

# *International Communication Effectiveness of Short Videos on Chinese Traditional Costume Culture and the Configurational Effects of Influencing Factors*

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**Abstract:** As an important visual symbol of Chinese culture, Chinese traditional costume culture deserves close attention in terms of its communication effects on international short-video platforms. This study takes TikTok short videos of less than five minutes that present Chinese traditional costume culture as its research object. It evaluates the international communication effectiveness and selects 50 representative high-performing cases for fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). Six conditional variables are analyzed from a content perspective. The findings show that the current international communication effectiveness of Chinese traditional costume short videos is generally low and displays an obvious long-tailed distribution with clear stratification. Three configurational routes can generate favorable communication outcomes: a low-threshold foreign-language support route; an “the Other”-mediated translation route; and a deep content-supply route.

## 1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress proposed to enhance the communication and influence of Chinese civilization. Costume culture is among the most visually expressive carriers of culture, presenting national aesthetics and lifestyles while constructing national image and cultural identity<sup>[1]</sup>. In recent years, Chinese traditional costume culture has repeatedly attracted attention in the global digital media environment, demonstrating a notable capacity to cross cultural boundaries and providing an important entry point for research on the international communication of Chinese culture<sup>[2]</sup>.

In Lasswell’s classic “5W” model of the communication process, communication content is the basis on which communication activities occur; the quality and appropriateness of content largely determine whether communication effects can be achieved<sup>[3]</sup>.

Short video has become a key platform for displaying the distinctive charm of Chinese traditional costume culture and for supporting the global development of related cultural industries. However, the effects of different Chinese traditional costume short videos on international platforms vary substantially, and differences in the way content is presented are particularly salient. It is therefore necessary to examine what kinds of content elements, and what combinations of those elements, are

more conducive to broad, high-quality international communication.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Research on the International Communication of Chinese Traditional Costume Culture**

With the rise of “Hanfu fever” and the “going global” of Chinese culture, the international communication of traditional costume culture has become a prominent topic in academic research. Existing studies mainly develop along four dimensions. First, regarding the renewal of communication concepts, Liang and Dong argue that the international communication of Chinese costume culture should, on the basis of the unity of Chinese civilization, deepen the construction of cultural subjectivity, integrate traditional cultural resources with contemporary communication technologies, and form an image of Chinese costume culture that is recognizable, inclusive, and contemporary<sup>[1]</sup>. Second, regarding symbolic narrative routes, Yu suggests that digital platforms represented by TikTok have encouraged “grassroots communication”, and present a more authentic and approachable image of Chinese culture. At the same time, the interpretation of cultural symbols should be deepened, cross-cultural emotional resonance should be fostered.<sup>[4]</sup> Third, regarding practical paths, Yang proposes that the international communication of Hanfu should follow a cyclical route of “offline-online-interactive” communication<sup>[5]</sup>. Fourth, regarding the optimization of communication effects, Sui and Zhao demonstrate through empirical research that high-quality communication content can significantly enhance audiences’ cultural identity<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **2.2. Research on Short-Video Communication Content**

Communication content is the axial element of communication activities and a fundamental basis for the survival and development of media. Improving content quality is therefore the root of enhancing the communication power of short videos<sup>[7]</sup>. As information disseminated on the internet, short-video content may be evaluated in terms of information quality, namely the overall level at which it satisfies audience information needs and facilitates understanding and use. Scholars have examined information quality from different dimensions. Knight and Burn regard information quality as a multidimensional concept and argue that researchers should identify different characteristics of information according to different analytical perspectives<sup>[8]</sup>. In the specific context of Chinese traditional costume communication, Sui and Zhao find that the completeness and accuracy, usefulness, and vividness of communication content exert significant effects on the communication outcomes of such short videos<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **2.3. Research on Factors Influencing Short-Video Communication Effects**

Current studies on the influencing factors of short-video communication effects can be broadly divided into three fields. The first concerns public safety and security. Sun et al. find that the “hot dissemination” of national security knowledge can be summarized into three configurational paths: title-and-tag technique promotion, short-and-fast emotional impact, and audiovisual content-driven communication<sup>[9]</sup>. The second concerns cultural and educational communication. Wang and Wang identify interrogative titles and positive emotional tendencies as necessary conditions in the communication mechanism of short videos in the book industry<sup>[10]</sup>. The third concerns international communication. Yan and Xiong find that an “empathic” route, together with an “insight” route, forms a combined mechanism through which foreign bloggers’ travel videos in China shape cross-cultural cognition<sup>[11]</sup>. Wang and Wang, further identify landscape-display and cultural-experience configurations as core routes for improving international communication effects of cultural-tourism

short videos produced by Chinese<sup>[12]</sup>.

