

# Analysis on the Audience of Cross-Cultural Communication through Online Media Based on the Theory of Uses and Gratification - A Case Study of the Chinese Audience of Short Videos Published by Foreigners on Bilibili

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**Abstract.** In recent years, with the rapid development of cultural globalization, foreigners have started to settle in Chinese short video platforms. A research on Bilibili reveals a large number of foreign UPs (video uploaders on Bilibili) that record their lives, introduce customs and habits of various countries, and respond to trending events. As the subjects of cross-cultural communication, they have attracted millions of Chinese audiences. In the new media environment, the status of the audiences in the process of media use is highlighted. A study of the audiences of short videos posted by foreign UPs on Chinese platforms represented by Bilibili will improve the understanding of the media use of this category of Chinese audiences. This study explores the demands and degrees of gratification of Chinese audiences under the theoretical frame of Uses and Gratification, so as to understand the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication by such videos through the online media as a communication channel. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. 150 valid questionnaires were obtained; 10 relevant users were interviewed. The results show that the personal motives of the audiences is basically satisfied; the knowledge of the audiences has increased and the cognitive perception of the audiences has been changed to a certain extent.

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural Communication, Online Short Videos, Uses and Gratification, Audience Research

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Current Situation of Short Videos Published by Foreign UPs

Along with the development of business trading, science and technology, the communication and exchange among different cultures are increasingly showing a global trend. Short video clips are accepted by more and more people because of their fragmentation, visualization and entertainment, and thus become a major carrier of cross-cultural communication. Watching and producing short videos is not only an important cultural phenomenon in today's society, but also one of the lifestyles of modern people.

Bilibili, as one of the largest short video platforms in China, is also one of the first video platforms where foreign bloggers are settled. Among more than one hundred foreign UPs, i.e. video uploaders on Bilibili, many of them have a significant number of subscribers, as shown in Table.1.

**Table 1.** TOP 5 Foreign UPs with the Most Subscribers on Bilibili (Data as of June 25, 2022)

No.	Up (Account)	Nationality	Subscribers	Videos Published
1	I'm Jerry Guo	U.S.	7,107,000	470
2	Xin Shi Dan Dan	France	4,253,000	150
3	Foreigner Research Association	Multi-nationality	4,028,000	440
4	Tomohiro Yamashita	Japan	2,654,000	1336
5	Speaking Classes with Ma Siri	U.S.	2,019,000	267

It can be seen that the influence of such short videos cannot be underestimated, no matter from the number of subscribers of foreign UP owners, the number of videos published or the number of plays.

Along with the increase in foreign self-publishers, contemporary scholars have gradually expanded the scope of their research to include self-publishing communication activities. At present, studies related to foreign bloggers' short videos targeting Chinese audiences have become a new topic of cross-cultural communication research on self-media, indicating that the academic field have some interest in this phenomenon[1].

## 1.2. Studies on Uses and Gratification Theory

Katz, one of the early founders of Uses and Gratification Theory, viewed audiences as individuals with specific "demands"; audiences' exposure to the media is considered as the process of gratifying those "demands"[2]. Ikuo Takeuchi added to the discussion of media exposure conditions and outcomes by arguing that the actual exposure behavior of audiences occurs in two ways: the likelihood of media exposure and the impressions audiences hold of the media. The result of the media exposure behavior can be divided into whether it is gratified, if so, positive feedback to the established media impression would be produced; vice versa, negative feedback to the established media impression would be produced[3]. Stanford focused on the gratification process of the audience and pointed out that in the Internet environment, there are three main types of gratification obtained from the audiences' media use: gratification with the content of the media, gratification with the functionality of the media as a tool, and gratification with the social interaction supported by the media[4]. Scholars such as Ball-Rokeach proposed Media Dependency Theory, which suggests that the audience should not be considered as an isolated individual, but should be placed in the context of society, taking into account the social environment in which the audience lives and the social interactions they are exposed to, and other diverse and complex factors[5].

A search through Google Scholar still have not found present English-language research literature on foreign bloggers' videos on Chinese short video platforms from the perspective of Use and Gratification Theory.

