

The Construction of Chinese Internet Culture in the Era of New Media—A Case Study of Bilibili

Qizhen Han^{1, a, †, *}, Yi Rong^{2, b, †, *}, Ru Zeng^{3, c, †, *}

¹Xi'an University of Finance and Economics, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710100, China

²Department of Film and Media, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 3N6, Canada

³Wuhan Polytechnic University, Wuhan, Hubei 430040, China

*Corresponding author. Email: ^aQizhen0205@126.com, ^b18yr2@queensu.ca, ^cYolandazr@163.com

[†]These authors contributed equally.

ABSTRACT

This paper takes the environment of the development of contemporary new media as the background to explore and discuss how the mainstream media industry can adapt to the trend and build a young and interactive network culture. Concerning the previous literature, we mainly analyzed the video website Bilibili, which is being loved by young people, from the three aspects of bullet curtain culture, community culture, and business culture. The results show that the media industry's approach to leading users' needs is no longer applicable, and now users' needs have become the direction of change for the media industry. The rise of Bilibili has brought an innovative cultural trend to China's new media industry and reflects youth culture's importance. Mainstream media companies should change their development direction and adapt to the cultural needs of youth groups. After an in-depth analysis of the three cultures, people increasingly pursued new media products with selectivity and interactivity. Other media companies should adapt to the general environment, develop interactive and clustered commercial products. At the same time, media companies should limit users' real name access, raise the threshold for posting comments, ensure users' quality, and maintain network order.

Keywords: *Bullet Curtain Culture, Community Culture, Business Culture, Bilibili, Chinese New Media Industry*

1. INTRODUCTION

After the rapid development in the past few years, the overall situation of China's new media is becoming more and more stable. The whole industry has entered a stage of steady growth, but innovation and adjustment are needed for the industry to grow. The development of new media has exerted a great influence on the economy, society, and culture. People no longer focus on using media to watch videos but pay more attention to its communication value and utilization value. The development of "We Media" has made media no longer exclusive to officials or celebrities. And personal channels, like video software Tiktok, have come into the public. More and more people create their own accounts to share their lives on different new media platforms, bringing people an external source of income. With the development of China's idol economy, the community culture is becoming more and more obvious. People with the same interests create their space on the media to chat.

However, the development of new media in China is undergoing a major adjustment, problems in information

dissemination and network supervision, etc. Users also have higher and higher requirements for the Internet and new media. With new developments in both domestic and international markets, it is time for China's new media to explore and develop a new path.

Bilibili UP host (video maker), community culture (gather people with the same interests), and business culture (major customers) just meet the needs of contemporary people for new media. Bilibili is a video-sharing software for young people of Generation Z - users born between 1990 and 2009 account for up to 81.7%, which was established on June 26, 2009, and listed on NASDAQ in the United States on March 28, 2018. According to Bilibili's statement for the second quarter ended June 30, 2020, the total net profit of Bilibili reached the US \$370.5 million. Average monthly active users reached 171.6 million [1]. Bilibili is also the first Animation, Comics, and Games (ACG) related bullet curtain video sharing software in the Chinese mainland [2]. Bilibili bought the copyright of much Japanese anime that attracted a large number of fans, making Bilibili becomes the first choice of people who like animation.

At present, Bilibili is also the largest Professional User Generated Content (PUGC) platform in China, attracting many content video producers [1]. During the special period of Covid-19, video software has become the best choice for people to spend their leisure time at home. To attract more users, most video software had introduced a lot of relaxing packages and movie collections. At the same time, Bilibili retains the younger users and attracted a group of older customers. Although Bilibili does not buy new TV series and movies, it can find old TV series, which solves the troubles of the elders. There is no doubt that the rise of Bilibili has added new culture and impetus into the development of new media in China.

