

# A Study on the Influence Mechanism of New Media Usage on Central Plains Culture Identity among University Students in Higher Education Institutions of Henan Province, China

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**Abstract:** *Under the national strategies of "Digital China" and "Cultural Power", this study investigates how new media usage influences the cultural identity of Zhongyuan culture among university students in Henan Province. Based on Media Ecology and Social Identity Theory, it employs a mixed-methods approach, primarily using questionnaire surveys supplemented by in-depth interviews. The study finds that new media acts as a "double-edged sword" through three mechanisms. First, the Symbol Construction Mechanism uses visualization, narrativization, and fashion-oriented transcoding to make Zhongyuan culture vivid and emotionally engaging. Second, the Interactive Reinforcement Mechanism, via algorithms, likes, comments, and online communities, builds a reinforcing information environment but risks narrowing identity perspectives. Third, the Empowerment and Alienation Mechanism offers technical empowerment that fosters creative participation but may lead to superficial identity due to information fragmentation and entertainment trends. This research concludes that cultural identity formation in the new media era is a complex, dynamic process. It suggests enhancing integrated media systems in universities, innovating content quality, building collaborative communication communities, and improving digital literacy education to harness new media's positive role in strengthening youth cultural confidence.*

**Keywords:** New Media, Central Plains Culture Identity, Higher Education Institutions in Henan, Influence Mechanism, Symbol Construction, Mixed Research

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## 1. Introduction

Against the contemporary backdrop intertwined with the waves of globalization and digitalization, the construction and reshaping of cultural identity are undergoing profound and unprecedented changes. In recent years, the coordinated advancement of the national strategies of "Digital China" and "Cultural Power" not only marks a major shift in national development strategies, but also points out a digital path for the inheritance and innovation of excellent traditional Chinese culture. With the in-depth development of the mediated society, the social environment has evolved from "mediated representation" to "mediated existence". New media is no longer merely a tool for information transmission, but has further developed into a core field and structural force that shapes social cognition, influences emotional belonging, and guides behavioral tendencies (Tang, R., Shi, R., Zhao, Y., Chen, Y., & Hua, B. 2024). Against

this macro background, as an important component of the pluralistic and integrated pattern of Chinese culture, the inheritance of regional culture is directly related to the overall vitality and resilience of the culture (Hashi, A. 2025). As the birthplace and core carrier of Chinese historical civilization, Zhongyuan culture, featuring its extensive and profound connotation and time-honored history, embodies the roots and soul of the Chinese nation (Sandu, A., & Nistor, P. 2020). However, facing the impact of modernity and the integration and collision of diverse cultures, the inheritance of Zhongyuan culture, especially the state of its recognition among young people, is confronted with a complex situation where opportunities and challenges coexist (Srishti, S. 2025).

As the pillars of the country's future development and the digital natives of cyberspace, the shaping of university students' cultural identity is directly related to the foundation and future direction of cultural self-confidence (Zhang, Y. 2024). University students in Henan's higher education institutions, living in the hinterland of Zhongyuan culture, have both geographical proximity to cultural inheritance and pioneering nature in digital life. Their state of identification with Zhongyuan culture constitutes an observation window of great theoretical value and practical significance. New media platforms, such as short videos, social media and online communities, have completely transformed the way cultural information is accessed, interpreted and internalized by virtue of their communication characteristics including instantaneity, interactivity, visualization and community-based dissemination (Huang, X., & Wei, N. 2025). They can transcend temporal and spatial boundaries to showcase the charm of Zhongyuan culture in vivid and lively forms, such as demonstrating Jun porcelain firing techniques through short videos, organizing online ancestor worship activities via social networks, and restoring the appearance of ancient cities with virtual reality (VR) technology (Liao, C., Lao, S., & Zihan, L. 2025). This provides potential possibilities for improving university students' cognitive breadth of Zhongyuan culture (e.g., understanding its historical origins and connotative system) and emotional warmth (e.g., generating a sense of pride and affinity) (Smith, D., Leonis, T., & Anandavalli, S. 2021). For instance, programs such as Huayu Zhimen (China's Treasure Gate) and Chinese Character Hero launched by Henan TV Station have successfully stimulated public interest in Zhongyuan culture through integrated communication via TV and new media platforms (Xu, Y. 2023).

