

The Localization, Translation, and Dissemination Effectiveness of Overseas Popular Culture: A Case Study of Michael Jackson's Content on Xiaohongshu

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Abstract: The localized dissemination of overseas pop culture is an important issue in cross-cultural communication. Existing research has largely focused on macro-level cultural flows, with insufficient attention paid to the translation practices driven by social media users. This article takes Michael Jackson's content as a case study for its dissemination on Xiaohongshu. Relying on first-hand data from the author's operation of a popular fan account, and employing content analysis, participant observation, and data mining methods, it explores the mechanisms and effectiveness pathways of the localized translation of overseas pop culture symbols on domestic social platforms. The study finds that the account's audience is predominantly young women, challenging traditional stereotypes about audience demographics. The viral videos achieve highly effective dissemination through emotional activation, locally relevant storytelling, and community feedback, forming a progressive logic of "emotional hook—circle-layer penetration—user conversion." This article constructs a dual-perspective model of translation effectiveness, providing micro-level empirical support for understanding Generation Z's cultural consumption patterns and optimizing cross-cultural communication strategies.

Keywords: Localization and adaptation; Communication effectiveness; Michael Jackson; Xiaohongshu; Fan engagement; Data-driven

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I. Introduction

1.1. The origin of the study: A classic idol's unexpected viral success on Xiaohongshu

On January 28, 2026, the Xiaohongshu fan account for Michael Jackson, operated by the author, posted a short video themed around MJ's sibling bond. As of February 12, the video had reached 474,000 views and

302,000 plays. Engagement metrics—such as likes, saves, and comments—were significantly higher than the average for the same period, and the video attracted a large number of new followers, resulting in a small-scale “breaking-the-circle” spread.

This phenomenon prompts reflection: Why has a Western cultural icon who passed away many years ago managed to evoke such strong emotional resonance on Xiaohongshu—a platform predominantly used by Generation Z women^[1]? How do short videos that center on personal emotions make the leap from niche-circle dissemination to mainstream, cross-boundary reach? And how do operators’ localized adaptations in content creation, title formulation, and interactive engagement strategies influence the ultimate effectiveness of their dissemination efforts?

The aforementioned issues serve as the starting point for this study. As a university student majoring in management and planning to apply for the program in Media Management and Cross-Cultural Communication, the author draws on firsthand operational data to transform practical experience into academic research.

It aims to explore the mechanisms of localization and adaptation of overseas pop culture on Chinese social media, as well as the pathways for achieving its communication effectiveness.

1.2. Definition of core concepts

Localization Translation: Drawing on the theoretical framework of “trans-cultural communication”, this article defines “translation” as a cultural process that encompasses both transformation and evolution. In operational practice, “localization translation” manifests itself as a series of actions undertaken by content creators—including selective extraction of overseas cultural materials, reassignment of meaning, emotional integration, and adaptation of expression.

Communication effectiveness: Unlike “communication impact”, “effectiveness” places greater emphasis on the degree to which communication goals are achieved and the sustainability of the communication process. In this article, the author operationalizes the concept from three dimensions: reach effectiveness (exposure volume, views, cover page click-through rate), engagement effectiveness (like rate, completion rate, sentiment tendency of comments), and conversion effectiveness (number of new followers, save rate, users’ willingness to re-engage).

1.3. Data sources and research methods

The data basis for this article comes from a single video posted by the author’s Xiaohongshu account “Pingguo Tou” between January 28 and February 12, 2026, along with its associated data.

As shown in **Figure 1**, the following results can be seen.

- a. Traffic data: Impressions—473,559; Views—302,227; Cover click-through rate—21.9%; Completion rate—17.7%; 2-second exit rate—26.1%.
- b. Interaction data: 49,889 likes, 214 comments, 6,140 bookmarks, and 378 shares.

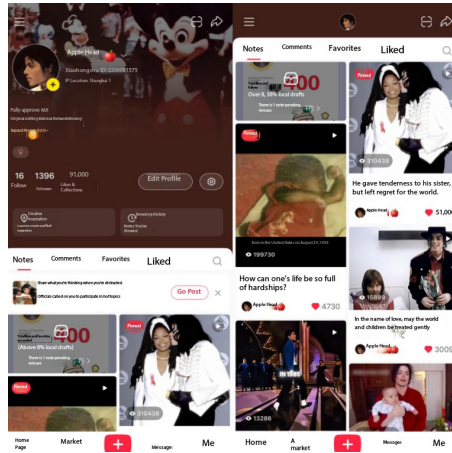


Figure 1. Xiaohongshu account homepage display

As shown in Figure 2, the following results can be seen.

c. Fan Profile: Gender distribution (95% female, 5% male); age distribution (primarily aged 18–24, followed by 25–34); urban distribution (leading cities include overseas, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Beijing); interest distribution (mainly focused on lifestyle documentation, entertainment, film and TV, anime/manga culture, and gaming).

