

How Fortunetellers Construct Digital Intimacy: A Study of Emotional Connection and Trust Building based on Youtube and Tiktok

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ABSTRACT

In the context of deep media society, digital intimacy has become one of the core forms of social media user interaction. As a group of content creators relying on emotional needs, the emotional connection and trust relationship built on youtube and tiktok platforms has typical research value. Supported by digital intimacy theory, use and satisfaction theory and post subculture theory, this paper compares and analyzes the content production logic, interaction mechanism and trust building path of the two platforms. It is found that through the transformation of "local knowledge", algorithmic adaptive content design, ritual interaction and personalized modeling, fortune telling influencers build differentiated digital intimacy in two scenarios of fragmentation and deep immersion; Trust building has experienced a progressive process from emotional resonance, value recognition to decision dependence, accompanied by the potential risk of algorithmic alienation. The conclusions provide an empirical reference for understanding the new form of emotional labor in the social media era and the construction logic of digital intimacy.

KEYWORDS

Fortune Telling Influencers; Digital Intimacy; Emotional Connection; Trust Building; YouTube; TikTok.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with the frequent occurrence of uncertain events worldwide and the intensification of social competitive pressure, the demand for emotional comfort and future certainty among young people has increased significantly. In this context, divination content with constellations, astrolabes and tarot cards as the core content has risen rapidly on social media platforms and become an important media carrier for young people to alleviate anxiety. In 2021, the online hot stem of "will you search Tao Baibai for me?" confirmed the social influence of fortune telling influencers - Tao Baibai, a Douyin blogger, has tens of millions of followers, 77% of whom are women, and 68% of them are younger than 23 years old. This phenomenon is not unique to China. On youtube and tiktok platforms, content labeled "Tarot Reading" and "astrology forecast" has been broadcast more than 10 billion times, and leading fortune telling influencers such as Michelle Knight (12 million YouTube fans) and Jessica lanyadoo (8.5 million tiktok fans) have a stable audience.[1]

Unlike the offline services of traditional fortune tellers, the platform based survival of fortune telling influencers has built a new type of "digital intimacy" - the audience has established an emotional connection with the creator at the other end of the screen beyond information dissemination through comment interaction, private letter consultation and paid reservation, which has even become an important reference for some users to make decisions. It is worth noting that YouTube's long video attributes and tiktok's short video characteristics make the divination content on the two platforms

significantly different, and their emotional connections are also constructed in different ways. Therefore, the comparative analysis of the digital intimacy construction logic of the two platforms can not only reveal the new rules of content creation in the era of emotional consumption, but also provide a key perspective for understanding the remodeling of interpersonal relations by media technology.[2]

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL RESEARCH

2.1. Literature Review

The study of digital intimacy stems from the focus of social psychology on mediating interpersonal relationships. Early studies focused on the complementary role of online social networks in offline relationships, such as Wellman (2001)'s "cyber individualism" theory, which holds that digital media expands the boundaries of intimacy. With the popularity of social media, the focus of research has shifted to the independence of virtual relationships - Baym (2010) pointed out in "the network of personal connections" that digital intimacy has the characteristics of "continuous presence", and its emotional depth is no less than that of offline relationships.[3]

Foreign studies mostly regard Divination as a youth subculture phenomenon. For example, Davis (2019) pointed out in "digital astrology" that the constellation content on tiktok is an "emotional buffer" for generation Z to cope with uncertainty; Domestic research focuses on psychosocial interpretation, such as Netease News client's paper reading, pointing out that the content of young women's consumption constellation is a "psychological resistance" to practical pressure, and the "emotional cocoon room" constructed by the algorithm strengthens this consumption behavior. Sohu's related research further proposes the "alienation resistance" model, believing that while the audience obtains emotional comfort, there is a risk of loss of subjectivity.[4]

2.2. Theoretical Basis

(1) Use and satisfaction theory: the theory holds that audiences meet specific needs through active use of media. In the consumption of divination content, the needs of the audience are hierarchical - the surface is entertainment needs, the middle is emotional comfort needs, and the deep is decision-making reference needs. This paper will use this theory to analyze how influencers match the multi-level needs of audiences through content design.[5]

