

Exploring Cross-Cultural Adaptation on Social Media Platforms: A Case Study on Xiaohongshu's Cultural Acceptance and Integration of TikTok Refugees

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ABSTRACT

With the acceleration of globalization, social media platforms have emerged as significant channels for cross-cultural communication. As an open social media platform, Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) has successfully attracted a massive influx of "TikTok refugees" (users who have shifted to other platforms due to TikTok's restrictions in the United States and other regions) by leveraging its robust content recommendation algorithm and flexible social mechanisms. These new users confront challenges posed by language and cultural differences; however, Xiaohongshu effectively facilitates their cross-cultural adaptation by offering diversified content, fostering a positive community atmosphere, and encouraging interactions among users. Taking Xiaohongshu as an example, this paper unveils the positive role of social media platforms in cross-cultural adaptation and integration. It also analyzes the beneficial development of social media platforms stemming from cross-cultural adaptation and integration, thereby exploring the relationship between cross-cultural communication and social media from a bidirectional perspective. This study offers practical insights and holds certain reference value.

KEYWORDS

Social Media Platforms; Cross-Cultural Adaptation; Xiaohongshu; TikTok Refugees

TikTok, as a globally popular short-video social platform, has become a significant channel for many young people to express themselves and share their lives due to its unique content format and extensive user base. However, during the oral arguments on the TikTok ban held by the U.S. Supreme Court, a majority of judges made it clear that national security takes precedence over freedom of speech. Ultimately, the ban was upheld. According to the regulations, if ByteDance does not sell TikTok, the United States will mandate its shutdown on a designated date, such as January 19, 2025. ByteDance has already categorically refused to sell TikTok. The issuance and enforcement of this ban have led a large number of TikTok users to seek new social platforms as alternatives. These users, known as "TikTok refugees," have transferred to other social platforms due to their inability to use TikTok, continuing their social activities and content creation⁶.

Amid the user migration phenomenon triggered by the TikTok ban, Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) has emerged as a crucial receiving platform. With its unique content ecosystem and community atmosphere, Xiaohongshu has attracted a flood of TikTok refugees. As of January 15, 2025, the hashtag #TikTokRefugee had garnered 5.681 million discussions and 250 million views. Based on communication theory and from a cross-cultural communication perspective, this paper analyzes the reasons why Xiaohongshu has served as a receiving platform for "TikTok refugees," studies Xiaohongshu's practical experience in cultural acceptance and integration of TikTok refugees, and explores the implications for the cross-cultural development of social media platforms.

1 The Role of Social Media Platforms in Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Regarding "cross-cultural adaptation," social media platforms can provide psychological and social support. For cross-cultural adapters, social media platforms serve as an important source of psychological and social support. They can find their own online communities on these platforms, seeking a sense of belonging and companionship, as well as solutions to practical problems. By communicating and interacting with people from the same cultural background, cross-cultural adapters can alleviate psychological pressure and loneliness, enhancing their adaptability and self-confidence. Meanwhile, social media platforms offer a wealth of resources for language learning and cultural exchange. Users can learn foreign languages and understand other cultures through short videos, live broadcasts, and other forms. These resources not only improve users' language abilities but also help them better adapt to and integrate into new cultural environments.¹

Therefore, social media platforms play an irreplaceable role in cross-cultural adaptation. They not only provide users with a platform for global cultural exchange but also promote cultural diversity and communication, facilitating the dissemination of cultural phenomena and social movements². Additionally, social media platforms offer psychological and social support to cross-cultural adapters, enhancing their language learning and cultural adaptation, and serving as bridges and ties for cultural exchange. The phenomenon of TikTok users migrating to the Xiaohongshu platform further

exemplifies the "bridging" attribute of social media. In the face of this sudden "internationalization," how Xiaohongshu should seize opportunities, address challenges, and develop will be the focus of the following discussion³.

2 Cultural Acceptance and Integration of TikTok Refugees by Xiaohongshu

In the user migration phenomenon triggered by the TikTok ban, Xiaohongshu has emerged as a significant receiving platform. Xiaohongshu, with its unique content ecosystem and community atmosphere, has attracted a massive influx of TikTok refugees. The reasons for this can be divided into the following three points: Firstly, Xiaohongshu and TikTok share many similarities in their content ecosystems, both focusing on young users and emphasizing lifestyle and individual expression. TikTok refugees can find similar content formats and creative spaces on Xiaohongshu to continue sharing their fashion, pet videos, dance talents, and other content. Secondly, Xiaohongshu offers a friendly receiving environment, being relatively open to overseas users without regional restrictions and having a low registration threshold. This enables TikTok refugees to easily transfer to Xiaohongshu and quickly adapt to the new platform environment. Thirdly, Lemon8, known as the "overseas version of Xiaohongshu," directly provides an alternative for TikTok refugees. This strategic layout gives Xiaohongshu an advantage in receiving TikTok refugees.

