

The Construction and Practice of Cross-Cultural Dialogue: A Study on the Communication Strategies of Foreign Bloggers on the Douyin Platform

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Abstract: In the context of anti-globalization, short-video platforms represented by Douyin have restructured the paradigm of cross-cultural communication and formed a new order of “platform-based survival.” This study takes foreign bloggers on Douyin as the research object and uses interpretive qualitative research methods to analyze their video texts, interactive contexts, and cultural practices through cultural depth description, multi-source triangulation verification, and critical deconstruction. The study found that foreign bloggers, through a three-dimensional integration strategy of “cultural symbols — emotional narratives — social practices”, used cultural contrast to create attention anchors, family narratives to reconstruct identity, and professional experiences to deepen social connections to construct dynamic cross-cultural dialogue mechanisms. Their communication practices not only break the one-way “gaze of the other” but also break down cultural barriers through symbolic interaction, emotional resonance, and participatory communication, forming a “micro-infrastructure” for mutual learning among civilizations in the digital age. The study provides a theoretical and practical basis for breaking through the theory of “civilizational conflict”, protecting cultural diversity, and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Keywords: Intercultural dialogue; Douyin platform; Dissemination strategy; Symbolic interaction; Civilizations learn from each other

Online publication: June 6, 2025

1. Introduction

In the context of de-globalization, short-video platforms represented by Douyin are redefining the paradigm of cross-cultural communication. Individualized and fragmented communication undermines the authority of traditional media, creating a new order of “platform-based survival”^[1]. Platform technology reconfigures the mechanism of cultural identity and builds a new field of dialogue in digital civilization. Foreign bloggers, as “digital nomads”, construct mixed cultural texts under the influence of algorithms, interactions, and business logic, creating Homi Bhabha’s “interstitial space”, which is neither a middle ground for cultural replication nor transplantation.

The study provides evidence for breaking through the “clash of civilizations” theory and a theoretical basis for the protection of cultural diversity in platform governance.

2. Research design and methods

This study adopts the interpretive qualitative research paradigm, with “cultural depth description” as the core methodology, revealing the deep meaning construction process of cross-cultural dialogue through systematic interpretation of foreign bloggers’ video texts, audience interactions, and cultural contexts. The research design emphasizes “contextual sensitivity” and “interpretation of subject experience” and explores the essence of phenomena through narrative analysis, semiotic deconstruction, and participatory observation.

2.1. Typicality selection of research subjects

Based on the principle of purposeful sampling, the criteria for selecting 10 bloggers focused on three dimensions: depth of cultural dialogue, narrative complexity, and social influence. Among them, cultural dialogue depth means that bloggers need to continuously participate in Chinese cultural practices, such as Tie Dan’er learning dialects and Rose making traditional cuisine; Narrative complexity means that the video content contains explicit cultural conflicts and adaptation processes, such as the collision of educational ideas between the Victorians; Social influence refers to the formation of a stable cross-cultural discussion community in the comment section, such as the “Foreigners’ View of the Spring Festival Travel Rush” topic by the Association for the Study of Foreigners.

Case diversity is achieved through three dimensions: nationality, content type, and fan size, avoiding the limitations of a single cultural perspective (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Basic information list of 10 foreign bloggers on the Douyin platform selected in this article

Blogger name	Nationality	Douyin fan count	Main style	Video main content
Foreigner Chris	Norway	19.827 million	Cultural contrast life contrast	A comparison of the differences between daily life in China and Norway
Foodie foreigner Tie Dan’er	America	15.747 million	Dialect funny family narrative	Dalian dialect teaching, family interaction, and Northeast folk customs
Rose	Uganda	14.977 million	Rural life food making	Rural life in China, traditional cuisine, and family collaboration
The Berni Family	Italy	11.41 million	Family interaction Cultural conflict	Everyday Transnational Marriages Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships, parenting
Danny Rui	Latvia	14.1 million	Study of film and television performance culture	Participating in Chinese TV dramas Learning Idioms
Old Wang is in China	Iraq	11.328 million	Food exploration	Social observations on food experiences across China
Ibo	Somalia	11.11 million	Localization of dialect comedy	Folk participation in variety shows
The Victorians	Russia	10.476 million	Educational conflict Cultural contrast	Differences between Chinese and Western education Children’s growth Record
Foreigners Research Society	Multinational	8.191 million	Cultural experience Social observation	Career experience Discussion on social issues
IShowSpeed	America	4.808 million	Customs of various countries	Cultural display

2.2. Multi-source triangulation for data collection

To enhance the validity of the study, construct three types of qualitative data: core text, activity context, and cultural background. For the core text data, the study plan to extract 20–30 representative videos from each blogger in the last three years, with priority given to those with over 1 million views and more than 5,000 comments and interactions, and record non-verbal symbols in the videos, such as the expression changes of Lao Wang when he visits the store; In terms of context of interaction, this study pays particular attention to “long article comments” and “cross-cultural debates.” Also, pay attention to collecting oral explanations from bloggers in live streams and fan groups; In terms of cultural background, this study focuses on supplementing the bloggers’ motives for coming to China and their cultural adaptation process through autobiographies and media reports, and comparing the narrative frameworks of similar local bloggers.