This article takes Bilibili as a case study to explore the development of network culture, for example, bullet curtain and community culture, in the context of media convergence. Besides, we would summarize some suggestions for the development mode of cultural construction (build a young and interactive network culture) under the contemporary new media environment. The second part of our paper presents the research method. The third part analyzes Bilibili and its influence on other video software from three aspects: bullet curtain culture, audience culture, and community culture. There are also suggestions for the development of Bilibili and other new media industries. The final part summarizes the main findings of our study.

2. METHOD

Literature review is the main research method in this study. We used this method to get a lot of information about Bilibili. Moreover, we collected information about Bilibili's community culture, bullet screen comments, and ACG subculture from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Other secondary data sources mainly come from the media report, journal article, and scholar's speech video record.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We mainly analyze the network culture of Bilibili from three aspects: bullet curtain culture, community culture, and target audience. The bullet curtain is a favorite way for young people to comment in recent years, and it is one of Bilibili's competitive advantages. Community culture is a feature of Bilibili, which provides a platform for people with the same interests to communicate so that Bilibili has many loyal fans. The target audience is an analysis of Bilibili's main customer groups.

3.1. Bullet Curtain Culture of Bilibili

The bullet curtain that refers to the captions of comments comes out when watching a video that originated in Japan. The bullet curtain video system was originated from the Japanese video sharing website

Niconico Animation. Acfun was the first one introduced in China, but Bilibili is the best one to develop the bullet curtain culture. Bullet curtain makes single video software became the best choice of expressing impressions. Users can send their own thoughts while watching the video, and they can also see the bullet curtain sent by others, which gives people a feeling of "real-time interaction" or even "space dialogue", for example, watching the video released three years ago in this year, we can see the comments left at that time. Bilibili has a variety of channels for users to choose from, which provides a platform for people who have the same hobbies to watch their favorite videos together, while the existence of the bullet curtain allows them to watch videos while chatting (you can also see the number of real-time viewers on the web page), eliminating the step of switching to the chat software. The content of the bullet curtain is also varied, although there are verbal attacks and unenriching comments, it cannot hide the joy of the bullet curtain. Many Internet slang words are popular in the bullet curtain, making people feel friendly, especially among young people. Thus it can be seen that the bullet curtain is not only a tool for people to express their feelings but also a medium for emotional transmission [3]. This attracted a lot of curious and young users to use Bilibili and turn them into regular users.

The bullet curtain culture of Bilibili satisfies contemporary people's demand for the interactivity of new media software, and its success also influences other new media software. The most obvious are large video platforms like Tencent Video and iQIYI, which used to scroll down to the comments section to see what others were thinking, but now you can see comments while watching a video. Even QQ Music, a music-playing software, will appear bullet curtain when playing music videos. Although their bullet curtain is not as outstanding as Bilibili, it can satisfy the interactive function of video software, which is a good phenomenon of high-quality cultural spread in the development of new media.

3.2. Community Culture of Bilibili

In the 1960s, Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan discussed the development of mass media. One of his famous theories was the idea of a "global village", in which everybody is involved in everybody else's life [4]. As we are in the 21st century of the digital era, the Internet has created a wireless "global village" and made people extremely connected online. Subculture benefits most from the concept. People from subculture groups can now quickly find others with similar interests and share the same identity online. As they quickly gather together on the Internet, a new form of virtual community culture has developed.

Bilibili, one of the most popular video-sharing websites in contemporary mainland China, is well known for its unique virtual community culture. As introduced

in the previous part, Bilibili originated from Japanese animation and comics content, and it focuses on animation, comics, games, and novels. The social mainstream does not widely accept such culture, and it's only popular among a limited number of people. Because of that, as a platform that gathers a lot of related content, Bilibili attracts a large number of ACGN fans, who are mainly young users belonging to generation Z, and becomes a gathering place of ACGN culture. These youth users can watch the animation and comics they like on the Bilibili website. Its unique commentary system of "bullet curtain" enables them to post real-time comments over the ongoing video. Bilibili provides the platform for ACGN fans, a minority group, to find the group with the same taste and communicate with each other through the real-time commentary system. Such interactive systems constitute a stable user group, effectively enhancing the feel of participation for every user. More importantly, it also enhances the identity among youthful subculture groups and the sense of identity in the community [5]. In Mu Hu et al.'s 2016 study of the role of self-construal and community interactivity, the result found that independent construal was positively related to community usage and community participation in video sharing communities [6]. This result indicates that the video-sharing community, like Bilibili's virtual community, enables young generations to find a sense of belongings and discover the real selves.

