

The Literature Review of Chinese Cultural Symbols on the Effectiveness of Cultural-themed WeChat Official Accounts

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Abstract: This literature review explores the development of Chinese cultural symbols in new media platforms. It mainly starts from the concept, framework, and categorization definition of Chinese cultural symbols to conduct a review of related research. On this basis, the research and problems of new media platforms, especially WeChat official accounts (WOAs), in cultural communication are systematically sorted out. Related studies in the dissemination of Chinese culture through WOAs, especially and the impact of the dissemination effect of WeChat official accounts of cultural themes. The study deeply analyzes the role played by these symbols in communication as well as the current problems of cultural symbols in the process of communication. The study reveals the importance of WOAs, especially cultural WeChat official accounts (CWOAs), in cultural communication, and recognizes them as an important channel for spreading Chinese culture. The paper also highlights the shortcomings of the current research and makes suggestions for future research, aiming to deepen people's understanding of the application of cultural symbols in social media platforms (especially WeChat platform) and their impact on cultural communication. This review can serve as a basis for research on how people can effectively utilize cultural symbols and improve their communication effects.

Keywords: Chinese culture, Cultural symbols, WeChat official accounts.

1. Introduction

WeChat has become one of the largest social platforms in China, with a wide user base and rich functionality making it irreplaceable in China's social media landscape. WeChat Official Accounts(WOA), as its derivative products, have won the favor of more and more users.

The emergence of cultural WeChat Official Accounts (WOA) undoubtedly provides a new platform for the dissemination of Chinese cultural symbols. This is not only in line with China's current political context, but also meets the needs of modern society for cultural communication. However, there are numerous new media platforms at present, but there are no specific norms and requirements for cultural WeChat public numbers in terms of the dissemination of cultural symbols (i.e., accompanying pictures), which may lead to low competitiveness, confusing dissemination contents, and limited development potentials, among other problems.

Therefore, this paper aims to conduct an in-depth study of cultural WeChat Official Accounts (CWOAs) to reveal the characteristics of different categories of cultural symbols in CWOAs' presentation, and which categories of cultural symbols are more advantageous in terms of communication effects. To better carry out this research, this paper will make a detailed combing of the existing relevant studies, with a view to providing strong theoretical support for the subsequent research.

1.1. Background and Significance of the Study

WeChat is a social networking software originated from

China[1], and according to the 51st Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the size of Internet users in China was 1.067 billion as of December 2022, and the Internet penetration rate reached 75.6%[2]. With the development of China's Internet becoming more and more perfect and the popularity of 5G networks, Internet users are gradually getting used to using cell phones to access the Internet. Various apps and applications of mobile Internet are closely integrated with people's lives, and mobile Internet applications such as mobile payment, instant messaging, short video, and live broadcast platforms have lowered the threshold of Internet use and enriched the cultural and entertainment life of the masses[3].

WeChat Official Account (WOA) is a derivative of WeChat, which first appeared on January 21, 2011. Soon after, Tencent officially released the WOA on August 21, 2012, and its "picture + text" article subscription format attracted a large number of readers and users, as the active users of the WeChat platform exceeded 1.1 billion³. WeChat official account also began to be widely used by users. Since its launch, the WeChat official account has quickly become one of the most popular platforms for new media, thanks to its diversified information dissemination content, its free choice of subscription and push function for lazy users, and its compliance with the modern fragmented reading craze[4].

In recent years, China has prioritized cultural diplomacy, recognizing it as a crucial avenue for shaping its global image[5]. Among the diverse channels available, CWOAs stand out as one of the most widely accessed new media platforms. These accounts play a significant role in

disseminating Chinese culture, particularly due to their combination of text and visual content.

However, a closer examination reveals several noteworthy issues in the communication of cultural symbols through CWOAs. For instance, some accounts resort to “click bait” posts, compromising the overall quality of content[6]. Moreover, the accompanying images in low-quality articles also suffer from subpar standards[7].

