Research on the Cultural Brand of Internet Celebrities in the Post-epidemic Era

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Abstract: In the internet environment, it is not easy for internet celebrities to stand out from the crowd. Internet celebrities need to adapt to market rules and establish unique cultural brands, they are constructing their own cultural brands in a different way in the post-epidemic era. This study takes makeup and beauty influencers as a case to explore the cultural brand construction, profit distribution model and cultural brand maintenance of internet celebrities. The research results are as follows: Super professional ability and special style can help internet celebrities construct characteristics of cultural brand that distinguish them from others. The cultural brand construction of internet celebrities in the post pandemic era is gradually showing a trend of public welfare development, and with the enhancement of cultural brand influence, many internet celebrities have entered a high tide of development, and their profit distribution models have evolved into complex and diversified patterns, the form of audience commodity is constantly upgrading and evolving. As intermediaries connecting audiences with public welfare activities, internet celebrities gradually gain good reputations in the process of promoting public welfare undertakings. This reputation is an intangible asset that can not only stimulate people's enthusiasm for public welfare activities to a certain extent, but also potentially enhance the social influence of internet celebrities, thereby driving the development of the internet celebrity industry economy and even generating more long-term value. Internet celebrities gradually master the skills of maintaining cultural brands in practice, and to a certain extent, achieve transformation among cultural capital and economic capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. This article aims to expand the content field of internet celebrity research from the perspective of cultural brands, helping people understand and grasp the situation of emerging cultural industries.

Keywords: Post-epidemic era, Internet celebrity, Cultural brand

1. Research Background

In the noisy internet environment, new media phenomena emerge in endlessly, and internet celebrity is one of the controversial topics. Since the "first year of internet celebrities" in 2016, the number of internet celebrities in Chinese Mainland has grown in a "blowout" manner, and the number of fans is also growing. According to the 2018 China Internet Celebrity Economic Development Insight Report, as of May 2018, the total number of fans of Chinese internet celebrities has reached 588 million, a year-on-year increase of 25%. The growth of fan base has driven a rapid increase in the number of internet celebrities. The number of internet celebrities with a fan base of over 100000 has increased by 51% compared to last year, and the number of most influential internet celebrities with a fan base of over 1 million has increased by 23%[1]. With the help of the internet, internet celebrities can spread information widely and rapidly, accumulate a large number of fans, and become the object of high attention. From content production to content consumption, the vigorous development of internet celebrity economy is based on the support of fans, and the development mechanism of internet celebrities can break through the "threshold restrictions" and other factors in the traditional entertainment industry to a certain extent.

In today's open and prosperous internet environment, it is not easy for internet celebrities to stand out. As special cultural workers, internet celebrities must adapt to market rules and establish unique cultural brands. With the great improvement of economic level, people are no longer satisfied with basic material consumption, spiritual and cultural consumption is increasingly valued. If the consumption value of general commercial brands lies in obtaining functional benefits, then cultural brands are more inclined to provide consumers with leisure, entertainment, and emotional experiences.

Consumers not only pay attention to the effectiveness of product use, but also increasingly focus on the consumption experience of cultural symbols and content[2]. Many people are keen on consuming short videos and pictures produced by internet celebrities. These cultural products stimulate people's visual and psychological perception to a certain extent, and even affect people's behavior. The dual characteristics of culture and economy of internet celebrities require them to pay attention to the promotion of their commercial value while developing their cultural significance. So we can see that many internet celebrities swing between cultural production and commercial profits, trying to maintain a balance through continuous practices. It has been proven that such a balance is not easy to achieve. Taking the internet celebrity "Li Ge" as an example, she has attracted many fans because of her beautiful voice and looks. At the time of her great popularity, her vanity was at play, and she openly sold her private WeChat account by asking for gifts, which led to strong resistance and disgust from fans. Therefore, for today's internet celebrities, how to stand out in fierce competition and how to balance their cultural significance and commercial value in the process of rapid development are extremely challenging issues. As the epidemic gradually gets under control, internet celebrities in the post epidemic era are constructing their own cultural brands in a different way. How do internet celebrities construct differentiated cultural brands through multimodal language and art (such as posts, pictures, and short videos)? How does the cultural brand of internet celebrities affect their profit distribution model? The follow-up and response to these questions not only helps people understand the development situation of emerging cultural industries and summarizes practical skills for industry development, but also helps researchers reflect on the theoretical value and practical significance of traditional cultural labor.

