UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Intercultural Communication on China's We Media—

WeChat Public Platform as an Example



School of History, Culture and Arts Studies

European Heritage, Digital Media and Information Society

Master's Thesis

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May 2016

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To explore the deep associations between diversified culture communication modes and

the new tendencies of China's social media, this thesis focuses on the development

patterns of intercultural communication on China's we media.

Symbolized by WeChat Public Platform, China's we media has achieved a tremendous

development in recent years. In Chapter 1, the background introduction of we media

highlights the essential connotation and the basic methodology of this thesis. And by

interpreting the rise of China's we media in Chapter 2, the unique evolution process of

social media in China is revealed logically. Besides, as specific case studies, the two

cultural WeChat official accounts: EatPrayLove and Shameless in Chapter 3

comprehensively present a macroscopic cognition as well as the detailed descriptions of

intercultural communication on China's we media. In addition, based on a series of

analyses and demonstrations on the developments and prospects of China's we media in

Chapter 4, the further exploration and interpretation on how to promote intercultural

communication is concluded concisely and precisely in Chapter 5.

Keywords: we media, China's social media, intercultural communication, WeChat

Public Platform.

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1. Introduction

In China, we media has attracted great attention in recent years. Starting from the microblogs on Sina Weibo to the era of the WeChat Public Platform, China's we media has formed its own features and created a unique media circle. Based on this mature media environment, intercultural communication has become a new research direction in China's we media field.

Although there are an increasing number of we media operators have devoted vast media resources to disseminating foreign cultures and traditional Chinese cultures, the development patterns of intercultural communication still need to be improved. Therefore, how to promote intercultural communication on China's we media can be regarded as a valuable research topic which is worth to be explored.

By interpreting the rise of China's we media, researching representative official accounts on WeChat Public Platform as specific case studies and analyzing the developments and prospects of China's we media, this thesis is intended to explore the optimal solution of above research question with a progressive structure. To comprehensively reflect the essential connotation of we media as well as the basic methodology for thesis writing, the definition of we media, the characteristics of China's we media, the previous researches in China's we media field and the research methodology are revealed in the Introduction as the background information.

Based on the detailed observations and the deep analyses of two characteristic official accounts: EatPrayLove and Shameless, the research on intercultural communication can be presented from two relative directions—cultural input and cultural export. To collect authentic data and to gain detailed experience from both of the audience and operator perspective on WeChat Public Platform, author established EatPrayLove in May 2015 as a practical case study and has operated it independently for one year to accumulate original research materials. With the dual identities of the disseminator and the receiver,

the further exploration on intercultural communication can be concluded precisely and profoundly in a dialectical way.

1.1 Definition of we media

In the late 1960s, based on the rapid development of the network, new media entered the public attention as an emerging media concept. This development continued and the combination of digital, network and multimedia technologies became the main character of the 1980's information revolution. Nevertheless, as a relative concept, new media was continuously renewing with the development of science and technology. In 1998, the concept of the fourth media was published, which highlighted the Internet as the principal element of new media. Meanwhile, today intense discussions on the scope of the fifth media have expanded in different fields. Despite the fifth media being difficult to define, because of the multiple and complex theoretical concepts as well as a series of unknown uncertainties, we media has been recognized as a new characteristic of the fifth media by scholars. However, it is noteworthy that we media is not a new-type media, on the contrary, we media belongs to the category of new media and needs the technical support from new media. In general, we media can be conceptually defined as the newest stage of new media development.

Dan Gillmor, an American scholar, took "Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People" as the subtitle of his monograph *We the Media*. This brief description can be regarded as a short but precise definition of we media. Specifically, we media is derived from social media, it is a low-threshold journalism which provides users with a high degree of freedom to create personal press centers. According to a more immediate and detailed viewpoint from Bowman and Willis:

We Media is a way to begin to understand how ordinary citizens, empowered by digital technologies that connect knowledge

¹ Gillmor 2004, 1.

throughout the globe, are contributing to and participating in their own truths, their own kind of news.²

From the perspective of practical application, we media can be defined as global personal media platforms which require solid support from both advanced digital technologies and open network environments.

1.2 We media in China

Under the dual influence of the blockade of foreign social media and the self-development of China's social media, we media has emerged in China as a new development stage of Internet medium. To adapt China's network environment while at the same time retaining the fundamental principles of social media, we media has been endowed with several new characteristics as the localized development in China.

Valuing on autonomy, privacy, functionality and manageability is the current mainstream trend on China's we media. For example, "No matter how trivial the individual is, it deserves a personal brand" (Translated by author). The slogan of WeChat Public Platform in a certain extent reflects the insistence on autonomy. Besides, with the great reputation of WeChat, WeChat Public Platform has been rapidly accepted by Chinese netizens as a practical derivative in recent years. Based on the specific functional partitioning and the strict management system, WeChat Public Platform satisfies different ages with diversified functions in various fields. Nowadays, WeChat Public Platform has greatly impacted on the daily life in modern China by the unique information dissemination mode. In other words, WeChat Public Platform has become a new lifestyle in China's modern society.

1.3 Researches on China's we media

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² Bowman & Willis 2003, 5.

³ Log-in page of WeChat Public Platform: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/cgi-bin/loginpage?t=wxm2-login&lang=zh_CN [Referenced 15 March, 2016]

The rise of we media in China attracts increasing attention of domestic scholars. Thus, the recent research focus in new media field has turned to this active topic gradually. For example, the competition and integration between we media and traditional media, the impacts of we media on university ideological education and the negative effects of we media on society and individuals are several mainstream research topics in China's we media research field.

Contrasting the commonalities and diversities between innovation and predecessor to analyze the competition and development is the most conventional topic in general researches. Similarly in we media field, the research direction on the competition and integration between we media and traditional media occupied the majority of research resources in earlier studies. According to a core research:

Compared with the one-way transmission on traditional media, we media highlights the 'Sharing' function which presents a nonlinear and multi-dimensional transmission characteristic. (Translated by author)

The essential distinction between we media and traditional media is the divergence and interactivity of information dissemination mode. Besides, the unique features of we media, such as instantaneity, portability and high-efficiency provide users with a creative experience which traditional media has failed to give. Nonetheless, according to a contrary viewpoint:

The enormous scale of official accounts impact on the content quality in a certain extent. Specifically, a considerable proportion of we media operators are equipped with limited abilities and insufficient innovations, which cause the hasty failure eventually.⁵

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⁴ Luo 2015, 34-37.

⁵ Wen 2013, 55-58

(Translated by author)

The superiorities of we media transform into hidden deficiencies in this circumstance. Consequently, to break the current stalemate, "strengthening the integration between traditional media and we media, expanding the channels of information source and promoting the influence of media products" (Translated by author) is an optimal option for this competitive relation. To be specific, the Media Convergence theory which presents a multifunctional integrated media tendency can be accepted as the most rational choice for the further improvement of China's we media industries.

Similarly, the intense discussions have also emerged in the research fields which focus on the impacts of we media on university ideological education and the negative effects of we media on society and individuals. Excerpting from an academic paper on the former topic:

The era of we media provides the ideological and political education work with incredible opportunities from the perspectives of environment, content, format and concept. However, it also brings great challenges such as culture shock, vulgar content and Internet dependence.⁸ (Translated by author)

The culture permeation of we media in the ideological and political education field can be accepted as a mixed blessing. Furthermore, the principal contradictions on the latter topic concentrate in two research aspects, which are the negative effects on social morality and the negative guidance on the formation of both personality and mentality.

In addition to the above mainstream research directions, intercultural communication can be recognized as a new research hotspot which is worth to be noticed and be further

⁶ Chen & Zou 2014, 52-53.

⁷ Pool 1983.

⁸ Lu & Xu 2013, 72-76.

studied. In the early 20th century, Wilbur Schramm, a communications scholar, combined information theory with communication theory. Starting from this cross-over study, new media and intercultural communication have established a deep and intrinsic association. In general, promoting intercultural communication on China's we media has become a worthy research topic in this information society.

1.4 Methodology

Basing on literature review, case study and SWOT analysis to acquire foundation knowledge, obtain statistical data and evaluate future trends is the main methodology of this research topic.

Literature review is a significant preparation for thesis writing, which can bring central arguments solid theoretical supports. Specifically, studying on the relevant literatures and previous researches of China's social media contributes to defining we media precisely and to interpreting emerging media phenomena logically in Chapter 1 and 2. Furthermore, by organizing a literature review, the research vacancy on intercultural communication can be observed clearly in the initial background study.

Case study is the most direct and effective method for illustration argumentation. For instance, by deeply observing and analyzing the specific official accounts: EatPrayLove and Shameless in Chapter 3, the basic information such as content selection, target audience and dissemination mode can be easily collected and summarized. In addition, as a core research step, author established EatPrayLove on WeChat Public Platform in May 2015 and has operated it independently for one year to explore the original motivation, the daily operation pattern and to accumulate the authentic user feedbacks. Furthermore, comparative research method and questionnaire survey method are two significant assisted methodologies within the case studies.

In Chapter 4, to interpret the development status and to estimate the future trend of

China's we media, SWOT analysis can be regarded as an efficient tool. To be specific, the current situation of WeChat Public Platform is presented comprehensively by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses on network technology, information dissemination and user habit. Besides, based on the various research perspectives such as social impact, transformation mode and intercultural communication, the conclusions on the further improvements of China's we media in Chapter 5 can be generalized more concisely and precisely.

2. The rise of China's We Media

The self-development in China's social media field explains the internal reason for the rise of China's we media, and the blockade of foreign social media in China reflects the external impetus. Under the catalysis of these two factors, China's we media has formed a unique operating model to satisfy different market demands, which especially benefits the promotion of intercultural communication.

