

Construction of Social Media Short Video's Media Taste: Japan's Chinese Students' use of Vlog on Bilibili

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Abstract. This study focuses on the practice of Chinese international students in Japan who use Bilibili Vlog to show their daily lives. By conducting participatory observations and in-depth interview, this study examines the behavioral characteristics of this group in reproducing and reshaping the daily lives, and attempts to reveal the construction of social media short video's media taste. This study concludes that media taste exhibits characteristics of *sensus communis* and symbolic "persona" distinction in the dynamic process of media contact, which systematically constitute the internal generation mechanism of media taste. In the contradiction between conforming to popular commonalities and promoting one's own individuality, different taste communities form a gap, and Vlogger also uses "persona" to demonstrate personal value orientation and shape the "ideal self". In this dynamic communication process, media taste fashion is self-promoting.

Keywords: Vlog, Social media, Short video, Bilibili, Media taste

1 Introduction

Vlog is the abbreviation for Video Blog, which refers to the video format in which creators capture video images, post edit them, and upload them to social media platforms, reflecting their personal charm and presenting their daily life status. As an emerging media form, Vlog has influenced social media with its personalized recording form and refined and high-quality content output. Among them, the use of Vlog by international students is prominent, and the Chinese international student in Japan is a typical example.^[1]

The emergence of Vlogs in China can be traced back to the influence of overseas students, who utilized filming as a means of achieving social interaction and reducing feelings of isolation and alienation.^[2] As of the year 2023, the number of monthly active users on the Vlog social media platform Bilibili has reached a staggering 324 million. These official statistics affirm the platform's dominant position in the Chinese market. The novelty of this study stems from its dynamic examination of the way media taste is constructed over time, unlike previous studies that relied on static cross-sectional data or observed the behavior of both parties in a single moment. This study examines Bilibili vlogs created by international Chinese students in Japan, which demonstrate distinct cultural traits and possess theoretical implications, to describe Vloggers' media tastes – about how they construct their own taste system, how to judge others' taste system, and how the above content can be fed back into their daily lives.

2 Literature review

2.1 Taste theory

Taste is defined by Kant as the ability to judge and choose in a universally effective manner.^[3] On the basis of Kant, Bloomer further proposed the concept of "collective taste." Simmel focuses on modern urban life in the West, taking into account the needs of "identity identification" and "seeking identification" in terms of taste.^[4] Bourdieu has made new developments in the study of taste from the perspective of social class structure, grasping taste research from a macro level, and further clarifying the discriminatory role of taste. People move towards positions in social space that align with their personal attributes through taste, but in the process, they are unconscious and act solely on "feelings or intuition", thus creating significantly differentiated and corresponding styles of life.^[5]

Throughout the academic community's research on media taste, there is a general focus on the role of aesthetic taste and self-presentation in media communication activities. In terms of taste and self-presentation, Dong and Ding believe that "taste" is the self-identity and values that people externalize through personal "items." In this kind of taste performance, which is both real and fake, people consolidate their position in the circle and distinguish themselves from those who taste others.^[6] Donath and Boyd have a similar view on this issue, as they study the relationship between online dating behavior and users' self-presentation, believing that there is a subjective performance component involved.^[7] Hogo Liu found that reputation and differentiation are important semantic expressions for taste statements by studying interest lists such as book reviews on MySpace social media sites.^[8] Some scholars conducted further analysis of personal profiles on MySpace social networking sites, believing that users' taste performances on social networks can enhance group identification within the taste community. At the same time, some shortcomings need to be deliberately displayed to make them appear authentic.^[9] Zhu and Li believe that the youth group creates a digital experiential lifestyle that combines imagery, connectivity, and experiential elements in the presentation of social networks through social network practice, based on taste as the principle.^[10]

