

Analysis of the Transformation of Bilibili Video Content from the Perspective of Communication

Shijia Zhang*

Department of International Cultural Communication, Communication University of Zhejiang,
Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

*Corresponding author: 201109116@stu.cuz.edu.cn

Abstract. In today's extremely developed Internet, Bilibili has changed from a niche website to a mainstream media. This paper takes the content transformation in the transformation process of Bilibili as the main research object. It analyzes the content partition change, user growth and "broken circle" publicity according to the content partition data, form change and user portrait in its transformation and development. The results show that the content of Bilibili has gradually become mainstream and ubiquitous. Among them, Generation Z users still occupy a high proportion of users, and Bilibili also makes good use of this user's feature. The New Year party, live broadcast business and homemade programs have achieved remarkable results. At the same time, during the transformation of Bilibili, problems such as high-profit pressure, reduced user stickiness, and difficulty in supervising the infringement of secondary creative content also emerged. Taking Bilibili as the research object, the research on its transformation from a single-style video website to a social media has reference significance for other domestic video websites.

Keywords: Bilibili; Video culture; Transformation; Communication.

1. Introduction

According to the 49th Statistical Report on the Development of Internet in China released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in Beijing, as of December 2021, the number of Internet users in China has reached 1.032 billion, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 73.0%. The Internet has brought great development opportunities to the online video industry. However, when the online video industry is in full swing, many problems also emerge, hindering the further development of the industry. First of all, there is a market monopoly in the industry, making it challenging to build small platforms. As a result, people must depend on the excess resources of major platforms, which have a limited competitive edge. Second, the market has a high desire for innovation, and blindly plagiarizing and imitating make it more difficult to produce original and elevated web videos: imposing technology will enlarge the benefits and interests, but will abate the quality of content. With the wide application of 5G, watching videos through mobile Internet will become one of the main forms of future literary and artistic consumption. This requires the platform side to explore a more inclusive and sustainable payment mode based on the publicity and commercialization of literary and artistic works. The top priority is to optimize the membership system and content payment rules. Bilibili is now a highly aggregated cultural community for China's young people. Generation Z-users account for up to 81.7% and average monthly users reached 171.6 million [1,2]. It is one of the most popular video sites in China. It is the largest Professional User Generated Content (PUGC) platform in China, and also the first Animation, Comics and Game (ACG) related bullet curtain software in the Chinese mainland [3]. Bilibili was established in 2009. At the start-up stage, it focused on anime and comics. It was sought after by network indigenous residents who are familiar with the subculture, and quickly became a gathering base for Generation Z. According to the financial report of the second quarter of 2022, the monthly average active users of Bilibili reached 300 million and the daily average active users reached 83 million. It is the largest cultural community in China for the young generation and a new focus for many brands. Through a series of transformations in content, marketing and function expansion, Bilibili is gradually getting rid of the single constraint of niche platforms and transforming into a multi-dimensional, interactive, symbiotic and strong communication social media. This paper will study the reasons for the transformation of Bilibili's

content. Literature review is the major research approach used in this study. Moreover, the author collected data from Bilibili's official financial reports and the changes in network flow, community culture and results of the transformation from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Other secondary data sources primarily originate from academic journals, periodicals and media coverage. This research will bring some enlightenment to the transformation of other video sites.

2. Bilibili's Background and Development

The development of Bilibili is the process from the niche ACG subculture content to Generation Z. This paper will analyze the development history of Bilibili from three stages.

The start-up stage was from 2009 to 2010. The predecessor of the company, MikuFans, was founded by Xu Yi in 2009 and officially renamed Bilibili in 2010. In the early days, as a bullet screen, which allows viewers to send comments that travel across the screen in real-time and a video-sharing website, it was a relatively pure niche ACG community.

The growth stage was from 2011 to 2014. This is a period of user accumulation. At the same time, Bilibili is also expanding its business in ACG. During this period, Bilibili gradually developed into the largest ACG website in China.

Since 2015, Bilibili has got into the maturity period. In 2014, Chen Rui, an investor, formally joined the company as chairman of the board, and the company began its commercialization process, launching live broadcast, advertising, game agency distribution, paid membership, e-commerce and other businesses. In 2018, Bilibili was listed on NASDAQ. Since 2019, Bilibili has started to break through the original ACG-dominated user circle, and implemented the user growth strategy. At the end of the year, it co-hosted the New Year party with Xinhua, which is China's most influential online media. Today, Bilibili is a community of young people in China, and it is also one of the most popular video stations in China.

