
The Impact of Digital Media on the Cultural Identity of Chinese University Students

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Abstract

Historically speaking, cross-cultural communication was reserved for an elite group of people, such as officials, businessmen, travelers, explorers, and missionaries. But today, with the assistance of globalized network and digital media, people from opposite corners of the planet could easily be connected and they could contact people in other continents effectively and efficiently. There is concern that more frequent cross-cultural communication and massive information that digital media brings may weaken Chinese young generation's cultural identity. In other words, the rise of digital media undermines the notion of cultural identity of Chinese university students. Cultural identity is crucial, not only for a country or a culture, but also for individuals' self-identification. This research answers the question regarding the impact of digital media on university students' cultural identity in China. A questionnaire survey was carried out on a sample of 600 university students. The research instrument used was ethnic identity scale (MEIM-R). Quantitative data collected was analyzed. The finding has come out: digital media has an impact on university students' cultural identity in China. The more university students use digital media, the stronger their sense of their cultural identity becomes.

Keywords: Digital media; Cross-cultural communication; Cultural identity, Chinese university students.

1 Introduction

Human society has developed to the stage of globalization, which has happened not only in the economic, politics, information, transport, but also in the field of culture. In the traditional sense, the distinction between different cultures and cultural identities is confirmed legally and ceremonially by physical entities such as geographical boundaries and boundary monuments. However, in the context of globalization, the increasing development of transportation and communication technology has made the world so closely connected that everyone seems to live in the same village. McLuhan (1964) first introduced the term “global village” to express the idea that the world is getting smaller. The world is to be connected no matter the distance from user to user (Carey, 2019), since the rise of digital media has increased communication between people all over the world and the Internet. The planet Earth is not shrinking, but time and space are. Digital media, has gradually become the main channel for transmitting culture, entertainment and information by spreading information quickly and comprehensively. They are providing people with rich ways of interaction and entertainment (Zhang, 2021). The influence of it on traditional values is inevitable. Traditional values may include people's beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and thoughts (Liu, 2019). With different cultures collide and coexist, traditional values have to usher in a series of changes and updates. Hence some people concern that more frequent cross-cultural communication may weaken young generation's cultural identity in China because standardized digital technology and the Internet has given people a broad group commonality. Cultural identity is important both to individuals and cultures. Qiao Zhilong and Teng Chi (2019) insist that cultural identity is conducive to strengthening the common value consciousness of people of all ethnic groups and building a common spiritual home, and is conducive to avoiding ideological collision, conflict of interests, and imbalance between regions among different ethnic groups, and plays an important role in maintaining border stability and national unity.

However, the deep structure of Chinese culture is hard to change, and the core cultural identity is stable and lasting. The deep structure of culture can be referred to a culture's world view (religion), family structure and state (Samovar L.A., Potter R.E., 2004). China's social and cultural structures have formed naturally on the basis of its early farming culture. Fei Xiaotong believes that this is a unique differential pattern society (Fang, 2021). And the core cultural identity has formed over a long period of time and is often linked with ethnic groups, history, traditions and ideas. It not only appears in people's daily discourse, but also in social practice, social norms and concept systems, which cannot be easily changed (Sun, 2015). The deep structure of culture and core cultural identity are hard to change. In other words, some part of cultural identity is core and some is peripheral. Generally speaking, the peripheral cultural identity is easy to change, while the core cultural identity is stable and lasting among Chinese young generation. Furthermore, more frequent cross-cultural communication and digital media use constantly stimulate the original expression of each culture. And in current China, mainstream media, government agencies, social organizations and institutions are all making concerted efforts to build Chinese national image. Therefore, the rise of digital media holds great chance to facilitate the formation and reinforcement of close-knit cultural groups which are homogenous (Akfirat et al., 2016). Only by constantly paying attention to and studying the practice and theory of digital media communication, making clear the influence of it on cultural identity, especially the cultural identity of university students, can we better adapt to the needs of world change and play a positive role in promoting cultural innovation and effective inheritance from generation to generation.

