

A study of Bilibili's communication strategy based on the 5W analysis model

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Abstract. This study is based on the 5W analysis model to explore the communication strategy of bilibili, one of the most successful video sites in recent years, whose development strategy has attracted much attention. The company was founded only 13 years ago, and its target users are mostly today's young people. To a certain extent, it represents and leads the development trend of the industry, so it is worth studying. This study adopts a survey, literature, and case study method. It concludes with five aspects: the subject of information communication, the content of information communication, the manner of information communication, the audience of information communication, and the effect of information. This study also discusses the issues involved and proposes three suggestions: strengthen self-correction and improve the mechanism of rights protection, clear their positioning, enhance user stickiness, improve the audit mechanism, and achieve personalized recommendations. Finally, the paper summarizes and concludes the research results, once again outlining the successes of bilibili's communication strategy and briefly suggesting the shortcomings of the study due to objective reasons and the prospects for future research.

Keywords: 5W analysis model; Bilibili; Communication strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

In the Internet era, people are becoming increasingly dependent on the Internet, and some video websites have gradually developed. Especially under the influence of the epidemic, the general public must be in lockdown. Hence, people are at home for longer periods, and most choose to watch videos (including long videos like TV series and movies as well as short videos) as a pastime.

With an average of 272 million monthly active users in 2021 and an average of 24.5 million monthly paying users, Bilibili has been able to rank among the top five in China's online video industry despite being established only 13 years ago and has gradually become the favorite pan-entertainment App of contemporary youth instead of just being a gathering place for subculture enthusiasts. As one of the most successful and popular video sites in China, there is no doubt that Bilibili has its strengths. The role played by its appropriate communication strategy cannot be underestimated. The company differs from traditional online video sites, where only TV series, movies, and other films can be viewed. Some short-form video sites feature shorter videos uploaded by self-publishers. It can be said that Bilibili is in between these two kinds of video sites, combining the characteristics of both and exploring a unique development path of its own. It is gaining momentum and has the potential and trend to hit the top of the industry. Therefore, studying Bilibili's communication strategy can improve understanding of its development trajectory, explore why its influence is so large and widespread, and predict its or even the industry's development trends.

1.2 Literature review

Li and Wei identified the changes in Bilibili's target audience over the past decade: the gradual spread from niche culture enthusiasts like ACG culture to young people and even the entire population. Chen and Guo focused on Bilibili's emphasis on and investment in documentaries and, through a comparative analysis with other companies, pointed out that many other video sites overlook this part of the content, thus becoming a unique advantage for Bilibili. Chen and Yu compare Bilibili with other companies in the same industry, analyze the advantages and shortcomings of its communication

strategy, argue that there are still unreasonable aspects of its positioning and price, and propose corresponding countermeasures. Han used SWOT theory and STP theory to make some relevant discussions on Bilibili's marketing strategy. He argued that Bilibili needs to seize the opportunity of promising market development and be prepared to deal with the threat of other companies competing to create and imitate its features.

The 5W model divides communication activities into five segments and elements, namely "Who" "Say What" "In Which Channel" "To Whom" "With What Effect", which represent the subject, content, manner, audience, and effect of information communication separately. Most researchers have analyzed one of these aspects in detail. Still, few articles have comprehensively studied Bilibili's communication strategy, and even fewer have used the 5W model to analyze it.

1.3 Research framework

Therefore, this paper will first analyze Bilibili's existing communication strategy from these five aspects, including its strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, based on the available information and trends, we will propose recommendations to address the shortcomings. Finally, the paper will conclude with objective analysis and prediction of the direction and focus of Bilibili's development.

2. Methods

2.1 Survey research method

The survey research method is a method in which the researcher collects and understands detailed data about things and analyzes them through field interviews and questioning surveys. Some of the content in this paper comes from interviews with the creators of the Bilibili videos around customers. This will help understand their feelings and thoughts as both the subject of information dissemination and the audience of information dissemination to make a more focused discussion.

2.2 Literature research method

The literature research method involves collecting, identifying, and organizing literature and forming a scientific understanding of the facts through literature study. This paper collects, organizes, and analyzes relevant data by reviewing literature and reports to understand the history and current status of Bilibili and the industry and support the content of the thesis.

2.3 Case Study Method

The case study method is a scientific method of analysis in which representative things or phenomena are studied in-depth, carefully, and thoroughly to gain a general understanding. In this paper, some specific cases will be presented and analyzed to enrich and expand the paper's content and make the study of this topic more in-depth and systematic.

