

# Concept, Perspective and Method

## A Review of Researches on Foreign Online Celebrities

Yiwen Ding<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China

\*Email: 20181303500@gdufs.edu.cn

### ABSTRACT

With the development of internet technology and the advancement of globalization, it has become normal for people from different cultural backgrounds to communicate with each other through the internet. In this context, the number of "foreign online celebrities" has gradually increased, and the content they post on the Internet has also been enriched. This article compares literature related to the foreign online celebrities, and evaluates the definition, classification, characteristics, content and role of foreign online celebrities, as well as the communication problems that have arisen and the corresponding measures for their management. This paper holds that although the academic circles pay more and more attention to the research on foreign online celebrities, as an emerging research object, it still lacks clear research direction and research methods, and the conclusion is relatively single. In future research on foreign Internet Celebrities, scholars may be able to innovate research perspectives, adopt different research methods, pay attention to other aspects of the audience needs of foreign Internet users, so as to conduct in-depth and systematic research on foreign Internet users.

**Keywords:** Foreign online celebrities, Research overview, International communication

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As the rapidly rise and globalisation progresses of China, the One Belt One Road policy has led to more frequent exchanges with countries along the route. China is taking a more open-minded approach to the world stage, letting Chinese stories go beyond its borders and trying to "go out". The world also needs to know more about China being able to communicate with each other. The development of the Internet has provided a bridge between China and the world. At present, it is no longer a problem for people from different cultures to communicate on the Internet.

With the popularity and development of smartphones and 5G technology, people rely more on timely and fragmented access to information. When people are tired of simple pictures and text, the emergence of short videos has enriched people's access to information. Short videos are rich in information, simple to operate and extremely easy to spread. In the background of this era, a special group of "foreign online celebrities" has emerged. Through short videos, they capture what they see and hear in China, and at the same time introduce the culture and food of their own

country to people around the world, playing the role of cross-cultural communication. The contents of these videos are diverse and rich. They also highlight the cultural differences between China and the rest of the world, facilitating exchanges between China and the world. This paper aims to review the current research on communication among foreign online celebrities and to summarise the current shortcomings and possible directions of development in this research area.

### 2. REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

#### 2.1. Definition, classification and characteristics of foreign online celebrities

The concept of "foreign online celebrities" is an emerging group, which has been developed from "net celebrities". According to the definition of Yin Jun and Zhang Yueyue, "net celebrities" are people who use the Internet as the original channel to become famous, i.e. "net celebrities", and are the products of specific social conditions[1]. It is the product of a combination of specific social conditions and human psychological factors. Ao Peng believes that online platforms and audience interaction are the two core elements of the

concept of net celebrity, and divides the development of net celebrity into three stages according to the form of communication: the next era, the graphic era and the rich media era. It is in the rich media era that the concept of "foreign online celebrity" developed [2]. In these three stages, Shen Xiao et al. suggest that the development model of net popularity has gradually expanded, with net celebrities in the past carrying out their activities mainly as individuals, but nowadays, net celebrities gradually have their teams, and even capital has entered, forming industrial synergy [3]. In terms of the development status of weblebrities, Hu Yong and Zhang Yuezhi argue that the long-term development of weblebrities needs to be achieved through professional production, combining the personal charisma of weblebrities with team operation, and IP-ization through capital promotion [4].

In general, foreign online celebrities have been around since 2004, with the number gradually increasing with the degree of world exchange. Earlier, Deng summarised the following characteristics of foreign bloggers in China popular in blogs: blog names with Chinese characteristics, bloggers mainly located in first-tier cities in China, and bloggers mainly from English-speaking countries such as the United States [5]. According to journalist Li Jie, with the promotion of the digital economy, "foreign online celebrities" from all over the world are creating funny content with Chinese elements featuring foreigners by virtue of their fluency in Chinese and their knowledge of Chinese customs and culture [6]. According to the definition of net popularity, Guo Guohua, Gao Wei and Li Huifang define "foreign net celebrities" as foreigners who have become popular on Chinese online platforms after being noticed by the majority of Chinese netizens in the real world or online [7]. Feng Shuqi further defines "foreign online celebrities" as foreigners who are self-media bloggers in China, whose main audience, main communication language and main communication platform are all positioned around China [8]. They have a deep understanding of Chinese culture and have a certain degree of communication influence. Yang Meng uses the beeping website as the main research platform and defines foreign online celebrities as having a fan following of over 500,000 on the beeping website [9]. Xia Feifei and Pan Qiongqiong define "foreign online celebrities" as non-Chinese netizens who mostly have the experience of living or studying in China [10]. Pang Yu-Liang also focuses on the experience of foreign bloggers living in China and defines the concept in detail, taking into account the situation of transnational couples and expatriates of Chinese descent [11]. Regarding the classification of foreign internet celebrities, Wang Guohua et al. classify the group of foreign internet celebrities into four categories, namely dignitaries, businessmen, celebrities and grassroots [7], according to their professional types and personal

identities, represented by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Tesla CEO Musk, Korean singer "Uncle Bird" and Israeli student Gao Yousi. At the same time, the development of foreign online celebrities can be divided into the old period when "channels were king" in the traditional media era and the new period when "content was king" in the new media era.

