

Multi-platform Distribution of Video Content: An Analysis of Video Content Cross-posted by YouTubers on Bilibili

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Abstract. Among YouTube content creators from the Western culture, it is becoming more and more present to upload their YouTube content on the Chinese video-sharing platform Bilibili. YouTubers may adjust their video content and uploading strategies when cross-posting to Bilibili. However, research on the cross-posting behavior of YouTube creators between YouTube and Bilibili by YouTube creators is lacking but will give insights into platform-specific practices. In this work-in-progress paper a qualitative content analysis is performed, to compare video content cross-posted from YouTube to Bilibili by the same creators, their uploading behaviors and the utilization of user interface features associated with the videos. Results show adjustments of video content, especially regarding textual elements and outro design. All in all, adjustments to content and platform-exclusive content uploaded are targeted at Chinese viewers, who represent a potentially large audience group on Bilibili with a different cultural background, extending their audience base. The present research is an initial step to form a contribution to the literature that seeks to understand the role of culture and platform affordances played in multi-platform content distribution, specifically in the Chinese-Western context.

Keywords: Cross-posting, Multi-platform, Content analysis, YouTube, Bilibili.

1 Introduction

Cross-posting and, thus, uploading identical content on various social media platforms is nothing new. The procedure is common for user-generated text and images, especially by professional users [1]. When it comes to short-video content, multi-platform distribution is typically found across TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts [2]. In recent years, YouTube content creators started posting their content on Bilibili, a Chinese video-sharing platform. Recent research about Chinese creators posting on multiple platforms, indicates adjustments to the same content posted are made [e.g., 3], but does not go into detail about those adjustments. Considering the platform differences between YouTube and Bilibili (e.g., user base, interface elements), YouTubers

may alter their content and strategies when cross-posting on Bilibili. However, research on the cross-posting behavior between YouTube and Bilibili by YouTube creators is lacking. Therefore, this paper aims to compare videos cross-posted to Bilibili by YouTubers and the utilization of user interface features associated with the videos as well as YouTube creators' uploading behavior on YouTube and Bilibili. The research questions are:

RQ1: What differences can be observed between the content cross-posted by YouTubers from YouTube on Bilibili?

RQ2: How do YouTubers utilize the platform's interface features on Bilibili when cross-posting their content, in comparison to YouTube?

RQ3: What differences between YouTubers' uploading behaviors on YouTube compared to Bilibili can be observed?

The present research is an initial step to form a contribution to the literature that seeks to understand the role of culture and platform affordances played in multi-platform content distribution, specifically in the Chinese-Western context.

2 Related Literature

Farahbakhsh, Cuevas, and Crespi [1] investigated the cross-posting activity of professional users on the online social networks Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Results showed that content is frequently cross-posted by professional users, especially between Facebook and Twitter. Ma, Gui, and Kou [4] found that platform prioritization, synchronization of content across multiple platforms, and audience management are important practices in creator ecology. Meng and Nansen [3] uncovered Chinese content creators not only produce and circulate videos across multiple platforms but also consider their self-presentation and online identity management and formation. Cross-platform sharing is performed to increase the creator's visibility and reach a greater audience. However, platforms are used following their respective aims, leading to platform-specific practices including platform-specific management of identity and self-presentation practices.

Some studies explored the differences between user-generated content (UGC) across multiple social media platforms regarding the same topic.

Smith, Fischer and Yongjian [5] compared the customers' UGC related to two brands across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and found significant differences. For example, customers are more likely to upload self-promotional content on YouTube, tweet brand-centred content on Twitter, and respond to marketer action via UGC on both Twitter and Facebook. Later research by Roma and Aloini [6] built on Smith et al.'s and further compared the brand-related UGC across the three platforms and discovered updated evidence regarding the UGC differences. For example, they found that though YouTube still features more self-promotional UGC from customers than Facebook and Twitter, Facebook has closed the gap with YouTube due to the inclusion of features that allow more visually rich content. The results also found customers reacted

to the brand campaign differently on three platforms depending on the brands, further arguing that in addition to the platforms' differences, how the brands use social media to engage customers is also important to determine the content posted.

