Subsequent interviews and focus group discussions are mainly based on the interview outline to conduct semi-structured interviews, guide the interviewees to answer within the scope of the interview, and ask further questions based on the answers. Fifteen thousand words of text data were obtained through notes and recordings, rooted in the original sentence data, repeated comparisons, and extraction, induction, and dimension division of relevant information.

Table 1. Respondent Basic Information

Serial Number	Respondent	Identity	Education	Age	Interview Method
wm1	Mr. Wang	township cadres	University	49	In-depth interview
lm2	Mr. Lu	township cadres	Postgraduate	27	In-depth interview
lw3	Ms. Li	ordinary villager	Primary school and below	63	Focus group interview

ZM4	Ms. Zhou	ordinary villager	Primary school and below	65	Focus group interview
LM5	Mr. Li	ordinary villager	Primary school and below	58	Focus group interview
lw6	Ms. Li	ordinary villager	High school	54	In-depth interview
zw7	Ms. Zhang	ordinary villager	University	47	In-depth interview
fw8	Ms. Fang	ordinary villager	University	51	In-depth interview
yw9	Ms. Yu	village cadre	University	38	In-depth interview
zw10	Mr. Zou	village cadre	University	35	In-depth interview
zm11	Mr. Zhu	ordinary villager	University	24	In-depth interview
cm12	Mr. Chen	ordinary villager	High school	20	In-depth interview
lm13	Mr. Liu	ordinary villager	Junior high school	44	Focus group interview
hm13	Mr. Hu	ordinary villager	Primary school and below	62	Focus group interview
wm15	Mr. Wan	ordinary villager	Primary school and below	47	Focus group interview

3. Category Refinement and Model Construction

3.1 Open Code

Open coding, as the first-level grounded theory coding, must dismantle the collected data, perform statistics and coding word by word, and then recombine and refine the initial category. To reduce errors and biases, this study tries to use the original sentence data in the interview records and inspection notes as the parent data for mining the initial categories. At the same time, the contents with low frequency and irrelevant to this study were eliminated, and the overlapping contents were selected, merged, and categorized. Eighteen initial categories were determined through multiple analyses and sorting, as shown in Table 2. The most frequently occurring and representative sentence data were selected in each category.

Table 2. Open Coding Category

Coding	Original Category	Original Sentence Data
1	Television media consciousness	It's more TV, and the audience is wider. When reach our age, we usually watch both TV and mobile phones. And young people look at their mobile phones more.
2	Film media cognition	Twice a month, open-air movies are shown on revolutionary war themes and patriotic themes Older people like to watch that kind of war movie.
3	New media short video usage	Like Douyin, it may be less used in rural areas. Rural government propaganda is generally more formal. We have not used new media platforms to promote it.

Coding	Original Category	Original Sentence Data
4	Prints, posters, banners consciousness	There are banners and pictures, but we don't care much.
5	Villagers participate	There is a vibrato to eat and broadcast, and you can wear an apron when you eat to shoot and broadcast, Happy things can also be filmed. You can take pictures wherever you go; there are a lot of them.
6	Main body	Our propaganda is generally top-down. Don't pay much attention, feel useless.
7	Villager needs	Provide some way to make money. Watch the news, and TV series. Like funny, dancing.
8	Policy-oriented cultural content	There are a lot of core values, party branches and so on. Poverty alleviation manuals or poverty alleviation forms are posted on the wall. The basic civilization construction in the countryside is called the improvement of the living environment. It also belongs to the category of spiritual civilization.
9	Behavioral cultural content	Neighborhood harmony, filial piety to the old and caring for the young, marital harmony, family harmony, and the like. Generally watch family life films and Legal Report. You can't throw rubbish anywhere; there was no such concept before.
10	Intellectual cultural content	Can make money. Practical technology, science or something. Look at some, such as health care.
11	Featured Cultural Content	The excellent traditional culture and customs are now lost. After the Three Gorges immigration, I feel nothing, there must be something, but I don't know.
12	Rural population hollowing out	Chongqing is a large province of labor exporting a young and strong labor force. The young people in the village came to the town in their spare time.
13	Aging of the rural population	Most villages are older adults, and the older people don't understand. But there are more children outside. Which older man would go to the city to watch a movie now?
14	Villagers' media exposure	We can't even play on mobile phones for the elderly. We can't even play those smartphones. Some people do not have mobile phones, some are old-fashioned, and we cannot afford new smartphones.
15	Economic foundation	Too expensive to watch TV at home. No outdoor movies. Most villagers are pursuing the material level to meet their needs, and finally, they can rise to the spiritual level.