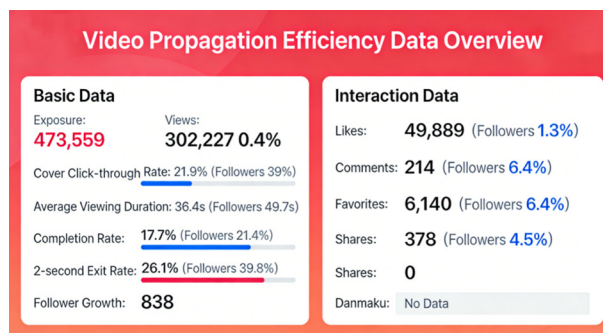


Figure 2. Basic data and engagement data (source: Red Note creator dashboard, statistical period: 2026.1.28-3.4)

As shown in Figure 3, the following results can be seen.

d. Comment section text: The original corpus of 214 comments.

Comment 214 = Likes and Saves 56,028 × Comment 214 = Likes and Saves 56,028

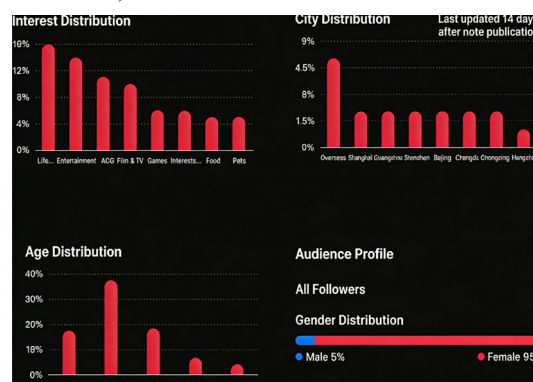


Figure 3. Distribution of audience interests, city distribution of audience, age distribution of audience, and gender distribution of audience

As shown in **Figure 4**, the following results can be seen.

The research methodology adopts the following mixed approach:

- a. Quantitative Analysis: Conduct descriptive statistics and comparative analysis on the traffic funnel, engagement rate, and fan profiles.
- b. Qualitative analysis: Conduct thematic coding on the comment section text and track the process of operational decision-making.
- c. Reflective Observation: As both an “operator and researcher”, conduct a retrospective analysis of decisions related to content production, headline design, posting schedules, and other key factors.



Figure 4. Overview of some comments

1.4. Research questions and paper structure

This article attempts to answer the following question:

First, what are the demographic characteristics of MJ content’s audience on Xiaohongshu?

Second, how can viral videos achieve wider dissemination through “localization and adaptation”?

Third, how can researchers achieve reach, identification, and conversion in terms of communication effectiveness, and what kind of progressive relationship exists among these three elements?

The paper is divided into six parts. The first part, the Introduction, clarifies the research problem and the data basis. The second part, the Literature Review, establishes the theoretical framework. The third part, the Audience Profile Analysis, reveals audience characteristics based on fan data. The fourth part, the Mechanism Analysis, provides an in-depth examination of the threefold pathway for localized adaptation. The fifth part, the Effectiveness Evaluation, conducts an analysis from three dimensions: the traffic funnel, emotional resonance, and user conversion. The sixth part, the Conclusion, summarizes the research findings and discusses theoretical and practical implications.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. From “cultural globalization” to “glocalization”: The evolution of the theoretical framework

The study of transnational cultural flows has long been marked by a debate between “cultural homogeneity

theory” and “cultural heterogeneity theory.” Proponents of cultural homogeneity worry that the global proliferation of Western cultural products will lead to the erosion of local traditional cultures ^[2]. However, anthropological research offers a different perspective. In James Watson’s edited volume, “Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia”, fieldwork conducted in five cities across East Asia reveals that the global brand McDonald’s has not eroded local cultures; rather, it has been imbued with diverse, locally rooted meanings (**Table 1**) ^[3].