These studies provide important theoretical foundations and methodological references for the present research. Nevertheless, research on the international communication of Chinese traditional costume short videos still leaves room for expansion. First, existing studies tend to focus on qualitative interpretation of typical cases, while systematic evaluations of current communication effects based on quantitative data remain limited. Second, existing literature often examines the independent effect of a single dimension on communication outcomes, neglecting synergistic influences of multiple elements. This study takes TikTok short videos of less than five minutes on Chinese traditional costume culture as the object, screens cases according to explicit conditions, and uses fsQCA from the perspective of communication content to identify configurational paths through which favorable communication effects can be achieved.

### **3. International Communication Effectiveness of Chinese Traditional Costume Short Videos**

#### **3.1. Collection of Existing Samples on TikTok**

TikTok was selected as the source platform for this study. In the content-screening process, hashtags such as “hanfu” and “Chinese clothing” were used to collect data. Videos published between July 2020 and August 2025 and lasting less than five minutes were selected, and basic information such as likes, comments, and shares was collected. After manual screening and cleaning, 14,923 valid samples were obtained.

Compared with previous studies that often use single indicators, such as likes or views, to measure communication effectiveness<sup>[13]</sup>, this study improves it by constructing a composite indicator. Specifically, it refers to the data-processing method used by Wang et al. in calculating the communication power of organizational Weibo accounts<sup>[14]</sup>. Natural logarithmic transformation is used for normalization, and the entropy weight method is applied to determine the corresponding weight of each index. The communication effectiveness of a short video on a platform is calculated as  $W0 = b1 \ln(X1 + 1) + b2 \ln(X2 + 1) + b3 \ln(X3 + 1)$ . Here, X1, X2, and X3 denote the numbers of likes, comments, and shares, respectively, while b1, b2, and b3 are the corresponding weights. If a short video performed so strongly that it attracted the attention of all users of the platform, W0 would approach  $\ln(X + 1)$ , where X approximates the total number of registered users on that platform. This value can be treated as a relative theoretical upper bound for communication effectiveness.

#### **3.2. Current Communication Effectiveness**

The W0 values of 14,923 videos were calculated. Figure 1 shows the distribution. Results show effectiveness concentrated in low ranges. A total of 10,672 videos (71.52%) have W0 between 0-4; only 11.55% have W0 above 6; and <0.4% have W0 above 9. Thus, most videos remain at low to medium interactive levels.

The maximum W0 in the sample is 12.45. With TikTok’s global user scale in January 2025 at about 1.59 billion<sup>[15]</sup>, the theoretical upper bound is about 21.19. The highest sample value reaches only 58.8% of that, indicating a considerable gap from potential capacity.

