

A Study on the Audience of Cantonese Short-Form Video Content from the Perspective of Place Identity Theory

Ziyuan Liu^{1*}

¹*Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China*

**Corresponding author: Ziyuan Liu*

Abstract

Dialect is a carrier for spreading local culture, an iconic symbol for recognising local groups, and it is the foundation for the construction of place identity. Nowadays, Short videos have penetrated people's daily lives due to the development of new media technologies. As the most spoken unofficial language in China, Cantonese (also known as Yue Chinese) also has a special status in Chinese short video platforms. This study investigates Cantonese Short-form video audiences from the perspective of place identity theory, aiming to explore the relationship between Cantonese Short-form video content and the construction of place identity. Focusing on this theme, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with 19 Cantonese Short-form video content audiences and non-participatory observation on the short video platform Douyin to obtain qualitative data. The collected data were summarised using the thematic analysis method, and finally, three main themes were identified: the construction of boundaries, inheritance anxiety, and cultural integration. The study examines the paths and influences on the construction of place identity by audiences in the process of consuming Cantonese Short-form video content.

Keywords

Place Identity, Local Culture, New Media, Short-form Video, Audience

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Introduction

In contemporary society, where globalisation and urbanisation are accelerating, the survival of dialects presents a complex situation. From a global perspective, dialects such as the Alsatian dialect in Texas, USA, which has disappeared from people's lives, serve as examples of the process from decline to death of a dialect (Roesch, 2012). In contrast, the surviving Galilean dialect has played an important role in the development of modern Hebrew (Bar-Adon, 1979). While in the local context of China, Cantonese, as the core carrier of Lingnan culture, is facing the challenges of intergenerational transmission breaks and cultural identity dilution. From a socio-cultural perspective, China's policy of popularising Mandarin since the end of the 20th century and large-scale population movements have

gradually weakened the social functions of dialects (Peng & Ge, 2016). This change in language ecology reflects the anxiety of cultural assimilation that is common in the process of China's modernisation, where dialects are not only a communication tool but also an important symbolic system for the construction of regional group identities.

Dialect as a carrier of information, its transmission path changes with the development of information technology. Previously, dialects existed in interpersonal communication, later in television programs, and now they are widely present in short videos. In this context, the rise of short video technology provides a new path for the development of dialect culture. The popularity of mobile internet has lowered the threshold of content production, and the algorithmic recommendation mechanism has reconstructed the underlying logic of cultural communication. Cantonese

Short-form video embeds the traditional dialect into the framework of cultural expression in the new media era through the narrative strategy of life. Through dialect talk shows and short dramas, the creators not only continue the unique beauty of the Cantonese language but also give it online cultural features.

Since the concept of place identity was formally introduced by Proshansky in 1978, it has become one of the core concepts in environmental psychology. 'Place' not only has a geographical meaning but also has humanistic and psychosocial connotations. According to human geographer Tuan (1977), the main function of 'place' is to promote people's sense of belonging and attachment. A related concept to 'place' is 'space', which can be precisely expressed through vectors and refers specifically to geographic location and physical form (Sack, 1997). Previous research has focused on three dimensions of the physical environment: the house, the neighbourhood and the city. However, the definition of 'place' suggests that there is a great deal of flexibility in what can be referred to as place, especially in the new media era, where virtual cyberspace has expanded the meaning of place. Short videos are not merely a virtual space but also a 'third space' that represents a deep integration of the virtual and the real.

The synergy between technological development and social demand has made the Cantonese Short-form video audience an important sample for observing the evolution of cultural ecology. It not only reflects the creators' creative transformation of traditional culture but also reveals how new media technology reconfigures the spatial distribution of dialects. This phenomenon of dialect mediatisation provides a unique research perspective for exploring the mechanism of place identity in the new media era.

Literature Review

The Research Status of Place and Place Identity Theory

Human geographer Tuan proposed the concept of 'place' in 1977, and 'identity' is an internal, subjective self-concept of an individual. Tajfel proposed social identity theory in 1982, pointing out that identity is an individual's sense of belonging to a particular social group, as well as the emotions and values that an individual feels as a member of a certain group.

Proshansky conceptually defines place identity based on the cognitive connection between the self and the physical environment. According to him, place identity is a part of the self, a personal identity related to the physical environment determined through the complex interaction of ideas, beliefs, preferences, emotions, values, goals, behavioural tendencies, and skills present in people's conscious and unconscious minds. In 1983, Proshansky added that place identity is a functional component of a person's self-identity, a 'physical world socialisation of the self'. Korpela argued that people's place identity is a product

of positive self-regulation, self-identity increases self-esteem, and place identity, as part of self-identity, also has the effect of increasing self-esteem. It can be seen that place identity is concerned with how people relate to places on a cognitive level.

