Wall Breaker or Wall Builder? The Dual Role of Livestreaming in Cross-Cultural Communication: A Case Study of IShowSpeed's China Tour

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Abstract. Under the development of global digitalization, live streaming has emerged as a new media form and is transforming the way of cross-cultural communication. Regarding the experiences of American live streamer IShowSpeed's China tour as a case study, this article explores the role of livestreaming as both a bridge and a barrier. A three-layered theoretical framework was utilized in this paper, including platforms, hosts, and audiences, revealing how key characteristics of live streaming, such as its strong interactivity and immediacy, contribute to real-time cultural exchange. This research indicates that livestreaming platforms create new spaces for cultural coexistence due to the ability to blur geographic and temporal boundaries, but also raise concerns about the negative value of attention-seeking. Although live streaming shortens the distances of distinct community members, several concerns were raised by the public regarding the possible threats it might bring, such as algorithmic recommendations, authenticity issues and misunderstanding of diverse cultural backgrounds. Generally, live streaming is a double-edged cultural format with both opportunities and challenges, allowing global audiences to communicate and negotiate while also deepening stereotypes. Theoretically, this paper offers an exploratory theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural communication. Practically, constructive insights were given into platform governance, streamer and audience engagement.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, IShowSpeed's China Tour, Livestreaming, Digital intimacy.

1. Introduction

Under the backdrop of the rapid development of digitalization, livestreaming profoundly changes the way of cross-cultural communication [1, 2]. Several social media platforms have started to provide the live stream function in their applications, making it possible for individuals to share diverse cultures and knowledge. With the population of social media worldwide, an increasing number of people choose to use live streaming spaces, as it provides an interaction that transcends time and geography, which allows audiences to immerse themselves in diverse cultures from different countries and areas. There are several significant characteristics of live streaming, such as interactivity, high engagement, immediacy, and low entry barriers. Compared to traditional culture and information dissemination approaches, live streaming has its own unique and irreplaceable strength in cultural communication. First of all, the voices of ordinary individuals and communities were amplified by livestreaming, and multiple cultural exchanges and mutual learning were accelerated during this process. Secondly, live streaming has features like high interaction, and thus, the distances of cultural communication in both time and space have been shortened. Cultural events around the world have transcended boundaries and gained global exposure through livestreaming, no matter if it is a festival gala or music and dance performances. Live streaming changed the public's motivation and methods of media participation. For example, in livestreaming, people are not acting as onlookers, on the contrary, they become the subject in cultural exchanges and actively interact with other audiences as well as share their own opinions on specific topics. This is proof that it can break the barriers of space, time and geography. However, a heated debate has been raised by the public, which is whether live streaming can bridge cultural gaps or whether it simply replicates and deepens existing cultural barriers within a new technological framework.

American livestreamer IShowSpeed's journey to China provided a vivid example through his humorous, exaggerated and improvisational performance style, which attracted the attention of millions of viewers around the world. His livestreams in China encompass street interactions, food experiences, and traditional games, demonstrating both the potential for cross-cultural exchange and the risks of misunderstanding and conflict. Real-time interaction and audience commentary allow unfamiliar cultures to be experienced and interpreted in real time, creating a digital public square. However, platform algorithms, commercial logic, and audience preferences for interpreting content continue to fragment these cultures into mere entertainment and novelty. This coexistence of potential and limitations makes live streaming a challenging cross-cultural media practice.

Using IShowSpeed's Chinese livestreams as an example, the purpose of this article is to explain how cultural barriers could be declined in livestreaming. Through a multiple framework consisting of platform, host, and audience, this paper discussed the strengths and limitations of livestreaming regarding cross-cultural communication, and offered a constructive conception on how social media could shape global cultural exchange.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Platform Layer: Algorithms, Governance, and the Boundaries of Cultural Flow

Existing research generally emphasizes that platforms are not merely intermediary channels in cross-cultural communication, but also institutional forces that shape the boundaries of communication. Gillespie, in Custodians of the Internet, argues that platforms exercise "invisible governance" over the visibility of information through algorithmic recommendations, content moderation, and commercial logic [3]. While this mechanism creates a seemingly open digital public space, it actually restricts the expression of cultural diversity. A similar perspective emerges in Zhang, who, using the case of Chinese live-streaming platforms [2], reveals that algorithms not only determine the reach of content but also prioritize "consumability" over deeper cultural context in cross-cultural communication.

