

Research on the International Communication Effect of “Genshin Impact” on YouTube From the Perspective of Interaction Ritual Chain Theory

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Abstract. Based on the interaction ritual chain theory, this study conducts in-depth research on the international communication of “Genshin Impact” on YouTube. In addition to analyzing the international communication of popular videos with “Genshin Impact” as the keyword on YouTube, this paper reveals the focus of the audience through word frequency statistics and figures out its communication mechanism from the perspective of interaction ritual chain theory. Finally, the paper summarizes the enlightenment of the successful international communication of “Genshin Impact” and provides profound thinking for the overseas communication of Chinese culture.

Keywords: Genshin Impact, Interaction Ritual Chain, International Communication.

1. Introduction

(1) Research Background and Research Significance

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi has put repeated emphasis on the need to tell Chinese stories well. China’s main external communication, with the official media as the main body, has taken the lead in going overseas and establishing accounts on overseas social media. However, under the pressure of digital geopolitics and data sovereignty, the communication effect of official accounts is not desirable. In addition to the mainstream communication on the official website, the game “Genshin Impact” was born and became a viral example of international communication. Having been popular on overseas social media such as YouTube, “Genshin Impact” grasped the key to times development and realized the innovative output of Chinese culture.

With the successful communication of “Genshin Impact” on the overseas social media YouTube as a case, this paper aims to take advantage of interaction ritual chain theory to explore the characteristics and paths of “Genshin Impact” in the international communication through qualitative and quantitative research, so as to provide a reference for disseminating Chinese culture in other ways and breaking through platform barriers.

(2) Literature Review

The research on international cross-cultural communication of digital games such as “Genshin Impact” is still in its infancy. There are few related studies and most of them are qualitative studies. Wang Wenjia believed that the digital media platform has pioneered a new dimension for international communication to enhance soft power and build national image. With “Genshin Impact” as the research object, how it grasped the key to the times and realized the innovative output of Chinese culture was interpreted. On this basis, three feasible paths were brought forth to boost “meta-soft power”, which gives insight into this research [1]. Attributed “Genshin Impact” to the “clique culture” of Generation Z, Li Hourui held that “it has become a significant communication force.” Such a force breaks through the restrictions of national and ethnic identity, and forms discourse expansion through individual preferences and common value pursuit [2]. Focusing on the international market research of online games, Xue Qiang et al. took the dissemination of Chinese games in ASEAN as an example to propose strategies and suggestions for Chinese online games to go overseas [3]. Tang Runhua et

al. explored the efficiency improvement and realization in international communication from the perspective of IP brand operation, and analyzed the optimal use of traditional cultural symbols in “Genshin Impact” to develop brand IP [4].

(3) Research Objectives

In this study, the communication videos of “Genshin Impact” on the international social media YouTube are roughly divided into two groups according to the publishers: official accounts and private accounts. The video content, communication characteristics and communication effects of each group are studied, with the specific questions as follows:

RQ1: How is “Genshin Impact” spreading internationally on YouTube? What is the focus of the overseas audience?

RQ2: How to complete the interaction ritual chains in the international communication of “Genshin Impact”?

RQ3: What enlightenment can the successful international communication of “Genshin Impact” provide for other international communication products?

(4) Research Methods

1. Content Analysis: The titles of videos with more than 100,000 views under the theme of “Genshin Impact” are collected. Word frequency statistics are also processed before summarizing the concerns of overseas audiences and the characteristics of popular videos.

2. Internet Ethnography: Search the keyword “Genshin Impact” on YouTube and select some representative videos as samples with reference to the criteria such as views, likes, and comments, so as to analyze the video with different communication effects. A detailed analysis of the communication strategy of videos is also conducted.

(5) Research Theory

When it comes to the interaction ritual chain theory, American sociologist Erving Goffman put forward that “interaction ritual” refers to expressive procedural activities. Randall Collins developed the interaction ritual chain theory on this basis, proposing that interaction is the fundamental source of social life, and the image presented by individuals is formed in the interaction with others. Collins believed that there are four conditions for interactive rituals: physical co-presence, a barrier to exclude outsiders, a focus of mutual attention and shared emotional power.