3. Transformation of Bilibili Content

3.1 Content

Since the formation of the ACG cultural group, no matter the changes of the times or the progress of technology, the communication content has not changed much, which is the ACG information that the groups are interested in. However, a significant feature of the ACG cultural communication content in the new media era is the secondary creation of this culture. In the past, ACG information was often produced by professional cartoonists, publishers, media companies, etc. Through traditional media such as books, magazines, television and the Internet, technology is now close to making the production of communication content tend to be audience oriented. Rather than being a new and timely way for the audience to express their own opinions, the bullet screen is more a secondary creation of the communication content by the audience. At the same time, Bilibili also experienced content generalization, and the category structure was improved from ACG to "living area+game, area+knowledge, area+animation, area+entertainment area". The Professional Generated Content (PGC) supply has changed. Bilibili cooperates with high-quality studios to achieve a continuous supply of professional pan-entertainment content. It continuously optimizes the content structure and strives to enter the pan-entertainment video content industry chain by supporting domestic original animation, exploring online variety shows, meeting users' needs for film and television content, and holding a New Year's Eve party highly overlapping with mainstream culture. For example, GO! Bilibili is a cooperative program that focuses on water reality. Each episode of this program gathers at least 12 video creators who are popular and have a large number of fans in Bilibili to participate in the program, and to make a breakthrough in sports games. So far, this program has 230 million broadcasts and 782,000 fans, creating heat for Bilibili. It also imported much content that was originally broadcast exclusively on other websites, such as Talk Show conference, Produce 101 and even overseas love variety shows. It only supported VIP members to watch, which also increased

a lot of benefits for Bilibili and proved the importance of transformation. In addition, during this transition period, six national departments, such as the Cyberspace Office, jointly ordered to investigate and deal with part of the content of Bilibili. After that, Bilibili reshaped its corporate image and committed itself to the publicity of domestic original content, traditional culture and positive-energy content. Although the increase in game business has enabled Bilibili to temporarily rejuvenate, it also faces the problem of a too single structure and lack of competitiveness, which poses a great risk to the long-term development of Bilibili in the future. In view of this, Bilibili has also made smart adjustments by integrating into mainstream media. In 2018, Bilibili reached a strategic cooperation with the People's Daily. In 2019, CCTV news settled in Bilibili, and even had a cooperative relationship with the Communist Youth League. The "high light moment" brought by this series of official media enabled Bilibili to successfully leverage the mainstream media to provide support for the subsequent transformation [4].

3.2 Form

In the past few years, in the content field, the "out of the circle" of Bilibili has attracted the attention of all content creators. Although it has always regarded itself as an "interest community", Bilibili is trying to show its great potential as a content marketing platform to the mainstream Internet. The rapid growth of Bilibili provides a new creative position for creators. It tries to express to the outside world that its mainstream users are such a group of people - they may be very young, but they have certain ideas and opinions. They are very adhesive to KOL, and they are the aborigines of the Internet. The living conditions and commercialization potential of content creators are also the core factors affecting the development of video websites. At present, the commercialization of the creators of Bilibili has been accelerated, which has also changed the creation form of Bilibili in terms of content.

Thus, live broadcasting emerges as times require. Compared with other platforms, Bilibili opened its live broadcasting business much later. After other platforms made profits from live broadcasting, Bilibili began its initial exploration. Although it started late, in recent years, it got some achievements. The most famous and attractive is the live game business. There are many players of the League of Legend in China, and Bilibili has also bought out the exclusive global live stream right of League of Legend. Since the agency and operation of the game business in 2014, the revenue of the game business in the following two years has reached 600 million yuan, and by 2017, the revenue of the game business has reached 83% of the total revenue of the company [5]. In addition, the rise of virtual live streamers is also a highlight. As a form of live broadcast rising from overseas, virtual live streamers mostly appear on the screen in the form of anime images, dubbed by real people or AI, with anime characteristics, which is consistent with the community atmosphere of Bilibili. In July 2020, Cai Ming, a Chinese sketch actor, was the first real celebrity to settle in Bilibili's virtual live broadcast. She took "Caicaizi Nanako" as the name of the virtual live streamer, and in just 25 minutes, she got 100 "captains" (captains are a monthly ticket consumption of 198 yuan in Bilibili's live broadcast service) [1]. In the fourth quarter of 2021, Bilibili live broadcasts and value-added services. The business income is nearly 2 billion yuan, the year-on-year growth is of 52%. In 2021, the revenue will be on a year-on-year basis. It increased by 80% to 6.93 billion yuan. In 2020, COVID-19 has swept the world, but in a disguised form, it accelerated the breaking speed of Bilibili in news and education. College teachers give live lectures in Bilibili by live stream, which gives full play to their abundant learning resources, and also captures the core of users' age group concentrated in Generation Z. In addition, Bilibili also played a major role in publicity during the special period of the epidemic, helping to spread the epidemic news [6].

Bilibili continues to provide users with high-quality content in multiple scenes. The new content form represented by Story-Mode vertical screen video effectively meets users' fragmented use needs and further promotes community activity.