2.2 Media practice and short video

Some European immigration and media researchers believe that due to the increasingly complex contemporary media environment, it is becoming increasingly difficult to assess its consequences for free expression and diverse dissemination. Policies and research tracks either focus on the dominance of digital media by countries and businesses, or over-emphasize the "liberation effect" of digital media on people, failing to see the inherent contradictions and coherence between these two sides in the digital world.^[11] It is in this environment that empirical research focuses on users rather than the technology itself becoming more useful.^[12] MD Certeau followed Lefebvre and Heller's theory of daily life and proposed to focus on daily life from a practical perspective. That is, the study of daily life needs to focus on the flexible, subtle, and ordinary practical behaviors of people.^[13] Zeng and Yu, starting from the three key words of representation, materiality and daily practice, believe that the production of short video culture cannot only focus on the transmission of information through media such as video and text from the perspective of symbols, but should explore the true psychological motivation and communication context behind the topic of dissemination in the daily practice of short video.

^[14] As Nick Kurdley said, the foundation of media practice research is the analysis of people's daily behavior and habits. Based on this, we further examine how media is applied, how media plays a role in organizing other social practices, how the meaning of circulation in media generates social influence, shapes social life, and so on.^[15] Therefore, incorporating a dynamic materialistic perspective based on daily practice into the study of media taste has also shown some importance.

2.3 Vlogs on social media

Previous studies focused more on case studies, including the impact of Vlog content on audience consumption behavior, lifestyle, and emotional counseling, as well as Vlogger's own operational strategies. Berryman R believes that the audience tends to focus on Vloggers that are homogeneous with themselves and develop emotional dependence on them. Homogeneity mainly refers to the similarity in attitude, values, and appearance between the two parties, while the influence of Vloggers' professional knowledge and personal background is not significant.^[16] In Liu's opinion, Vlog uses a simulation perspective and a slow paced style to create a simple texture that is loyal to the reality of life.^[17] Besides, Vlogs cater to the behavior pattern which was generally accepted that just needs a short attention span but acquires a visual impact.^[18] Zhang summarized the research on Vlog audiences in recent years and found that existing studies have focused not only on the impact of Vlog on audience cognition, attitude, and behavior, but also on the reverse impact of audience on Vlog production and production, as well as the impact of Vlogger's personality traits and five major personality traits on its Vlog dissemination effect.^[19] It is worth noting that the current research mainly focuses on static cross-sectional data or behavioral states of both parties at a certain time, failing to conduct research on dynamic processes that reflect audience cognition, attitude production, and generation, such as bullet-screen¹ and comment areas. As a result, it is unable to explore the underlying logic of interaction mechanisms and opinion generation rules among all parties involved in the Vlog field.

In summary, although academic research on media taste has achieved some results, it mainly focuses on different aspects in related fields. In media practice research, more attention is paid to the role of aesthetic taste and self-presentation in media communication activities. Researchers need to conduct specific surveys on more diverse social media, such as locally grown social media such as Bilibili, Douban, and WeChat in China. With unique cultural characteristics and theoretical potential, it is a field of media taste research that can be further explored. At the same time, it is also necessary to incorporate a dynamic perspective based on daily practice, exploring from a micro perspective how media has changed users' thoughts and behaviors.

3 Research design and sample introduction

This study uses a research method that combines participatory observation and in-depth interviews. On the one hand, the author engaged in an immersive experience of observing Vlogs on Bilibili; on the other hand, during a six-month term of visiting Japan, the author conducted

¹ Bullet-screen is a technique that allows website users to send real-time comments "bullet" across the screen.

in-depth interviews with a total of 15 Chinese international students who were Vloggers on Bilibili.² First, Vloggers of Chinese international students studying in Japan who used Vlog for six months or more were selected by observing their earliest submission times. Then, a purposive sampling was conducted based on their submission frequency to obtain representative target interviewees. In-depth interviewees' data are shown in Table 1. In order to gather insights, the author engaged in semi-structured in-depth interviews via a variety of communication channels, including WeChat messages, voice mail, and offline meetings, after initiating contact with the interviewees through private messages on Bilibili.

