A Study on the Communication Modes and Characteristics of Cultural Innovation Symbols Under the Meta-Media Context

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Abstract

Cultural innovation symbols undertake an important social role in cultural communication and industrial development. Such symbols have higher requirements for their own ideographic functions than general symbols. Nowadays, the development of meta-media technology delivers new opportunities and challenges for the communication of symbols. Taking cultural innovation symbols as the research object, this study explores several main features of the communication of cultural innovation symbols in the meta-media context. It clarifies the influence of the enhancement of "poetic feature", "conative feature" and "contacting feature" on the communication effect of cultural innovation symbols, while identifying the typical communication problems caused by each feature. Finally, based on the communication characteristics of cultural innovation symbols in the meta-media context, some solutions are proposed to address such issues as unclear ideographic meanings of cultural innovation symbols, rapid dissemination of erroneous content, and occupation of information channels by low-quality messages.

The information society is a society of media. As the media society evolves to the era of mobile Internet, meta-media have seemingly become a high-speed channel for information communication. Every day, users are wrapped up in massive information, and the mode and nature of information communication are experiencing dramatic change as compared to the era of "words — written media". However, the high-speed channel for information does not facilitate accurate communication of meanings; on the contrary, the meanings carried by the huge amount of information are getting increasingly deficient. It is especially true for the communication of cultural innovation symbols. The contradiction between "traffic" and "content" actually maps the competition between information and meaning. Therefore, as national policies attach great importance to cultural communication, it is necessary to explore the communication and related characteristics of cultural innovation symbols under the meta-media context (Zhao Kaiqiang & Fan Zhou, 2022).

Keywords: symbol propagation, meta-media, cultural and creative symbols, propagation characteristics

1. Analysis of the Mediator and Its Symbolic Communication Characteristics

1.1 Cultural Innovation Symbol

Cultural innovation symbol refers to the "symbols for cultural innovation." In a strict meaning, they are some text combinations composed of cultural innovation symbols, including cultural derivative products, culturally innovative film and television works, cultural innovation industry, cultural innovation education and so on in a broad sense. According to Charles Sanders Peirce, symbol consists of symbolic forms, symbolic objects and symbolic interpretation. In terms of perception, cultural innovation symbols indicate the symbolic forms; cultural content is the object to which the cultural innovation symbols are intended to point, as well as the significance of

cultural innovation symbols being produced; and cultural content is disseminated and expressed through cultural innovation symbols (ZHAO Yiheng, 2020). The interpretation of cultural innovation symbols is somehow complex and can be regarded as an interpretation of the meanings of cultural innovation symbols by symbol receivers. If cultural derivative products are taken as a case, symbolic interpretation would be the interpretation of the design significance of certain cultural derivative products by their consumers. As the receiver of symbols, consumers own the ultimate power of interpreting the symbols, regardless of whether their interpretation is correct or not.

1.2 Meta-Media and the Symbolic Communication Characteristics Under the Meta-Media Context

"Meta" means "something about something itself". "Meta-media" refer to a kind of communication media based on integrated Internet and mobile terminals as a whole, which are represented by computers, smartphones and others. In terms of rendering forms, meta-media are more like a "screen page", because most of the information transmission terminals nowadays, such as mobile phones and computers, adopt a "screen" as their main means of output (L.P. Glazier, 2002). As such technologies as VR get matured, the forms of "screen" would change slowly. Nevertheless, the text on the meta-media is still a sort of re-use and dissemination of the upper-level media text. Meta-media have delivered great convenience for the communication of meanings, because each and every individual can spread his/her own views via voices on the Internet. Therefore, both the communication speeds and volumes of information are far higher than the traditional paper-based media. In his work titled "*Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics*", Roman Jakobson put forward six elements of symbolic text when communicated — sender, receiver, text, object, medium and symbol. He also pointed out that the distribution of the elements of symbolic text is not in a balanced state. When the focused elements are changed and one of the symbolic elements becomes dominant, symbols would be led to different interpretations of meanings. On the basis of this theory, Lu Zhenglan and Zhao Yihang propose several typical characteristics of symbol meanings' communication under the meta-media context, while putting forward three communication features of symbols under the meta-media context: 1) The "poetic feature" is enhanced due to more focus on the content of the symbols themselves; in terms of presentation, this refers to all kinds of non-textual images in meta-media. 2) A focus on the receivers of symbols and an encouragement for them to make some kinds of reaction lead to boosted "conative feature". For example, such functions as "forwarding", "following" and "sharing" have greatly enhanced the interaction between meta-media and users. In the meanwhile, users are guided by the received meta-media information imperceptibly to make certain preset behaviors. 3) The increase of "contacting feature" refers to the phenomenon that symbols stress the occupation of media channels, emphasizing the linkage and presence of information on the Internet, e.g., daily sharing activities by famous personalities, or the "likes" given in WeChat. What such symbols underscore is not the idea of their content; instead, they are used to emphasize users' presence in the meta-media as well as their willingness to connect with others.