In order to further approach internet celebrities, this study focuses on makeup and beauty influencers as the subject of online observation. The researcher will use the method of text analysis to carefully analyze the posts, pictures, and videos of internet celebrities, aiming to explore the complex situation and adaptation process of internet celebrities in the social structure, as well as the cultural brand construction of internet celebrities in the post epidemic era. The researcher will also carefully examine the relevant interview programs of internet celebrities. Most of these video materials are hosts conducting face-to-face interviews with internet celebrities based on key topics, and the scene atmosphere, language, and facial expressions are worth analyzing in detail. The texts produced by internet celebrities and related comments from netizens are all included in the scope of investigation, such as the length of the text? What words were used? Especially what prominent words were used? These aspects are worth careful consideration[3]. Tone, emoticons, and other details are also important analysis objects that cannot be ignored, because text analysis is the analysis of context, seeking the reasonable meaning behind language in details and between lines. In other words, the analysis of a text cannot only focus on the literal writing or images themselves, what (spatiotemporal) contextual context the text is placed in, why it is in this (spatiotemporal) contextual context, and what social effects do all of the above produce? These are important questions worth exploring[4].

2. Research and analysis

2.1. The Cultural Brand Construction of Internet Celebrities: Differentiated Characteristics and Public Welfare Trends

In recent years, the popular trend of we-media has led to the "blowout" development of Internet celebrities. Internet celebrities who are good at promoting cosmetics, food, singing and dancing are active in front of the camera, involving people with different interests in the gorgeous landscape, and jointly forming a wonderful carnival ceremony. As mentioned above, the internet celebrity, a special cultural worker, has both cultural and economic characteristics. On the one hand, their own personality and production content should promote them to become unique and outstanding individuals in the flourishing subculture. On the other hand, the theme of their production content needs to meet the market demand to obtain benefits and sustainable development. Most makeup and beauty influencers are women, they always teach skilled makeup techniques on their naturally beautiful faces, their coquettish voices and delicate appearances seem to be showing off. However, some internet celebrities have unique style, pay attention to separating themselves from others, dare to show face without makeup, the real state before makeup and the delicate and flawless state after makeup is in stark contrast, attracting many fans by superb makeup skills. In addition, as a man, Li Jiaqi has strong professional ability and friendly language style, the strong gender contrast in wearing lipstick has attracted the attention of many netizens, helping him to have a cultural brand characteristics that distinguish him from others, and develop into an important public figure. Li Jiaqi, known as the

"Lipstick Brother", has outstanding understanding and explanation skills for beauty products. His experience as a Beauty Adviser (BA) at a counter has given him rich practical experience. With the rise of the trend of "BA becoming an internet celebrity", Li Jiaqi transformed into a Taobao anchor and sold 15000 lipsticks in 5 minutes, becoming a well-known top anchor and top internet celebrity on Taobao. Li Jiaqi's cultural brand construction mostly stems from the training and effort of emotional labor.

Emotional labor is a form of work that achieves commercial purposes or obtains salary by obeying the fixed emotional rules of the post. In the dreamlike virtual society, emotional labor is extremely important, which not only involves emotional regulation, but also has subtle regulations on the image of workers[5]. Compared with traditional cultural workers, internet celebrities need to invest instant and interactive emotional labor in their work to establish emotionally personified brands with emotional appeal. The high-quality personified brands of internet celebrities can not only capture the attention of the audience, but also bring unique emotional experience to people and create differentiated deep impressions. For example, Li Jiaqi often attracts the attention of many fans by showing pretty body symbols and charming temperament. Smiling expressions, affectionate nicknames, unique languages such as "Oh My God", "buy it, buy it", constitute his way of instant interaction and become an important skill for internet celebrities to manage intimate relationships. The attractive physical and emotional informations of internet celebrities appear, stimulating the senses and promoting emotional resonance of fans, transforming fans' attention into sustained attraction, and then generating an impact on actions. Li Jiaqi and his team also upload the filmed video to a number of media platforms (such as Weibo and Tiktok) at the same time, which are interlinked and interconnected, and gradually obtain the economic benefits of "one production, multiple use" through comprehensively "emotional blackmail".