Yet, new media is also a "double-edged sword". The fragmentation, entertainment-oriented nature of its information dissemination and algorithm recommendation mechanism may lead university students to understand Zhongyuan culture merely at the level of superficial symbols, failing to grasp its spiritual core and contemporary value in depth. The interplay of diverse ideological trends in cyberspace, and even certain inappropriate remarks and the tendency of entertainment supremacy, may dilute the influence of mainstream culture and pose challenges to the formation of stable values among university students. The complex information environment constructed by new media has transformed the cultural identity formation of contemporary university students into no longer a one-way process of indoctrination and acceptance, but rather a sophisticated process featuring subjective choices, creative transformation and dynamic adjustment. They may chase after Guofeng music (which incorporates traditional cultural elements) online while displaying a certain sense of alienation from local culture in practice; this potential discrepancy between "cognition" and "practice" highlights the urgency of exploring the internal influence mechanism underlying this phenomenon (Soto, P., Bauwens, J., & Smets, K. 2023).

While existing studies have examined the macro-level impacts of new media on cultural communication and the inherent value of Zhongyuan culture per se, there remains a paucity of

empirical research and theoretical discussions that focus on how new media usage specifically affects the multidimensional (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) Central Plains Culture identity of the specific group—university students in Henan's higher education institutions—and thoroughly reveal its internal functioning mechanism. Most existing researches either explore strategies from the communicator's perspective or conduct descriptive analyses of phenomena, lacking systematic scrutiny of the micro-mechanisms through which university students' new media usage practices mediate or moderate the formation of cultural identity from the audience (university students) perspective (Zhu, D., & Lin, X. 2022). Key questions remain unanswered: What usage characteristics (e.g., usage intensity, content preferences, interaction depth) play a pivotal role? Does new media strengthen cognition by providing knowledge-based content, stimulate a sense of belonging through emotional resonance, or facilitate practical engagement via community interaction? Are there significant differences in these impacts among student groups with varying academic backgrounds and ascribed cultural capital (e.g., native place)? All these questions warrant in-depth exploration.

Accordingly, anchored at the intersection of the national strategies of "Digital China" and "Cultural Power", this study focuses on the critical issue of Central Plains Culture identity among university students in Henan's higher education institutions. Its core research questions are as follows: How does new media usage (encompassing short videos, social media, online communities, and other forms) influence university students in Henan's higher education institutions regarding their cognitive understanding, emotional belonging, and behavioral tendencies toward Zhongyuan culture? What are the underlying influence mechanisms? To address these questions, this study integrates perspectives from Media Ecology, Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to construct an analytical framework that includes "new media usage behavior (independent variable) — cognitive, emotional and behavioral identity dimensions (dependent variables) — mediating/moderating variables (e.g., perceived credibility, community norms, self-efficacy)". Through empirical investigation and theoretical analysis, this study aims to reveal the specific paths, effects, and boundary conditions of new media in shaping young people's regional cultural identity (Wen, X. 2025).

The significance of this study is reflected in two aspects. At the theoretical level, it endeavors to deepen the understanding of the construction mechanism of cultural identity in the digital era, transcend the simplistic dichotomy of technological determinism or cultural essentialism, and enrich relevant theories in media and cultural studies from the perspective of practical mutual construction. At the practical level, the research findings are intended to provide precise strategic references for higher education institutions in Henan to effectively utilize new media platforms to optimize cultural education practices and enhance the effectiveness of ideological and political education. Meanwhile, it also offers decision-making insights for government cultural departments to formulate policies for the digital dissemination and inheritance of regional culture that better align with the characteristics of young people. In this way, amid the in-depth development of the mediated society, the foundation of cultural self-confidence among the youth can be effectively consolidated, and the creative transformation and innovative development of Zhongyuan culture in the new era can be promoted (Hu, S., Ji, F., Song, J., & Akram, U. 2025).

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation**

This study aims to systematically sort out the theoretical context and existing research findings related to the theme of this study, laying a solid academic foundation for empirical analysis. Firstly, it will define the multidimensional structure of cultural identity and elaborate on the

special status and connotation of Zhongyuan Culture in the genealogy of Chinese civilization. Secondly, it will introduce theories including Media Ecology to conduct an in-depth analysis of how new media, as a structural force, reshapes the generative field of cultural identity. Finally, on this basis, it will construct an integrated analytical framework for this study and clarify the relationships among variables.

## **2.1 The Multidimensional Structure of Cultural Identity and the Particularity of Zhongyuan Culture**

As a deep-seated form of identity, cultural identity (CI) serves as the root of ethnic unity and the soul of ethnic harmony. It is not a unidimensional concept, but a complex psychological structural system encompassing cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions (Ghahramani, S., Sharfabadi, A., & Afshani, S. 2024).