Coding	Original Category	Original Sentence Data
16	Village cadre quality	The main route of transmission is the village branch secretary. There is also a village chief.
17	Village cadre quality	Like high-tech communication and Douyin, they may be unable to keep up with your team. We lack professionals like you here.
18	Focus of work	The task of poverty alleviation for township cadres is still very heavy.

3.2 Correlation Coding

Correlation coding, as the secondary coding of the grounded theory, needs to perform cluster analysis on the initial categories to discover the logical correlation between them to form a more comprehensive and general abstract coding. From the perspective of visual communication of rural culture, this study comprehensively analyzed 18 initial categories and finally refined five main categories: media consciousness, villager consciousness, content consciousness, object environment, and subject environment, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation Coding (main category)

Main Categories	Corresponding Categories (initial category)	Concept (connotation of category)
media consciousness	TV media consciousness	Villagers get news information through TV media
	Film media consciousness	Villagers carry out cultural and entertainment activities through film media
	New media short video usage	Villagers' use of new media
	Prints, posters, banners consciousness	Visual communication such as prints and posters in rural areas
villager consciousness	Villagers participate	Villagers actively participate in the visual communication of rural culture
	Villager subject	The focus on villagers' subjectivity in the visual communication of rural culture
	Villager needs	Villagers' needs for rural culture
content consciousness	Policy-oriented cultural content	Rural targeted poverty alleviation policies, institutional and cultural content such as party branches and councils
	Behavioral cultural content	Code of family ethics (filial piety and love for the young, marital relationship) code of social behavior (township civilization, etiquette, moral literacy)
	Intellectual cultural content	Practical skills knowledge, business knowledge, medical and health knowledge
	Featured Cultural Content	Distinctive regional culture, folk culture, traditional cultural content
object environment	Rural population hollowing out	The hollowing out of the rural population caused by the young and middle-aged labor force going out to work and urbanization

	Aging of the rural population	The phenomenon of aging population in rural areas
	Villagers' media exposure	Villagers' exposure to visual media affects the effect of rural cultural communication
	Economic foundation	The effect of villagers' economic foundation on cultural acquisition
subject environment	Village cadre quality	The quality of village cadres affects the visual communication of rural culture
	Professional teams	The degree of specialization of rural cultural communication affects the communication effect
	Focus of work	Rural work focuses on material and policy level

3.3 Selective Coding

Selective coding (core coding), as the three-level grounded theory coding, needs to compare and integrate all concepts in relational coding and extract a top core category. The purpose is to explore the influencing factors of the visual communication effect of rural culture and the typical connection between them. This study firstly analyzes the various influencing factors of rural cultural visual communication, then discriminates the relationship between the various influencing factors acting on rural cultural visual communication, and finally explores its improvement path. The main concepts presented by the typical relational structure of this conceptual model are as follows:

(1) Many factors affect the visual communication activities of rural culture, and there are intricate mutual influences among the various influencing factors;

(2) The subject environment and the object environment are the basis and premise of the visual communication of the rural culture and objectively affect the behavior and effect of communication;

(3) Villagers' consciousness, content consciousness, and media consciousness are the internal influencing factors of rural cultural visual communication activities. At the same time, these three factors influence each other, and also control the subject and object environment, thus affecting the concept, behavior, and effect of rural culture communication.