Other researchers have concluded that place identity refers to the symbolic importance of a place, storing emotions and relationships, and giving meaning and purpose to people's lives. They argue that people's use of places represents their sense of identity with them, and thus their emotional connection to these places (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989), while Dixon and Durrheim suggest that place identity can be described as an implicit psychological construct. The importance of place identity is often ignored in daily life, but when people change or transition, the bond between people and places is threatened, and place identity becomes apparent. Residence facilitates the development of personal social relations in the local context, and therefore, long-term residence in a place strengthens place identity. Moreover, people relate their place of residence to significant life events (Fleury-Bahi et al., 2008). In addition, in recent years, research on 'placeless-ness' and 'non-place' has also emerged, expanding the scope of research, and most scholars apply Relph's explanation to the definition of placeless-ness. Relph's explanation, placeless-ness is the place where identity becomes weakened; and non-place can be summarised as the mobile space that people move through.

Research Status of Cantonese Short-Form Video Audience

At present, there are fewer studies on Cantonese short-form videos, and some scholars have studied the content of Cantonese short-form videos. For example, He elaborates on the cultural communication power of Cantonese short-form videos from the creative characteristics and development dilemmas of Cantonese short-form videos, and prospects for future development. Yan analyses the content of Cantonese short-form videos from the perspective of audience needs, and explores the diversified needs for programmes to satisfy the audience's needs of entertainment and recreation, local culture, emotional catharsis, as well as cognitive learning. Zhao considers the Cantonese short-form video audience as a group of fans, and researches the characteristics and motivations of their participation behaviours from the perspective of participatory culture, analysing the organisational characteristics, participation behaviours, and cultural constructs of this group.

Among the existing studies, for the time being, there is no previous research on the audience behaviour of Cantonese short-form videos from the perspective of place identity, which means that this study will create a brand new perspective in the research related to Cantonese short-form videos. Based on the place identity theory, this paper will study the process of constructing place identity by Cantonese short-form video audiences, and from the perspective of place identity, it will focus on the aesthetic

and cultural connotations of the content of Cantonese short-form videos, as well as on studying the position of Cantonese short-form videos in the construction of culture and exploring the correlation and influence of these factors on the society.

Methodology

This study uses Netnography and Semi-structured Interviews as methods for collecting qualitative data, and conducts Thematic Analysis on the data.

Ethnography is a research method proposed by the anthropologist Malinowski, in which a group of people is taken as the object of study, and the unique culture, values and behavioural patterns of the group are observed, to achieve the purpose of cognition of the group and related cultural patterns. The ‘netnography’ is proposed by Kozinets, who argues that cyber ethnography is based on traditional ethnographic methods, focusing on the qualitative analysis of the content and form of members' online interactions, and aiming to study the subcultures, interactional processes, and group behavioural characteristics presented by online groups. This study conducts non-participatory observations primarily on the Douyin platform, and selectively records the audience's behaviours such as commenting and liking, to explore the embodiment of the place identity theory in the audience's behaviours and its influence on the audience's behaviours. Contents from other short-form video platforms are also used as data sources where necessary. At the same time, the study will also explore the relationship between the algorithmic recommendation mechanisms of video platforms and the construction of place identity.

The in-depth interview method is a common research method in qualitative research, and the semi-structured interview is a form of interview between unstructured and full-structured interviews, which is a form of interview in which open-ended questions are asked according to a predefined thematic framework. In this study, the interviewees are all long-term audiences of Cantonese short-form video content. As previously mentioned, the audiences are all from the Pearl River Delta region, but due to the development of the society and the use of Mandarin as the official and common language in China, their mother tongue from Cantonese-speaking regions is not always Cantonese, and so the interviewees will be tagged as either native or non-native, and in general, natives can use Cantonese proficiently, and non-natives Generally speaking, natives can use Cantonese proficiently, while non-natives are unable to use Cantonese proficiently, which is manifested in the fact that they can understand but not able to speak Cantonese. Adding tags to the interviewee is not only conducive to obtaining rich qualitative data but also facilitates more in-depth and detailed conclusions in the subsequent data analysis process.

To explore the impact of Cantonese short-form videos on the audience's place identity, this paper uses the snowball sampling method to find interviewees. First, one Cantonese

short-form video audience, each of whom can proficiently use Cantonese and those who can only understand Cantonese, is selected from the researcher's social network, and then 2-3 additional Cantonese short-form video audiences are co-opted through the further recommendation of the first batch of interviewees, and so on. Finally, 19 Cantonese short-form video audiences were interviewed in an official semi-structured interview. By interpreting the psychological origins of place identity through their self-reports, it can understand what they gained as Cantonese short-form video audiences and what kind of content shaped their place identity.

