



Analysis of the International Communication of TCM Culture from the Perspective of Digital Media

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Abstract. During the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has played an important role in the prevention and treatment of the coronavirus. The world's attention is once again focused on TCM culture. In this period, opportunities and challenges coexist. Starting from the concept, characteristics and development trend of digital media, this paper firstly analyzes the current situation of TCM culture in the context of digital media development and concludes the difficulties of international communication of TCM culture. Accordingly, in order to give full play to the positive communication effect of TCM culture in the digital media environment, a three-pronged strategy of users, enterprise and government is recommended: establishing a sound government-led digital media communication system and supervision system for TCM culture; strengthening self-regulation of the digital media industry to achieve accurate communication of TCM culture and cultivating composite talents. It is hoped that the above suggestions can contribute to the high-quality development of the international communication of TCM culture in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Digital Media Technology; TCM culture; International Communication.

1 Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China outlined a comprehensive approach to cultural construction in the new era and on the new journey, emphasizing the need to continuously strengthen the soft power of national culture and enhance the global influence of Chinese culture [1]. The culture of TCM is a treasure of Chinese civilization, an expression of the soft power of traditional Chinese culture and a great force for enhancing cultural self-confidence and self-improvement of the Chinese nation. With the rapid development of digital technology, the integration of TCM and digital technology has significantly accelerated the pace of international communication of TCM culture, diversified its channels of global communication, and given rise to a novel mode of international exchange for this profound heritage.

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2 Literature Review

Research on the international communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) culture by foreign scholars is limited, with the majority of studies in this field conducted by Chinese academics. These studies serve as valuable references. Luo Qian conducted a statistical analysis of TCM culture's international communication through new media, revealing a notable upward trend in research interest. However, the predominant publication of research results in TCM-specific journals and the concentration of scholars within TCM academic circles limit their broader impact. Collaboration across institutions and disciplines is sparse, leading to a homogeneity of research outcomes [2]. In her work *A Study on Cultural Communication of TCM under the New Media Environment—Taking Mobile Phone APP as an Example*, Yang Yinfang investigated various media platforms such as broadcasting and video apps, identifying them as prevalent channels for communicating TCM culture. Notably, video apps have garnered significant attention from diverse communication sectors. Yang proposes strategic measures for enhancing the international communication of TCM culture, including content innovation, technological advancements, audience media literacy enhancement, and bolstering government and financial support. She emphasizes the importance of aligning with internet characteristics and involving professional technicians in platform development [3]. Addressing challenges in the current state of international communication of TCM culture in new media, Tang Jingxin, in her article *Current Situation and Strategy on TCM Cultural Communication in New Media*, highlights issues such as insufficient professionalism, authenticity discernment difficulties, and commercialization tendencies. Tang advocates for transformative approaches, advocating for innovative communication modes, rigorous assessment of content professionalism, and the collaborative establishment of a conducive environment for TCM cultural communication [4].

In summary, while existing literature provides valuable insights into the status quo and strategies for international communication of TCM culture, it predominantly focuses on popular mobile apps, neglecting the potential of emerging digital media technologies. Thus, this paper aims to address this gap by examining current practices and factors influencing communication efficacy, aiming to offer effective recommendations to navigate the evolving communication landscape in the new era.

3 An Overview of Digital Media

In recent years, digital media has witnessed robust growth, enabling the effective communication of information across various domains, both domestically and internationally. To enhance the utilization of digital media for the international communication of TCM culture, it is imperative to delve deeper into the concept and distinctive features of digital media technology.

Digital media is a comprehensive discipline with a high degree of integration of science and art that takes science and digital technology as its leading edge, mass communication theory as its basis, and modern art as its guide. It has become the newest

information carrier after language, text and electronic technology. The direction of digital media research and development is oriented to video and audio technology and to further applications in other industries.

Digital media has several significant characteristics in our era: Firstly, digitization is the most distinctive feature of digital media in its literal sense. Given the continuous advancement of networking, computer systems necessarily employ receiving equipment to digitally transform data into novel signals, primarily encompassing images and videos, to facilitate their transmission. Secondly, interactivity is the second most distinctive feature of digital media. The emergence of new media has broken down many restrictions for the exchange of ideas, allowing ordinary citizens to express their opinions through the Internet, and their voice has been respected as never before. Thirdly, having fun is also a prominent feature of digital media. Internet, iptv, digital games, digital TV, mobile streaming media, etc, provide individuals with an extensive range of entertainment spaces, truly reflecting the enjoyable and engaging nature of these media platforms. Fourthly, integration is another prominent feature of digital media. Integration refers to the organization of various types of information, such as text, sound, graphics and images, they are integrated to express a complete message in an integrated manner.