Firstly, in the cognitive dimension, cultural identity is manifested as an individual's intellectual understanding and comprehension of the historical origins, symbol systems (language, characters, art), values and behavioral norms of a specific cultural group (e.g., Zhongyuan culture). This constitutes the rational foundation for identity formation. Secondly, in the emotional dimension, identity is reflected in an individual's emotional experiences such as a sense of belonging, pride and affinity toward the culture they belong to or come into contact with, which is the most stable bond for maintaining identity. Finally, in the behavioral dimension, identity is externalized into an individual's specific actions of actively contacting, participating in, inheriting and even innovating the culture, serving as the ultimate foothold and criterion for identity. The three dimensions are interrelated and progressive, jointly forming a complete process of cultural identity. It is worth noting that although cultural identity overlaps with concepts such as political identity and social identity, it is more characterized by "self-identity", deeply embedded in the inner core of human existence, and the impacts caused by its anxiety and vacillation are more far-reaching.

When this multidimensional structure is placed in the context of this study, the object refers to Zhongyuan culture. Unlike ordinary regional cultures, Zhongyuan culture is the birthplace and core carrier of Chinese historical civilization, occupying a fundamental position in the pluralistic and integrated pattern of Chinese culture. Its connotative system is rich, which can be divided into environmental culture, human group culture (e.g., profound surname culture), material culture (e.g., historical buildings, historical sites and cultural relics) and intangible culture (e.g., folk customs and craftsmanship). It is characterized by being extensive and profound as well as time-honored, with strong cohesiveness, inclusiveness and radiation. The history of Zhongyuan culture is almost half of the history of Chinese culture; the spirits it carries, such as self-improvement, vigor and enterprise, and harmony and inclusiveness, constitute the core of the basic cultural form and character of the Chinese nation. Therefore, the identification with Zhongyuan culture is essentially the contemporary youth's identification with the root of Chinese culture, serving as an important cornerstone of cultural self-confidence. However, existing empirical studies have shown that there is a structural tension between "weak cognition" and "strong emotion" in university students' current identification with Zhongyuan culture, and their behavioral participation lags relatively behind, which provides a practical problem orientation for this study focusing on the "influence mechanism"(Ananyeva, N. 2025).

## **2.2 New Media and Social Impacts from the Perspective of Media Ecology**

To understand how new media influences cultural identity (CI), we must move beyond the traditional perspective that regards media as mere "tools" or "channels", and instead examine

it from the theoretical height of Media Ecology (ME). Marshall McLuhan, a representative figure of this theoretical school, put forward the famous proposition that "the medium is the message", emphasizing that the form of media itself shapes social structures and human perception modes, and its influence even surpasses the specific content it conveys (Bartleet, B., Grant, C., Mani, C., & Tomlinson, V. 2020).

In the new media era, this theory demonstrates strong explanatory power. New media refers to a communication form that relies on digital technology, network technology and mobile technology to provide users with information and entertainment services through channels such as the Internet and wireless communication networks, with typical characteristics including instantaneity, interactivity, multimedia, decentralization and community-based dissemination. Media Ecology reveals that new media forms such as Weibo, short videos and social media are not merely communication tools; they themselves constitute a brand-new information environment and social ecosystem (Guan, T., Luo, N., & Matsunobu, K. 2022). This environment reshapes people's ways of perceiving the world (e.g., fragmented reading, visual cognition), reconstructs social relations (e.g., networks interwoven with strong ties and weak ties), and resets the rules of cultural communication and reception (e.g., users actively "pulling" information, participatory cultural production). As existing studies have pointed out, information dissemination on new media platforms has added two additional values: netizens' social relations and cultural identity. This implies that the dissemination of Zhongyuan culture and the construction of its identity in the new media environment are inevitably different from traditional classroom education or offline practical activities, with greater emphasis on interactivity, experience, sharing and community resonance (Deng, Z. 2025).

In addition, it is also necessary to clearly recognize that new media is a "double-edged sword". The instantaneity and diversity of its information dissemination not only provide a cross-temporal and cross-spatial display platform for Zhongyuan culture and enhance its influence, but may also lead to information overload and superficial cognition. What is more, it may provide a breeding ground for inappropriate remarks and the tendency of entertainment supremacy, dilute the influence of mainstream culture, and pose challenges to in-depth identity. Such complexity requires us to adopt a dialectical perspective when analyzing its influence mechanism (Li, X., Liu, M., & Su, C. 2024).

### **2.3 The Construction of the Analytical Framework for This Study**

Based on the aforementioned theoretical sorting and literature review, this study constructs an integrated analytical framework, aiming to systematically reveal the action paths and internal mechanisms of "New Media Usage (NMU)" on "Central Plains Culture Identity (ZCI)". The framework includes independent variables, dependent variables, and key mediating/moderating variables.