Table 1: Interviewee's basic information

Number	Gender	Age	Native place
A1	M	25	Henan
A2	M	27	Guangdong
B1	M	25	Henan
B2	F	30	Shandong
B3	M	27	Guangdong
B4	F	24	Guangdong
B5	M	25	Guangdong
C1	M	33	Hunan
C2	F	31	Shandong
C3	M	54	Guangdong
C4	F	54	Guangdong
C5	F	24	Guangdong
C6	M	25	Guangdong
D1	M	62	Guangdong
D2	M	50	Guangdong
D3	M	25	Guangdong
E1	F	59	Guangdong
E2	F	46	Guangdong
E3	F	21	Guangdong

The data collected either using netnography or semi-structured interviews were read over and over again, coded and generalised according to the six-step method of thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2006), i.e. Familiarisation - Coding - Theme generation - Review of themes - Defining and naming themes - Write up. Themes

were not set in advance but were identified after the initial reading of the data.

For the data obtained through in-depth interviews, in order to more accurately represent the respondents' views, after identifying the themes and sub-themes, those categorised discourses are confirmed by the respondents who published them to ensure the consistency of the discourses with the meaning of the themes. Finally, persuasive, compelling and representative examples were selected to represent each theme.

Local Circles: Constructing Geographic Boundaries in Place Identity

Exclusivity of Cantonese Characters

As the written carrier of the Cantonese dialect, Cantonese characters contain unique dialectal vocabulary, grammatical structures and ideograms. In short video communication, text often appears as the title of the video, the cover, the content of the creative effect elements (such as special effect words, additional description of the clip), which can not only provide a complementary description of the video content, but also improve the efficiency of information transfer and enhance the expression of emotions. Cantonese characters are widely used in Cantonese short-form video content, where short-form video creators combine traditional Cantonese slang with internet buzzwords to form communication symbols that mix the traditional and the modern. For example, the Cantonese short-form video content creator 'Cantonese Know One or Two' adapts the Cantonese two-part allegorical saying into short-form video lines, which not only retains the original meaning but also increases the comedic effect, attracting a large number of audiences to imitate and spread the video.

Nowadays, short-form video platforms accurately push short-form video content to specific users based on user labels, such as geographical and linguistic preferences, such as Douyin's 'collaborative filtering algorithm', which enables Cantonese content to quickly reach Cantonese-speaking communities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and overseas (Li & Huang, 2019). This provides a broad communication space for Cantonese characters in short-form video platforms, and Cantonese short-form videos not only realise the modern transformation of the dialect but also become an important medium for place identity in the Lingnan region.

The Formation of Reading Barriers

Cantonese has long existed as a spoken language, and the lack of a written standard set by an authoritative body has led to a high level of freedom in folk writing. To restore the 'original flavour' of the dialect, Cantonese characters are often used to express their pronunciation directly using characters with similar pronunciation, resulting in a writing habit that gives priority to transliteration over ideograms. This is the result of a combination of the existence of the need to write in spoken dialects and the lack of

standardisation. This phenomenon is a direct reflection of the fact that non-Cantonese speakers can read Chinese characters but not Cantonese characters.



Figure 1. The same passage written in Cantonese script is different from that written in standardised Chinese

Audience Attitudes Towards Cantonese Characters

Users of Cantonese characters hold complex and diverse attitudes towards its dissemination on the internet, encompassing recognition of the positive promotion of cultural inheritance, as well as concerns and reflections on cultural dissemination.

Interviewee (D3 – native) said:

I don't care whether other viewers can understand it or not.

Interviewee (C6 – native) thinks that for the target audience, Cantonese characters are conducive to creating a sense of familiarity, but Cantonese characters are not beneficial to the dissemination of short-form videos.

Another Interviewee (B1 - non-native) considered that Cantonese characters were helpful for outsiders who were interested in Cantonese to learn Cantonese, but he also considered that Cantonese characters were not beneficial to the dissemination of Cantonese short-form videos.

Internally, Cantonese characters are a cultural code for place identity, reinforcing community cohesion through symbols of exclusivity, but externally, they are an obstacle to cross-cultural dialogue, exacerbating the risk of marginalisation of regional cultures. Sebba argues that spelling can be an 'ideal site of struggle and resistance for ideologies of all sorts' because orthography is often seen as a virtually unchanging linguistic system with a high degree of standardisation and strict normality. Using graffiti, Jamaican Creole writing and communication as examples, he demonstrates how users blatantly refuse to conform to authorised spelling norms, and how spelling mistakes are symbolically used to construct identities in opposition to the mainstream (Sebba, 2003). The difference in opinions among the interviewees reflects the contradiction that arises in the process of seeking a dynamic balance between cultural purity and communication efficacy in dialect

communication, and they hope that Cantonese will not lose its authenticity in the wave of digitisation while integrating into the multi-cultural ecology.

