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Digital Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage Post-prints

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Abstract

Intangible cultural heritage constitutes an extremely precious traditional cultural resource in China, and continuously updating and reflecting upon digital communication methods for intangible cultural heritage is of paramount importance. In the information tide abundant with digital media, presentation modes that integrate intangible cultural heritage with digital technology are characterized by diversity, connotative depth, and technical sophistication. To better digitally disseminate intangible cultural heritage, it is necessary to pool resources from multiple stakeholders and innovate collaborative approaches; consolidate the talent foundation, bridge the intergenerational digital divide, and enhance disseminators' digital literacy in technical aspects and conceptual awareness of digital communication; strengthen platform development and interface with high-quality resources; innovate integration mechanisms and leverage multiple technologies; enhance content supervision and establish robust preservation systems. While platforms and relevant departments develop digital products and services for intangible cultural heritage, they should actively respond to people's spiritual and cultural needs for a better life, and create more quality-oriented, personalized, and diversified digital communication works of intangible cultural heritage.

Full Text

Digital Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Intangible cultural heritage represents an invaluable traditional cultural resource in China, making it imperative to continuously update and reflect upon digital dissemination methods. In the current wave of abundant digital media, the integration of intangible cultural heritage with digital technology exhibits characteristics of diversity, connotation, and technical sophistication. To enhance digital dissemination, it is essential to integrate multi-party resources and innovate collaborative approaches; strengthen the talent foundation to narrow the intergenerational digital divide and improve communicators' digital literacy both technically and ideologically; reinforce platform construction to connect with quality resources; innovate integration mechanisms by applying diverse technologies; and strengthen content supervision while improving preservation mechanisms. As platforms and relevant departments develop digital products and services for intangible cultural heritage, they must actively respond to the people's spiritual and cultural needs for a better life, creating higher-quality, more personalized, and diversified digital dissemination works.

Keywords: digitization of intangible cultural heritage; scientific and technological value; cultural connotation

Introduction

The digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage has acquired new characteristics such as embodied experience, fragmentation, and premium quality against the backdrop of continuously evolving information technology. The *Implementation Opinions on Bringing Cultural Artifacts to Life and Expanding the International Influence of Chinese Culture* states: "We must accurately distill and display the spiritual symbols of excellent traditional Chinese culture, better reflecting the historical, cultural, aesthetic, scientific, and contemporary values of cultural artifacts[1]." As a crucial component of public cultural digital infrastructure, the multi-dimensional and multi-value presentation of intangible cultural heritage through digital dissemination better satisfies people's spiritual and cultural lives while enriching their sensory experiences. At the level of cultural service provision, the application of digital technology represents an unavoidable trend, necessitating comprehensive multi-dimensional construction of digital dissemination systems for intangible cultural heritage to showcase and promote excellent culture.

Scholars have conducted in-depth research on the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage combined with digital technology. The following sections propose supplementary strategies regarding talent cultivation, collaborative university construction, platform development, improvement of regulatory systems and mechanisms, and digital preservation.

[1] Tencent News. Major: Central Conference Approves *Implementation Opinions on Bringing Cultural Artifacts to Life...* [EB/OL]. [2021/11/25]. <https://new.qq.com/omn/20211124/20211124A0DRIA00.html>.

1. Digital Dissemination: Integration of Technological Value and All-Element Value

In the information age, digital technology has driven various integrated display modes. The combination of technology and culture represents just one such mode, yet it sufficiently demonstrates the diverse connotations of intangible cultural heritage. Elements such as knowledge, information, technology, and data can deeply integrate with intangible cultural heritage in digital management, generating new values and new experiential modes. This essentially represents a fundamental reconstruction of how intangible cultural heritage is expressed through digital technology's underlying logic.

Many articles on digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage mention the concept of “coming to life.” While diversified technological presentation is one aspect, and digital technology indeed enhances the research, interpretation, and dissemination of cultural artifacts, the concerted efforts of official and social forces to delve into the cultural connotations of intangible cultural heritage and align with popular viewing modes preferred by the people can truly make intangible cultural heritage “go viral,” thereby genuinely nourishing public cultural construction.