2 Literature review

2.1 Digital Media and Cultural Identity

Digital media is a way to provide users with information and services through computer networks, wireless communication networks, satellites and other channels, as well as terminals such as computers, mobile phones and digital TV sets, using digital technology. The digital media industry has achieved

remarkable development results with distinctive characteristics, showing great vitality and innovation. The next generation of Internet is coming (Tian, Wang, Huang, 2022). Chen Jian and Shen Xianjun (2007) summarized the characteristics of digital media as divergence, interactivity, rapidity, tolerance, rapidity, repetition, mass, virtuality, etc. Cultural identity comes from the relationship between different members of our culture and other cultural evaluation and judgment, associated with a specific cultural patterns, and presents a confirmation of cuckoo common culture between members of the culture, is a definition of self, the difference between others and group, reinforcing each other the same feeling to condense into a group which has the common cultural connotation (Monica Shelly, 1995). Cultural identity reflects people's perception and understanding of common history, common historical experience and cultural symbols, as well as the instinct and emotion of cultural members to protect their own way of life and cultural characteristics (Sun, 2015).

Sun Yingchun (2015) holds that cultural identity is the link between man and history with stable and continuous utility, as well as the changing cultural imagination in the realistic context. In the era of local coexistence, cultural identity is a kind of innate identity positioning. People can obtain spiritual conversion and support for settling down by blood relationship. Family, tribe, race and ethnicity are the main units of individual and group's cultural identity. Cultural identity, as a problem, is brought about by the changes of modern society and is increasingly prominent under the influence of western modernity and post-modernity. With the increasingly frequent transnational and cross-cultural communication, the connection between man and nature has been cut off, the connection between man and the countryside has been weakened, the stable social system has been transformed into a mobile society, and differences, hybridization, migration and diaspora have become common phenomena. The development of modernity, the integration of globalization and the development of new media make the cultural identity of individuals and groups face more possibilities.

The cultural identity is being eroded, which leads to a crisis of national identity (Ravshanova, 2021). The concern is especially about our youth. The universities students in China are growing up with the rapid development of the Internet and digital media. It is extremely easy for them to get information from the Internet and be influenced by this information and new ways of communication.

Ernest Geller (2002) believes that people do love their own culture, because they can now feel the atmosphere of culture, they know that they can not breathe without culture, can not guarantee the integrity of their identity. Jeremy Rifkin (2006) expressed a similar idea: cultural identity, gives people a way to make their voices heard and secure a safe shelter in a new multilayered world. Every culture has its own characteristics, and these characteristics are the core of the culture. Without the identification of these cores, these cultures will no longer be what they were. The identification of cultural core is the foundation of a culture and an important source of maintaining a nation and a country.

2.2 Implications of Digital Media on University Students' Cultural Identity

For a long time, the academic community has not reached a consensus on how digital media affects individual cultural identity. Some scholars argue that the role of media content should not be overstated. However, some other scholars insist that the influence of cultural products communicated by media should be at the core of the formation of individual cultural identity (Kellner 1995), because cultural products provide raw materials for individuals to construct cultural identity.

Cultural identity cognition does show the characteristics of integration and assimilation in the initial stage, and when the state of integration is further advanced, people will be surprised to find that each "small" me hidden under the "big" me retains its unique cultural imprint to a greater or lesser extent. New media have expanded the definition of "group" from country, nationality, region, religious belief to occupation, age, interest, virtual character, etc. Under this definition, a new cultural identity can be formed as long as common meaning space can be reached. The ideological cultural identity is sinking,

but the circular cultural identity begins to rise. While research projects have focused on the effect of digital media on cultural identity, a study provides new insight by investigating the reverse relationship. It may turn out that the relationship is not linear but cyclical where the two forces reinforce one another. Scholars should place greater emphasis on research aimed at investigating the impact of social identity, social media, interaction and engagement with online communication messages. Cultural identities have a direct impact on interaction on digital platforms. In cases where culture was described in relation to beliefs, individuals are more likely to defend beliefs central to their sense of identity when contradicted by new information. The intersection between science communication, cultural identity, and social media remains unclear (Dobbins et al., 2021).