2.1 The blockade of foreign social media in China

The Chinese government occupies a significant position in China's social media industry. Almost all foreign SNSs (social network services), including the most famous such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have been banned in China by a network control measure since 2009. Although the government has never given a positive response, it seems to me that Chinese netizens to some extent accept this measure as a security control of network and a rumor control for political stability.

Government intervention had produced several negative influences in the preliminary development phase of China's SNSs and also had stuck intercultural communication in a dilemma over a long period. However, from a positive perspective, the blockade offers domestic social media abundant resources by providing an independent market. Under the loose but resourceful development environment, China's social media has developed rapidly over the recent decade and has gradually formed a diversified media circle. In addition, from the perspective of national economy, the internal monopoly on social media has contributed to a new force of China's economic structure and in a certain extent has driven the further development of related industries.

Based on the blockade, we media was born as a new type of social media product which supplies the lack of communication channels and in a large extent promotes intercultural communication in China.

2.1.1 The reasons for blockade

According to the Gatekeeper Theory⁹ which Lewin Kurt introduced in *Channels of Group Life* in 1947, gate and gatekeeper are two crucial elements of information transmission. Gate symbolizes the information channels and gatekeeper refers to the in power individuals or groups who can control information sources. ¹⁰ From the macroscopic view, governments take the responsibility for international information transmission as gatekeepers. Nevertheless, the rise of social media has greatly weakened the gatekeeper function in recent years.

Network security is one of the fundamental elements for the daily operation of social media. Nowadays, due to the high Internet penetration, the concept of network security contains a broader scope than former. In the information age, extremists have started to utilize the international influence of social media to spread terroristic information, organize terrorist attacks and even establish terrorism brands. These potential threats destabilize social stability and threaten national security in a large extent. For example, social media played an important role in the political unrest in Middle East several years ago and also provided the recent Thailand Bombing (August 2015) with an influential platform to continuously ferment. Under this circumstance, foreign social media might provide domestic users with more opportunities to easily contact international terrorist organizations, which is difficult to be supervised instantly. Consequently, as a gatekeeper, Chinese government chose an overly direct but fairly effective approach to safeguard the network security, which is closing all the potentially dangerous gates by blockading foreign social media.

Besides, political rumor is another significant reason for blockading foreign social media in China. According to an academic article in *Press Circles*:

⁹ Lewin 1947, 143–153.

¹⁰ Lewin 1947, 143–153

Western countries have quickly found the breakthrough to instigate and subvert the Middle East Dictatorship on social networks. Hillary Clinton has vigorously implemented E-Diplomacy and has attached importance to releasing foreign policy on famous social media such as Facebook, Youtube, Flickr and Twitter since she took office. Besides, Hillary Clinton also claimed she will use the power of network to fight against those countries who are suppressing domestic media. (Translated by author)

A significant majority of governments have realized the importance of social media on guiding public opinions for both domestic issues and international affairs. The populist political method encourages the further communication between authorities and the public. However, political rumors and conspiracy theories can spread rapidly through social media as well, which might impact the stable political situations. To analyze the international public opinion environment without political stands, blockading foreign social media could be accepted as a foresighted strategy which is conducive to consolidating the political consensus in China.

2.1.2 The impacts of blockade

As a controversial network strategy, the impacts of blockading foreign social media have both positive and negative side. From the perspective of self-development, an independent market which forbids foreign competitors to access to is the most obvious and direct development superiority for domestic social media. Moreover, by analyzing overseas successful social media products, domestic social media has acquired the mature theoretical knowledge and abundant practice experiences, which contributes to the rapid growth especially in the early development phase. Under the dual promotion of

¹¹ Wei 2011, 89-91.

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the loose market environment and the practical oversea experience, China's social media has risen rapidly and also has created a solid foundation for future innovations. In general, government intervention provides a stable development environment to domestic social media in the initial stage by establishing a local protection.

Besides, the complete market share brings enormous economic benefits. Based on the huge population and the expanding network coverage in China, social media and the relevant industries have become a significant component of China's economic structure. Furthermore, the increasing great demands of social media reflect a potential market space and enormous commercial opportunities. Although the monopolistic market structure limits users' selection, this closed market provides China's economy with infinite vitality in the Internet age.

Like a double-edged sword, excepted for the resourceful and independent market, the blockade also causes a twisted development model for China's social media. To be specific, the excessively loose environment has weakened the international competitiveness of domestic social media. For instance, due to the lack of the long-term developing spirit, almost all the China's social media have no language options. Under today's internationalization trend, this one conspicuous shortcoming in a large extent reflects the insufficient competency of developers and exposes the narrow development prospect for China's social media.

In addition, intercultural communication was stagnant in China under the blockade. Over a long period before the rise of we media, the only channel for acquiring foreign news was the domestic mainstream media. However, the negative effects are not only in the cultural exchange field, those foreign social media platforms which contribute to promoting daily transnational interaction and communication are also severely restricted in China. In my opinion, although E-mail still can be regarded as a practical tool for international communication in cyberspace, the unique superiorities of social media such as instantaneity, portability and interactivity are hardly to be replaced.

2.2 The development history of China's social media

Under the external influence of blockading, China's social media grows and develops independently from the international social media circle. To be specific, UUZone, Sina Weibo and WeChat are the most representative domestic social media products who can present the development history of China's social media. With the further evolvement, there are several new features and fresh trends have emerged in China's social media field, such as the rise of mobile Internet, the dominant position of the young generation and the emergence of grassroots media—we media.

According to the 34th report of CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center), by June 2014, the size of mobile Internet users in China has reached 527 million, which surpass the proportion of PC Internet users for the first time. ¹² Thus it can be seen that mobile Internet becomes a significant future trend in China. Besides, according to an age structure survey of Chinese Internet users, "In December 2014, an overwhelming majority (78.1%) of Chinese netizens were aged 10-39", which reflects that the young generations have dominated the market shares in China. Therefore, a large proportion of social media developers have recognized young generations as the primary target audiences. In addition, grassroots media is another new climate in China's social media field. To be specific, we media has become an irreversible development tendency, which provides Chinese netizens with unprecedented freedom of speech and excellent opportunities for promoting intercultural communication.

2.2.1 UUZone

The earliest history of China's SNSs can be traced to 2003. To be recognized as the first batch of domestic social networking sites, UUZone was established in this year by Mao Zhihong, a software engineer. Starting from a simple online community to a

¹² China Internet Network Information Center 2014.

¹³ China Internet Network Information Center 2015.

full-featured social networking site, UUZone had experienced the tortuous growth and transition to become a milestone in China's social media filed eventually. Specifically, UUZone can be defined as one of the greatest pioneers who brought the SNS information dissemination mode to China, and "to some extent, UUZone is more like an explorer who kept experimenting and practicing the concept of SNS", (Translated by author). A Chinese journal China New Telecommunications evaluated UUZone with this pertinent description.

In 2005, UUZone ushered in the most glorious moment that there were more than 3 million users had registered to UUZone by this year. And in the same year, UUZone topped the list of domestic SNSs by the highest comprehensive strength scores. In general, the remarkable achievement which UUZone left on the inchoate social media development history demonstrates the value of interactive model in Web 2.0 Age, and also symbolizes the rise of China's social media. Nevertheless, UUZone had started to fade rapidly due to an intense contradiction between the founder and the stakeholders. In 2007, Mao Zhihong announced his demission. Soon in 2009, UUZone closed the site down and disbanded all the employees, which officially marks the end of UUZone era. This incident aroused extensive social concerns and caused intense discussions at that time. In a certain extent, the decline of UUZone exposes the limitations of domestic SNSs and reveals how quickly the weather vane changes in network world. After the initial shocks and regrets, insiders have started to analyze the reasons why UUZone ended in failure behind the great honor and fame.

Despite the fact that UUZone has a stable user base and the rational operating model, the declining prospect for this successful social networking site is traceable. Incipient low penetration of the Internet and the cutthroat competitions within Chinese Internet industries are two objective factors which caused the ultimate downfall. However, in addition to above external reasons, from the perspective of user agglutinant, Communication Information News presents a specific viewpoint:

¹⁴ Quan & Hu 2007, 21-22.

Compared with Microsoft Operating System and the search engines which concentrate on promoting user dependency, SNS sites only can be regarded as one of the various options for killing time instead of an indispensable daily tool. 15 (Translated by author)

Besides this fundamental cause, the large amount of spams and advertisements, the hysteretic services and the embarrassing profit model are all negative factors which hasten the disintegration of UUZone indirectly.

With the end of the UUZone Age, the first generation of China's SNS sties has withdrawn from the historical stage. Although UUZone ends in failure, it has created a new pattern of online communications in China and also inspires users to accept varied new media products in a certain extent. In the next few years after the fail of UUzone, there are many matured social media products have emerged in China's social media market gradually.

2.2.2 Sina Weibo ¹⁶

Sina Weibo was launched by the biggest Chinese web portal in 2009. As the new generation of social media, Sina Weibo has inaugurated the era of microblogging. According to an incomplete statistics, there are 5 hundred million users had registered to Sina Weibo by 2012.¹⁷ Although in the past few years there is a declining tendency has appeared, Sina Weibo is still an irreplaceable contributor for the development of China's social media.

The popularity of Sina Weibo can be attributed to varied influencing factors such as the

¹⁵ Lin 2009, B05.

¹⁶ Sina Weibo: http://www.weibo.com/ [Referenced 15 March, 2016]
17 Yue 2012.

increasing number of Internet users, the matured network technologies and the loose environment in the new media field. Nonetheless, the root cause of the great breakthrough is derived from the unique information dissemination mode of microblog. According to a specific research on Sina microblog's development:

Node Transmission establishes an equal status for both of the disseminator and the receiver. Under this particular information dissemination mode, the identities of the disseminator and the receiver can be easily interconverted.¹⁸ (Translated by author)

In summary, microblog has created an immediate and interactive public platform which provides the general users with a free space of speech online.