At the same time, the transnational operations of platforms have also triggered cultural and political tensions. Plantin et al. proposed the concept of platformization, highlighting how global platforms interact with the policies, cultural institutions, and market logics of different countries as they expand [4]. In cross-cultural contexts, the technological architecture of platforms can serve as a medium for global connectivity, but can also exacerbate information gaps through commercialization and policy intervention. Therefore, IShowSpeed's journey in China relies not only on the dissemination effects of global platforms like YouTube, but is also inevitably affected by content blocking, algorithmic suppression, and cross-platform differences. These studies provide important theoretical support for understanding the functions of the platform layer.

2.2. Host Layer: Performance, Authenticity, and the Negotiation of Identity

Scholars studying the host layer have focused on the tension between its performative characteristics and the construction of authenticity. Abidin proposed the concept of calibrated amateurism [5], explaining that hosts often maintain intimacy with their audiences through seemingly casual improvisations during live broadcasts, but this authenticity is essentially a carefully calibrated performance. Similarly, Tolson, in his study of online self-media [6], noted that hosts' performances simultaneously possess both privacy and publicness, expressing their unique personal identities while also adapting to the expectations of both audiences and platforms.

The prominent role of performative figure is highlighted in cross-cultural communication background. In a study of Chinese livestreaming ecosystem, Zhang and Hjorth found that the host prefer to use cultural symbols to increase the translatability of content and help them understand cultural connotations when interacting with foreign audiences [7]. However, this translatability can lead to superficial consumption of culture, even reducing complex cultures to symbolic performance fodder. IShowSpeed's immediate reaction and his humorous personality act as a bridge to promote

diverse cultural understanding. However, the possible concern about alienation is also stressed. For example, overinterpretation or one-sided understanding of the anchor's behavior could reinforce stereotypes about China.

2.3. Audience Layer: Decoding, Empathy, and Cultural Interpretation

Research on audience levels emphasizes the crucial role of decoding in cross-cultural communication. Hall's encoding and decoding model laid the theoretical foundation for this discussion [8], arguing that audience interpretations do not strictly adhere to the communicator's intentions but are instead shaped by cultural background, social position, and media literacy. These differences in decoding are particularly pronounced in cross-cultural livestreaming.

Brewer holds the view that the instantaneous interactivity of livestreaming allows audiences to take part in cultural construction and boosts a sense of digital humanity [1]. This promotes cross-cultural empathy, but at the same time, it may accelerate the spread of prejudice as well. Marwick and Boyd's theory of perceived audience suggests that interactions between streamers and viewers often rely on assumptions about each other, and these assumptions [9], lacking cultural understanding, can easily lead to misinterpretations. Some Chinese audiences expressed their preference towards the authenticity that displayed by IShowSpeed during his livestreams through comments, however, some comments showed the criticism and hostility, saying that his behavior is rude, disrespectful, and even offensive. Different interpretations of the same livestreaming show that in cross-cultural communication, the audience actively participates in content construction based on individual understanding rather than passively accepting.

The existing literature on livestreaming's function remains gap. Most studies focus on a single dimension, lacking an integrated analysis of all three. Furthermore, while cross-cultural communication research typically focuses on macro-level national and regional differences, the impact of this on cultural understanding in the context of live streaming remains understudied. IShowSpeed's journey through China exemplifies this research gap. To explore the strengths and limitations of livestreaming in different cultural communication, this study put up a conceptual framework involved three-layers, which are platform, live streamers, and audience (Fig 1). Firstly, the platform tier focuses on how algorithms systems and mechanisms construct cultural dissemination boundaries. Secondly, the live streamers layer explains the connection between authenticity and performance. Thirdly, the construction of content by audiences from different cultural backgrounds and the reinforcement of stereotypes are discussed at the audience layer.

