

## **Role of Social Media in the Global Reception of Chinese Animation: A case study of 'Nezha'**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the role and influence of social media in the global spread of Chinese animated films, taking *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* as a case study. The research objective is to explore how *Nezha* has gained recognition from a global audience through social media platforms and highlight the positive impact of social media on cultural communication. The study uses qualitative research methods based on social media content analysis and in-depth interviews with 30 global audiences. The findings of this study indicate that the global dissemination of *Nezha* via social media significantly enhanced its acceptance across diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Social Media; Chinese Animation; *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*

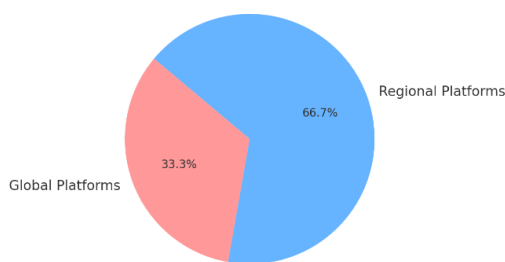
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### **1.0 Introduction**

In recent years, with the rise of digital platforms, the global dissemination of cultural products has changed significantly, especially with the emergence of social media. These platforms have become essential tools for cultural communication. In this context, Chinese animation gradually attracted international attention. Among the many success stories, *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* has been widely recognized as a significant milestone in the globalization of Chinese animation, achieving a remarkable global box office revenue of over \$700 million and widespread acclaim across various cultural contexts. This unprecedented success prompts a deeper exploration of the role played by modern communication channels, mainly social media platforms, in enhancing the global acceptance of Chinese cultural products.

As crucial channels for global cultural dissemination, social media platforms can be broadly categorized into global and regional platforms. Global platforms, such as TikTok and YouTube, have extensive reach and large user bases, while regional platforms, including China's Weibo and Douyin, Japan's Line, and South Korea's Kakao, exert significant influence within specific regions. During cross-cultural communication, these platforms facilitate the global dissemination of cultural products through user-generated content, interactive comments, and cross-cultural dialogues (Xiao & Wu, 2024). The findings about that is referring to the following Figure 1 and Figure 2:

Impact of Digital Platforms on Global Cultural Dissemination



Role of Social Media in Cross-Cultural Dissemination

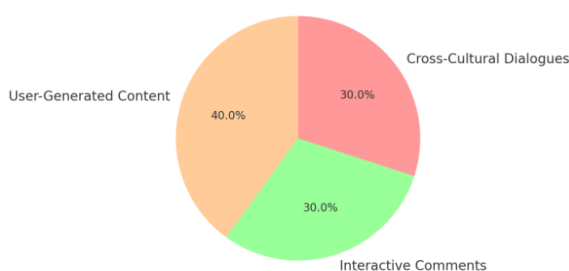


Figure 1.The Impact of Digital Platforms on Global Cultural Dissemination

Figure 2.The Role of Social Media in Cross-cultural Dissemination

Since its release in 2019, the Chinese animated film *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* has gained widespread global attention through diverse social media channels. The film integrates traditional Chinese cultural elements with modern narrative techniques, achieving remarkable box office success in its domestic market. Moreover, through dissemination on international streaming platforms such as YouTube and promotion via social media, the film has attained significant success in global markets. However, its international impact is not solely attributed to the quality of the film itself but also to the strategic utilization of social media platforms, which serve as bridges between cultures (Liu, 2020).

This paper examines the role of social media in the global acceptance and understanding of Chinese animation, using *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* as a case study. It analyzes how social media platforms facilitate cultural dissemination, establish emotional connections, and promote cross-cultural dialogue. By investigating interactions surrounding *Nezha* on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, this study reveals the transformative power of social media in the globalization of Chinese cultural content.

The primary objective of this study is to explore how *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* gained global audience recognition through social media platforms and to highlight the positive impact of social media on cultural dissemination. The specific research objectives are as follows:

- To examine the role of social media platforms in promoting and disseminating Chinese cultural content globally.
- To analyze user interactions and cross-cultural dialogues surrounding *Nezha* on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube.
- To assess the global reception of *Nezha* and its cultural significance within social media engagement.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Social Media and Cultural Dissemination

In the context of globalization, social media has emerged as a critical player in cross-cultural communication, enabling broader audience engagement. By leveraging these platforms, individuals can transcend geographical and linguistic barriers, fostering interaction and communication with people worldwide (Xu, 2024). Social media platforms are not just tools for sharing information; they have evolved into spaces for creating cultural exchanges and fostering dialogue between diverse communities (Hussain & Wang, 2024). In Chinese animation, social media amplifies its global influence by creating a participatory ecosystem. Within this ecosystem, audiences enhance cultural resonance through sharing, commenting, and re-creating content (Han, Zhao, & Xiong, 2022).