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the global industry, economy and communication pattern have undergone great changes. Social media and major website platforms play an important role in information dissemination. On the one hand, they provide timely information about the epidemic, on the other hand, they provide timely and appropriate entertainment products to help people relieve anxiety and tension in the process of entertainment consumption. The form of "online variety show" and "internet celebrities selling goods" have promoted the development of the real economy to a certain extent. Meanwhile, the cultural brand construction of internet celebrities has undergone some changes, many internet celebrities have actively participated in public welfare undertakings, voluntarily donating medical supplies, and jointly organizing public welfare live broadcasts with CCTV anchors, sharing touching stories of medical staff in the fight against the epidemic. Weibo and other media platforms have recorded the public welfare behaviors of internet celebrities, reflecting the change of identity of some internet celebrities from fashion leaders to social public welfare participants, highlighting the cultural attributes of internet celebrities and their cultural brands, which are closely related to public discourse such as "society" and "public welfare". When the cultural brands of internet celebrities develop towards public welfare, their functions and values are not limited to product promotion, but also to some extent stimulate user behaviors and achieve a transformation of some social reality forces[6].The success of these transformations is closely related to the characteristics of cultural brand, word-of-mouth image, live broadcast methods and skills of internet celebrities. In the post-epidemic era, it is common for internet celebrities to establish and maintain good images and cultural brands through public welfare behaviors. As indicated in the "Report on Social Responsibility of the Most Influential Internet Celebrities", internet celebrities such as Li Jiaqi and Li Ziqi are actively "promoting products" and "engaging in public welfare" through the form of public welfare live broadcasts, demonstrating the outstanding quality of social responsibility of internet celebrities[7]. As an innovative form of public welfare communication, public welfare live broadcasting needs to create an opportunity for emotional resonance, the information disclosed in the process of live broadcasting must be authentic and credible, and creative interactive elements need to be incorporated into live broadcasting activities to enhance participation. In short, it is not easy to mobilize people to implement purchasing behaviors in a short time.

2.2. Cultural Brands and Profit Distribution Models of Internet Celebrities: Diversified Income Sources and Reputation Economy

The generation of internet celebrities serves as the premise for the economic development of internet celebrities, and the form of internet celebrities is constantly evolving in the continuous advancement of science and technology. Internet web1.0 is the era of text reading, where talented network experts and network writers are active in major forums. The internet ecology engendered by blogs focuses on the display of pictures. Internet celebrities such as Sister Fu Rong draw attention with their peculiar images and attempt to promote the diversification of the monetization mode with certain

power. With the prevalence of Weibo, a group of "super V" represented by Yao Chen emerges, and the original discourse structure of the network world is disrupted to some extent. When we step into the widescreen era of internet development, the emergence of WeChat public accounts, videos, live broadcasts, and audio platforms has pushed the development of internet celebrities to a new climax. From Wang Sicong's "post-90s" girlfriend Xue Li (Taobao store owner) to Papi Jiang, internet celebrities in the new era are increasingly diverse[8]. The internet celebrity economy belongs to the category of fan economy, which is a business revenue generating behavior based on the relationship between fans and followers[9]. Regardless of the type of internet celebrity, only by managing the intimate relationship between celebrities and fans, maintaining high loyalty or stickiness among fans, can monetization mechanisms (such as e-commerce shopping, tipping encouragement, and advertising implantation) be effective. The realization of the internet celebrity economy has broken the traditional business model, improved the social and economic structure, and promoted the vigorous development of related industries to some extent.