3.4 Theoretical Saturation Test

This study randomly selected five interview records and field investigation data to test the theoretical model and found no other major influencing factors, which proves that the model can reasonably explain the visual image factors of rural culture. Therefore, the categories in the "consciousness-environment" model are theoretically saturated.

4. Model Explanation of the Influencing Factors of Visual Communication of Rural Culture

A coding analysis based on grounded theory shows that the influencing factors of visual communication in rural culture are mainly composed of environment and consciousness. The "consciousness-environment" model can effectively explain visual communication's influencing factors and interrelationships in rural culture. However, the five factors of visual communication, "subject environment, object environment, media consciousness, villager consciousness, and content consciousness," have inconsistent influences and mechanisms on rural cultural communication.

4.1 Visual Communication Consciousness of Rural Culture

In rural areas where the economy, culture, and education are relatively backward, the consciousness of visual communication of rural culture directly affects the content selection, media selection, and strategic path of its communication activities. Therefore, it affects the acceptance of village cultural communication by villagers and greatly influences the behavior and effect of communication.

Regarding the content consciousness of the visual communication of rural culture, there are differences in the consciousness of mass media, grassroots cadres, and villagers. Through convergence and induction, policy culture mainly includes documents and regulations such as benefiting farmers, poverty alleviation, and rural revitalization. It usually communicates the document's content from top to bottom in the form of text in the form of "meeting" and "posting." The bureaucratic system guarantees the communication of policy documents. At the same time, it will inevitably lead to the deformation and loss of information in the process of spreading its content down level by level. Judging from the results of the fieldwork, misreading and lack of knowledge still

exist. Behavioral culture mainly includes values such as ethics and morality, ideological quality, internal connotation, and external manifestations such as a funeral, marriage, mahjong, alcoholism, hygiene, health, and other behavioral habits. In the "acquaintance society" system, in rural areas where the influence of interpersonal communication is relatively strong, behavioral culture and policy culture are spread similarly, and certain actions are carried out. It can show a more obvious effect on external representation in the short term. However, in the long run, the rebound phenomenon still exists, and the communication from the inner cognitive level of ideological quality is not strong. Intellectual culture mainly includes agricultural technology, production and operation, and other economic aspects. The communication method at this stage is mainly based on the text of the teaching material as the carrier, and the organizational communication is carried out in the form of special training. It has certain requirements for the villagers' cultural quality, and the form is relatively traditional, making the effect difficult to measure. Featured culture mainly includes local featured culture and excellent traditional culture. The older generation sighs at the loss of excellent culture, and the single communication method that lacks vitality in traditional culture is difficult to cater to the preferences of younger generations. Yunyang County is located in the Three Gorges Reservoir region and has the Zhang Fei culture that represents the spirit of loyalty and bravery. However, with the relocation of immigrants from the Reservoir region, the culture has been lost across generations, and the communication of featured culture has declined.

The villager consciousness of the visual communication of rural culture mainly includes three levels: villager participation, villager main body, and villager needs. With the rise of villagers' subjectivity and public consciousness, villagers' consciousness of participating in cultural communication activities has been continuously enhanced. As the subjects of rural cultural revitalization, villagers are not only the main recipients of rural culture but also the content producers of rural communication and even a channel of cultural communication. Cultural construction should be a two-way interactive process. In the actual government-led cultural construction, peasants are more passively accepted, lack subjectivity, and get the top-down communication method. The villagers' attention is low, and they may feel unnecessary, thus affecting the effect of communication.

The media consciousness of the visual communication of rural culture is influenced by its subject and object environment. The economic foundation, the hollowing out, and the aging of the rural population directly affect the media consciousness of the main body of the communication. The overall quality of the grassroots professional teams and cadres affects their media consciousness. This further affects the selection of media such as television, film, new media, short videos, prints, posters, and banners, as well as the strategies and behaviors of the visual communication of rural culture.

