

# Differences in Communication between Trendy Doll Clothing and Chuxiong Yi Ethnic Costumes and Pathways for Their Inheritance

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## Abstract

In the context of digital globalization and the upgrading of cultural consumption, the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the dissemination of trendy culture exhibit markedly different development trajectories. Taking traditional Yi ethnic costumes from Chuxiong, Yunnan, and trendy doll clothing as research objects, this study systematically compares their communication differences across five dimensions—communicator, content, channel, audience, and effect—based on consumer society theory and algorithmic affordance theory. It explores the core reasons for the declining inheritance of Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes. The findings reveal that significant differences in the composition of communication subjects, symbolic expression logic, channel operation and feedback mechanisms, audience demand matching, and transformation of communication effects are the key factors hindering the dissemination of Yi ethnic costumes. Based on these findings, this paper proposes practical suggestions including optimizing communication subjects and content, broadening and coordinating communication channels, and integrating platform economy to promote co-creation of ICH. The aim is to provide practical guidance for balancing cultural authenticity and market adaptability in the living inheritance of ethnic ICH costumes such as Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes, while enriching the theoretical system of ICH communication within the context of consumer society.

## Keywords

Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes, trendy doll clothing, living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, symbolic consumption

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## 1. Introduction

In the dual context of digital globalization and the upgrading of cultural consumption, the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage has attracted widespread attention. As a living carrier of Yi ethnic craftsmanship and values, the traditional Yi costumes of Chuxiong, Yunnan, represent a vibrant expression of Yi culture. They embody the aesthetic pursuits of the Yi people and have formed a unique ethnic cultural identity after thousands of years of inheritance [1]. However, under the impact of modernization, Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes face a dilemma of declining inheritance, with issues such as insufficient attention from young people and low marketization becoming increasingly prominent. In contrast, trendy doll clothing—

specifically designed and produced for dolls—has formed a distinctive communication ecosystem through its prominent subcultural symbols and emotional connection attributes [2], becoming a consumption craze among Generation Z. The stark contrast in their communication effectiveness deserves in-depth investigation.

Regarding the causes of this phenomenon, some scholars argue that purchasing trendy toys helps construct identity and emotional attachment [3], turning cultural and creative products such as doll clothing into consumption hotspots. Meanwhile, platform traffic logic has led to the homogenization and fragmentation of ICH content, with cultural distinctiveness being obscured [4]. For solutions, some scholars suggest that ethnic cultural design should integrate respect for cultural connotations with adaptation to modern contexts [5]. However, existing studies lack a comprehensive comparison of the communication models of the two types of costumes and targeted recommendations for the inheritance of ethnic ICH costumes, leaving a clear research gap. Therefore, this study holds both theoretical and practical significance: theoretically, it enriches ICH communication theory by integrating symbolic consumption and algorithmic affordance theories; practically, it provides guidance for the living inheritance of ethnic ICH costumes.

Focusing on communication models and audience psychology, this study compares the communication differences between the two types of costumes based on Lasswell's 5W model. It employs theories of symbolism, consumer society, and algorithmic logic to explore the dilemmas facing the inheritance of Yi ethnic costumes and to propose transformation pathways. The research adopts literature review and case comparison methods. The core objectives are: to clarify the five-dimensional differences in the communication of the two types of costumes, to reveal the causes of the inheritance difficulties of Yi ethnic costumes, and to propose transformation strategies that balance cultural authenticity with market adaptability.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study constructs an analytical framework for comparing the communication differences between trendy doll clothing and Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes by integrating consumer society theory, algorithmic affordance theory, and Lasswell's 5W communication model.

### **2.1 Consumer Society Theory**

Consumer society theory posits that the essence of consumption is not the acquisition of the use value of goods, but the completion of identity construction, emotional expression, and social circle building through the symbolic meaning of consumed objects. Symbolic consumption has become a core feature of consumer society [6]. This theory provides a central perspective for analyzing differences in audience demands and the symbolic expression logic of communication content between the two types of costumes.

From the perspective of audience demand, Generation Z purchases doll clothing to obtain symbolic value and integrate into social circles, whereas traditional audiences of Yi ethnic costumes place greater emphasis on cultural value. This mismatch in demand is the fundamental reason why young people are alienated from ICH. From the perspective of symbolic expression logic in communication content, doll clothing caters to the consumption needs of Generation Z through entertaining and personalized symbols, forming a "symbolic carnival." In contrast, Yi ethnic costumes carry ICH craftsmanship and ethnic spirit through profound cultural symbols, presenting "craftsmanship persistence." The opposition between these two symbolic logics directly leads to differences in communication attractiveness.

