



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study on the External Communication Path of Chinese Traditional Culture from a Semiotic Perspective: A Case Study of Li Ziqi's Short Videos on YouTube

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: May 26, 2024 Accepted: Aug 24, 2024	This paper examines the short videos posted by Li Ziqi on YouTube, using them as a case study in applying semiotic theoretical concepts to digital Chinese cultural symbols. By analyzing the visual, auditory, and linguistic symbols in these short videos, this study aims to uncover the production mechanisms and communication modes of the cultural symbols embedded in her works. Li Ziqi's videos are rich in traditional Chinese cultural elements, and through a detailed semiotic analysis, this paper seeks to highlight the ways in which these cultural symbols are crafted and conveyed to a global audience. Furthermore, the research will discuss the significance of her work in terms of exporting traditional Chinese culture, considering the broader implications for cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchange. The paper will also address how national cultural symbols can be effectively constructed and disseminated through the Internet, especially within a cross-cultural context. By examining Li Ziqi's approach, this study will provide insights into leveraging digital platforms for cultural output and the strategic role of semiotics in enhancing cultural visibility and appreciation globally.
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INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, cultural dissemination has taken on new dimensions, with the Internet serving as a powerful platform for sharing and experiencing diverse cultural expressions globally. Among the many digital content creators who have leveraged this medium to promote their cultural heritage, Li Ziqi stands out for her exceptional ability to showcase traditional Chinese culture through her meticulously crafted short videos on YouTube. This paper examines Li Ziqi's videos as a case study to explore how semiotic theoretical concepts can be applied to understand the digital representation of Chinese cultural symbols. Li Ziqi's videos are a rich tapestry of visual, auditory, and linguistic symbols that collectively construct a narrative deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. Through a semiotic analysis, this study aims to uncover the production mechanisms and communication modes of these cultural symbols, revealing how they are crafted and conveyed to a global audience. The intricate details in her portrayal of Chinese rural life, traditional crafts, and culinary arts are not just representations but are embedded with cultural meanings that resonate with viewers worldwide.

The significance of Li Ziqi's work extends beyond entertainment; it serves as a form of cultural diplomacy, facilitating international cultural exchange and enhancing the visibility of Chinese culture on a global stage. This paper will discuss how her videos contribute to the export of traditional Chinese culture and the broader implications for cultural diplomacy. Moreover, it will address how national cultural symbols can be effectively constructed and disseminated through digital platforms, especially within a cross-cultural context. By examining Li Ziqi's approach, this study will provide insights into leveraging digital platforms for cultural output and the strategic role of semiotics in enhancing cultural visibility and appreciation globally. This analysis will offer valuable perspectives on the potential of digital media to bridge cultural gaps and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural heritages.

Research Objectives

As the first Chinese self-media person with over 10 million fans, Li Ziqi's videos mainly focus on food, and have won the love of many overseas audiences with beautiful pictures and high-quality content. As the saying goes, food knows no borders. As of January 18, 2023, Li Ziqi's YouTube channel has reached 14.1 million subscribers, and the views of her video "Chinese New Year Snacks" have reached a staggering 81.07 million. Today, Li Ziqi's YouTube subscription has reached 14.1 million, breaking the Guinness World Record for "the most subscribed Chinese-language channel on YouTube" set by her. Therefore, researching Li Ziqi's videos on the YouTube platform and conducting a semiotic analysis of Chinese culture in her videos can provide reference value for related studies on the dissemination of Chinese culture abroad. Based on this, the research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the manifestations of Chinese culture and its evolution through symbolic representations in Li Ziqi's videos, using cultural semiotics theory as an analytical framework.
2. To investigate how the use of Chinese cultural symbols in Li Ziqi's YouTube videos impacts the transmission or understanding of Chinese culture to international viewers.
3. To develop effective external communication strategies for Chinese traditional culture based on a thorough analysis of Li Ziqi's videos, aiming to enhance the global dissemination and appreciation of Chinese cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation, provides the foundational theoretical framework for this research. Rooted in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics examines how meaning is constructed and understood through different sign systems. Saussure's model of the sign, comprising the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the concept it represents), is instrumental in analyzing the symbols in Li Ziqi's videos (Saussure, 2011). Peirce's triadic model, which includes the representamen (the form of the sign), the interpretant (the meaning derived), and the object (what the sign refers to), further enriches this analysis by emphasizing the dynamic nature of meaning-making (Peirce, 1998). Visual semiotics, one important type of semiotics, explores how images convey meaning and how visual elements function as signs within a cultural context. In Li Ziqi's videos, visual symbols, such as traditional Chinese landscapes, clothing, and culinary practices, serve as rich sites for semiotic analysis. These visual elements not only depict cultural artifacts but also encode deeper cultural narratives and values, which are decoded by global audiences. Theories by Roland Barthes, particularly his concepts of denotation and connotation, help unpack the layers of meaning embedded in these visual symbols, revealing both their explicit content and their underlying cultural significance (Barthes, 1977).