2.3. Analysis method: Interpretive meaning mining

This study employs contextualized interpretation and critical deconstruction to explore the multi-dimensional meanings of video text, audience interaction, and cultural practice layer by layer, from surface narrative to deep cultural logic. First, deconstruct the cultural tension in the video based on narratology and cross-cultural conflict theory, track the dynamic process of “culture shock — adaptation — reconstruction” through narrative arc analysis, and analyze the blogger’s identity positioning strategy; Secondly, using Roland Barthes’ symbol stratification theory, critically interpret the sensory presentation of visual, linguistic and behavioral symbols to reveal the construction mechanism of the “naturalization” authority of symbols; Third, examine the meaning negotiation among bloggers, audiences and algorithms in combination with online ethnography, and analyze the emotional resonance between rhetorical strategies in the comment section and cultural events; Finally, embed a reflective perspective to avoid the trap of cultural essentialism by comparing the blogger’s own account, audience feedback and third-party reports, and reflect on the cognitive limitations of the researcher as a native observer.

3. Analysis of the dissemination strategies of foreign bloggers on Douyin

The dissemination strategy of foreign bloggers on Douyin is essentially a three-dimensional integration of “cultural symbols — emotional narratives — social practices.” By creating attention anchors through cultural contrasts, reconstructing identities through family narratives, and deepening social connections through professional experiences, they not only monetize the traffic of individual IPs but also promote mutual learning among civilizations at the micro level.

3.1. Bidirectional coding of cultural contrast and emotional resonance: From symbolic conflict to meaning sharing

Foreign bloggers break the cognitive inertia of the audience by constructing “cultural symbol contrasts”, stimulating the audience’s curiosity, and creating a double visual and psychological impact ^[2]. For instance, Norwegian blogger Chris, a foreign blogger, has surpassed 30 million views in a single video titled “Norwegian vs. Chinese Breakfast Comparison”, which juxtaposes cold Nordic foods like rye bread and salmon with Chinese hot porridge and fried dough sticks, using the differences in tableware and ingredients to inspire cultural associations of “cold and warmth” among viewers. Such content satisfies the audience’s curiosity about heterogeneous cultures through exaggerated symbolic contrasts and enhances the dissemination efficiency of the content through contrast tension.

The deeper contrast strategy is reflected in “the recreation of cultural symbols” ^[3]. For example, Ugandan blogger Rose combined traditional African weaving techniques with Chinese bamboo weaving skills to showcase “African-style Chinese bamboo baskets” in her video, which retain the vivid colors of Africa while incorporating the delicate structure of Chinese bamboo weaving. This “cross-cultural symbolic hybridization” not only creates a visual impact but also hints at the possibility of cultural integration.

While creating conflicts, bloggers make up for the alienation that cultural differences may cause through emotional narratives. The Iraqi food blogger “Old Wang in China” shed tears after being comforted by a neighbor saying “There’s no need to be afraid in China” in a video about “fear of firecrackers during the Spring Festival”, and heartwarming comments like “Welcome to become a new Chinese” flooded the comment section. This narrative arc, from “culture shock” to “emotional shelter”, transforms individual anxiety into collective identity, achieving a “soft landing” in cross-cultural communication.

The deep logic of emotional resonance lies in the construction of “empathetic communication.” For instance, when documenting the conflict in parenting concepts between China and Russia, the Victorian couple deliberately inserted scenes of their children crying to evoke a general resonance among the audience about “educational anxiety.” In the comment section, supporters of “Chinese tiger moms” and “Western freedom” debated, but eventually reached a reconciliation under the emotional consensus that “it’s all for the good of the children.” This three-part narrative of “conflict — reflection — consensus” effectively reduces cultural confrontation ^[4].

Bloggers construct dual-meaning channels through cultural symbol coding, such as slang terms like “must-land” and “maliudi” in the Northeastern dialect skit of Somali blogger Ibo, and emotional value coding, such as “Victoria couple” documenting reconciliation scenes after conflicts in parenting concepts between China and Russia. The audience can perceive cultural differences at the symbolic level and resonate at the emotional level, thus breaking through the one-way communication limitations of the “other gaze” ^[5].