**Independent Variable: New Media Usage Habits** This study takes university students' new media usage habits as the core independent variable. In terms of operationalization, it will focus on examining dimensions such as usage intensity (e.g., daily usage duration, frequency), content preferences (e.g., the proportion of following historical and cultural accounts, frequency of accessing Zhongyuan culture-related content), and usage methods (e.g., passive browsing, liking and commenting, original sharing) (Jing, J. 2025).

**Dependent Variable: The Multidimensional Structure of Central Plains Culture Identity** As mentioned earlier, the dependent variable is Central Plains Culture Identity (ZCI), which is operationalized into three interrelated yet independently measurable dimensions: cognitive

identity (level of understanding of Zhongyuan culture knowledge), emotional identity (sense of pride and belonging to Zhongyuan culture), and behavioral identity (willingness and actual actions to participate in online/offline activities related to Zhongyuan culture)(Song, J. 2023). Mediating and Moderating Variables: Key Links in the Influence Mechanism New media usage does not directly affect cultural identity; instead, complex psychological and social processes exist in between. This study introduces the following variables as potential mediating or moderating variables:

**Perceived Credibility:** Refers to university students' evaluation of the authenticity, professionalism, and trustworthiness of Zhongyuan culture information obtained through new media platforms. This may mediate the impact of content preferences on cognitive identity.

**Interactive Experience:** Covers interactions between users and content, users and communicators, and users and users. A high level of interactivity can enhance immersion and participation, potentially strengthening emotional connections, and serving as an important mediator for new media to influence emotional and behavioral identity.

**Peer Influence (Subjective Norm, SN):** In new media communities, the attitudes and behaviors of peer groups (e.g., liking, commenting, reposting) can form social pressure or demonstration effects, which may moderate the relationship between usage behaviors and identity outcomes. **Self-Efficacy:** Refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to effectively understand and participate in Central Plains Culture activities. The low-threshold practical opportunities provided by new media may improve self-efficacy, thereby promoting behavioral identity.

The logic of this analytical framework is that new media, through specific usage habits, influences university students' psychological variables such as perceived credibility and interactive experience, and ultimately acts on their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral identity toward Zhongyuan culture under the moderation of social factors such as peer groups. This framework integrates media technology, individual psychology, and social environment factors into a unified perspective, striving to more comprehensively and profoundly reveal the complex formation mechanism of young people's regional cultural identity in the new media era.

### **3. Research Design**

This study aims to systematically elaborate on the overall research design of this study, including research objects and sampling methods, main research methods adopted, operational measurement of variables, data analysis strategies, as well as reliability, validity and ethical considerations of the research, so as to ensure the scientificity, standardization and operability of the research.

#### **3.1 Research Objects and Sampling Methods**

The research objects of this study are full-time undergraduate students in regular institutions of higher education in Henan Province. To ensure the representativeness of the sample and capture potential group differences (e.g., differences based on native place, major, and school type), a multi-stage stratified cluster sampling method is adopted in this study.

**Stage 1: Stratified Sampling of Universities.** Universities in Henan Province are stratified by academic level (e.g., "Double First-Class" universities, regular undergraduate universities, and vocational universities) and geographical distribution (e.g., Northern Henan, Central Henan,

and Southern Henan). One to two universities are randomly selected from each stratum, with a total of 6 to 8 universities selected.

**Stage 2: Cluster Sampling by Major and Grade.** Within the selected universities, stratification is conducted based on disciplinary categories (humanities and social sciences, science, engineering, agriculture and medicine, art and physical education, etc.) and grades (freshmen to seniors). Subsequently, cluster sampling is performed using natural classes or majors as units, with a certain number of classes randomly selected.

**Stage 3: Questionnaire Distribution.** A questionnaire survey is conducted among all students in the selected classes. The total sample size is expected to be controlled between 1,200 and 1,500, so as to meet the sample size requirements of advanced statistical analyses such as structural equation modeling. In addition, 30 to 40 students with different new media usage habits and cultural identity performances will be purposively selected from the questionnaire respondents for semi-structured in-depth interviews, providing in-depth interpretation and context for the quantitative data.

### **3.2 Research Methods and Data Collection**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, with questionnaire survey as the main method and in-depth interview as the supplementary method.

**Questionnaire Survey Method:** It is the core method for this study to collect quantitative data and test research hypotheses. A structured electronic questionnaire will be designed and uniformly distributed in the selected classes with the assistance of the academic affairs office, student affairs department, or teachers of each university. The questionnaire will be anonymous, and the research purpose, confidentiality principle, and voluntary participation principle will be clearly stated in the introduction to improve the response rate and data quality.