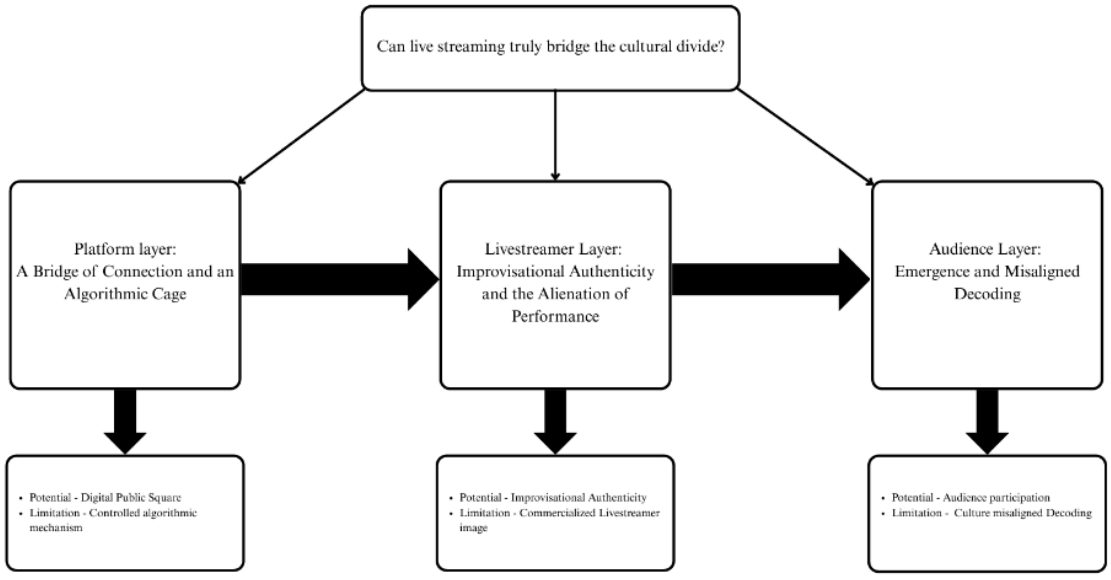


Fig 1. A three-level framework for live streaming to bridge the cultural gap (Photo credit: Original)

3. The Platform Layer: A Bridge of Connection or an Algorithmic Cage

As a core platform for live streaming, platforms possess a dual structure. Relying on instant transmission, synchronous interaction, and trans-lingual practice, they enable cultural events to be shared as they occur, creating a seamless public square for real-time negotiation of meaning. Operating under the logic of maximizing attention and governing compliance, their recommendation systems and review mechanisms reshape what is visible and how it is interpreted. Recommendation algorithms favor clips that quickly engage viewers and are fast-paced, while putting topics that require background knowledge and more complex cultural content at a distribution disadvantage. Consequently, while platforms expand the radius of cross-cultural encounters, they also narrow the paths to deeper understanding: culture becomes more visible, yet more difficult to discern.

The greatest contribution of live streaming platforms to cross-cultural communication lies in providing unprecedented instant connectivity [1]. Traditional media often experience time and space delays, as evidenced by the fact that films, documentaries, and news reports need to be edited, packaged, and distributed in order to reach a transnational audience. However, the technological framework of live streaming enables the global viewing of culture as it occurs, creating a delay-free cultural scene. Moreover, the technical feasibility of live streaming does not remain at the abstract level of media theory, but is concretely reflected in cross-cultural communication. By collapsing temporal and spatial barriers, livestreaming platforms provide the structural conditions for cultures to be experienced "as they unfold" rather than as post-produced narratives. This immediacy opens up new possibilities for audiences to participate in meaning-making, transforming cultural communication from a delayed process of representation into a shared process of co-presence and negotiation.