Instead of specific brands, Zhan et al. [7] analyzed the content relating to the same product across Reddit, Twitter, and product online forums. Similar to [5] and [6], the results showed that the product-related content is presented differently based on the platform characteristics. For example, the posts on Reddit are broader due to their comprehensive nature, while Twitter is more specific on debates regarding the product.

Overall, the above research indicated content on different social media platforms may be presented differently, even if they evolve around the same topics. However, existing research has not focused on comparing the content created by the same creator cross-posted on multiple platforms, and they did not focus on comparing platforms that are built for video sharing like YouTube and Bilibili. They also did not compare the content created by the same creator cross-posted on other platforms, especially platforms that are within different cultural domains.

Recent research by Zimmer, Scheibe, and Zhang [8] found different utilizations and inclusions of the gamification elements (e.g., donating, commenting, linking, chatting, sending a digital gift) on popular video streaming apps used in countries like China, Germany, and United States, with a noticeable difference between the design of gamification features in Chinese and Eastern Country apps and the one usually used in the Western countries. While the research did not compare the cross-posted content on YouTube and Bilibili, the results still imply that like other social media sites, video sharing or streaming platforms are also built differently for user groups in different cultural domains. This is in line with Levian and Arriaga's [9] argument that different social media platforms offer the contributors various forms of capital from the content they posted, such as ratings, featuring, social network position, and attention. So, when the same group of creators cross-posts from one video platform to another, especially when the platforms are focusing on viewer groups with different cultural backgrounds like Bilibili and YouTube, the content and the utilization of the platform features may be altered by the creators to maintain the same level of the benefits or capitals received. However, existing research rarely has specifically explored the creators' cross-posting behaviors on Bilibili and YouTube. This research should serve as a first step towards closing this gap.

3 Methodology

A qualitative content analysis was performed by observing the content of the same videos uploaded to Bilibili and YouTube by creators who have an official account on both platforms but first started content creation on YouTube. The YouTube creators Viva La Dirt League (VLDL; entertainment content) and Pamela Reif (fitness content) have been considered for analysis. Both YouTube channels started posting their content on Bilibili in 2020 and are still actively uploading content on both platforms. The sample videos were the most viewed ones on Bilibili, the first videos that were uploaded to Bilibili and were also available on YouTube, and one was randomly chosen. In total,

six videos (three videos each) have been observed regarding the video content. Furthermore, the video uploading behavior of both content creators has been observed by examining the uploading date of the same videos on both platforms as well as by checking whether content has solely and especially been uploaded to one of the platforms.

The conventional approach [10] was applied to arrive at the content categories, therefore the themes emerged during the analysis. The authors watched the videos independently, whereby one researcher observed the videos of Pamela Reif and one of VLDL. The emerging topics were discussed during a meeting. The authors watched different videos to arrive at a generalizable codebook. Content analysis allows qualitative as well as quantitative results, whereby the results presented in this study are qualitative by presenting the coded themes.

4 Results

4.1 Video Content

The results found six areas of differences between the content of the videos on YouTube and the one cross-posted to Bilibili: on-screen texts, subtitles, thumbnail design, outro design, ads, video quality, and watermarking.

On-screen texts are texts YouTubers added to their video as part of the content. For Pamela Reif, the name of each workout movement is presented in all her workout videos. For VLDL, the title of each episode is shown at the beginning of each short story in the video that contains multiple episodes. Both creators have changed on-screen texts from English to Chinese while maintaining a similar text style on Bilibili. This may be due to their aim to make the video more accessible to Chinese viewers.

The observation shows that the videos uploaded by VLDL to Bilibili have Chinese *subtitles* embedded, but no embedded subtitles in the original YouTube videos. This can be the creators' technique to further enhance the accessibility of their videos for Chinese viewers. This does not apply to Pamela Reif as all her videos in the sample are workout videos with no dialogues but music playing in the background.

Thumbnail design refers to the video thumbnails presented on YouTube and Bilibili. Both YouTubers have changed the English texts on the original thumbnail to Chinese, with similar colors and styles. The images most of the time remain the same (design style) across both platforms. This again reflects the practice of YouTubers trying to enhance the accessibility of their videos.

