

Study on the Aesthetic of the Ugly from the Perspective of "We Media" Taking Brother Potion as an Example

Zhijing Zhu^{1,*} Guicheng Zhuang¹

¹ School of Humanities, Jiangnan University, Wuhan, Hubei 430056, China

*Corresponding author. Email: gczhuang@163.com

ABSTRACT

"Local flavor culture" is a kind of network subculture which is accompanied by new technologies such as short video and network broadcast. The rapid popularization of mobile Internet and the increasing popularity of short videos provide an excellent opportunity for the development of "local flavor culture", which makes it get rid of the identity of marginal culture and gradually become a hot phenomenon that attracts public attention and affection. As an important continuation form of network media, we media has laid a solid foundation for the further dissemination of local flavor culture. Brother Potion's rising to stardom, as a typical example of "local flavor culture", is analyzed in this paper to summarize the characteristics of aesthetic of the ugly under "We Media" and the main reasons for the popularity of local flavor culture. In this way, people who appreciate local flavor culture can keep calm and not get lost in all kinds of network culture.

Keywords: *We media, Local flavor culture, Aesthetic of the ugly, Brother Potion.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Local flavor culture refers to "the content with strong local flavor as 'MC', which was created by netizens and spread on various short video platforms represented by Tiktok" [1]. It has almost the same development trajectory as some other network cultural phenomena. They all rise on the Internet platform but are not limited to it. Instead, they begin to organically integrate into traditional media and even real communication activities.

2. WE MEDIA AND AESTHETIC OF THE UGLY

2.1 Local Flavor Culture

The analysis of local flavor culture shows that it is a relatively special text born under the background of prevailing consumer culture. It believes that the original ecology should be highlighted, and there is no need to dig deeply in the connotation, which well meets the curiosity and even the aesthetic of the ugly of some netizens. It is usually posted in the short video platforms, spread

rapidly among the netizens through various social platforms including microblog, and become a cultural phenomenon with strong attraction to the majority of Internet users under the circulation of relevant subjects such as Internet users. Prevalence of local flavor culture reflects the previously vulnerable groups under the Internet environment is endowed with certain "power" and the self-showing stage. The psychological needs of these groups have been met to a certain extent. Therefore, it is an important way for local culture to gain more people's attention and recognition, and a competitive strategy deliberately adopted by the short video industry to entrench itself.

2.2 We Media

At the end of 2002, Dan Gilmore, a well-known American columnist, proposed the concept of "We Media". In January the following year, he published an article named news for the Next Generation: Here Comes "We Media" that analyzed and discussed the growth trend of media in Columbia Journalism Review. In July 2003, Shane Berman and others published a report entitled "We Media", which analyzed the problems of how media operate

and develop in the new era. Not long after, "Dan Gilmore also published *We The Media*, a special discussion on the birth and growth of We Media" [2]. Chinese scholars' research on "We Media" started in 2005. Up to now, quite fruitful research results have been achieved, covering many fields such as definition of relevant concept, public opinion guidance and legal regulation. "In essence, We Media is an extended form of network media, which can be classified into the category of network platform operating system" [3]. Thanks to the "We Media" platform, local flavor culture has grown rapidly and successfully attracted the attention of the vast number of netizens.

2.3 *The Popularity of Brother Potion*

Brother Potion first came to the public eye on October 3, 2017, when he appeared as a technical anchor on Panda Live. He called his studio "Panda's trump card," but one netizen, who was dissatisfied with the name, rebuked him, "Do you really have the strength to be an ace?" "Will you spend the whole evening arguing with me about this? Will you have the guts?" asked an angry Brother Potion. So they quarreled all night, but they just repeated the same sentence: "Are you good enough?" The argument lasted for nearly eight hours, from 8 p.m. on October 3 to 3 a.m. the next morning. The next day, Brother Potion became a hot topic on Baidu's search engine and a top trending topic on Weibo. This also led him to go further and further on the road of "local flavor art". He became more famous after joining Huya Live, where he mainly chatted with people, dressed dirty and acted crazy, even insulted black fans and chatted with the campus belle of Wuhan University on the Internet.

Some fans say it's performance art in a way. In the beginning, everyone will be amazed at the development and tolerance of the Internet, allowing fools to broadcast live. But when you dig deeper, his wit becomes apparent: he knows he's playing dumb, and his fans know he's playing dumb, which is a good example of dramatic life. He can be a student at Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, a tragic orphan, a victim of depression after being beaten, or a pyramid selling godfather who leads his staff to clap and dance. In the dark yellow room, he made twisted body movements in front of the camera, crying and laughing alternately, and pretended to say positive energy sayings in a playful way, hiding his true self deeply under the mask.

3. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AESTHETIC OF THE UGLY UNDER "WE MEDIA"

3.1 *Distinct Epochal Characteristics*

The early local flavor culture represented by Sister Lotus and Pang Mailang who sang "My Skateboard Shoes" in the early years was to satisfy the audience's curiosity, while the present Brother Potion and teacher Guo have become the representation of popular culture, which is because it fits the audience's psychology of secondary creation. The survey showed that most people did not stick to the live stream. Instead, they got to know these "Internet celebrities" through the secondary creation of netizens, such as static and dynamic emoticons made by screenshots and wacky videos, and promoted them to a wider audience. Secondary creators realize their creative intentions through emoticons. In addition, the current "We Media" platforms, such as Bilibili, Tiktok, Kuaihou and various live broadcasting platforms, all allow the audience to make real-time comments and interactions through "bullet screens", thus further promoting the breadth and popularity of communication, which is also a full manifestation of interactivity.