### **2.2 Algorithmic Affordance Theory**

Algorithmic affordance theory focuses on the interactive relationships between algorithmic technology and communicators, communication channels, and audiences. It refers to the action possibilities afforded by algorithmic technology that can be perceived and utilized by communication subjects [7]. Its core lies in the algorithm's logic for distributing content, feedback mechanisms for audience behavior, and the amplification or suppression of communication effects. This theory provides a key technical perspective for explaining how differences in communicators' capabilities, channel potential, and audience feedback behaviors between the two types of costumes lead to divergent communication outcomes in the digital communication context.

From the perspective of communicators' capabilities, trendy doll clothing communicators are proficient in algorithmic rules and can precisely produce content that fits recommendation logic. In contrast, inheritors of

Yi ethnic costumes lack algorithmic awareness and operational capabilities, resulting in ineffective communication channels. From the perspective of channel potential, the algorithms of short-video and social platforms prioritize highly interactive content. Doll clothing content naturally possesses high visual appeal and interactivity, making it easy to enter algorithmic recommendation pools. Conversely, static displays and craftsmanship explanations of Yi ethnic costumes have low interaction rates and are marginalized by algorithms, resulting in “invisibility” in digital communication.

### **3. Comparative Analysis of Communication Differences Between the Two Types of Costumes**

#### **3.1 Differences in the Communicator Dimension**

There are significant differences between trendy doll clothing and Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes in terms of the compositional characteristics and communication capabilities of their communicators, particularly in the perception and utilization of algorithmic affordances. The former exhibits characteristics of diversification, youthfulness, and marketization, while the latter is characterized by non-diversification, traditionalization, and non-marketization.

The core communicators of trendy doll clothing are young merchants, designers, and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), with auxiliary communicators being the general consumers who participate in User-Generated Content (UGC) creation [5]. Young merchants and designers precisely align product design with market demand, KOLs guide consumption trends, and consumers contribute to secondary dissemination, collectively building a diversified communication system. In contrast, the core communicators of Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes are ICH inheritors, cultural scholars, and local governments. They generally lack understanding and application capabilities regarding platform algorithms. Their auxiliary communicators are limited to a small number of ICH enthusiasts, resulting in a narrow audience and insufficient marketization.

These differences at the communicator level endow trendy doll clothing with strong flexibility and market vitality, enabling it to quickly adapt to social media communication and consumer market demands. Conversely, the communication system of Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes lacks youthfulness and market vitality, which has become one of the important contributing factors to its declining inheritance.

#### **3.2 Differences in the Communication Content Dimension**

Communication content is one of the core aspects of the dissemination differences between trendy doll clothing and Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes. Drawing on semiotics theory, the two exhibit fundamental differences in “signifier” and “signified,” forming a sharp contrast between “symbolic carnival” and “craftsmanship persistence.”

According to Saussure’s semiotics, the “signifier” refers to the surface level of things that brings intuitive feelings to the audience and leaves psychological impressions, while the “signified” refers to concepts, that is, meaning—specifically the connotation and symbolic significance of things [8]. In terms of the “signifier,” trendy doll clothing features highly malleable elements such as styles, colors, and patterns, frequently incorporating popular trendy elements like celebrity makeup, Chinese style, and anime aesthetics. This satisfies personalized demands and triggers a “symbolic carnival.” In contrast, Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes, passed down through generations, predominantly feature natural patterns of animals and plants as well as geometric patterns, with a color preference for black, cyan, red, and yellow [4]. Their “signifier” is constrained by traditional norms and exhibits low plasticity. Regarding the “signified,” doll clothing focuses on emotional expression and identity construction for Generation Z, making it highly popular. However, the cultural connotations embedded in the patterns of Yi ethnic costumes are relatively abstract and detached from modern life, easily falling into the risk of symbolic hollowing.

The symbolic differences in communication content between the two cultural carriers mean that trendy doll clothing, through its entertaining symbolic expression, rapidly adapts to the demands of social media and Generation Z, achieving widespread dissemination. Although Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes carry profound cultural and artistic value, their fixed symbolic expression and high interpretive threshold make it difficult to attract the attention of young audiences, further exacerbating the communication gap.

### 3.3 Differences in the Communication Channel Dimension

Significant differences exist between trendy doll clothing and Yi ethnic costumes in terms of core carriers and operational orientation of communication channels. The former centers on social media, while the latter primarily relies on traditional museum exhibitions. This directly affects the communication coverage and reach effectiveness of the two cultural carriers.