4 Current Situation of the International Communication of TCM Culture Under the Development of Digital Media Technology

Along with the gradual integration of digital media into all walks of life, digital media is playing an increasingly important role in the international communication of TCM culture. Looking at the development in recent years, with the promotion of digital media technology, the channels, forms and opportunities for developing the international communication of TCM culture are now becoming more and more diversified.

4.1 Communication Channels Greatly Diversified

For a long time, TCM culture has been disseminated overseas mainly through government-to-government exchanges and cooperation, international education in TCM culture among universities and training of international students in TCM culture, etc. Nonetheless, in the era of digital media, the international communication of TCM culture has expanded into novel avenues. This includes the creation of short videos, sharing intriguing articles, as well as leveraging platforms like WeChat and immersive applications such as AI and VR. These immersive technologies have qualitatively transformed digital media, significantly enhancing the interaction between users and culture. Utilizing technologies like naked-eye 3D, individuals can now observe the forms and properties of medicinal herbs and ancient texts anytime, anywhere, and realizing the malleability and dynamic nature of the cultural experience. This multidimensional experience mode supersedes the simplistic interaction paradigm, achieving a realtime quasi-realistic sensation and obtaining diversified feedback [5].

With the constant advancement of science and technology, 5G communication technology has undergone innovative and sustained development. Notably, the integration of the digital media and 5G communication technology has given rise to the proliferation of short videos and live broadcasts, thereby maximizing cultural communication. It has been widely recognized that 4G revolutionized our daily lives, and it is anticipated that 5G will transform society at large. Therefore, the international communication of TCM culture must seize this opportunity to capitalize on both TCM culture and the digital media, giving birth to a novel “storytelling” paradigm in the information era.

4.2 Communication Forms Highly Enriched

Prior to digital media, TCM culture was typically communicated through paper media, broadcasting, textual translations, and international conferences. These methods were inefficient and inaccessible to the masses. Nowadays, digital media transforms TCM works into digital formats, enabling them to be easily accessed online. For instance, TCM classics are converted to e-books, freely copied and shared on reading apps. Additionally, digital media releases TCM from textual constraints, interpreting it visually through videos, providing foreigners a more intuitive understanding of TCM culture.

Digital media technology has significantly enhanced the efficiency of international communication of TCM culture, now achieving exponential growth. Oral communication of TCM culture has been transformed into a “star effect” through digital media, for example, in the 2013-2014 season, the famous NBA basketball star LeBron James took his teammates to a foot massage and Tui Na, the live video quickly became popular, and brought Tui Na quickly spread to the basketball fans. Furthermore, there is a “repost” button on all kinds of social media, which allows users to share the content with others with just one click. With the support of these technologies, the efficiency of international communication of TCM culture has increased considerably.

4.3 Developing Opportunities Generally Diversified

In the treatment of this Covid-19 pandemic, the efficiency of TCM treatment means exceeded 90%, which is based on clinical data analysis, and TCM has shown its unique advantages and functions. As a responsible country, China has shared its solutions with the world to help combat the pandemic and contributed the wisdom to build a health community for humanity. According to CCTV, since the outbreak of the pandemic, sales of TCM prescriptions at local Chinese medicine shops in New York have increased exponentially.

After analyzing the data about TCM culture on Youtube and Twitter platforms, it can be concluded that foreign people’s attention to TCM culture has increased after the pandemic, and the emotion of TCM reporting on digital media platforms has also changed. First of all, “TCM efficacy” and “acupuncture and moxibustion” have become topics of great concern to the English media. Secondly, negative reports about TCM culture on digital media platforms decreased by 126% and positive reports increased by 158% between June 2020 and February 2021. This phenomenon shows that after the

Covid-19 outbreak, positive reports about TCM culture increased significantly, especially after February 2020, with several small peaks. The information behind these data encapsulates the development opportunities for international communication of TCM culture, and flexible adjustment of strategies based on these data can help promote the international communication of TCM culture.

5 Challenges of the International Communication of TCM Culture under the Development of Digital Media Technology

The Eastern and the Western countries face difficulties in international relations, social practice, and medical theories in the process of building a global community of shared future, because of the great differences in political, economic systems and cultural traditions. Although due to the promotion of media, the international communication of TCM culture has made some achievements, there are still some challenges according to the current environment. The details are as follows.

5.1 Incapacity of Communicators to Combine Digital Media and TCM Culture

“By the end of 2020, the total number of TCM health personnel nationwide reached 829,000, while the total number of visits to TCM medical and health institutions nationwide reached 920 million.” [6] This result shows that the number of TCM personnel worldwide is still not enough to meet people’s demand for TCM. Digital media has lowered the barriers for individuals to engage in international communication of TCM culture, offering everyone the opportunity to participate. However, the main body of international communication of TCM culture still lacks professionalism [7]. In China, there is a shortage of composite talents who are proficient in TCM professional knowledge and skills, as well as proficient in using digital media to disseminate TCM culture. What’s more, there are not enough TCM communicators for international communication, but there is a lot of information about TCM in the global community. If you pay close attention, you will find that in addition to a large amount of inaccurate information, there is also serious homogenization.