**In-depth Interview Method:** It is used to deepen and interpret the quantitative results. The interview outline will be designed around the respondents' new media usage experiences, specific views on Zhongyuan culture, and the influence of peers around them. The interview process will be recorded and transcribed into text for qualitative content analysis, aiming to reveal the "black box" behind the influence mechanism and capture vivid subjective experiences.

### **3.3 Variable Measurement and Operationalization**

Based on the analytical framework constructed in Chapter 2, the main variables of this study and their operational definitions are as follows:

#### ***(1) Independent Variable: New Media Usage Habits***

This variable will be measured from three aspects, all using Likert 5-point or 7-point scales.

**Usage Intensity:** Including average daily usage duration and frequency (e.g., "I use short video/social media apps every day").

**Content Preference:** Measuring the frequency with which students access content related to Zhongyuan culture, such as "I often watch/read short videos/articles about Zhongyuan history, folk customs, intangible cultural heritage, etc."

**Usage Methods:** Distinguishing different levels of participation, such as passive browsing (e.g., scrolling), active interaction (e.g., liking, commenting, reposting), and original content creation (e.g., posting relevant content).

## **(2) Dependent Variable: Central Plains Culture Identity (ZCI)**

Drawing on classical cultural identity theories, this variable is operationalized into three dimensions, measured by Likert scales.

**Cognitive Identity:** Measuring students' level of understanding of basic knowledge, historical figures, and core spirits of Zhongyuan culture, such as "I have a good understanding of Heluo culture, Shaolin culture, Yu opera, etc."

**Emotional Identity:** Measuring students' emotional connections such as a sense of belonging and pride toward Zhongyuan culture, such as "I am proud of Zhongyuan's long history and splendid culture."

**Behavioral Identity:** Measuring students' willingness and actual actions to participate in activities related to Zhongyuan culture, including online behaviors (e.g., sharing relevant content) and offline behaviors (e.g., visiting museums, participating in traditional cultural activities).

## **(3) Mediating Variables and Moderating Variables**

**Mediating Variables:**

**Perceived Credibility:** Measuring the degree to which students believe in the authenticity, reliability, and professionalism of Zhongyuan culture information disseminated on new media.

**Interactive Experience:** Measuring the degree of interaction, immersion, and participation perceived by students when using new media.

**Moderating Variables: Peer Influence (Subjective Norm, SN):** Measuring the expectations and pressure perceived by students from their significant others (e.g., friends, classmates) regarding their understanding and participation in Zhongyuan culture.

**Ascribed Cultural Capital:** As an important control variable, it is measured by students' native place (Henan native/non-Henan native) and family cultural atmosphere (e.g., parents' emphasis on traditional culture).

## **3.4 Data Analysis Strategies**

After data collection, the analysis will be conducted in the following steps:

**Descriptive Statistical Analysis:** Describing the basic characteristics of the sample, as well as the mean and standard deviation of each variable, to initially grasp the data distribution.

**Reliability and Validity Testing:** Using SPSS or R software, the reliability of the scales will be tested through Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient; the construct validity will be tested through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

**Difference Analysis:** Independent samples t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and other methods will be adopted to test whether there are significant differences in core variables among students with different demographic characteristics (e.g., native place, major).

**Hypothesis Testing and Mechanism Analysis:** This is a key step of the study. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be used with AMOS or Mplus software to construct and test a path model including mediating effects. This model can simultaneously handle the relationships among multiple independent variables, dependent variables, and mediating

variables, effectively verifying the indirect influence path of "New Media Usage (NMU) → Perceived Credibility/Interactive Experience → Dimensions of Cultural Identity", and testing the moderating effects of variables such as peer influence.

### **3.5 Reliability, Validity and Ethical Considerations of the Study**

**Guarantee of Reliability and Validity:** The scales used in this study are mainly adapted from mature domestic and foreign scales, revised in combination with the specific context of Zhongyuan culture, and modified through expert review and pre-survey to ensure content validity. After large-scale investigation, reliability and construct validity will be tested through statistical methods.

**Ethical Considerations:** The study will strictly abide by academic ethics. Before the survey, participants will be informed of the research purpose, data usage, and anonymity principle to obtain informed consent. All data will only be used for academic research, and personal information will be strictly kept confidential. Interview recordings and transcripts will be properly handled in accordance with regulations after the analysis is completed.

