Ritualized Practice of Digital Media: The Group Identity Mechanism of Adolescent Meaning Generation

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Abstract: Digital media technology has restructured the spatio-temporal boundaries and participation models of traditional rituals. Through the innovation of symbol systems, the upgrading of spatial experiences, and the transformation of participation methods, it has formed media rituals that are immersive, interactive, and emotionally resonant. During this process, the adolescent group achieves meaning generation through symbol decoding, emotional resonance and behavioral imitation, and completes the construction of group identity relying on the need for group belonging, the reinforcement of peer interaction and the social comparison mechanism. The ubiquitous nature of digital media has broken through the limitations of physical space, enabling teenagers to complete self-awareness and social positioning in the interwoven ritual scenes of virtual and reality, and form a group identity model with the characteristics of The Times. Research reveals that digital media rituals, through technological empowerment and cultural innovation, offer a new path for the identity of the youth group, but they also face potential risks such as symbolic alienation and emotional superficiality.

Keywords: Digital Media; Ritualized Practice; Teenagers; Group Identity; Meaning Generation

1. Introduction

Digital media technology, through means such as dynamic special effects, electronic music and interactive design, digitizes traditional ritual symbols, constructing a new type of symbol system that combines cultural inheritance and technological innovation [1]. Henan Satellite TV's "2024 Mid-Autumn Festival Magic Tour" transforms elements such as ink wash paintings and folk music into dynamic digital symbols, and uses AR technology to present the "Moon Palace" scene in an immersive way, enabling teenagers to complete the cultural practice of the moon worship ceremony in a virtual space [2]. This symbolic innovation not only retains the core values of traditional culture but also endows it with modern communication power through technological empowerment, forming a cultural resonance that transcends time and space. For instance, the Dunhuang Academy has utilized 3D modeling technology to restore the details of murals and combined VR devices to enable teenagers to "enter" the caves, allowing them to perceive the fragility and preciousness of cultural heritage through virtual restoration [3].

1.1 Virtualization Reconstruction of Spatial Experience

Digital media has broken through the limitations of physical space and constructed multi-dimensional ritual spaces through technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and panoramic live streaming. When the EDG team won the League of Legends World Championship, 73.86 million online viewers jointly completed the collective ceremony of "champion coronation" in the digital space through bullet screen interaction, virtual gift giving and other means. [4] This spatial reconstruction enables teenagers to break through geographical boundaries, gather in groups in virtual scenes, and form ritual venues with strong cohesion. For instance, Bilibili's "Cloud Self-study" live-streaming room transforms individual learning behaviors into group competition rituals through real-time ranking, study duration statistics and other functions. Participants can earn virtual MEDALS by "checking in", forming a closed loop of "learning - competition - recognition" [5]. The anonymity and openness of the digital space have further lowered the participation threshold, enabling teenagers to express their identity in a more free manner.

1.2 Interactive Transformation of Participation Methods

Digital media rituals transform the passive acceptance of traditional rituals into active creation. Teenagers deeply participate in the ritual process through bullet comments, secondary creation, virtual avatar customization and other means. In the "National Style Circle", users build a subculture group with cultural characteristics in the digital space by posting videos of traditional clothing outfits and participating in cover songs of ancient Chinese style, etc. [6] This participation model meets the dual needs of teenagers for autonomy and a sense of belonging, enabling them to complete the dual construction of self-expression and group identity in ritual interactions.

1.3 Digital Translation of Cultural Symbols

Digital media technology provides an innovative path for the modern translation of traditional cultural symbols. The "Digital Cultural Relics Library" launched by the Palace Museum transforms cultural relics such as the "Thousand Mile Long River and Mountain Painting" into interactive digital assets through high-precision scanning and 3D reconstruction technology. Teenagers can view the details from multiple angles by zooming and rotating, and even participate in the "virtual restoration" game [7]. This translation not only retains the original meaning of cultural symbols but also enhances their appeal through technical means. For instance, the "Underwater Luo Shen Dance" in Henan Satellite TV's "Wonderful Tour of the Dragon Boat Festival" combined traditional dance with mythological imagery through underwater photography and special effects synthesis, triggering a "cross-border" spread on social media. The related topic has been read over 5 billion times [8]. The cross-media nature of digital media enables cultural symbols to permeate the daily lives of teenagers in more flexible forms.