4.2 The Visual Communication Environment of Rural Culture

For a long time, rural communication has mainly been organized and guided from top to bottom by grassroots cadres in townships and villages through organizational communication and interpersonal communication. With the rapid development of mobile Internet, radio, television, and other media today, the urban-rural binary opposition is gradually broken under the same metaphor, and rural culture's communication subject and object cannot be simply divided. Villagers are the recipients of the communication of rural culture, as well as the communication subjects of content production and opinion leaders.

The main environmental impact factors for visual communication to promote the revitalization of rural culture mainly include the quality of grassroots cadres in townships and villages, professional teams, and work focus. Object environmental impact factors mainly include rural population hollowing out, rural population aging, villagers' media exposure, and economic foundation. There are primarily the following action paths between the influencing factors of the subject-object environment:

First of all, compared with cities, rural cultural construction lags overall, and the cultural quality and education level of rural residents are lower. The rapid development of urbanization and industrialization widens the gap between urban and rural areas. Many rural residents have migrated to cities and towns, resulting in serious aging and hollowing out of the rural population, resulting in a generally low level of media exposure for the rural population. At the same time, the aging and hollowing out of the rural population also make it difficult to form a professional team for visual communication in rural culture, which restricts the improvement and optimization of the quality of village cadres.

Second, the economic foundation determines the superstructure. The media exposure of rural residents is significantly affected by their economic foundation. Under the current economic construction-centered background, although absolute poverty is resolved, grassroots work focuses on higher-level requirements and material areas. Rural revitalization work is still mainly focused on the industrial and economic fields. The interaction between the subject and object environment and the consciousness level of the visual communication of rural culture affects the cultural revitalization of rural areas.

5. Conclusion and Improvement Strategies

5.1 Visual Communication Consciousness Is Closely Related to the Revitalization of Rural Culture

According to the grounded theory coding analysis of the original interview materials, the three main categories of consciousness, namely content consciousness, villagers consciousness, and media consciousness, and the content consciousness of policy, behavior, knowledge, and featured culture covered by them; villagers' participation, subjectivity and demand consciousness; the consciousness of visual media such as television, film, new media short videos, and printmaking, have a strong positive influence on the revitalization of rural culture. Comprehensively considering various influencing factors of consciousness, rural visual communication should mobilize villagers to participate, consider villagers as subjects, and select communication content and media according to villagers needs. At the same time, starting from consciousness, taking both sides of village cadres and villagers into consideration, and improving the top-level design, can optimize rural cultural communication and promote rural cultural revitalization.

5.2 Visual Communication Environment Boosts Ruralization Development

The research shows that the focus of work, professional team, and the quality of village leaders at the visual communication environment level, the economic base of the object, the degree of media contact, aging, and hollowing out all affect the communication and development of rural culture. The revitalization of rural culture is the endogenous driving force for its industrial revitalization, talent revitalization, organizational revitalization, and ecological revitalization. The communicator should agree with this view and proceed from the real environment. Improving the quality of grassroots workers in visual communication and building a professional team is necessary. At the same time, the focus of work should be clear to avoid outdated information and backward concepts. With the staged achievements in poverty alleviation and the continuous improvement of the economic situation, in the face of the hollowing out and aging of the rural population, grassroots work should also focus on media guidance and improve villagers' media exposure. In selecting content and media, it is necessary to consider the two categories of consciousness and environment and to communicate more efficiently.

5.3 The Visual Communication of Rural Culture Urgently Needs Universal Implementation Norms

As the main carrier of rural culture, rural residents have their complexity and particularity, and traditional communication methods are no longer fully applicable in current rural areas. Research shows that visual communication can play a greater role in developing rural culture. At this stage, the "consciousness-environment" of visual communication and the strategic design of rural cultural revitalization still lacks universal implementation norms. In addition, although the research on rural cultural communication is ascendant, the grassroots lack systematic guidance on how to communicate. Based on this, this study believes that the visual communication of rural culture urgently needs universal implementation norms.

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