Cultural Superiority and Regional Identity

Guangdong is one of China's most economically developed provinces, and the region's customs and culture are highly visible on the internet, with Cantonese people often comparing outsiders to themselves as two subjects. Douyin's famous Cantonese video creators 'Guo Jiafeng' and 'Noisy Boy KC' have a large number of videos comparing and interpreting the concepts and living habits of Cantonese people with those of outsiders. The videos are full of regional stereotypes and generalisations. For example, sending red envelopes, a traditional Chinese New Year custom, contrasts the small sum of red packets in Guangdong with the large sum of red packets in other provinces; and the lower wedding bride price of Cantonese people is often contrasted with the much higher bride price in other provinces. This reflects the superiority of Cantonese short-form video creators and their audiences over the cultural practices of their environment.



Figure 2. 'Guo Jiafeng' and 'Noisy Boy KC'

Regarding the existence of stereotypical content in Cantonese short-form videos, the interviewee (B4 - native) said:

Although I know it is a stereotypical reflection, I still find it funny and would share it with my friends due to the creators' humorous interpretation of these things.

The interviewee (C1 - native) said:

In my personal opinion, the existence of stereotypes is not necessarily all bad. For example, when it comes to 'Cantonese', there are a lot of positive stereotypes, such as 'low-profile', 'no face-saving', and so on. When talking to people from other provinces, I can quickly and easily portray my own personal image to others by telling them

that I am from Guangdong.

It has been experimentally shown that simply assigning an arbitrary label to research participants activates a sense of group identity, even if they do not recognise others in their group (Tajfel et al., 1971). The construction and dissemination of regional stereotypes in Cantonese short-form videos is the result of the intertwined evolution of cultural identity and local economic status. By selectively reinforcing the 'reasonableness' of local practices, such as the 'pragmatic' label of low red packets and the 'civilised' narrative of simplified marriage customs. Short-form video creators sublimate local customs into a kind of progressive cultural capital, and when audiences consume this kind of content, they not only implicitly judge the customs of others but also realise a ritualised confirmation of their traditions, and through the entertaining expression of short-form videos, they simplify complex cultural differences into communicable symbols of comparison. When Cantonese features are repeatedly packaged as synonymous with greater efficiency and enlightenment, the act of watching becomes an unconscious authentication of group identity, and what the viewers consolidate in their laughter is not only place identity but also an implicit notion of cultural hierarchy, i.e., 'our customs' are naturally adapted to the operating logic of modern society.

Exploring the Loopholes and Solutions of Content Regulation

In the practice of content regulation on short-form video platforms, a phenomenon arising from language differences is occurring: a large amount of video content produced in Cantonese is systematically circumventing the platform's vetting mechanism due to the significant difference between the sound characteristics of Cantonese and Mandarin. Take the Cantonese radio programme creator 'Macau Crazy Radio' as an example, the creator's videos contain a lot of vulgar language and sexually suggestive content narrated in Cantonese, which would have been impossible to pass the vetting process if the content had been produced in Mandarin. However, Cantonese short-form video audiences have long been accustomed to the above situation, and most of the interviewees do not oppose this situation, and even welcome it.

An interviewee (C5 - native) thinks that as long as the content does not break the law, it could exist. Interviewee (A2 - native) considered this an interesting type of content:

Existence is reasonable it is quite interesting to have this kind of content once in a while, and the existence of this kind of content does not create any serious problems, and it is a kind of content that only those of us who understand Cantonese can understand.

Interviewee (D3 - native) expressed a fondness for this kind of content:

I'm happy that Cantonese can say what Mandarin is not able to say.

However, there are also people who are against the existence of this phenomenon, the interviewee (E3 - native) said:

Any vulgar content should not pass the vetting process, which is not conducive to the harmonious development of society and is also disrespectful to the audience. Moreover, the use of Cantonese in the production of relevant content will be harmful to the development of our cultural image.

When linguistic difference becomes a technical barrier to circumvent content regulation, Cantonese exists not only as a cultural carrier but also as a subcultural symbol. Taboo expressions that are inevitably filtered in the Mandarin system are transmitted through the dialect's phonetic encryption, and this linguistic privilege objectively builds up an exclusive subcultural space. In the process of decoding these 'exclusive contents', the audience not only enjoys the satisfaction of breaking through the discipline of the mainstream discourse, but also completes the double confirmation of the group identity by sharing the 'understandable taboos': the audience is a co-conspirator who fights against the censorship mechanism together with the creators, also a defender of the dialect's cultural strongholds.

The regulatory dilemma of Cantonese short-form videos is essentially a collision between technology and localisation. The ideal solution should not be limited to blocking loopholes, but also to construct a flexible governance framework that can intercept truly harmful information through technical means, while preserving breathing space for the innovative expression of dialect culture, so that dialect short-form videos can truly become a carrier of inherited culture in the digital era.