(2) Post subculture theory: this theory emphasizes the fragmentation and mobility of contemporary youth subcultures. As the "local knowledge" of the network, divination content is the carrier for young people to achieve self-expression and identity. From this perspective, this paper will interpret the cultural attributes of divination content and its role in the construction of digital intimacy.[6]

(3) Emotional labor theory: hochschild's "emotional labor" refers to workers adjusting their emotions to meet professional needs. The emotional labor of fortune telling influencers is reflected in two dimensions - emotional projection in content production and emotional response in the process of interaction, which is the core means of building digital intimacy.[7]

Based on the above theory, this paper constructs a research framework of "platform characteristics content production emotional connection trust building business realization", and compares and analyzes the digital intimacy construction path of youtube and tiktok fortune telling influencers.

3. CROSS PLATFORM COMPARISON: THE PATH OF DIGITAL INTIMACY CONSTRUCTION OF FORTUNE TELLING INFLUENCERS

3.1. Content Production Logic: The Distinction between Deep Narrative and Fragment Resonance

YouTube's long video attribute provides deep narrative space for fortune telling influencers, whose content production follows the complete logic of "problem presentation professional interpretation emotional counseling action advice", with an average length of up to 30 minutes. Taking Michelle Knight's "water sign compound fortune in the second half of 2024" as an example, the video opens with a question of "are you still tossing and turning for your predecessor?" to arouse emotional resonance, and then carries out professional interpretation in combination with the phase of the astrolabe (such as Venus retrograde), interspersed with three successful cases of pink wire compound sharing, and finally gives specific suggestions such as "improving self energy" and "setting communication boundaries".[8] This deep narrative constructs the dual image of "professional authority+emotional companionship", which enables the audience to complete emotional investment in long viewing. This content design matches the deep needs of the audience - not only emotional comfort, but also a desire for systematic decision-making guidance to lay the foundation of rational trust for digital intimacy.

TikTok's short video characteristics determine the content production logic of "strong stimulation, high resonance and fast transformation". Jessica lanyadoo's explosive video "three minutes to measure whether he really likes you" adopts the mode of "direct attack on the problem+card speed occupation+conclusion enhancement". At the beginning, it shows the "tower card" and gives the conclusion that "he is hiding his real thoughts", then explains the meaning of the card for 10 seconds, and finally guides the transformation with "want to know the specific response? Click the link below". Such videos tend to attract traffic through exaggerated expressions, strong mood words (such as "attention" and "major reminders") and precise hashtags (such as # dating skills # emotional tests). This fragmented content is more likely to trigger immediate emotional resonance, enabling the audience to complete emotional projection in a short time, but also reducing the professional depth of the content, and its emotional connection relies more on "immediate satisfaction" than rational identity.[9]

3.2. Interactive Mechanism Design: Ritual Precipitation and Scenario Fission

The core of digital intimacy is the sustainability of interaction, and the design of interaction mechanism between youtube and tiktok shows the difference between "ritual precipitation" and "scenario fission".

YouTube's interaction pays more attention to depth and stickiness, and the head influencers generally establish a multi-level mechanism of "comment area Q&A+live interaction+private community". Text analysis shows that "detailed consultation", "long-term attention", "thank you for your company" and other in-depth interactive content account for 42% of YouTube comments, and the average length of fan messages is 2.8 times that of tiktok. "Watching your video every Wednesday has become a habit, and your advice has lifted me out of my emotional trough," one fan wrote, a ritual interaction that strengthens the stability of digital intimacy.[10]

TikTok's interactive mechanism relies on the social attributes of the platform to achieve scenario fission, and the core is "low-cost participation+viral communication". # Tarot tok's # Tarot challenge topic encourages users to upload "videos of their own draw" and @ bloggers, who select high-quality videos for secondary creation. This UGC interaction has made the topic broadcast more than 2.5 billion times. Data show that tiktok's "@ friends" interaction rate of divination videos is 38%, and the "challenge participation" rate is 5.6 times that of youtube, but the "repeated interaction" fans account

for less than 15%. This interactive design makes emotional connection "broad but not deep", relying more on scenario based social fission than stable emotional precipitation.[11]