(6) Research Objects

In this study, “Genshin Impact” is used as the keyword to search on YouTube, ranked according to the views from high to low. Besides, the app “Octoparse” is applied to crawl 239 videos with more than 2 million views.

2. Dissemination of “Genshin Impact” on YouTube

According to the search on YouTube with the keyword “Genshin Impact” from the high to low number of views, 616 videos have more than 100,000 views.

(1) Basic Overview

Among the 616 videos, 184 are from official accounts of “Genshin Impact”, accounting for 29.8%. When it comes to the number of video creations, its official accounts do not have advantages. In addition to official accounts, four game-bloggers including “Doro44” and “BranOnline” have also produced more than 10 videos with 100,000+ views, which play the role of key opinion leaders, accounting for 11.0% in total. The remaining 233 users have produced 10 or fewer videos with 100,000+ views, of which 165 have produced only one, accounting for 26.7%. Thus, the communication of “Genshin Impact” is apparently participatory.

In terms of the view counts, the 184 videos of the official account were played 954.1 million times, accounting for 58.1% of the total view counts of 1,640.43 million times in the statistical data. Hence, the creation of official channels still dominates the dissemination of “Genshin Impact” on YouTube, attracting the vast majority of users.

In terms of video format, according to manual statistics, there are only 40 vertical display videos, of which “My P2P friend’s summon vs mine” ranks 20th in views. Although short videos are not mainstream in the content dissemination of “Genshin Impact”, they are more likely to go viral.

(2) Word Frequency Statistics

Word segmentation is performed on the title. After the processing (excluding meaningless words such as pronouns and prepositions as well as subject words such as “Genshin Impact”), the chart of words with the top 20 statistical frequencies and word cloud diagrams of word frequency is shown as follows:

Table 1. Word Frequency

Label Word	Word Frequency	Label Word	Word Frequency
character	81	exe	18
demo	49	ost	17
teaser	37	# shorts	17
trailer	27	animation	16
version	26	guide	16
new	24	vs	16
navia	21	cutscene	16
characters	20	shogun	14
story	19	players	13
raiden	19	theme	13

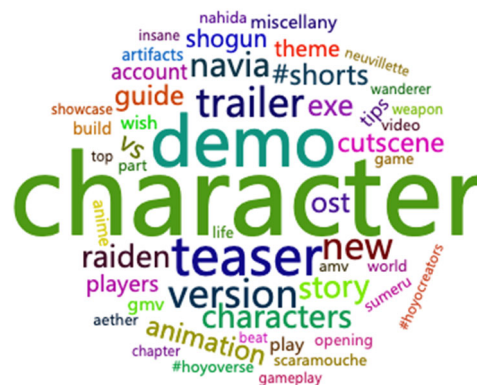


Figure 1. Word Cloud

Based on the text analysis of video titles with high view counts, the attention paid by the audience to “Genshin Impact” on YouTube can be roughly classified into the following five categories:

2.1. Character Preview (“Character”, “Demo”, “Teaser”, “Trailer” and Character Names such as “Navia”)

Since this kind of video is intertwined with the actual playing experience, it has higher information value for players with a large number of videos. It usually gains a very high view count and appears in a fixed mode. To be specific, the cover of the game character appears after a simple introduction, which is then combined with the actual shots of the game and the 3D-perspective camera to reflect the character’s skills and pictures before leading to the background story and lines of the character. Such comments on videos with abundant likes mostly focus on the quality of characters and pictures as well as the enlarged analysis of characters’ interesting details. Meanwhile, the comments will

involve the interaction between this character and others, and output the player's understanding of the game content.

2.2. Story Preview (“Story”)

This kind of video is usually a trailer that releases the storyline of a new game, with a duration of 1-3 minutes. It is mixed and cut with lyrical music to explain the protagonist and plot development, and then with the character's English explanation. Such comments of videos with abundant likes mostly resonate with the excerpts of character lines and the output of opinions, or evaluate the plot from a rational perspective.