2.1 User Acceptance

When facing the wave of TikTok refugees, Xiaohongshu's primary task is to simplify the registration process to enable them to easily and quickly join the platform. For example, it can allow quick registration through email, social media accounts (such as Instagram, Facebook, etc.), or mobile phone numbers, and optimize the verification code sending speed and verification steps to reduce user waiting time. To facilitate TikTok refugee users, Xiaohongshu can provide customized registration pages or prompts in English or other languages (such as Spanish, French, etc.) to clearly guide new users on how to fill in registration information and provide necessary information explanations.

For TikTok refugees, Xiaohongshu can accurately recommend content that matches their interests by analyzing their behavior data (such as browsing, liking, commenting, etc.) to optimize content recommendations. Utilizing advanced artificial intelligence algorithms, it can identify and analyze the preferences and active areas of TikTok refugees on TikTok, recommend related Xiaohongshu creators and content, and promote new user retention and activity.

Xiaohongshu has always been renowned for its community philosophy of sincere sharing and mutual assistance, which can attract TikTok refugees. Xiaohongshu has also set up dedicated hashtags (such as #TikTokRefugee) to give TikTok refugees a clear sense of belonging and facilitate better understanding and acceptance by other users.

2.2 Cross-Cultural Symbols and Cultural Exchange

Upon opening the Xiaohongshu homepage, many Americans are seen "paying cat tax." It is said that in Xiaohongshu, only by paying cat tax can one be accepted by the community. Posting pictures of one's own cats often leads to explosive traffic. It is worth pondering why pets have become a globally universal cultural symbol. Meanwhile, content such as "want to see Chinese breakfast," "want to see real Chinese cities," and "want to see Chinese selfies" also conveys foreign netizens' curiosity about China. Photos from Chinese netizens in the comment section present different dietary cultures from various regions, which then evolves into a spontaneous field for cross-cultural exchange with photos of cuisine from around the world appearing in the subsequent comments. Currently, the exchange between TikTok refugees and Xiaohongshu users is friendly, and the enthusiasm of Chinese netizens has made foreign netizens feel the charm of China. However, Xiaohongshu should consider whether conflicts may arise between Xiaohongshu natives and TikTok refugees after international political events or when sensitive political topics are involved. Content regulation and community atmosphere maintenance are important challenges faced by Xiaohongshu as it suddenly becomes a cross-cultural exchange platform⁴.

2.3 Technical Support and Overcoming Language Barriers

In terms of cross-platform compatibility and data migration, Xiaohongshu ensures that its platform is compatible with devices and operating systems commonly used by TikTok refugees, enabling them to seamlessly switch to the Xiaohongshu platform.

For example, it provides client download links suitable for different mobile phone brands and operating systems, as well as web version access supporting multiple browsers. To attract more TikTok refugees, Xiaohongshu can develop or introduce data migration tools to help them migrate content, fans, and interaction data from TikTok to the Xiaohongshu platform. This will greatly reduce users' migration costs and time costs, increasing their willingness and enthusiasm to join.

As a multinational software, multilingual support and intelligent translation are crucial. Xiaohongshu should provide multiple language versions of the platform interface to meet the language needs of TikTok refugees. For example, it can launch interfaces in English, Spanish, French, and other languages, allowing users to operate in their familiar language. To overcome language barriers, Xiaohongshu can introduce intelligent translation functions to help users automatically translate languages when posting content, commenting, and sending private messages. This will facilitate friendly exchanges and interactions between Chinese and American users, enhancing the platform's cross-cultural inclusiveness.

Meanwhile, as an expanded service of Xiaohongshu, a series of technical training courses or tutorials can be launched for TikTok refugees who may be unfamiliar with Xiaohongshu's platform functions, helping them quickly master the platform's usage methods and techniques. These courses can cover content creation, posting processes, data analysis, and other aspects. Additionally, a professional technical support team can be established to provide real-time technical guidance and assistance to TikTok refugees. They can communicate with users through online customer service, email, or social media to solve problems and confusion encountered during use.

3 The Impact of Cross-cultural Adaptation and Integration on the Development of Xiaohongshu

3.1 User Growth and Increased Activity Levels

Xiaohongshu, a social platform originating from China, has demonstrated robust cross-cultural adaptation and integration capabilities in the face of globalization. This trend is particularly evident when considering the influx of American netizens to Xiaohongshu amidst TikTok's ban risks in the United States. This change has not only brought significant user growth to Xiaohongshu but has also greatly enhanced user activity levels.