## ***2.2. Analysis of the content of the communication of foreign online celebrities***

In the web 1.0 era, text and pictures were the main content of communication by weblebrities. In his study of blogs by foreigners in China, Deng points out that the comments and reports of "foreign online celebrities" are mostly personal opinions and feelings, mostly in the form of text and pictures [5]. With the development of the self-media era, the content and forms of communication of "foreign online celebrities" have become more diversified. Wang Guohua, Gao Wei and Li Huifang distinguish the grassroots type of foreign online celebrities from the other three types of foreign online celebrities and use them as research subjects, arguing that the grassroots type of netizens are more inclined to use short videos to present personalised content with Chinese characteristics, grasp the psychology of the audience, and are recognized by mainstream media [7].

In terms of agenda-setting, Gu Xiangyu believes that "foreign online celebrities" have a clear bias in setting the topics of short videos, mostly praising China from a small perspective in a humorous and light-hearted way. Gao Biyao concludes that the content produced by "foreign online celebrities" mostly focuses on Chinese characters, Chinese festivals, lifestyles, and hot topics in China.

In terms of narrative characteristics, Cai Yucheng analysed typical cases using frame theory and suggested that under the combined effect of cultural logic, transmitter logic and audience logic, foreign online celebrities used symbols to metaphorically construct a positive image of China as a great nation in their video content. In addition, Feng Shuqi analyses the communication content of foreign online celebrities from three perspectives: works, content and narrative, and summarises their original, popular, entertaining and popular characteristics [8]. Yang Meng argues that the familiar scenarios constructed in foreign Netflix videos for Chinese audiences, such as foreigners experiencing Chinese food and speaking in dialect, can give a higher sense of empathy, while the video titles need to highlight the cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures to attract audiences [9]. Xia Feifei and Pan Qiong take the example of "Korean Dongdong", a foreign netizen who focuses on soft cultural content such as film and entertainment, and suggest that their videos are divided into two types of recordings:

personal experience and guests, and their emotional orientation is mostly positive and neutral [10]. Qiu Guanghua takes "I am Guo Jierui", one of the top foreign weblebrities, as an example, and investigates that the key to good Chinese storytelling lies in its civilian first-person narrative, which gives viewers an immersive experience and is highly humanistic [12].

In terms of thematic genres, different scholars have given different classifications. Qi Airong and Yang Kang summarised four types of communication content for foreign online celebrities: language teaching, street interviews, science on cultural differences, and funny challenge videos [13]. Liang conducted an in-depth study of five top foreign weblebrities on Sina Weibo, suggesting that the thematic types of their communication content include observation of Chinese culture, display of their own culture, travel photography in "third-party" countries, world evaluation, and others. These videos present cultural differences from an objective standpoint and capture the psychology of the audience [14].

In general, the current research results on the analysis of the communication content of foreign online celebrities can summarise a relatively complete set of theoretical frameworks and research ideas.

### ***2.3. Analysis of the communication role of foreign online celebrities***

The current analysis of the communication role of foreign online celebrities is more comprehensive and objective, addressing the positive aspects of foreign online celebrities while not ignoring the negative ones. At the level of communication role, Wang Guohua, Gao Wei and Li Huifang argue that "foreign online celebrities" are promoters of the net popularity economy, constructors of the national image from the perspective of the other, key discussions of international topics, and disseminators of Chinese culture [7].

In terms of internal communication, Gu Xiangyu suggests that foreign Netflix videos can enhance national self-confidence from the perspective of personal integration needs, emotional transformation needs, cognitive needs, and social integration needs, and that the bilingual subtitles of the videos also accumulate bilingual knowledge for viewers while satisfying their entertainment needs. Qi Airong and Yang Kang use a combination of theory and case studies to suggest that "foreign online celebrities" have promoted the development of China's short-form video industry [13]. Qiu Guanghua suggests that foreign online celebrities have played a role in recording social changes and witnessing China's development, presenting a diverse, objective and realistic China [12]. He Qing describes foreign online celebrities as Sinologists in the new era

of the Internet, telling Chinese stories and spreading Chinese culture [15].

In terms of foreign communication, Du Guodong believes that foreign online celebrities have played a key role in international communication and that communication innovations have expanded the subject, content and mode of international communication [16]. Gao Wei similarly recognises the guiding role of foreign online celebrities in the process of constructing the national image, and their strong influence on the content and emotional tendencies of the national image on the majority of netizens, greatly enhancing the national recognition of China's national image and presenting the image of a great nation more objectively in the international community [17]. As the voice of the people, the "foreign online celebrities" have played a role in international communication together with the official media. From the perspective of international communication, Liang suggests that the role of "foreign online celebrities" in testing the effectiveness of China's cross-cultural communication has also broadened China's international communication ideas and improved the single propaganda approach [14].