The *outro design* is also different between both platforms. For VLDL, at the end of a video on Bilibili, they added an outro graphic that matches the three buttons on the Bilibili interface, including likes and shares. On YouTube, however, the outro includes a YouTube "subscribe" button asking for subscriptions. For Pamela Reif, the original video on YouTube includes the promotion of the workout music playlist (on certain platforms that are not accessible in China), which was cut out on the cross-posted version on Bilibili. Thus, both creators seem to alter their outro to accommodate the platforms or overall environment and accessibility of viewers.

Advertising includes ads added by the platform during the video and ads included as promotions by the creators. It was found that videos on Bilibili do not have ads that interrupt the viewers. On YouTube, however, there are ads in the videos (the users can also remove ads by buying a membership). Pamela Reif’s videos however further included ads by the creator which were highlighted by a note saying “AD” at the beginning of the video.

For *video qualities*, on YouTube, viewers can change available qualities without restrictions. However, on Bilibili, the video was played in low quality by default. Users need to log in to access high-quality selection, with the highest quality locked behind a Bilibili membership payment. This may be due to policy differences between the platforms instead of the choice of the uploaders.

Watermarking is a unique element of Bilibili. In both creators’ videos, there are watermarks in the form of the channel names and a Bilibili Logo. Only Pamela Reif’s first video on Bilibili does not have a watermark, which may be due to being at an early stage of uploading. This is perhaps due to there being plenty of videos on YouTube that were directly reuploaded to Bilibili by users without the creators’ permission, leading to both creators adding watermarks to the video to prevent copyright. However, based on the similarity of the watermark format, it could be a requirement by the Bilibili platform as well.

4.2 Utilization of the User Interface Elements

Five differences between the utilization of user interface features on YouTube and Bilibili by the creators were discovered, which are related to the function of video titling, donation, commenting, copyright statement, and video description.

For *video titling*, the results showed that both YouTubers utilize Chinese video names (or English and Chinese combined) when they cross-post their videos. The titles are not always directly translated from English to Chinese. It seems like the YouTubers not only try to lower the language barrier but also make the video titles more understandable to Chinese viewers.

Donation refers to the function on both platforms that allows viewers to donate money to the creators. On YouTube the videos from VLDL all have the donation, or “thanks” functions enabled. Pamela Reif, on the other hand, does not enable the donation function on YouTube. On Bilibili, there are two possibilities to donate to the creators on the video interface, named “giving coins” and “charging”. Both functions will grant the creators virtual currencies that can be exchanged for real money or to buy virtual items. Among those, the charge function can be enabled or disabled by the creators. The analysis showed that both donation functions on Bilibili are present for both creators. This can be the practice in which the creator adopts the business models of the Bilibili platform.

For *commenting*, the results show that comment sections are all enabled under the videos on YouTube and Bilibili. On YouTube, VLDL sometimes directly interacts with viewers by liking their comments. Pamela Reif added her own comments on the top of the comment section under the videos making the comments “pinned” comments. On Bilibili, there is no interaction between VLDL and the viewers’ comments. However,

Pamela Reif still utilizes the pinned comments, but in Chinese, to connect with her Chinese viewers. Bilibili also has a function called Danmaku, through which the viewers can input comments on the exact moment in the video and let it move across the screen for other viewers to see. All the videos cross-posted to Bilibili from YouTube have Danmaku on them.

Copyright statement is a unique function of Bilibili. Creators can choose to turn on the copyright statement when they upload the video. The statement, besides the video title, indicates other users cannot reupload or redistribute the video unless authorized by the original creator. Both creators have this function turned on for all the videos they cross-posted to Bilibili. This is perhaps due to the situation in which there are YouTube videos directly reuploaded by the users to Bilibili.

Video descriptions are extra information displayed under the video added by the creators. Both creators have English descriptions under their original videos on YouTube. On Bilibili, the descriptions are in Chinese (combined with English sometimes), but also have different content from the English version. For example, one video from VLDL has a Chinese description of the video content on Bilibili, while the original YouTube video has a longer description with video content and promotion of the YouTubers (e.g., social media, product range). In Pamela Reif's first video on Bilibili, in addition to describing the video content in Chinese, she added that she hopes her Chinese is correct (in English). So, it seems like the creators all tailored their descriptions for their Bilibili uploads.