Building upon the visual, auditory semiotics examines how sounds function as signs and how they contribute to meaning-making processes. In the context of Li Ziqi's videos, sounds such as traditional

Chinese music, ambient nature sounds, and the auditory elements of cooking and crafting play a crucial role in creating an immersive cultural experience. These sounds not only complement the visual elements but also evoke cultural atmospheres and emotional responses. Theories on the semiotics of sound, including those by Theo van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress, provide tools to analyze how auditory signs contribute to the overall cultural narrative and how they enhance the reception of cultural symbols (van Leeuwen, 1999; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Parallel to auditory elements, linguistic semiotics focuses on how language functions as a system of signs to convey meaning. In Li Ziqi's videos, spoken and written language elements, including narration, dialogue, and textual overlays, are integral to the communication of cultural symbols. The language used in these videos is not merely a medium of communication but a carrier of cultural values and traditions. Saussure's ideas on the arbitrary nature of the sign and the structural relationships within language systems are pertinent here, as they help analyze how linguistic signs operate within the broader semiotic framework of the videos (Saussure, 2011). Moving beyond individual signs, cultural semiotics, as developed by scholars like Yuri Lotman, examines how cultural texts function as sign systems and how they communicate cultural meanings. Li Ziqi's videos can be seen as cultural texts that encapsulate and transmit traditional Chinese culture to a global audience. This theoretical perspective allows for an exploration of how cultural symbols are produced, encoded, and decoded within specific cultural and historical contexts. It also addresses the ways in which these symbols function within the global cultural marketplace, contributing to cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchange (Lotman, 1990). Finally, digital semiotics studies how meaning is constructed and communicated through digital media. Given that Li Ziqi's videos are disseminated through YouTube, a digital platform, this theoretical lens is crucial for understanding how digital technologies shape the production and reception of cultural symbols. Theories on digital media by scholars like Lev Manovich and Henry Jenkins offer insights into the unique affordances of digital platforms for cultural communication, including interactivity, multimodality, and the potential for viral dissemination (Manovich, 2001; Jenkins, 2006). This perspective also highlights the role of digital semiotics in constructing and negotiating cultural identities in the online space.

These theoretical concepts collectively provide a robust framework for analyzing the visual, auditory, and linguistic symbols in Li Ziqi's videos. By applying these semiotic theories, this research aims to uncover the intricate mechanisms through which cultural symbols are produced and communicated, and to elucidate their significance for the digital dissemination of traditional Chinese culture. This analysis will offer valuable insights into how national cultural symbols can be effectively constructed and leveraged for cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchange in the digital age.

The use of digital platforms for cultural communication has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of globalization and the increasing interconnectivity of cultures. Scholars have explored how multimedia content can convey complex cultural narratives through the integration of visual, auditory, and linguistic symbols (Lee, 2020). These symbols work synergistically to create a rich, immersive experience that can transcend linguistic and cultural barriers, allowing for a more profound understanding of cultural elements. Visual symbols in digital content, such as those used in Li Ziqi's videos, play a crucial role in conveying cultural elements. These symbols, ranging from traditional attire to architectural styles, serve as immediate indicators of cultural identity (Zhou & Meng, 2019). For instance, the use of traditional Chinese clothing and rural landscapes in her videos not only highlights the aesthetic aspects of Chinese culture but also reinforces the values associated with simplicity and harmony with nature. Auditory symbols, including traditional music and natural sounds, enhance the cultural narrative by providing an auditory context that complements the visual elements (Wang, 2018). The incorporation of traditional Chinese music in Li Ziqi's videos evokes a sense of nostalgia and cultural