Delving deeper, it becomes evident that the root cause lies in the lack of a clear focus when conveying cultural symbols[8]. While studies on the communication effects of CWOAs exist in various domains such as medicine, film, and literature, there remains a research gap concerning the communication impact of cultural content[9].

The investigation into cultural symbols within CWOAs holds profound implications. By understanding how cultural symbols are communicated, it can better preserve and revitalize the cultural legacy. This research bridges the gap between theory and practice, guiding content creators to convey cultural symbols with clarity and impact. Moreover, scholars, educators, and intellectuals stand to benefit from this research, gaining insights that enhance cognitive understanding and contribute to informed cultural discourse.

In summary, investigating cultural symbols in CWOAs enriches academic discourse and plays a pivotal role in preserving Chinese cultural identity in the digital age.

1.2. Research Objectives

The objective of this review is to systematically summarize existing research on Chinese culture, Chinese cultural symbols, and WeChat official accounts. By doing so, it can lay the groundwork for future studies in this field.

2. Definition and Framework of Chinese Cultural Symbols

2.1. Chinese Cultural Elements

A Chinese element is a concept that contains many basic components and their representative forms, which represent the spirit of Chinese national culture and cultural characteristics. According to some views, this concept has two major implications: first, it is the concrete materialization of a Chinese element, which is produced and exists in real life and is unique to all kinds of real things. The second type is an abstract or generalized Chinese element, which is not the reproduction of various concrete materials, but rather an ideology formed out of ideologies and social interactions, which is a concentrated expression of China's unique traditional culture, embodied in the national spirit, national image, and national customs[10].

2.2. Chinese Symbols

Chinese symbols are a fundamental aspect of Chinese culture and communication, reflecting the country's long history, rich heritage, and diverse traditions. These symbols encompass a broad range of visual elements, including characters, numbers, colors, animals, plants, and other culturally specific images[11].

Chinese characters, for instance, are a unique system of writing that has evolved over thousands of years, with each character representing a particular meaning, sound, and concept[12]. Numbers and colors also have special meanings in Chinese culture, often associated with luck, fortune, and other positive connotations.

Animals and plants are also prominent symbols in Chinese culture, with each animal or plant representing specific qualities, characteristics, or auspicious meanings. For instance, the dragon is a revered creature in Chinese mythology, symbolizing power, strength, and good fortune, while the phoenix is associated with beauty, grace, and renewal. These symbols are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture and are used in art, design, and communication to convey cultural values, ideas, and beliefs.

In addition to their cultural and historical significance, Chinese symbols are also widely used in contemporary art, design, and media. They serve as a source of inspiration and creativity, providing a rich and diverse visual language for contemporary expression and communication. For instance, Chinese memes are a popular form of online communication in China, using humor and wit to convey cultural and social messages.

Overall, Chinese symbols are an integral aspect of Chinese culture and identity, reflecting the country's deep roots, diverse traditions, and ongoing evolution. They continue to play a vital role in shaping Chinese society, communication, and artistic expression, and serve as a bridge between the past and the present, the local and the global.

2.3. Chinese Culture and Cultural Framework

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines culture as a set of unique cultural elements that constitute a society or a social group, which include more than just art and literature but also lifestyles, ways of living together, and values, beliefs, and traditions[13]. Generally speaking, when it comes to measuring culture, common cultural divisions are based on three common cultural dichotomies. 1. the scope of culture (economic or social) 2. the mode of governance (public or private) 3. the degree of institutionalization (formal or informal).

UNESCO has divided the different cultural fields carefully into different levels of institutionalization (formal or informal) in order to make the definitions adopted by the cultural statistics framework applicable for statistical purposes. Also, there is an argument that culture can be defined by the concept of cultural cycles. In the preliminary study submitted by BOP Consulting, an examination of the classification system of countries and regions revealed that some UNESCO member states have adopted the concept of cultural cycles. In the cultural cycle, there are different stages associated with cultural creation, production, and dissemination. Similar to the cultural statistics framework of 1986, the cultural cycle is structured into five phases (Figure 1)[14].