As highly successful microblogging platforms, Sina Weibo and Twitter have many detailed similarities such as the 140 characters limitation of message length, the general items of user profile and the attractive celebrity effects. Nevertheless, "Sina Weibo is a Twitter clone, but better". Thomas Crampton, a social media scholar, evaluates these two similar but not identical social media products with this brief description. Compared with Twitter, there are several additional features have emerged on Sina Weibo, which can bring fresh user experiences in a certain extent. For example, Twitter allows users to comment by text and links on others tweets; however, the users of Sina Weibo can post text, pictures, links as well as videos. Although the new features only reflect in detailed improvements instead of structural changes, it has aroused great repercussions. Generally, learning from successful oversea experiences while at the same time developing self-innovation, Sina Weibo becomes a classic case on China's social media history which is worth to be studied by the future generations of domestic social media.

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¹⁸ Zheng 2010.

¹⁹ Crampton 2011, 28.

2.2.3 WeChat

In 2011, WeChat was launched by Tencent which is the largest Internet integrated service provider in China. Although WeChat is a latecomer in China's social media field, the development of WeChat in recent years has demonstrated the unlimited potential. As a multimedia communication mobile application, WeChat combines with the communication function, the social function, the marketing function and the media function. Equipped with the practical and diversified functionalities, WeChat has become the most influential social media who dominates the largest market shares in China.

Both shouldering the responsibility of daily communication tool, WeChat is similar with Facebook. Nevertheless, different from Facebook, WeChat has developed a series of additional features and extra derivatives. For instance, a powerful transfer and payment function was launched in 2013, which can be accepted as a brave attempt in the social media field. To some extent, this payment function provides WeChat with more opportunities to increase user agglutinant and to redefine the service scope of social media. Besides, another striking distinction between Facebook and WeChat is the different emphases on privacy protection. Specifically, on WeChat, there is no tag or advertisement being embedded in user interface and only mutual friends have the permission to view the interactive comments. Furthermore, Lucky Money and WeChat Public Platform are representative cases for indigenous innovation, which in a great extent combine Chinese cultures with social demands.

However, it is noteworthy that the strictly controlled private space on WeChat is not in conflict with the cultural transmission. On the contrary, to promote cultural integration and intercultural communication, WeChat Public Platform was established by WeChat team in 2012, which has truly started we media era from the perspective of technology maturity and public recognition. By March 2014, the size of active users on WeChat

Public Platform has reached 396 million from both home and abroad. 20 As a full-featured multimedia platform, WeChat Public Platform provides flexible information push services, which include massive push and directional push, one-on-one interaction service and intelligent response service. In my view, basing on the new information dissemination mode which allows the receivers to obtain information actively, we media has established new orders for intercultural communication in today's information society.

²⁰ Yang 2014, 162.

3. Intercultural communication on WeChat Public Platform

The cultural transformation process of media convergence can be regarded as a Digital Renaissance²¹, which was presented by Henry Jenkins, an American media scholar, in 2001. As an innovative media product in we media era, WeChat Public Platform has greatly impacted the everyday life in modern China from various aspects. Specifically, to be recognized as the most active information transmission platform in China's we media field, WeChat Public Platform has dramatically changed the media habits of Chinese netizens. According to a recent article in *Business*:

> the environment of information transmission has been transformed from 'Hall' to 'Box', the contents of mass communication have turned from 'Fragmentization' into 'Integration', the model of public opinion has been changed from 'Waterfall' to 'Stream' and the channels of information transmission have turned from 'node-to-surface' into 'node-to-node'. 22 (Translated by author)

As for me, the new climates and features which have been driven by WeChat Public Platform are not only beneficial for press freedom, brand creation and rumor clarification, but also to a certain extent have contributed to promoting intercultural communication in modern China.

3.1 Foreign culture in China—"EatPrayLove"

EatPrayLove, a young official account, was established on WeChat Public Platform by author in May 2015 as a practical case study for this thesis. Targeting WeChat users who are interested in European customs and cultures as the potential audiences, EatPrayLove is committed to presenting the distinct local customs and practices in Europe. In general, as a cultural official account, EatPrayLove is promoting intercultural communication in

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²¹ Jenkins 2001, 93. ²² Yang 2014, 162.

China from the perspective of cultural input.

3.1.1 Main content

With the increasingly closer international relations and the development of global communication, Europe is no longer a strange and mysterious foreign land for China. On the contrary, based on the recent Europe travel craze and the smooth progress of the preliminary culture contact, the initial interests in European society have transformed into a deeper demand for cultural communication. Consequently, a large amount of official accounts which concentrate on roughly introducing tourist cities and landmarks in Europe have been eliminated gradually. Nevertheless, combined with unique cultural aesthetics and original personal interpretations, EatPrayLove is superior to the inchoate official accounts because of the accurate content selection and the precise literal expression.



Figure 1: The main interface of EatPrayLove

According to the concise user interface (Figure 1), the theme selection in EatPrayLove can be divided into three sections, which are City, Culture and Travel. Based on specific functional distinctions, the main contents which belong to different classifications reflect different priorities while maintaining subtle internal associations.

Specifically, in City category, EatPrayLove expresses the beauty of details in different European cities by following the cultural moods. For example, by choosing the sunset glow as an urban element of Turku, EatPrayLove presents the harmonious relationships between city and nature in *Pretty in*

Pink²³ (Figure 2). Although this post only focuses on one moment of one scene, it is impressive for audiences to discover the unique charm of Turku. Similarly, belonging to City category, A Half-Day Idyllic Experience in Espoo²⁴, Sunny Day in Paris²⁵ and Hello, Saturday's Country Road²⁶ (Translated by author) are all typical representatives which present urban charm by detailed characteristics.

Besides, to observe the unique cultural expressions and to explore cultural origins, EatPrayLove has published a series of posts such as Fesch'Markt2015—Designer Market 2015 in Austria²⁷ (Figure 3) and Wedding Dav²⁸ (Translated by author) to present the typical cultural events and folk customs in Europe. Furthermore, cultural comparison is another significant theme in Culture category. To be specific, the relevant Chinese cultural phenomena will be introduced as references when interpreting European customs and cultures, which actually create an associated cultural environment to enhance the acceptance of foreign civilization and to promote cultural integration.

In addition, the introductions on scenic cities and the traveling tips of famous tourist cities in Europe are two main themes in Travel category. Specifically, EatPrayLove

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzAxNzUyNiQ10Q==&mid=400521124&idx=1&sn=af593b0b1948932a697ed50f a4c09b1f&scene=1&srcid=0315W3bG28OupSkxrVXgRvXz&pass_ticket=8IPaNLY0aG182c6BJpAbjq2tVMPxVio6hY6y %2BNeR6EYVYoswM74NTEwyY1tXAVTz#rd [Referenced 10 December, 2015]

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzAxNzUyNjQ10Q==&mid=208214532&idx=1&sn=fd1266d580e4f3f9ab6513b54f26df9e&scene=1&srcid=0315xzBDEFmUVLBgKeyWCcm8&pass_ticket=8IPaNLY0aG182c6BJpAbjq2tVMPxVio6hY6y %2BNeR6EYVYoswM74NTEwyY1tXAVTz#rd [Referenced 10 December, 2015]

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzAxNzUyNjQ10Q==&mid=208395286&idx=1&sn=20d55192f45885ff1bac0b31 1ddf0cc0&scene=1&srcid=03152JoYdpfJf4YvZ4lk9MbN&pass ticket=8IPaNLY0aG182c6BJpAbjq2tVMPxVio6hY6y%2B NeR6EYVYoswM74NTEwyY1tXAVTz#rd [Referenced 10 December, 2015]

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzAxNzUyNjQ10Q==&mid=209775053&idx=1&sn=d97b62b895a81831f8366d4 703f324a8&scene=1&srcid=0315AnYPh34LwGhosSzvSlzY&pass_ticket=8IPaNLY0aG182c6BJpAbjq2tVMPxVio6hY6y% 2BNeR6EYVYoswM74NTEwyY1tXAVTz#rd [Referenced 10 December, 2015]

https://mp.weixin.gg.com/s? biz=MzAxNzUyNjQ10Q==&mid=205423601&idx=1&sn=4ec028d1aefbe0f0ba12efc2 9253b0fd&scene=1&srcid=0315wPqPGaBAszfP6cDPLIMJ&pass_ticket=8IPaNLY0aG182c6BJpAbjq2tVMPxVio6hY6y% 2BNeR6EYVYoswM74NTEwyY1tXAVTz#rd [Referenced 10 December, 2015]

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzAxNzUyNjQ10Q==&mid=207766301&idx=1&sn=a4b6680893f63a34694e665 $\underline{e029f8f2c\&scene=1\&srcid=0315E7MshlpAdowx9N7kpBlZ\&pass_ticket=8lPaNLY0aG182c6BJpAbjq2tVMPx}Vio6hY6yass_ticket=8lPaNLY0aG182c6BJpAbjq2tVMPx\\Vio6hY6yass_ticket=8lPaNLY0aG182c6BJpAbjq2tA$ %2BNeR6EYVYoswM74NTEwyY1tXAVTz#rd [Referenced 10 December, 2015]

²³ Pretty in Pink:

A Half-Day Idyllic Experience in Espoo:

Sunny Day in Paris:

Hello, Saturday's Country Road:

Fesch'Markt2015 - Designer Market 2015 in Austria:

Wedding Day:

concentrates on recommending charming places which might not be familiar to Chinese travelers, such as Hallstatt (Figure 4), Tromso and Rovaniemi by exhibiting the natural scenery and cultural aroma. Different from the former theme, the traveling tips section mainly focuses on providing detailed travel guides of popular urban destinations such as Prague (Figure 5), Barcelona and Budapest instead of expounding cultural background. For example, opening hours of local attractions, public transportation routes and ticketing websites are the most frequent practical information which can be accessed easily in this section.