Table 1. In-depth interviewees' data.

Interview number	Gender	Age	Qualification	Residence
F-01-WZL	Female	23	Master	Tokyo
F-02-SZR	Female	24	Master	Tokyo
F-03-HCY	Female	19	Bachelor	Osaka
F-04-WWY	Female	22	Master	Tokyo
M-05-CY	Male	28	Doctor	Tokyo
F-06-ZJJ	Female	23	Master	Tokyo
F-07-ZMY	Female	26	Master	Nagoya
M-08-HZT	Male	27	Doctor	Tokushima
M-09-CMZ	Male	23	Master	Sapporo
F-10-DWT	Female	23	Master	Tokyo
F-11-HT	Female	21	Bachelor	Tokyo
M-12-ZL	Male	21	Bachelor	Tokyo
F-13-NL	Female	22	Bachelor	Tokyo
F-14-LXY	Female	25	Master	Kyoto
F-15-LM	Female	24	Master	Nagoya

4 Research findings

The observation includes the production of content and dissemination practices mainly focused on content viewing on the platform of 15 Vloggers from Bilibili in Japan. The video content and interview materials are sorted and analyzed, and the taste construction mechanism of the Vlog group of Chinese international students from Bilibili in Japan is summarized. Through participatory observation and in-depth interviews, tracking the Vlog communication practice of Bilibili among Chinese international students in Japan, it was found that media taste exhibits co-influence and symbolize characteristics in the dynamic process of media contact, which systematically constitute the internal generation mechanism of media taste. In the contradiction between conforming to popular commonalities and promoting one's own individuality, there is a gap between different taste communities. Vlogger also uses "persona" to demonstrate personal value orientation. This media practice of seeing and being seen is actually shaping the "ideal

²This study takes samples from Bilibili, primarily due to the substantial volume of User Generated Content (UGC) and the potential for bullet-screens and comments to be received following publication. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the emotions conveyed by Vloggers and viewers is feasible, and more extensive interactive content can be acquired by both parties.

self" of Chinese students studying abroad in Japan. In this dynamic communication process, media taste fashion is self-promoting.

4.1 The taste sensus communis: gain recognition

Kant believes that taste appreciation judgment requires *sensus communis*,^[3] which is often embedded in the contact of both parties in Vlog short videos featuring technology. In the media dissemination process of Vlog, Vlogger is driven by his own personalized specific concepts to produce content, which is disseminated on Bilibili through Vlog as an intermediary. The audience evaluates the distinct ideas within a Vlogger's personalized content by observing their Vlog, and provides feedback through various methods such as "likes, comments, sending bullet-screens, and following." In this process, the audience achieves a certain degree of agreement or inconsistency in the taste *sensus communis* of Vlog content at the subjective level, which affects subsequent media contact behavior. With the advancement of social media technology, the "participatory culture" on social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Bilibili has also been continuously developing. Users with common interests and tastes have promoted the formation and development of circle culture through interaction on social media platforms, while also gaining recognition and belonging from the taste community.^[20]

F-02-SZR tells the story of her experience of finding a sense of belonging on social media. During her school years, she was already an active social media user, and her main interaction was not with classmates in the class, but with netizens on social media networks. After studying in Japan, she gradually became closer to her classmates. During the COVID-19, Chinese students in Japan tended to record this special time with Vlogs. F-06-ZJJ photographed the current situation of materials purchased by supermarkets in Japan. M-12-ZL shared the process from infection to recovery. F-14-LXY photographed empty scenes on the streets of Tokyo in the daily Vlog. *"None of the data from my earlier Vlogs garnered much attention, but surprisingly, my supermarket Vlog recorded during the epidemic situation suddenly became a hit. A lot of viewers from China viewed the situation in Japan and let me take care of myself. Their response was heartening."* (F-06-ZJJ)

According to Mead, the founder of symbolic interaction theory, every individual in society belongs to a certain group or class, and is also influenced by these groups or classes, which is called "in group norm".^[21] Users gain recognition in the community of taste *sensus communis*, and this intra-group norm also represents exclusion and differentiation from the outside of the taste recognition circle. In the opinion of some interviewees, adjusting the production content to the norms of the inner group is particularly important.