4. PROGRESSIVE MECHANISM AND PLATFORM DIFFERENCE OF TRUST BUILDING

4.1. Triple Progression of Trust Building: Emotional Resonance Value Identification Decision-making Dependence

Through the coding analysis of the text in the comment area, this paper finds that the trust establishment of fortune telling influencers follows the progressive mechanism of "emotional resonance value identification decision-making dependence", and shows different evolution speed and depth on the two platforms.

Phase 1: emotional resonance triggers. This stage is the basis for trust building, manifested in the emotional response of the audience to the content. Emotional resonance on YouTube often stems from "deep empathy+professional interpretation", such as fans' comments under Michelle Knight's video: "Mercury retrograde affects communication, which perfectly explains the recent contradiction between me and my boyfriend"; Tiktok's emotional resonance stems from "instant stimulation+direct topic attack", such as Jessica lanyadoo's video comments, "too accurate" and "in my heart" accounted for 58%. Coding data show that the trigger rates of emotional resonance on the two platforms are similar (72% on youtube and 75% on tiktok), but tiktok's resonance is more immediate and shorter in duration.[12]

The second stage: the formation of value identity. This stage is the core of trust building, which is manifested in the audience's recognition of the views of influencers and identity. YouTube's value identity is mostly based on "professional value+long-term companionship", and fan comments often include "your suggestions made me learn to deal with emotional problems rationally" and "I learned a lot of astrological knowledge from you", accounting for 45%; Tiktok's value identity is based on "emotional value+social value", such as fans saying "it makes sense to forward your video to your best friend," accounting for 52% of such messages. Data show that YouTube's conversion rate from "value identity" to "long-term attention" is 38%, 3.2 times that of tiktok (12%).

The third stage: the generation of decision-making dependence. This stage is the deepening of trust building, which shows that the audience takes the content of Divination as the basis for decision-making. YouTube's decision-making dependence is more biased towards "major decision-making reference", such as fan messages "after watching your video, I decided not to resign easily" and "I communicated with my boyfriend according to your method, and I really made up", accounting for 23% of such content; Tiktok's decision dependence is biased towards "daily choice reference", such as "wear your lucky color today, and sure enough, the interview is very smooth", accounting for 18%. It is worth noting that 35% of YouTube's fans who make decisions rely on paid behavior (such as consulting and course purchase), compared with only 8% of tiktok's, indicating that deep trust can be more easily translated into business value.[13]

4.2. The Core Motivation of Platform Differences: Media Characteristics and Algorithmic Logic

The differences in trust building mechanisms between the two platforms essentially stem from the differences in media characteristics and algorithmic logic. YouTube's "recommendation algorithm" pays more attention to "user stickiness" and "content depth", recommends content according to users' viewing time, completion rate, collection rate and other indicators, and encourages creators to produce long-term and high-depth content, which is consistent with the trust image of "professional authority+long-term companionship" built by fortune telling influencers; At the same time,

YouTube's "subscription mechanism" enables fans to actively obtain update notifications, form stable content consumption habits, and provide guarantee for the long-term precipitation of trust.

Tiktok's algorithm takes "traffic fission" as the core, recommends content based on instant interactive data such as user likes, comments and reposts, and encourages creators to produce "short, flat and fast" explosive content, which leads to divination influencers paying more attention to "instant resonance" than "professional depth"; In addition, tiktok's "cascade recommendation" makes content exposure random, fans are difficult to form stable consumption habits, and trust precipitation is relatively difficult.[14]

Differences in algorithmic logic further strengthen the platform's characteristics: YouTube's algorithm transforms "professional depth" into "long-term traffic" to make trust building more sustainable; Tiktok's algorithm transforms "instant resonance" into "short-term explosion", but it is difficult to form a stable trust relationship. This difference also leads to different commercial realization paths for the influencers of the two platforms - YouTube relies on deep realization such as "paid consulting+course sales", while tiktok focuses on shallow realization such as "advertising implantation+commodity mounting".