## 2. Methodology

This study is based on the Uses and Gratification Theory, using questionnaires as the main method and interviews as the supplementary method. A total of 150 representative related users were surveyed through online questionnaires and 10 of them were interviewed. The purpose of the survey is to analyze the audiences' motives, behavior, and degrees of gratification while using these short videos, in order to further explore the effectiveness of the specific cross-cultural communication mechanisms. Based on the above, the following questions have been raised.

- (1) What are the motives of the users of videos made by foreign UPs?
- (2) What are the users' behaviors while using the videos?
- (3) Have the users' personal motives been gratified after using these videos? If so, to what extent?

Foreign UPs are both active adapters of Chinese online culture and cross-cultural communicators. As opinion leaders in some degree, they set cross-cultural issues and interact with their audiences, forming a personal field on the video platform that gathers many sticky users and possesses powerful communication effects and social influence. Therefore, the study of such issues is conducive to the use of online media to achieve more efficient information transfer and cultural exchange in the online media era.

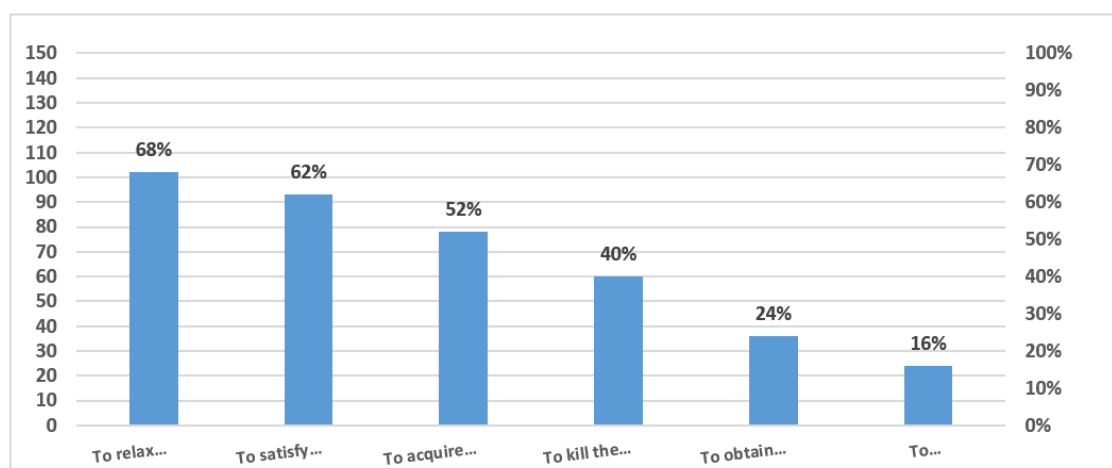
## 3. Analysis on Users' Behavior

### 3.1. Personal Motives of Users

Due to Bilibili's social functions, people generate multiple usage behaviors such as subscribing related accounts, watching videos posted by related accounts, sharing videos across platforms, and

expressing opinions in comments and pop-ups. The users' behaviors reflect multiple usage preferences, such as preference for specific UPs' accounts, preference for videos with specific contents, and sharing or reviewing different videos. It can be concluded that users have diverse demands and motives for using Bilibili videos, such as the motives to obtain knowledge and information.

As an "audience-centered" theory, the core of Uses and Gratification Theory is that individuals take the initiative to access and use the media to satisfy their motivation or need for use. Therefore, the "personal motives" factor, which reflects individual initiative, is a key part of Uses and Gratification Theory, and is the main factor that influences users' behavior in this paper. Survey and interviews have been carried out to study users' personal motives, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Personal Motives of watching Foreign UPs' Video Users

### 3.1.1 Entertainment Motives

Entertainment needs have a significant impact on users' use of online short videos, and the content of short videos can bring mental relaxation and emotional pleasure to users. Uses and Gratification Theory suggests that users are willing to continue to use a medium if it brings them emotional pleasure while using[6-7].

From Figure.1, it can be seen that 68.00% of the users' motives are to relax and get interesting information. It is observed that the foreign UPs' videos themselves have many interesting elements. First of all, the topic selection contains a certain degree of interestingness. There are video titles like "How to drive Italians crazy? From food paradise to pineapple pizza", "Foreigners make a fool of themselves during Chinese New Year" "An UP with 4 million fans is making a street challenge" "I found out the secret of making money overseas" "A strong foreigner is challenging the physical test of Chinese elementary school students. Will he success?" Compared with their homogeneous form of videos on Bilibili, these videos add variety of having foreigners as the main characters, making the videos unique, thus are easy to attract users' interest and huge network traffics.