### 2.2 The Current State of Research on the Global Dissemination of Chinese Animation

In recent years, research on the global dissemination of Chinese animation has expanded, focusing on its challenges and opportunities in cross-cultural acceptance. Li and Wu (2022) identified language barriers, cultural differences, and market competition as the primary challenges. Conversely, digital platforms such as TikTok and YouTube have been recognized as key drivers facilitating the international dissemination of Chinese culture, playing a crucial role in the globalization of Chinese animation (Lu et al., 2024). Additionally, the importance of localization strategies, such as dubbing and subtitles, in enhancing cultural accessibility has been emphasized (Zhang, 2020).

### 2.3 *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*

The animated film *Nezha* has garnered academic attention for its innovative narrative and cultural symbolism. Liu (2020) explored the film's successful creative communication strategies, emphasizing its integration of traditional Chinese mythology with modern storytelling techniques. Ma and Zhang (2020) examined how *Nezha* reinterprets Chinese cultural archetypes, enabling the film to resonate with contemporary audiences while preserving its cultural essence. They highlighted that *Nezha* revitalized the storytelling of Chinese myths, reshaping audience perceptions of traditional mythology, opening up new forms of mythological archetype transformation, and offering fresh possibilities for the artistic representation of the Chinese mythological universe. These studies demonstrate that *Nezha* serves as a cultural medium, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

### 2.4 The Role of Social Media in the Global Dissemination of Chinese Animation

Social media has emerged as a transformative tool for the global dissemination of Chinese animation. Platforms such as TikTok and YouTube have facilitated the viral spread of animation-related content, fostering a global fan base (Hu & Huang, 2024). In the case of *Nezha*, studies have documented how user-generated content, including memes, fan art, and comments, has amplified the film's international visibility (Xiong, 2023).

In summary, the literature provides significant insights into the role of social media in the global dissemination of Chinese animation, yet several research gaps remain. First, most studies focus on individual factors, such as localization or audience engagement, and lack a systematic analysis of how these factors collectively contribute to cross-cultural engagement. Second, there is a dearth of empirical studies on audience interaction dynamics regarding Chinese animation on global social media platforms. Finally, existing research on *Nezha* primarily concentrates on its cultural and narrative innovations, with limited in-depth analysis of how social media facilitates its cultural resonance and international acceptance.

This study aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of how social media platforms contribute to the global dissemination of *Nezha*, with a focus on exploring the role of social media in promoting Chinese cultural content, analyzing the interactions and cultural dialogues surrounding *Nezha* on social media platforms, and evaluating the film's acceptance and cultural significance in the social media environment.

### 3.0 Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining social media content analysis with in-depth interviews. The focus is on investigating how social media platforms facilitate cultural interaction and dialogue, with particular emphasis on user-generated content (UGC) and cross-cultural engagement.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

**Social Media Content Analysis:** This research analyzes major global social media platforms, including TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter, which play a significant role in the international promotion of Chinese animation. Posts, comments, hashtags, videos, and other user-generated content related to *Nezha* were collected, with a focus on viral dissemination, fan interaction, and creative reimagination (such as fan art and memes). The data spans from 2019 (the year of the film's release) to 2023, reflecting its sustained impact and discussions. Thematic analysis was applied to identify emotional connections, cultural identification, and widespread cross-cultural interactions.

**In-depth Interviews:** A purposive sampling method was used to select 30 participants, covering a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, language proficiency, and experiences engaging with *Nezha* on social media platforms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, with questions focusing on how social media content influenced participants' acceptance of *Nezha*, the role of social media in helping to understand Chinese culture and their motivations and feelings regarding participation in cultural dialogue.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

**Social Media Content Analysis:** This study uses thematic analysis to conduct an in-depth examination of the collected social media data, focusing on the key content and interactive characteristics of user comments. Data extracted from multiple platforms includes text (comments, posts), visual content (images, videos), and metadata (likes, shares). Themes frequently appearing in user comments, such as cultural identification, emotional resonance, and narrative elements of the film, were initially identified. NVivo, a qualitative analysis tool, was used to code and categorize these themes. Popular hashtags and their dissemination paths were analyzed to reveal how content spreads rapidly through social networks. The study also examines how fan-created secondary content such as memes, and fan art enhances the appeal and effectiveness of cultural transmission. Special attention is paid to how user conversations promote bidirectional cultural exchange. The choice of thematic analysis was justified as it allows for capturing both the emotional and cultural dimensions of the data. Unlike narrative analysis, which focuses on storytelling structure, thematic analysis is well-suited for identifying recurrent themes across diverse media, thus providing a holistic view of the cultural impact.