Figure 2: Pretty in Pink



Figure 3: Fesch'Markt2015—Designer Market 2015 in Austria



Lake Town



Figure 4: Hallsttat—the Most Beautiful Figure 5: Prague—the Fairytale City in Real World

In general, the content selection in EatPrayLove is accurate, which follows the current cultural trends and targets specific audiences. Nevertheless, from the perspective of a professional media platform, the lack of systemic arrangement, the strong individual characteristics and the unclear orientation are obvious deficiencies of EatPrayLove. Consequently, presenting concise but organized contents is the most crucial improvement direction for EatPrayLove in the future development, which requires this young official account to determine a precise self-orientation while in the meantime unremittingly producing unique interpretations on European cultures.

3.1.2 Dissemination mode

As a full-featured multimedia platform, WeChat Public Platform provides diversified possibility for content presentation. In EatPrayLove, excepted for the dominated visual graphics-text information, there are several fresh multimedia elements such as voice message, video message and voting system have emerged increasingly in the recent posts. Based on the diversified information formats, EatPrayLove has gradually formed a distinct information dissemination mode for regular updating on WeChat Public Platform.

By treating user subscription as the main communication channel, "WeChat Public Platform has extended the private interpersonal communication mode and has achieved a unique 'Circle' dissemination" ²⁹ (Translated by author). The node-to-node dissemination mode has improved both propagation efficiency and transmission quality in a great extent. To be specific, without the chaotic comments, the multifarious advertisements and other distracting information, WeChat Public Platform has created a comfortable reading environment for users to easily and effectively draw the essence from EatPrayLove. Furthermore, as a two-way communication platform, WeChat Public Platform provides users with an excellent chance to interact with publishers directly by

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²⁹ Liu & Zhao 2015, 99-101.

sending text or voice messages through the user interface (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Direct interaction with the publisher of EatPrayLove



Figure 7: The ancillary dissemination mode on WeChat Public Platform

In addition to the basic subscription, WeChat users can also send and receive posts on Chat and Moments (Figure 7). This private ancillary dissemination mode to some extent achieves a more widespread transmission. Specifically, over 70% of the posts in EatPrayLove gain more pageviews than subscriptions, and 50% of them acquire the double pageviews than cumulative subscriptions. In general, the ancillary dissemination mode is more flexible and extensive, which to some extent has become a new information habit among WeChat users.

3.1.3 Significance and influence

The most influential Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model was

presented by Byram in 1997, which highlights that ICC is composed of knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, favorable attitudes and critical cultural awareness.³⁰ According to the ICC evaluation model, EatPrayLove can be defined as a mature intercultural communication platform which interprets the European cultural connotation and contrasts the cultural expressions between western and eastern civilization with favorable attitudes.

With the inherent advantages on profound knowledge of Chinese culture and abundant cultural resources from European society, EatPrayLove presents audiences a comprehensive cultural cognition of Europe from the perspective of value, social rule and spiritual demand. Besides, the skills of interpreting, exploring and interacting to a great extent can be reflected in EatPrayLove on both of content selection and content presentation. Based on graphics-text information, the interpretations of cultural contrast are presented intuitively in EatPrayLove, which can easily arouse the interests and strike a chord with audiences. Furthermore, favorable attitude is another significant element for a cultural communication platform. To be specific, the understanding and respect for foreign cultures, the tolerant attitude on cultural differences and the open attitude on distinct cultural groups in EatPrayLove express the favorable attitudes of inclusiveness in a certain extent. In addition, evaluating rationally on intercultural communication to rethink personal cultural values and the behavioral guidelines can be regarded as a cultural introspection. Under the loose cross-cultural environment, it is beneficial that audiences can improve their own critical cultural awareness by deeply interpreting those cultural official accounts on WeChat Public Platform.

Intercultural communication is affected by multiple factors, according to a research paper on intercultural competence:

The globalization context presents new requirements for intercultural competence. ICT (information and communication

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³⁰ Byram 1997, 34-35.

technology) revolution and network popularization provide netizens with an authentic cross-cultural context and establishes an unprecedented platform for cultivating intercultural competence beyond the strict restrictions of time and space.³¹ (Translated by author)

Based on adequate intercultural competences such as the accuracy of language use, the sensitivity of cultural differences and the flexibility of cultural integration, EatPrayLove has created a stable environment for cultural input on WeChat Public Platform as a mature multimedia platform.

3.2 Chinese culture in foreigners' eyes—"Shameless"

Being established in March 2015, Shameless is a successful English official account which operates by a foreigner who lives in Beijing. In contrast with EatPrayLove, the core cultural value of Shameless is cultural export. Dominated by text information, Shameless presents the hot topics and folk cultures in modern China with a sexy and humorous language. "Life is too short, let's be shameless."

3.2.1 Main content

"Trying to make sense of culture and sex in modern China. If it doesn't make you laugh, you just don't get the joke", (Figure 8). The operation concept of Shameless in a great extent reflects a facetious and conceited textual atmosphere. In addition, the accurate content orientation attracts stable target audiences, determines the specific functional localization and achieves profound cultural significances. To be specific, Sexy&Offensive, Stereotypes and Culture Shock are three main sections in Shameless, which express untraditional views on contemporary cultures and modern lifestyles in

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³¹ Miao & Wang 2013, 68-72.

³² Intro of Shameless official account: http://www.wxdog.cc/show/shamelesschina.html [Referenced 15 March, 2016]

³³ The operation concept can be found in every Shamless post as a slogan.

China from the perspective of expats.

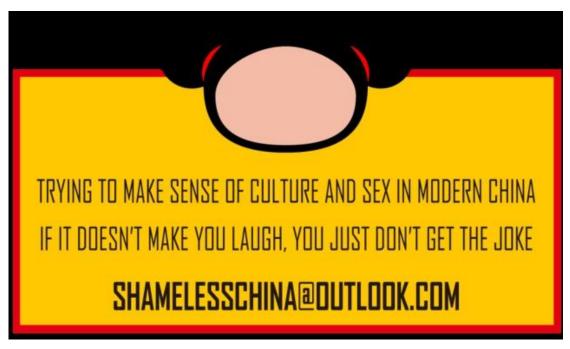


Figure 8: The operation concept of Shameless

As the most distinctive section, Sexy&Offensive occupies a dominant position in Shameless, which focuses on the cultural affective phenomena in modern Chinese society. Specifically, How to Pick up Girls Scientifically³⁴, How to Date (Sleep) a Foreigner 35 and Chinese Girls in Bed 36 are representative posts which aim at interpreting the emotional differences in cross-cultural love. For instance, Shameless lists several embarrassing dating situations and offers amusing advices in How to Win a Chinese Blind Date (Figure 9):

If you've ever had dinner with Chinese people, you've probably

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=209173842&idx=1&sn=aca9997d9a13fc57cc9d1c0 2caad4afb&scene=1&srcid=0224kNG4rQkvQ1t1y3cp5GFk&pass_ticket=cVoahTybBXRebBZA9rgGR1Fq09kvP5GEtOm 4cLjqU6MrORtwKbYOoNKYuQDbw%2B95#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

https://mp.weixin.gg.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=208133923&idx=1&sn=f78d36a200da6ace8c068ff 264e958a3&scene=1&srcid=02231TexWCUgQYYSkSTm73kS&pass_ticket=HJCx4Mx6cg1RiTk3%2F4Qr4bT1ZTbfelt9ZJ qBCw8sUb6SPXtYrHVDznSghvmXaOAi#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

³⁴ How To Pick Up Girls Scientifically:

How to Date (Sleep) a Foreigner:

Chinese Girls in Bed:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=205086798&idx=1&sn=69ee37faa765c43c2b324b 6304bf31fa&scene=1&srcid=0318ctgbpyuRtT5bBWCRG0Rq&pass ticket=ehXkCsmn04VpDDY%2BbPTp8VXlgq6Sghi QkIYEg8Y%2Bh%2F%2BtpUfyV7WCQ4tH%2BImqz7AW#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

seen the bill scramble - people fighting to pay for your dinner to show friendliness. You'll have to fight all-out to impress your date. We recommend you bring your nunchucks along just in case.³⁷

In addition to the comical description, the exaggerated bill scramble to some extent presents the traditional hospitality etiquettes in China from a flank. Generally, this bold and forthright Sexy&Offensive section provides a fresh perspective on the cultural differences of sexual relationships between China and western countries.

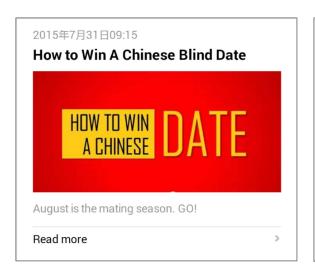


Figure 9: How to Win a Chinese Blind Date



Figure 10: 5 Not-Making-Sense Festivals Chinese Celebrate



Figure 11: High School: China V.S. USA!!