pride, further immersing viewers in the cultural experience. This auditory dimension is essential for creating a holistic representation of culture that engages multiple senses. Linguistic symbols, such as spoken language and written text, provide additional layers of meaning and context. The careful selection of words and phrases can convey cultural nuances and values that might be lost in translation (Liu, 2017). Li Ziqi's use of Mandarin, along with subtitles in multiple languages, ensures that her content is accessible to a global audience while retaining its cultural authenticity. The production mechanisms and communication modes of these cultural symbols are pivotal in the effective dissemination of cultural content. The strategic use of high-quality production techniques, such as cinematic filming and meticulous editing, enhances the aesthetic appeal and emotional impact of the videos (Chen, 2019). Moreover, the narrative structure, which often follows the cycles of nature and traditional practices, reinforces the themes of continuity and tradition.

Digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for the global dissemination of cultural symbols. Platforms like YouTube and TikTok provide creators with the tools to reach international audiences, fostering cross-cultural exchange and appreciation (Sun & Yu, 2021). The algorithmic nature of these platforms also aids in targeting audiences who are likely to be interested in cultural content, thereby increasing visibility and engagement. The global appreciation of traditional Chinese culture, as evidenced by the popularity of Li Ziqi's videos, underscores the potential of digital platforms in cultural diplomacy. By presenting authentic and aesthetically pleasing content, creators can counter stereotypes and provide a more nuanced understanding of their culture (Huang & Zhao, 2020). This approach not only enhances cultural appreciation but also fosters mutual respect and understanding among diverse audiences. In summary, the integration of visual, auditory, and linguistic symbols in digital content, coupled with sophisticated production techniques and the strategic use of digital platforms, can significantly enhance the communication and appreciation of traditional cultural elements. As the case of Li Ziqi demonstrates, digital media has the potential to serve as a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy and global cultural exchange.

Conceptual Framework

The objective of this research is to analyze the short videos posted by Li Ziqi on YouTube through the lens of semiotic theoretical concepts. To achieve this, the study addresses several key research questions that will guide the exploration of how traditional Chinese cultural symbols are represented and communicated through digital media. The research framework of this study encompasses three integral components: the presentation of Chinese cultural symbols in Li Ziqi's YouTube videos, the symbolic analysis of Li Ziqi's videos, and the examination of the communication effects of cultural symbols.

Presentation of Chinese Cultural Symbols in Li Ziqi's YouTube Videos

The author selects all videos uploaded by Li Ziqi on the YouTube platform as the research object, categorizing them based on thematic content to discern and summarize embedded Chinese cultural symbols. These symbols are elucidated through textual dissection and graphical interpretation. Furthermore, Li Ziqi organizes her videos into four distinct playlists on YouTube, each corresponding to a season of the year. These playlists afford viewers immersive experiences with nature's cycles, such as cherry blossoms and bamboo shoots in spring, lotus blossoms and loquats in summer, persimmons and chestnuts in autumn, and bacon and sweet potatoes in winter.

Symbolic Analysis of Li Ziqi's YouTube Videos

Semiotic analysis encompasses all symbol systems, including words, images, movements, music, and objects. Traditional Chinese culture, being abstract and metaphorical, relies on symbolic

representation for dissemination. The study thus employs semiotics to analyze symbols in Li Ziqi's videos across material, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions of Chinese traditional culture. These symbols include the Chinese language, calligraphy, traditional crafts, and other folk arts, imbued with rich cultural connotations that epitomize China's enduring material and intangible heritage.

These questions are designed to uncover the various mechanisms and impacts of cultural symbol dissemination in the context of Li Ziqi's content, as well as the broader implications for cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchange.

1. How do visual, auditory, and linguistic symbols in Li Ziqi's videos function to convey traditional Chinese cultural elements?
2. What are the production mechanisms and communication modes of these cultural symbols within the context of her digital content?
3. How do Li Ziqi's videos contribute to the export and global appreciation of traditional Chinese culture?
4. In what ways can digital platforms be leveraged to construct and disseminate national cultural symbols effectively within a cross-cultural context?