### 3.1.2 Motives to Satisfying Curiosity

As can be seen from the Figure 5, 62% of the users are motivated to satisfy their curiosity. It is observed that many video titles and covers, after being skillfully created, are more attractive to audiences and are more likely to stimulate people's curiosity. For example, the titles mostly include "why", "what", "how", "which" and other question words, in order to capture the attention of the platform users in a short period of time. On the other hand, the video content also incorporates "foreigners as the main characters", or exploits something new and innovative with the help of the unknown state of native Chinese audience to another cultural environment and cultural group and the connection between China and foreign countries. For instance, there are titles like "Positive response to foreign people's doubts about China", "The popularity of Jay Chou overseas", "Are foreigners more extroverted? Chinese and foreign UPs' personality test", "The strange questions displayed on the

website when you search "China" in Google", "An over-aged foreign exchange student in a Macau secondary school", "When a foreigner is speaking Chinese, is it possible for other foreigners to understand him?" etc.

### **3.1.3 Motives to Acquiring Knowledge**

According to Katz's classification of audience's demands for media use, cognitive demands, the demand for access to information and knowledge understanding, are the primary demands among the five major demands for use[8]. In the survey on the motives of using videos published by foreign UPs, 52% of the users chose the option of acquiring knowledge, that is, these users would use the videos to enrich their knowledge, broaden their horizons and improve their understanding of foreign countries and foreigners. One of the interviewee, an undergraduate student majoring in foreign languages at a Chinese university, said that she sometimes used Bilibili to find this type of videos in order to enhance her professional knowledge, to increase her understanding of foreign literature and culture, or to search for suitable assignment topics.

### **3.1.4 Motives to Pastime**

Boredom is also a factor that influences audiences' usage. According to the survey results, 40% of Bilibili users chose to use this type of short videos for aimless browsing, which is different from the use with a clear purpose, but only a habitual use. These users often have no motives to gain knowledge or insight, nor do they have the purpose of entertainment or social interaction, but simply as a way to spend their time.

### **3.1.5 Motives to Obtain Necessary Information**

24% of users watch videos published by foreign UPs to get necessary information for their daily lives. The survey shows that users with this type of motives have a stronger and more purposeful demand for use. According to the research on video content, users are more interested in videos about foreign customs and social etiquette, Chinese and foreign cultural differences, foreign school life and work life, etc., which are more practical and can provide users with life guidance. The number of likes, comments and reposts of such videos is also relatively high, such as "what should you do if you are caught by the police in Japan?", "Japanese citizens' comments on the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics", "Why the shortage and inflation in the United States are so serious", "Street interviews on how Americans view the war in Afghanistan", "Comparing the differences between China and the United States in poverty alleviation" and so on.

Some interviewees said that they subscribed the accounts of several British UPs because of their plan to study abroad soon. They are in need of getting information about the academic system and assessment methods of British master students, British dining etiquette, climate of different regions in Britain, etc., they would consciously collect relevant videos to watch. After watching, they would share the videos with other people who needed them, and post questions in the comment section to interact with other users.