This characteristic was fully demonstrated during IShowSpeed's trip to China. While learning Chinese and participating in square dancing on the streets, the streamer was able to engage not only with local audiences but also with global audiences through subtitles and real-time commentary. For example, during a live broadcast of the "Chu River and Han River" video, Western viewers would raise questions about the scene in the comment section, and Chinese viewers would actively respond with supplementary explanations. This interaction fosters the process of cultural understanding, transforming viewers from spectators into participants in the construction of cross-cultures. The platform's high frequency and timely interactivity are its advantages. Regardless of their location, viewers can enter the same media space and negotiate cultural meanings with other viewers and streamers. This sense of cross-cultural coexistence not only shortens physical distance but also creates an immersive emotional experience [10]. Therefore, the platform's global connectivity can transcend cultural barriers through instant interaction, providing opportunities for multicultural understanding and becoming a new hope for cross-cultural exchange.

More importantly, the platform's global distribution mechanism expands the reach of culture. Audience discussions on topics such as virtuality and reality, light and spirit, demonstrate that live streaming technology not only promotes the global dissemination of intangible cultural heritage but also provides new interpretive frameworks for it in cross-cultural dialogue. This process resonates with Zhang's analysis of how live-streamed intangible heritage reshapes ethnic perceptions and cultural reception in global audiences [11]. A live stream of a night market experiences showcasing stinky tofu, an authentic Chinese snack, further reinforces this view. The audience's astonished reactions created a global classroom atmosphere, demonstrating the platform's technological potential to break down barriers of time and space, transforming cultural events into globally shared digital moments [1].

The instant connection and collaborative interpretation enabled by platforms have laid the technological foundation for cross-cultural understanding and reshaped visible content and how it is interpreted. However, when fast-paced, inquisitive content is favored by algorithms, while content requiring cultural and intellectual context is disadvantaged in terms of dissemination, cultural communication faces difficulties. Livestreaming platforms create a seemingly open and democratic digital space, but this freedom is sometimes an illusion. Algorithmic logic and governance

mechanisms create invisible boundaries for cultural communication, perpetuating this so-called openness within the framework of capital and power. In other words, the freedom granted by livestreaming platforms is both a real technological condition and a result of capitalist discipline.

Firstly, recommendation algorithms largely determine the visibility of cultural content. These algorithms are not neutral distribution tools, but rather operate according to the logic of maximizing attention and optimizing advertising revenue [3]. This means that platforms tend to promote content with strong visual impact, emotional tension, or novelty, rather than content with cultural depth or educational value. IShowSpeed shows that different live streams receive vastly different levels of audience engagement. While the cultural communication scenes in "Shaolin Temple Kung Fu" demonstrate the potential for interactivity and cross-cultural discussion, their recommendations and views are far inferior to those of the "Hot Pot Challenge" segment. The latter, due to its novelty and sensory-stimulating qualities, received 115 times the number of recommendations and was categorized by the algorithm as cultural curiosity. This disparity suggests that algorithms not only determine what culture is visible but also subtly shape a new cultural hierarchy. Gravino et al. similarly observe that algorithmic shifts across platforms reconfigure public discourse by privileging entertainment-oriented content [12]. Complex, profound cultural expressions are marginalized, while symbolic, fictional fragments are over-amplified.

Secondly, the platform's governance mechanisms also restrict cultural dissemination. Platforms regulate information flows by censoring real-time comments and blocking sensitive terms, such as those referring to people of color, racism, and insults. These measures are ostensibly intended to maintain order in the live broadcast process, but underlying them reflect the platform's position within the political and economic context and the direction of capital [2, 3]. Speed repeatedly demonstrated his sensitivity to these invisible boundaries during his livestreams in China. For example, in his interactions with passersby at night markets, he deliberately avoided topics involving social issues and quickly redirected content if potentially controversial symbols or behaviors appeared. This self-censorship stems not from a natural respect for cultural sensitivities but rather from a pre-existing adaptation to the platform's punitive mechanisms [13]. It reveals how platform governance, through internalized mechanisms, subtly compels streamers to obey rules, thereby restricting cultural dissemination within a controllable range. Notably, this restriction is not sporadic but a systemic structural repression. Content categorized as Chinese culture, such as Sichuan Opera face-changing, mahjong, hot pot, and night markets, is placed within a pre-set recommendation framework. Algorithms recode this content into symbols of tradition, cheapness, and exoticism through labeling, thereby blocking diverse cultural interpretations. This symbolic recoding formally grants cultural communication global visibility, but in essence it suffers from a lack of meaning. In other words, viewers experience not a complex and diverse China, but a "consumable China" shaped by algorithms and the logic of the platform economy. Therefore, the platform's freedom is based on controlled openness and limited diversity. The cultural dissemination potential of live streaming is compressed, and the space for cross-cultural understanding is reduced to a symbolic, entertainment-centric consumer experience. Under these conditions, platforms are both providers of cultural exchange and reproducers of cultural barriers. This contradiction, balancing freedom and repression, lies at the heart of whether livestreaming can truly bridge cultural divides.