In the internet celebrity industry in the new media era, many internet celebrities tend to sign contracts with brokerage firms, cooperate with labor unions, or join MCN companies. Internet celebrities rely on external forces in various aspects of production and sales, which gives rise to complex and diverse profit distribution models. Although many livestreamers appear to earn huge income through monetization mechanisms such as tipping, advertising, and e-commerce, in fact, these revenues are proportionally distributed to agencies such as talent agencies and live streaming platforms, and we don't know how much money internet celebrities ultimately make. Moreover, the profit distribution ratios of different brokerage companies and live streaming platforms vary, and the varying levels of qualifications of various internet celebrities determine their base salaries to some extent, the profit distribution model of the internet celebrity industry is complex. With the expansion of the influence scope of cultural brands, many internet celebrities have entered the peak period of development, and their profit distribution modes are relatively diversified. In addition to the income from live broadcast gifts, advertising endorsements and other income, some internet celebrities' annual income mainly comes from Taobao live broadcast, Tiktok, Taobao stores and other aspects. Taking Li Jiaqi as an example, the three Taobao stores (Jiaqi Global Selection, Li Jiaqi Exclusive Store, and Li Jiaqi Overseas Exclusive Store) mainly sell beauty and skincare products. Although the sales revenue varies, they are all important components of internet celebrity income. Li Jiaqi is the co-founder of Mei ONE and a shareholder of some companies, his actual income is very complicated to calculate[10].

According to the number of followers, ability to monetize and degree of specialization, internet celebrities are often divided into three categories: internet microcelebrities, middle-level internet celebrities and most influential internet celebrities. Internet microcelebrities are often at the end of the industrial chain, in the increasingly competitive market environment, due to a lack of voice, dancing in shackles and freely transitioning between the "front" and "back" spaces has become a survival skill that they must learn. The number and activity level of accounts of middle-level internet celebrities are enough to become the core competitiveness of many short video platforms, but in these platforms that rely on the mainstream feed flow and CTR logic, the relationship between content and users is random, and the fans will eventually precipitate to the platform rather than the account[11]. Some middle-level internet celebrities gradually take action to guide the traffic to their own media platforms, and selling goods has become their expected cash model. However, some internet celebrities are concerned that their fans will detest the act of selling goods with a strong commercial atmosphere, they are balancing their cultural values with their commercial values, and their choices often determine their future. Most influential internet celebrities tend to transform into superstars, some film and television groups and star-making systems are willing to let qualified internet celebrities act in movies and TV series,, the barrier between the star and internet celebrities seems to be broken. Although most influential internet celebrities dream of becoming superstars, different internet celebrities have different internal qualifications and external opportunities, the way of internet celebrities' transformation cannot be replicated in some cases. Moreover, as some internet celebrities have been regulated by relevant departments due to their inappropriate words and deeds, as public figures, internet celebrities need to constantly improve their own literacy and spread positive values.

No matter how the media is updated, people's attention is always the key to the survival of the media. Dallas Smythe's theory of the audience commodity is enlightening, he believes that TV media attract viewers to TV sets through programs, and package their data to sell to advertisers, so viewers become temporary commodities, but also the real commodities of commercial radio and television[12]. Compared with traditional media television, the Internet has the characteristics of liquid flow and rapid change, which is followed by the continuous upgrading and evolution of the form of audience commodity. Some internet celebrities sometimes call on fans to actively provide interesting stories, and

then incorporate these stories into their video production, so fans are working when they provide interesting stories, which consumes time and energy, but they are willing to pay for it. The reason for this is that the influencer's infectious cultural brand brings a pleasant spiritual experience to fans.

As intermediaries connecting audiences with public welfare activities, internet celebrities gradually gain good reputations in the process of promoting public welfare undertakings. This reputation is an intangible asset that can not only stimulate people's enthusiasm for public welfare activities to a certain extent, but also potentially enhance the social influence of internet celebrities, thereby driving the development of the internet celebrity industry economy and even generating more long-term value. As explained by Ryan, in the symbolic society of the cultural industry, fame can identify the professional talents and skills of cultural workers. For laborers, fame in the cultural industry is an indicator of their labor value[13].