"I will read the bullets and comments carefully in my Vlog. If everyone feels good, I will be very happy and continue to follow this path. In the process, I have attracted many fans who like me as well. I feel that my Vlog is more and more inclined to have Japanese style and a little French style. If you don't think it's good, for example, I photographed my locker in the first stage of the room tour, with shoes on it and spices under it. Although the middle partition is very thick, many people in the barrage think it's not good to put it this way, so I changed it." (F-13-NL)

According to Goffman's parody theory, "individuals possess the capability to regulate their conduct, portraying behavior that is agreeable to others while concealing genuine traits that do not conform to societal norms".^[22] Audiences often expect the front-end behavior of public figures to conform to the broad aesthetic of the maximum common divisor. Consequently, in

order to win over the audience's favor, content creators typically engage in self-regulation, exhibit admirable personal qualities, carefully curate their appearance and attire during televised appearances, and advocate a positive and optimistic worldview.^[17] Vlogger displays an aesthetic performance of daily life in Vlog. In order to make more audiences accept this kind of taste dissemination and achieve greater benefits at the level of taste *sensus communis*, a feedback mechanism for media taste has been formed in this interaction of taste communities. At the same time, Vlog users engage in media contact according to their individual needs, but the chosen audience also comes from Vlogger's "ulterior motives" performance. This daily life Vlog based on taste *sensus communis*, has garnered the affection of a vast majority of the audience, and the audience is also unconsciously becoming a member of the taste community. Therefore, it has achieved the goal of starting with individuality and returning to commonality while also satisfying the needs of personalized Vlog media exposure.

4.2 Symbolic "persona" distinction: comparison with daily life

Short videos reproduce and shape the media image of social forms and groups within a limited period of time. As a communication practice, short videos can also profoundly affect the audience's identity recognition.^[23] In the face of mainstream popular culture, more and more Vloggers tend to present personalized front-stage images in Vlogs, achieving a distinction between the taste groups of others and the mainstream public through careful design of appearance and clothing, and aesthetic presentation of daily life. In this process, the uniqueness of personal taste is also strengthened and consolidated.

Most interviewees believe they have their own specific "personas" in Vlog, such as M-05-CY who believes his "persona" is a humorous and witty foodie. F-02-SZR is a Vlogger with a unique personal style. The characteristic of her Vlogs is the attractive cafe exploration tour. She expresses a preference for interiors featuring white tones and wooden furniture, while also showing a strong attraction to tableware from renowned designers. She emphasizes effortless dressing and prefers comfortable but thoughtful clothing designs. In the use of Vlog short videos on social media, Chinese international students in Japan watch Vlogs to find group identity, while Vloggers also use "persona" symbols to highlight personal value orientation. This media practice of seeing and being seen is actually a way for Chinese international students in Japan to shape their "ideal selves". Vlog meets their dual psychological needs for self-image beautification and virtual socialization, while also distinguishing themselves from mainstream media tastes and projecting an "ideal self".

