

## Research on the Communication Strategies of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the New Media Era: A Case Study of the Sisters Festival in Southeast Guizhou

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**Abstract:** With the advent of the new media era, intangible cultural heritage is facing unprecedented difficulties as well as new opportunities in inheritance and dissemination. In the continuous practice, intangible cultural heritage has accumulated experience in the application of new media. Taking Qiandongnan Sisters Festival in Guizhou, China as an example, this paper analyses the communication characteristics of intangible cultural heritage in the new media environment, and on the basis of the analysis of its communication status, puts forward strategic and provide reference for relevant departments to make decisions.

### 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of Internet and other technologies, the new media era featuring digitalization, high integration and fragmentation has arrived. The so-called new media began in the latter-half of the 20th-century. The Oxford English Dictionary attributed its first use to the master wordsmith, showman and communication scholar Marshall McLuhan in the Journal of Economic History.[1] New media mainly refers to interactive and integrated media forms and platforms based on digital technology, network technology and other modern information or communication technology, including network media, mobile media and other interactive digital media forms.[2] The era of new media not only brings more communication channels, but also brings infinite possibilities to the inheritance and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. As the crystallization of thousands of years of excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage is of great significance. It not only helps to enhance the public's cognition of traditional Chinese culture, promote the development of cultural industry and enhance the comprehensive national strength, but also helps the government to enhance cultural confidence in cultural diplomacy. How to better inherit and spread it has always been a concern of all sectors of society. Therefore, this paper takes the Sisters Festival as an example to explore the characteristics of the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage in the new media era, and puts forward feasible strategies according to the existing communication difficulties of the Sisters Festival.

### 2. The communication status of intangible cultural heritage in new media environment

In the process of civilization development, human beings have created a lot of valuable cultures, and people's understanding of it has been deepening. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China, which took effect on June 1, 2011, defines intangible cultural heritage as various forms of traditional cultural expression passed down from generation to generation by people of all ethnic groups and regarded as part of their cultural heritage, as well as physical objects and places related to traditional cultural expression forms. It mainly includes five parts: oral legends and expressions, performing arts, social customs, etiquette, festivals, knowledge and practice about the nature and universe, and traditional handicraft skills, which are characterized by historicity, locality, diversity and practical vulnerability.[3] Since 1967, P. Goldmark, the director of the Technology

Research Institute of the American CBS Television network, put forward the concept of new media, the media has changed with each passing day. The advent of big data, multimedia, Internet and other technologies has constantly promoted the transformation of media. At the same time, the popularity of mobile terminal devices makes all kinds of software and applications promoted, the change of new media has changed people's life and way of thinking. The new media era will make it possible for the faster and more vivid dissemination of intangible cultural heritage: from offline communication to online, from mass media to social media; From the text expression of newspapers and books at the beginning to the audio-visual experience of radio and television, and then to the immersive experience brought by VR, AR and other technologies, the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage has more new possibilities, enabling people to experience intangible cultural heritage through various media with multiple senses.