Table 1. Five regions and the core cultural positioning and social functions

Region	Researcher	Core Cultural Positioning and Social Functions
Beijing	Yan Yunxiang	Modern experience space; for couples’ dates, children’s birthday parties, symbolizing Western culture and modern taste
Hong Kong	Huashen	Community social space; regarded as snacks rather than main meals, replacing traditional teahouses and becoming a hub for youth socializing and children’s parties
Taipei	Wu Yanhe	Starting point for young people’s careers + subcultural hub; platform for young workers, also a temporary resting place for the elderly and women “homes outside home”
Seoul	Park Sang-mi	Shift from American hegemonic symbols to localized brands; due to nationalist resistance, later adapted deep-localized food products such as kimchi burgers to meet market demands
Tokyo	Ogawa Eimi	Food etiquette restructures space; older generations resist American-style eating, while younger generations use it as social space, reshaping local food etiquette

As shown in **Table 1**, Watson’s team’s research confirms that when global cultures enter local contexts, they are reinterpreted and imbued with new meanings by indigenous cultures, thus giving rise to diverse cultural variations. McDonald’s success in East Asia is precisely due to its departure from its American origins and its transformation into a locally adapted institution. Building on this foundation, the theory of “glocalization” has been further refined by Wu Dongying and others into two distinct levels: “adaptation and transformation of discursive practices” and “integration and innovation of discursive practices” ^[2, 4]. This theoretical framework provides an important reference for the analysis in this paper of the localized adaptation of Michael Jackson’s content.

2.2. “Trans-cultural communication”: Theoretical resources beyond “intercultural”

Based on reflections on cross-cultural communication, domestic scholars have proposed the theory of “trans-cultural communication”, emphasizing the transformation, transition, and integration of cultures and breaking down fixed cultural boundaries ^[5]. This article argues that Michael Jackson’s dissemination on Xiaohongshu is not merely a simple instance of cross-cultural flow; rather, it represents a trans-cultural practice in which Chinese users reconstitute the meaning of his cultural symbols.

2.3. A Study on the Emotional Mechanisms of Fan Communities

Chang Shu argues that cultural studies should focus on local individuals and key actors, a perspective that aligns closely with the viewpoint of the operators of this article ^[6]. The emotional turn in fan studies offers significant insights; relevant research, taking MJ fans as an example, identifies four major emotional hooks ^[8]. This article’s viral video, by highlighting the idol’s warm and tender side, confirms the emotional power of “real cracks” and successfully achieves a localized emotional translation.

2.4. Theoretical framework: A translation effectiveness model from the dual perspective of operators and users

Based on the above-mentioned literature ^{[2][3][4][6]} and combined with account operation practices, this paper proposes the following analytical framework (Figure 5) ^[2-4, 6]:

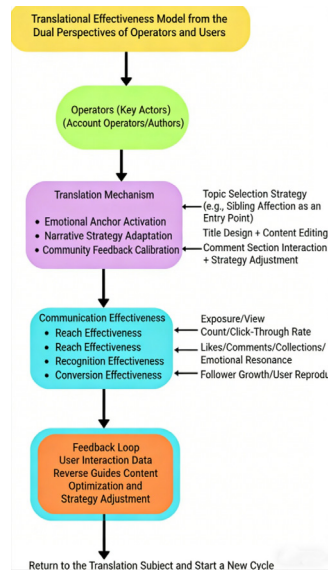


Figure 5. A translational efficiency model from the dual perspectives of operators and users

As shown in **Figure 5**, the following results can be seen.

This model extends the theory of “glocalization” to micro-level operational practices, shedding light on the “agency of subjects” and “data-driven nature” of cross-cultural communication in the social media era, and providing a practical analytical framework for understanding Generation Z’s consumption of foreign cultures.

3. Audience profile analysis: Who’s “browsing the bill” for MJ on Xiaohongshu?

3.1. Gender Distribution: Breaking the stereotype that “MJ fans are predominantly male”

Account backend data shows that the gender distribution among fans is 95% female and 5% male. This data is striking—traditionally, MJ’s fan base was thought to be predominantly male; yet on the Xiaohongshu platform, female users make up the clear majority. This stark contrast reveals that the platform’s underlying logic has reshaped the audience structure. The operators’ choice of “brother-sister bond” as the entry point for their viral videos is precisely a targeted response to the emotional preferences of female users.

3.2 Age distribution: The “core force” aged 18-34 and intergenerational continuity

As shown in the previous figure, the age distribution of the audience exhibits a spindle-shaped structure—large in the middle and small at both ends.