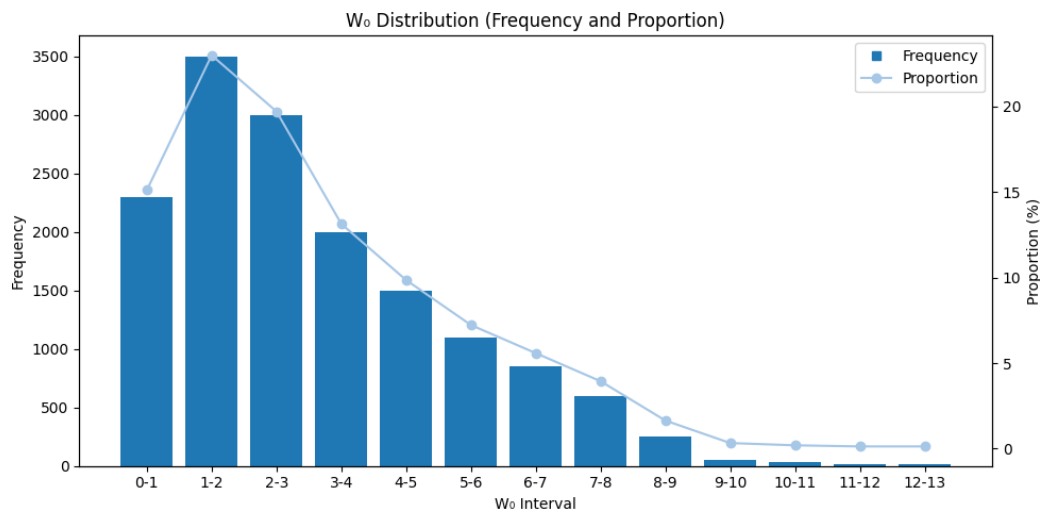


Figure 1. Distribution of  $W_0$  intervals and proportions for Chinese traditional costume short videos

Overall, Chinese traditional costume short videos have already formed a certain communication base on TikTok. However, from the perspective of overall statistical characteristics, their communication performance shows a clear pattern of low-value concentration and scarcity of high-value cases.

## 4. Configurational Effects of Factors Influencing the International Communication Effects of Chinese Traditional Costume Short Videos

### 4.1. Fuzzy-Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis

This study adopts fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) which emphasizes “configurations of conditions” rather than the net effect of any single variable.

### 4.2. Sample Selection

Based on the effectiveness assessment, the 50 highest-scoring videos were selected as the fsQCA sample, satisfying the 10-80 case requirement. This sample size satisfies the common requirement of 10 to 80 cases for qualitative comparative analysis<sup>[16]</sup>.

On TikTok, these 50 short-video samples received approximately 37.34 million likes, 270,000 comments, and 970,000 shares in total, coming from 42 creator accounts with diverse content. The sample is typical yet heterogeneous.

### 4.3. Variable Extraction

Communication effectiveness, which reflects communication outcomes, is established as the outcome variable. Based on the characteristics of the 50 cases and relevant studies, this article identifies the following six conditional variables.

1) Thematic orientation. Different types of content differ significantly in communication effects, and that targeted selection of particular types of content is one effective way to improve communication outcomes<sup>[17]</sup>.

2) Participation of “the other”. When foreign actors participate in the presentation of cultural content, localized international narration from an “other” perspective can reveal emerging forces of international communication and help improve the problem of “self-speaking” in China’s self-

construction of national image<sup>[18]</sup>.

3) Content density. It reflects the number of information points per unit of time and is an important indicator for measuring information load. Cognitive load theory suggests that when information input exceeds an individual's processing capacity, comprehension will be weakened and communication efficiency will decline<sup>[19]</sup>.

4) Video duration. Existing research suggests that the duration of video content is related to knowledge content and directly affects audiences' viewing experience and communication effects<sup>[20]</sup>.

5) Narrative strategy. Narrative strategy may be regarded as a necessary condition for short videos on Chinese traditional culture to achieve favorable cross-cultural communication effects<sup>[16]</sup>.

6) Narrative language. Language is not only a tool of communication but also a cultural symbol and a carrier of cultural identity and inheritance. In international communication, narrative language directly affects how easily audiences can understand the content<sup>[21]</sup>.

#### 4.4. Variable Assignment and Calibration

The use of fsQCA requires calibrating all variables to values between 0 and 1 based on membership degree<sup>[13]</sup>. The seven research variables selected are divided into categorical variables - thematic orientation, participation of "the other", content density, narrative strategy, and narrative language - and continuous variables, namely video duration and communication effectiveness. Following relevant configurational research practice<sup>[22]</sup>, different assignment and calibration methods are adopted for the two types of variables.

Categorical variables are calibrated by an indirect method. This study assigns values according to the proportion of each variable category in the overall sample<sup>[23]</sup>. The closer the assigned value is to 1, the higher the membership degree of that condition with respect to the outcome variable.

1) Thematic orientation (theme). This variable refers to the cultural meaning orientation of traditional costume in a video. A modern-integration theme means that costume is combined with contemporary life or modern concepts. A traditional theme means that the focus is on the inheritance of costume culture itself. Among the 50 cases, 33 videos adopt modern-integration themes, accounting for 66%, and are assigned a value of 1; 17 videos adopt traditional themes, accounting for 34%, and are assigned a value of 0.