Over several years of development, today's Bilibili not only limits itself in the ACGN culture, but has also become an inclusive multicultural community that covers content in diversified areas. With Bilibili's success, other leading video-sharing websites in mainland China also started to develop their own community culture. In recent years, Tencent video and iQiyi began to produce reality shows focusing on a talent competition, which popularized Korean K-pop culture among Chinese audiences. Those video-sharing websites no longer only play the role of the platform for minority groups to gather. They start to become the disseminator of subculture and influence the mainstream culture. People, especially adolescents from virtual communities, have the enormous potential to lead public opinion and challenge the existing social norms. The rise of community culture is a phenomenon of Internet culture, and it also could be a revolution of subculture leading by youth.

3.3. Business Culture of Bilibili

3.3.1. Target audience

According to the Mobile Internet 2017 Q2 Summer Report released by data company Quest Mobile, station B ranks first among the top ten apps preferred by young users aged 24 and below [7]. And in the 2016 hottest topics released by Baidu, Bilibili ranked first among the

top ten fresh attention apps after 00 [7]. It is undeniable that the ghost and animal videos on Bilibili are very popular among young persons, because of this type of video more exciting and fun than ordinary videos. Simultaneously, according to the user portraits provided by the July 2017 User Survey Report on Station B, the education level of users at Bilibili is mainly undergraduate, which also builds a younger and highly educated audience for Bilibili [8]. These audiences have created a positive, lively and innovative, and healthy environment for Bilibili. According to the analysis of Bilibili's target users, attracting high-quality users is conducive to their development. Building a network culture in the new media era requires fresh blood. It is these young people who promote the birth and development of new network culture.

3.3.2. Product diversification

Bilibili contains multiple content sections, and each content section is composed of various small areas. And it involves many topics such as animation, games, and fashion. Bilibili provides an environment of "own" for creators and audiences so they can find their sense of belonging. To attract more persons like the same things, people in the circle will continue to create and publish new content. These have brought a lot of high-quality content to Bilibili. To test the audience's loyalty to Bilibili, Bilibili conducts a "user review test" for audiences who want to become full members [8]. By passing the exam, people can become full members, which provides high-quality creators and video content for Bilibili.

3.3.3. Building fan loyalty

In new media, various new communication methods have emerged, such as live broadcast, barrage, and group discussions. These methods promote the interaction between the audience and the media platform. For Bilibili, the most distinctive feature is that it provides a unique barrage communication platform. Through this platform, audiences not only can share their opinions, but also can make secondary creations. The audience is not only the recipient of the video but also the product [8]. It gives the audience a sense of accomplishment and gives a sense of belonging, which significantly enhances user stickiness and brings many loyal fans to Bilibili. In the era of new media, Internet culture has developed rapidly, with many distinctive cultures emerging and attracting many fans. But precisely because of this, how to maintain fan loyalty is a problem. Bilibili shows that the platform not only improve itself to attract the audience. But more importantly, let the audience become fans of the platform spontaneously.