2. Propagation Characteristics and Issues of Cultural Creative Symbols in Meta-Media

The accurate expression and communication of cultural content is the fundamental purpose of the generation of cultural innovation symbols. Designers of cultural innovation products, creators of cultural innovation videos, and planners of cultural innovation industries are all decoding and encoding cultural contents in their respective fields, and the final result of such encoding is just certain cultural innovation symbols. Based on Jacobsen's six elements of communication, the creation of cultural innovation symbols has a clear purpose of conveying certain meanings; and if users have no way to understand what kind of cultural knowledge is expressed with the symbols, such symbols will lose their basic insignificance. This idea indicates that symbols need to have strong "referentiality". Meta-media have easily boosted the speed and breadth of communication of cultural innovation symbols, but the "referentiality" of such symbols themselves has been continuously weakened. Many reasons contribute to this situation. Analysis will be made below by taking the "poetic feature", "conative feature" and "contacting feature" as the clues.

2.1 Characteristics and Issues of Cultural Creative Symbols Under the Dominance of "Poeticism" in Meta-Media

As indicated by Tang Xiaolin, media self-reference leads to the emergence of poetic symbol landscape in the era of mobile Internet; and media self-reference can also become symbol self-reference; in other words, symbol self-reference would produce poetic meanings (Tang Xiaolin, 2022). The most typical characteristic of "poetic feature" is a large number of pictures, videos and other visual elements that flood screen pages; it seems that replacing text with images has become the most significant characteristic of symbolic text under the meta-media context. For example, the "Weibo Intangible Cultural Heritage" column on Sina Weibo mainly introduces such heritages in China, with each post having about 100 words; and almost all of the posts come with images and videos. Users pay more attention to the labeled keywords, as well as the image and video content, than to the textual content. On such video websites as Douyin and Bilibili, which themselves are rendering contents mainly in the form of videos, the status of text is further depressed. Compared to simple textual description, displaying