2.3. Maintaining the Cultural Brand of Internet Celebrities: Wavering Between the Dual Logic of Culture and Economy

Although internet celebrities in the post-epidemic era are gradually linked with public welfare communication, some people still believe that the motive of internet celebrities' public welfare live broadcasting is to respond to the government's call to obtain recognition and rewards. Compared with daily livestream sales, the number of public welfare livestream is limited. When internet celebrities actively make profits in order to survive, the pure spiritual meaning contained in cultural brands seems to be tainted by the smell of money. How to balance their own cultural significance and commercial value has become a key issue faced by internet celebrities. In fact, internet celebrities are maintaining their own cultural brands through a variety of ways, grasp the stable relationship between culture and business. On the one hand, internet celebrities adhere to the strict selection of products, continue to share cheap and good things, serve every audience with responsible attitude, establish the reputation of "conscientious sellers". On the other hand, internet celebrities continue to construct attractive images through the confluence of meaning symbols, timely release dynamic information on the we-media platform, and maintain close contact with fans.

After a series of practices and experiences, many internet celebrities now deeply understand the "law of the jungle" of the market and the importance of audience attention, and gradually form their own unique language style, speech system, ability to deal with emergencies in a timely manner, and public relations strategies to effectively resolve crises on the basis of enhancing team cooperation and accumulating product expertise. Some scholars have explained Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" as "a certain way of being, that is a state of being both inside and outside of a person, which includes temperament, character in life, but also means a fixed way of acting, a way of living, and a persistent endowment influenced by external behavior, education and personal efforts"[14]. Specifically, the survival mentality of internet celebrities is gradually shaped in continuous practice, and its internal personality willing to share and external efforts to get more fans determine the complexity of the survival mentality. With the help of repeated practice, internet celebrities have gradually deepened their insight into their own field, trying to find a balance between objective limitations and internal subjective initiative, and carefully constructing a professional behavior model. The construction of this professional behavior model reflects that the development of internet celebrities has entered a critical period. Internet celebrities can integrate external symbolic content and other external factors into their internal ideological system and form corresponding behavioral tendencies[15]. Now internet celebrities have been familiar with the taste and psychological characteristics of the audience, they can skillfully use their own professional knowledge and classic speech to attract attention, successfully manage the flow through cooperation with the star. In other words, internet celebrities who swing between the binary logic of culture and economy gradually master the skills of maintaining cultural brands in practice, so they can develop from internet microcelebrities with a small number of fans to most influential internet celebrities with top-level flow

Under circumstances of high exposure and top-level flow, internet celebrities, as special cultural workers, are gradually moving towards the identity of celebrities and other public figures, shouldering greater social responsibilities and obligations. During the special period of the epidemic outbreak, the rapid increase in online sales benefits internet celebrities and their live streaming industry. Internet celebrities will also try to give back to society through donating materials, public welfare live streaming, and other means. In an interview program, Li Jiaqi talked about his experience of becoming famous. Before becoming an internet celebrity, he was just a beauty consultant who was willing to promote cosmetics. His professional knowledge of cosmetics and proficient mastery of makeup techniques together formed a merged form of cultural capital, which was hidden in his own knowledge

system and difficult to be given and exchanged as material possessions. But when he began to engage in live streaming by chance, his cultural capital was concretized through multimodal language and symbol convergence. With the continuous production and release of high-quality videos, the scale of Li Jiaqi's fans has gradually expanded, the degree of fan adhesion has gradually increased, and the fan communities on media platforms have gradually been established and connected. Many agile businesses gain insight into market opportunities and invite internet celebrities to become product salespeople who promote their products directly, or through indirect marketing and other means. As a result, the transformation among cultural capital and economic capital, social capital, and symbolic capital becomes possible.