The core part of the international communication of TCM culture is the professional and accurate grasp of TCM culture. If TCM culture communicators are only proficient in using digital media technology but have limited knowledge of TCM culture, it may lead to the misuse of information in the communication process. If the communicators of TCM culture are only skilled in TCM knowledge but not in the use of digital media technology, it means that they cannot contribute to the international communication of TCM culture and must be empowered by digital media technology to achieve efficient international communication of TCM culture. Therefore, it is vital to cultivate the composite talents who are both specialized in digital media technology and skilled in Chinese medicine culture.

5.2 The Deficiencies of the Digital Media Itself

Digital media does not have a good supervision system compared to traditional media, and there are large loopholes in information regulation. With the development of digital media, the most intuitive social outcome is the increase in the amount of information. According to a projection made by the American scholar H.H Fredrick, even if we take a 5-year cycle, it means that in less than 70 years, the amount of information accumulated by human beings will reach one million times the amount of information we have today. However, this rapid growth results in information imbalance, prompting some Internet rumor mongers to fabricate false news for attention. Consequently, TCM information disseminated on digital media platforms is not always accurate, leading to a dwindling understanding of TCM culture among the populace. This erroneous dissemination further erodes the credibility of TCM culture.

There is extensive false propaganda about TCM culture in foreign media, resulting in the distortion of its principles and leading to misunderstandings and stereotypical views among foreigners. In recent years, particularly, a significant amount of erroneous rumors have circulated on the internet, obfuscating the audience's ability to discern accurate information about TCM culture. What's more, the negative impact of the "information cocoon" phenomenon has further eroded the social reputation of TCM culture. Those who falsely label TCM as pseudoscience on the internet lack a profound understanding of its scientific principles and misdirect international communication about TCM, gravely undermining its international image. "Regrettably, the absence of a rigorous monitoring system on digital media platforms allows such false information to proliferate unchecked, diminishing the credibility of TCM culture on international platforms." [8]

5.3 The Discrepancies between Chinese and Western Medical Cultures and Systems

TCM and Western medicine differ significantly due to their distinct historical and knowledgeable backgrounds, leading many foreigners to harbor skepticism towards TCM, which could hinder its international communication. In the past, the foreign public may have only been vaguely aware of TCM, lacking easy access to comprehensive knowledge. Nowadays, with the advancement of digital media, information flows swiftly and efficiently, yet foreigners unfamiliar with TCM culture may misinterpret it if their initial exposure is limited to one-sided information. Western medicine relies heavily on anatomy, physiology, tissue embryology, biochemistry, and molecular biology for diagnosis, whereas TCM is founded on the doctrines of the Viscera State and Meridian-collateral Theory, emphasizing the diagnostic methods of "inspection, listening and smelling, inquiry, and palpation", and treating patients by balancing yin and yang, qi and blood. Without a thorough understanding of TCM culture, foreigners initially exposed to this knowledge may misunderstand it and erroneously perceive TCM diagnosis as unscientific.

Furthermore, digital media holds a significant guiding influence on public perception. In utilizing digital media for TCM culture international communication, there

exist malicious media outlets that stigmatize or misrepresent TCM culture, sometimes exaggerating its knowledge to attract users. TCM culture views the universe as a unified entity with mankind as its microcosm, contrasting with Western medicine's perspective of man as a collection of discrete parts [9]. These fundamental differences underlie the disparities between TCM and Western medicine. Regrettably, some media exploit these differences to generate higher clicks, falsely portraying TCM culture as misleading public values. Consequently, it is imperative for governments and enterprises to enforce regulations across all platforms, while individuals must exercise discernment in evaluating information.

6 Strategies of Promoting the International Communication of TCM Culture under the Development of Digital Media

Nowadays, with the speedy development of digital media, information is rapidly spread to all corners of the world. At the same time, as an integral part of Chinese traditional culture, TCM culture plays a significant role. Promoting TCM culture can contribute to enhancing the international image of Chinese traditional culture and fostering national cultural confidence [10]. Therefore, the international communication of TCM culture should be in step with the era and take advantage of digital media. Thus, based on the difficulties presented above, some optimization strategies can be proposed, which will be explained in detail from the government, enterprise and talents training.