## **4. Analysis and Findings**

Based on the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews with university students in Henan Province, this study systematically reveals the three core mechanisms through which New Media Usage (NMU) influences their Central Plains Culture Identity (ZCI). These mechanisms not only reflect the constructive power of new media as a technical carrier, but also embody the complexity of its interaction with individual cognition, emotion, and behavior. This chapter will elaborate on the research findings in depth around three dimensions: symbol construction, interactive reinforcement, and empowerment and alienation.

### **4.1 Symbol Construction: The Visual Reconstruction and Emotional Awakening of Central Plains Culture Image by New Media**

By systematically conducting visual transcoding and emotional narration of Central Plains Culture symbols, new media has profoundly reshaped university students' perception framework of Zhongyuan culture, transforming it from abstract historical knowledge into a perceptible, tangible, and resonating emotional object. This construction process is mainly realized through the following paths:

Firstly, at the level of visual symbols, new media vividly presents Central Plains Culture heritage to students with the help of high-definition images, animation effects, AR/VR and other technologies. For example, programs such as Night Banquet in Tang Palace use 5G+AR technology to combine virtual scenes with real stages, vividly reproducing the grand scene of the prosperous Tang Dynasty, enabling students to experience strong visual impact and immersion while watching. This immersive experience effectively eliminates the sense of historical distance, transforming the cultural cognition process into a pleasant aesthetic experience. As one interviewee said: "When I swiped the video of Night Banquet in Tang Palace, I felt that history 'came alive'—it was no longer boring words in textbooks, but an intuitively perceptible beauty (Yao, M. 2025).

Secondly, at the level of auditory and narrative symbols, new media works carefully select music with Zhongyuan characteristics (such as Yu opera and Henan Zhuizi) and adopt a narrative strategy of "small perspective, great feelings". They often focus on the stories of ordinary people; for instance, Rickshaw Puller Speaks English reflects the grand theme of an

open Henan in the new era through the ordinary story of a Kaifeng rickshaw puller who taught himself English and introduced Kaifeng to foreign tourists. This personalized narration embodies grand cultural values into vivid life stories, greatly enhancing the affinity and appeal of the narration, and stimulating students' local pride and emotional resonance (Wang, D., & Li, J. 2025).

Furthermore, through the collage and mixing of symbols, new media actively constructs a new "fashionable" and "interesting" image of Zhongyuan culture. Henan TV's "Chinese Festival" series and IPs such as "Wonderful Tour" have creatively integrated traditional culture with modern popular elements (such as electronic music, street dance, and sci-fi visuals), successfully shaping Zhongyuan culture into a "Guochao" trend. This symbol reconstruction strategy greatly caters to the younger generation's aesthetic psychology of pursuing individuality and fashion, enabling Zhongyuan culture to get rid of the rigid impression of being "old-fashioned" and "outdated" in the minds of some students, and transforming it into a fashionable cultural capital worth pursuing and sharing. The interviews found that many students are willing to share such content on social platforms and regard it as a reflection of their own "cultural taste"(Astleitner, H., & Schlick, S. 2024).

**Table 1: Reconstruction Strategies and Effects of New Media on Central Plains Culture Symbols**

Reconstruction Strategy	Specific Methods	Cognitive-Emotional Impacts on University Students
Visual Transcoding	High-definition images, VR/AR, animation restoration	Transform abstract knowledge into intuitive images, lower the cognitive threshold, and enhance the vividness of perception.
Narrative Embedding	Micro-documentaries, first-person vlogs, story-based short videos	Embed cultural values into life narratives, trigger empathy, and strengthen emotional connections.
Fashionable Grafting	Integration of traditional elements with trendy music and visual styles (Guochao)	Change rigid cultural stereotypes, endow it with fashionable value, and stimulate the willingness to share and identify with it.

#### 4.2 Interactive Reinforcement: The Narrowing and Solidification of Identity Paths by Algorithmic Recommendation and Online Communities

New media is not only a disseminator of information, but also constructs an information environment that continuously strengthens specific cultural preferences through its unique interactive mechanisms (Jin, R., & Wang, X. 2025). This study finds that three interactive forms—algorithmic recommendation, likes/comments, and online communities—jointly shape a "positive feedback loop", but also harbor the risk of leading to identity narrowing.

Based on user behavior data such as clicks, dwell time, and sharing, the algorithmic recommendation mechanism continuously pushes Zhongyuan culture content that university students may be interested in to them. In the interview, a history major student stated: "After I liked several videos about YinXu on Douyin, the platform began to constantly recommend more related archaeological discoveries, cultural relic interpretations, and even clips from relevant historical dramas, making me more and more interested." This "tailor-made" recommendation model can quickly gather like-minded people and deepen students' understanding of a certain cultural aspect in a short period of time. However, the "information cocoon" effect of algorithms may also limit students' cultural horizons, making the Zhongyuan culture content they are exposed to tend to be homogeneous, and it is difficult for them to access a comprehensive, systematic, and even critical cultural knowledge system.