Figure 12: Chinese New Year Survival Guide

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=207772437&idx=1&sn=25d147acad7d548733e80 426a400b38a&scene=1&srcid=0223NCfswosn03SptWNPk3EG&pass ticket=HJCx4Mx6cg1RiTk3%2F4Qr4bT1ZTbfelt9 ZJqBCw8sUb6SPXtYrHVDznSghvmXaOAi#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

³⁷ How to Win a Chinese Blind Date:

By using moderate irony to present topical issues in various aspects of modern life, Shameless has successfully struck a chord with an increasing number of loyal audiences. In Stereotypes category, shameless explores multifarious social hotspots and generalizes cultural phenomena methodically. For example, in 5 Not-Making-Sense Festivals Chinese Celebrate³⁸ (Figure 10), Shameless summarizes a series of weird numbers days which can reflect the innovative trends in modern China as an absurd culture. To be specific, May 21st represents I love you because of the Chinese pronunciation, and young people make confessions of love on this day as a celebration. Besides, October 24th corresponds to 1024 which is an exclusive festival for computer engineer in China. Furthermore, April 19th means Four One Nine (for one night) that one night stand becomes a ridiculous social culture in this case. In addition to the meaningless celebrations, Top 5 Annoying People at the Gym³⁹ and Top 6 Assholes on Social Media⁴⁰ are both fantastic posts which focus on current humanistic environment and cultural phenomena. From the perspective of social culture, Stereotypes explores diversiform cultural circles and guides social cognitions with a thorough understanding of modern society.

Cultural comparison and cultural advice are two main branches in Culture Shock category. From a certain extent, the civilization conflicts and cultural confrontations between different regions bring new thinking and inspirations by cultural comparison. For instance, the culture clash between the rigorous Chinese education system and the relaxed academic atmosphere in USA is revealed in *High School: China V.S. USA*

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³⁸ 5 Not-Making-Sense Festivals Chinese Celebrate:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=400454650&idx=1&sn=ee269b60263b9c847f3d2f 178dc83798&scene=1&srcid=0223ps4HNAW30sb08t9xHC7m&pass_ticket=HJCx4Mx6cg1RiTk3%2F4Qr4bT1ZTbfelt9 ZJqBCw8sUb6SPXtYrHVDznSghvmXaOAi#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

³⁹ Top 5 Annoying People at the Gym:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=207960831&idx=1&sn=d2ef816b468199c2adc2d8 586920c455&scene=1&srcid=0225CtXGXlit5YD6ed0SNFNu&pass_ticket=BC%2Fzr5OOfk87gp2gLV%2BNxy%2F5Ae1 WxQ%2FPXoJqtHZX1zgtGO4NyFBO8e1KZNRtduwn#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

Top 6 Assholes on Social Media:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=207646515&idx=1&sn=e610907ae0f22369b642cb 0b1453855a&scene=1&srcid=0223zKCvLOP7jsqKJdAAe0xc&pass_ticket=HJCx4Mx6cg1RiTk3%2F4Qr4bT1ZTbfelt9ZJq BCw8sUb6SPXtYrHVDznSghvmXaOAi#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

(Figure 11):

The hardest part of high school life for American teenagers is choosing between the endless options of sports, interest groups, or family time. At least Chinese enjoy the simple life with just one choice - homework and then more homework.⁴¹

Specifically, education model is a controversial social issue which is worth to be explored deeply and inspired mutually through cultural comparison. In addition, cultural difference is an essential communication obstacle for foreigners. Therefore, by providing recommendations on specific occasions, cultural advice section concentrates on assisting expats to better integrate into Chinese society. For example, several unique cultural symbols are introduced in *Chinese New Year Survival Guide* (Figure 12): The two-faced parents—"For the first two days at home you'll be their sweet baby and starting from the third day they want to throw you away"; the drama queen aunties—"How much money do you make now?" 'Why are you still not married?' 'When are you buying a house in Beijing?' Boom boom boom a trifecta"; the CNY friends—"People who you are only friends with during Chinese New Year, however, they never come with good intention"; and the annoying kids—"Eating up your favorite snack, drawing a penis on your expensive bag, and screaming at you for red pocket money". ⁴² By interpreting the distinctive modern connotation of Spring Festival culture, Culture Shock posts witty cultural advices for both of the expats and the Chinese.

3.2.2 Target audience

McQuail indicates "audiences (sets of users) will become more and more fragmented

⁴¹ High School: China V.S. USA:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=205938593&idx=1&sn=b9b47d692e32b14112dcc 44e9b579d80&scene=1&srcid=0319HYGUt3EqDdsPOOiKSw1G&pass_ticket=9gdjHutRrhpqTWVLC1wpB5zlbxao6lFn6 37nynbEZxiqVYiIDdJRCkDT38l6GLSd#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

⁴² Chinese New Year Surivial Guide:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=401870073&idx=1&sn=415a86cff4a87c1a87986c2cd1cf0160&scene=1&srcid=0319340AEdpzc6mlp595ZrzX&pass_ticket=9gdjHutRrhpqTWVLC1wpB5zlbxao6lFn637nynbEZxigVYilDdJRCkDT38l6GLSd#rd [Referenced 15 February, 2016]

and atomized and lose their national, local or cultural identity",43 when interpreting the implications of new media technology. In other words, new media contributes to breaking the regional cultural differences and promoting intercultural communication among audiences in the Internet age. Correspondingly, depending on diverse demands and interests, target audiences can obtain information actively and organize new cultural circles easily by new media.



Figure 13: Over one hundred thousand pageviews

Basing on the broad influence of WeChat Public Platform. Shameless has received extensive attention from WeChat users. Besides, the sharp but humorous language and the fresh content selection which closely follows daily cultural trends in modern society have rapidly attracted a loyal audience base for Shameless. Specifically, the massive user base of Shameless can reflect in the impressive pageviews which beyond the statistical range of WeChat system (Figure 13). From the perspective of structural composition, the target audiences of Shameless can be divided into two branches: the expats in China and the Chinese who

To be specific, Shameless serves as a social life guide for the expats in China instead of a traditional cultural platform which focuses on the upper civilization. For example, based on the posts *How to Nail a Job Interview in China*⁴⁴ and *How to Make Chinese Friends*⁴⁵, Shameless reveals the social rules in China and to a large extent accelerates

are in the spirit of self-mockery.

⁴³ McQuail 2005, 231.

⁴⁴ How to Nail a Job Interview in China:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=208059478&idx=1&sn=664fcbbe9dd6594f52397c 9994f59d53&scene=1&srcid=0327Z5pkiq6bPkxUwMUr5Gmb&pass ticket=Y7t5dkQgpBoHCvv1QZucBnwKNe3Ze7DjnHeZ5xtj4K%2Ffbm70VBdLrb8wnr58Ys5V#rd [Referenced 26 March, 2016]

⁴⁵ How to Make Chinese Friends:

the integration between the native cultures and Western thought patterns. In addition, to treat expats as target audiences, Shameless has an inherent advantage of English language skills which can provide the expats who don't understand Chinese with an excellent breakthrough point to know modern China and to assimilate into the Chinese society. In contrast, the superiority on language transforms into a limitation among Chinese audiences because of the low penetration of English in China. Besides, the bold sexual topics and the ironic social commentaries to some extent are difficult to be accepted and be appreciated by the elder audiences. Consequently, Shameless only target the young generation as potential audiences in China.

3.2.3 Significance and influence

As a domestic intercultural communication platform, the cultural dissemination range of Shameless is relatively limited. Nevertheless, by selecting content creatively and targeting audience accurately, Shameless has successfully promoted cultural export on WeChat Public Platform by cultural classification and cultural comparison. In general, combining Chinese social culture with American thought patterns, Shameless devotes to exporting the social cultures and daily lifestyles of modern China and correspondingly introducing diversified thinking principles from Western civilization.

With the development of multimedia capability and network technology, intercultural communication model has gradually matured on China's social media. However, from the perspective of cultural flow direction, cultural input to a great extent dominates the major resources in the cultural exchange field. According to a dialectic research analysis on cultural export and soft power construction:

Unfortunately, China's social media can never become a significant communication platform for cultural export. Although

the scale of domestic SNSs such as Sina Weibo, WeChat, Renren⁴⁶ and Youku⁴⁷ is increasingly expanding, the influences are difficult to spread abroad due to the narrow development strategy. In addition, the global influential social media are still beyond the sight of Chinese netizens. Consequently, promoting China's cultural products on international SNSs is infeasible, even though China has the world's largest quantity of netizens.⁴⁸ (Translated by author)

Shameless fills the vacancy on cultural export in a certain extent. Based on the limited existing resources, Shameless has established a new pattern for promoting intercultural communication on WeChat Public Platform. Specifically, the increasing international influences of domestic social media can be regarded as the most notable contribution of Shameless.

The introduction of Western thoughts in Shameless presents cultural compatibility. Under the facetious and ironic language expression, cultural essence can be revealed more precise and be interpreted more holistic. To be specific, "humor is a significant carrier of culture kernel which can highly condense cultural quintessence and accurately reflect social values, aesthetic sentiment and ideology" (Translated by author). In Western academia, Raphaelson-West classified English humors into three categories: universal humor, linguistic humor and cultural humor 50. From the perspective of cultural specificity, human perception and understanding of humor is similar in same cultural region. Nonetheless, cultural humor which contains cultural allusions and connotations is severely limited by different values and diversified cultural backgrounds in intercultural communication. Under this circumstance, treating Chinese culture as the central theme to eliminate the cultural barriers, Shameless introduces fresh cognition

⁴⁶ Renren: http://browse.renren.com/index.jsp [Referenced 29 March, 2016]

⁴⁷ Youku: http://www.youku.com/ [Referenced 29 March, 2016]

⁴⁸ Xu 2015, 45-49.

⁴⁹ Hong 2010, 3-5.

⁵⁰ Raphaelson-West 1989, 128-141.

theories and spreads multicultural thought patterns through American humor and irony.

3.3 How to establish an official account

By focusing on the original motivations, daily operation pattern and authentic user feedbacks of EatPrayLove to analyze how to establish and operate an official account on WeChat Public Platform, the practical case study reveals the platform structure and user experiences of China's we media in general from the perspective of background operation.