4.3 Creator's Uploading Behaviors

Finally, the results showed that the uploading behaviors of the creators are different when they start cross-posting videos to Bilibili, mainly regarding the uploading schedule and exclusive content.

For the *uploading schedule*, the results showed that the creators' accounts on Bilibili are uploading slower than on YouTube. The original videos on YouTube are usually uploaded months earlier than the cross-posted version on Bilibili. It can be explained by the post-production they need to do before posting the content from YouTube to Bilibili, including adding Chinese subtitles and replacing on-screen text as well as translating the thumbnail's text.

We also found that there is *exclusive content* posted by the creators that are specially created for the platform's viewers. For example, one video on Pamela Reif's Bilibili channel was made for the Chinese Lunar New Year, in which she briefly speaks Chinese (Mandarin) in the video. There is also another video she made in partnership with the Chinese online retailer Jingdong. Those videos were not uploaded on YouTube. However, on YouTube, some videos are not uploaded to Bilibili either, especially those workout videos that are older than the first video she cross-posted to Bilibili. VLDL also made exclusive content for Bilibili's audience. The first upload on their Bilibili channel is a promotional video for the Chinese viewer base and is solely available on Bilibili. In the video, the main members of VLDL introduce themselves in Chinese. On YouTube, they also uploaded an introduction video for YouTube's audience when they

started the channel, which is a skit and music video. Similar to Pamela Reif, some of their earlier content is not cross-posted to Bilibili.

5 Discussion

The present study sheds light on the multi-platform distribution of video content cross-posted by YouTubers on the Chinese video-sharing platform Bilibili.

The results reveal that YouTubers have made changes to the content they have cross-posted on Bilibili. Especially by changing the textual content of the video and thumbnail from English to Chinese and by adding Chinese subtitles, the video is more accessible to Chinese viewers. However, some changes may be caused by the affordability of the platform, such as the video quality options, and the cut outro or the new outro design for Bilibili. Meng and Nansen [3, p. 37] argue it “is a form of *platform migration*, in order to create optimal conditions for their videos to spread and be viewed”. Other studies identified differences in the content posted by different users across multiple platforms regarding the same topic [5-7]. Our results are partially in line with the existing research, which revealed that content types regarding the same topic are different across different UGC platforms. However, with the focus on YouTube and Bilibili, our research proposes there are also changes applied to the content cross-posted from the original platform to the one in another cultural environment by the same creator, due to the platform features and the viewer demographics on those platforms.

Previous research uncovered creators’ behaviors for audience engagement on YouTube including the use of comment sections for participation [11-13] and fulfilling viewers’ needs of seeking information [14] by, for example, using descriptions on YouTube. Our research added to those studies and found that YouTubers also try to utilize similar features on Bilibili when cross-posting to engage their viewers. However, our research also indicates that YouTubers also alter their way of using those functions to further accommodate the viewers’ demographics on Bilibili, such as using Chinese comments and video descriptions. In addition to similar functions, our research also found some other unique implementations of the user interface on Bilibili including the inclusion of a copyright statement. This is in line with existing research [e.g., 8] that uncovered different or similar gamification elements of the online streaming platform. However, we have further discovered that when the same creators cross-post content from one streaming platform to another, there will also be similarities and differences between their utilizations of those functions.

Further, the results show that the creators have considered the Bilibili demographics intentionally to market their channels in a different way than they do on YouTube. While some of the results are in line with the research that discovered the differences between user behaviors across different platforms, such as the content they are posting regarding the brands and topics [5, 6], our results further indicate that the creators may alter their strategies to engage their audience when cross-posting between different platforms with the same functionality (e.g., video sharing), especially when the platforms are in different cultural domains (e.g., Chinese vs Western).

Some limitations of this work-in process study must be mentioned. First, the number of YouTube channels as well as the number of analyzed videos is rather low and only content in the field of fitness (Pamela Reif) and entertainment (VLDL) was considered.

Further videos from creators of other topics should be included in future analyses (e.g., cooking, fashion, lifestyle.). Second, at least two researchers will have to watch the same videos to be able to calculate an inter-coder reliability score [15] for validity of the results.

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