What Content in Videos Posted by Gay Bloggers on YouTube Could Make Chinese People More Accepting of Sexual Minorities

Shuyi Chen

Department of ENGL, University of Colorado Denver, Denver, USA

Abstract. This study considers how the video content the gay bloggers post on YouTube can make the sexual minorities to be more accepted by Chinese audiences. The question is put in the context of China in its changing social, policy and media environment, in which the sexual minorities suffer the discrimination but also are more visible by the online. With the qualitative content analysis, we review the videos by some famous lesbian and gay bloggers, and compare the visible presentation, the language style, the video-cover's design, the narrative topics, and the implicit social messages. The result shows that the familiar everyday dress, the friendly language, the visually coherent cover, the funny or the emotionally persuade story-telling, and the narratives of the discrimination and the family to accept them all help to reduce the social distance. The paper believes that social media can make the life of sexual minorities to be more legible to mainstream view, and it can provide the organization with the communication strategy of improving the public understanding.

Keywords: Sexual minorities, gay bloggers, YouTube, China, content analysis, public acceptance, social media communication, video narratives.

1. Introduction

Historically, sexual minorities in China have not been socially recognized much, have not received public support in an even way, and have been under the pressure of institution and culture. For instance, the public reporting in recent time has written how the LGBT organizations are closed down under the name of force majeure and the online public accounts related to gay groups are blocked [1, 2]. These examples show that online visibility is important not only as entertainment but also as the public space that is contested in which sexual minorities would like to get recognition.

Social media is a useful site for studying how sexual minorities represent themselves and how, in turn, the mainstream audience responds to them. However, the Internet boom has expanded the space available for the Chinese gay community to operate.

With this background, the goal of this study is to see how the awareness of sexual minorities in China may be raised by the videos put on the Internet, and how sexual minorities are shown on social places. Specifically, the study analyses the videos put up by gay bloggers, then finds the elements that may help Chinese viewers accept the homosexuality, and divides them into the common elements of communication. According to this study, the elements of such videos may give sexual minorities possible ways to extend the social visibility and be better socialized in society. It may also give the organizations and enterprises that support the sexual minorities new perspectives for the public communication and the operational strategy.

The analysis shows that for the videos made by gay bloggers, everyday dress, same visual style, friendly language, interesting presentation and the satirical story lines of the videos can make the sexual minorities more familiar and acceptable to the Chinese audience.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Attitudes

In a UNDP report, it is said that many sexual minorities in China have difficulties in disclosure, social life and in the recognition by institutions [3]. In the last years, the attitudes towards sexual minorities in the Chinese Society have changed but the sexual minorities have little space to organize

activities. In the previous works given above mentioned, the author also relate the above difficulties with the psychological difficulty and with the choice of migration of the sexual minorities [4, 5].

First, sexual minorities may suffer discrimination in social activities. For example, research on the rental housing market in Hong Kong shows that many of the respondents said that they feared that disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity would affect their housing access, so they used filtering, hiding or deception when they dealt with the landlords and the agents [6]. It implies that the sexual minority is not fully accepted by the general public and that some people discriminate to them without proper knowledge.

Second, problems encountered by sexual minorities do not always receive public attention or lead to effective solutions. One study of female same-sex intimate partner violence in China suggests that, both domestic violence and homosexuality may be treated as losses of family prestige, which can push such problems into social marginality [7]. It shows why changing public understanding through communication is important.

2.2 Current Policy

The policy environment for sexual minorities in China is not all friendly to the present. For instance, we can see in work, fertility, education, and the health policy. However, some policy changing also provides a small chance to some groups.

At work, anti-discrimination policies are not common, but the available evidence shows that when they are, they are related to less negative treatment [8]. Thus, the lack of explicit policy can be also an indirect pressure on the living and working space of the sexual minorities.

In relation to fertility and family policy, the three-child policy puts the focus on marriage, on the child being born at the right age, and on the family unit as a reproductive institution [9]. In this sense, the fact that it also puts the focus on the heterosexual marriage can make it hard for the sexual minorities to imagine the equal reproductive Futures they can have also in relation to this, if in other context the same sex couple wants an adoption, assisted reproduction or other ways of building a family.