3.3.1 Original motivation

The original motivations for establishing and operating an official account on WeChat Public Platform are diverse, such as individual profits, personal interests and job requirements. As a low-threshold media platform, WeChat Public Platform encourages users to present distinct individualities and also provides the information society with infinite possibilities to achieve the we media era. In consequence, multiple original motivations determine the unique self-orientations and the specific operation patterns of various official accounts.

To deeply explore the operation pattern, user feedback, current strengths and weaknesses of China's we media for thesis writing, author established EatPrayLove on WeChat Public Platform in May 2015 as a practical case study. After a year of precipitation and growth, EatPrayLove has gradually formed a particular orientation and stable operation patterns which can generate specific data information. From the perspective of thesis preparation, gathering experience resources and collecting data materials is the most immediate original motivation for operating EatPrayLove. In addition, living in Europe for two years, author gained some exposure to European cultures. Based on the inherent advantage of dual cultural backgrounds, intercultural communication became a significant internal motivation. Besides, as personal hobbies

and interests, professional-quality writing and photography skills provide EatPrayLove with a solid foundation to present cultural themes accurately. Nevertheless, with the further maturation of EatPrayLove, external motivations have gradually occupied a dominant position. To be specific, the loyal user base and those positive user feedbacks encourage EatPrayLove to update continuously and improve constantly.

Generally, the official accounts on WeChat Public Platform can be divided into two factions by commercial motivation. For instance, the international brands who target the potential market in China have accepted WeChat Public Platform as the most influential network publicity channel. Specifically, by promoting and popularizing new products, interpreting brand connotations and releasing brand news on WeChat Public Platform, the commercialized official accounts such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Rolex have gradually attracted the attentions of domestic consumers online. Furthermore, besides the mature business brands, WeChat Public Platform to some extent provides local restaurants, tourist attractions and individual online stores with an effective promotional platform. However, a majority of official accounts are still commercially irrelevant. For example, the initial inspiration of Shameless was derived from a simple joke:

One year ago at this time, I was sitting in a little restaurant in Sanlitun, talking to my friends about this crazy idea of setting up a WeChat blog. I want to write about everything I hate in life. I'm gonna make fun of them. I'm gonna make fun of them so hard that they're gonna cry. 51

The success of official accounts in various fields reflects the unlimited potential of China's we media. To be specific, diverse original motivations and positive creative attitudes provide today's information society with a solid premise to create the

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⁵¹ Who the hell is Shameless?:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MzA3MTUxNjM5Mw==&mid=402576103&idx=1&sn=d8d0a4714747cfd7ae7ea02c36a95a0b&scene=1&srcid=0406nDKByEj9rpRYILttSNxu&pass ticket=%2Fo7tP%2FGu50BS1ekEjQEe%2F3ViaOyQT2fOd105n%2B5dCvJcJg%2B%2Br%2F2pODFeXeRAqnNn#rd [Referenced 01 April, 2016]

diversified we media era.

3.3.2 Operation pattern

As a widespread and influential media platform, WeChat Public Platform implements strict identity authentication to support the network accountability system. Specifically, to apply for an official account on WeChat Public Platform, personal identification number is required to be authenticated and registered by WeChat team. Moreover, one ID can only correspond to one official account.

From a macroscopic perspective, individual operation and team collaboration are the two most frequent operation structures for we media. Depending on the specific motivations and different functional orientations, the regular update modes of official accounts can be generalized into daily push, weekly push and monthly push. It is noteworthy that daily push is particularly attractive than other long-term polishing on WeChat Public Platform. Furthermore, as a potential operation rule, 9am and 9pm can be observed as the prime time for updating because of the breakfast free and the after-dinner leisure.

In addition, message management, user management and source material management are significant components of the background operation on WeChat Public Platform. Specifically, the one-on-one interaction service and multimedia editing are all derived from this full-featured management system. Nevertheless, besides the basic edition and operation, a new concept that data is king has gradually been recognized as the prime operation principle in we media era. Under this circumstance, WeChat Public Platform built a comprehensive data analysis model which involves user analysis, graphics-text analysis and message analysis for operators to promote the continued evolution. Generally, specific items serve different purposes and perform varied functions. For example, the information source analysis (Figure 14) which belongs to the category of graphics-text analysis presents that Moments is the most effective communication

channel for EatPrayLove. From a flank, the analysis result also reflects an unbalanced user selection and indicates an explicit improvement direction.

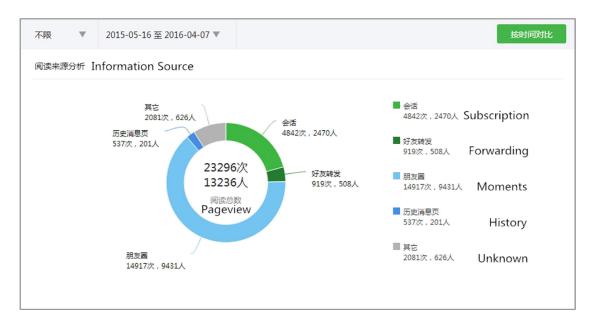


Figure 14: Information source analysis of EatPrayLove

With the further popularization of WeChat Public Platform, there are plenty of new features have been developed by WeChat team. The most representative one is Original Content Protection function. By accumulating a certain amount of original posts as well as a loyal user base, official accounts might gain the opportunity to receive an invitation for activating this innovative function. In addition, based on the Original Content Protection, WeChat Public Platform launched a commercial function recently which is known as Appreciation. Different from other basic functions, WeChat team established a strict censorship for Appreciation. For instance, after ten months of observation and verification, EatPrayLove eventually obtained the permission to apply for the Appreciation. To be specific, users can send official accounts rewards voluntarily through Appreciation to encourage editors, which in a great extent inspires freelance writers and attracts excellent journalists to devote into the we media field.

3.3.3 User feedback

Through a period of steady progression, it can be observed the basic subscription of EatPrayLove is eventually frozen around 286. By treating a certain amount of users as further study targets, the professional user analysis results and authentic user feedbacks to some extent can reflect a comprehensive user requirement and provide fresh inspirations for future evolution.

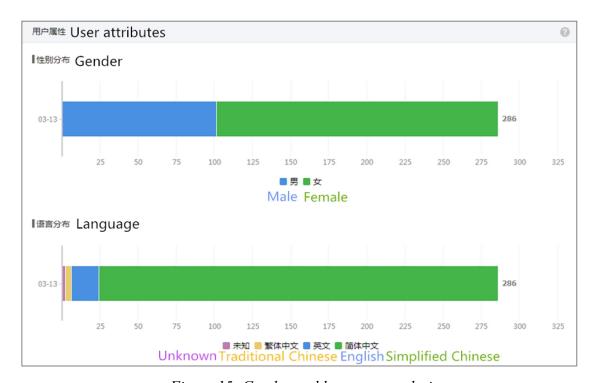


Figure 15: Gender and language analysis

Within the user attribute category, various basic elements such as gender, language (Figure 15), province (Figure 16), city, user terminal and phone model (Figure 17) are presented accurately by intuitive statistical charts. For example, by roughly summarizing the gender analysis, it can be observed that female is more interested in European customs and cultures than male users. Besides, according to the user language statistics, mainland netizens constitute the primary reading community of EatPrayLove. Moreover, to optimize user structure, strengthening English expression can be treated as a long-term operation strategy which can attract foreign users fundamentally.

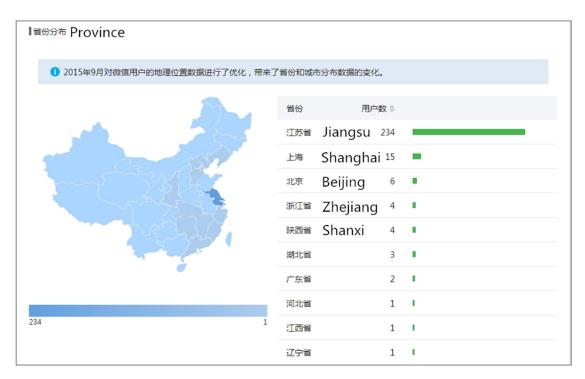


Figure 16: Provincial distribution analysis



Figure 17: Phone model analysis

In addition, the provincial distribution analysis in a certain extent reveals the internal association between regions and cultural demands. To be specific, Jiangsu province and the southern coastal provinces form the major user groups of EatPrayLove. Excepted for

the individual influence of author's social circle in Jiangsu, the developed regions which are satisfied with the basic living requirements focus more on cultural demands than other distressed backward areas. Furthermore, from the perspective of technical presentation, the phone model analysis presents the improvement and renovation of WeChat Public Platform in technical level, which introduces users a full-featured statistical system from a flank.

Based on the voting system, to determine the future development directions and to promote the communication with audiences, EatPrayLove organized an online voting which focuses on the self-regulation of development orientation. As a simple questionnaire survey, content selection and content presentation are the only two involved multiple choice questions. And within two weeks, there were 259 audiences participated in this incomplete user investigation to assist to gather authentic and diversified user feedbacks without any background screening and restrictive grouping.

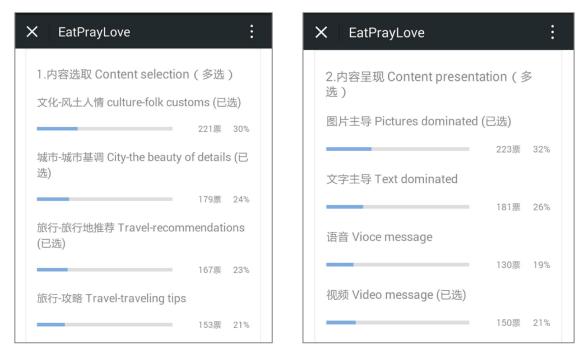


Figure 18: The results of the content selection and the content presentation questionnaire surveys

According to the simple and intuitive questionnaire results (Figure 18), the relative

expectations of the multiple content selections just present a slight difference. But it is noteworthy that culture and customs is still the most high-profile theme. Besides, 32% of audiences choose graphics information as the most acceptable content presentation which can greatly satisfy users' visual perception. Generally, the concise user feedbacks in a certain extent reflect a specific transformation direction for EatPrayLove. Relying on visual presentation to focus on cultural themes can be accepted as the most rational option for the further improvement of EatPrayLove.