cultural content through images and videos tends to easily attract users' attention, and thus becomes the main means for symbol senders to capture the publicity channels in meta-media. However, once symbols focus too much on themselves, the meanings of symbols would instead become less important. This situation does not only involve the issue that, in order to occupy the channels, symbol senders would heavily use pictures and videos, without considering the meanings of the symbols; moreover, this situation also involves the problem that symbol receivers become blunt and blind in perceiving the meanings of symbols in the midst of massive image-based information. The former is mainly related to cultural creators. For example, there are a large number of erroneous Jianzhan (a kind of special cup from Fujian) making videos on short-video platforms. In such videos, the uploaders would, in order to gain more clicks and reposts, directly clip the hot embryos of cups out from the kiln and pour water to cool them down. In order to increase the sense of novelty, the producers may put flower petals, leaves and other debris into the embryos before they cool down. And then, the effect of the finished Jianzhan would be directly rendered through video editing. In fact, such a workmanship and process is totally misguiding, because the actual effect of Jianzhan, especially refined Jianzhan, is uncontrollable. The seemingly eye-catching video content from such video producers are virtually impart wrong cultural knowledge. In this case, therefore, the symbolic object is no longer important in the perspective of the symbol sender; instead, whether the content of the video itself can get impactful and topical becomes the primary consideration. In addition, the "poetic feature" causes the receivers of symbols to become sluggish in perceiving the meanings of symbols. Although symbols can be arbitrarily set up or dressed up by the senders, the power of interpreting the symbols is ultimately vested in their receivers. When a receiver finds that a symbol has not been correctly interpreted, he or she can still seek the correct meaning of the symbol by continuing his/her inquiry. However, the characteristics of communication under the "poetic feature" attribute sufficient attraction to the symbols themselves, and the interpretation of symbols becomes less important instead. Naturally, people would lose the motivation to continue to explore the symbols. Many similar cases can be found with cultural innovation symbols. For instance, for the Jianzhan-making videos as mentioned earlier, users may marvel at the novelty of Jianzhan's production (albeit wrong), while expecting more production methods and results, without thinking about whether the process and related knowledge are correct or not. Ultimately, this would result in the spread of wrong cultural content, so that some users may think that the Jianzhan-making process is eye-catching and seemingly simple. Nevertheless, this is a complete mismatch with the craftsmanship of Jianzhan as well as the cultural context behind it.

The "function of poetic feature" deepens the basic detachment between symbols and objective objects through the specificity and palpability of symbols, and such detachment is especially prominent in cultural innovation related texts. In addition to the video-like texts as mentioned above, other forms of cultural innovation texts, including all kinds of blog posts, online popular science articles, and subscriptions, are also troubled by the problem of attaching too much emphasis on the elements of symbols themselves. Usually, senders tend to be concerned about whether a symbol has an outstanding quality and whether it can quickly attract users or not. On the other hand, users are also looking forward to the most novel texts: As long as the symbol text itself is sufficiently spectacular and amazing, the symbolic meanings that the text is intended to express would become trivial. In the end, users have seemingly felt that they were learning a great deal of knowledge through cultural innovation texts in meta-media; but in reality, such knowledge is only as superficial as a slapdash, let alone erroneous knowledge has been incorporated in users' interpretations.

2.2 Purpose and Pitfalls of Cultural Creative Symbols Under the Dominance of "Intentionality" in Meta-Media

When receivers are the focus, symbols would demonstrate strong "conative feature", which can drive the receivers of symbols to deliver certain kinds of preset responses, e.g., such commonly seen settings for symbolic texts as recommending, forwarding, following and favoriting. Originally, most of the meanings of cultural innovation symbols were transmitted in a one-way manner. For example, when a user purchased a certain cultural innovation product, book, etc., the receiver (i.e., the user) was passively accepting the meanings preset by the sender of the symbols. However, meta-media has changed such purely one-way interaction, so that the receiver of symbols can immediately become a sender for communication to make a wider dissemination. In the cases of communication of cultural innovation symbols, several main kinds of "conative feature" include: "to boost consumers' desires", "to enhance user stickiness", "to expand the scope of communication", etc. Under the meta-media context, a large number of advertisements are typically to straightforward "boost consumers' desires", but cultural innovation symbols would be delivered in an implicit way. For example, a video for culture and tourism suggests after its introductory paragraph that "only when you come here, may you relish the real cultural heritage". In fact, these words hope that consumers would prioritize their trip to this attraction when making travel plans. This kind of soft advertisement is especially prominent in cultural innovation products. For example, products are first combined with hot cultural topics to attract users to make selection and purchase. "To enhance user stickiness" and "to expand the scope of communication" mainly refer to the symbolic texts for following or forwarding frequently seen in meta-media. For instance, certain culture online platforms or cultural

innovation platforms may share some user-appealing resources, but they often require users to first click on the "following" label or share certain texts. The existence of such symbols is mainly purposed to hike the views and clicks of the content; when the volume of views reaches a certain level, the sender can convert the traffic into economic output.