In the digital era, the synergy between e-commerce and social media constitutes the core of costume communication. Social media amplifies dissemination effects through localized narratives and KOL collaborations [9]. The communication channels of trendy doll clothing are centered on social media, relying on youth-oriented platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weidian, Douyin, and Weibo. They employ diversified forms including community engagement, images and text, and short videos for matrix-style operational promotion. In contrast, the dissemination of Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes mainly relies on traditional channels, primarily museum exhibitions, with communication forms dominated by static displays and weak interactivity.

Even when ICH begins to use social platforms for promotion, the logic of algorithmic affordance still leads to channel differences between the two. Short-video platform algorithms recommend content based on the precise matching of video content with user profiles, calculated according to users' interactive behavior characteristics [10]. The core logic is "highly interactive content is prioritized for entry into the recommendation pool." Doll clothing content naturally possesses high interactivity; its cute visual features, outfit displays, and customization sharing easily trigger user likes, comments, and reposts, enabling rapid accumulation of interaction data and continuous algorithmic recommendation. In contrast, content related to Yi ethnic costumes—mostly static displays and craftsmanship explanations—features a slow pace and low interactivity, making it difficult to accumulate sufficient user behavior data. As a result, it struggles to enter the algorithmic recommendation pool, leading to "invisibility" on social media platforms and further narrowing its communication coverage.

The differences in communication channels and the influence of algorithmic affordance enable trendy doll clothing to precisely reach Generation Z and achieve widespread dissemination. However, Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes, due to their heavy reliance on traditional channels, weak presence on social media, and difficulty in adapting to algorithmic recommendation logic, struggle to expand their communication scope. This has become a major factor constraining their contemporary dissemination.

### 3.4 Differences in the Audience Dimension

The audience is the core of communication activities. There are significant differences between the audiences of trendy doll clothing and Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes in terms of age structure, consumption demands, and feedback behaviors. From the perspective of consumer society theory, these differences essentially reflect disparities in symbolic consumption needs and constitute the core reason why Generation Z enthusiastically pursues trendy doll clothing while showing limited understanding of Yi ethnic costumes.

In *The Consumer Society*, Baudrillard emphasizes that consumption is an ordered coding of status and identity. People achieve identity construction and emotional expression through the symbolic meaning of consumed objects [11]. The core audience of trendy doll clothing is Generation Z, primarily students and young professionals. Their primary purpose in purchasing doll clothing is not use value, but rather to demonstrate aesthetics, integrate into social circles, and realize emotional expression and identity construction through its personalized and community-oriented symbols. In addition, Generation Z's consumption behavior is heavily influenced by product marketing and social media dissemination, showing a stronger preference for innovative and topical products [12]. Consequently, audience feedback for doll clothing is highly immediate, with substantial UGC contributions [5], which sustains continuous communication.

The core audience of Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes consists of middle-aged and elderly Yi ethnic groups with strong ethnic sentiment and cultural enthusiasts focused on academic research and ICH protection. This audience is narrow and skewed toward older age groups. The absence of these two groups in social media communication results in delayed audience feedback for Yi ethnic costumes, extremely low participation from ordinary audiences, and difficulty in forming secondary dissemination.

The differences in symbolic consumption demands and feedback behaviors at the audience level enable trendy doll clothing to precisely meet the needs of Generation Z, forming a highly sticky and widely covered communication pattern. In contrast, Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes, due to their narrow audience base and disconnection from Generation Z's consumption demands and media habits, struggle to attract the attention and participation of young people and fail to generate effective secondary dissemination. This has become a key factor constraining their youth-oriented communication.

### **3.5 Differences in the Communication Effect Dimension**

There are significant differences between trendy doll clothing and Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes in terms of audience stickiness and sustainability of communication effects. These differences represent the concentrated manifestation of the differences in the previous four communication dimensions. The integration of ICH with modern design is an effective pathway to address poor communication effects of ICH and achieve market-oriented transformation.

Experiential economy theory emphasizes that carefully crafted immersive experiences allow consumers to gain emotional resonance during participation, thereby enhancing consumption experience value and user stickiness [1]. Doll clothing achieves high audience stickiness through users' immersive participation in outfit coordination, gradually forming a cultural atmosphere of "symbolic carnival," with high repurchase rates and strong industry sustainability. In contrast, as traditional elements, Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes struggle to attract contemporary audiences, resulting in narrow coverage and insufficient recognition among young people, leading to weak industry sustainability. Only by combining modern aesthetics and communication scenarios can cultural acceptance and sustainability be improved [13].

Trendy doll clothing has achieved widespread dissemination and high audience stickiness, yet it struggles to convey deep cultural value. Although Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes carry profound cultural and craftsmanship value, their poor communication effects and lack of sustainability further exacerbate the dilemma of declining inheritance.

