

Paradigm Shift of Douyin App

Xuhua Jiao

Shandong University of Technology, Zibo 250000, China.

xidou@sdut.edu.cn

Abstract

Since its launch in September 2016, Douyin App has developed rapidly. However, it's not all been smooth sailing for Douyin. To make great success, Douyin made attempts continuously to adapt to the changing media ecology. It's target market is changed from youngsters in first-and-second-tier cities to all generations in all China; it devoted to spread core values and positive traditional Chinese cultures to improve its quality of content; its functions broadened to covers inform, propaganda, marketing besides entertainment. Douyin's paradigm shift make it kind of promising competitive new media.

Keywords

Douyin, Paradigm Shift, Traditional Chinese Culture.

1. Target Market: From Youngers to Peoples of All Ages, From Cities to Rural Areas

According to the latest user portrait revealed by Douyin, age structure has changed greatly. As a music short video app, Douyin caters especially to youngsters' taste and hurried lifestyle. So it attracts dramatic users since its launch in late 2016. Previously, more than 85% of users of Douyin were under 24 years old, and most of them were from 18 to 24 years old, mostly from second-tier cities. By June 12th, 2018, Douyin has attracted 166 million active users, with the majority aged below 30, announced by Beijing ByteDance Technology [1]. By June 2018, users were mainly between 24 and 30 years old. But in reality, people of all ages are attracted by this app and tent to indulge in surfing on it. As time passed, Douyin has become the most widely and frequently used social media in China and become popular with all the people of the country. All generations tends to spend their leisure time watching short videos on the app after work as a means of relaxing and relieving stress of work and life. It's the app that's everywhere. Teens and tweens post hashtag challenges, grandparents post dance videos, and influencers promote products on it. Douyin — the short-form video app — has taken over China's internet.[2] At first, Douyin's main market is cities, especially first-and-second-tier cities at first. After the Spring Festival of 2018, Douyin app began to sink into the third and fourth tier cities. Then the firm changed its development strategy and has expanded further into rural markets.

2. Content: Rationality , HumanisticSpirit, and Traditional Culture Prevail

In the information age, the innovation of new technology makes information dissemination and acquisition more and more convenient, and also generates a large number of spam information. In Entertainment to Death, Pozman once said that "all public discourse is increasingly appearing in the form of entertainment and becomes a cultural spirit. Our politics, religion, news, sports, education and commerce are willing to become appendages of entertainment, without complaint or even silence. As a result, we become a species of entertainment to death." [3] Although this statement is exaggerated, it reveals social reality to some extent. Entertainment is innocent, yet immoderate entertainment is harmful. "Douyin is poisonous" has become one the most overused catch phrases in recent memory. To some extent, it implies the bad quality of the content on Douyin app. The platform is full of pornography, vulgarity, abuse, rumors and spam advertising. The phenomenon of "bad money drives out good money" in public opinion ecology is most vividly reflected. ByteDance and Douyin app face regulatory challenges owing to the quality of the content.

To improving the quality of the content, on the one hand, the firm starts to practice self-censorship. According to one bulletin, from June 1 to June 30, 2018, tremolo platform 27 578 videos, 9415 audio, 235 challenges were withdraw and 33146 accounts were banned permanently. Such kind of self-censorship is becoming the routine of Douyin app. This shows the strength and determination of management team of the firm. With the help of Douyin's filter system, the potentially offensive and improper clips will be prohibited from publishing in the first place.

On the other hand ,the firm make some attempts to encourage the popularity of positive contents. Since 2018, Douyin began to devote to spread rationality and humanistic spirit and mainstream ideology and core values, positive information and excellent traditional culture become more and more abundant to exclude vulgar superficial information and seize what Luo Zhenyu calls "Gross Domestic Time". Diffusing of traditional culture by Douyin app, and disseminating traditional culture to young people in a way they like, is kind of "cognitive surplus" of the general public. Douyin grows to be a means of popularizing the traditional culture by ordinary netizen whether consciously or unconsciously and whether purposefully or not. The traditional culture contributed by netizen themselves and disseminated via Douyin is more easily welcomed and accepted by netizens. Quite a lot of traditional culture has been generated and transmitted among tremendous numbers of users via Douyin, which approve that enormous potential of Douyin to affect the diffusion of culture among ordinary people.