3. Results

3.1 The subject of information communication

Bilibili's dissemination subjects can be roughly divided into two categories. One category is individuals or official account owners (e.g., China Science magazine official), and the other is the Bilibili official. The former mainly shoots, produces, or reproduces videos on their own and uploads them. This category of people is called "uploaders" in bilibili. At the same time, the latter is the cooperation between the Bilibili official and other companies, purchasing the copyright and putting it on the platform, or investing in the production of TV series and documentaries.

Bilibili's information dissemination body cannot be defined by OGC (Occupationally-Generated Content), PGC (Professionally-Generated Content), or UGC (User-Generated Content), although users create a large portion of the content on the platform [6-7]. However, to attract creators to create

better quality works, Bilibili has opened a “creation incentive”, where uploaders can apply for the “creation incentive” after reaching a certain level (provided that the content is original and not reproduced) and receive revenue from it.

There are two reasons why this approach can greatly enhance user stickiness: first, since videos cost money to shoot and produce, creators have more incentive to create better quality work if they can benefit from it; second, creators are not only the creators of their videos but also the viewers of other creators [8-9]. The creation incentive is inseparable from the click rate, like rate, and share rate of work. Therefore, the creators can keep exploring and searching for better-quality creations. At the same time, the viewers can see the content they are interested in on the Bilibili platform, bringing revenue for the creators to continue creating, forming a good cycle.

3.2 The content of information communication

In the early days, Bilibili focused its development on ACG culture, namely Animation, Comics, and Games, so the site was mostly filled with anime-related works. As more and more users joined Bilibili, its dissemination content has been gradually enriched. Currently, Bilibili has 15 divisions, including animation, games, lifestyle, music, and dance, and each division is further subdivided to cover a multicultural community of more than 7,000 interest circles.

In addition to uploading videos, Bilibili has purchased the rights to many popular TV series and movies. The introduction of the movie “Harry Potter” and the TV series “Old Friends” on the shelves have brought it much heat and attracted many new users. At the same time, Bilibili itself has invested in producing documentaries, TV series, movies, and variety shows. Among them, it is worth mentioning documentaries.

On September 17, 2018, Bilibili entered into deep cooperation with Discovery in the United States and launched the Discovery section. It includes the introduction of 145 documentaries and 200 hours of exclusive content, covering a variety of subjects, such as survival adventure, science, and technology, history, animals, and other types, including “Extreme Survival Game”, “Wilderness Survival Six” and other Discovery’s ace programs. Currently, CCTV, BBC, Discovery, NHK, SKY, etc., are in the documentary section.

Bilibili’s documentaries are also a big success; in 2017, Bilibili launched the “Search for Documentaries” program, which focuses on original documentary content with the national team, and has produced famous works such as “Polar Regions”, “A String of Life” and “History of Those Things”. Among them, “Polar Regions” won the 2017 Top 10 Most Influential Documentaries in China, and “A String of Life” won the 24th China Documentary Best Online Popularity Work Award.

The unique distribution of content has led to an increasing number of users choosing Bilibili, but it has also exposed it to some problems.

First, although Bilibili is copyright conscious, some users ignore this issue when making video reprints. Since the main body of Bilibili’s distribution is still the users, this has gotten Bilibili into copyright disputes. In May 2018, iQIYI argued that its program “China has Hip Hop”, which has exclusive information network distribution rights, was broadcast by Bilibili without authorization. iQIYI sued for infringement of the right to information network dissemination of works dispute, demanding the immediate cessation of infringement and compensation for damages and reasonable costs of 1 million yuan.

Second, the emergence of short video platforms has brought a very big impact on Bilibili. When the pace of life is getting faster and faster, it is obvious that watching shorter videos in fragments of time is more popular among people. The content of Bilibili is mainly long videos, which has directly led to the loss of many users [10].

In response to these problems, Bilibili is still looking for solutions and improving itself.

3.3 The manner of information communication

Communication channels are the specific means of achieving communication activities and can be divided into macro and microchannels. Bilibili belongs to one of the macro channels, while the microchannels are the secondary screening of communication contents by the platform.

Like many websites, Bilibili uses “recommendation algorithm” technology to target content, with the main reference indicators being likes, favorites, coins, retweets, and pop-ups. Among them, coins refer to a virtual currency introduced by Bilibili, and users can get a coin by logging in every day. The “pop-up” refers to a real-time commentary where viewers can express their thoughts and interact with other users while watching the video.

3.4 The audience of information communication

Bilibili was founded to serve niche culture enthusiasts, so registration was restricted and only opened for registration at certain times. On May 20, 2013, Bilibili changed the invitation code system to a registration question and answer system. The promotion test is limited to 60 minutes, with 100 questions and a passing score of 60. The questions contain content such as a pop-up etiquette chapter and some basic knowledge of animation, comics, and games. In order to attract more and more viewers, the difficulty of the questions is currently being reduced.