2.3. Version Preview (“Version”)

Compared with the “character” preview and “story” preview, this kind of video is not quite attractive to players and its information value is not rich. Moreover, not all versions can gain high view counts, which is limited to a few major innovative versions. Among them, the “Version 2.0” video with the highest view count only ranks 10th in terms of view counts. Such comments on videos with abundant likes mainly focus on version comparison. For example, almost all comments with abundant likes in the Version 2.0 PV video focus on the “nostalgia” of Version 2.0, lamenting the rapid change of versions with the love of this PV video that has passed the test of time. However, the comments under the Version 3.0 PV video focus on the expectation of Version 4.0.

2.4. Reaction Video (“Players”, “Tips”)

This kind of video is mainly recorded by well-known game video bloggers, and is re-edited after shooting game recordings or live screen recordings. High-played videos usually have certain gimmicks in the title. For example, videos such as “playing Genshin Impact with poor-skilled players for a day” and “playing Genshin Impact in reality” get medium view counts, which usually have a clear targeted audience based on anchor fans as “recreated” videos.

2.5. Short Video (“# Short”)

This kind of video usually gains numerous likes for its short size. It usually focuses on themes such as the essence extraction of reaction videos, challenging the real original shin, and playing the song of “Genshin Impact”. Highlighting a certain clear gimmick makes a difference in the communication effect to instantly capture the attention of the audience.

3. Analysis of the Interaction Ritual of Video Communication of “Genshin Impact”

(1) Physical Co-presence in Virtual Space

Physical co-presence refers to contact and perception in a physical space simultaneously as well as emotional input through body language and eye contact, so as to build a common emotional foundation and complete the interactive ceremony. With the development of media and the Internet, physical co-presence can break the spatiotemporal limitation, and individuals can communicate and interact emotionally in the virtual field.

As a game, “Genshin Impact” has this virtual co-presence attribute. On the one hand, in the game, players can not only control game characters through virtual handles and choose whether to buy and operate a certain character, but also complete tasks in the virtual world of the game, upgrade levels, and realize spiritual interaction with virtual characters. On the other hand, the functions of friends and co-play in online games have become an integral way to realize interaction rituals with people in virtual fields. Most of the popular videos of “Genshin Impact” on YouTube focus on the sample display of new characters and the recorded videos of gamers, which is an extension of the interaction ritual brought by digital games.

(2) Characteristic Cultural Symbols to Exclude Outsiders

It is constructed by giving certain identities and common interests to the individual group with exclusiveness to the outside world. “Genshin Impact” strengthens the common characteristics of the community, where like-minded people build cultural ethnic groups in this game, form a certain circle, and share specific cultural symbols. For example, words such as “Get Started in Genshin Impact” and “Fans of Genshin Impact” emerging in China have been symbols of group identity, while the classic line of the characters in videos such as “If you were smart, you wouldn’t charge into unknown danger” that frequently appear in the comment area on YouTube has received numerous praises, which reflects a unique way of discourse and sharing in the clique.

Based on the algorithm recommendation and refined partitioning of YouTube, users of Genshin Impact can better find groups with common interests and hobbies and their favorite video fields on YouTube. Therefore, videos related to “Genshin Impact” are widely spread in the clique. Such accurate recommendations isolate users who pay less attention to “Genshin Impact” entering the clique and complete the exclusion of outsiders.

(3) Focus of Mutual Attention

The premise of individual resonance through interaction is that they have converging focuses and hobbies to further strengthen this resonance in interaction. First of all, YouTube can become the common identity of the audience and immerse itself in the unique “YouTube culture”, thus forming a high-viscosity emotional community. Meanwhile, according to statistics, the words “Character Demo” and “Teaser” are often seen in the titles of videos with the highest view count. These videos have created a popular topic without exception, which has won the common attention and expectation of the audience.

(4) Shared Emotional Power

Different from the barrage culture of Bilibili, sharing emotions on YouTube is mainly concentrated in the comment area. In the field of mutual attention based on “Genshin Impact”, users post comments that can resonate, such as classic lines of video characters, or express their opinions on this new character. The emotions of multiple individuals converge into collective common emotions through comments or likes, which enhances the audience’s sense of belonging and identity and forms the emotional results of interaction rituals.

Outside the comment area, the “Genshin Reaction” video that records the actual playing pictures and real-time emotional reactions of players captures the attention of the audience. The audience finds their own similar emotional resonance by watching others, which also forms a “node-to-segment” interaction ritual.