As for the communication of intangible heritage in new media, academic circles have made research from different aspects. First of all, it is reflected in the discussion of the characteristics, advantages and difficulties of the dissemination of Intangible cultural heritage in new media. Li and Bai put forward that the communication of intangible cultural heritage in new media has the characteristics of visualization of communication content, convenience of communication mode, crossover of communication process and diversification of communication channels.[4] At the same time, the academia has also noticed the hidden worries behind such convenience. Jing believes that the inheritance and transmission of intangible culture are facing with the impact of modern civilization on traditional civilization and the dilemma of "no successor" caused by the lack of social cognition of intangible culture. [5] Zhao etc. analysed the difficulties in the dissemination of intangible culture from the perspective of audiences, and concluded that under the background of new media, audiences were more inclined to contact intangible cultural heritage on the spot, and the attempts in new media had little effect and the audience's acceptance was low.[6] Papangelis, Chamberlain, Liang mentioned that the vast majority of technical application of intangible cultural heritage were primarily focused upon documentation, and mobile technologies played a small role in capturing the intangible indigenous cultural heritage.[7] In terms of the subject of communication, Zhou highlighted the position of the government as the main body of communication in the strategy proposed for the development of intangible cultural heritage in Chaozhou. She believed that the government should not only make new media communication plans, formulate new incentive policies, but also played a role in establishing new media display platforms.[8] At the same time, some scholars focused on the exploration of specific modes of communication. Li and Zhao believed that animation, as a new form of cultural record, could display intangible cultural heritage through rich colours, fast rhythm and exaggerated images, and other unique visual effects.[9] In addition, vivid interpretation and dialogue also could be used to construct the context and the atmosphere for intangible cultural heritage communication. Through their analysis of Dong opera, Xiao and Chen proposed ways to develop professional applications, build comprehensive communication channels, and use new media discussion circles to deliver to young people.[10] Yang and Abidin proposed the role of Computer 3d Scanning and Reconstruction Technology in the presentation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, and highlighted that by combining with the latest sound effect and touch technology, the audience would be free to enjoy the immersion and interaction of intangible cultural heritage dissemination.[11] In addition, Muqeem, and De Byl proposed the important role of augmented reality technology in museums, the application provided physical participation and entertaining feedback for museum visitors. [12] In the Intangible Cultural Heritage and New Technologies: Challenges and Opportunities for Cultural Preservation and Development, from the perspective of new technologies, the authors respectively explained the role of facial expression analysis and modelling, vocal tract sensing and modelling, body motion and gesture recognition, encephalography analysis, semantic multimedia analysis and other technologies in the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. In addition, the authors made their point that the modernization brought by technological development makes intangible cultural heritage disappear, and argued that technology should be used rationally to make it a tool rather than a threat for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage in an increasingly global twenty-first century.[13]

In brief, there is a certain system for the study of intangible cultural heritage in new media communication. From the present situation to the communication strategy, there are certain researches in all aspects, which can reflect the importance of intangible cultural heritage inheritance and communication in a certain extent. However, the overall perspective of the study is relatively fixed, and the study of different intangible cultural heritage needs to be expanded.

For intangible cultural heritage, borrowing from new media is an effective way for its continuous development in the future. The Sisters Festival is one of the representative festivals of the Hmong people. From the perspective of communication, this paper analyses the communication strategies of the Sisters Festival as an intangible cultural heritage in the new media era, and puts forward relevant suggestions. On the one hand, it has widened the exploration of China's diverse traditional culture. On the other hand, the study of the communication strategy of the Sisters Festival can also play a reference role for other intangible cultural heritage in the communication environment of new media.

### 3. Analysis on the characteristics of the Sisters Festival communication in new media era

With the continuous development of media technology, the Sisters Festival is exploring the development path constantly. In this process, not only the local official subjects made actions, but also more communication subjects began to make use of different platforms to voice and aggregate various contents, thus bringing a more comprehensive perspective for the audience to understand the intangible cultural heritage. In the current communication, the Sisters Festival presents different characteristics in the communication subject, communication channel, and communication content and so on, making an effective exploration of its dissemination.

**Diversified communication subjects.** One of the characteristics of the communication of the Sisters Festival in the new media era is the diversification of the communication subjects. The government and other official communication subjects are no longer the only source of information, and the communicators from different industries are playing an increasingly important role in the dissemination of information.

First of all, the content transmitted by the official communication subject under the influence of its own credibility is more likely to gain the trust of the audience, which is also the preferred channel for most people to obtain information. Since the Fifth Meeting of the Commission for Deepening Overall Reform of the CPC Central Committee deliberated and approved the Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of County-level Convergence Media Centers in 2018, various counties in southeastern Guizhou have accelerated the construction of converged media centers and created their own accounts in social platforms, in order to better spread national culture. For example, the publicity department of Taijiang County, the main birthplace of the Sisters Festival, has linked the accounts on different platforms, such as Taijiang News network, Taijiang Today Newspaper, Taijiang Converged Media Weibo, and Sister Taijiang APP in the public account, forming a matrix gathered on the wechat platform. On the other hand, new media being considered "new" is not only because of its successful integration in the form of the traditional interpersonal and mass media, but also because of its new functions that enable individuals to equally control messages in interpersonal media, which allows them to control messages in mass media.[14] The decentralization of communication rights brought about by the new media era makes more subjects participate in the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. They spread information actively either for the purpose of profit or interest. According to the results of searching Sisters Festival of Qiandongnan in the Sina microblog, the communication subjects are mainly divided into individuals, we-media and official accounts. There is no doubt that they are indispensable keys in the transmission chain of intangible cultural heritage. The communication subjects formed by multiple parties greatly expand the influence of inheritance transmission of intangible culture (see Figure 1).