At the same time, Bilibili is becoming better known to more and more people due to the characteristics of the communication subject and the content mentioned in the previous article. Currently, Bilibili is the most popular App among young people under 24 years old in China, with 86% of monthly active users aged 35 and below and 450 million core users from the “Z+ generation” (born in 1985-2009).

3.5 The effect of information communication

Bilibili has a wide dissemination range and relatively good dissemination effects. Take pan-knowledge videos as an example. In 2021, pan-knowledge content accounted for 45% of the total broadcast volume of Bilibili, with 190 million users watching pan-knowledge videos on the website, equivalent to five times the number of Chinese university students.

Bilibili has therefore held the “Top 100 Uploaders” campaign, and has honored uploaders with more than 1 million followers and outstanding performance in terms of professionalism, influence, and innovation.

However, due to the too wide range of dissemination subjects, coupled with the imperfection of the platform review mechanism, some vulgar videos often appear, producing adverse effects. On July 20, 2018, a CCTV news channel named and criticized Bilibili and other animation websites and APPs for their vulgar content, reporting that some of the content even involved incest. The CCTV called for the dissemination and production of youth programs with distinctive positive energy. This should be taken seriously.

4. Discussion

4.1 Strengthen self-correction and improve the mechanism of rights protection

Copyright is a problem that has plagued video sites for a long time. In addition to the problems mentioned in the previous article, bilibili has been sued by other companies for copyright infringement. There are also many other video sites where users illegally reprint videos on bilibili’s website. Since most of the videos on bilibili are uploaded independently by users, it is much more difficult to defend their rights. Therefore, for the former, bilibili should strengthen its self-examination and self-correction, tighten its gates at the review stage, and take down videos that constitute infringement. Secondly, for the latter, bilibili already has some measures in place, such as automatically generating a watermark after uploading a video and attaching a “No Reprint Without Authorization” reminder under the original video. But in addition, bilibili should also improve the

rights protection mechanism. When the uploader is infringed, and there is no way to protect the rights, the platform will intervene to help protect the rights to shorten the time, reduce the cost of protecting the rights, and protect the rights of users.

4.2 Clear their positioning and enhance user stickiness

In the face of the impact of the short video industry, bilibili has also actively responded. Its video is divided into “horizontal mode” and “vertical mode”, the latter is a better match for short videos, and the video can be switched by swiping down. However, although this method allows for quick viewing of different videos, ensuring that the videos interest viewers aren’t easy. At the same time, most users choose bilibili at first because they are interested in the medium-length or long videos on the site, and these users are not yet willing to see short videos interspersed with them [11]. Therefore, bilibili can open a section for vertical mode video only to display the title and cover of the video. At the same time, there is no necessity to give up the function of swiping the videos down. The company should offer more choices to users.

4.3 Improve the audit mechanism and achieve personalized recommendations

As mentioned above, bilibili’s users are mostly Generation Z, and many of them are still juveniles, so the video content must be strictly audited.

In response to this situation, bilibili has launched a “teenager mode”, which requires the authorization of a guardian for authenticated users under the age of 14. There are also limitations on the time and functions of use. In addition, bilibili also has three ways to manage its content: technical approach, manual auditing, and user reporting. In the first half of 2022, bilibili disposed of a cumulative total of 101,000 manuscripts that endangered the content of minors and 125,000 manuscripts related to minors.

However, the review of content should not adopt a one-size-fits-all standard. Putting aside vulgar content that should not have been disseminated, some content is unsuitable for minors to watch so that bilibili can adopt a grading strategy. Users must pass real-name authentication before watching by buying some videos into different levels suitable for the age group 14+, 18+ or 21+, and users need to pass real-name authentication.

5. Conclusion

The above analysis shows bilibili’s development has been relatively mature, and its rapid rise over the decades is well documented.

One is that the platform’s positioning has been clear from the beginning. The development strategy formulated on this basis can play a good effect with half the effort.

The second is that bilibili has been expanding its development scope and not giving up its characteristics. Although with the development and progress of the times, the platform inevitably encountered threats and challenges. The company has been actively responding. As far as the existing situation is concerned, bilibili has reflected and improved on the problems that exist in the company.

Bilibili’s achievements are evident throughout the industry, so a study of its communication strategy can provide a glimpse of the industry’s development and a reference for the development of other industries of the same type. At the same time, the problems mentioned in this paper are more or less the same problems faced by other companies in the same industry, so both the countermeasures that bilibili has taken and the suggestions made in this paper can contribute to the development of the company and the industry.

Of course, this paper’s analysis is still incomplete, and the data collected is still limited. At the same time, due to the rapid development of the Internet era, there is inevitable that some information could not be updated during the period from the writing to the completion of this paper. As a result, we hope that we can continue to follow up in the future studies.

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