6.1 Active Policy Guidance from the Perspective of Government

The government plays the role of management and supervision in the process of international communication of TCM culture. However, in the process of management and supervision, the government should proactively participate in media activities and should promote the new method of "Internet + government" to guide the TCM culture in the direction of scientific, institutionalized and standardized model. The development of policies should focus on two priorities: deep excavation of TCM culture and media communication. The connotation and influence of TCM culture are the foundation to achieve international communication. TCM culture has a rich historic connotation which has been passed down for 5,000 years, and the humanistic values it contains are beneficial to people all over the world. Scholars say "The trend at the current stage is media convergence, which is both the law of development in the digital media era and an important manifestation of the national will in media communication." [11] Therefore, we should follow this trend and promote the integration of the digital media and TCM culture, take advantage of digital media, and exploit its power to achieve the broad communication of TCM culture in the international community.

Accordingly, the construction of the supervision system should be clearly planned and implemented in an orderly manner. First of all, government should fully understand the necessity of the supervision system and realize that the construction of the supervision system is enacted to avoid false and negative adverse effects in the international communication of TCM culture. Ensure that relevant communicators carry out cultural

communication on the premise of ensuring objective and truthful content. In the construction process, the role of the government and media organizations should be given full play and combine the responsibilities of all parties. At the same time, the government can realize the new forms of online regulation by using the power of modern technology. Hence, it is a trend to combine with corresponding policy measures to reduce and avoid the harm of negative and inaccurate information to the development of TCM culture.

6.2 Accurate Communication and Supervision from Enterprises

In the international communication of TCM culture, prioritizing the preferences and needs of users should be the focal point of digital media. This targeted approach ensures that TCM culture is purposefully represented abroad, achieving the desired communication outcomes. To accurately and authentically convey information on TCM policy planning, culture, philosophy, and medical practices to users across diverse regions, enterprises must recognize the need for accurate communication and supervision.

To achieve accurate communication, enterprises should focus on two key aspects. Firstly, they must organize and categorize TCM knowledge intended for communication. Modularizing TCM cultural materials enables users to directly access the knowledge they seek. Secondly, a thorough analysis of the foreign audience is required, categorizing them based on language, age, and affinity towards Chinese culture. This tailored approach ensures the release of relevant knowledge tailored to different countries on digital media platforms. Furthermore, the cornerstone of TCM culture international communication is translation, with the accuracy of the target language being crucial for effective communication.

Analogous to the government's functions, enterprises must scrutinize and rigorously review user-generated content on APP platforms to prevent the communication of misinformation. Entities involved in the international communication of TCM culture must assume responsibility, leverage the interactivity of digital media, and collaborate with the government to foster a favorable environment for the international communication of TCM culture. To accomplish this, firstly, enterprises should establish an internal supervision system, provide guidance to the public, and establish a strong presence on various media platforms. Additionally, enterprises must capitalize on the strengths of digital media to enhance user interaction, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the public's preferred content and ensuring greater control over information posted on digital media platforms. Furthermore, it is crucial for enterprises to recognize that the integration of digital media with TCM culture requires an interactive communication approach, rather than a one-way communication.

6.3 All-sided Cultivation of Composite International Communication Talents of TCM Culture

Most TCM translators lack a professional background and comprehensive understanding of TCM culture, impeding their ability to accurately translate its connotations. Consequently, we must prioritize cultural background in personnel training. Currently,

there is a significant scarcity of translators proficient in both TCM and Western medical cultures, hindering the pace of TCM cultural communication. Additionally, given the need for cultural communication via digital media, training talents in this field is crucial.

To address this issue, the training of talents for international communication of TCM culture must be integrated into the talent training system. The cultivation model of international communication primarily refers to local universities leveraging their own school characteristics, geographical advantages, disciplinary strengths, and professional advantages to cultivate talents specializing in international communication in a particular field [12]. Thus, international education majors and sino-foreign collaboration programs should include compulsory and elective courses on TCM culture, enabling students to effectively interpret its core values and philosophy in global contexts. Additionally, we must strengthen the training of foreign language talents specializing in TCM culture and encourage qualified institutions to offer undergraduate programs with a TCM focus, such as TCM-related English translation and interpretation, as well as medical rehabilitation in foreign languages. Furthermore, establishing a master's program in TCM translation and cross-cultural communication is recommended to nurture future communicators proficient in both foreign languages and TCM culture. Finally, integrating TCM cultural communication with digital media is crucial. Given the urgent need for professionals with interdisciplinary knowledge in TCM, culture, communication, and scientific information for global promotion, we must address the shortage of such talents. Therefore, eligible universities should establish robust talent communication and collaboration programs with internet enterprises to facilitate the communication of talents and enhance the quality and reach of TCM culture's international outreach.

7 Conclusion

In the digital media era, media have been integrated into everything. The rapid development of artificial intelligence technology and big data technology has provided fertile ground for the development of TCM culture and opened up new perspectives for the international communication of TCM culture. As President Xi Jinping said, "TCM culture is the key to opening the treasury of Chinese civilization and the treasure of ancient Chinese science". Such an environment provides opportunities for TCM culture to flourish in the domestic and international arena, as well as a good opportunity for Chinese media to tell the Chinese story well in the world.

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