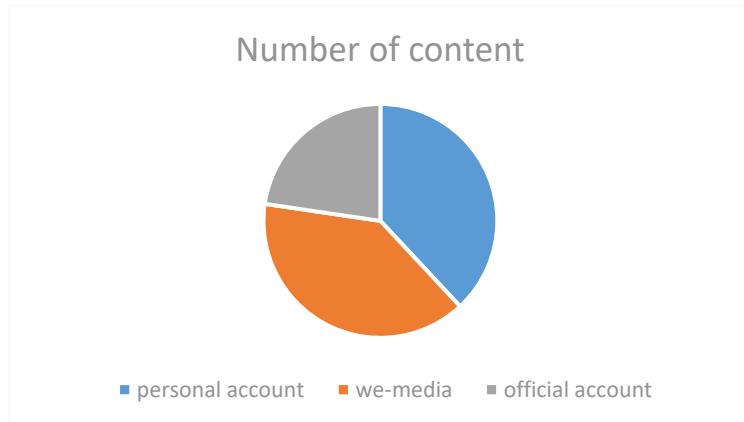


Figure 1 The number of sisters Festival related content published by different subjects in Weibo.

**Multi-faceted aggregation of communication content.** As one of the intangible cultural heritage of Qiandongnan, the Sisters Festival has rich cultural connotation. Not only the material folk customs such as clothing and diet, but also the spiritual culture contained in ancient legends and other folk activities such as festival rituals and dances all provide rich sources of information for the transmission subjects. On the whole, these cultures are mainly expressed through the form of festival reports, folk customs and personal records.

The first is the report. The festival is usually held on the March 15<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar in Taijiang. Various celebrations are held during the festival to attract tourists, so the festival has become a hot topic in the press every year. For 2021, the public account named Taijiang Today reported the Sisters Festival Folk Culture Week from April 15th to April 29th, with 21 articles covering the whole process of the festival activities. The second form is the introduction of folk customs. According to local customs, on the day of the festival includes eating sisters' rice, swimming, singing folk songs, boating, bullfighting and other activities. The introduction of folk customs requires certain knowledge base and video shooting and editing ability, so the disseminators of such content are mostly local convergence media centre and we-media. For example, in the APP named Sister Taijiang, a 30-minute video titled Sisters Flower Blossom was released in 2019, introducing the Sisters Festival from various aspects such as geographical location, origin of the festival and folk customs. Finally, everyone with a microphone is characteristic of the new media age. In terms of content, the personal records about the Sisters Festival are mostly fragments of local residents and non-local tourists participating in the process of festival activities. The narrative is relatively scattered and the perspective is more unique. Usually, the first person perspective of the communicator can bring people more intuitive feelings. The more populist voice combining local people's talk, special food and other aspects brings deeper resonance.

**Social based communication platform.** The diversification of platforms in the new media era has led to the differentiated development of them, thus forming various distinctive platforms that focus on relationship connection or visual presentation. Therefore, the festival can use different strategies to show its charm on different platforms. Firstly, the platform with graphics and text as the main communication media like Wechat can spread in a large range of one-to-many at the same time, and it can also make the spread of information to produce one to one rapid fission. Secondly, in the Red, the content related to the Sisters Festival presents the characteristics of we-media and individuals as the main communication subjects, and is expressed from a more realistic perspective, which effectively improves the credibility and authenticity of the information. At the same time, among the main video platforms, short video platforms such as Tiktok, on the one hand, have simple operation interfaces that not only let most people participate in the communication process, but also gain sufficient user base and make short video form can better penetrate users' daily life, which greatly enhances the communication power. On the other hand, in the long video platform such as BILIBILI, the communication content related to the Sisters Festival in the special form of Vlog narrates from a more complete and vivid perspective, effectively improving the sense of video insertion and enhancing the influence of the content.