The enhancement of the "conative feature" can increase the interaction between the symbol communication subjects. Nevertheless, the increase in interaction alone cannot drive up the effect of meanings' communication. In the process of communication of cultural innovation symbols, the senders of symbols would be overly concerned about the settings of the "conative feature" symbols, while expecting users to give feedbacks according to the senders' expectations (e.g., consumption, forwarding, etc.). As a result, the core content (the cultural meaning) of symbols takes a backseat, something similar to the problem incurred by increased "poetic feature". Meanwhile, the excessive increase in "conative feature" often allows the superficial or even erroneous symbol interpretations to spread quickly through meta-media. This is also one of the reasons why the eye-catching but erroneous Jianzhan-making videos can harvest a lot of clicks quickly, as mentioned in the previous section.

2.3 Cultural Innovation Symbols Under the Dominance of "Contacting Feature" in Meta-Media

The "contacting feature" is considered as the most fundamental characteristic of meta-media, and it has also become the rule for interpersonal communication in meta-media (Zhao Xingzhi, 2018). Based on the "contacting feature", Tang Xiaolin puts forward the term "connectivity", which refers to the behavior and phenomenon of users occupying communication media and channels in the process of symbol communication. Only by occupying the channels, may it be possible to own the power of speaking under the meta-media context. In addition, "connectivity" becomes an important means of competing for cultural interpretation power and economic productivity in the meta-media. Thus, both "conative feature" and "poetic feature" are ultimately purposed to serve the "contacting feature". During the communication of cultural innovation symbols, the senders of symbols will also set up specific content in the communication content, so as to boost the "contacting feature". For example, some broadcasters of cultural innovation content frequently update their content to gain users' continuous attention, although the content may sometimes have weak relationships with culture and cultural innovation products. And some senders may even deliberately upload controversial cultural innovation content to forge certain topics, so as to engage more users in the discussion and communication. Another example comes from the e-commerce platforms that sell cultural innovation products: Through sustained advertising investment, senders repeatedly publicize the eye-catching products, regardless of the quality of the cultural innovation products themselves or the correctness of the expressed content. Although the advertisements themselves also have the connotation of "conative feature", capturing the channels (so as to become a front-page product) is gradually becoming the most important element concerning the senders. Again, take the fake Jianzhan-making production videos as an example: the videos focus too much on their own content, but ignore the cultural objects, leading to an increase in "poetic feature". The eye-catching content and the provocative behaviors and languages boost the "conative feature" of symbols; and the senders of symbols hope to enhance users' purchasing desire and attract their attention through strong "conative feature". All of the contents above are the means for the senders to get more "connectivity" opportunities in the meta-media. For a long time, erroneous Jianzhan-making videos have got so much popular on the Internet that their dissemination has overshadowed the cultural innovation videos of normal Jianzhan-making processes. This is just the problem with meanings' communication caused by excessive concern for the "contacting feature".

3. The Design Idea for Cultural Innovation Symbols' Communication Modes in the Meta-Media Context

The sections above elaborate on several typical features and related problems in the communication process of cultural innovation symbols under the meta-media context. In the field of cultural innovation symbols' communication, meta-media act as a double-edged sword. If the features and nature of symbols' communication under the meta-media context are properly utilized, the communication effect of cultural innovation symbols will be greatly enhanced.

First, the characteristic of "poetic feature". The "poetic feature" is the most obvious characteristic of symbol communication under the meta-media context. Pictures, videos and even VR content can render cultural innovation content more intuitively than traditional paper-based media. In the communication mode dominated by "poetic feature," due to the fact that the symbolic text pays too much attention to its own content, the content of the objects referred to by the symbols become blurred or even wrong; and in the communication of cultural innovation symbols, the cultural content would be displayed incorrectly, or the cultural meanings are erroneously communicated. Therefore, in the actual creation of network content, symbol senders can use more intuitive forms of symbols to showcase the cultural content, rather than improving the attractiveness of the content only by using pictures and videos. For example, for Jianzhan-making videos, animation can be used to simulate the transformation of Jianzhan inside the kiln, or VR technology can be adopted to illustrate the shaping of Jianzhan

in a more intuitive manner. Of course, paying attention to the content production of both symbolic texts and symbolic objects would entail high cost, while imposing stronger requirements on the ability of symbol senders.