2) Participation of "the other" (other). This variable indicates whether foreigners appear in the video and interact with traditional costume. "No" means that only Chinese participants appear, or that foreigners appear only as irrelevant passers-by. "Yes" means that foreign participants appear and have evident interaction with costume. In this study, 33 videos have no meaningful participation of the "other," accounting for 66%, and are assigned a value of 1; 17 videos have such participation, accounting for 34%, and are assigned a value of 0.

3) Content density (density). This variable refers to the number of information points carried by the video per unit of time. Using a 30-second window as the benchmark, high density means that four or more information points appear within every 30 seconds. Medium-low density means that three or fewer information points appear. Information points include the appearance of new costumes, craft details, scene changes and so on. Of the 50 videos, 27 are high-density videos, accounting for 54%, and are assigned a value of 1; 23 are medium-low-density videos, accounting for 46%, and are assigned a value of 0.

4) Narrative strategy (strategy). This variable refers to the main mode through which a video presents its content. Pure display videos take visual aesthetics as the core and have no clear storyline. Narrative videos include explicit narrative content, either micro narratives or macro narratives. In the present sample, 33 videos use a pure display strategy, accounting for 66%, and are assigned a value of 1; 17 videos use narrative techniques, accounting for 34%, and are assigned a value of 0.

5) Narrative language (language). This variable indicates whether a video uses a foreign language in narration or provides foreign-language subtitles or labels. Videos coded as having a foreign language include those with full foreign-language voiceover, foreign-language subtitles, or bilingual Chinese-foreign subtitles. Videos coded as having no foreign language use only Chinese, no verbal language. In this study, 28 videos contain foreign-language expression, accounting for 56%, and are assigned a value of 1; 22 videos use only Chinese or background music, accounting for 44%, and are assigned a value of 0.

Continuous variables are calibrated by the direct method. Raw values are mapped onto the interval between 0 and 1 according to their degree of membership. Following Ragin’s standards<sup>[24]</sup>, three key calibration anchors are set for the sample values: full membership, crossover point, and full non-membership. In this study, the 80th, 50th, and 20th percentiles of the descriptive statistics for video duration (duration) and communication effectiveness (effectiveness) are used as the calibration points.

## 4.5. Results Analysis

### 4.5.1. Necessity Analysis of Single Conditions

According to the criterion commonly used in fsQCA, a condition can be considered necessary for the outcome only when its consistency is higher than 0.90<sup>[25]</sup>. On this basis, the calibrated data were imported into fsQCA 4.1, and necessity analyses were conducted for both high communication effectiveness (effectivenessfs) and non-high communication effectiveness (~effectivenessfs). The results are shown in Table 1. As Table 1 indicates, none of the single conditional variables reaches the 0.90 consistency threshold. This means that the international communication effectiveness of Chinese traditional costume short videos does not depend on a single isolated content feature.

### 4.5.2. Sufficiency Analysis of Conditional Configurations

Because the sample size of this study is 50 cases, which belongs to a medium-scale sample, the case frequency threshold is set at 1 in accordance with common fsQCA practice, so as to avoid excessively excluding path combinations with explanatory value. In terms of consistency parameters, the raw consistency threshold is first set at 0.80. The PRI consistency is then manually adjusted, and logical combinations with PRI consistency lower than 0.75 are corrected so that the corresponding outcome variable is treated as 0<sup>[13]</sup>.

Table 1. Necessity test for single conditions

| Condition | Effectivenessfs |          | ~Effectivenessfs |          |
|-----------|-----------------|----------|------------------|----------|
|           | Consistency     | Coverage | Consistency      | Coverage |
| theme     | 0.625867        | 0.486697 | 0.695990         | 0.513303 |
| ~theme    | 0.374133        | 0.564765 | 0.304010         | 0.435235 |
| strategy  | 0.308628        | 0.465882 | 0.626921         | 0.462364 |
| ~strategy | 0.308628        | 0.465882 | 0.373079         | 0.534118 |
| language  | 0.572091        | 0.506241 | 0.588339         | 0.493759 |
| ~language | 0.427909        | 0.522905 | 0.411661         | 0.477095 |
| density   | 0.474710        | 0.451185 | 0.608842         | 0.548815 |
| ~density  | 0.525290        | 0.586087 | 0.391158         | 0.413913 |
| other     | 0.719819        | 0.559758 | 0.596927         | 0.440242 |
| ~other    | 0.280181        | 0.422941 | 0.403073         | 0.577059 |
| duration  | 0.440379        | 0.485856 | 0.570671         | 0.597119 |
| ~duration | 0.634830        | 0.609237 | 0.508629         | 0.462939 |