4. The Livestreamer Layer: Improvisational Authenticity and the Alienation of Performance

If the platform represents the structural framework for the dissemination of livestreaming culture, then the livestreamer is the practitioner of cultural meaning production. Livestreamers are both cultural intermediaries and performers operating within the constraints of algorithmic logic and capital. Their behavior, style, and strategies determine how culture is translated and reproduced within the livestreaming landscape. The sense of authenticity created by livestreamers during their performances is not necessarily objective, nor does it necessarily represent their truest reactions.

Rather, it is a self-presentation constructed to maintain the personal image in the minds of the audiences. These authentic reactions, reflected in scenes like square dancing, night markets, food, and mahjong, demonstrate the true potential for cross-cultural exchange. They also allow international audiences to experience the humorous and endearing qualities of his live interactions, leading them to engage with other aspects of his China journey. However, his livestreams also revealed how commercial logic and traffic mechanisms have alienated this authenticity.

The personal immediate reactions and authentic interaction with viewers evident in IShowSpeed's livestreams from China make them crucial elements in cross-cultural communication. In the context of cross-cultural communication, the greatest potential of livestreamers lies in their ability to create a highly engaging and interactive atmosphere through improvisional authenticity. This authenticity is not the objective presentation of traditional media, but rather the fleeting yet credible state created by livestreamers through their immediate reactions, emotional expression, and interactions in unscripted situations. Differing from post-editing in movies or TV or precisely packaged product presentation in short social videos, the in-site authenticity in livestreaming is an irreproducible contemporary experience. In learning Chinese in the street, his accent and facial expression got laughter from the audience, yet it was exactly this awkward moment which reinforced his sincere learning attitude and inspired empathy. Commenters replied with correction of his pronunciation and even response in a combination of Chinese and English, slowly building up an atmosphere of mutual learning. This interactive function not only enables the host to adapt to the cultural scene earlier, but also turns passive audience into co-producers of cultural knowledge so that the threshold to cultural understanding between both parties could decrease.

The authenticity of the anchor is also reflected in its emotional contagion, as the genuine expression of improvisation is more likely to elicit a mirrored reaction from the audience than rehearsed performances [10, 14]. When Speed tries stinky tofu or silkworm pupae at the night market, his exaggerated expressions and immediate reactions, while entertaining, provide a strong space for the audience to project their emotions. While Western audiences might experience emotional synchrony by echoing the same reactions, Chinese audiences felt understood and cared for through laughter and explanations. This shared emotional path goes beyond language barriers and gives another way to talk to people from different cultures. It helps understand each other through direct communication based on emotion instead of knowledge. Besides, value of live authenticity also comes from how easy it is to change identity which is usually a set role or a set commentator's identity in media. In live streaming, though, the host's identity changes all the time. West might think of it as self-entertainment, while people in China might think of it as an attempt to fit in with the local culture. Fluidity of identity makes cross-cultural communication more possible because it lets different groups build cultural meaning in different ways instead of as a single thing. Also, the fact that live broadcasts are real helps create a decentralized communication effect. During the livestream, audience comments about the Forbidden City tour and wearing an imperial hat often give useful information about cultural knowledge that is often very important to cultural significance. When Speed's awkward square dance moves made people laugh, the audience went beyond just teasing him to talk about how square dance is important for community and intergenerational exchange in Chinese society. So, cultural communication is no longer just a one-way presentation by the host. Instead, it is always being negotiated, added to, and reproduced through interaction between the audience and the host. This makes the creation and sharing of culture more open and varied.