3.3.4. *Building partnership and cooperation*

Seeking stable and high-quality partners is very beneficial to the development of the platform itself. For example, up owners are the most important partners of Bilibili [9]. Bilibili provides related services and equipment support for up owners, such as improving supervision to combat plagiarism of original content. Also, Bilibili has established the barrage culture and community culture, and strengthened the interactive communication between the up owners and the audience, and so on. Simultaneously, Bilibili is also actively seeking third-party cooperation, such as the People's Daily and other official media [4]. It strives to create positive energy videos to guide the mainstream values of society. In comics, it is seeking cooperation with Japan's Kyoto Animation [9] and also. Cooperating with NetEase in gaming, etc. Bilibili actively seeks collaboration and keeps up with the new era's requirements to further enhance its competitiveness.

In summary, in the era of new media, it is essential to build a benign network culture. And Bilibili gave a perfect example to all major platforms. Bilibili has grown from obscurity to become one of the largest video sites in China, and its advantages and its own competitiveness are undeniable.

As we all know, the value of Internet culture is the new values and lifestyles of people formed through the Internet [10]. Therefore, it is vital to building a healthy network culture in the era of new media. Building a network culture requires fresh blood. It is these young audiences to promote the birth and development of new Internet culture. Besides, to make a healthy network culture, the platform does well in a user review, and guides great social mainstream values.

4. CONCLUSION

Nowadays, as we are in digital information era, the Internet is playing a pivotal role in shaping people's behaviour. In recent years, the development of media technology provides technical support for people to enjoy convenient online entertainment at home. Especially during the pandemic, most of the entertainment places were forced to close, more and more people started to change the way they entertain, and turned to online entertainment. Traditional ways of entertainment are eliminated, and the new media industry is dominating the future. The demand for online entertainment will continue to increase, and it is not hard to predict that video-sharing media, like Bilibili, will lead the future. Using Bilibili as a case study this paper explores the construction of modern-day Internet culture in the era of new media. By studying Bilibili's culture, we can predict the future influence it has on the entire new media industry and find how the innovative Internet culture would direct the future of the industry.

Bilibili undoubtedly is dominant in the new media industry in mainland China. It is one of the most popular websites among Chinese young people, a multi-culture platform that collects videos of all forms. We found three unique features that distinguish Bilibili from other video-sharing websites in the marketplaces, the participatory culture, audience culture, as well as its virtual community. Originating from Japanese animation and comics, Bilibili's contents attract many subculture groups to gather together at the same platform. The innovative commentary system of "bullet curtain" introduced real-time interaction to the users, dramatically increasing their interactivity and sense of identity. This new form of comment is quickly accepted and popularized by young users and changes the traditional way of comment in the industry. More and more new media companies have started to adopt "bullet curtain" commentary systems on their own websites and apps in order to increase user engagement. With the development of media technology, the Internet becomes a free place for people to communicate. The emergence of video-sharing new media provides the platform for subculture groups to gather. People form communities online and find their sense of belongings and identities through these virtual communities. The communicability of the Internet popularized those subculture communities. Even mainstream media has started to join those communities by creating their official accounts on Bilibili. A lot of leading new media companies also learn after Bilibili to develop their virtual communities. In the era of new media, building a network culture needs fresh blood, and the injection of fresh blood can carry out innovative development of network culture. To build a healthy online culture, the platform not only does well in a user review, but also guides good social mainstream values. As for platforms, platforms should not only improve themselves to attract audiences but, more importantly, making audiences become fans of platforms spontaneously. Finally, cooperating is vital. They are learning to cooperate and play a positive role.

The rise of Bilibili brings a new and innovative cultural trend to the Chinese new media industry. It is influencing mainstream media companies to adjust themselves in order to adopt youth culture. Like Tencent video and iQiyi, some leading companies all start to follow after Bilibili's operating conditions, creating content that matches with contemporary popular culture. However, although Bilibili achieves great success, it still is facing some problems. Recently, it has been involved in some public criticism and crisis for unhealthy content. Today, the biggest two problems Bilibili is facing are the questions about how to improve its supervision and be more influential in the global market. This is not only the problem for Bilibili but also the problem for all Chinese new media companies. These problems lead to deeper research in the field.

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