**Interview Data Analysis:** The interview transcripts were verbatim and analyzed using open coding to extract key concepts such as "cultural understanding," "emotional connection," and "social media influence." Each segment of text was annotated to highlight content related to the research questions. The initial codes were grouped into higher-level themes, such as "emotional resonance and connection" and "cross-cultural interaction and dialogue." The perspectives of participants from different cultural backgrounds were compared to explore similarities and differences. Using cultural dissemination theory, the interview data's representation of cultural acceptance and dissemination patterns was interpreted. The findings from the interview analysis were compared with the results from the social media content analysis to identify consistent or complementary evidence.

### 4.0 Findings

This study, through an in-depth analysis of social media interactions and participant interviews, explores how *Nezha* achieved global dissemination and cultural impact for Chinese animated films. The findings about that is referring to the following Figure 3:

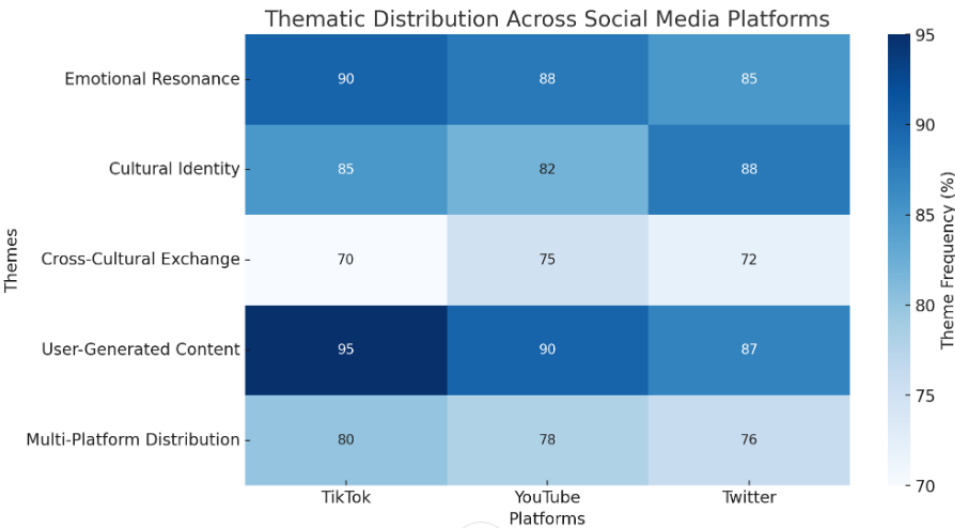


Figure 3. Topic Matrix Diagram for Thematic Distribution Across Social Media Platforms

4.1 Emotional Resonance: Connecting Global Audiences

The social media analysis reveals that users on platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter experienced strong emotional resonance with the film’s central theme of “defying fate.” Frequent emotional expressions in user comments and short videos, such as "moved by Nezha’s rebellious spirit" and "feeling the power of fighting against destiny," highlight the significance of emotional connection.

Interview data further revealed that participants generally believed the emotional conflicts in the film transcended cultural and linguistic barriers, prompting reflections on personal growth and societal expectations.

4.2 Cultural Resonance: Deepening Understanding of Chinese Culture

Through an analysis of high-frequency discussion hashtags on social media, such as Nezha and Chinese Mythology, it was found that users actively discussed Chinese traditional cultural elements in the film, including mythology, Daoist philosophy, and character portrayal. This cultural resonance was not limited to Chinese-speaking users; many non-Chinese-speaking users also expressed interest and appreciation for these cultural elements.

Interview data showed that non-Chinese-speaking participants gained a deeper understanding of Chinese culture through interpretations and discussions from other users on platforms. Some participants mentioned that in-depth movie reviews and cultural analysis videos on YouTube helped them understand the cultural symbols and values in the film.