Based on an investigative motivation, EatPrayLove concentrates on attempting various expressions of multimedia to acquaint the daily operation pattern of China's we media. Nonetheless, the specific operation process and the detailed user feedbacks bring EatPrayLove a fresh inspiration experience and an instructional opportunity to achieve the transition from a simulant case study to a mature official account which is equipped with complete intercultural communicative competences. In general, WeChat Public Platform provides domestic social media with an epochal opportunity to promote intercultural communication in China. From my point of view, everyone can be we media in this new media era, in spite of the various original motivations and the distinct development directions.

4. Developments and prospects of China's we media

Under the loose media environment, we media has been recognized as an irreversible development tendency in today's network information society. By rigorously analyzing the strengths and weaknesses in current situation and deeply exploring the crises and opportunities for future development, the development patterns and trends of intercultural communication on China's we media can be presented and predicted comprehensively from multiple perspectives.

4.1 Strengths and weaknesses in current situation

From the current development, we media has entered a maturity stage that a great quantities of grassroots media emerge rapidly. As a representative product in we media era, WeChat Public Platform has fundamentally changed the media habits of the public and has influenced the basic dissemination patterns of information in a large extent. Based on the unique characteristics such as mobility, instantaneity and interactivity, WeChat Public Platform has become an irreplaceable intercultural communication platform in China which attracts the most active users.

4.1.1 Network technology

Network technology is the operating foundation of new media, which provides innovative concept designs with solid technical supports. WeChat Public Platform has accumulated a series of functional advantages on technology development and has attempted several bold proposals to promote the further evolution of we media. Nevertheless, from the perspective of user experience, there are still many operational details need to be improved and enhanced in technical aspect.

Through a series of technical debugging and a period of experience accumulation, the development costs of we media platforms have been decreased significantly. In addition, with the progressive liberalization of WeChat interfaces, plenty of new modules and

functions have been developed gradually. For instance, WeChat voting system which is equipped with basic voting function can be transformed into a compound system function by technology upgrading. Specifically, the rational application of Hypertext Preprocessor (PHP) on WeChat voting system achieves a harmonious interaction between mobile clients and the central server⁵² (Figure 19). Furthermore, based on the optimized operation and the high execution efficiency of PHP, WeChat Public Platform provides operators with a technical permission to improve background design, implement user management and create custom modules optionally, which in a great extent can better serve the various promotion measures of intercultural communication.

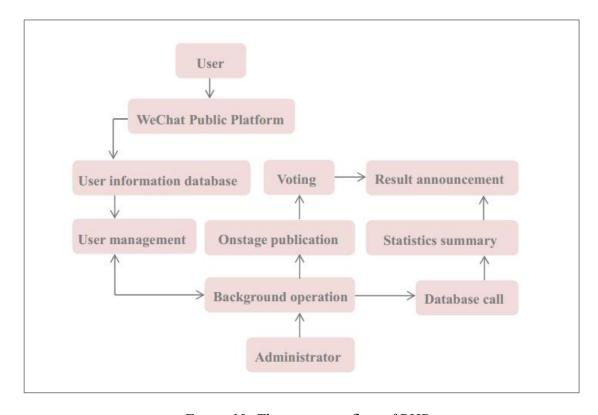


Figure 19: The operation flow of PHP

Although the advanced network technologies can promote the current development of China's we media fundamentally, technical deficiencies and limitations to some extent still impact user experiences from the perspective of irrational operating design. To be specific, the background operation interface of WeChat Public Platform is only

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⁵² Wang & Yan 2015, 62-64.

accessible on PC, and correspondingly, the browsing interface is specifically designed for mobile devices. Besides, the quantity ceiling of sub-menu item is only 5, which hampers the multiple expressions of thematic characteristics. Moreover, regardless of the information formats, one official account can only push one message in one day. Essentially, the strict backstage management system limits the daily operation of official accounts in a great extent, and the inadequacies of technology operations on WeChat Public Platform are mainly reflected in detailed designs. Generally, to achieve the long-term development of we media, technological ascendancy should be recognized as the fundamental support of continuous innovations.

4.1.2 Information dissemination

In 1948, Lasswell summarized the behavioral process of communication into a simple question which is known as the 5w communication theory:

Who

Says What

In Which Channel

To Whom

With What Effect?⁵³

This profound question highlights that control analysis, content analysis, media analysis, audience analysis and effect analysis are five basic research directions in communication science. Treating WeChat Public Platform as a specific communication channel, the current dissemination pattern of China's we media can be revealed and presented comprehensively by exploring the internal associations between those essential elements such as disseminator, receiver, content and communication effect.

Based on the bi-directional interaction, WeChat Public Platform creates an equal

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⁵³ Lasswell 1948, 37-51.

relationship and establishes a smooth communication between the disseminators and the receivers. In addition, the one-on-one information dissemination mode presents an explicit directivity of specific contents and receivers, and in a large extent improves the transmission efficiency. Moreover, mobile clients have broken the time and space restriction of traditional information dissemination. Equipped with the fundamental advantage of portability, WeChat Public Platform provides operators with sound dissemination conditions to communicate with audiences immediately and to manage the fragmented time instantly. Based on the enclosed transmission characteristics, WeChat Public Platform achieves a private communication pattern. In contrast with other social media, the honest opinions of individuals can be expressed freely and the rational voices are rising gradually on WeChat Public Platform. To be specific, eliminating the interferences from advertisements and other audiences, the unique thoughts and beliefs which were isolated from mainstream ideologies have eventually been released on we media. In other words, The Spiral of Silence⁵⁴ phenomenon has been weakened under the distinct information dissemination mode of WeChat Public Platform.

Nonetheless, besides the innovative communication pattern, content quality determines the rise and fall of we media platforms fundamentally. From the perspective of long-term development, information homogenization and originality deficiency are the prominent negative factors on WeChat Public Platform, which exposes a flimsy foundation and potential infringements of intellectual property rights between official accounts. Besides, the majority of audiences are inclined to subscribe to those official accounts which advocate the common positions and values with individual users. As an adverse dissemination tendency, diversified themes have only a slim chance to be delivered to the closed audiences and the group polarization effect has gradually emerged on WeChat Public Platform. 55

⁵⁴ Noelle-Neumann 1974, 43–51.

⁵⁵ Jiang, Shenghong & Yin, 2014, 41-44.

4.1.3 User habit

According to the WeChat User Global Report 2015 (Figure 20), there are over 90% of smartphones in China have installed WeChat as a requisite mobile application. Besides, "25% users check WeChat over 30 times a day and 55.2% users check WeChat over 10 times a day" WeChat guides the user habits and constantly improve the user experiences as the most influential social media platform in China. Consequently, based on the vast active user resources, WeChat Public Platform occupies an inherent superiority on user agglutinant, which is beneficial for the further promotion of intercultural communication from the perspective of popularity rate.





Figure 20: WeChat User Global Report 2015

However, as a daily communication tool, the utilization rate of multifarious additional functions such as transportation service, payment function and credit card service on WeChat is relatively low. Although there has formed a loyal user base on WeChat, only

⁵⁶ WeChat User Global Report 2015:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s? biz=MjM5NjExMDE2MA==&mid=206004404&idx=1&sn=46218d6e247cbcd4c9ef8f8 91d4bb8eb&scene=1&srcid=0428bgRjJmlNWfME1eCmNSA7&pass ticket=GKs9HkkWgbSE576RPq2XyJnx02RZjlK53rf OZnRki70OuWRicedm3jL6vzb%2FBuEF#rd [Referenced 28 April, 2016]

a fraction of users are attracted to WeChat Public Platform. In addition, by reinterpreting the above information source analysis of EatPrayLove (Figure 14), it can be observed that over half of WeChat users are accustomed to acquiring news information and discovering fresh posts through Moments instead of viewing updates on WeChat Public Platform.

4.2 Crises and opportunities for future development

With the steady evolution of we media in China, WeChat Public Platform constantly attempts to achieve further breakthroughs and continuously improves the existing deficiencies to avoid potential threats. In general, based on accurate prediction and rigorous prevention, WeChat Public Platform explores developmental opportunities actively from the hidden crises.

4.2.1 Social impact

As the most successful domestic we media platform, WeChat Public Platform possesses abundant media resources and extensive social impacts in China. From the perspective of positive social recognition, spreading optimistic attitudes toward life and promoting public service activities on WeChat Public Platform arouse broad public concerns and achieve tremendous repercussions among charitable organizations. Nonetheless, due to a series of regulatory lacunas and an imperfect legal system on network accountability, positive social values can be easily distorted into severe social conflicts which can cause the perpetual crises of confidence on social management.

To be specific, with the further expansion of we media, network information supervision is facing an unprecedented challenge in China. Attached to WeChat Public Platform, fake and exaggerated information can be shared widely without any reliability and authority verification. Generally, in this network information society, the disorderly diffusion of extremist opinions and the pervasive communication of negative thoughts

to a large extent intensify social contradictions as Internet rumors. Besides, the loose legal environment disturbs the network ecological balance profoundly. Although the intense competitions between various official accounts have no pecuniary benefit involved at the present stage, the long-term neglect on intellectual property protection will create an irreversible stagnation in the future evolution.