3.2 *The Symbolization of Local Flavor Culture*

Baudrillard, a famous French philosopher, pointed out that "in order to become widely recognized consumption objects by the public, it is necessary for an object to be made into a specific symbol. The stars and Internet celebrities are no longer people in the pure sense, but endowed with the identity of commodities and transformed into a special materialized existence" [4]. In such an environment, anything and people that can generate traffic can be considered cultural products. In order not to move bricks at the construction site and be waiters, the anchors who live broadcast act crazy in front of the camera and complete the original accumulation of capital in this process. Brother Potion's video shows the Goddess leaving in the Maserati while he sits helplessly on the ground, wailing and beating himself. What the audience does not know is that the Maserati is Brother Potion's own, and finally the audience has become Brother Potion or the teacher Guo. This is a small and insignificant irony of the consumer society.

Gradually, they are no longer themselves, but are stripped down to a symbol, an entertainment symbol, they are anyone, you or me. As long as you wear a mask, everyone can be Brother Potion. The Brother Potion in real life may just be a poor man without fixed income, longing for sweet love and being bullied by the network all day long. This model is also easy to replicate. Some anchors found that as long as they used dirty words and employed anti-fans to build momentum, their popularity will unexpectedly began to rise.

3.3 Local Flavor Culture Is a Special Text of Consumption Society

Against the background of consumer society, cultural consumption can be summarized into several levels. Not only do people have access to relatively high-end, sophisticated cultural products, but they also have the opportunity to explore some accessible ways to help with stress management. Local flavor culture falls under the latter category. "Local flavor culture makes use of easy-to-understand, primitive and life-close expressions to create and convey happiness for the audience, which well caters to their curiosity and even the aesthetic of the ugly" [5]. Local flavor culture, a text that survives on the Internet as a medium, has evolved into a place of meaning struggle in the process of development. The producers of local flavor culture try to increase their own popularity and grab money, while the average netizens will watch it with mixed feeling, some for fun, some to get rid of boredom, and some for satisfaction. When the local flavor culture is labeled as a commodity, more and more communication platforms begin to explore the economic benefits contained in it and turn it into a marketing method, which can often produce a good response among fans.

4. THE CAUSE OF THE POPULARITY OF LOCAL FLAVOR CULTURE

4.1 Meeting the Psychological Needs of Grassroots People

"Nowadays, the competition of short video platforms is becoming increasingly fierce, and content innovation has encountered a huge bottleneck" [6]. Differentiated performances can leave a deep impression on the vast majority of Internet users, but the repeated impact of similar

content will also lead to aesthetic fatigue. The accelerated pace of life has increased the pressure of grassroots people, forcing them to effectively vent their psychological pressure. The individual's sense of superiority was enhanced to a certain extent during the viewing of the local flavor video. In addition, such videos use entertainment in a light way to convey certain values. No matter under what circumstances, local flavor videos that show self-mockery, worship, or cute, innocent images are all entertainment, which undoubtedly conforms to the grassroots principle of "happiness first" and "entertainment first".

4.2 The Psychological Boost of Curiosity and Aesthetic of the Ugly

The increasing pressure of life makes ordinary people lose interest in everyday things, so "ugly culture" is promoted to meet certain psychological needs. In this context, the "national aesthetic of the ugly" has become more and more intense, and has been highlighted in interpersonal communication. "Superficially, the spread of local flavor videos benefits from two main features: 'aesthetic of the ugly' and 'curiosity'" [7]. However, from a deeper perspective, these videos use special symbols as the medium to describe and show secular and dramatic images to attract the public's attention. This group finds a new way to express themselves, which makes up for the lack of discourse power caused by personal social status in the real background, and develops into an important way for the local culture to promote themselves, so as to obtain their own sense of belonging and satisfaction in the corresponding circles.

4.3 Realization of Flow and Platform Boost

In order to attract traffic, Brother Potion performs exaggerated performances in front of the camera to win the attention of fans, and realizes the cash of traffic with the help of gift reward. Short-video platforms such as Tiktok and Kuaishou display commodity purchase links in the videos, directly boosting the traffic monetization of communicators. Microblog has set up the recommendation section on the home page to increase the exposure rate of relevant bloggers, encourage and reward high-quality content producers, and award certain titles to gain the help of certain traffic resources.

5. CONCLUSION

Under the joint action of many factors, the original ecological color of local flavor culture began to fade away to meet the general netizens' aesthetic of the ugly, and gradually developed into the accumulation of visual symbols with a high degree of similarity. The clothes, language and actions of the protagonists in the video are highly similar and stereotyped, and the narrative is almost the same. The original communication meaning of local flavor culture began to dissipate, and "authenticity" gradually disappeared, while "playability" and "duplicity" dominated. The evolution of network culture shows that local flavor culture may not survive for a long time, and will be replaced by other more characteristic "waves" in the tide of network culture. Some netizens who appreciate the culture with curiosity or even aesthetic of the ugly will leave without any nostalgia once they lose their sense of freshness.

Local flavor culture, as a kind of popular cultural phenomenon bred in the Internet era, should be reasonably restrained. The average netizen should have a clear understanding of the illusory and the reality to avoid getting lost in the network culture and becoming a tool of capital control, rather than say goodbye to the network world. The worship of stars or Internet celebrities is just an approach to bring satisfaction and spiritual entertainment. Therefore, netizens, as subjects, should always regard them as objects. Every move below network medium can further abet the undesirable atmosphere that entertainment is supreme. When appreciating local culture, it is necessary to be calm and sober, so as not to indulge in it like a moth to the fire, and not to lose oneself in the cultural carnival that is difficult to distinguish.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Zhijing Zhu devoted to collecting, sorting out data and wrote the manuscript; Guicheng Zhuang contributed to revising and editing.

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