- a. 18–24 years old: The largest proportion (approximately 40%+)
- b. 25–34 years old: Second largest share (approximately 30%+)

- c. Over 35 years old (approximately 15%)
- d. Under 18 (approximately 10%)

Data shows that MJ's fans have not "aged" along with his passing; on the contrary, they have attracted a large number of Gen Z users who are rediscovering MJ through social media. The 18–34 age group forms the "backbone" of his fan base, possessing both strong purchasing power and a willingness to express their emotions. In the comment sections, younger users tend to express their immediate feelings, while older users are more inclined to share personal memories, creating a unique intergenerational dialogue.

3.3. Urban distribution: "cultural consumption hotspots" dominated by first- and new first-tier cities

The top 8 cities with the largest fan bases are: Overseas, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Beijing, Shenzhen, Chongqing, and Hangzhou. First-tier and emerging first-tier cities constitute the primary source of fans. These regions feature vibrant cultural consumption and frequent international engagement, providing fertile ground for the acceptance of overseas pop culture. "Overseas" ranks first, suggesting that some of the fans are overseas Chinese, and MJ serves as a "cultural nostalgia", connecting them to their sense of identity.

3.4. Interest distribution: "Broadly interested users" dominated by lifestyle and entertainment

As shown in the preceding figure, the top 5 fan interest tags are: lifestyle documentation (16%), entertainment (14%), anime/manga and related content (11%), film and television (10%), and gaming (6%). This distribution closely aligns with the user profile of Xiaohongshu's platform ^[9-10].

The key insight from this distribution is that the vast majority of fans are not "core enthusiasts" but rather "users with broad interests." They pay attention to MJ because his content can seamlessly integrate into everyday life—emotional experiences, entertainment consumption, and even subcultural preferences. This calls for content creation to be carried out in an emotionally resonant and relatable manner, rather than being overly specialized.

3.5. Summary: Insights from audience profiling for content strategy

MJ's audience on Xiaohongshu exhibits the profile characteristics of being "female-dominated, youth-oriented, concentrated in first-tier cities, and with broadened interests", challenging the stereotypical perception that "MJ fans = middle-aged male enthusiasts." For operators, content strategies must:

Emotional engagement (responding to the emotional needs of female users), life-oriented translation (integrating users' everyday interests), and intergenerational dialogue design (fostering interaction across different age groups).

4. Analysis of the localization translation mechanism: The birth of a viral video

This chapter takes the viral video "He Gave His Tenderness to His Younger Sister, But Left Regret Behind for the World" as its analytical subject, and examines the process of indigenous adaptation—from topic selection and decision-making, to headline design, and content editing—through these three stages. As shown in **Table 2**, the following details of the video can be seen.

Table 2. Basic information about the video

Item	Data
Release Date	January 28, 2026
Video Duration	1 minute 18 seconds
Title	He gave tenderness to his sister, but left regret for the world
Impressions	473,559 times
Views	w302,221 times
Cover Click Rate	23.3%
Completion Rate	18.3%
Likes	49,889 times
Favorites	6,139 times
Number of Comments	214 comments
Shares	287 times
Number of fans increases	838 people

4.1. Translation mechanism 1: Precise activation of emotional anchors

Topic selection decision: Why choose “sibling bond”?

Scarcity: The sibling bond between MJ is rarely featured in Chinese internet content, giving it a fresh and unique appeal. Emotional Tension: The brother and sister are both pop superstars; their relationship is complex yet deeply moving, naturally brimming with dramatic conflict. Local adaptation: Chinese traditional culture places great importance on “brotherly and sisterly bonds”, and topics related to sibling relationships easily resonate with audiences. Theoretical Interpretation: This choice corresponds to the “local awakening of spiritual totems”—connecting MJ’s universal values (family and kinship) with China’s indigenous family ethics. This precisely mirrors the cultural transformation and evolution process emphasized by the theory of “transcultural communication”^[11].

4.2. Translation mechanism No. 2: Local adaptation of narrative strategies

The title design—“He gave his tenderness to his younger sister, yet left his regrets to the world”—is a key localization strategy. The first half of the sentence sets up emotional anticipation, while the second half links the sibling bond with the collective memory of MJ’s passing. The use of the pronoun “he” creates an air of mystery. This title generated a 23.3% increase in cover click-through rate, surpassing over 85% of similar content, thereby confirming the empowering value of AI in self-media operations.

