

The Influence of Social Media on the Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Jiangsu Lacquer Fans

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Abstract:

In recent years, social media has rapidly developed, providing not only a new platform for cultural activities but also greatly enhancing the speed and scope of dissemination, ushering in new opportunities for the cultural heritage dissemination and achieving partial reconstruction. The dissemination and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage have always received widespread attention from all sectors of society. However, issues such as homogenization of content and a lack of innovation persist in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage. This article focuses on the theme of the context of contemporary digital platforms, deeply analyzes the impact of social media on the spread of intangible cultural heritage, and takes Jiangsu lacquer fans as an example. This analysis concludes that social media has broadened the audience for intangible culture, though the depth of dissemination and level of cultural innovation require further enhancement. On this basis, this article suggests improving communication platforms and innovating communication forms to establish sustainable commercial development channels, in order to promote better regional adaptation and inheritance development of intangible cultural heritage under social media.

Keywords: Cultural dissemination; intangible cultural heritage; social media; innovation; inheritance

1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage, as artistic treasures embodying historical memory and national character, crystallises humanity's shared spiritual wealth and

cultural aspirations [1]. There are numerous and diverse forms of intangible cultural heritage, and it is an indispensable and important component of Chinese civilization. In recent years, the rise of social media has not only provided a new platform for

cultural activities but also greatly improved the speed and scope of dissemination, rebuilding the dissemination methods of intangible cultural heritage [2]. Against this backdrop, numerous scholars have undertaken relevant research. Yao et al. explored how social media disrupts traditional modes of transmission for the cultural heritage, highlighting its ability to transcend temporal and spatial constraints [3]. Li, Wu, and others, adopting an audience-centred approach, investigated the impact of social media on audiences of intangible culture [4]. However, existing research still has shortcomings. On the one hand, research into prolonged mechanisms for disseminating intangible cultural heritage through social media remains scarce. On the other hand, a lack of in-depth analysis of the differential strategies of intangible cultural heritage projects in different regions via social media persists. This article aims to reveal the dissemination mechanism of traditional intangible cultural heritage crafts through social media, analyses the role of social media in the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, provide sustainable innovation and development strategies for intangible cultural heritage, and promote the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage.

2. The Case Study of Lacquer Fans

Jiangsu lacquer fans utilize the fan ribs as a base, harnessing the unique properties of lacquer through techniques such as coating, painting, and inlaying to create exquisite patterns and textures.

2.1 Platform Features

Numerous creators publish detailed video tutorials on the crafting process of Jiangsu lacquer fans. For instance, they documented the entire “texture-shifting” process in lacquer fan production through video, demonstrating how distinct textures emerge on the lacquer surface using varied tools and materials. This allows users to intuitively appreciate the artistry and subtlety of lacquer craftsmanship.

2.2 Audience Engagement Metrics

High-quality lacquer fan content on rednote typically garners substantial likes. Viral posts showcasing craftsmanship or exploring cultural narratives can accumulate thousands or even tens of thousands of likes, indicating strong user appreciation and engagement.

2.3 Cases of Successful Transmission Attempts

A Jiangsu-based lacquer fan brand launched an online promotion for its “Lacquer Fan Handcrafting Experience Event” on rednote. Several prominent craft bloggers on

rednote were invited to preview the event by sharing their experiences and finished creations. These bloggers’ posts attracted significant follower engagement and registrations. During the event, participants crafted their own lacquer fans under professional guidance, subsequently sharing both the creation process and finished product photographs on rednote which generating secondary dissemination. This initiative not only allowed more individuals to personally experience the allure of Jiangsu lacquer fan craftsmanship but also significantly enhanced the brand’s visibility and influence.

3. The Role of Social Media in the Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology to emphasize deep understanding and interpretation of phenomena, uncovering underlying meanings and latent relationships through the collection of rich non-numerical data such as text and images. Furthermore, this article used the thematic analysis method to analyze underlying motivations and significance for each core theme undergoes in-depth interpretation. For example, for the “cultural significance theme”, analyse how cultural storytelling enhances users’ cultural identification with lacquer fans.