2. The Psychological Mechanism of Meaning Generation in Adolescents

Teenagers generate meaning through symbol decoding, emotional resonance and behavioral imitation in digital media rituals. This process involves three dimensions: cognitive reconstruction, emotional connection and social learning.

2.1 Symbol Decoding and Cognitive Reconstruction

Teenagers come into contact with translated cultural symbols through digital media and complete their modern understanding of traditional culture in the process of decoding. The electronic ink-wash paintings in Henan Satellite TV's Mid-Autumn Festival program not only retain the charm of brush and ink but also enhance the visual impact through dynamic effects, enabling teenagers to reconstruct their understanding of Mid-Autumn Festival culture in the process of aesthetic experience. This cognitive reconstruction not only involves an update at the knowledge level, such as understanding the historical origin and traditional customs of the Mid-Autumn Festival, but also encompasses the reshaping of values. In symbolic interaction, teenagers no longer merely view the Mid-Autumn Festival as a time for eating mooncakes and admiring the full moon. Instead, they endow it with more profound meanings related to family reunion and cultural inheritance, thus forming personalized interpretations of cultural traditions. For instance, some teenagers may sense the innovative vitality of traditional culture from electronic ink-wash paintings, and thus cherish and love their local culture even more. This shift in perception will influence their future cultural choices and behavioral patterns.

2.2 Emotional Resonance and Identity Confirmation

Digital media ceremonies inspire emotional resonance among teenagers through collective participation. In the EDG championship event, expressions such as "We won" and "Come on, Chinese e-sports!" In the bullet comments, elevated individual emotions to collective ones, fostering a strong sense of identity. This emotional resonance stems from the "coexistence" feature of digital media. Teenagers feel emotional synchronization with others in the virtual space and thereby confirm their position in the group. When they see a large number of comments in the bullet screen that are consistent with their own viewpoints and emotions, they will realize that they do not exist in isolation but belong to a group with common interests and pursuits. The accumulation of emotional energy prompts teenagers to shift from passive observation to active participation, forming a stable ritual dependence. They will continue to follow relevant events, participate in discussions, and even take part in offline activities to further

strengthen this sense of identity and emotional connection.

2.3 Behavioral Imitation and Social Learning

Teenagers conduct social learning by observing the behaviors of their peers in digital media rituals, forming group norms and behavioral patterns. In e-sports live streaming, viewers internalize e-sports culture by imitating the operation skills, language style and even emotional expression of the hosts. This kind of behavioral imitation is not limited to skill learning, but also involves the transmission of values. The part of the process in which teenagers accept the values such as competitive awareness and team spirit advocated by the group during the process of imitation, and thereby achieve socialization. For instance, in team-oriented e-sports games, they learn how to collaborate and communicate with others, and how to maintain fairness and respect in competition. These behaviors and concepts will gradually integrate into their daily lives, influencing their ways of interacting with others and their value judgments.

3. The Construction Path and Reinforcement Mechanism of Group Identity

The construction of group identity among teenagers relies on the need for group belonging, the reinforcement of peer interaction and social comparison mechanisms. Digital media has optimized the operational efficiency of these paths through technological empowerment.

3.1 Digital Satisfaction of Group Belonging Needs

Digital media provide teenagers with a low-threshold channel for group belonging, meeting their psychological needs for group identity through means such as interest communities and virtual identities. On Bilibili's "National Style Circle", teenagers have built a subculture group with cultural characteristics in the digital space by posting videos of traditional clothing outfits and participating in cover songs of ancient-style music. The acquisition of this sense of belonging does not rely on the aggregation of physical spaces, but is achieved through the sharing and interaction of digital symbols, enabling teenagers to find like-minded people across geographical boundaries.

3.2 Technological Empowerment for Enhancing Peer Interaction

The immediate interactivity of digital media enhances the influence of peer interaction on group identity. Teenagers maintain continuous contact with their peers through functions such as bullet comments, comments, and private messages. In the "cloud self-study" scenario, learners form a supervision mechanism through real-time check-in, progress sharing and other means. This peer interaction not only improves learning efficiency, but also enhances group cohesion through emotional support. The recording function of digital media makes the interactive process visual. Teenagers consolidate group memory by reviewing the interactive history and thereby deepen their sense of identity.