**Various innovative means of communication.** In addition to the use of pictures, text, video and other forms of expression, in the new media era, the communications are also focus on using new means to enhance the influence such as cross-border communication, penetrating the fragmented time by live broadcasting and building scenes for immersive experience. First of all, because of the cultural heritage effect, which means the influence of the cultural image on consumers' perceptions of and attitudes toward heritage-related national products and services, more and more attention is paid to the role of intangible cultural heritage in marketing.[15] Through a variety of marketing activities, the dissemination of the Sisters Festival can break through the existing circle and expands the existing audience range. In the series of activities of the Sisters Festival last year, the Embroidery Competition and silver embroidery exhibition was set up. Miao embroidery is also one of the intangible cultural heritages. While the combination of the two brought more hot spots, the support of commercial factors brought higher popularity and income ability to the Sisters Festival. In addition, the way of live + short video has powerful social functions, which can import more traffic through social sharing, and form social links and communities in various forms of interaction. The content conveyed by the form of live + short video is more real and rich.[16] In 2021, in addition to live broadcast by the local convergence media centre through the live cloud of The Xinhua News Agency, there were also no lack of participants at the event site using the live broadcast function of multiple platforms to broadcast live. This form of live broadcasting not only increased the sense of audience participation, but also facilitated audience viewing.

#### 4. The predicament of The Sisters Festival spreading in new media era

Under the efforts of each body, the Sisters Festival has been spread through a variety of new media channels and achieved preliminary results. However, with the rapid iteration of new media, the utilization of new media is still insufficient, and the exploration of the role of new media is not deep enough, so it will face many difficulties in the future development.

**Weak foundation.** First of all, the disseminators fail to fully establish the basis consciousness of spreading the intangible cultural heritage culture. The official media, in particular, have reported on the festival, but have not been able to play a leading role, and their promotion of the culture has been mainly focused on the holiday period. For example, the 2021 report only lasted for a month or so in April, and there was no long-term publicity. Therefore, it can be seen that the disseminators from the official to the folk just take it as an instant event, and lack of attention to the dissemination of the culture of the Sisters Festival. Furthermore, such short publicity time node is also the problem that the culture of Sisters Festival can not spread widely. Second, the foundation of official channels is missing. Although local websites, public accounts and microblog accounts have been established, on the whole, the communication of the Sisters Festival has not established special and effective channels, so the Sisters Festival is more about borrowing strength from third-party channels. Third, the foundation of communication technology is lacking. In the era of new media, technology is changing rapidly. However, AR, VR and other technologies have not been fully used. In general, in the transmission process of the Sisters Festival mainly used are video, audio, graphic, live and other forms, interactive forms did not get a big promotion.

**Insufficient spread.** First, from the perspective of geographical breadth, although some central and provincial media participate in the communication and reporting, generally speaking, the main communication bodies of the Sisters Festival are local media. The audience of regional media is mostly composed of local residents, and such audience structure greatly limits the spread of the festival in the region. Compared with the external spread, the spread of the festival is still in a state of internal spread. Second, from the perspective of the breadth of cross-border, the Sisters Festival has made many explorations, but overall, the breadth of cross-border is still not enough, and some strategies for cooperation in more fields have not been formulated. For the Sisters Festival, online games, commercial brands are nice choice for cross-boundary cooperation. In general, the spread of the festival is still in a passive and limited state.