Nevertheless, as a moderate option to suppress Internet rumors and to consolidate the social stability, enhancing the information transparency of government authorities and public institutions on we media platforms is feasible. For instance, based on mutual trust and equal respect, releasing daily work arrangements comprehensively and channeling social emotions instantly through WeChat Public Platform contributes to maintaining social image and promoting self-propaganda. In addition, by establishing a sound legislation on Internet infringement, the potential vulnerabilities can be prevented fundamentally and managed strictly in legal system aspect.

4.2.2 Transformation mode

Due to the covenant-lite operation pattern of we media and the low operation cost of official accounts, a significant proportion of we media operators on WeChat Public Platform tend to terminate the promotion and operation hastily once meet the bottleneck period, or some even simply abandon the original account to develop a new one cyclically. However, to achieve a sustainable as well as stable development of we media, attempting bold innovations and considering rational transformations can be regarded as an inevitable stage which infuses we media with fresh vitality.

As an effective information generation model which integrates mass creative works and collective intelligences, crowdsourcing directly connects people with abundant information resources to the people who need it.⁵⁷ During the process of sources soliciting and integrating, receivers to some extent participate in information production

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⁵⁷ Howe 2008, 101-103.

process as well. To be specific, the identities of the receivers and the disseminators can easily be interconverted in this particular circumstance. Reflecting on WeChat Public Platform, crowdsourcing accelerates information output and promotes information value by improving the activity of WeChat subscribers and achieving the optimization of communication effects. For example, the announcement in EatPrayLove (Figure 21) provides a mature platform to general audiences who are eager to express unique opinions on European customs or willing to interpret European cultures with extraordinary life experiences. In the meanwhile, EatPrayLove can acquire abundant original materials from the receivers. Generally, crowdsourcing can be recognized as an efficient transformation direction for we media from the perspective of information producing.



Figure 21: The announcement of contribution soliciting in EatPrayLove

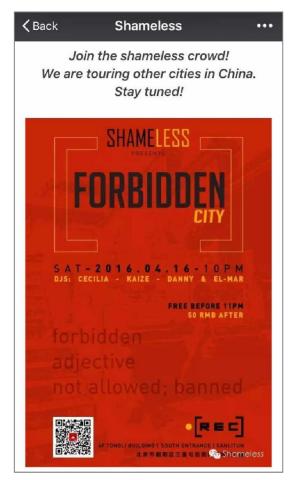


Figure 22: Shameless offline activity—Forbidden City Dance Party 2016

In addition, by organizing various offline activities as independent but close-knit communities in actual world, solid relations can be consolidated and extended among the audiences who share the similar interests on WeChat Public Platform. Correspondingly, the stable communities can further promote the internal solidarity and external expansion of existing official accounts from a reverse perspective. For instance, after a year of online dissemination and interaction, Shameless held a Forbidden City Dance Party (Figure 22) in April 2016 as the first gathering of Shameless expats in Beijing. The immense popularity indicates a successful transformation which has established a more centralized and organized communication channel for we media without the restriction of network. In essence, the tendency of offline promotion has dramatically changed the information dissemination mode on WeChat Public Platform as an auxiliary strategy of market exploitation.

4.2.3 Intercultural communication

With a swift and violent tendency in recent period, intercultural communication has occupied a considerable proportion of sought-after topics on WeChat Public Platform. However, the integrity of source materials and the maturity of platform constructions on cultural input are far superior to cultural export. Based on the unbalanced resource allocation and distorted development trends, it is noteworthy that the cultural concerns behind this phenomenal market selection are cultural invasion. Besides, the unstable cultural foundations of operations teams and the inaccurate information sources of cultural allusions in a large extent damage the authenticity of intercultural communication and leave a series of chaotic impressions to audiences as a profound threat. Furthermore, under the normal circumstances, cultural misconceptions are difficult to be traced and corrected thoroughly once being published on those influential official accounts

Nevertheless, as a favorable turn in cultural restraint and balance, plenty of foreign

operators have gradually noticed the enormous impacts of WeChat in China and attempted to utilize WeChat Public Platform to achieve intercultural communication. By further enhancing the diversity of cultural official accounts, the dilemma of cultural erosion can be relieved in a certain extent. In addition, although the official accounts which operate by foreigners have no language advantage in China, the recent enthusiasm and motivation for English learning among the young generations have significantly accelerated the dissemination of foreign official accounts. Specifically, a great majority of WeChat audiences treat these English official accounts as educational reading materials which provide both abundant intercultural knowledge and unrivalled opportunities for practicing English.

5. Conclusion

Symbolized by WeChat Public Platform, China's we media has achieved a tremendous development in recent years. Based on the background introduction for the rise of China's we media, the unique evolution process of social media in China is revealed methodically. Besides, the two case studies: EatPrayLove and Shameless present a macroscopic cognition of the specific operation pattern on WeChat Public Platform from a comprehensive perspective. In addition, through a series of analyses and demonstrations on the development status and the prospects of we media platforms, the further exploration of how to promote intercultural communication on China's we media can be concisely concluded to several practical improvements:

• Strengthening the network legislation

With the diversified development tendency of we media, amount of official accounts which concentrate on cultural transmission have emerged on WeChat Public Platform recently. However, behind the rapid expansion, an imperfect system of network legislation seriously disturbs the basic operation rules in network world. As a destabilizing factor, the legal deficiencies in we media field impede the further improvement on content quality. For instance, the lack of legal consciousness on intellectual property protection creates an irreconcilable contradiction between the plagiarism and the copyright, which in a certain extent discourages we media operators from producing original posts. Consequently, strengthening the network legislation is a fundamental step for the sustainable development.

• Improving the technical support

Although WeChat Public Platform is the most influential we media platform in China which is equipped with the current most integrated system and mechanism, a multiplicity of technical deficiencies and limitations still need to be paid attention to by developers and to be improved for the future evolution. From the perspective

of content presentation, intercultural communication requires a more comprehensive multimedia mode such as voting system, data analysis system and audio-visual system in the technical aspect than other topics. Compared with innovative content creation, widespread marketing promotion and diversified dissemination mode, a solid technical support to a great extent should be accepted as the essential core of the further breakthrough development of we media platforms.

• Crowdsourcing tendency

According to the above-mentioned research results of the current development status, the future trend of China's we media in the next few years is predictable to grow in an explosive phase. Nevertheless, focusing on the long-term evolution tendency, a lengthy and tortuous transformation period will occupy the dominant position as an inevitable process. For example, intercultural communication topics require abundant cognitions and various thoughts from different social stratifications and diverse cultural backgrounds, which cannot be presented independently by the minority operators. Under this circumstance, crowdsourcing plays an important role which provides an optimal transformation direction to this vast cultural theme. By soliciting and integrating information materials from the receivers, the relevant topics can be presented more efficiently and integrallty from various aspects.

• Integrating into international market

Under the strict network control measure in China, foreign social media can only impact on Chinese netizens in a minor extent. However, from an opposite perspective, integrating into international market can be accepted as an alternative development strategy for China's we media. Specifically, to attract more foreign operators and audiences to devote into the intercultural communication field,

China's we media should further strengthen the diversification of language options. In general, intercultural communication requires a globalized media environment to improve the efficiency and extensity.

• Adjusting the resource allocation

From the perspective of content quality, the unstable cultural foundations and narrow cultural attitudes in a large extent impede the further promotion of intercultural communication. To improve the quality of cultural products, it is necessary to adjust the resource allocation by implementing specific measures. For instance, once be involved in plagiarism, the operators should be forbidden to login the relevant official account or apply for a new one on WeChat Public Platform in the next six months. Moreover, if the quantity of followers is less than 50 during the whole year, the official account should be cancelled automatically. In general, survival of the fittest is a natural law by market choices, which is conducive to promoting the qualitative changes of intercultural communication.

In addition to the general improvement directions, there are several practical experiences and development tendencies of China's we media can be generalized from EatPrayLove and Shameless.

EatPrayLove has completed the responsibility as a practical case study excellently. However, from the perspective of a mature official account, the operation structures of EatPrayLove still need to be adjusted. Learned from the operating experiences of EatPrayLove, the dissemination and promotion process of intercultural commination can be implemented more smoothly by realizing the importance of diversified multimedia forms and specialized cultural themes. To be specific, besides the graphics-text information, utilizing more multimedia elements such as voice message, video message and voting system to present and restore cultural connotations can improve the visual experiences of WeChat audiences in a large extent. In addition,

although EatPrayLove focuses the central topic on European cultures, the boundaries of this cultural theme are still fuzzy. Based on the limited resources, it is rational for individual operators to determine a specific self-orientation, which contributes to promoting a targeted development.

Shameless can be recognized as a successful English official account on WeChat Public Platform. By organizing offline activities in actual world, Shameless creates a close-knit community which can consolidate the solid relations among Shameless audiences. Besides, without the space-time restriction of network, the face-to-face communication can nurture mutual trusts in a certain extent and create more inspirations from the real interaction. Furthermore, foreign operators should attempt to edit original posts in their native languages. To attract specific groups of audience, the diversified language structure can be accepted as a noteworthy development direction on WeChat Public Platform which contributes to consolidating the niche market.

By observing and analyzing the development pattern of intercultural communication on China's we media, the development status and the future trends are concluded methodically in this thesis. To continuously exploring the deeper connotation of this specific research field, the research results of this thesis can be treated as a solid research foundation. Specifically, how to use the crowdsourcing mode to promote intercultural communication on China's we media, how do offline activities impact on intercultural communication and how to gain the advantage on promoting intercultural communication in the international market are several valuable research topics which are worth to be further studied. In my opinion, we media is an irreversible development tendency in social media field. By further improving the content quality and the operation pattern, China's we media can create new possibilities for intercultural communication in this information society.

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