Through this investigation, the paper aims to contribute to the understanding of digital cultural dissemination and the strategic role of semiotics in enhancing cultural visibility and appreciation globally.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aims to explore the manifestations, evolution, and transmission of Chinese culture through symbolic representations in Li Ziqi's YouTube videos. It utilizes a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to achieve the research objectives effectively.

Qualitative research stands as an exploratory methodology aimed at unraveling the meaning, characteristics, and intricacies underlying phenomena. It delves into subjective understanding and interpretation, probing individual experiences and perspectives. This approach typically involves the collection and analysis of non-statistical data, including text, images, observation notes, and interview content.

Quantitative research, on the other hand, is a methodological approach designed to gather and analyze numerical data to validate hypotheses, test relationships, predict trends, and summarize results. It relies on statistical analyses and mathematical models to infer characteristics and patterns of phenomena through large sample sizes.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Li Ziqi's videos often feature meticulously selected natural backdrops to showcase the serene and unspoiled rural landscapes of China, creating a picturesque pastoral scene. Elements such as "mountains," "bamboo forests," and "mist" are used to evoke a tranquil, comfortable, and slow-paced lifestyle. These natural elements initially appear as mere backgrounds, but when they are imbued

with meaning and perceived as conveying specific cultural connotations, they transform into symbols. This aligns with Peirce's triadic model, where these natural elements function as representamen that, through interpretation, acquire symbolic significance, embodying the ideal of a harmonious life connected with nature (Peirce, 1998). Furthermore, Li Ziqi's depiction of nature clearly suggests the subtle influence of Daoist philosophy, which is pervasive in Chinese traditional paintings. Daoism emphasizes living in harmony with nature, reflecting the belief that humans and the natural world are interconnected and should coexist peacefully. This philosophy is often illustrated in Chinese landscape paintings, where artists aim to capture the essence of nature rather than its exact form, promoting a sense of tranquility and balance. Similarly, Li Ziqi's use of natural elements in her videos conveys a sense of peace and harmony, resonating with Daoist ideals and enhancing the cultural narrative of a simple, harmonious rural life.

Transitioning from natural elements, the second category includes man-made objects, prominently featuring traditional Chinese food. The most frequently tagged hashtag in Li Ziqi's videos is "Chinese Food." Food, a fundamental necessity, is depicted within the context of traditional Chinese culture, showcasing the origins, production methods, and traditional utensils associated with it. This presentation allows viewers to appreciate traditional Chinese cuisine and its cultural significance. For instance, in the video "Spring Festival Dish - Reunion Dish full of blessings, Auspicious and happy Year - New Year's Eve Dinner," the dishes prepared become symbols of the festival. Names like "Gold and jade," "Fish Leap Dragon Gate," and "Purple gas from the East" symbolize the positive aspirations of Chinese people for the New Year. These food elements, embedded in cultural narratives, align with Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation, where the explicit content (food) connotes deeper cultural meanings (festive and auspicious symbols) (Barthes, 1977). Additionally, this can be further analyzed through the lens of van Leeuwen's (1999) theory of social semiotics, which examines how social and cultural meanings are created through semiotic resources. In Li Ziqi's videos, traditional Chinese food is not only a means of sustenance but also a rich semiotic resource that communicates social and cultural values. The preparation and presentation of these dishes are deeply rooted in cultural rituals and traditions, thus serving as a medium through which cultural identity and values are expressed and reinforced.

Furthermore, this use of traditional food as a cultural symbol can be connected to Lotman's (1990) concept of the semiosphere, which is the semiotic space in which all cultural and communicative acts occur. Within this semiosphere, traditional Chinese food acts as a cultural text that interacts with other texts and symbols in Li Ziqi's videos, creating a complex network of meanings. The ritualistic aspects of food preparation and consumption, as depicted in her videos, resonate with the viewers' cultural memory and shared heritage, reinforcing the collective identity of the Chinese community and offering an authentic cultural experience to international audiences. By integrating Barthes' ideas of denotation and connotation with van Leeuwen's social semiotics and Lotman's semiosphere, we gain a deeper understanding of how Li Ziqi's depiction of traditional Chinese food transcends its immediate, practical function and becomes a powerful vehicle for cultural expression and communication. This multi-layered semiotic analysis reveals the intricate ways in which man-made objects, such as food, can convey profound cultural meanings and contribute to the broader narrative of cultural heritage and identity.