Social interaction functions such as likes, comments, and reposting provide immediate social identity feedback. When students share a piece of content about Zhongyuan culture (such as an exquisite micro-video or a segment of Yu opera), likes and positive comments from friends will form positive group recognition, thereby strengthening their sharing behavior and the cultural identity behind it. This "group resonance" effect places individual cultural experiences in a social network, making cultural identity no longer merely an internal psychological state of individuals, but an observable and reinforceable social behavior.

Interest-based online communities (such as the Guofeng section on websites, Henan culture super topics on Weibo, and regional cultural groups on WeChat) provide university students with a space for in-depth communication and meaning-making. In these communities, members not only consume content, but also engage in participatory cultural production through translation, explanation, and secondary creation (such as adding music to Zhongyuan culture materials and making emojis). This in-depth community participation greatly enhances members' sense of belonging and group identity. On the other hand, there are often certain group norms and value orientations within the community, which may form invisible pressure on members with different views or ideas, leading to the phenomenon of "group polarization" in identity.

#### **4.3 Empowerment and Alienation: The Tension Between Enhanced Expression Rights and In-Depth Identity**

While empowering university students' cultural expression, new media also brings potential risks of shallow identity and alienation, presenting a distinct dialectical impact.

The empowering aspect is reflected in that new media technology has greatly lowered the threshold for cultural expression and creation, stimulating students' subjectivity and creativity. Among the interviewees, some used short videos to record the intangible cultural heritage skills in their hometowns, and some wrote articles on official accounts to explain the modern understanding of the spirit of Zhongyuan culture. This role transformation from "passive recipients" to "active communicators and even creators" makes cultural identity transcend a simple internalization process and enter a stage of positive externalization and practice, which in itself is a deeper and more stable form of identity.

However, the risk of alienation cannot be ignored. Firstly, the massive, fragmented, and entertainment-oriented nature of new media information may cause students' cognition of Zhongyuan culture to stay at the level of "knowing", making it difficult for them to conduct systematic and in-depth understanding. One student admitted: "There is a lot of information online, but it is all fragmented, like a mess of sand, and it is difficult to form a systematic understanding." Secondly, in order to pursue traffic and attention, some content may over-entertain or even misinterpret traditional culture, which may instead undermine the seriousness and in-depth value of culture. Finally, when students are accustomed to consuming cultural symbols in a quick and concise way, they may weaken their motivation to enter real cultural fields (such as museums and historical sites) for in-depth experiences, leading to "alienation" in cultural practice. This contrast between "online enthusiasm" and "offline indifference" reveals the challenges that new media faces in promoting the depth and thickness of cultural identity.

In summary, the impact of new media on the Central Plains Culture Identity (ZCI) of university students in Henan's higher education institutions is a complex process intertwined with multiple mechanisms. It reconstructs cultural images through symbol construction to stimulate

emotional acceptance; builds an identity environment through interactive reinforcement to solidify and narrow identity paths; and while empowering students to conduct cultural expression, it may also lead to the alienation of in-depth identity due to the characteristics of information. These three mechanisms do not exist in isolation, but are intertwined and interact together to shape the contemporary picture of Central Plains Culture identity among university students. Understanding this complexity is crucial for thinking about how to guide new media to play a more positive and healthier role in cultural inheritance.

## **5. Conclusion**

Through empirical investigation and theoretical analysis, this study systematically examines the influence mechanism of New Media Usage (NMU) on the Central Plains Culture Identity (ZCI) of university students in Henan's higher education institutions. The research finds that as a "double-edged sword", new media not only provides unprecedented opportunities for the dissemination and identity construction of Zhongyuan culture, but also brings severe challenges. Based on summarizing the research findings, this chapter puts forward targeted countermeasures and suggestions.