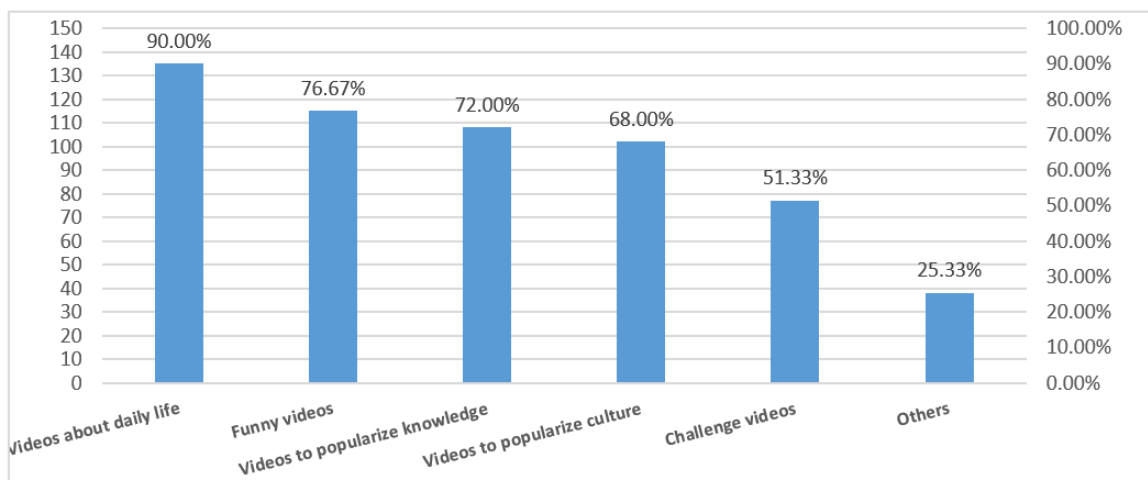
### **3.1.6 Motives to Socializing**

16% of the audiences' motive is social interaction. In the era of social media, the social needs of human beings have been highlighted, and mobile phones have given rise to diverse social applications such as Tik Tok and Wechat, which provide various channels for users to socialize online. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, social needs are the basic needs that are indispensable for human beings after satisfying their physiological needs and security needs[9-10]. In the process of using short videos, users will comment on the content in the comment section below the video, or make relevant replies to other comments, and mention their friends on the platform, so that they can come to watch the video, and then complete the sharing of information. In addition, users can share the content they are interested in to their friends on other platforms, such as reposting to other social media platforms including WeChat, Weibo, QQ, etc. With video contents as social currency, users complete social interactions with others in the online social field provided by short videos.

### 3.2. Users' Usage Behavior

#### 3.2.1 Users' Preference for Videos about Daily Life

The question "Which types of videos are more attractive to you?" has been asked to users. The result is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** User's Preference for Different Types of Videos

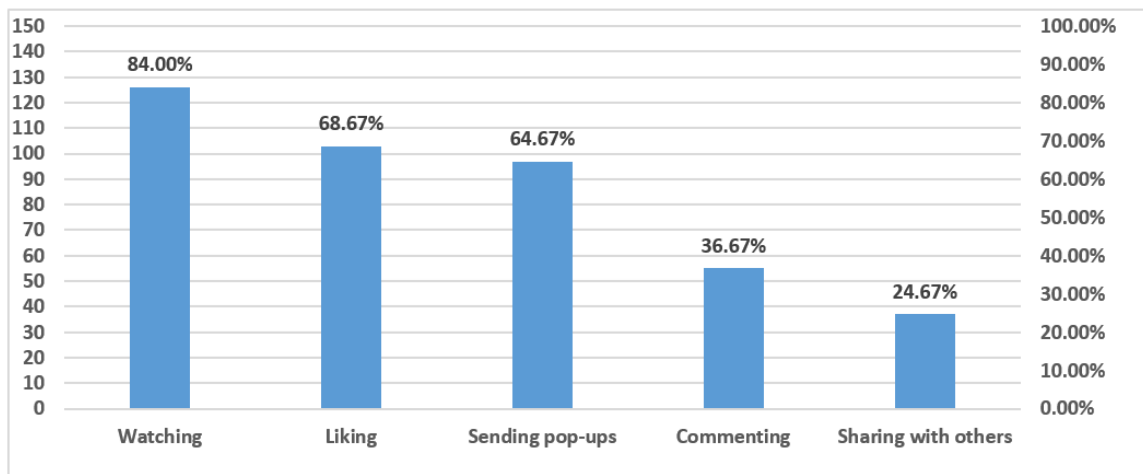
It can be seen that users pay more attention to the videos about daily life, the funny videos, the videos to popularize knowledge and the videos to popularize culture, all the above accounting for more than 50% each; the challenge videos are of general concern, 51.33% of users are interested in them; in addition, 25.33% of users choose the option of "others". From the preference survey on video contents, users pay more attention to daily life videos, as high as 90%; besides, the videos to popularize knowledge and the videos to popularize culture also receive high attention. And these types of video contents are also the mainstream options when the foreign UPs are posting a video.