Expanding on the idea of cultural symbols, the third category encompasses purely artificial symbols that inherently carry specific meanings. In her videos, Li Ziqi often highlights traditional Chinese festivals through elements such as red lanterns and firecrackers, which are emblematic of the Chinese New Year. These symbols are direct and unambiguous carriers of cultural significance, aligning with Saussure's model of the sign where the relationship between the signifier (the physical form) and the signified (the cultural meaning) is clear and established (Saussure, 2011). These

traditional symbols not only create a festive atmosphere but also serve as cultural markers that communicate the essence of traditional Chinese celebrations to a global audience. For instance, the red lanterns symbolize prosperity and good fortune, while firecrackers are believed to ward off evil spirits, encapsulating the cultural narratives and beliefs surrounding the Chinese New Year. This clear semiotic relationship enhances the viewer's understanding of Chinese cultural practices and values, making the videos accessible and informative even to those unfamiliar with the traditions. Moreover, this use of symbolic elements can be examined through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) theory of multimodal discourse, which explores how different modes of communication (visual, textual, auditory) interact to create meaning. In Li Ziqi's videos, the combination of visual symbols like red lanterns and firecrackers with traditional music and narration creates a rich, immersive experience that engages multiple senses. This multimodal approach not only strengthens the cultural narrative but also enhances the emotional resonance of the content, making the cultural symbols more impactful and memorable for the audience. Additionally, Lotman's (1990) concept of the semiosphere is relevant here, as these cultural symbols operate within a larger semiotic space where they interact with other elements to construct a cohesive cultural narrative. The presence of red lanterns and firecrackers in the videos is not isolated; they are part of a broader cultural text that includes traditional attire, music, and rituals, all contributing to the viewer's holistic understanding of Chinese New Year celebrations.

By integrating Saussure's model of the sign with Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse theory and Lotman's semiosphere, we can appreciate how Li Ziqi's use of artificial symbols goes beyond mere decoration. These symbols function as powerful communicative tools that convey rich cultural meanings, bridging the gap between Chinese traditions and global audiences. This approach not only preserves the authenticity of Chinese cultural practices but also fosters a deeper, more nuanced appreciation of these traditions among international viewers, thereby enhancing cross-cultural communication and understanding (Manovich, 2001; Jenkins, 2006). The interplay of these three categories of cultural symbols—natural elements, man-made objects, and pure symbols—creates a unique representation of traditional Chinese village life in Li Ziqi's videos. This representation offers a tranquil lifestyle rooted in traditional culture to foreign viewers, embodying the idealized pastoral life described by Tao Yuanming, such as in the phrase "picking chrysanthemums under the eastern fence, leisurely seeing the southern mountain" (Ma & Wu, 2016). The aesthetic depiction of the natural environment, combined with traditional food culture, forms a distinctive style that conveys a rich and nuanced image of Chinese traditional culture. This synthesis not only enhances the national image but also highlights the unique characteristics of rural Chinese life. By applying the theoretical frameworks of semiotics, including visual, auditory, and linguistic analysis, this research elucidates the intricate mechanisms through which Li Ziqi's videos produce and communicate cultural symbols. This analysis provides valuable insights into the effective construction and utilization of national cultural symbols for cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchange in the digital age (Manovich, 2001; Jenkins, 2006; Lotman, 1990; van Leeuwen, 1999; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

Further emphasizing the role of language, Li Ziqi's videos are primarily narrated in Chinese, with dialectal variations adding emotional depth and authenticity. Despite being posted on YouTube, a platform predominantly used by an international audience, the videos do not cater specifically to non-Chinese speakers by including English subtitles or translations. This choice aligns with Saussure's idea of the arbitrary nature of the sign, emphasizing the integrity of cultural symbols conveyed through the Chinese language (Saussure, 2011). The use of dialect further enriches the cultural texture, reflecting the unique charm and essence of Chinese culture. This approach supports the idea that linguistic semiotics plays a crucial role in conveying cultural values and traditions without compromising the original cultural output (van Leeuwen, 1999; Kress & van Leeuwen,