3.1 Characteristics of the Cultural Heritage Dissemination

3.1.1 Literature Review

Debray’s theory of media studies posits that media are not merely carriers of information but also the ‘materialized organization’ of cultural transmission [2]. In the digital age, social media as a new media domain has reconfigured the dissemination chain of intangible culture through technological devices, algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, and user-generated content models. Users form initial awareness through “inspiration-driven” posts, with likes and saves reflecting cultural interest. Early research focused on the dissemination efficiency of social media, while recent studies have shifted towards examining cultural value dimensions. Debray’s media theory, the digital narrative trust model, and the user engagement gradient model collectively construct an analytical framework for the dynamic equilibrium of ‘technology-culture-users’.

3.1.2 Dissemination Backgrounds

There are various ways to disseminate intangible cultural heritage, including traditional written and oral transmission, as well as modern digital dissemination and practical inheritance [5]. Whether online or offline, intangible her-

itage remains fundamentally rooted in people and craftsmanship. By highlighting the individual achievements of artisans and showcasing the processes of traditional skills, it engages audiences to recognize and understand its significance [6]. This generational transmission ensures the authenticity and stability of its dissemination [7]. However, the broadcast of intangible culture is not static. In contemporary society, the popularity of new media has greatly increased the speed of spread of intangible cultural heritage, and geographical boundaries no longer constitute a constraint on dissemination. As a shared treasure of humanity worldwide, intangible cultural heritage is gradually emerging from its local origins to engage with the global community. The rise of the youth demographic has infused new vitality into the spread of intangible cultural heritage, simultaneously steering its promotion towards a younger audience. The integration of online and offline platforms has fostered a more comprehensive commercial ecosystem for cultural heritage, thereby enabling its practical implementation.

3.2 Advantages and Outcomes of Social Media Dissemination

With its formidable reach and distinctive interactivity, social media presents fresh opportunities for intangible cultural heritage dissemination. It transcends traditional constraints, integrating intangible cultural heritage into everyday life and revitalizing ancient traditions across multiple domains—geography, trends, and audiences. This section examines lacquer fans as a case study, analyzing social media's advantages and impact on intangible cultural heritage dissemination.

3.2.1 Expand the geographical scope of dissemination

Social media, with its comprehensive network coverage, has broken traditional geographical limitations, allowing intangible cultural heritage to transcend borders and reach audiences in every corner of the world, achieving widespread dissemination. In 2024, the East China and South China regions accounted for over 60% of the painted fan market consumption. However, the central and western regions demonstrated significant growth, this indicates that video dissemination has effectively stimulated market demand in these central and western areas. Social media is a highly dependent channel for the global dissemination of lacquer fan intangible cultural heritage content [8]. Through short video platforms, people from all over the world can see the production process of lacquer fans and the superb skills of craftsmen, which has spread the cultural connotation and artistic value of lacquer fans worldwide. This rapid cross-regional dissemination has attracted more people from different backgrounds and cultures to

understand and learn about traditional Chinese intangible cultural heritage handicrafts, promoting global cultural exchange and ideological collision. Simultaneously, it elevates the lacquer fan's international profile, broadens its audience base, transcends conventional geographical constraints, and enhances its global influence.

3.2.2 Innovation and integration with modern trends

Social media provides a broad stage for the fusion of intangible cultural heritage with contemporary trends, breathing new life into ancient traditions through innovative and creative expressions, attracting more attention from young people. Taking Jiangsu lacquer fans as an example, social media has added diverse forms of lacquer fan communication, enriched the content of communication, and expanded the areas where lacquer fans can be used. Social media has strong interactivity, and users can follow video content in real-time through comments and bullet comments, enhancing the audience's experience and promoting the secondary culture spread [9]. The combination of lacquer fan technology and handbags fully demonstrates the dual benefits and long-term stable audience brought by cross-border products. The pioneering combination allows lacquer fans not to stop at traditional art, but to reappear in new forms in front of the public to achieve a more stable dissemination effect.

3.2.3 Promote community cohesion and strengthen ethnic identity

The interactive nature of social media has promoted the formation and development of communities of intangible cultural heritage enthusiasts. In these communities, audiences can not only have in-depth communication, but also participate in intangible cultural heritage dissemination activities together, enhancing the stickiness and depth of cultural dissemination. In addition, using social media to spread intangible cultural heritage can also evoke people's memories of ethnic culture, strengthen their sense of belonging to ethnic culture, and effectively enhance their sense of ethnic identity and cohesion of national spirit. Therefore, as an important material carrier of Chinese culture, lacquer fans, under the influence of social media, can not only help promote traditional Chinese intangible cultural heritage but also enhance national identity and cultural confidence. Social media has widely spread the development history and cultural roots of lacquer fans, allowing ethnic compatriots to deeply understand China's long-standing cultural heritage, resonate with it, and strengthen the connection between the audience and social groups. In addition, communication on the platform also promotes people from different backgrounds, regions, and cultures to communicate, collide ideas, enhance national

pride and cohesion, and promote cultural exchange and inheritance between communities.