The dissemination of "foreign online celebrities" is a "double-edged sword", with both positive and negative effects. The Internet platform is characterized by a large amount of content and fast dissemination, and the level of media literacy of Internet users varies, coupled with the fact that the content of "foreign online celebrities" is disseminated for different purposes, Fei Tianxiang suggests that "foreign online celebrities" may make some Internet users blindly arrogant internally, while externally it may stimulate cultural conflicts [18]. In addition, Fei suggests that "foreign online celebrities" may make some netizens blindly arrogant internally [18], while externally they may stimulate cultural conflicts. Wang Shumin and Du Enlong studied and analysed 11 influential "foreign online celebrities" on the ShakeYin platform and concluded that the videos of "foreign online celebrities" risked homogenisation, vulgarisation and over-commercialisation and that these media might malign China's image, intensify conflicts and trigger cultural conflicts [19]. These media have the potential to malign China's image, exacerbate conflicts and provoke clashes.

### ***2.4. Analysis of the problems associated with foreign online celebrities and measures for their governance***

While the "foreign online celebrities" group is booming, it is also facing many problems. In response to these problems, scholars have also given targeted governance measures. Feng Shuqi summarizes and reflects on the current phenomenon of the dissemination of foreign online celebrities, arguing that there may be wrong cultural values or a narrow view of cultural

export in the works of foreign online celebrities [8]. As most of the current foreign weblebrities are of grassroots origin, they choose a single topic, and the quality and frequency of their works are unstable. In terms of account operation, foreign weblebrities are less capable of commercial realisation and do not have a healthy community of fans. To address the above problems, innovative themes and forms of work, continuous high-quality output, brand awareness and spreading correct values have become the remedies for the sustainable development of foreign weblebrities.

Zhao Dongshan focuses on a group of foreign weblebrities, such as "Fake Smile Boy", who have migrated from overseas and entered the Chinese market. The first problem that these foreign weblebrities need to solve is how to localise their operations. The first stage is to move the content to China. The second stage is to create content with China as the main audience, and the third stage is to incorporate Chinese characteristics and produce content from China [20].

Liang argues that foreign weblebrities spread vulgar and undesirable content or deliberately cater to the Chinese audience to achieve a certain communication effect [14]. To make foreign weblebrities develop positively, government departments should strengthen regulation and foreign weblebrities themselves should create quality content. In addition, Chinese mainstream media can support the development of foreign weblebrities. As audiences, they should also view online content rationally and maintain cultural confidence. From the perspective of communication agencies, Wang Shumin and Du Enlong suggest that social media platforms such as Weibo and Bili Bili can cooperate with "foreign weblebrities" and segment their communication content to optimise vertical classification [19].

### ***2.5. The shortcomings of the current research on foreign online celebrities***

A review of relevant literature reveals that the academic community has paid relatively little attention to and studied the group of foreign online celebrities, and the breadth and depth of attention are far from adequate. It is only in 2018 that "foreign online celebrities" were defined precisely. The emerging communication subject of "foreign online celebrities" should receive more attention in various aspects, and help China's international communication and national image construction.

In terms of research direction, the study of foreign online celebrities is limited to the perspective of "other theory". Most scholars have studied foreign online celebrities from the perspective of the "other" theory, focusing on cross-cultural communication and the construction of the national image. The study of foreign

online celebrities can choose more theoretical perspectives and expand other research directions. Apart from this, scholars have paid less attention to the audience analysis of foreign online celebrities, and their research perspectives lack innovation.

In terms of research methods, most scholars adopt a combination of multiple research methods to analyse the communication phenomenon of foreign online celebrities. In the analysis of the content of the communication of foreign online celebrities, most scholars have adopted the content analysis method to analyse the sample data. However, the samples they took were all popular contents of the head foreign online celebrities, which could not represent the majority and lacked significant universality.

## **3. CONCLUSION**

This paper mainly summarizes and combs the relevant research of foreign online celebrities, and evaluates the definition, classification, characteristics, content and role, as well as the communication problems and corresponding management measures. At present, academics are paying more and more attention to the study of foreign online celebrities. As an emerging research object, the research results are rich, and there is a more complete theoretical framework in terms of communication content and communication role. However, due to the lack of research direction and research methods, the research lacks depth and the conclusions are rather homogeneous. Therefore, scholars can innovate their research perspectives, use different research methods and pay attention to other aspects of the audience needs of the foreign netizen group in their future research on foreign online celebrities, so as to study the foreign netizen group in an in-depth and systematic way.

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