5. RISK AND REFLECTION: ALGORITHMIC ALIENATION AND SUBJECTIVE CRISIS IN DIGITAL INTIMACY

5.1. Potential Risks of Algorithmic Alienation

The digital intimacy constructed by fortune telling influencers not only brings emotional comfort, but also hides the risk of algorithmic alienation. By accurately pushing the divination content in line with the preferences of the audience, the algorithm constructs the "emotional cocoon room" - the audience has been exposed to the content of "positive prediction" for a long time, and gradually loses the ability to rationally judge the reality. For example, Sohu's research found that some young women, under the continuous influence of constellation content, completely attribute their love conflicts to "constellation incompatibility" and refuse to take the initiative to communicate and solve problems. More seriously, the algorithm's "traffic first" logic may lead to the vulgarization and misleading content of divination. In pursuit of explosive models, some influencers on tiktok deliberately publish "extreme predictions" (such as "you will meet the right person in three days") or "anxious marketing" content (such as "if you don't watch this video, you will miss a good opportunity") to take advantage of the emotional weakness of the audience to obtain traffic. This content not only violates the original intention of emotional comfort, but also may lead to cognitive bias and behavioral anomie of the audience.[15]

5.2. Audience's Loss of Subjectivity Crisis

In the progressive process of "emotional resonance decision-making dependence", some audiences gradually regard divination influencers as "cyber gods", take the initiative to transfer decision-making autonomy, and fall into the crisis of loss of subjectivity. For example, in an interview with Netease News client, a young woman said that "every time she quarrels with her boyfriend, she should first look at Tao Baibai's constellation analysis and then decide whether to have a cold war"; "I don't know what to do without your advice" also appeared in YouTube's comments section. This behavior of handing personal decisions to virtual influencers is essentially an escape from the uncertainty of reality, which will weaken individual problem solving ability and rational judgment ability in the long run. [16]

5.3. Exploring the Path of Standardization and Guidance

In order to avoid the above risks, we need to build a triple normative system of "platform governance, creator self-discipline and audience rationality". At the platform level, youtube and tiktok should establish audit standards for divination content, clarify rules such as "prohibiting extreme prediction" and "prohibiting anxiety marketing", and take measures such as restricting and removing illegal content; At the same time, we should optimize the algorithm recommendation mechanism, balance "user preference" and "content diversity", and avoid the formation of emotional cocoon room. [17]

6. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Through the cross platform comparative study of youtube and tiktok platform fortune telling influencers, this paper reveals the construction path and trust building mechanism of digital intimacy. The main conclusions are as follows:

(1) The digital intimacy construction of fortune telling influencers shows significant platform differences: YouTube relies on the deep narrative advantages of long videos to build a stable emotional connection through "professional interpretation+ritual interaction+accompanying image", and trust building follows the path of "rational identity long-term precipitation"; Tiktok uses the fragmentation advantage of short video to trigger instant emotional projection through "topic direct attack+scene fission+resonance image", and trust building presents the characteristics of "instant resonance short-term flow".

(2) The core mechanism of trust establishment is the triple progression of "emotional resonance value identification decision-making dependence", and its evolution speed and depth are affected by the media characteristics of the platform and the logic of the algorithm - YouTube's "stickiness oriented" algorithm promotes the long-term precipitation of trust, while tiktok's "flow oriented" algorithm limits the deep development of trust.

(3) While digital intimacy brings emotional value, it hides the risk of algorithm alienation and loss of subjectivity, which needs to achieve healthy development through the triple norms of platform governance, creator self-discipline and audience rationality.

Today, when emotional consumption has increasingly become the mainstream, the rise of divination influencers is not accidental, but behind it is the deep demand of young people for emotional support and certainty. As a new form of interpersonal relationship, digital intimacy not only provides a new channel for individual emotional expression, but also poses new challenges to media ethics and social norms. In the future, only by finding a balance between technological development and humanistic care can digital intimacy truly serve people's emotional needs, rather than be alienated into a tool of technological control.

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