#### 3.2.2 Higher Attention to Hot Events

With an online media proliferation, media discourse is decentralized, and present hot events always attract wide attention and discussion. When foreign UPs are selecting an appropriate video topic, they also use the current affairs as materials to produce relevant video for the sake of attracting network flow. According to the research, contents based on hot topics often bring more plays, likes, comments and reposts. For instance, on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022, a famous Japanese UP released the video "How much do Japanese people like 'Bing Dwen Dwen'?" During the Beijing Winter Olympics, the mascot "Bing Dwen Dwen" has become a popular cartoon image in China and even around the world, and a craze of buying "Bing Dwen Dwen" was spread in the whole society. The video, which was filmed with the theme of Japanese people's views on "Bing Dwen Dwen", received 955,000 plays. The video titled "What Japanese citizens say about the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics" released by the same UP on July 25, 2021, also received 692,000 plays, far exceeding the average plays of the UP's other videos. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, an American UP posted a video with the title "How about the situation in the first American city that has gone into lockdown?", which garnered 1.44 million plays, 1.1 pop-ups and 3,847 comments. The video showed Chinese people the measures taken by the U.S. to deal with COVID-19 and the real-time conditions of a U.S. city in the early stages of the pandemic. This type of videos take full advantage of people's concern about social hot events and have achieved effective cross-cultural messaging.

#### 3.2.3 Interactive Use of Video

After the questionnaire survey, it is found that the users were satisfied not only with watching and understanding the video content, but also had interactive behaviors such as liking, commenting and reposting, as shown in Figure 3.



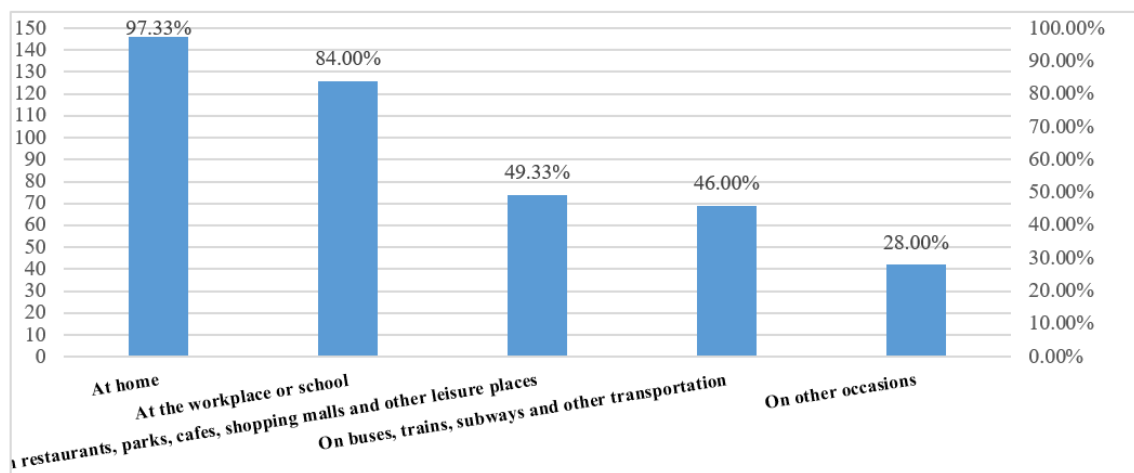
**Figure 3.** Users' Interaction Behavior

84.00% of users chose the option of "watching" the video; 68.67% of users chose the option of "liking"; 64.67% of users would like to send pop-ups; 36.67% of users tend to comment on the video; 23.91% of users would repost the video to others. It is easy to conclude that users are not only actively acquiring effective information from the videos themselves, but are also engaging in social behaviors related to the videos, using the contents they share with others as social currency.

Mark Granovetter argues that in real life, there are strong ties and weak ties in interpersonal interactions. Ties between people with strong heterogeneity and no close connection, which is not based on emotional factors, is called weak ties; otherwise, they are strong ties[10]. According to the survey, Bilibili allows users to repost videos through third-party social platforms such as Weibo, WeChat and QQ, which has a strong cross-platform social attribute. It can also be found in the comment section below the videos that when users participate in the interaction, they will reply to comments and mention other friends on the same platform, thus completing the sharing of information. Whether it is commenting or mentioning, it is a kind of interpersonal interaction based on either strong ties or weak ties. This realizes the cultural transmission within the audience group, thus invisibly expanding the scope of cross-cultural communication.