It is worth mentioning that those who study abroad and those immigrant population may show stronger cultural identity although they are in foreign countries, which can be partly attributed to the access digital media. Social theories of national & cultural identity provides a way to understand identities at the intersection of local and distant circumstances - e.g. international student. It is interesting to explore cultural identities can be shaped by exposure to different cultures and what impact this exposure has on learners (Wang, 2017). An experiment provides an interesting insight into the manifestations of cultural and national identity when studying in a foreign country. Being exposed to direct & online interactions with other cultures triggers a reconsideration and enhanced appreciation for one's cultural roots. Qualitative interviews with 23 Chinese undergraduate students studying in the USA demonstrated that cultural values and identity is enhanced when studying abroad. Findings documented a heightened sense of national & cultural identity among Chinese intentional students. This is partially attributed to the role of digital media and online community building amongst foreign students (Zhao, 2020). Another study investigates the process of (re)shaping identity under multiple cultural backgrounds. These findings show that digital media plays a role in enabling returning Chinese students to mitigate language barriers, awake cultural memories, consolidate values and continue to improve international understanding and broad recognition from an intercultural perspective (Hu & Dai, 2021).

In 2019, in Han Xiaowen's research on the influence of Chinese and foreign media products on Chinese university students' cultural identity, it is found that, in the era of globalization, the content of cultural products has an impact on university students' cultural identity. Through a questionnaire survey of 295 university students, it analyzed the impact of the consumption of local and western cultural products on the national and global cultural identity of university students. The results of this study have confirmed the impact of cultural product consumption on individual cultural identity, and cultural products provide raw materials for the formation of cultural identity. The study found that reading Chinese local news media, reading books published by Chinese authors, and watching Chinese TV programs had a significant positive impact on cultural identity (Han, 2019). Furthermore, more exposure to cultural products with Chinese cultural content can enhance the cultural identity of university students. In 2014, Wu Shiwen and Shi Yibin conducted a study on cultural identity of audiences exposed to different media types and media content forms. The results show that the exposure of audiences to Chinese cultural content in electronic books, newspapers and television can predict their Chinese cultural identity, and the more exposure, the higher their Chinese cultural identity. It is concluded that the audience's contact and participation through various ways in the new media era can better shape the audience's values (Wu, Shi, 2014). Zhu Duogang and Ren Tianhao (2020) analyzed the influence of media on the young's national identity based on the survey data of Chinese netizens' social consciousness. The results have proved that the young' cultural identity is the result of media construction, and different media has different construction effects.

3 Methodology

In this research, quantitative research is used, and it is carried out by a questionnaire survey. Through the survey to collect quantitative data, how university students' cultural identity in China influenced by digital media is analyzed. The population for this research is totally around 60,000 university students from 3 universities in China, and the universities are chosen because of their similarity in size, level, major structure and course structure. The total sample is 600 university students, which is around 10% of the population, and they are selected at random from the three universities. In this research, MEIM-R scale is used to measure university students' cultural identity. Jean S. Phinney (1992) believes that identity is universal and members of all ethnic groups share a common ethnic identity. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) created by him and it was first published in 1992. MEIM scale has been widely used in the field of ethnic identity research. In order to improve the validity and reliability of the old version of MEIM, Phinney revised the MEIM scale and published in *Conceptualization and Measurement of Ethnic Identity: Current Status and Future Directions* in 2007. The revised version of MEIM (MEIM-R) consists of a total of six questions (Phinney, 2007) as following: as follows: I have spent time seeking out the history, traditions and customs of my ethnic group; I have a deep sense of belonging to my ethnic group. I understand very well what my ethnicity means to me; I often do things that contribute to my understanding of ethnic background; In order to better understand my ethnic group, I often communicate with others; I have a deep attachment to my ethnic group. The scale measures three aspects of ethnic group understanding, ethnic group attachment and behaviour disposition. A 5-level Likert scale is used to record respondents' agreement on specific statement items which are represented by 1-5 values: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree, which are graded from 1 to 5. The higher the score is, the stronger the ethnic identity is.