3.3 Digital Presentation of Social Comparison Mechanisms

Digital media have expanded the scope and frequency of social comparison. Teenagers position themselves by paying attention to their peers' digital footprints, such as social media updates and gaming achievements. In the field of e-sports, players compare themselves with others through digital indicators such as leaderboards and rank systems. This comparison not only involves competition at the skill level but also a contest of identity recognition. Successful comparison results (such as improved rankings) can enhance teenagers' sense of self-efficacy and thereby strengthen their group identity. Failed comparisons may cause anxiety, but through group support, they can be transformed into motivation for improvement.

4. Potential Risks and Countermeasures of Digital Media Rituals

While digital media rituals promote the identity of the youth group, they also face risks such as symbolic alienation, emotional superficiality and value conflicts, which need to be addressed through technological governance and educational guidance.

4.1 Symbolic Alienation and Cultural Distortion

The excessive commercial translation of traditional symbols by digital media may lead to the loss of cultural connotations. Some merchants, in pursuit of economic benefits, simplify the Mid-Autumn moon worship ceremony into flashy but impractical visual

effects, adding a large number of elements unrelated to traditional culture, while neglecting the cultural logic behind the moon worship, such as the reverence for nature and the cherishing of reunion. This kind of symbolic alienation can easily lead teenagers to form a one-sided understanding of traditional culture. They may only remember the superficial excitement but fail to comprehend the profound cultural background it contains, thereby weakening the depth of cultural inheritance. The response strategies include establishing a strict review mechanism for digital cultural products, conducting a comprehensive assessment from content, form to cultural connotation, to ensure that the products are both innovative and retain their cultural authenticity. At the same time, creators are encouraged to deeply explore the essence of traditional culture, adhere to the cultural core in technological innovation, and make digital media a powerful tool for cultural inheritance.

4.2 Risk of Emotional Superficiality and Dependence

The immediacy feature of digital media rituals may lead to the superficialization of teenagers' emotional experiences. In the interaction of bullet comments, simple expressions like "666" and "so exciting" can quickly evoke emotions, but such emotions are often like a flash in the pan, lacking deep resonance. Teenagers who are immersed in such superficial emotional exchanges for a long time may gradually lose their ability to perceive and express complex emotions. Excessive reliance on digital rituals may also lead teenagers to a paradoxical state of "virtual presence but real absence", where they can talk freely in the virtual world but become taciturn in real social interactions. Educators need to guide teenagers to distinguish between virtual and real emotions. By organizing offline cultural activities, social practices and other means, they should cultivate their ability to express emotions in real society and enable them to learn to establish deep and sincere interpersonal relationships in reality.

4.3 Value Conflicts and Cultural Security

The openness of digital media exposes teenagers to diverse values, some of which may conflict with the traditional education they have received. For instance, the excessive emphasis on individual competition and victory in e-sports

culture may be contrary to the spirit of cooperation and team awareness advocated by schools. This conflict of values may leave teenagers confused and unsure of how to make choices and trade-offs. The coping strategies include strengthening digital media literacy education, integrating media literacy courses into the school education system, helping teenagers develop critical thinking, enabling them to rationally analyze the values in digital information and distinguish right from wrong and good from evil. Meanwhile, through technical means to filter out bad information, and by combining intelligent algorithms with manual review, a healthy digital cultural environment is created to ensure the cultural safety of teenagers.

5. Conclusion

Digital media rituals, through technological reconstruction and cultural innovation, offer a new path for the construction of identity among the youth group. Teenagers complete the generation of meaning through symbol decoding, emotional resonance and behavioral imitation, and achieve group identity through the need for group belonging, peer interaction reinforcement and social comparison mechanisms. However, the potential risks of digital media rituals require us to treat technological empowerment with caution. Through cultural persistence, emotional guidance and value education, we should guide teenagers to form a healthy and stable group identity model in the digital age. Future research can further explore the operational mechanisms of digital media rituals in different cultural contexts, providing more targeted theoretical support for the development of teenagers.

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