4.3 Cross-Cultural Communication: Building Bridges for Understanding and Dialogue

The interactive nature of social media plays a crucial role in fostering cross-cultural communication. On Twitter, users discussed the film through comments, retweets, and citations, creating a global cultural dialogue. The interactions between users not only facilitated the spread of information but also promoted mutual understanding across different cultural backgrounds.

Interview results indicated that some non-Chinese-speaking users engaged in dialogue with Chinese-speaking users through discussions on social media platforms, thereby deepening their understanding of Chinese culture. This form of bidirectional interaction enhanced the breadth and depth of cultural dissemination and created new possibilities for cross-cultural understanding.

4.4 User-Generated Content: Enhancing Fun and Appeal of Cultural Dissemination

User-generated content (UGC) played a pivotal role in the film’s dissemination on social media. Data analysis revealed that secondary content created by users, such as memes, fan art, and short videos, not only made the dissemination more enjoyable but also enhanced the film’s cultural appeal.

Interview data supported this finding, with participants generally agreeing that the diverse forms of UGC allowed them to further engage in cultural dissemination after watching the film. Creators, through their perspectives and expressions, gave the film new meanings and interpretive dimensions, further strengthening its appeal and influence.

4.5 Multi-Platform Distribution: Achieving Global Dissemination and Cultural Impact

The study indicates that the coordinated efforts of multiple platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter were key factors in the film’s global dissemination. The short video distribution on TikTok, in-depth video analyses on YouTube, and real-time interactive discussions on Twitter together formed a multi-layered, multi-dimensional dissemination network.

Interview data showed that participants felt that different platforms provided varied paths of engagement and understanding, enabling them to appreciate and understand the film from multiple perspectives. This multi-platform distribution strategy successfully helped the film overcome language and cultural barriers, achieving wider global reach and profound cultural impact.

## 5.0 Discussion

### 5.1 The Role of Emotional Resonance in Cultural Acceptance

The findings indicate that one of the critical factors behind the global success of *Nezha* lies in its strong capacity for emotional resonance. These universal emotions transcend cultural boundaries, enabling global viewers to engage with the film on a personal level. This underscores the pivotal role of emotional engagement in cross-cultural media consumption.

Social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter played a significant role in amplifying this emotional connection. User-generated content (UGC) not only enhanced the emotional impact of the film but also fostered community formation around shared emotions. This finding aligns with existing research emphasizing the role of emotions in fostering cultural resonance and acceptance.

### 5.2 Cultural Resonance and Modern Interpretation of Mythology

Another key theme emerging from the analysis is the film's modern and relatable reinterpretation of traditional Chinese mythology, which achieved cultural resonance. The story of *Nezha*, emphasizing individual values and personal struggle, resonated strongly with global audiences, many of whom drew parallels to similar narratives in their own cultures. This reinterpretation served as a "cultural bridge," allowing non-Chinese audiences to engage with the film's cultural elements while appreciating its universal themes.

The findings also reveal that audiences are not merely passive recipients of cultural content but active participants in cultural exchange. Through social media discussions and fan creations, audiences contributed to ongoing dialogues surrounding the cultural significance of the film. This participatory interaction highlights the importance of adaptive narratives in fostering cross-cultural understanding.

### 5.3 Cross-Cultural Dialogue and the Role of Social Media

Social media platforms emerged as significant venues for cross-cultural dialogue, enabling audiences from different backgrounds to share interpretations and insights about the film. The study found that non-Chinese audiences often sought to understand the cultural symbols within the film, leading to exchanges of information with Chinese viewers. This interaction facilitated a deeper comprehension of Chinese culture and mythology, showcasing the potential of digital platforms in cultural education and exchange.

Moreover, the findings demonstrate that social media platforms are not merely content distribution channels but also influence audience perceptions through algorithm-driven visibility and community interaction. Platforms like TikTok and Twitter amplified discussions around *Nezha* through trending hashtags and viral content, thereby expanding the film's reach and enhancing global interconnectedness.

### 5.4 User-Generated Content and Cultural Adaptation

The study highlights the role of UGC in enhancing the cultural impact of the film. Forms of UGC such as memes, fan art, and derivative works not only extended the narrative universe of the film but also adapted its cultural elements to diverse contexts. This phenomenon demonstrates the active role of audiences in cultural production, facilitating the global dissemination and adaptation of Chinese cultural content.

The participatory nature of UGC suggests a shift from traditional media consumption to interactive models, where audiences become co-creators of cultural narratives. This trend aligns with media convergence theories, emphasizing the role of digital platforms in merging the roles of production and consumption.