In Bourdieu's capital theory, capital exists in the form of economic capital (property), social capital (mainly manifested as social relationship networks), cultural capital (especially educational qualifications), symbolic capital (titles and prestige), and various forms of capital can be converted into each other[16]. The cultural capital possessed by internet celebrities helps them gain the support and affection of their fans, and attract fans to form social networks such as communities. The title of "Lipstick Brother" also enhances the social identity of internet celebrities, as Li Jiaqi said in an interview, "Especially when I recommend a product to customers, they love it... I feel that everything I do is meaningful and worthwhile"[17]. At the same time, businesses have noticed the charming qualities and influential reputations of internet celebrities, and are willing to invite them to become product spokespersons. As a result, internet celebrities have considerable economic income, realizing the transformation from social capital and symbolic capital to economic capital. However, economic capital is not the end of the capital conversion process. Internet celebrities who earn substantial income can purchase more branded products for trial use, continuously improve their professional abilities, attract more fans and create greater reputations. In other words, under the specific conditions of internet celebrity field, economic capital gradually rises and retracts, transforming into valuable cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital, forming a cyclical capital conversion loop.

3. Discussions and conclusions

To sum up, it is not easy for internet celebrities to stand out from the crowd. As special cultural workers, internet celebrities need to adapt to market rules and establish unique cultural brands. This study takes makeup and beauty internet celebrities as the object of online observation and makes a detailed analysis through text analysis, aiming to explore the cultural brand construction, profit distribution mode, the complex process of cultural brand maintenance and survival mentality of internet celebrities in the post-epidemic era. The researcher has found that super professional ability and special style can help Internet celebrities to construct characteristics of cultural brand that distinguish them from others. The cultural brand construction of internet celebrities in the post pandemic era is gradually showing a trend of public welfare development, and with the enhancement of cultural brand influence, many internet celebrities have entered a high tide of development, and their profit distribution models have evolved into complex and diversified patterns. Compared with traditional media television, the internet has the characteristics of liquid flow and rapid change, the form of audience commodity is constantly upgrading and evolving. In the post-epidemic era, cultural brands and public welfare live broadcasting have contributed to many non-profit actions. These non-profit behaviors seem to be unable to make money, but in fact, they bring good reputations to internet celebrities, attract more fans and lay a good foundation for the smooth development of commercial promotion, thus helping to enter a virtuous circle of development.

When internet celebrities actively make profits in order to survive, the pure spiritual meaning contained in their cultural brands seems to be tainted by the smell of money, and internet celebrities who swing between the dual logic of culture and economy gradually master the skills of maintaining cultural brands in practice.With the help of repeated practice, internet celebrities have gradually deepened their insight into their own field, trying to find a balance between objective limitations and internal subjective initiative, and carefully constructing a professional behavior model. The construction of this professional behavior model reflects that the development of internet celebrities has entered a critical period. Internet celebrities can integrate external symbolic content and other external factors into their internal ideological system and form corresponding behavioral tendencies. Some people still believe that the motive of internet celebrities' public welfare live broadcasting is to respond to the government's call to obtain recognition and rewards, under circumstances of high exposure and top-level flow, as special cultural workers, internet celebrities are gradually moving toward the identity of public figures, and indeed shoulder greater social responsibilities and obligations. Under the specific conditions of internet celebrity field, cultural capital and economic capital, social capital and symbolic

capital are converted to each other, gradually forming a recurring capital conversion circle.

In short, the epidemic has accelerated the popularization of digital life. In the wave of digital transformation, the rapid development of new consumption has profoundly changed the consumer life of modern society[18]. The popular trend of network live broadcast and shopping reflects the characteristics of new consumption, as well as the changes of related industries. As special cultural workers, internet celebrities are bound to follow the changing trend of times and constantly improve their survival strategies and cultural brand strategies. This article aims to expand the content field of internet celebrity research from the perspective of cultural brand, which not only helps to understand and grasp the situation of emerging cultural industries, but also promotes people's reflection on the appropriateness and contemporary construction of traditional cultural labor theory.

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