**Insufficient content depth.** The first point is the lack of in-depth exploration of the cultural resources of the festival. There are rich cultural connotations behind the Sisters Festival, such as

ancient legends, rich folk activities, food culture and so on, these parts are the key essence of the Sisters Festival culture. Although there are corresponding academic studies on these cultures, they have not been fully expressed in the transmission process, the introduction content about the Sisters Festival is not in-depth enough, and the transmission content is fragmentary. In addition, the dissemination content of government websites or institutional platforms is mainly about the reports about the Sisters festivals. The presentation of this news method is difficult to deeply present folk culture and arouse the interest of the audience (see Figure 2).

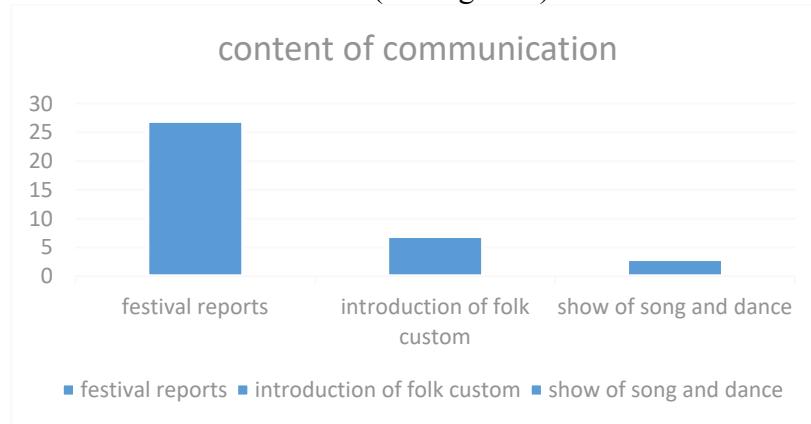


Figure 2 Distribution of the content about Sisters Festival in the public account of Taijiang Convergence Media Centre.

## 5. New development strategies for the communication of intangible cultural heritage in new media

Faced with the problems arising from the transmission of the Sisters Festival in the new media environment, the intangible cultural heritage should learn from the past experience, take advantage of opinion leaders, unite multiple subjects, deeply explore the cultural connotation, attach importance to channel construction and focus on the needs of the audience, and start the road from multiple perspectives.

**Form a multi-subject production mode dominated by opinion leaders.** Katz and Lazarsfield put forward the concept of opinion leader in the 1940s, which used to refer to the figure who often provides information and advice and exerts influence on others in interpersonal communication.[17] In the new media environment, the social influence of opinion leaders is further enhanced, so the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage should pay more attention to the power of opinion leaders. We should not only train opinion leaders at all ages, but also pay attention to the development of opinion leaders on various platforms. For example, in Weibo, we can make full use of the followers of verified weibousers who have more than 500,000 fans to improve the communication power, or we can use the communication experience of opinion leaders in RED to strengthen the influence of content.

**In-depth exploration of the cultural connotation of intangible cultural heritage and innovative content and form.** From the current communication content, most of the festival activities are superficial, and the form is mostly news reports and personal records. Content-based communication of intangible cultural heritage is the basis for coping with many challenges in the future. On the one hand, communicators should focus on the humanistic spirit and cultural connotation behind the festival, and use a more user-friendly voice, either by telling stories, or from the perspective of tourists and local residents, to show the cultural meaning more subtly and moving. On the other hand, the form of intangible cultural heritage content needs to be innovated. According to the 2018 Research Report on the Cognition and Demand of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Chinese Internet Users, audiences are more interested in the combination of intangible cultural heritage with quadratic elements, movies and TV dramas, variety shows and music forms. Presenting intangible cultural heritage through corresponding new media forms enables users to better taste the cultural details of intangible cultural heritage and show the charm of intangible cultural heritage. For example, the

mobile game The New Smiling Proud Wanderer unites the intangible cultural heritage inheritors of Miao nationality, embodies the historical and cultural characteristics of Miao nationality for thousands of years in the new professional version of the game, and creates a magnificent game scene based on the Miao village in Xijiang .(see Figure 3).