4. Use Theory to Analyze Changes in Content

4.1 Social Integration Theory

The theory of social integration refers to the process and result of integrating different social factors and parts into a unified and coordinated whole. In 1964, Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan put forward the concept of the "global village", which means the distance of space and time between people suddenly shortened, because of the development of mass media, and the whole world became a "village" [7]. People are now more closely connected to the outside world, and even the entire world, thanks to the rise of the global village, which has altered how people traditionally think about time and distance. People are also getting to know one another better. It is under this concept that Bilibili has completed the unique community construction, which makes more people feel dependent and increase user stickiness.

By analyzing and sorting out the means of content adjustment made by Bilibili for transformation through communication theory, the author finds that, based on the social integration theory, people know that different people's preferences are mediated through "like" and "not interested". It enables users to find the content they are interested in more accurately, so that users can spend more time on the platform and increase their persistence and immersion. The addition of some vertical content, such as the expansion of video partitions and the addition of short video functions, plays a positive role.

From the user portrait of Bilibili, people know that 90.7% of the users are aged 15 to 29. More than half of the users aged 20 to 24, reached 53.6%, and these people are so-called Generation Z.

In relevant research, the majority of scholars usually concur that two factors primarily impact an enterprise's decision to undergo strategic transformation. One factor is the change in the external environment, which forces enterprises to carry out strategic transformation. According to Hicks, the industry environment in which the business is placed has a greater impact on its development [8]. When a corporation is faced with possibilities and hazards, Kotter and Heskett contend that it is important to consider elements like market saturation and competitive pressure within the same sector [9]. When these crises and difficulties occur, the company passively transforms to enhance its competitiveness and survive. Another factor that makes the enterprise strategic transformation is the development needs of the enterprise itself. Boely and Desai believe that the enterprise's choice of transformation is not only affected by external factors [10]. Internally, when the enterprise's business needs to expand or the scale of the platform needs to expand, their own needs will encourage the enterprise to actively seek strategic transformation to build a more ambitious, more reasonable and more suitable business model for future development.

4.2 Uses and Gratification Theory

The "use and satisfaction" theory focuses on the communicator or medium in order to determine whether the media has fulfilled its objectives or what effects it has on its audience, while the study of "use and satisfaction" is to investigate the psychological and behavioral effects of mass communication on people from the perspective of the audience by analyzing the media contact motivation of the audience and what needs these contacts have met. It stands on the position of the audience, and by examining the audience's motivation to utilize the media and the satisfaction of their needs, this study investigates the psychological and behavioral consequences of mass communication on people. It stresses the audience's initiative and accentuates their standing, in contrast to the conventional method of thinking about how information impacts the audience. This theory asserts that the audience limits media communication through active media use and emphasizes that media use is solely driven by individual wants and goals. According to the theory of Uses and Gratifications, most people have a desire, and they usually want to meet their needs. For Bilibili, the continuous expansion of product content is to meet the growing complex needs of consumers and adapt to fierce competition, which means that if enterprises can better meet the interests of consumers, companies can better occupy the market and gain a competitive advantage. Therefore, starting with its core

products, Bilibili has changed the content strategy of the video platform. It uses the community platform model to incorporate a diversified industrial ecology, such as electronic sports teams, animation exhibitions, variety shows, etc, and expand the content boundary through product extension.

It can be seen that the New Year gala dominated by Bilibili in the past 13 years, which is an official long video of the New Year gala submitted by the up hosts (video makers). The author found that in recent years, the program content of the New Year Celebration Festival has become increasingly diversified, with 100% ACG content from 2010 to 2015, and now the ACG content of the New Year gala has dropped to 71%.

In recent years, besides anime, comic and game, another 15 subareas have been added to Bilibili, which includes domestic original animation, variety show, dancing, entertainment, drama, auto-tune remix, science and technology, documentary, film, news and information, music, food, daily life and knowledge. It also adds a short-video function like TikTok.

5. Conclusion

From the financial report, people can see that Bilibili's paid memberships are growing steadily, which shows that this series of transformations have a positive effect on the company. But in this process, there are also many problems. First, in terms of content, there are vulgar content and infringement. If it cannot be handled, the company may need to bear corresponding responsibilities. Secondly, from the perspective of marketing activities, in order to achieve the effect of breaking the single content structure, Bilibili has carried out a series of online and offline activities, which has led to an increase in the net loss rate. Thirdly, due to more mainstream values and more users' concerns, if Bilibili cannot handle the relationship between new and long-time users well, there is a risk that the community atmosphere will weaken, affecting the retention ability of long-term users.

Therefore, the author believes that in the future, Bilibili should strengthen the supervision of content, and not forget to protect the experience of existing users while expanding the content boundary.

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