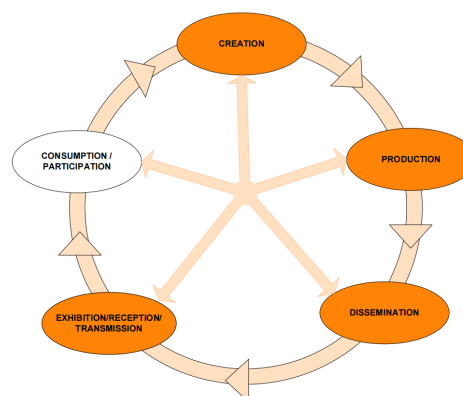


Figure 1. Cultural Statistics Framework from UNESCO (2009)

In 2009, UNESCO added fields to its 1986 definition of culture in order to construct a framework to define and understand the culture. As part of this study, culture is considered as a whole as well as divided into several subfields, so that each country may develop a cultural research framework tailored to its own national conditions based on this framework. Considering the classification of cultural cycles, the dissemination of cultural symbols from the WeChat official account platform belongs to the dissemination stage. As a result, some products or services can be delivered directly by creators to consumers through digital communication means. There are, however, only a few publications relevant to the practice of cultural communication on new media platforms because the UNESCO definition of the cultural framework was made in 2009, which is many years before the widely spread rise of new media platforms. As a platform that was only introduced in 2011, WeChat has even fewer empirical studies in this area. Until now, there has not been a clear definition of how cultural elements should be classified and defined when using the WeChat platform for cultural interaction[15].

As the definition of culture and the framework of culture continue to evolve, they are being used throughout the world. It is difficult to classify and define Chinese culture because of its specific characteristics. In 2017, Cheng Tingjing of Southwest University in China attempted to conduct an empirical study on cultural classification and cultural expression characteristics in electronic newspapers and classified Chinese cultural symbols into six categories, which in turn led to the widespread use of cultural symbols in official WeChat accounts[16]. Therefore, the researcher intends to apply Cheng Tingjing's cultural classification and coding methods to WeChat in this research. By combining the media platform offered by the official WeChat account with the six types of cultural elements, an attempt will be made to better understand and analyze the classification and presentation characteristics of Chinese cultural elements on the WeChat official platform.

3. Chinese Cultural Symbols in WOAs

3.1. Cultural Communication Via the WOAs

Through the development of WOAs, it has gradually become a tool for cultural communication. Upon reviewing the literature on WOAs published in recent years, the researchers found that WOAs are mainly used to promote Chinese culture in the following manner:

The WeChat official account is first of all available as a promotional platform for a certain group or organization. Zhang Li concentrates his research on young groups, and he believes that WeChat's official platform has a large number of active users, so its influence on young people cannot be ignored. WeChat's official account of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League frequently shares updates regarding colleges and universities, showing them to the public and spreading their culture on the one hand, and paying close attention to the thoughts and behavior of college student groups on the other. Through the study of the official Communist Youth League WeChat account, the author explores how the official WeChat account of the Communist Youth League can promote college culture[17]. According to Zhang Li, the construction and development of official WeChat accounts should move beyond the single

information-release function and focus on the combination of information distribution and user service, in order to create high-quality columns and further enhance the media value. Furthermore, it is important to promote socialist values in the process of spreading college culture. In addition to the mainstream culture of colleges and universities, it should also take into consideration the popular culture prevalent in colleges and universities.

The work of Tian Jianping and Yang Yufang, on the other hand, focuses on the dissemination of the excellent culture possessed by China's ethnic minorities[18]. As an active self-media platform, WeChat has played a critical role in the dissemination of excellent minority cultures. Tian Jianping and Yang Yufang se examples of the official WeChat account "Mongolia Circle" to illustrate the content analysis method of selecting sample articles and reviewing them for article form, language, and content to summarize the uniqueness of the official account in terms of cultural communication. Afterward, describe its success and summarize its cultural communication strategy to provide a model for the construction of similar official accounts.