4. Inspiration of “Genshin Impact” to International Communication

The mechanism of international communication of “Genshin Impact” videos on YouTube is roughly as follows. The physical co-presence is conducted to exclude outsiders through the digital game symbol “Genshin Impact”. Besides, the emotional power is shared around the mutual focus to consolidate group loyalty and team affiliation in collective excitement. On this basis, “Genshin Impact”, a phenomenal international communication behavior, provides inspiration for other cross-cultural communication.

(1) Cultural Empathy and Emotional Consensus

Chinese culture is the core of “Genshin Impact”. For example, in the promotional videos of characters such as Zhong Li, there are numerous displays of his traditional Chinese costumes and Chinese martial arts. In addition, its presentation form relies on an idea that can arouse the universal empathy of human beings, including plot, conflict, picture, battle, art, etc. In the comments on character trailers, the interpretation and evaluation of the plot account for an overwhelming proportion, and the character lines also stimulate the audience’s resonance. In the comments on all videos related to

“Genshin Impact”, it is inseparable from the exclamation of the picture. These cross-language symbols have been the key to triggering cultural empathy and emotional consensus, conveying Chinese culture attractively and impressively.

In addition, the story of the game is set in seven “countries”, each of which has its distinct characteristics. For example, “Mond City” combines humanistic features of Europe and Britain, with the stories and plots spanning countries, which provides an opportunity for cultural empathy in the blending of cultures. It is also easier for the communication audience to accept diverse contents and cultures based on their familiar symbols, improving the reach rate and communication effect of Chinese culture.

(2) IP Creation and Encouragement of Re-creation

Under the phenomenal IP of “Genshin Impact”, many private account videos have emerged and have received numerous views and likes due to the open IP derivative permissions and inclusive creative environment of “Genshin Impact”. As of 2022, the view count of re-creation content with the tag of “Genshin Impact” has reached 12.6 billion.

The re-creation behavior promotes the interaction ritual in communication, and the expression of individual content creators as key opinion leaders shapes a common clique with shared hobbies. Like-minded audiences gain a sense of belonging and emotional resonance in the clique. Combined with the “virtual co-presence” of the recreated video, they finally rely on IP, spontaneously and consciously enlarge the clique, and increase benign interaction, thus forming word-of-mouth communication and expanding the influence of IP.

Meanwhile, most of these recreated bloggers are well-known overseas players, breaking the limitations of self-shaping, which fits overseas audiences, unshackles cultural stereotypes with more friendly and effective communication, and expands cultural communication to overseas entities.

(3) Localization, Precision and Focus Communication

International communication in the era of intelligent media requires to rely on science and technology, so as to tailor communication content for targeted audiences and design targeted communication strategies. First of all, as for language, “Genshin Impact” supports more than 15 languages. Most of the videos on YouTube are dubbed in English after localized English translation. Local expert teams and dubbing teachers are invited to eliminate the information reduction caused by language barriers and convey the sense of “first-hand information” to the audience. In the official account of “Genshin Impact”, non-English users are also taken into account. Among them, videos in other languages, such as Korean, Japanese, Russian, etc., which account for about 10% of the total, have received high views and likes. As for the content, “Genshin Impact” will also design materials for specific festivals. For example, during the Russian festival “Maslenitsa”, the official account of the Russian region releases congratulatory pictures of characters in “Genshin Impact”, with views much higher than that of ordinary tweets.

5. Conclusion

Under multiple pressures such as digital empowerment, platform power, and digital geopolitics, the overseas communication path of Chinese culture has been blocked, and mainstream media have generally lost their right to speak internationally. In this situation, digital games have been a vital medium of cross-cultural communication, which realizes implicit communication through role setting, storyline and cultural symbols. As the second largest social media in the world, YouTube has a huge audience. How to spread Chinese culture without being labeled as “propaganda” has become a critical issue. The successful dissemination of “Genshin Impact” on YouTube has guided the development of China’s international communication. In the future, we should constantly increase investment in cultural media and understand the profoundness of Chinese culture in a subtle way that is popular with overseas users.

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