Note: “~” denotes the absence of the condition.

On the basis of the above parameter settings, the intermediate solution is selected as the main object of analysis. Further following the principles of QCA, conditions that appear in both the intermediate and parsimonious solutions are treated as core conditions, while conditions that appear only in the intermediate solution are treated as peripheral conditions<sup>[26]</sup>. The path structures are then interpreted accordingly. The final results are shown in Table 2.

From the perspective of overall effect, the solution consistency of the obtained configurations is 0.923729, and the consistency of each individual path is higher than 0.85. This indicates that these combinations of conditions have strong explanatory power for Chinese traditional costume short videos achieving relatively high international communication effectiveness. The overall solution coverage is 0.254852. Referring to the research of Yu and Chen<sup>[27]</sup>, this result falls within an acceptable range for this type of configurational analysis.

A further analysis of the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the four paths shows a certain clustering pattern. Configurations 1 and 2 display strong homogeneity. They are completely consistent on four conditions - narrative language, content density, participation of “the other”, and video duration - and are both characterized by a combination of foreign-language expression, medium-low content density, no meaningful participation of “the other”, and shorter video duration. The difference between them lies only in thematic orientation or narrative strategy. This result suggests that, when foreign-language expression is used as a basis and information load and viewing cost are simultaneously controlled, either a modern-integration theme or a pure display-oriented narrative mode may lead to relatively high international communication effects. In other words, in this type of path, language accessibility and information-load control constitute more critical content-structure conditions, while theme and narrative mode play more supplementary roles.

Table 2. Configurational paths for international communication effects of Chinese traditional costume short videos

| Conditions           | Configurational paths |           |           |           |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                      | 1                     | 2         | 3         | 4         |
| Theme                | •                     |           | ⊗         | •         |
| Strategy             |                       | •         | •         | •         |
| Language             | •                     | •         | •         | •         |
| Density              | ⊗                     | ⊗         | •         | •         |
| other                | •                     | •         | ⊗         | •         |
| Duration             | ⊗                     | ⊗         | ⊗         | •         |
| Raw coverage         | 0.128595              | 0.104045  | 0.0346816 | 0.0545554 |
| Unique coverage      | 0.0615696             | 0.0370197 | 0.0346816 | 0.0545554 |
| Consistency          | 0.861619              | 0.92069   | 1         | 1         |
| Solution coverage    | 0.254852              |           |           |           |
| Solution consistency | 0.923729              |           |           |           |

Note: •denotes core condition present; ⊗denotes core condition absent; •denotes peripheral condition present; ⊗denotes peripheral condition absent; blank cells indicate that the presence or absence of the condition is irrelevant to the outcome in that configuration.

Compared with the two paths above, Configurations 3 and 4 display obvious heterogeneity. Configuration 3 is mainly characterized by a traditional theme, pure display strategy, foreign-language expression, high content density, meaningful participation of “the other,” and shorter duration. This indicates that when traditional cultural connotations are taken as the core content, the introduction of foreign participants and the increase of information carried per unit of time can enhance watchability and interaction, thereby compensating for the comprehension threshold associated with traditional cultural topics in international communication. Configuration 4 is

characterized by a modern-integration theme, pure display strategy, foreign-language expression, high content density, no meaningful participation of “the other,” and longer duration. Its logic is that when the content theme is closer to contemporary life, relatively high information density and longer video duration may still generate favorable communication effects through visual display and foreign-language expression.

From the overall configurational structure, narrative language appears repeatedly in multiple high-communication-effectiveness paths and functions as a core condition in some of them. This reveals its structural importance in the process of international communication.