Alams also examines the official WeChat account "Mongolia Circle" as a research object, analyzing its communication content and presentation model, and exploring the ways in which this account affects the construction and transmission of Mongolian national culture[19]. Alams has discovered that the official Mongolia Circle WeChat account pushes various types of content, including memories, rules, life, entertainment, and art. As well as interactive content presentation formats such as pictures, texts, audios and videos, there are also defects such as "title parties" and a lack of originality in the content.

In conclusion, these studies have demonstrated the significance of WOAs as a platform for promoting and disseminating Chinese culture.

3.2. Specific Applications and Forms of Chinese Cultural Symbols in WOAs

Initially, Wang Weichi and Chen Xiangyu analyzes and researches the distribution of WOAs and cultural symbols pertaining to theatre. Through the theoretical perspective of communication semiotics, the author analyses the process of creating meaning in the promotion of theatre art through the symbolic nature of texts that appear in WOAs. In his view, an individual WOA represents a unified collection of symbols and meanings, which construct meanings through information production activities, and which audiences interpret and understand through symbols. As a sign of the symbolic nature of text production activities, the WOAs of theatrical types serve to complete the union of meaning and the act of communication. So, the communication barrier raised by the statute of theater program symbols may be reduced. Due to the strong social connection property of the "common topic" and "shared discourse", the WOA becomes an effective medium for theatrical art to enter the everyday lives of social audiences and the public sphere at large[20].

Another researcher, Chiba Maneko from Japan, uses the WOA "Micro Forbidden City" as a research sample, which integrates cultural symbols and the WeChat account[21]. She asserts that the competition between historic and cultural sites is not only about attracting tourists, but also about forming values, communicating meanings, gathering identities, and creating cultural symbols that have distinctive meanings. "The micro palace" uses various visual expressions such as

hyper-visual, "virtual reality", and hyper-text to enhance the audience's sense of involvement in the event, guide the audience to watch, stimulate physical sensations, stimulate emotional communication, and for other communication purposes, creating a new visual experience. By using this technique, the objectiveness of reality is not only maintained but also a deeper level of physical and emotional reality is expressed, Providing a new mode of visual communication.

Scholars have also examined the role of WOAs in spreading the symbols of regional folk festivals by analyzing the publicity of traditional media against official accounts on WeChat. A researcher from Guangxi, China, Li Xian, has used the method described in this paper to analyze the reports of Guangxi Daily and its WOAs on March 3, the traditional Chinese folk festival. Contrary to traditional paper media, he believes that, unlike traditional media outlets, the WOA reports the festival with more preview content and more festive propaganda. Consequently, he believes that different levels of reporting in two different media could lead to more effective spreading of the cultural image symbol of "March 3," as well as constructing the regional cultural image of Guangxi[22].

Wang Yujia devoted her attention to the development and dissemination of the cultural symbols of the city. Upon studying the traditional paper media "Inner Mongolia Daily", "Wuhai Daily", the new media "micro Wuhai", "Wuhai News" platform on WeChat, and microfilm, she learned that Wuhai is gradually changing the original city symbols in the process of development. A comprehensive transformation of the city's image is being carried out properly and in an organized manner, and new symbols are constantly being added to deepen the overall image of the city. She believes that the key to cultural communication is to make the new symbols penetrate into the hearts of the citizens. Through an analysis of the concept, characteristics and meaning of media image, and the means of constructing and maintaining a media image, she analyzes several symbols of the city of Wuhai thoroughly and presents the media image of the city in both traditional and new media[23].