Content Editing: The video is 1 minute and 18 seconds long and features a combination of “heartwarming clips + slow-motion shots + background music.” The footage deliberately avoids focusing on the stage’s spotlight moments, instead zeroing in on intimate interactions between the brother and sister—such as their knowing glances, attentive listening to each other’s words, and playful water fights. This “de-mythologizing” approach makes the idol feel more relatable and approachable. The first 19 seconds show the highest retention rate, coinciding with the moment when the younger sister is moved by a scene and transitions into nostalgic memories—a testament to the effectiveness of the “emotional hook placed upfront” strategy.

The data shows that the retention rate is highest during the first 19 seconds of the video. This segment features poignant visuals paired with moving remarks, creating a powerful emotional hook that effectively

sparks viewers' curiosity, thereby validating the effectiveness of the emotion-first strategy.

4.3. Translation mechanism 3: Real-time calibration via community feedback

Comment section engagement: After the video was posted, the author continuously monitored activity in the comment section and engaged with users based on their feedback. The “comment summary” generated by the platform's system identified three main topics

- a. Feelings of sadness and regret (52%)
- b. Deep sibling bond (34%)
- c. Jenny's Talent Discussion (8% weighting)

Operational Calibration: Based on this feedback, the author adopted a differentiated interaction strategy:

- a. For comments expressing “sadness and regret”, prioritize empathetic responses.
- b. Comment on “deep sibling bond” and encourage in-depth discussion.
- c. Comment on and like “Jenny's Talent” to show your support.

This “instant calibration” enables users to shift from being mere “content consumers” to active “conversation participants”, enhancing community engagement and driving a secondary boost in traffic to previously published content.

4.4. Summary: The synergistic effect of the translation mechanism

The three translation mechanisms do not operate in isolation; rather, they form a coordinated system:

Emotional anchors determine “what to say”—choosing the angle of sibling relationships. Narrative strategies determine “how to say it”—title design + heartfelt editing. Community feedback determines “how to say it better”—continuously optimizing based on comments. It is precisely this synergy that enabled a 1-minute and 18-second video to make the leap from “circle-based dissemination” to “cross-circle dissemination.”

5. Evaluation of communication effectiveness: The logic of transforming traffic into engagement

5.1. Reach effectiveness: Funnel analysis of traffic

Exposure-to-view conversion

Total impressions: 473,559 times

Total views: 302,227 times

Cover click-through rate: 21.9% (exceeding 85% of similar content)

Conclusion: The high click-through rate is attributed to the emotional tension in the headline and the heartwarming moment captured in the cover image (MJ kissing his younger sister).

Viewing-Completion Conversion

Average watch duration: 36.6 seconds; fans: 49.7 seconds (total duration: 1 minute and 18 seconds)

Completion rate: 17.7% (exceeding 81% of similar content)

Conclusion: The retention rate is highest during the first 19 seconds and gradually declines thereafter. This suggests that in the future, content should incorporate a new “emotional hook” after 19 seconds, or keep the duration within 20–25 seconds to improve completion rates.

Viewing source analysis:

Video recommendation: 81.1% (primary traffic source)

Homepage recommendation: 15.3%

Conclusion: This indicates that the content is receiving positive feedback from the platform’s algorithm, creating a positive cycle of “high-quality content → high engagement → more recommendations → greater exposure.”

5.2. Identity efficacy: Quantitative and qualitative measurement of emotional resonance

Engagement rate

Total engagement (likes + comments + saves + shares): 56,529 times

Engagement rate (engagement count/view count): 18.7%

Conclusion: This means that nearly 19 out of every 100 viewers engage in interaction, serving as direct evidence of perceived effectiveness. Likes: 49,889 (88.2% share)

Favorites: 6,140 times (10.9% share)

Comments: 214 (accounting for 0.4%)

Shares: 378 times (accounting for 0.5%)

This structure reveals the different levels of user identification:

Like: Mild agreement, expressing “I like it.” Favorites: Moderate agreement, expressing “I’d like to keep it.”

Comment: Strongly agree; expressing “I want to express.”

Share: Strongly agree, expressing “I want to spread this.” The number of saves (6,140) significantly exceeds the number of comments (214), indicating that a large number of users view these videos as “emotional resources that can be revisited” rather than “one-time consumption content.”

Sentiment Analysis of the Comment Section

The thematic coding of 214 comments is shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Sentiment analysis of the comment section

Emotional Type	Percentage	Typical Comments
Sadness and Regret	52%	“Crying my heart out”; “Can’t control my tears”; “I cried all day when he left”
Warm and touching	28%	“Siblings are so loving”; “This kind of feeling is so precious”
Personal Memory	12%	“Thought of my brother”
Jenny’s attention	8%	Janet is really underestimated”

Key finding: Users’ emotional projection is shifting from “MJ himself” to “the users themselves”—comments such as “It reminded me of my brother” indicate that MJ’s sibling relationship has become an “emotional trigger” that activates users’ memories of their own families. This precisely reflects the micro-level manifestation of emotional flows within what Appadurai calls the “media landscape”^[12].