Public gender expectations are also influenced by education policy. For instance, the official discussion of physical education has associated the practice of ball games and the school sports to the cultivation of masculinity [10]. In a such a policy of education, the ways that gay bloggers speak, dress, and narrate their lives will be especially related to how the public will interpret gender expression.

Another important area is health policy. The government included some hormone related products in a list of drugs prohibited for online sale [11]. Such a decision can increase the pressure on the transgender people and affect the perceived legitimacy of the sexual minorities. At the same time, later clinical management standards lowered the age threshold of the gender reassignment procedures to 18 years and simplify some of the certification requirements [12]. We see that in the same policy environment, the tendency to be progressive and the tendency to be traditional can live together.

2.3 The Impact of Social Media

The prosperity of the Internet has changed how people think, feel, and perceive the social world. Research on social media influence shows that the online platform and the influencer can influence the attention, perception, and responses to social stimulii [13]. Other research also show that the social media plays a key role in mediating information communication [14]. These researches help to explain why the video platform matter for the public acceptance of sexual minorities.

3. Methodology

The well-known gay and lesbian bloggers in YouTube which this study targets are several. They are chosen for three reasons. First, they are popular in social platforms, have great fans and can reach audiences. For instance, one account is CACA, who has so many followers of hundreds of thousands,

and many likes and comments of thousands on videos. This shows that their videos are popular and have possibility to affect some public attitudes.

Second, the selected bloggers have appeared on media platforms for a long time as sexual minorities and have accumulated experience in self-representation. This matters because some accounts online may perform homosexuality only to attract attention or provoke discrimination. This study is then on accounts that present as experienced and recognizable sexual-minority creators.

Third, the five accounts are different types of video production. Some of them focus on travel, some on family life, some on documentary narration, and some on comedy or daily vlogs. It makes the study more comprehensive to compare different type of account.

At the surface level, the study see the commonalities and the differences in the videos, such as clothes style, colors, behavioral actions, language style, speaking habits, cover design, audience interaction, etc. At the deeper level, it studies the logic of the language in the videos and the implicit relation of the video with the society.

4. Findings

As a previous studies pointed the Internet can increase the harm to sexual minorities by increasing sexual victimization, prejudice, and mental-health risks [15]. The present study is about the positive effect that the online video may have when the sexail-minority creators have control their representation.

4.1 Superficial Video Features

The study finds by analyzing the common features in the selected video content that these bloggers are good at choosing the topics which is interested by the mainstream society or the society does not understand. They design the video cover which is visual coherent, and often choose a stable main color. This is the common operation strategy of the Internet in order to gain traffic and of course, they pay attention to the fact that the gay bloggers exists legally.

In any case of the kind of video, these creators select a type of style that shortens the distance between itself and the viewer. These contents show the sexual minorities as belonging to the ordinary daily life and not as another and stigmatized group.

Besides, they often dress cleanly and ordinarily. With this dressing, the public will feel sexual minorities are not strange or unacceptable. We note on the research about gay men's style and dress that the clothing can reflect the sexual identity. However, the bloggers analyzed here usually dress the same as the heterosexual peers [16]. The everyday style is one reason why their videos may be acceptable to Chinese viewers.

They also select interesting titles to attract more viewers. Some titles are more directly related to the sexuality than ordinary entertainment videos. The additional attention will bring more to gay bloggers, also the chance to the public understand.