Second, the characteristic of "conative feature". As the most important goals of "conative feature", both drawing traffic and stimulating consumption are the motivation for symbol senders to create cultural content. Therefore, the role of "conative feature" in the communication of cultural innovation symbols cannot be totally denied; on the contrary, an appropriate enhancement of "conative feature" will help disseminate the cultural meanings. According to Charles Sanders Peirce, the "community of inquiry" should be the ideal state of symbol communication, and the "truth" is the beliefs and opinions finally agreed upon by a "community of inquiry" based on scientific methodologies over a long period of time. In the field of cultural innovation symbols, the ideal "truth" is the correct cultural knowledge that that everyone has learnt and understood through cultural innovation symbols. However, the knowledge threshold may obstruct some users from exploring symbols, and this will always prevent some cultural knowledge and content from being transmitted smoothly. In this situation, the "conative feature" can become a means to bolster the motivation of users to inquire. Currently, the common way is to encourage uses to "follow the original text", which would attract the attention of users to the content with low symbol interpretation thresholds, and such content is placed on the home page. By "following the original text", users are guided to understand the cultural innovation content in a deeper manner. Similarly, relevant links can be set up, or experts' comments can be fixed on the page top and forwarded. All of these methods are intended to enhance users' inquiry motivation on the basis of "conative feature", so as to strengthen the depth of symbolic content's interpretation.

Finally, the characteristic of "contacting feature". The enhancement of "contacting feature" is the most fundamental characteristic of symbol communication under the meta-media context. And the improvement of symbols' "poetic feature" and "conative feature" is essentially based on the communication subjects' appeal for "contacting feature". It is obviously a difficult task for common symbol senders to post cultural innovation content at a high frequency while maintaining the quality of the content. By this time, some interventions are required from the communication management mechanisms, such as the administrators of APPs, forums, e-commerce platforms, etc. The administrators can pick up and publish high-quality cultural innovation content on the home page or in the priority recommendation area, so as to ensure that the correct cultural innovation text occupies more communication channels in the meta-media (Lv Yuxiang & Zhang Yang, 2022). For the poor-quality or even erroneous texts, the distribution channels taken by them are reduced by restricting their traffic; or certain comments can be provided (e.g., "This content is in controversy. Please watch it with caution"); or links to other premium content of the same type can be introduced to grab the distribution channels of poor-quality content. Certainly, in the most ideal situation, the overall competence meta-language of the main communicating subjects (including both senders and receivers) of cultural innovation symbols shall be boosted, so as to form a "community of inquiry" for culture and cultural innovation content and deliver a benign meta-media communication model.

4. Conclusion

Undertaking the important social responsibility of disseminating cultures, cultural innovation symbols play an important role in enhancing cultural confidence and national confidence. Meta-media have brought many new features to the communication of cultural innovation symbols, mainly including "poetic feature", "conative feature" and "contacting feature". Specifically, the "poetic feature" is an important manifestation of the communication of cultural innovation symbols in the meta-media context; the "conative feature" is the main driving mechanism for the creation and communication of cultural innovation symbols; and the "contacting feature" is the fundamental characteristic of the communication of cultural innovation symbols in the meta-media context. The above features may give rise to certain communication problems, such as: symbols point to wrong cultural contents; erroneous but attention-grabbing cultural content is rapid disseminated; and poor-quality cultural innovation contents take a large number of communication channels. Based on the characteristics and problems with cultural innovation symbols' communication in meta-media, this study proposes an idea of solving these problems by utilizing the characteristics of "poetic feature", "conative feature" and "contacting feature". In meta-media, "Poeticism" enhances the quality of cultural creative symbols, attracting more user attention; "Intentionality" helps increase the motivation for users to explore these symbols, thus deepening their dissemination; finally, the use of "Accessibility" will assist high-quality cultural creative symbols in dominating communication channels, enhancing the overall quality and effectiveness of cultural dissemination.

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