Well-known technologies such as VR, AR, holography, and 3D fully showcase the brilliance and connotations of intangible cultural heritage. Emerging concepts like digital twins and the metaverse also appear to empower intangible cultural heritage with new possibilities. Some publishers have developed VR products specifically for youth audiences, while nine intangible cultural heritage sites in Henan have created travel products and knowledge dissemination systems through mini-programs. Additionally, numerous national treasures have been displayed through holographic imaging technology. Evidently, the integration of digital technology and cultural heritage combines the advantages of online and offline dissemination, provides greater space for displaying cultural value and connotation, and creates more possibilities for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

2. Reflections on Intangible Cultural Heritage Dissemination in the Digital Context

2.1 Widening of the Intergenerational Digital Divide The arrival of an aging society has remained a focal concern. The varying levels of proficiency among elderly populations in using digital products and platforms exemplify the digital divide. Meanwhile, young people familiar with digital dissemination platforms like Douyin demonstrate weak willingness to inherit intangible cultural heritage with strong primitive and retro characteristics. Research examining the causes of the digital divide in intangible cultural heritage dissemination in Yunnan's ethnic minority regions found that: “In Mengla Township of Jinping Miao-Yao-Dai Autonomous County and Bamei Town of Guangnan County, the actual inheritors and performers capable of demonstrating Dai three-string

dingqin plucking and Zhuang bronze drum dancing techniques have an average age of over 50, while the younger generation proficient in digital technology remains marginalized in intangible cultural heritage inheritance[2].”

Many scholars propose that relevant departments and institutions should strengthen digital skills training for older inheritors, enabling them to use short-video platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou to produce and disseminate their own craft works. Attracting traffic and commercial cooperation would provide incentives for these inheritors and the intangible cultural heritage field. Other scholars suggest that youth should assume greater responsibility in passing down and disseminating the cultural connotations and ethnic core spirit of intangible cultural heritage across generations. How to enhance digital proficiency among elderly populations and strengthen young people’s confidence and sense of responsibility in inheriting intangible cultural heritage culture represents a crucial consideration for digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage in the digital era.

2.2 Strengthening of the Commercial Matthew Effect Many excellent digital dissemination efforts of intangible cultural heritage fail to receive large-scale exposure. Commercial operations under MCN institutions reinforce traffic amplification and Matthew effects for their contracted works. Some scholars argue that Douyin’s algorithmic mechanisms strengthen the Matthew effect for MCN institutions and professional influencers in intangible cultural heritage, marginalizing ordinary inheritors and intangible cultural heritage projects that are not easily monetized in the market[3]. Many videos from folk intangible cultural heritage inheritors’ personal accounts receive minimal traffic and popularity, becoming increasingly marginalized under the commercial Matthew effect, while contracted influencer accounts receive greater platform traffic support.

Different platforms exhibit inconsistent commitment to digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, related to their traffic distribution mechanisms. This imposes new requirements on intangible cultural heritage account operations: capturing hot topics and adding appropriate trending tags to video content. A persistent stereotype suggests that culturally-colored intangible cultural heritage works should maintain authenticity, but can they incorporate commercial attributes? This actually requires balancing economic interests and social benefits—a question perhaps already answered when culture transforms into various products.

2.3 Disconnect Between Digital Dissemination and Audience Needs

First, a gap exists between communicators’ encoding and audience decoding. While communicators may intend to restore the core spirit of intangible cultural heritage, audiences experience temporal and spatial dislocation when comprehending its essence. Just as many controversial advertisements diverge from advertisers’ original intentions yet convey unintended meanings to audiences, intangible cultural heritage information transmission undergoes distortion by

various “noises” before reaching audience terminals.

Second, insufficient market research on audience needs during production has resulted in a mismatch between cultural product supply and market consumption demand. Deepening supply-side reform should also manifest in digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, truly using the intangible cultural heritage supply system to lead and create new audience demands. Digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage culture should constitute a public cultural content dissemination effort jointly built by government departments, public welfare institutions, and social forces including the public.

3. New Developments in Digital Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.1 Integrating Resources and Innovating Collaboration Methods Local cultural departments, universities, museums, and libraries should actively assume cross-boundary responsibilities. As highlands for cultivating applied talents and initiating cultural activities, local universities can collaborate with cultural departments to develop joint courses related to craft culture and industrial economics. Particularly against the backdrop of China’s Ministry of Education adding 37 new majors—including “Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection”—to the undergraduate catalog in March 2021, institutions can draw upon curriculum designs, invite professional intangible cultural heritage inheritors for teaching interactions, record courses for release on online learning platforms, and produce short videos for distribution on short-video or MOOC platforms.

Local cultural departments can initiate competitions for creating digital intangible cultural heritage works, inviting public participation and university students in online voting and opinion collection activities, with outstanding works displayed online to attract public attention. The key to activating intangible cultural heritage dissemination lies in attracting mass participation. Bringing intangible cultural heritage culture into campuses to engage with youth groups—whether students from related majors or not—can infuse traditional cultural charm with new generational thinking.

3.2 Strengthening Talent Foundation and Enhancing Cultural Connotation From the perspective of university student cultivation, it is necessary to enhance personal cultural literacy and consolidate students’ cultural foundation.