### **5.1 The "Double-Edged Sword" Effect of New Media in Cultural Identity**

This study shows that new media exerts a profound impact on the formation process of university students' ZCI through three core mechanisms. On the positive side, relying on its technological advantages, new media has significantly expanded the breadth and depth of cultural communication. Through visual, narrative and fashionable symbol transcoding, it constructs Zhongyuan culture into a vivid, perceptible and emotionally attractive image, effectively stimulating students' emotional resonance and willingness to identify. The interactive mechanisms of social media (such as likes, comments, and community participation) create a continuously reinforced identity environment, transforming cultural identity from an individual psychological state into an observable and reinforceable social behavior. New media also lowers the threshold for cultural expression and creation through technological empowerment, encouraging students to transform from passive recipients to active communicators and creators, and promoting the externalization and practice of identity. However, the negative impacts of new media cannot be ignored. The fragmented and entertainment-oriented nature of its information dissemination may cause students' cognition of Zhongyuan culture to stay on the surface, making it difficult to form a systematic and in-depth understanding. While accurately delivering content, the algorithmic recommendation mechanism may also build an "information cocoon", limiting students' cultural horizons and leading to the narrowing of identity. In pursuit of traffic, some content may over-entertain or even misinterpret traditional culture, which may undermine the seriousness and in-depth value of culture. When students are accustomed to the quick content consumption mode, they may weaken their motivation for in-depth cultural experience and practice, leading to the discrepancy between "online enthusiasm" and "offline indifference" in knowledge and practice. The interweaving and collision of diverse ideological trends in cyberspace also pose challenges to mainstream cultural identity.

### **5.2 Strategic Suggestions for Improving the Effectiveness of Cultural Identity**

Faced with the above complex impacts, universities, the government and social forces need to work together to maximize the positive effects of new media and restrain its negative impacts. Firstly, promote the systematic construction and value guidance of the university's integrated media system. Universities should go beyond the simple thinking of platform superposition and strive to build an integrated media ecosystem oriented by the education logic. This includes

establishing a content hub mechanism of "unified planning and multi-terminal production", realizing differentiated expression and precise distribution of content according to the characteristics of different platforms. For example, WeChat official accounts can focus on in-depth reports and cultural interpretation, while short video platforms such as Douyin are suitable for showing vivid moments of cultural practice. The key is to establish an evaluation system centered on education effectiveness, abandon single traffic indicators, and introduce comprehensive indicators such as interaction depth, emotional tendency, and value internalization, guiding the construction of integrated media to return to the essence of moral education and talent cultivation.

Secondly, strengthen the innovative production and connotation excavation of high-quality cultural content. Content innovation is the core of improving identity effectiveness. It is suggested to deeply explore Central Plains Culture resources, and create a number of high-quality works with both cultural heritage and contemporary flavor in combination with the discourse system and aesthetic preferences of Generation Z. We can learn from the experience of successful cases such as The Chinese Poetry Conference and Gate of Huayu, integrating knowledge, ideology and interestingness. Actively encourage and support teachers and students to engage in participatory cultural production based on new media platforms, such as carrying out Zhongyuan culture short video creation competitions and digital cultural and creative design projects, transforming students from cultural consumers into creative subjects, and deepening their identity in the practice process.

Thirdly, build a collaborative communication community and capacity support system. University publicity departments need to establish a regular linkage mechanism with academic affairs, student affairs, scientific research and other functional departments, embedding cultural education into the whole process of education and teaching. At the same time, strengthen strategic cooperation with mainstream media and cultural institutions, jointly plan thematic activities, and enhance the breadth and depth of Central Plains Culture communication. In addition, great importance should be attached to improving the media literacy and professional capabilities of the publicity team, and cultivating compound talents who understand the laws of cultural inheritance and are proficient in new media communication through various methods such as training and practice.

Fourthly, improve the guarantee mechanism for cultural security and network literacy education. In an open network environment, it is necessary to build a solid line of defense for cultural security. This requires improving the public opinion monitoring and risk early warning mechanism, and enhancing the ability to identify and respond to bad information. At the same time, incorporate network literacy education into the curriculum system, cultivate students' ability to critically examine new media information, enable them to remain rational in a complex information environment, and consciously identify and resist cultural distortions.

### **5.3 Research Prospects**

This study provides a preliminary framework for understanding young people's regional cultural identity in the new media environment, but there is still room for deepening. Future research can further explore the differences in the influence mechanisms of different new media platforms (such as short videos, social media, and online communities), as well as the moderating role of university students' individual characteristics (such as academic background and ascribed cultural capital) in the formation of identity. In addition, longitudinal follow-up surveys will help to more clearly reveal the causal relationship between new media usage and changes in cultural identity. With the rise of new technologies such as the metaverse

and generative AI, what revolutionary impacts they will have on cultural communication and identity construction is also a very forward-looking research direction.

In summary, the shaping of Central Plains Culture identity among university students in Henan's higher education institutions in the new media era is a multi-dimensional, dynamic and complex process. Only by deeply understanding its internal mechanism and working together with various forces can we guide the powerful current of new media to truly nurture the flowers of cultural self-confidence rooted in the hearts of young people, and make Zhongyuan culture radiate more vigorous vitality in the new era.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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