In March 2018, Douyin launched the Good Challenge Program and Social Responsibility Program. In June, the "Thousand People to Inherit Traditional Culture Program" was launched. The purpose of these programs is that more and more people will participate in promoting and disseminate traditional culture through this platform. Traditional Chinese culture and art has gain a foothold on short video platforms and attracted a large number of young followers. The interactive platforms are expanding the charm of the traditional opera among young people. Peking Opera artist Dong Fei started sharing his stories of the traditional Chinese art form on Douyin since 2018, taking the opera closer to more young Chinese. The videos of Li Shujian, a Henan opera performer and vice chief of China Theater Association, have been viewed for over 20 million times in less than 20 days.

In addition to Chinese operas, intangible cultural heritage items are also actively promoted on short video platforms. Douyin launched a project called "Intangible Cultural Heritage Partnership," with a pledge that at least 10 intangible cultural inheritors would make at least one million yuan (140,000 U.S. dollars) every year or garner one million followers on the platform. The report shows that as of May 31, 2020, clips uploaded on Douyin have featured 96 percent of the country's national intangible cultural heritage projects. [4] Leading short-video and livestream platforms Douyin have launched ICH promotion topics, such as #GetToKnowICH (#ZoujinFeiyi) and #MyICHcraft (#WoDeFeiyiShouyi), where representative ICH inheritors have been posting videos showcasing their crafts, like embroidery and oral stunts. [5] China marked its Cultural and Natural Heritage Day on June 13 and the country's short video apps commemorated the occasion by publishing their latest reports on their efforts to boost traditional culture online and infuse new blood into ancient heritage. "For cultural destinations, Douyin could play a critical part in reaching China's younger generations," says China Skinny's marketing manager, Alexander Hefel.[6]

3. Functional Diversification

Main functions of mass media are to inform, entertainment, propaganda, mobilize public opinion, and make profit. The importance of the entertainment function of mass media has grown as Chinese accumulated more leisure time. As a music short video social media, Douyin app's main functions is entertainment and social intercourse. As a participative, interactive app, Douyin has enabled new ways of information transmission, interpersonal communication, and social participation. This social media application appeals to modern netizens who are eager to exchange information and ideas with others. According to use and gratification theory, users use this app to meet all kinds of needs, most important, to amuse themselves, spend the leisure time, release pressure and relax. The video content is about entertainment, and social interaction in general. Douyin app meets the needs of users in this

fast-paced and high-pressure modern life to make use of fragmented time for entertainment and decompression. Users undoubtedly use this application mostly for relaxation, leisure and recreation. 70,000 Douyin users once raced to make humorous dance moves to the Seaweed Dance song, which inspired countless Internet memes and offline dancing contests in China.

The government has discovered Douyin app' popularity and power and is using it to make direct propaganda efforts based on online public opinion, to enhance its claims to legitimacy, to adapt policy, etc. Chinese government and organizations tends to use social media such as Douyin as a one-way information dissemination channel and propaganda media neglecting Douyin's powerful interactive functions. They take advantage of Douyin' fast and convenient broad casting function to make themselves heard. Douyin id of the government and authority is different from the ordinary id after all; their contents are more formal and serious. Although the content of short video posted on platform by government and authority is usually serious, the tone of the videos is usually casual, full of popular web slang and emoji taking into consideration of what ordinary persons likes and dislikes. It should be noted that even in the serious informational videos, the use of slang and emoji prevalent, which is catering to netizens.

Douyin is also used by companies for advertisement and marketing. It is crucial to run a social media campaign to engage with digital consumers and accelerate brand awareness, which ultimately increases sales in the digital age. Douyin can be used as a marketing tool owing to its popularity among all netizens, especially young digital generations. More and more companies are using Douyin app to promote and popularize their products and services, to collect information about their products and services and to engage with their target audience. Advertisers such as automobile companies and gaming studios pay to work with music producers on related promotional songs that are shared across the app.