3.3. Graphics and Cultural Symbols in WeChat Official Accounts

A study conducted by Chen Hanlun in 2018 examined the originality of cover images used for official WeChat accounts, and 68 academic journal cover images were taken as a sample and uploaded to an online image database for identification and screening. Based on his research findings, only 13.24% of official WeChat accounts of academic journals use original cover images, and cover images are used in an irregular manner, resulting in infringement issues¹². Analogously, other categories of official WeChat accounts experience similar difficulties. Zhang Genhui represents the perspective of photo editors on official WeChat accounts and proposes new requirements for enhancing the quality of photo editors on official WeChat accounts. As part of her research, she examines how to improve the quality of editors so that they can edit accurately, disseminate timely, and serve the platform and audience better in the competitive news production and dissemination industry[24].

Zhang Qiong used the official WeChat account of China Photo Agency as a case study and developed a marketing model to adapt to the image WeChat official account in the era of palm charts. As an example, she implemented the IACI model into brand content marketing, triggering interest to

gain attention, and then pushing content on the basis of this to achieve interaction. From the perspective of a WeChat official account, this study examines the marketing model most appropriate for image communication[25].

An article by Tan Yan from Guangxi University first combined the official WeChat account with news images and then applied the methodology of documentary analysis and content analysis to the study²⁶. As the case study, the official WeChat account of the Southern Metropolis Daily, which has an extensive circulation and influence, was utilized. As part of the study, 408 headlines and 3097 news images pushed between January 1 and June 30, 2016 were selected as research samples. According to a study conducted by Southern Metropolis Daily, the use of news images in the headlines of the official WeChat account was analyzed in order to identify trends between Southern Metropolis Daily and the more influential traditional media accounts on WeChat. This study offers a model for how traditional media can leverage official WeChat accounts to improve their media influence in the future[26].

4. Shortcomings and Challenges of Existing Research

Taking an overview of the global and Chinese studies carried out on cultural symbols, it's easy to find a large number of studies and research directions. However, there is a noticeable gap in research on the categories of Chinese cultural symbols and the communication effects of cultural symbols on new media platforms - this remains an underdeveloped area. And while there are studies on WOAs that cover many areas, there are fewer on CWOAs, and even if there are, they are all about their content, and there is a gap in the research on the dissemination of cultural symbols. Therefore, this study is both necessary and significant. It not only deepens the study of Chinese cultural symbols, but also fills the gaps in existing research. In this sense, the present study is a valuable endeavor.

5. Suggestions for Future Research

This study is an overview of research on cultural symbols in WeChat official accounts (WOAs), particularly cultural WeChat official accounts (CWOAs), and lays the groundwork for future research. One potential direction is to investigate a broader category of cultural symbols, possibly delving into more nuanced subcategories, to assess their unique impact on communication effects.

Follow-up studies could also delve into audience perceptions and interpretations of these cultural symbols, providing valuable insights into the reception and understanding of cultural content by different audience groups. A comparative approach is also useful to compare the effects of cultural symbols across different social media platforms, regions, or demographic groups, revealing the different impacts these symbols may have in different contexts.

Longitudinal studies can track the use and effects of cultural symbols over time, thus providing dynamic insights into an evolving field. Examining the interplay between textual and visual elements in posts and their combined contribution to communication effects is another rich area for exploration.

Finally, given the changing landscape of social media and frequent algorithmic changes, it is critical to assess how these

changes affect the reach and effectiveness of cultural symbols. These future research directions will greatly enrich our understanding of the use and impact of cultural symbols in digital communication, paving the way for more nuanced and dynamic cultural communication strategies.

6. Conclusion

This paper summarizes the research on WeChat official accounts (WOAs), especially cultural WeChat official accounts (CWOAs) for relevant cultural symbols. It can be found that in the rapid development of new media, there is an increasing number of studies on WOAs.

Under China's current policy of promotion, the efforts of cultural communication have also been gradually strengthened. The research on WOAs and cultural communication is very necessary. And the study of Chinese cultural symbols, as the visible signs of cultural communication, is also indispensable. After combing through the relevant literature, this article finds that there is still much room for development in the dissemination of cultural symbols on CWOAs, which proves that research on the effects of different categories of cultural symbols on WOA platforms is urgently needed, and this review also lays the foundation for the relevant studies to be carried out in the future.

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