2001). In addition to linguistic elements, Li Ziqi's videos prominently feature Sichuan's rural landscapes and ancient houses, presenting the picturesque rural scenery of China. This use of visual elements to create a cultural atmosphere is a form of visual semiotics, where the natural and man-made backdrops serve as rich cultural symbols. The portrayal of beautiful, vast rural China highlights the richness and power of the country. By focusing on ordinary characters, such as herself, her grandmother, and other rural residents, the videos symbolize the rural life of ordinary Chinese people. This approach aligns with Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation, where the explicit depiction of rural life connotes deeper cultural meanings and narratives (Barthes, 1977).

The use of soft and soothing background music in her videos, primarily Chinese-style music, deeply embodies China's cultural heritage while appealing to contemporary popular music tastes. This music, characterized by its subtlety, elegance, and dynamic nature, aligns with traditional Chinese aesthetics. The music enhances the ancient style of the videos, creating a tranquil atmosphere that allows the audience to immerse themselves in Li Ziqi's world and find peace of mind (Lau, 2020). Auditory symbols, particularly the use of pure instrumental music without vocals or lyrics, play a crucial role in constructing the narrative of rural life in the videos. These musical elements, performed on classical Chinese instruments, contribute to a soothing and ethereal ambiance, thus relaxing the viewer and reinforcing the cultural narrative (Cheng, 2021; Li, Z., & Kluensuwan, P. (2023). Li Ziqi's strategic use of auditory symbols not only enhances the cultural narrative of her videos but also demonstrates the potential of digital media in conveying and promoting cultural heritage. By integrating visual, auditory, and linguistic symbols within a cohesive semiotic framework, her content serves as a model for effective cultural communication and global engagement. These insights can guide future content creators in leveraging digital platforms to construct and disseminate national cultural symbols, fostering greater cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

From a semiotic perspective, Peirce's triadic model illustrates how the natural elements in Li Ziqi's videos transition from mere backgrounds to rich cultural symbols, embodying the Daoist philosophy of harmony with nature. This aligns with Peirce's representamen-interpretant-object triad, which emphasizes the symbolic significance of these elements, enhancing the viewer's appreciation of a harmonious rural lifestyle (Chandler, 2017). Additionally, Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation help elucidate how the explicit depictions of food preparation in Li Ziqi's videos convey deeper cultural meanings. These culinary practices serve as semiotic resources that express and reinforce cultural values (Hodge & Kress, 1988). The integration of visual, auditory, and linguistic symbols, as per Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse theory, creates a rich, immersive cultural experience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). The success of Li Ziqi's videos underscores the transformative potential of self-media in cultural communication. By leveraging semiotic theories, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms behind this success and offers insights for future cultural communication efforts (Jenkins, 2006).

Furthermore, the visual representation of everyday rural life gradually shifts the political implications, focusing instead on the cultural and emotional appeal of short videos. This aligns with Lotman's theories on cultural semiotics, which explore how cultural texts function as sign systems and communicate cultural meanings (Lotman, 1990; Shen & Abas, 2023). The portrayal of rural life and traditional practices in a visually appealing manner enhances the cultural narrative and strengthens the appeal of Chinese culture to a global audience. The interplay of linguistic and visual symbols in Li Ziqi's videos constructs a unique representation of traditional Chinese culture. The decision to use Chinese narration without English subtitles maintains the authenticity of cultural transmission and reflects the importance of language in conveying cultural essence. Visual symbols, such as the rural landscapes and traditional practices, create a rich cultural atmosphere that appeals