3.2. Family narrative and localization integration: From cultural collision to identity reconstruction

In the video showcases of foreign bloggers on Douyin, the family scene is, to some extent, a micro-laboratory for cultural adaptation. The home is the core field for cross-cultural bloggers to showcase the process of cultural adaptation. The Italian blogger “The Beni family” has visualized cultural conflicts as concrete events through a series of “Cross-border mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law parenting battles” — the mother-in-law insists on taking traditional Chinese medicine baths, and the daughter-in-law advocates Western medical care. The video showcases the gradual integration of cultures through a narrative of their debates, compromises, and joint development of a “blend of Chinese and Western parenting”. Such content has not only received over 200 million views, but also sparked in-depth discussions in the comment section about the differences in parenting views between the East and the West. A similar example can be seen in Rose’s “African Family Collaborative Tea Making” video, where the husband splits firewood, the children pick, and the mother-in-law light the fire in collaboration, which not only showcases the family ethics of rural China but also incorporates the collective labor tradition of Uganda, creating a visual metaphor of “transnational family communities”.

The unique value of family narratives lies in their “everyday nature” and “authenticity”. The “clumsy sincerity” of the Bernys in their New Year video of bowing in Tang suits, though awkward in their movements, instead strengthens the audience’s recognition of their cultural identity. This “imperfect integration” strategy breaks away from the traditional “expert-like” didactic stance in cross-cultural communication and brings the

audience closer as “learners”^[6].

Dialects and regional symbols have become key tools for identity reconstruction in the localization strategy. American blogger Tie Dan’er, with his “Dalian Dialect Level 10” profile, integrates dialect teaching into the daily life of the city. In his work “Tie Dan’er’s Visit to the Market”, he bargains with vendors in Dalian’s characteristic “oyster flavor” dialect, interweaving “Northeastern humor” such as “How is this cabbage selling?” Bigger than my face!” And received high praise from Chinese fans. Such content, through the localization of language, eliminates the sense of distance from foreign identities and creates a “down-to-earth” communication image. A deeper level of localization is reflected in the deep engagement with regional culture. Somali blogger Ibo, for example, is not only proficient in the northeastern Chinese dialect but also participates in folk activities such as “pig slaughtering feast” and “Yangko dance” in his videos. Through his hands-on cultural practice, he has transformed himself from an “observer” to a “participant”, with comments in the comment section saying “This foreigner knows the rules better than the locals” marking the audience’s recognition of his “quasi-local identity.”

3.3. Deep engagement in professional experience: From social observation to value co-construction

Through career experience, foreign bloggers reveal the logic of how Chinese society operates as “participants” rather than “observers.” The “12 Hours Delivery Man” series by the Foreigners Research Association, which records details such as fines for late delivery and exhaustion from climbing stairs, has been viewed over 100 million times. The video not only shows the hardships of the industry but also analyzes through mechanisms such as algorithmic dispatching and user ratings, sparking a public discussion on “the platform economy and individual survival.” A similar practice can be seen in “Old Wang in China” “Night Market Vendor Experience” — from bargaining to buying goods to communicating with urban management officers, presenting a complete micro and small business ecosystem, the comment section is filled with exclamations of “So foreigners know the rules of the business world too.”

The deep value of the professional experience lies in the “de-spectacle” of social observation. For example, the Victoria couple documented the collectivist educational model in China’s early childhood education industry through the “Kindergarten Teacher Experience” video, contrasting it with individualized education in Russia. This presentation of cultural differences based on professional scenarios is more persuasive than abstract cultural theories^[7].

Career experience is not just a material for content, but a vehicle for transmitting cross-cultural values. When making traditional delicacies, Rose often invites villagers to participate. For example, Grandma Wang, 78, instructs Rose on fermenting rice wine. At the end of the video, Rose is marked “Inheritor of the craft: Wang Xiulan”, which respects local wisdom and builds her identity as a “cultural shaper.” The Victorians, on the other hand, transformed one-way communication into two-way consultation by inviting viewers to vote on the way of education through a live broadcast of the “China-Russia Teachers’ Debate Competition”, which attracted more than 500,000 people to participate in decision-making in a single live broadcast. This “community co-creation” model breaks the one-way output logic in cultural communication and creates a value chain of “traditional skills — international bloggers — global audiences.” The “Spring Festival Travel Experience” video work by the Foreigners Research Association is highly constructive. By documenting realities such as difficulty in getting tickets and crowded carriages, it concludes with the collective sentiment of “going home no matter how far”, achieving a balance between social observation and value transmission.

4. Cross-cultural dialogue mechanism: A practical path for breaking down cultural barriers

The essence of cross-cultural dialogue mechanisms is a dynamic negotiation process of symbols, emotions, and power. Foreign bloggers dissolve cultural boundaries through the creative recombination of symbols, build a foundation of trust through emotional resonance, and democratize the production of meaning through participatory communication. This mechanism not only reshapes individual cultural identities but also gives rise to new models of mutual learning among civilizations within the platform ecosystem.