Generational Inheritance: Highlighting Inheritance Anxiety in Place Identity

The Inheritance Anxiety Brought to the Audience by Cantonese Short-form Video

Language is an important part of the environment, an important carrier of culture, and an important factor influencing people's place identity. China has a wide area, and there are many Chinese dialects. Chinese dialects are an important criterion for people to identify 'fellow countrymen' or 'outsiders' (Jiang, 2006), which reflects the speaker's regional identity. Since China's reform and opening up, there has been an influx of outsiders into Cantonese-speaking areas, which has contributed to the rapid economic development of Guangdong Province. At the same time, Mandarin has been quickly promoted along with this wave, and to this day, speaking Cantonese is no longer a necessary skill for living in the Pearl River Delta region, with more than half of the Guangzhou population being pessimistic about the future of Cantonese (Shan & Li, 2018), and the vitality of Cantonese is on a downward trend. Faced with the phenomenon of the new generation gradually ceasing to speak Cantonese, the vast majority of interviewee expressed their unacceptability.

The interviewee (D3 - native) said:

It is absolutely unacceptable to me that in the future, my next generation will not be able to speak Cantonese.

The interviewee (E1 - native) said:

It is too far for people who have grown up in the local community not to be able to speak the local language.

The interviewee (A1 - non-native) said:

If you don't speak Cantonese, you can never really integrate into this place.

When Cantonese as a language that sustains the cultural community in the Pearl River Delta is faced with a shrinking number of speakers and intergenerational linguistic faults, Cantonese has transformed from an essential skill of daily life to an optional dialect, and the value of the community memory and emotional connection it carries is gradually diminishing, so Cantonese speakers have developed an anxiety about their cultural inheritance. This anxiety stems not only from the decline of the pragmatic value of the language and the decline of the younger generation's mastery of Cantonese but also points to the irreversible loss of the cultural subjectivity originally possessed by the Cantonese language in the intergenerational transition.

Cantonese Short-form Video Reinforces the Audience's Inheritance Anxiety

From May to August 2010, Guangzhou witnessed a 'Support Cantonese event'. It was a social conflict triggered by the language issue, with a large number of participants, a wide range of influence, and a great impact never seen before (Zhu, 2011). The incident caused extensive discussions in the academic community and drew scholars' attention to the problems between dialect protection and the promotion of Mandarin. At the same time, the matter of 'protecting Cantonese' appeared in the public eye and attracted widespread attention.

To this day, 'Protecting Cantonese' remains one of the most frequently discussed topics in Cantonese short-form video content. The videos under the topic #ProtectCantonese on Douyin have been viewed 1.21 billion times, and most of the content under this topic contains negative and anxious sentiments, such as the video of Guangdong TV football commentator Chen Kaidong, who urges people to speak Cantonese with confidence. You can also see a video of the creator 'Dada has a class of small Cantonese cakes' who often teaches Cantonese songs to children, with netizens commenting: 'Cantonese inheritance cannot be delayed, there is a long way to go.' The author's videos have also been reprinted by celebrity Nicholas Tse.

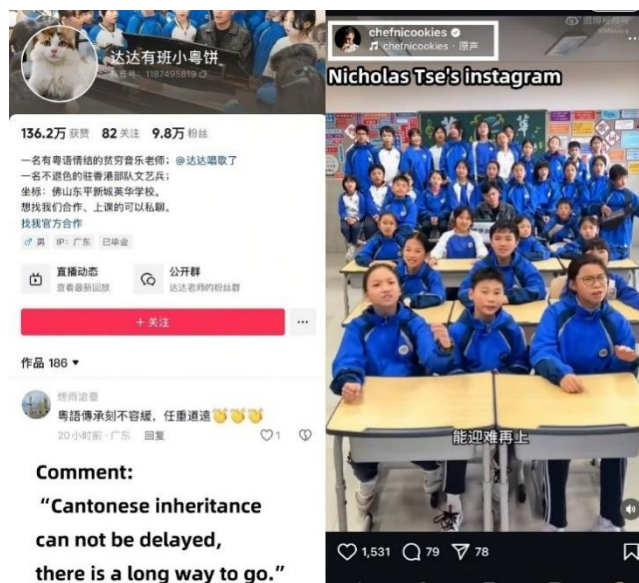


Figure 3. The creator teaching kids Cantonese songs

Regarding the fact that many Cantonese short-form video contents spread anxiety to the audience in the process of promoting Cantonese, the interviewee (C4 - native) said:

Many Cantonese short-form videos are calling for the promotion and transmission of Cantonese, and I agree very much with the views of these authors. At the same time, I also think of the increasing number of children around me who do not speak Cantonese, which triggers my concern about the failure to transmit Cantonese.

The interviewee (B1 - non-native) said:

Even though some of the views in these videos are rather radical, I can understand the inheritance anxiety of these authors as well as the natives. Although I seldom speak Cantonese in my life, since I left Guangzhou to work abroad, I would feel very familiar when I hear Cantonese over here (outside of Guangzhou), and in the future, I would feel uncomfortable if I come back home (Guangzhou) with no one around me to speak Cantonese.