### 3.2.4 Informal Occasions of Use

Bilibili, as a mobile social APP, does not require any certain place of use for its users, meeting the diverse demands of users in multiple sites. In this survey, the question "On which of the following occasions have you ever used short videos published by foreign UPs" was set in the questionnaire, and the results are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Users' Occasions of access

97.33% and 84.00% of users chose to use the short videos at their home as well as at their workplace or school; 49.33% of users would use them at restaurants, parks, shopping malls and other places of leisure and entertainment; 46.00% of users tended to use them during their rides on buses, subways, trains, etc.; 28% of users would like to use them at other places.

Spreading information in a fragmented form is the main feature of short videos on Bilibili, and videos published by foreign UPs are no exception. Most videos cater to the contemporary habit of fragmented browsing with their short, concise lengths. Individual videos vary in length, ranging from 1 minute to 20 minutes, and are highly refined to disseminate information.

When talking to interviewees, one mentioned, "I usually watch these videos in my own house or on my way to the workplace, such as on the subway, because I have nothing else to do or cannot do anything else at the time."

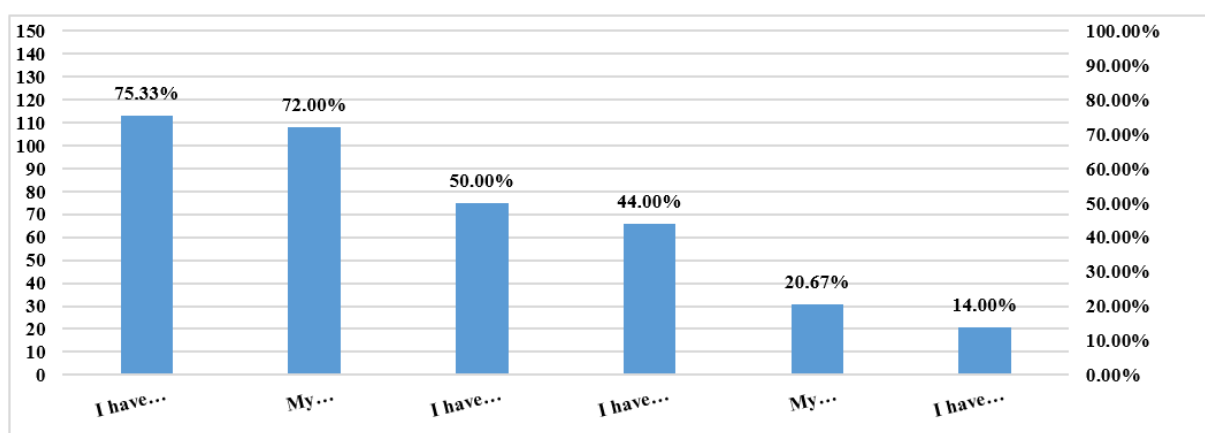
The short videos published by foreign UPs based on Bilibili have achieved no limitation on occasions of use, so that users can actively or passively engage in cross-cultural exchange activities anytime and anywhere for the purpose of learning new knowledge, expanding their horizons and entertaining themselves.

#### 4. Gratification of the Users

Users' usage behavior of short videos is a continuous process. Whether and to what extent the motives of users are gratified have an impact on users' subsequent use. This research examines users' gratification in the following three ways. Whether the personal motives are gratified? Whether the information conveyed have changed the users' perceptions? And what are the users' attitudes towards the development of this form of cross-cultural communication.

##### 4.1. Gratification of Personal Motives

In the previous section, the personal motives of the relevant audiences have been divided into various types. The situation of users' gratification after using the relevant short videos was obtained through the survey conducted in the previous stage, the result of the question "In what ways have you been satisfied after using the videos?" is shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Gratification of Users' Motives