Table 1. Superficial Video Features of Gay Bloggers

Blogger's Name	Clothes	Theme Style	Language Style	Video Cover	Gender
CACA & BELLA	Mainly black and white clothes; simple and clean.	Travel, home, and interactive answers to audience questions about sexuality.	Everyday and relaxed language; lively tone.	Purple theme and frames taken from video footage.	Two women; lesbian.
Rabbit & Wolf	Light colors predominate.	Rainbow babies, same-sex students, and same-sex talk.	Everyday and relaxed language; lively tone.	Light green theme, character cut-outs, stickers, and large titles.	Two women; lesbian.
FJ234	Normal short sleeves, tank tops, black-and-white clothing, and topless scenes.	Interesting daily-life topics, games, food, and challenges.	Lively, witty, humorous, explicit, and direct.	Exaggerated character expressions and captions.	Two men; gay.
FuFuKnows	Usual T-shirts in different colors.	Short skits and daily vlogs.	Casual and lively.	Different colored borders and large bold text.	Two men; gay.
NINTH SHOW	People in the films wear everyday clothes.	Explaining the beauty of lesbian movies.	Beautiful language with a slower rhythm.	Beautiful film stills with smaller descriptive text.	Lesbian topics.

Note: This table summarizes selected characteristics of the bloggers' videos and video-cover design.

4.2 Discrimination Narratives

The second finding is that the bloggers' videos often show direct or subtle discrimination against sexual minorities. But such videos do not only ask for sympathy. They use stories, questions, sitcoms, and film interpretation so that the viewers see the irrational nature of discrimination.

Through these cases it is also clear that queer bloggers did not get recognition and support online in a smooth way. Many went by struggle and challenge, and their early videos turned these experiences in communicative material. This is indeed the basis for how they were able to build the gay accounts and attract the public attention.

Table 2. Implicit Discrimination Against Sexual Minorities Represented in Video Content

No.	Video Content	Social Meaning
1	A film clip about homosexuality shows a lesbian character asking why two women cannot be together.	The scene directly questions the assumption that same-sex intimacy is illegitimate.
2	Two lesbian bloggers share their coming-out experiences. One says she discovered her homosexuality at 19 but hid it for seven years; the other says some people hide until middle age.	The video turns hidden identity and fear of disclosure into a public topic that audiences can understand.
3	A sitcom shows a heterosexual boy insulting a gay boy with an anti-effeminacy slur after a restroom conflict.	The comic format exposes everyday verbal discrimination and shows how gender expression becomes a target of stigma.

Note: In the source manuscript, the original screenshots have Chinese interface text. Here the visual evidence is in the form of English textual descriptions because the template requires the whole text to be in English.

4.3 Replacement of Old Ideas by New Ideas

The third finding is that many videos show a process in which old ideas are slowly replaced by new ones. For example, bloggers use a story of coming out, of family conflict, learning, and of eventually being accepted, in order to show that homosexuality is no moral failure and not to be corrected.

Such content can help the Chinese viewers to recognise that they themselves do not have much sexual knowledge and to search for more information about homosexuality. Such content also helps viewers to see that the gay community life is not so unpleasant or chaotic as they have learnt in the traditional stereotypical way. Such videos also show that the sexual minorities can be respected, can be successful in a suitable working place, and perhaps have some special cultural insight in a field of fashion and self presentation.

Table 3. Video Content Showing the Gradual Replacement of Old Ideas by New Ideas

No.	Video Content	Interpretation
1	Parents initially think a boy should not wear makeup and judge the behavior negatively. Later, he applies for a fashion-industry position and succeeds, which changes his parents' attitude.	The story connects gender expression to ability and professional recognition rather than moral failure.
2	A middle-aged gay man tells his father about his identity. After traveling with him to the Czech Republic, the father sees public respect for homosexuality and rethinks his views.	Exposure to a more accepting social environment helps replace old prejudice with new understanding.
3	A man is discovered to be gay by his parents at 27. His mother is peaceful but his father is intolerant. After learning more about homosexuality, the parents reconcile with him.	Knowledge acquisition becomes a route from family conflict to acceptance.
4	A mother initially cannot tolerate her daughter's homosexual identity and even threatens suicide. She later chooses to learn more and gradually accepts her daughter.	The case shows a shift from emotional rejection to informed family recognition.

Note: The following table will discuss the succession of new and old ideas which appear in the videos shown in gay bloggers, in particular, in the narratives about coming out to the parents.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to have a look at the role of media platform for sexual minorities in China in the Internet age. In particluar, we study in this paper how to make Chinese people more accept of the sexual minorities. We use the method of video content representation analysis and the method of content logic analysis to study several well-known and differently styled gay and lesbian bloggers on YouTube. In the study, we focus on the content production and the way of operations of the videos of the bloggers.