5.3. Conversion effectiveness: From “passerby” to “fan” retention

Follower growth performance: Before the video was posted, we had approximately 470 followers; after posting, the number surged to 1,308, representing a net increase of 838 followers—a nearly 1.8-fold growth in followers. Follower growth is a key metric for conversion effectiveness—users not only appreciate individual pieces of content but are also willing to establish long-term connections. Notably, there’s a significant gap between the number of new followers (838) and the engagement volume (56,000)—only 1.5%

of engaged users chose to follow.

This suggests that a “funnel effect” exists between “one-time interactions” and “long-term following”, indicating the need to design specialized “conversion hooks” (such as pinned posts or series previews). Fan quality: The newly added fan profile is largely consistent with the existing fan base (95% female, primarily aged 18–34). The primary interest tags remain “life logging” and “entertainment”, confirming a user audience dominated by “general-interest users.”

5.4 Summary: The progressive logic of communication effectiveness

a. Reach effectiveness (getting users to “see” it): Cover click-through rate 23.3% → Impressions 474,000 → Views 302,000

b. Engagement effectiveness (making users “feel moved”): Interaction rate 18.7% → Likes: 49,000+; Saves: 6,139 → Emotional resonance in the comment section.

c. Conversion effectiveness (encouraging users to “stay”): Gained 838 new followers → Total number of followers now stands at 1,308 → Building a pool of “seed users” for future dissemination. The three pathways are interlinked and together form a complete closed loop—from “traffic” to “retention.”

6. Conclusion and discussion

6.1. Core findings

First, MJ’s audience exhibits the following characteristics: “female-dominated, predominantly young, concentrated in first-tier cities, and with broadened interests” (95% female; approximately 70% aged 18–34). This challenges the stereotypical perception that “MJ fans = middle-aged male enthusiasts”, revealing the reshaping effect of platform logic on audience structure.

Second, localization-based translation is achieved through a threefold mechanism: activation of emotional anchors (focusing on sibling bonds), adaptation of narrative strategies (title design + heartwarming editing), and calibration via community feedback (interactive engagement guided by comments). This synergistic interplay enables a leap from circle-based dissemination to cross-circle dissemination.

Third, the effectiveness of dissemination follows a progressive logic of “reach—identification—conversion”: Reach lays the foundation for traffic, and identification. The platform embodies emotional depth and facilitates the accumulation of user engagement. Users’ emotional projection shifts from “MJ himself” to “themselves”, and foreign culture becomes a “medium” through which local users express their own emotions.

6.2. Theoretical contributions

First, the author proposes a “Translation Effectiveness Model from the Dual Perspective of Operators and Users”, extending the theory of “glocalization” to micro-level operational practices.

Second, based on primary data, the author has validated the central role of “emotional hooks”^[8]. MJ’s “genuine cracks” (the warmth between siblings), rather than “perfect divinity”, have emerged as the key factor for resonance, confirming the emotional shift observed in fan studies^[13–14]. Future research could extend this study to examine the dissemination of other overseas cultural symbols on Xiaohongshu, exploring both the common patterns and individual differences in their localized adaptations^[15]. Third, it reveals the reshaping effect of platform logic on audience structure: on Xiaohongshu, MJ content has shifted from being

consumed primarily by “professional music fans” to being embraced by “users with broad interests.”

6.3. Practical implications

First, placing great importance on the selection of “emotional anchors” and aligning with the emotional structures of local users is a prerequisite for effective translation.

Second, make good use of platform diagnostic tools (comment summaries, retention trends) to achieve data-driven operations.

Third, design “conversion hooks” (featured posts, series previews) to bridge the funnel from “traffic to retention.” Fourth, adopt an audience structure primarily composed of “broad-interest users”, integrating content into everyday life.

6.4. Study limitations and future prospects

Based on the analysis of a single video, its generalizability remains to be verified; the dual role of “operator-researcher” may introduce cognitive biases; user retention after gaining followers was not included in the analysis.

In the future, we can develop translation mechanisms to compare different types of content, track the long-term evolution of fan communities, and extend our research to the dissemination of other overseas cultural symbols (such as European and American singers and Japanese and Republic of Korean idols) on Xiaohongshu.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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