Young talents and students must establish cultural confidence and national sentiment. As an extremely valuable spiritual asset, intangible cultural heritage embodies the profound connotations of Chinese traditional culture spanning thousands of years. As young students with time, advantages, and platforms, mastering these cultural connotations constitutes a fundamental condition for expanding high-quality dissemination content.

While national sentiment serves as the foundation, expanding international vision represents an essential requirement for disseminating civilizational diversity under globalization trends. Taking information dissemination in the Russia-Ukraine war as an example, the diverse media propagation methods employed by various nations demonstrate the importance of digital dissemination methods for information products amidst unprecedented global changes[1]. Applied to intangible cultural heritage production and dissemination, this raises questions: how to embody Chinese cultural connotations—namely, good Chinese stories; how to disseminate these stories; where to disseminate them; how to overcome language barriers; which digital platforms to utilize; how to collect feedback from different countries and regions; and how to better expand the international influence of Chinese culture. All these require creators to possess excellent international communication competencies.

Young students must understand all-media production methods. While schools teach theoretical knowledge and provide certain practical conditions, digital technology evolves rapidly, and digital dissemination methods are extremely diverse. How to rationally utilize study time to master different media platforms to improve dissemination efficiency is a crucial consideration. For instance, when using holographic projection technology, specialized skills may be delegated to technicians, but understanding the basic logic and principles of modeling technology is necessary to better combine intangible cultural heritage's unique attributes and produce high-quality digital products.

3.3 Strengthening Platform Construction and Connecting Quality Content Dissemination platforms serve not merely as display spaces but must assume social responsibility by catering to audience needs and popular trends, developing enjoyable and innovative digital services that integrate intangible cultural heritage into daily life and serve the people. In August 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued *Opinions on Further Strengthening Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Work*, emphasizing: “Adapt to the trend of deep media integration, enrich dissemination methods, expand communication channels, encourage news media to establish special columns on intangible cultural heritage, support the creation of relevant documentaries, organize excellent programs, and encourage various new media platforms to improve related dissemination work[4].”

Platforms should focus on auditing account content quality, verifying the relevance between platform tags and video content, avoiding “slack” accounts, cracking down on false commercial accounts, and using big data to collect user evaluations and feedback. They should issue warning announcements for watered-down content and low-quality accounts to compel official account operators to improve production standards.

From a media consciousness perspective, specialized production teams should be responsible for filming. Video production teams should undertake responsibilities including topic selection planning, innovating playback formats based

on user feedback, following up on platform data analytics, and producing works suitable for digital dissemination characteristics to connect with platform video resources.

3.4 Innovating Integration Mechanisms and Applying Diverse Technologies We must consistently prioritize innovation as the core driver for digital integration methods of intangible cultural heritage. Although not every emerging technology merits experimentation, the introduction of concepts with greater dissemination potential—such as the metaverse, digital nativity, and digital twins—paints a promising vision for innovating integration methods in intangible cultural heritage digital dissemination.

China possesses abundant high-quality intangible cultural heritage resources and should further combine them with new technologies. Exploring integrated dissemination mechanisms through blockchain, cloud services, and other methods, and developing application standards and integration expressions suitable for various industries, can leverage blockchain's distributed transparency and immutability to prevent malicious piracy, while enabling outstanding intangible cultural heritage resources to shine anew in metaverse concepts through digital twin technology. This imposes higher demands on talent, platform construction, and university cultivation.

3.5 Strengthening Content Supervision and Improving Preservation Mechanisms We must improve platform content quality supervision mechanisms. Taking short-video platforms as an example, phenomena such as homogenization and content saturation also appear in intangible cultural heritage video dissemination, with fierce competition driven by commercial interests. Only by improving content quality supervision mechanisms and implementing more standardized and stringent review requirements can audiences who genuinely appreciate intangible cultural heritage culture access quality content.

We must improve standards and regulations for digital preservation work, systematically and comprehensively preserving digital resources of intangible cultural heritage. Establishing institutional standards for classified and graded preservation, conducting census records for digital resources of different quantities, types, and presentation forms, and building a national information sharing platform are essential steps.

Conclusion

Digital dissemination methods for intangible cultural heritage require continuous enrichment. Simply uploading videos to platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, and Bilibili—which have large youth audiences—and waiting for platform traffic pushes or user searches is insufficient. In response to the national big data strategy, cultural tourism departments, video production teams, and publicity institutions should further consider: based on big data analysis of user preferences and needs, how to better excavate the historical and contemporary values

of intangible cultural heritage culture. This is akin to splitting a heavy cultural ancient book into different highlights, using various display methods and communication channels for precise push delivery, feeding content directly to different users' hearts and driving experiential consumption.

Digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage still faces numerous challenges. Improving digital skills and literacy, cultivating outstanding talent, perfecting platform dissemination environments, and improving regulatory mechanisms and preservation standards require sustained long-term effort.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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