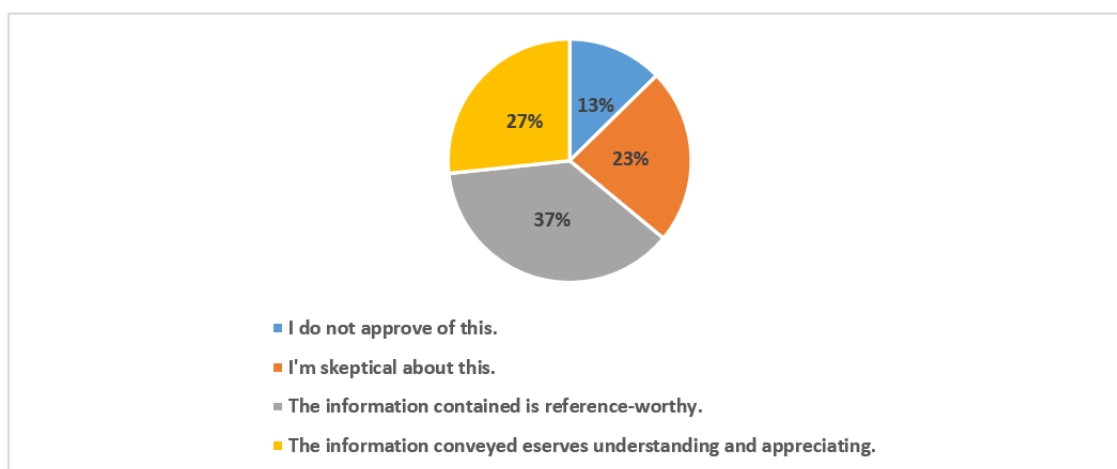
75.33% of the users pointed out that their knowledge had increased and their horizons had been broadened; 72.00% of the users held the view that their curiosity had been satisfied; 50.00% of the users had been entertained and got relaxed physically and mentally; 44% of the users used short videos to pass time; 20.67% of the users had gained interpersonal contacts; and 14% of the users had got the information they needed.

Nowadays, the short video has become one of the most popular media tools. Video images have the ability to enter human beings' vision faster compared with text information such as books. Thus, they are much easier for people to obtain information. Virtual knowledge images visualize information and give audiences a new experience with color, form, audio and motion. Intercultural

communicators use a large number of videos and pictures to explain the topic, transforming the content into a dynamic and three-dimensional presentation, which satisfies users' knowledge or information needs in the process of watching and interacting, thus realizing intercultural communication in the online media environment.

#### 4.2. Users' Perception towards the Information Conveyed

As can be seen from the above, the survey on “whether users' personal motives have been gratified” reveals that users' demands are basically gratified in this process. The investigation of the degree of users' gratification also needs to be combined with the question of “whether the information conveyed in the video contents has changed users' existing perceptions”, i.e. “whether the culture has been effectively disseminated”. Therefore, the question "What is your attitude towards the information conveyed in the video?" has been designed. The result is shown in Figure 6.



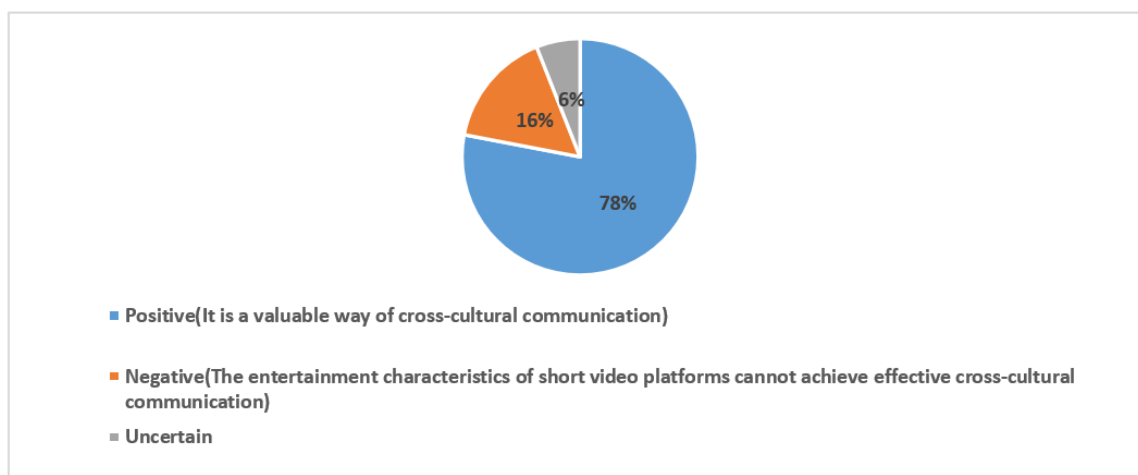
**Figure 6.** Users' Attitudes towards the Information Conveyed in the Video

37% of users believed it could be used as valid information for their own reference; 27% of users expressed understanding and appreciation; 23% of users would be somewhat skeptical about the authenticity and accuracy of the information; there is still a minority of 13% of users who cannot endorse the information.