### 5.5 Multi-Platform Distribution and Global Reach

The findings also underscore the importance of multi-platform distribution in achieving global reach. By strategically leveraging various social media platforms, *Nezha* successfully engaged diverse audience groups, maximizing its impact by utilizing the unique features of each platform. For instance, TikTok's short video format facilitated viral challenges and creative adaptations, while YouTube provided a space for in-depth reviews and discussions.

This multi-platform strategy highlights the significance of diversified digital dissemination approaches in global media distribution. By tailoring content to platform-specific audiences, *Nezha* successfully overcame language and cultural barriers, gaining widespread recognition and a profound cultural impact.

### 5.6 Implications and Future Directions

The study demonstrates the indispensable role of social media in facilitating the global dissemination and cultural acceptance of *Nezha*. This finding not only offers new insights into the globalization of Chinese animation but also provides a reference for the cross-cultural dissemination of other cultural products.

Future research could further explore how to optimize social media strategies to enhance the depth and breadth of cultural content dissemination. Investigating the integration of emerging digital technologies, such as AI-driven personalization and virtual reality, could also provide valuable insights into expanding the global impact of cultural products.

## 6.0 Conclusion& Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion

This study explores the pivotal role of social media in the global dissemination of the Chinese animated film *Nezha*. Through content analysis of social media and interviews with global audiences, the research demonstrates that social media platforms play multiple roles in cultural transmission, cross-cultural communication, and user interaction, which can be summarized as follows:

**Promotion of Cross-Cultural Communication and Cultural Understanding:** Social media breaks the geographical limitations of traditional media. Through algorithmic recommendations and user interactions, it has facilitated the widespread transmission of Chinese culture. Audiences engage in discussions, sharing, and re-creation on social media, which deepens their understanding of the film's cultural content and fosters cross-cultural dialogue.

**User-Generated Content (UGC) and Value Addition:** Users have reinterpreted the cultural elements of *Nezha* by blending them with their cultural backgrounds, resulting in a diverse array of UGC. This content has broadened the reach of the film and enhanced audience participation and a sense of belonging.

**Emotional Resonance and the Establishment of Cultural Identity:** Universal themes in the film, propagated through social media, have resonated emotionally with audiences from various cultural backgrounds. Social media interactions have deepened viewers' understanding of the film and helped build a sense of identification with Chinese culture.

**Advantages and Limitations of Social Media for Dissemination:** While social media has significant advantages in cultural transmission, it also poses risks such as content fragmentation and misinterpretation. Therefore, appropriate guidance and regulation are needed to ensure the accuracy and depth of cultural dissemination.

### 6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to further enhance the global impact of Chinese cultural products:

**Optimize Content Creation and Social Media Strategies:** Animation filmmakers should focus on deep collaboration with social media platforms, employing multi-platform promotion and cross-cultural marketing strategies to enhance global exposure. Additionally, interactive engagement with users through co-creation will increase user participation and loyalty.

**Encourage User-Generated Content (UGC) and Community Interaction:** Platforms and creators should actively encourage audience-generated content through creative competitions and fan interactions to spark enthusiasm for re-creation. The diversity and creativity of UGC will help expand the influence of cultural transmission.

**Strengthen Cultural Content Guidance and Interpretation:** For audiences from different cultural backgrounds, creators should provide multi-language subtitles, cultural annotations, and other supporting materials to help viewers better understand the cultural connotations of the film. Platforms can also guide users in in-depth discussions to avoid cultural misinterpretations and biases.

**Enhance the Cultural Dissemination Responsibility of Social Media Platforms:** Social media platforms should take responsibility for cultural transmission by optimizing algorithmic recommendation mechanisms and balancing content quality to ensure accurate dissemination of cultural products. Content review systems should also be established to prevent inappropriate content in UGC.

**Deepen Cross-Cultural Cooperation and Exchange:** Animation filmmakers and cultural institutions should actively engage in international collaborations with cultural transmission platforms in various countries, organizing multicultural exchange activities. This will not only expand the global influence of Chinese culture but also promote mutual learning and cultural integration.

### 6.3 Future Research Directions

Although this study has revealed the role of social media in cultural dissemination, some limitations remain, such as the small sample size and limited data sources. Future research could expand the sample scope and explore the mechanisms behind the global dissemination of different types of cultural products.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper enriches the discussion on the role of digital media in global cultural dissemination and provides academic support for the interdisciplinary field of new media technologies and cultural production within the animation industry.

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