Much of Douyin's success comes from its thriving e-commerce capabilities, which allow users to shop directly within the app for products they see in videos. That function is part of what has drawn both Chinese and foreign firms, searching for novel ways to reach Chinese consumers. Douyin was among the first to offer the option to link from videos to purchase on Taobao/Tmall or directly through the app itself with its shopping cart feature. One example of this would be beauty brand Perfect Diary, which offers links to Taobao to purchase the products featured in its videos.[7] In China Douyin has become one of the most efficient and effective ways to reach customers in the mobile-dependent society. Advertisers, ranging from luxury brands like Michael Kors to the local Family Mart, have flocked to the app, enticed by user volume and the ability to create a wealth of highly targeted content. Companies can advertise on Douyin in many ways, ranging from using influencers to feature their products, producing their own campaigns and livestreams, or selling products directly in videos. [2] Whether brands with a lower price or luxury brands both can thrive on the app using appropriate strategies. Official Douyin accounts allow brands to list all their previous sponsored hashtag challenges of the aforementioned top account lists, as well as a link to the brand's official site.

The platform, which has gained extreme popularity over the years among Chinese youngsters, especially the so-called Gen Z, is now betting high on the education market. Douyin has also embraced all manner of educational short-videos, especially teenager-facing ones. Earlier this year, it partnered with national-level organizations like China Research Institute for Science Popularization, and rolled out a plan called "Dou Zhi Plan," to encourage more education-relevant content by giving out incentives to content creators. Douyin hasn't launched paid courses yet, but its gigantic user pool of 320 million DAUs has snagged the attention of educational institutions which consider Douyin a necessary tool to acquire more students, and the platform is benefiting itself ad-wise. English learning app Liulishuo has gathered more than two million followers on its Douyin profile by posting catchy ads and videos. China's online education startup Yuanfudao, or "Ape Tutor" in Chinese, reportedly poured over RMB 100 million into ads for Douyin's news feed.[8]

4. From Short Video App to Livestreaming and Long Video

Although Douyin is known for short video, intense competition in China's tech ecosystem make it make some tactical shift. Now Douyin offers livestreaming and long video as well. Livestreaming can be accessed in a button in the upper right corner of the short videos on Douyin app. Douyin is kind of livestreaming platforms now, Douyin used a combination of short videos and livestreaming to showcase ICH items such as traditional Chinese oral stunts and Guqin. To enrich its content, Douyin gave privileges to its individual educational content-makers, allowing them to upload five-minute-long videos, while the time limitation for a normal user is 60 seconds. Short video platforms, innovatively offering a fun, popular and easy way to explore the traditional art forms, are receiving a lot of positive feedbacks from China's young generations. The seconds, or minutes long videos have produced remarkable achievements in promoting traditional Chinese culture.[9]

5. Conclusion

Since its launch in September 2016, Douyin App has developed rapidly. It's not all been smooth sailing for Douyin however. Douyin faces up to some problems and makes attempts continuously to adapt to the changing market, cater to the netizens, and to abide by the laws and rules. Although Douyin is known for short video, intense competition in China's tech ecosystem means that app generally adopt a wide range of functions beyond its main focus.

References

- [1] http://www.sohu.com/a/241765037_439726, July 18, 2018.
- [2] Kate Magill, How to take advantage of China's mega-popular app, <https://www.amcham-shanghai.org/en/article/insight-magazine-do-it-douyin#!>
- [3] Neil Bozmann, Translated by Zhang Yanwu: Entertainment to Death and the Pass of Childhood [M], Guangxi Normal University Press, 2009 edition.
- [4] Traditional culture benefits from trendy short video apps. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-06-14/Traditional-culture-benefits-from-trendy-short-video-apps-Rk4JbAc6d2/index.html>
- [5] Yang Xiaoyu, Celebrate China's heritage online for holiday. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202006/08/WS5eddc76a3108348172517e3_1.html
- [6] Richard Whiddington, Riding the TikTok Wave: How 15 Minutes Can Grow Your Audience, <https://jingculturecommerce.com/tiktok-douyin-15-minutes-grow-audience/>
- [7] Liz Flora, TikTok vs. Douyin, <https://www.gartner.com/en/marketing/insights/daily-insights/tiktok-vs-douyin>.
- [8] Wency Chen, How Bilibili, Kuaishou, Douyin are fostering Chinese youngsters' education, <https://kr-asia.com/how-bilibili-kuaishou-douyin-are-fostering-chinese-youngsters-education>
- [9] Short videos drives spread of traditional Chinese culture, art. People's Daily, Apr 7, 2020, <https://newsghana.com.gh/short-videos-drives-spread-of-traditional-chinese-culture-art/>