to both domestic and international audiences. This synthesis aligns with Peirce's triadic model, where the representamen (visual and linguistic elements) and the interpretant (audience's understanding) interact dynamically to convey cultural meanings (Peirce, 1998). By applying these semiotic theories, this research elucidates how Li Ziqi's videos produce and communicate cultural symbols effectively. This analysis provides valuable insights into the construction and utilization of national cultural symbols for cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchange in the digital age (Manovich, 2001; Jenkins, 2006). The continued growth of Li Ziqi's YouTube fanbase and the expanding influence of her videos highlight a successful example of traditional Chinese culture being disseminated globally. This phenomenon provides valuable insights and experience for cross-cultural communication efforts from China. The effective cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese culture is a subject worthy of in-depth study, necessitating the application of detailed cross-cultural communication theories and strategies (Jenkins, 2006). Li Ziqi's approach to video production serves as a significant reference for cultural dissemination entities and self-media creators. By demanding excellence in her work, Li Ziqi avoids overtly praising or publicizing Chinese culture. Instead, she quietly showcases her farm work and converses with her grandmother in Sichuan dialect, all within beautifully crafted frames. This method has successfully attracted a global audience, embodying Peirce's concept of the triadic model, where the representamen (her videos), the interpretant (the audience's understanding), and the object (Chinese culture) interact dynamically to create meaning (Peirce, 1998). As CCTV noted, her genuine love for traditional culture and her dedication to high-quality video production are key to her global appeal.

DISCUSSION

The success of Li Ziqi underscores the need for more high-quality self-media content creators in the realm of Chinese cultural communication. Scholars should explore the communication advantages of self-media from multiple perspectives, using frameworks such as Saussure's structural relationships within language systems and Barthes' denotation and connotation to analyze how cultural symbols are conveyed and perceived (Saussure, 2011; Barthes, 1977). Self-media platforms, with their wide reach and interactive nature, offer a unique opportunity to disseminate cultural content effectively and engagingly. Li Ziqi's videos serve as a prime example of how self-media can be harnessed to communicate traditional culture in a modern context, blending visual storytelling with cultural education. By employing Saussure's structural relationships within language systems, scholars can examine how linguistic elements in self-media, such as subtitles and dialogues, function to convey deeper cultural meanings and values. This approach can reveal how language structures contribute to the audience's understanding and appreciation of cultural narratives. Moreover, integrating multimodal discourse theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) into the analysis can enhance our understanding of how different modes of communication—visual, textual, auditory—interact to create a cohesive and immersive cultural experience. This holistic approach can help identify the strengths and potential of self-media in presenting a rich, multifaceted portrayal of culture that resonates with both domestic and international audiences.

In conclusion, the success of Li Ziqi highlights the transformative potential of self-media in cultural communication. By leveraging theoretical frameworks such as Saussure's structural relationships, Barthes' denotation and connotation, and incorporating multimodal discourse and semiosphere concepts, scholars can develop a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms behind effective cultural communication through self-media. This knowledge can guide future content creators in crafting high-quality, culturally rich media that can foster global appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture (Manovich, 2001; Jenkins, 2006).

Knowledge from Research

The study of Li Ziqi's short videos demonstrates the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication in conveying traditional Chinese culture to a global audience. By analyzing 128 videos released from August 2017 to July 2021, the research highlights how Li Ziqi incorporates traditional Chinese cultural symbols such as clothing, festival decorations, natural sounds, and hand-written Spring Festival couplets. The application of semiotic theory to these elements reveals the depth and richness of Chinese traditions depicted in her videos.

These findings address the three research questions as follows: Firstly, the data showcases the prominent traditional Chinese cultural symbols in Li Ziqi's videos, validating the systematic and rich portrayal of Chinese traditions. Secondly, the audience's high engagement levels, measured through quantitative metrics and qualitative emotional analysis, underscore the effective communication and positive reception of these cultural symbols. This research highlights the role of digital media in cultural diplomacy and the potential of creative content to bridge cultural gaps.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenal success of Li Ziqi's self-media content underscores the profound potential of digital platforms in the realm of Chinese cultural communication. By meticulously curating videos that showcase serene rural landscapes, traditional Chinese food, and festival symbols, Li Ziqi has created a compelling cultural narrative that resonates with a global audience. This paper has examined her content through the lens of various semiotic theories, highlighting the intricate ways in which cultural symbols are conveyed and perceived. Analyzing natural elements in Li Ziqi's videos through Peirce's triadic model reveals their transformation from mere backgrounds to symbols embodying Daoist harmony with nature, enhancing viewers' appreciation of a tranquil rural lifestyle (Peirce, 1998). This also reflects a human cognitive aspect as pointed out by Ke and Hemchua (2023). Additionally, Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation, combined with van Leeuwen's social semiotics, illustrate how traditional Chinese food preparation conveys deeper cultural meanings and reinforces cultural values (Barthes, 1977; van Leeuwen, 1999). Lotman's semiosphere concept further shows how these food elements interact with other cultural symbols, offering authentic cultural experiences to global audiences (Lotman, 1990).