Effective cross-cultural communication activities should not only allow audiences to broaden their horizons and gain new knowledge, but also achieve the ultimate delivery of information and meaningful communication, so that relevant users can believe in the authenticity of the information and further understand it. Under the perspective of Uses and Gratification Theory, videos published by foreign UPs are relatively effective cross-cultural communication activities as they change their audiences' cognition and attitudes saliently in the process of using the videos and gratify the users' motives.

#### 4.3. Users' Attitudes towards the Development of Relevant Trends

In the questionnaire, the question "What is your opinion about this type of short videos as a means of cross-cultural communication?" was set. The result is shown in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** Users' Opinions about Videos Published by Foreign UPs as the Means of Cross-cultural Communication

78% of users held a positive attitude towards the development of this type of short videos, believing "this is a new type of cross-cultural communication" and "is of great value"; 16% of users held a negative attitude, believing that "entertainment short video platforms are not suitable for serious cross-cultural communication activities"; 6% of users are "not sure" and cannot give an accurate judgment.

During the interviews, more than half of the interviewees expressed optimism about the development of intercultural communication with the assist of online media. One of the interviewees said, "Since short video platforms are full of entertainment contents, I used to feel that I didn't get anything useful, and I felt boring after watching too many of them. I wasted so much time for nothing. But these kinds of videos provide us with a channel to learn about foreign countries while achieving entertainment functions." The other one said, "Short videos on online media platforms not only allow more people to capture relevant information, but also inject fresh blood into cross-cultural communication, while enriching video content and providing more options for audiences interested in cultural exchange." Someone also said, "The popularity of some foreign UPs shows that audiences still enjoy watching such type of short videos, and I think there will be a big market for them in the future. After all, it's a great way to relax and get new information."

However, some interviewees expressed skepticism about the development of this form of cross-cultural communication. They pointed out that the threshold for self-publishing is too low and the quality of practitioners varies, so the contents they provide to their audiences are also difficult to detect rumors. Meanwhile, in the era of streaming media, network flow is the main measure of success. Some foreign UPs may deliver fake or exaggerated information to Chinese audiences in order to attract them, which is not conducive to the orderly development of cross-cultural communication.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, audiences of videos published by foreign UPs on Bilibili have various motives for using them, including entertainment motives, motives to satisfying curiosity, motives to acquiring knowledge, motives to pastime, motives to obtain necessary information, and motives to socializing. At the same time, this form of cross-cultural communication is mainly based on people's entertainment motive and pastime behavior. At the same time, people's curiosity, needs for spiritual recreation, needs for socialization, and demands for knowledge and information also play a huge part in it. The results of the questionnaire and the information obtained from the interviews show that the above motives of users have been satisfied to different degrees. The contents delivered by the videos have more than half of the probability of changing the audiences' perceptions and cognition to some extent. In general, the short video published by foreign UPs can be considered as an effective

intercultural communication carrier in the online mediated intercultural communication mechanism. The vast majority of the audiences are optimistic about the development prospect of this field.

This research has some limitations as well. Due to the limited scope of the survey respondents, this paper may have a rather one-sided view. Additionally, the study tends to take short videos published by specific foreign UPs who have a large number of subscribers on Bilibili as representatives, and presupposes the audiences' motives to use these short videos by referring to relevant literature, preliminary surveys and estimations, which may lead to an inability to comprehensively portray all possible motives of the audiences. Meanwhile, for the exploration of factors influencing users' usage behavior, this paper only starts from the perspective of audiences' personal motives, but does not take the comprehensive environmental factors, such as knowledge contributor factors, knowledge beneficiary factors, and Internet network environment factors into consideration. Moreover, this study lacks theoretical reflection on the relevant communication model. Therefore, future research is expected to explore the topic in more depth and from more perspectives.

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