## **4. Recommendations for Future Development**

### **4.1 Optimization of Communicators and Content**

To break the singular pattern of communicators for Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes, a diversified collaborative system involving ICH inheritors, young creators, KOLs, and the government should be established to enhance communication vitality. This can be achieved by providing market-oriented communication training for ICH inheritors, attracting young designers and KOLs to participate, exploring trendy elements and modern expressions of the costumes, and leveraging government support for dissemination. Such an approach respects cultural connotations while adapting to modern communication scenarios, thereby achieving both cultural inheritance and effective dissemination of Yi ethnic costumes [3].

The patterns, colors, fabrics, and accessories in ethnic costume culture are direct expressions of ethnic folk culture. Integrating these elements into modern design can enrich the ethnic cultural connotations of products and provide carriers for the dissemination of ethnic culture [12]. On the premise of preserving the core cultural connotations and craftsmanship of Yi ethnic costumes, key symbolic elements such as patterns and colors should be extracted and reconstructed in combination with popular trendy elements from doll clothing. This will lower the interpretive threshold, overcome the problems of symbolic hollowing and obscure communication, and better meet the demands of young audiences and algorithmic logic.

### **4.2 Expansion of Communication Channels and Adaptation to Algorithms**

To break the over-reliance of Yi ethnic costumes on traditional channels, a collaborative communication system combining traditional channels with social media should be constructed to achieve efficient content distribution and widespread dissemination [1]. Efforts should focus on youth-oriented platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu, collaborating with KOLs to conduct live-stream promotions and content seeding, and launching highly interactive activities such as Yi embroidery experience challenges to increase likes, completion rates, and alignment with algorithmic recommendation logic. At the same time, traditional

channels such as museum exhibitions and cultural festivals should be retained, achieving synergy between traditional and modern channels to expand communication coverage.

Based on the symbolic consumption needs of Generation Z for identity construction and emotional expression, derivative products of Yi ethnic costumes—such as Yi embroidery doll clothing and pendants—should be developed. Experiential economy theory also emphasizes that immersive experiences can enhance user stickiness and emotional resonance [11]. Immersive activities for Yi ethnic costume making and outfit coordination should be organized, combined with short videos to popularize the cultural connotations of Yi ethnic costumes. This will lower cognitive barriers and precisely reach young audiences.

### 4.3 Integration into Platform Economy and Co-creation of ICH

To address the compatibility dilemma between ICH and the platform economy, ICH elements should be embedded into young people's cultural practices. UGC secondary creation should be encouraged to enhance content interactivity and dissemination power [5], transforming young people from “viewers” into “co-creators” of ICH. Leveraging platform economy logic, cultural and creative products and outfit templates featuring Yi ethnic costume elements should be launched, with UGC secondary creation encouraged and supported through traffic incentives. Collaboration with trendy toy and fashion brands for co-branded products should be pursued, embedding Yi ethnic costume elements into cultural scenarios familiar to Generation Z. This will enhance communication power and participation, reconstruct cultural identity of ICH, and achieve living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

## 5. Conclusion

This study systematically compares the five-dimensional communication differences between trendy doll clothing and Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes through a multi-theoretical approach. It clarifies that Yi ethnic costumes have fallen into an inheritance dilemma due to singular communication subjects, high interpretive thresholds for symbolic expression, insufficient adaptation to channels and algorithms, and disconnection from Generation Z's demands. In contrast, although trendy doll clothing achieves efficient dissemination, it lacks deep cultural value. Accordingly, this paper proposes practical countermeasures including building a diversified communication system, innovating symbolic expression, coordinating communication channels, and promoting platform-based co-creation of ICH.

This study fills the research gap in existing literature, which lacks a comprehensive comparison of communication models between the two types of costumes and targeted inheritance recommendations. By integrating the 5W model with theories of symbolic consumption and algorithmic communication, it enriches the theoretical system of ICH communication in the context of digital consumer society. It also provides an analytical framework for comparative studies of similar cultural communication and offers practical guidance and conceptual references for the living inheritance of Chuxiong Yi ethnic costumes and other regional ethnic ICH costumes.

The current study adopts a relatively macro perspective on UGC co-creation mechanisms and audience segmentation. Future research could conduct empirical studies to deeply explore long-term operational mechanisms of UGC co-creation, carry out detailed audience segmentation research on ICH, and expand the research scope. Comparative studies on the integration pathways of different ICH categories with trendy culture could also be conducted to summarize differentiated communication patterns, further promoting a healthy balance between cultural and commercial value in ICH.

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