4.1. Symbolic interaction: Conflict resolution and recombination innovation of cultural elements

Foreign bloggers create new forms of cultural expression by deconstructing the established meanings of traditional cultural symbols^[8]. In his “Nordic Minimalism vs. Chinese Fireworks” series, Norwegian blogger Chris Foreigner mixed Norwegian minimalist home furnishings with Chinese redwood furniture. In the video “Christmas Tree meets Red Lantern”, he wove a Chinese knot with Nordic pine branches, and the comment section was met with exclamations of “So simplicity and liveliness can coexist.” This recombination of symbols breaks the binary opposition of “Western modernity — Eastern tradition” and creates a third space symbol system. A similar practice can be seen in blogger Yibo’s “A New Interpretation of Northeast Folklore”, where he wore a dogskin hat and held an African drum while participating in the winter fishing at Chagan Lake in Jilin Province, blending Manchu fishing and hunting chants with African rhythms. The video was praised as “the right way to mix and match cultures.”

Language is not only a tool for communication, but also a medium for cultural negotiation. Deep language innovation is reflected in the Victorian couple’s Sino-Russian glossary of parenting terms, which translates “tiger mom” as “education commander” and “free-range” as “free explorer”, building a bridge of understanding in semantic conversion. When cultural symbols cause conflicts, bloggers often use dynamic adaptation to achieve meaning transformation. The process of correcting symbols from “misreading” to “rectifying names” turns cultural conflicts into educational opportunities^[9].

4.2. Emotional connection: A trust-building mechanism for empathetic communication

Foreign bloggers on the Douyin platform generally evoke emotional resonance through vulnerability narratives. They build emotional alliances by exposing the predicaments in cultural adaptation. In the “1001 Nights of Transnational Marriages” series, “The Berni Family” documents the helplessness of a Chinese husband when facing his first transnational mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflict - the camera captures him smoking on the balcony late at night and using Google Translate to look up the definition of “filial piety”. This intimate display of vulnerability breaks the perfect image of the “cultural adaptor” and resonates strongly with the transnational marriage community.

By activating the cultural memory of the audience, the blogger achieves a deep emotional connection. In the project “Childhood in China for Foreigners Born in the 1990s”, the Association for the Study of Foreigners allowed Israeli blogger Gao Youxi to experience millennial memories such as rolling hoops, eating spicy strips, and copying lyric books. When he found the DVD of “The Story of Yingxian” in a flea market and blurted out, “Your Emperor, do you still remember Xia Yuhe by Daming Lake?” It instantly ignited the emotional breakpoint of Chinese 80s and 90s viewers, with comments flooding the screen with “This is my youth”^[10]. This transnational sharing of intergenerational memories elevates individual experiences to collective nostalgia, attracting 420,000

people to participate in content co-creation.

Foreign bloggers strengthen emotional bonds through ritualized interactions. In the video “I Celebrate the Little New Year in Dalian,” American blogger Tie Dan’er not only participated in the house cleaning and the Kitchen God worship, but also innovatively designed “cross-border kitchen candy”, replacing the filling with peanut butter. This new and old fusion of ritual remakes both respect tradition and reflect cultural identity.

4.3. Participatory communication: Meaning co-creation empowered by the audience

Bloggers make audiences co-conspirators in cultural dialogue by opening up their content creation rights. The “Foreigners’ Research Association” launched a topic called “What do Foreigners think?” inviting users to contribute their perspectives, such as a Canadian fan’s photo of the “bus seat giving controversy”, which sparked more than 3,000 systematic debates between Chinese and foreign audiences on “etiquette differences.” This decentralized content production breaks the vertical relationship of “blogger — audience” and forms a distributed dialogue network, achieving a paradigm shift from “cultural transmission” to “cultural co-creation.”

The platform algorithm serves as an accelerator for the diffusion of dialogue. When Ibo launched the “Northeastern Dialect Crash Course”, Douyin automatically pushed it to the “Dialect Protection” and “Cultural Inheritance” tag pools, attracting linguists to participate in the discussion. The in-depth analysis video of @Dialect Lao Zhang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (with 2.1 million views), resonates academically with the blogger’s content. This “grassroots—elite” algorithm-level interaction enables cultural dialogue to move beyond the entertainment level and into the public discourse space. It is worth noting that Rose’s Ugandan fans have reposted her videos on TikTok and added Swahili subtitles, creating a cultural relay chain from China to East Africa.

The study reveals that the cross-cultural practices of foreign bloggers have gone beyond mere content dissemination and evolved into a “miniature infrastructure” for mutual learning among civilizations in the digital age. Its value lies not only in resolving the “clash of civilizations” predicted by Huntington, but also in providing a concrete path for building a community with a shared future for mankind through the organic integration of “everyday dialogue” and “ritualized performance.”

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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