In short, the livestreamer's contagious authority, both in authenticity and in the ability to improvise, reveals the multiple potentiality of livestreaming. More interactive as a medium, livestreaming enables its users to more easily partake in the richest local culture, which involves them in the process and enables them to build identities in a supple manner. These characteristics set livestreaming apart from other forms of media, rendering it among the most creative methods of users across varied cultural backgrounds to communicate with each other.

Although live streamers' on-site authenticity holds incredible potential for cross-cultural communication, such authenticity inevitably becomes problematic and entangled in commercial

rationale and traffic principles, with the risk of alienation of authenticity. This risk may result in viewers having an unaccountable sense of dissonance watching live streams. This dissonance mainly comes from the understanding of such behavior of streamer being manipulated performance. IShowSpeed's spontaneous humor and over-exaggerated reaction in live streams might see like being natural and genuine on the outset, however, such behavior has been long conditioned by audience expectation and platform rationale and slowly congealed into a cliche. With livstreaming users always anticipating him to make outsize performances in food challenge (e.g., Sichuan hot pot) or dance performance, and his need to fulfill such expectation to acquire more video traffic and likes, such so-called authenticity has slowly congealed into a cliche performance, removing its serendipity and spontaneity.

Furthermore, the identity of the livestreamer is usually rebuilt into a commodified character. In the live industrial chain, the livestreamer is not only a medium of cultural experience but also a commodity that functions based on the logic of capital. Speed's live streams are plenteously interrupted by product placement, brand endorsement, or potential commercial co-operations, which imply that the cultural behaviors presented are motivated not only by the exploration interests but also by commercial interests. Liu and Qiu describe this as the commodification of digital intimacy, where authentic connection is reframed as a transactional affective labor [15]. Once this pattern becomes obvious, the audience will texturally read the streamer's conduct as a synthesis between cultural experience and commercial performance, even doubting the authenticity of its intentions. This procedure disvalues the worth of trans-cultural communication since the audience's attention shifts easily and gradually from the cultural content to the streamer's commercial identity. In the context of live streaming, platform logic and commercial pressures force streamers to maintain a frontstage persona for a long time. As a result, the front stage performance gradually consumes backstage authenticity. What viewers see as Speed is no longer a spontaneous individual reaction, but a performative identity shaped by the logic of capital.

Furthermore, this commodification and alienation may also deepen the superficiality and stereotyping of cross-cultural communication. When livestreamers are forced to constantly repeat the exaggerated and funny formula, culture is framed as a tool for generating jokes and traffic. Chinese cuisine, dance, and language learning, which could serve as gateways to deeper understanding, are instead reduced to exotic wonders for quick consumption under the guise of traffic. This shift not only diminishes the depth of cultural understanding but also risks further solidifying existing stereotypes, quietly perpetuating cross-cultural divides beneath the guise of entertainment-driven communication.

5. Audience Layer: Emergence and Misaligned Decoding

If the platform determines the structural conditions for cultural dissemination and the host shapes the performative forms of cultural practice, then the audience is the ultimate destination for meaning production. Viewers are not merely recipients of information but also reproducers of meaning. Their decoding methods determine whether livestreaming can truly promote cross-cultural understanding. However, audience participation can foster empathy and learning, but it can also lead to misinterpretation and the reproduction of stereotypes.