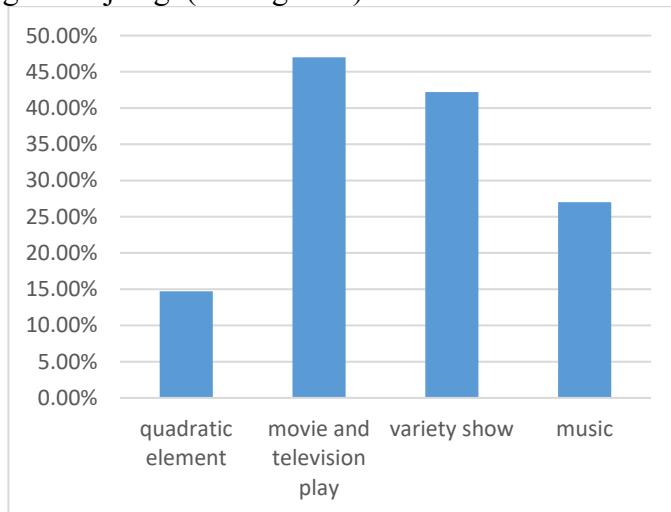


Figure 3 Audience preference of intangible cultural heritage combined with different forms.

Data source: 2018 intangible cultural heritage cognition and Demand Research Report of Chinese Internet users

**Strengthen channel construction to build a three-dimensional communication matrix.** Channel construction is an indispensable part of the communication of intangible cultural heritage in the new media era. At present, the communication of intangible cultural heritage is confronted with the dilemma of the competition among multiple communication subjects brought by the convenience of channels and the absence of official channels. In terms of channels, the overwhelming new media has greatly influenced people's lives, but the power of traditional media and offline experience should not be ignored. In addition, official accounts have been established on mainstream social platforms, and exclusive websites and software for the promotion of intangible cultural heritage have been built so that audiences can obtain information through more professional channels and inherit culture in a digital way. For example, Shicui, the first APP dedicated to the creation of intangible cultural heritage works in Yunnan, was launched in 2013, and a number of software focusing on folk traditional culture after that, which laid a solid foundation for the combination of software and intangible cultural heritage in the future and further extended the communication channels.

**Focus on audience needs to obtain effectiveness.** Katz proposed the Use and Satisfaction theory in his book Personal Influence: The Role of People in the Mass Communication Stream. He pointed out that audiences engage with media out of certain needs, including information needs, social relations needs, entertainment needs and psychological needs.[18] Therefore, the communication of intangible cultural heritage should not only improve the channels but also take into account the needs of the audience in order to maximize the communication effect. In the new media era with endless new technologies, the technical basis for further meeting the audience has been developed, and the audience is endowed with the ability to access information anytime and anywhere. In addition, interactive information nodes also allow the audience to get a more real feeling and a more intuitive sense of participation. For example, in the form of digital painting, different scenes of intangible cultural heritage are vividly reproduced with the help of mobile terminals, and interactive methods are also used to enable the audience to obtain the experience of craft production and festivals. In addition, AR, VR and other technologies also have great development potential. Sensors, positioning systems, big data and other technologies, together with vivid sound effects and high-definition display screens, enable the audience to experience the charm of various intangible cultural heritage in virtual situations or virtual interactions in real situations. The combination of technical basis, audience perspective and folk voice can effectively meet the needs of the audience, so as to achieve the ideal communication effect.

## **6. Conclusion**

In recent years, the importance of intangible cultural heritage has been increasingly recognized. There is a growing consensus that the protection, promotion and preservation of cultural diversity is essential for sustainable development for present and future generations.[19] As an important part of traditional Chinese culture, intangible cultural heritage is a vivid witness of the continuous inheritance of Chinese civilization, and an important component of national identification and representation as a repertoire of meanings and values, as well as an embodiment of symbols in a given society. Thus forming a solid foundation basis for connecting national sentiment and maintaining national unity.[20] In the new media era, we should make full use of new media, with the help of multiple communication subjects, build three-dimensional channels, and adapt to audience needs when exploring the connotation of intangible cultural heritage for creation, innovation from many aspects, to help the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, thus promoting the construction of our cultural power.

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