4. Challenges and Limitations of Social Media in Empowering Intangible Cultural Heritage

In the era swept by digitalization and intelligence, social media breaks traditional thinking and innovatively develops a characteristic culture belonging to the new generation. With strong dissemination power and a large user base, it empowers intangible cultural heritage and also brings new opportunities for its inheritance [2]. However, during empowering intangible cultural heritage through social media, there is not only uncertainty in the dissemination effect, but also many risks and challenges in sustainability issues. The transmission of intangible cultural heritage encounters multiple limitations and potential crises [10].

4.1 Content Homogenization

A substantial volume of intangible cultural heritage content exhibits homogeneity in both form and subject matter. Multiple creators may simultaneously publish videos titled “Learn Lacquer Fan Crafting in Three Minutes,” featuring similar content structures that guide viewers through material preparation, step-by-step production, and final product presentation which lack in-depth exploration of the unique value of different intangible cultural heritage projects. This leads to aesthetic fatigue among the audience and makes it difficult to highlight the diverse charm of intangible cultural heritage. Social media focuses on quick and easy dissemination, rather than in-depth and detailed explanation and promotion. Intangible cultural heritage content is often fragmented under the influence of this mainstream form, resulting in the homogenization of the content presented in videos. The same content or materials are repeatedly reflected in similar videos [11]. This fragmented and homogeneous dissemination method makes it difficult for the audience to have a comprehensive understanding, and users and viewers cannot deeply comprehend the connotation and value of intangible cultural heritage. In terms of communication form, the standardized communication content lacks rhythm changes and visual impact, and the plain language style lacks infectivity and interest. The homogenization of content has led to the proliferation of intangible cultural heritage dissemination on social media, but truly valuable, distinctive, and thought-provoking content is difficult to highlight. When faced with a large amount of similar content, the audience is prone to aesthetic fatigue, which hinders the

dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

4.2 Deviation and Misrepresentation of Cultural Connotation

Certain disseminators, in their pursuit of traffic, offer partial or erroneous interpretations of intangible cultural heritage, leading to distorted perceptions among audiences and undermining the original spiritual essence and value system of such heritage. However, intangible cultural heritage contains rich historical and cultural heritage with high barriers and professionalism, while in social media dissemination, the professional content is often simplified to attract the public and expand its influence. In the process of promoting cultural heritage through social media, creators have a one-sided interpretation and introduction of intangible cultural heritage. They focus solely on describing exquisite craftsmanship and showcasing the appearance of the finished product, yet overlook the historical depth, regional characteristics, and national spirit embodied within intangible cultural heritage. Moreover, due to an insufficient understanding of intangible cultural heritage itself, the original meaning of intangible culture is distorted, cultural symbols are misinterpreted, cultural essence is distorted as well, and the authenticity of cultural heritage is undermined. This leads to a biased or incomplete understanding of intangible cultural heritage by the public, damaging cultural diversity and hindering the inheritance and sustainable development of culture.

4.3 Over Commercialization

Some intangible cultural heritage dissemination media have completely focused on commercial interests during the dissemination boom, no longer focusing on promoting traditional culture as the core, but treating intangible cultural heritage as commercial products to obtain economic profits [12]. In the process of content creation and communication strategy formulation, these businesses prioritize traffic and product sales over conveying cultural connotations. The excessive commercialization of communication modes has gradually caused intangible cultural heritage to lose its dissemination significance and original cultural charm on social media. In the atmosphere of excessive commercialization, the value measurement standards of intangible cultural heritage are severely distorted, and the intangible cultural heritage products created blindly cater to market demand, seemingly novel but lacking inherent logic and cultural connection. This kind of cultural abuse not only undermines the integrity of intangible cultural heritage but also misleads the public’s correct understanding of intangible cultural heritage. Over time, traditional skills of intangible cultural heritage may be affected and

gradually lost, and cultural connotations will be gradually diluted, leading to a crisis of discontinuity in the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