In the realm of artificial symbols, Saussure's model clarifies the established relationships between signifiers and their cultural meanings, as seen with red lanterns and firecrackers symbolizing Chinese New Year (Saussure, 2011). Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse theory demonstrates how combining visual, textual, and auditory elements creates an immersive cultural experience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). These semiotic frameworks provide valuable insights into how self-media like Li Ziqi's videos effectively communicate cultural symbols. They highlight the importance of integrating various communication modes to create engaging, culturally rich media that fosters a deeper appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture among international audiences. Li Ziqi's success highlights the transformative potential of self-media in cultural communication. Employing theoretical frameworks such as Saussure's structural relationships, Barthes' denotation and connotation, and incorporating multimodal discourse and semiosphere concepts, scholars can better understand effective cultural communication through self-media. This knowledge can guide future content creators in crafting high-quality, culturally rich media, enhancing global appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture. As China seeks to enhance its cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchange, the lessons from Li Ziqi's approach can guide the creation of impactful self-media content that fosters global appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture (Manovich, 2001; Jenkins, 2006).

Suggestions

First of all, based on the semiotic analysis of the short video of Li Ziqi on YouTube platform, the author found that the reason why it has become a positive demonstration of overseas cultural dissemination is closely related to the content of the common cultural symbols in the video, which is of practical revelation significance to the overseas dissemination of the self-media thereafter. As a folk subject of the self-media blogger, especially KOL, the content of communication should weaken the fake and empty form. They should display the national image from the perspective of ordinary people with a strong sense of life. By breaking the communication barriers with the commonality of silent communication, and by breaking the barriers of cross-cultural communication with easy-to-understand cultural symbols, we can maximize the effect of China's cultural communication to the outside world, so that overseas audiences will be happy to watch and actively learn about the multicultural content of our country.

In terms of the communication theme, the content she creates is either closely related to the production of food or traditional Chinese crafts; whether it is the production of traditional New Year snacks or bamboo sofas, there is no complex textual information, and the content presented has a common understanding of the reception of the audience in different cultural backgrounds.

Secondly, the excavation of the commonality of cultural symbols should keep abreast of the times and break through the limitations of traditional symbols. Not only should we pay attention to the traditional cultural symbols such as "Chinese medicine culture", "Chinese dress culture", "tea culture", etc., but we should also explore new cultural symbols in an in-depth and easy-to-understand way, and in a rich and diversified form, so as to enrich the culture of the audience. In addition, we should explore new cultural symbols and enrich the cultural communication track, so that Chinese culture can be communicated to the outside world in an innovative way. Therefore, the thesis takes the video of Li Ziqi on the YouTube platform as an example, so that more creators can understand the importance of overseas platforms and the significance of the commonality of cultural symbols, which is conducive to the enhancement of the effect of Chinese culture's foreign communication in the future.

The advantage of commonality content is that it is audience-oriented, and by considering the topic of cross-cultural communication from their point of view, the obstacles of cross-cultural communication can be avoided, and it is easy to be understood and accepted by foreign audiences and build up a sense of closeness, so as to achieve a better communication effect. Li Ziqi chooses to use Chinese food to bring her audience closer to her. Cuisine is felt with taste and vision, even audiences from different cultural backgrounds may have the same choice. In terms of theme, she has crossed the barrier of cultural background, as long as she can convey the beauty of vision and taste to her audience, her video has succeeded in the first step. After the great success of her culinary output, she was well-prepared in delivering the content of the exquisite ancient craftsmanship, and can be seen to have traveled to learn the craftsmanship, and repeatedly modified it to perfection. Therefore, in terms of communication content, creators should understand the interests and needs of foreign audiences, proactively set the agenda, master the discourse of cross-cultural communication, respect every cultural tradition, seek cultural commonalities and avoid cultural conflicts.

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