4 Themes and findings

Based on the data obtained in the survey, SPSS 26.0 is used to analyze. In the questionnaire survey, 'rarely use', 'less than a hour at a time', '1 to 3 hours at a time', '4-6 hours at a time' and 'more than 6 hours at a time' are used to categorize different students' time spent on digital media. When the variables are continuous variables, regression analysis is used for data analysis.

TABLE I: R^2 of the Regression Model of Media Use Time on Ethnic Identity

Response Variable	Predictor Variable	R Square	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
Ethnic Identity	Time Amount	.548	.547	.67320605

TABLE II: Regression Model of Media Use Time on Ethnic Identity

		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Ethnic Identity	Constant	-4.688E-16		.000	1.000
	Time	.740	.740	26.902	.000

According to the tables, university students' time spent on digital media has a positive impact on their sense of ethnic identity ($t=26.90$, $p<0.001$), and the contribution rate R^2 is 54.8%. This means the longer students use digital media, the stronger their sense of their ethnic identity is. The standardized regression coefficient of the regression model is 0.74, indicating that for every unit increase in university students' time spent on new media, the sense of their ethnic identity increases by 0.74 units.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Enhance cultural consciousness and cultural confidence of university students

It is anticipated that the findings will provide education policymakers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how digital media & culture will shape education in the short and long run, and suggestions as carrying out the education of cross-cultural communication and promoting the construction of Chinese culture image are included. Cultural consciousness can be understood as the cognition and understanding of one's own culture, including the profound understanding of the source, characteristics and development trend of Chinese culture. As Chinese people, especially young students, cultural confidence is the necessary quality for mastering Chinese culture, which is manifested as the affirmation, adherence, inheritance and promotion of fine traditions of Chinese culture (Xu, 2022). Chinese university students in the new era should take the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as their own responsibility. University students are the main body of cultural identity, they should give full play to their subjective initiative in Chinese traditional cultural identity. Cultural consciousness and cultural confidence are the two key spiritual qualities of China's current social development, and also the basic guiding concept of Chinese cultural identity education (Liang, 2022).

5.2 Carry forward Chinese traditional culture

Culture is the spiritual and moral foundation of a country and a nation. It is an important part of the development of human society and one of the soft power of a country and a nation. The development and progress of culture is a very important part of human history. Cultural construction is of great significance to the development and progress of a country and a nation. Many ideas, values and moral codes in traditional culture have always influenced the history and culture of the Chinese nation. Although the changes of times and social progress have brought challenges and pressures to Chinese traditional culture. However, some values and spirits in traditional culture still have realistic significance and far-reaching influence, and these reasonable elements are what we should carry forward and inherit. Strengthening the construction of Chinese traditional culture is an important link to strengthen cultural identity. Chinese traditional culture is the spiritual wealth of the Chinese nation and an important part of world culture. It not only contains the profound historical and cultural deposits of the Chinese nation, but also has the essence of art and the spirit of the times.

5.3 Use digital media to enhance university students' cultural identity

Digital media has gradually become the main channel for transmitting culture, entertainment and information (Zhang, 2021). When university students get all kinds of information and entertainment from various digital media terminals every day, digital media is also promoting their exploration of culture, thought and cognitive mode. Universities use digital media to transmit educational content with national identity, which is suitable for students' consumption preference of network culture. Undergraduate students study and work on digital media platforms for a long time, and use digital media to enhance their cultural identity is the only way. Countries can adopt a strategy to protect their traditional culture. This strategy is heavily reliant upon schooling and education policy because schools are the main site for cultural cultivation and transmission (Chiang, Zhou, 2019). The dissemination of culture through new media can not only let more people know about culture and Chinese culture, but also deepen students' knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture. Universities should carry out online and offline multi-cultural activities on campus to guide undergraduate students to realize the integration of cultural confidence, knowledge and practice. Universities can give full play to their own characteristics, take advantage of digital media, explore new ways of cultural identity education, improve students' Chinese quality, and promote the

development of comprehensive strength of the school.

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