5. Effective Strategies for Addressing Dissemination Risks

5.1 Building an Evaluation System and Disseminating High-Quality Content

In the process of disseminating intangible cultural heritage, social media platforms should establish a relatively differentiated evaluation system and develop personalized review standards. Guide disseminators to focus on content and quality, fully considering the authenticity and accuracy of intangible cultural heritage technology. Encourage the dissemination of authentic content that showcases the unique cultural charm of intangible cultural heritage. For commercial promotion, the platform needs to review the correlation between the dissemination of content and intangible cultural heritage to prevent excessive commercialization from harming intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, establish an effective evaluation system to evaluate communicators from multiple aspects, such as the quality and effectiveness of communication content, encourage communicators to pay attention to differentiated contents, improve communication level and create a good atmosphere for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

5.2 Upholding Cultural Essence and Innovating Intangible Cultural Heritage

Preserving and developing heritage requires steadfast commitment to its cultural connotations. Cultural research constitutes the bedrock for the intangible cultural heritage transmission and development. A team of cultural research specialists should undertake comprehensive and systematic investigations into intangible cultural heritage, not only tracing its developmental history but also exploring the underlying cultural context and intrinsic value. Through in-depth analysis and research, define the core of intangible cultural heritage, as well as providing a basis for adhering to cultural connotations [13]. In addition, actively encourage the presentation of intangible cultural heritage in innovative forms, combined with modern aesthetics, to develop innovative cultural and creative products. Given its inherent inclusivity and openness, cross-sectoral integration can foster new cultural forms, establishing diverse industries with creative cultural substance. This enables the innovative development of traditional cultural products to meet varied consumer demands.

5.3 Establish a Rights Protection Mechanism to Promote Sustainable Business Development

It is also necessary to build a rights protection mechanism to ensure the healthy development of intangible cultural heritage in social media communication. Clarify the ownership of intangible cultural heritage-related rights and effectively prevent the misuse of intangible cultural heritage. With the increasing trend of internationalization of intangible cultural heritage business, strengthening international legal cooperation is crucial. Actively establish a unified intangible cultural heritage protection mechanism while safeguarding its legitimate rights and interests globally, while actively exploring sustainable business models to balance cultural dissemination with commercial interests [14]. Encourage reasonable commercial development and promote the launch of co-branded products with cultural connotations. Enable intangible cultural heritage to receive economic support while achieving wider and more sustainable dissemination, together with the sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage businesses, to achieve a win-win situation where economic benefits are realized alongside the cultural heritage dissemination.

6. Conclusion

Social media has transformed the transmission mechanisms of culture from unidirectional transmission to multifaceted interaction, while the role of cultural heritage promotion has evolved from mere cultural preservation to the revitalization of cultural values. In the digital age, social media has expanded the dissemination scope of intangible cultural heritage, increased its popularity, encouraged the public to participate in the process of cultural exchange, and greatly increased the inheritance of traditional intangible cultural heritage. Adequate cultural exchange and collision also allow traditional culture to be integrated and innovated across borders, making it easier for novel intangible cultural heritage works and cultural products to cater to the mainstream aesthetic of the public and gain cultural recognition from young people. However, the dissemination of social media also carries potential risks. Unreasonable commercial mechanisms can turn intangible cultural heritage into a tool for profit, destroying its unique cultural connotations and charm. To address these issues, it is crucial to adhere to the cultural core, screen high-quality content on social media for dissemination, and expand the publicity group to achieve true deep dissemination. Reasonably utilizing the internet for innovation and development of traditional culture, establishing protection mechanisms to achieve commercial sustainability. Keeping pace with the times, harness innovative

social media to enrich communication formats, embracing the best while discarding the worst, thereby integrating intangible culture into contemporary lifestyles. This study also has certain limitations which is that focusing solely on lacquer fans as its research subject. Its transmission mechanisms and effects may not be generalisable to other cultural projects, necessitating future expansion to include comparative analysis of diverse case studies. Social media presents unprecedented opportunities for disseminating intangible culture. However, to achieve sustainable dissemination, future research must compare the similarities and differences in social media spread, distil universal principles and explore global dissemination pathways for cultural heritage tailored to overseas audiences.

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