When Cantonese speakers' anxiety about language inheritance spreads to the Internet, short-form video platforms become the amplifier and memory of collective anxiety, and while these contents evoke group empathy, they also construct a cultural crisis narrative about the survival of the Cantonese language. This anxiety, when transmitted through the media, creates an emotional mobilisation that reinforces the cultural self-consciousness of the Cantonese-speaking community and triggers their traumatic imaginings of intergenerational linguistic fault lines. The transition from offline social movement to online resistance reflects that when the proportion of Cantonese in daily communication continues to decrease in reality, the virtual space is transformed into a position for defending cultural identity, and ultimately, these videos form a special spiritual consumer product that sustains place identity.

Local Culture Needs Tolerance and Support

According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou) in 2024 in the Guangzhou area, the usage rate of Cantonese in Guangzhou households is 83%, but the usage rate of Cantonese among young people is lower than that of older people. The decreasing usage scenario of Cantonese in the process of social development is not only caused by a large number of outsiders entering Cantonese-speaking areas, but also the decreasing number of Cantonese speakers among the new generation of the local population is one of the important reasons. Some interviewees believed that the emergence of the intergenerational fault lines in Cantonese is strongly linked to basic education.

This interviewee (D3 - native) considered that the new generation was gradually detached from the Cantonese environment since primary school:

Children who grow up in Cantonese-speaking families may speak Cantonese before they go to school, but after they go to primary school, most of the teachers do not speak Cantonese, and the language used in lessons is always Mandarin.

Interviewee (C4 - native) thinks that this is not only related to school education, but home education should be more responsible for this:

There is no way to change the fact that students need to speak Mandarin when they go to school, but parents can control the language they use when they go home after school.

The current situation of the basic education system being dominated by a standardised official language has objectively squeezed the survival space of Cantonese in intergenerational transmission, while the cultural nurturing function of the family has not been effectively complemented, both of which together have led to the tendency of Cantonese cultural inheritance to break down. The sustainability of language transmission depends not only on the tolerance of the external cultural environment but also on the institutional adjustment of the education system to ensure the survival of cultural diversity. School education needs to make allowance for local languages within the framework of knowledge dissemination, while family education needs to be more proactive in fostering cultural self-awareness in the next generation. Only when school education and family education complement each other can we build a complete ecology for the inheritance of dialects, so that the cultural vitality of languages can be balanced in intergenerational succession.

The strength of Mandarin is an undeniable fact, and without human intervention, Mandarin will be widely used because of its universality. At the same time, the promotion of Mandarin and the protection of Cantonese are not a set of contradictory concepts. On the premise that Mandarin is prevalent throughout the country, the proper development of

Cantonese may lead to a freer pathway for the development of cultures in different places, and it is also complementary and enriching to the mainstream culture, which can better serve the development of society and culture.

Mainstream Culture: Exploring Integration Challenges in Place Identity

Challenges Faced by Cantonese Short-Form Video in Integrating into Mainstream Culture

Mainstream short-form video platforms are centred on algorithmic recommendation, and their flow distribution mechanism naturally favours Mandarin content with a wide audience reach and high interaction rate. The platform algorithm divides the content into different circles through user profiles, and Cantonese short-form videos are often categorised as 'regional niche content' due to the concentration of users' geographical distribution, which makes it difficult to break through the geographical restrictions and enter the national flow pool. This algorithmic logic creates a vicious circle, i.e., the more obvious the geographical labelling, the more the platform restricts the scope of its recommendation, resulting in quality content being trapped in the local flow pool.

The extrusion of flow logic is also reflected in the commercial realisation level. When advertisers choose to broadcast short-form videos, they generally require the content to be in Mandarin in order to cover a wider range of people. For example, when famous car creator 'Yuan Qicong' accepts advertisement placement, his videos containing advertisements are all produced in Mandarin. The ecosystem for Cantonese short-form videos continues to shrink under the combined effect of the platform's recommendation mechanism and the pressure on creators to survive.



Figure 4. Creator 'Yuan Qicong'

Limitations from Audience Size

As mentioned earlier, as the core carrier of Lingnan culture, Cantonese is facing a crisis of declining frequency of use

among the younger generation. This language fault line directly leads to the narrowing of the audience base for Cantonese short-form videos. Coupled with the marginalisation of Cantonese teaching in the education system, young creators' sense of cultural identity with Cantonese is fading, further weakening the incentive for content creation, as the Interviewee (B4 - native) also realized:

If a creator wants to be at the top of the platform, he has to make videos in Mandarin.

Comparable exploratory food creators in the Guangzhou area have many more followers for Mandarin-speaking creators than Cantonese-speaking creators, given similar content quality.