The results demonstrate that the successful queer bloggers choose contents that are the ones that create the interest of the main stream in the sexual minorities; these contents often refer to points of the life of the sexual-minority that are not that well known. The bloggers use for the covers of the videos a beautiful aspect and always the same color for each of the posts, in order to attract the attention. They depict close to the life of the everyday and the clothes that are ordinary for the people, so they bring the sexual minorities nearer to the viewer and they are a way to make accept the public.

On a deeper level, of course, their early videos show on many occasions a discrimination against sexual minorities, which shows up on the way and slowly pulls attention to the need for social change. Then, on the other hand, they break the conventions by the story telling of courses from discrimination and prejudice toward acceptance. It would be interesting for future research to see, how the Internet and the public opinion can provoke changes in social attitude and policy that can make the living space of sexual minorities big.

References

[1] Liang, A. (2023, June 28). China's plight of sexual minorities under force majeure. BBC News. http://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-66040480

[2] BBC. (2021, July 9). Chinese gay group's WeChat account blocked in protest: We're all unnamed public numbers. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-57763594

[3] United Nations Development Programme. (2016). Being LGBTI in China: A national survey on social attitudes toward sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. UNDP China. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/cn/UNDP-CH-PEG-Being-LGBT-in-China_CH.pdf

[4] Hu, J., Tan, L., Huang, G., & Yu, W. (2020). Disparity in depressive symptoms between heterosexual and sexual minority men in China. PLOS ONE, 15(1), e0226178. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0226178

[5] Zhang, Y. (2020). Mental health status of transgender and cisgender college students. Chinese Journal of Mental Health, 34(1), 61-65.

[6] Pang, T. K., Chow, L. Z., & Huang, Y. T. (2022). Far more than a deal: Sexual and gender minorities' experiences of the rental housing market in Hong Kong. Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 19, 1795-1807. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13174-022-00847-8

[7] Lo, I. P. Y. (2022). Violence in the double closet: Female same-sex intimate partner violence and minority stress in China. Journal of Lesbian Studies. https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2022.2091732

[8] Suen, Y. T., Chan, R. C. H., & Badgett, M. V. L. (2021). The experiences of sexual and gender minorities in employment: Evidence from a large-scale survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in China. The China Quarterly, 245, 142-164. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741020000987

[9] Legislation Division, State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2023, March 20). Law of the People's Republic of China on Population and Family Planning. National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China. http://www.nhc.gov.cn/fzs/s3576/202303/5f2c908317154d2f8e57d1df4b0df41a.shtml

[10] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2021, January 28). Letter of reply to proposal No. 4404 of the third session of the 13th National Committee of the CPPCC. http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/xxgk_jyta/jyta_jiaoshisi/202101/t20210128_511584.html

[11] National Medical Products Administration. (2022, November 30). Announcement on the publication of the prohibited list of drugs sold on the Internet (No. 111 of 2022). https://www.nmpa.gov.cn/yaopin/ypggtg/20221130200847133.html

[12] National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China. (2022, April 20). Interpretation of the national catalog of restricted technologies and clinical application management specifications (2022 edition). http://www.nhc.gov.cn/yzygj/s3586/202204/5030835ba4d74ab995a0ebf1d55d5034.shtml

[13] Wachler, B. B., & Youn, T. (2022). Influenced: The impact of social media on our perception. ProQuest.

[14] Alrasheed, M., Alrasheed, S., & Alqahtani, A. S. (2022). Impact of social media exposure on risk perceptions, mental health outcomes, and preventive behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gale Academic OneFile.

[15] Guadix, M. G., & Incera, D. (2021). Homophobia is online: Sexual victimization and risks on the internet and mental health among bisexual, homosexual, pansexual, asexual, and queer adolescents. Computers in Human Behavior, 119. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106742

[16] Bowstead, J. M. (2023). Gay men's style: Fashion, dress and sexuality (Book review). Fashion Theory, 27(7), 1005-1009. https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2023.2211456