In the context of live streaming, viewers are no longer passive recipients but core participants in the construction of meaning. Viewers are allowed to send comments for real-time interaction, which will appear directly on the live screen. This real-time interaction places geographically dispersed individuals within the same timeframe. Around the same event, viewers experience expressions of surprise, hesitation, and appropriate or impolite behavior, forming synchronized perceptual and emotional circuits. The interactive channel created by the bullet screen allows this emotional convergence to converge and spread rapidly, creating a low-conflict, negotiable atmosphere for subsequent interpretation and learning. This phenomenon aligns with Zhao's discussion of bullet-comment communities as 'floating publics,' where emotional exchanges form transient yet powerful

digital collectives [16]. Bullet screen in real-time broadcasts is not commentary in any direction but rather real-time communication. As Li and Chen found in their study of Danmu in esports videos, such real-time commentary fosters a sense of collective presence and shared participation [17]. All the opinions of everyone are accessible to all others, and this public nature makes it possible for the audience with comparable feelings or views to converge easily. For instance, when a member finds another member releasing a bulletin that shares the same opinion with them, they respond instantly or give the opinion of agreement so creating a sense of identification. However, where they read opinions that they oppose, they will also release an opinion in disputation or opposition. In this manner, barrage commentary becomes a focus point for feelings and opinions, possibly inflating conflict or facilitating negotiation and collaboration, generating an elite atmosphere of group discourse. Once this atmosphere achieves a positive feedback loop, it will propel additional interpretation, extension, or supplementation of the commentary, enhancing interaction depth and contiguity. Emotion is no antithesis to knowledge, but a sine qua non to cognitive processing. Once group emotions have been fine-tuned in real-time interaction, viewers become more inclined to read, adopt, and construct background data and contextual explanations contributed by others. Cross-cultural empathy then becomes an accelerator of knowledge negotiation, and no terminus.

On a more profound level, this real-time communication also cultivates the potential of trans-cultural sympathetic understanding. Although IShowSpeed's feelings while experiencing Chinese delicacies such as stinky tofu and hot pot were taken to the extreme, it also opened the opportunity for viewers to let it out. Research shows that emotional resonance often sparks audience interest and memory more effectively than information presented [18]. Amidst laughter and discussion, viewers gradually shifted from curiosity sparked by the livestream to a cultural understanding of the promotional content. Some even began to delve into the historical origins of the cuisine or gained a new understanding of the social function of Chinese night markets. This demonstrates that cross-cultural empathy transcends mere curiosity and deepens through the chain of information, emotion, and knowledge.

In addition to this, audience interaction also builds a collaborative environment. In Speed's learning mahjong during the livestream, it appeared awkward and clumsy, yet the audience's commentary was always full of encouragement and praise, and even generated moments of viewers working in concert to teach the host how to learn the game. In this process, the mahjong becomes something more than entertainment or bet taking, and interprets it anew in terms of logic, sociology, and cultural practice. That is, immediate feedback and collective knowledge of the audience strengthen the multiple meanings of culture and prevent them from dissolving into a single narrative. This interactive process also builds up a moment of instant cross-cultural co-presence. With real-time interaction, the audience experiences a scenario where they participate in an unknown culture in real-time with the host. Their laughter, questions, and explanations all converge in a virtual space into a moment of co-experience. In contrast to the moment of latency and Uni-directional characteristic of traditional media, livestreaming presents a moment of co-experience for both audience and host and builds up knowledge about culture in a deeper sense.

While audience participation fosters interaction and empathy in cross-cultural communication, it also carries the risk of decoding violence. In cultural studies, decoding violence involves how audiences decipher other cultures by placing them into existing symbolic systems or ideologies and hence perverting or oversimplifying them. This was a frequent incident in IShowSpeed's China tour. On seeing IShowSpeed eat foods such as stinky tofu and silkworm pupae, the commentators' space was filled with exoticism and curiosity. Some audience comments referred to the local snacks as "exotic Asian food" and even ridiculed it with terms such as "weird" and "unacceptable". With the growing salient social role of night markets in Chinese cities, this interpretation not only wipes out the cultural reference behind the food but also unconsciously confirms Oriental stereotypes. Culture was dissolved from its rich social practice to being a spectacle, and its communication impact was still more about laughter and curiosity than understanding and sympathy. Similar experiences also happened in language learning. On seeing IShowSpeed awkwardly mimic Chinese salutations, some

commentators' space was taken up with derision and jeer, seeing it more as a comedy than an effort at learning culture. Although some commentators actively provided context and meaning, this conflict between earnest learning and consumption of entertainment illustrates that the interpretation of the viewers in the livestreams is subject to algorithmic suggestions and the social environment. In short, audience feedback is not only individual behavior; it is an outsider solution of group emotions under the vibrant environment provided by the platform itself. This environment has more chances to promote misunderstanding based on emotions rather than understanding based on reason.