Figure 5. Comparison of Mandarin and Cantonese creators' homepages on Douyin

Cantonese short-form videos have a limited radius of content dissemination due to the shrinking potential user base, which is in turn undermined by the lack of creative incentives. Reduced exposure of content inversely inhibits user growth, while stagnant user scale further undermines creative sustainability, resulting in the development of Cantonese short-form videos being caught in a vicious circle. How to open up a sustainable communication space for dialect content in a media environment dominated by a common language is a key challenge for the survival of cultural diversity in the digital era.

Audience and Cantonese Short-form Video Content Develop in Mutual Compromise

While using Cantonese to make videos can accurately appeal to the dialectal user group, it may also form a language barrier that affects the willingness of non-Cantonese speaking audiences to watch. In order to broaden the scope of potential audiences and increase video exposure, creators of Cantonese short-form videos have started to include Mandarin content in their videos, as evidenced by the presence of both Mandarin and Cantonese in a single video.

At the same time, some creators maintain the original production rhythm of Cantonese short-form videos, while at the same time attracting non-Cantonese speakers to click on their videos in a different way. For example, the leading automotive media company ‘Da Jia Cars’ has established a matrix of sub-accounts, with several of its media accounts being used to publish Cantonese short-form video content, to achieve an accurate match between the type of content and the language carrier. This approach significantly increases the cost of creation, but it also increases the frequency of content output, ensuring the loyalty of the core audience and expanding the potential user base through differentiated content.



Figure 6. Sub-account matrix for ‘Da Jia Cars’

The audience's tolerant attitude towards mixed languages not only supports the development of Cantonese short-form videos but also demonstrates their desire for Cantonese culture to be promoted. Cantonese short-form video audiences realise that in a media environment where Mandarin is absolutely dominant, a moderate compromise can buy breathing space for Cantonese culture. When Cantonese tones are intertwined with Mandarin pronunciation in the videos, language survival is no longer obsessed with the defence of purity, but rather, by lowering the threshold of comprehension, local culture can continue to live on in fluid communication.

Conclusion

Cantonese Short-form Video Content Constructs Place Identity

This study argues that Cantonese short-form video audiences construct their own place identity through the use of Cantonese language and Cantonese characters, consumption of subcultural content, and selective consumption.

By considering Cantonese and Cantonese characters as a

symbol to distinguish local and non-local cultural content, audiences feel their exclusivity during the dissemination of these contents, constructing virtual geographical boundaries and reinforcing the cultural cohesion of the audience groups. The majority of the audience agrees that Cantonese characters, although they can bring a sense of familiarity, are not conducive to the dissemination of local cultural content, and considers Cantonese characters as an artificially created reading barrier. At the same time, there is a small portion of the audience who do not care whether local culture can be popularised or not. The majority of the audience who consume Cantonese short-form video content show a tolerant or even positive attitude towards vulgar content that appears due to poor platform regulation, and hope that this type of content will remain on the internet. They enjoy the privileges that language affords them and, in the process, construct a space of exclusivity. A small portion of the audience believes that this type of content will affect the positive image of local culture and reinforce their own cultural identity in their concerns about local cultural dissemination and image building. Regardless of which side of the opinion the audience subscribes to, they complete the identification of their own group identity by consuming or being exposed to this type of subcultural content. Finally, audiences demonstrate their preference for Cantonese short-form videos through selective consumption, delineating their identity boundaries and further reinforcing their place identity.

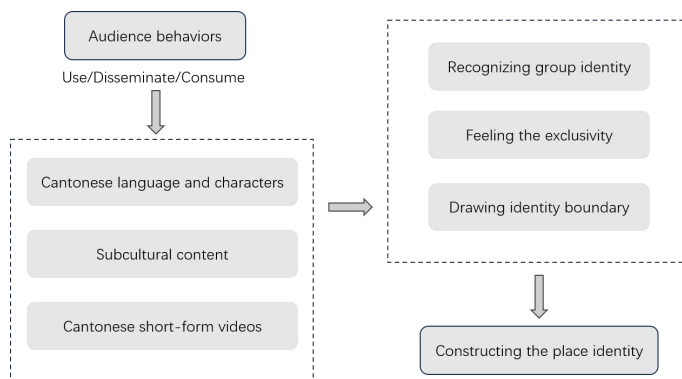


Figure 7. The process of audience construction of place identity

Differences Between Native and Non-native Audiences in the Construction of Place Identity

This study used semi-structured interviews as one of the methods to collect qualitative data and categorised the interviewees into natives and non-natives. The data show that the process of constructing place identity is roughly the same for native and non-native Cantonese short-form video audiences, with the main difference being in the degree of anxiety about cultural inheritance. In the process of constructing place identity, native audiences show a strong need for cultural identity and cultural inheritance anxiety, they are dissatisfied with and protest against the current

social environment that is not favourable to the dissemination and development of local culture, and they are entirely unacceptable to the emergence of the 'Cantonese intergenerational fault line'. Although the non-native audience identifies with the values of the Cantonese cultural circle in which they live and supports the communication and development of Cantonese culture since Cantonese is not their mother tongue, they do not show a strong willingness to fight in the face of the shrinking environment for the use of Cantonese and the declining usefulness of Cantonese as a linguistic tool, and they do not have a mandatory requirement for language learning for their next generation.