Is it boring just doing the usual things every day? That's why I love going to awesome restaurants all over Tokyo and the rest of Japan. I Vlog my food adventures to keep myself motivated and document all the amazing places I visit. (M-05-CY)

I believe that Vloggers show us their authentic everyday lives, which include activities such as enjoying coffee, shopping, exploring exhibitions, and wandering around the city. Of course, there might be a certain exaggeration since it's hard to have such a packed schedule every week. (M-09-CMZ)

My Vlog is all about my daily routine, but sometimes I wonder if I'd only attend that exhibition or visit multiple coffee shops less often if I wasn't filming for my Vlog. (F-11-HT)

The process of producing media products is the symbolization of individual media taste, accompanied by the continuous strengthening of the symbolic "persona" distinction. Watching which Vlog and following which Vlogger all reflect the perception of media taste judgment and self-identity attribution. Vlog, through its powerful landscape depiction and construction ability, transforms life reality into a "daily landscape" that can be viewed. Vloggers use symbolic "personas" to distinguish personalities and themselves, while also reconstructing their self-communication structure and reforming new self cognition.

4.3 Taste opinion leaders and self-promotion of fashion

Simmel pointed out that fashion presents complex and intertwined characteristics in promoting individuality and standardization of commonality.^[24] In the context of media taste diffusion, this entanglement between individuality and the community of taste *sensus communis*. That is, audiences select content for media contact according to their own individual needs, but choose the Vlogs produced by the communicator based on the commonality of taste *sensus communis*. The result of such a choice also contributes to the unconscious acceptance of commonality to some extent. Lazarsfeld proposed the concept of "opinion leader" in the 1940s, which refers to individuals in a team who are usually able to present ideas and have significant influence.^[25] In Zhu's opinion, users will imitate "taste opinion leaders" in a specific field or community of taste *sensus communis*.^[10]

As the in-depth interviews in this study progress, it is clear that some interviewees have developed trust in certain opinion leaders and even become enthusiastic about pursuing their taste. At the same time, users are constantly exploring the boundaries of their niche. While imitating taste opinion leaders, they are also committed to distinguishing themselves from the community of taste *sensus communis*, and even becoming new taste opinion leaders. In the dynamic dissemination of media taste, the widely recognized new taste has become a new trend through a new round of imitation. This upward spiral process constitutes the self-promotion of fashion taste on social media.

"I was recognized by fans on the street several times. They told me they liked me very much, and they also liked the clothes they bought with my recommendation." (F-11-HT)

"At the beginning, I followed the blogger to buy clothes, but gradually I also wore my own taste, so I had my own fans. Two years ago, I completely didn't expect to be recognized by fans when I walked on the street." (F-03-HCY)

As Vlogger incorporates new trends into Vlog, it not only resonates more and more, but also allows the "niche" to move towards the "mass", and personalized taste is also incorporated into the mainstream, becoming "outdated" in popularity. F-01-WZL is a Vlogger from the Japanese fashion field on Bilibili. In the interview, she expressed dissatisfaction with this phenomenon and tended to constantly make new fashion attempts to resist it.

"I found that the nice outfits on the streets of Tokyo were difficult to gain domestic recognition at the beginning. For example, some of my Vlogs of popular Japanese style outfits, which only a few people like. Although my initial attempts to wear this style in China were not successful, I kept experimenting with different ways to make it more appealing." (F-01-WZL)

Social media, as an interactive field, allows users to interact through likes, reposts, favorites, comments, and send bullet-screens, gradually establishing and consolidating their personal

media taste. At the micro level, it also encourages individuals to participate in the process of self-promotion of social media fashion.

5 Conclusion

Kitler's classic assertion is that "media determines our situation," which expresses the theoretical core and purpose of the media technology school, media theory, and other theories that focus on the construction of the relationship between technology, society, and subject.^[23] This study found that Vlog short videos serve as a technical intermediary, providing Chinese international students in Japan with a basic perspective on understanding specific daily life and constructing personalized media tastes. Media taste exhibits characteristics of *sensus communis* and symbolic "persona" distinction in the dynamic process of media contact, which systematically constitute the internal generation mechanism of media taste. In the contradiction between conforming to popular commonalities and promoting one's own individuality, different taste communities form a gap, and Vlogger also uses "persona" to demonstrate personal value orientation and shape the "ideal self". In this dynamic communication process, media taste fashion is self-promoting.

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