A more subtle limitation lies in the fact that collective discussions sometimes re-embed cultural elements within pre-existing Western contexts. For example, some viewers, while watching a Chinese chess match, did not attempt to understand the historical and cultural significance of the Chu-Han dividing line, but instead compared it to a Cold War symbol or a divided nation, thereby overlaying the inherent logic of Chinese culture with Western political metaphors. This transference of meaning seemingly emerges in the guise of cultural comparison, yet in effect constitutes cognitive hegemony, imposing Western narrative structures on other cultures by force. In addition, audiences' cross-cultural exposure also has a tendency toward the selective empathetic end [19]. They tend to respond empathetically in frivolous and pleasurable settings. Viewers, for instance, were energetic and warm in response to IShowSpeed sampling Chinese cuisine and remained indifferent or skipped segments related to deep background or touchy societal matters. This entertainment-focused viewing strategy diminishes the depth of cultural exchange and keeps cross-cultural understanding superficial. Thus, while livestreaming breaks down the constraints of time and space, it may not necessarily bridge the cultural understanding gap. Cultural adaptability should be optimized as it could sustain meaningful global communication [20].

Hence, the limitation of the audience is that they indulge in the replication of cultural meaning with real-time interaction. But this replication in no sense results in understanding and sympathy; rather, it increases stereotypes, simplification, and distortions. Algorithms, commentary, and aggregated emotions in the livestreaming platforms get entangled to make the viewers interpret content in favor of consumption on entertainment instead of acquiring knowledge. This brings to light the paradox of audience that it serves to both assert trans-cultural understanding and breed misunderstanding and prejudice. But these livestreaming platforms are created to entertain, and to some degree at least, understanding and perception of culture in the viewers are also conditioned in terms of entertainment itself.

6. Conclusion

This article, using IShowSpeed's live streaming in China as a case study, employs a three-tiered framework of Platform-Host-Audience to explore the potential and limitations of live streaming in cross-cultural communication. At the platform level, live streaming technology provides structural conditions for instant connection and real-time interaction for cross-cultural communication. But concurrently, algorithms and governance processes of the platform, motivated by visibility, entertainment, and commercialism, very frequently betray profound cultural understanding. Algorithmic optimization should prioritize cultural adaptability to sustain meaningful global communication. At the host end, emotional connection and identity negotiation afforded by the improvisational authenticity of live streaming to viewers become possible, yet at the same time become very susceptible to falling into performance and commodification motivated by traffic and capital logic. In terms of the audience, audience participation and emotional connection become climacteric in the construction of transcultural meaning, yet very frequently these interpretations degenerate into entertainment consumption and even recreate stereotypes.

Theoretically, this three-tiered framework, which integrates platform structure, host practices, and audience interpretations, provides a more systematic perspective for understanding the complex dynamics of cross-cultural live streaming. Practically, this research demonstrates that live streaming is neither a natural bridge nor a simple obstacle, but rather a contested space teeming with potential

and risk. Platforms need to strike a balance between visibility and depth in their algorithmic distribution and governance mechanisms to avoid marginalizing diverse cultural expressions. The implication for livestreamers is that they must maintain the originality of their livestream content while not completely succumbing to commercial logic. Only by striking a balance between the two can they maintain the long-term sustainable development of livestreaming. For viewers, this article suggests that livestream audiences should move beyond an entertainment-first approach to understanding culture and adopt a more critical and open mindset.

Future research could further compare live streaming practices across various platforms and cultural contexts, exploring how different technological affordances, governance systems, and audience composition shape the possibilities for cross-cultural understanding. This expansion may allow researchers to reflect more deeply on whether live streaming can truly develop into a more sustainable and equitable medium for global cultural communication.

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