Algorithmic recommendation mechanisms and the construction of place identity

It is worth noting that the platform's core objectives are user growth, retention, and monetisation. Algorithms serve as the core engine for achieving these objectives, while content acts as the medium through which these goals are realised. Algorithms enable users to more easily access content they are interested in, offering significant convenience and comfort. However, this convenience also comes with risks such as information narrowing, deepening cognitive biases, and the partial relinquishment of autonomy in choice. Under the influence of algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, Cantonese short video audiences construct and reinforce local identity. This may also lead to the deepening of stereotypes about certain things, as well as the increased visibility of low-quality, false, inflammatory, or clickbait content, which can squeeze out high-quality, in-depth content and influence the platform's and even society's value orientation.

Challenges Faced in the Construction of Place Identity Through Cantonese Short-Form Videos

The problems faced by Cantonese short-form video content in the process of constructing place identity mainly come from three aspects: shrinking audience base, forced changes in content structure, and changes in audience judgment standards. Firstly, the audience base of Cantonese short-form videos is already limited by the number of Cantonese speakers, and the development space is further compressed due to the phenomenon of 'Cantonese intergenerational fault'. Secondly, pressure from the mainstream language environment has forced Cantonese short-form video creators to reduce the proportion of Cantonese in their videos, and audiences have been forced to compromise and accept this change, which has weakened the ability of Cantonese short-form video content to build place identity. Finally, Chinese short-form video content continues to emerge with higher quality content in the process of the development of new media technology, which makes audiences value the creativity and quality of the video more than the language, and this change brings challenges for Cantonese short-form video content in the future

development.

Research Implications

With the development of new media technology, short-form video has penetrated the lives of countless people, and users can carry out entertainment, learning and consumption activities on the internet through the medium of short-form video. As Cantonese is the most widely spoken Chinese dialect, Cantonese short-form videos have attracted a large number of audiences to consume and disseminate their content. Taking Cantonese short-form video audience as the research subject and place identity theory as the starting point, this study explores the function of Cantonese short-form video content in the construction of place identity from multiple perspectives, proves the cultural and developmental value of Cantonese short-form video content, and extends and supplements place identity theory to a certain extent.

1. Place identity beyond physical space

In the previous studies on the theory of place identity, more attention was paid to the physical environment in reality. As the dissemination of Cantonese short-form video content is entirely dependent on the internet, this study argues that people construct place identity in the process of watching and disseminating Cantonese short-form video content in virtual space. It can be seen that although the construction of place identity is characterised by locality, it is not limited to the actual space, and the virtual space is also an important place to study the theory of place identity.

2. Place identity brings negative emotions

People incorporate 'place' into the identity structure of 'self', and the place becomes a part of the self. To judge the place one identifies with is to judge oneself (Korpela, 2003). This study supplements the connection between self and place from the perspective of cultural inheritance anxiety. This study argues that place identity not only brings exogenous negative emotions due to location changes but also may bring endogenous negative emotions due to changes in the cultural environment.

In the spatial dimension, the mechanism for generating local identity has broken through the limitations of physical places and evolved into a network of emotional ties that intertwine virtual and actual. In the psychological dimension, the maintenance of place identity is not only a defence mechanism against external shocks but also a sensitive nerve that triggers internal anxiety. Although the Cantonese short-form video content audience in this study does not represent the main group of Chinese short-form video platform users, it still has a reference value for the future development of theories in the field of new media and theories of place identity.

Future Research

This study focuses on how audiences construct place identity

through Cantonese short-form video content and discusses the challenges facing the dissemination and development of Cantonese culture in new media pathways. However, it can be expanded in the future in the following ways. First, to expand the dissemination and inheritance of dialect culture to the level of local or traditional culture. The second is to place it in a broader historical context, examining the construction of local identities by different cultures in different periods, such as the evolution of the ways of constituting place identities before and after China's reform and opening up. Third, the scope of theoretical focus can be expanded from place identity theory to personal identity theory or social identity theory. Fourth, the scope of the study will be expanded from mainland China to Chinese-speaking regions to conduct a comparative study of the construction of place identity. In conclusion, this study explores the construction of local identity by Cantonese short-form video audiences from the perspective of place identity theory, and different theories, methods and analysis paths can be tried in the future.

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About the Authors

Ziyuan Liu

Academy of Film and Creative Technology, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

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