#### 4.5.3. Robustness Test

With all other conditions unchanged, the calibration anchors of the continuous variables were first changed from 80%, 50%, and 20% to 75%, 50%, and 25%. The results show no obvious changes. Second, the raw consistency threshold of the original model was raised from 0.80 to 0.85, and the PRI consistency threshold was raised from 0.75 to 0.85. Under the stricter criteria, the number of intermediate-solution configurations decreased from four to three; however, the remaining configurations are all subsets of the original paths. The findings can therefore be considered robust.

#### 4.5.4. Conclusions on Configurational Effects

The comprehensive interpretation of the configurational paths leading to high international communication effectiveness shows that the success of Chinese traditional costume short videos is not determined by any single factor. Rather, it is formed through the joint action of multiple content and expression conditions in different combinations. Further integration of the results shows that high international communication effectiveness is mainly achieved through three typical routes: the low-threshold foreign-language support route, the “other”-mediated translation route, and the deep content-supply route.

First, the low-threshold foreign-language support route reflects a communication logic centered on lowering comprehension barriers. In this type of configuration, the content enhances information readability through foreign-language expression and adapts to the viewing rhythm of short-video platforms by controlling information density and video duration at an appropriate level. As a result, it effectively reduces the cognitive cost for overseas audiences when they encounter Chinese traditional costume culture. Its communication mechanism gives priority to “understandability”. Through concise and intuitive visual presentation and clear linguistic expression, the aesthetic appeal of Chinese traditional costume can be perceived and recognized by overseas audiences within a short period of time.

Second, the “other”-mediated translation route is organized around intercultural interaction. By introducing foreign participants into content interaction, Chinese traditional costume culture undergoes a process of reinterpretation from the perspective of the “other”. This can, to a certain extent, alleviate the problem of cultural discount in cultural communication. Through the participation of an external perspective, the meaning of traditional costume culture can be transformed into cultural expressions that are easier for overseas audiences to understand, thereby strengthening acceptance and identification.

Third, the deep content-supply route takes cultural content itself as the core driving force. In this structure, traditional costume culture is not presented as an isolated historical symbol; rather, it forms new modes of cultural expression through its connection with contemporary life contexts. This enables audiences to develop a sense of accessibility and practical relevance, allowing traditional elements to be reactivated in modern contexts. This is consistent with Wang Ningning’s view that contemporary fashion elements and traditional cultural concepts should be integrated<sup>[28]</sup>. At the same

time, through longer video duration and higher information capacity, creators can display costume forms, production techniques, and cultural connotations in a more systematic manner, thereby satisfying some overseas audiences' deeper cognitive needs regarding Chinese culture. This route indicates that when traditional cultural content maintains its distinctive cultural features while also being effectively connected with modern life and presented through a complete content structure, cultural content itself can become an important force driving international communication.

## 5. Conclusion

At the present stage, the communication of Chinese culture through international short-video platforms has made certain progress. However, the empirical analysis in this study shows that Chinese traditional costume short videos display a long-tailed distribution with clear stratification on international platforms. A large amount of content remains concentrated in low and medium communication effectiveness intervals, while only a small number of videos achieve high levels of interaction and diffusion.

In terms of communication mechanisms, high communication effects are not determined by a single content element, but are produced through the configurational arrangement of different content elements. Among these elements, language expression appears repeatedly in multiple paths leading to high international communication effectiveness, which highlights the importance of reducing cross-cultural comprehension barriers in the international communication of Chinese culture.

In the international communication practice of Chinese traditional costume short videos, greater attention should therefore be paid to the overall configuration between content expression and communication strategy. On the one hand, multilingual expression and intuitive visual presentation can be used to reduce cultural comprehension barriers, enabling overseas audiences to enter the cultural context more easily. On the other hand, while maintaining the traditional cultural characteristics of costume, creators can strengthen the connection between content and contemporary life scenarios, enhance contextualized and story-based expression, and thereby improve watchability and communication appeal. In addition, diversified participation in content production should be encouraged. Video creators may invite overseas friends to try on, interpret, or co-create traditional costume content, expanding the expressive space of traditional culture through cross-cultural cooperation and interactive narration, and further enhancing the vitality of Chinese culture on global digital platforms.

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