Firstly, from the perspective of user growth, the influx of TikTok refugees has brought a vast new user group to Xiaohongshu. Among these users are young people who pursue novelty, enjoy sharing, and exploring, forming the core target user group of Xiaohongshu. With the addition of these new users, Xiaohongshu's user base has rapidly expanded, laying a solid foundation for the platform's long-term development.

Secondly, user activity levels have also been significantly improved. Xiaohongshu, with its unique content sharing and community interaction model, has attracted a large number of users to actively participate in content creation and interaction. The fresh content and viewpoints brought by new users have stimulated the enthusiasm of existing users, fostering a positive community atmosphere. Meanwhile, Xiaohongshu's algorithm precisely pushes content of interest to users, further enhancing user stickiness and activity levels.

Xiaohongshu has not only launched multilingual versions but has also strengthened English support to ensure convenient platform usage for American users. Simultaneously, the platform actively introduces localized content, such as West Coast fashion trends and New York food maps, to satisfy American users' desire for localized information. These initiatives effectively reduce language and cultural barriers, promoting friendly exchanges and interactions between Chinese and American users.

3.2 Brand Value and Commercial Opportunities

With the increase in user growth and activity levels, Xiaohongshu's brand value has also been significantly enhanced. As an ecosystem integrating lifestyle sharing, consumption decision-making references, and social interaction, Xiaohongshu enjoys high popularity and influence among young consumers.

The elevation of brand value has brought abundant commercial opportunities to Xiaohongshu. On the one hand, Xiaohongshu can collaborate with well-known brands to enhance brand influence through KOLs and user sharing. For example, partnering with fashion and beauty brands to release new product color trials, styling tips, and other content attracts user attention and purchases. This collaboration not only boosts brand exposure but also strengthens users' brand recognition and trust.

On the other hand, Xiaohongshu can explore cross-border e-commerce business, achieving dual growth in content ecology and commercial value. With the acceleration of globalization, cross-border e-commerce has become one of the important trends in the e-commerce industry.

Xiaohongshu can leverage its platform advantages and user base to introduce more international brands and products, satisfying users' demand for high-quality lifestyles. Simultaneously, by collaborating with local brands, localized e-commerce services can be created to further expand market share.

Cross-cultural adaptation and integration also play a crucial role in this process. By deeply understanding the cultural habits and consumption demands of the American market, Xiaohongshu adjusts its content strategies and functional settings to adapt to local user preferences. This keen insight into cultural differences and flexible response have earned Xiaohongshu widespread user recognition and trust, providing a solid foundation for commercial collaborations.

3.3 Platform Ecology and Competitive Landscape Changes

Xiaohongshu's cross-cultural adaptation and integration have not only influenced user growth and brand value but have also profoundly impacted platform ecology and the competitive landscape.

Firstly, from the perspective of platform ecology, Xiaohongshu has enriched its content ecology by introducing diversified content and viewpoints. Friendly exchanges and interactions between Chinese and American users have facilitated the natural dissemination and integration of culture, forming a unique community atmosphere and cultural characteristics. This atmosphere attracts more users to join and participate, further promoting platform prosperity and development.

Secondly, from the perspective of the competitive landscape, Xiaohongshu's cross-cultural strategy has distinguished it in global competition. In the face of intense market competition and ever-changing user demands, Xiaohongshu has enhanced its competitiveness by continuously innovating and optimizing platform functions and services. Meanwhile, by collaborating with international and local brands, it has expanded market share and influence, further consolidating its position in the global market.

Cross-cultural adaptation and integration have brought multiple positive impacts to Xiaohongshu, including user growth, brand value enhancement, enriched platform ecology, and competitive landscape changes. These impacts have not only driven Xiaohongshu's long-term development but have also provided valuable insights and references for other social platforms. In future development, Xiaohongshu should continue to deepen the implementation of its cross-cultural strategy, strengthen interactions and exchanges with international users, and promote the sustained prosperity and development of the platform.

4 Conclusion

In summary, the migration to this cross-cultural user social platform represents an attempt at cultural integration and cross-cultural adaptation within the "digital living space." As the recipient platform, Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) undoubtedly becomes the first domestic social platform to confront numerous challenges. TikTok refugees primarily originate from overseas markets, particularly the US market, where their cultural backgrounds, language habits, and content preferences significantly diverge from those of domestic users⁵. Such cultural differences may lead to discomfort in content creation, interaction patterns, and community atmosphere, thereby affecting user experience and platform stickiness. Furthermore, this influx exacerbates the pressure on Xiaohongshu in terms of content moderation and management. With the massive influx of overseas users, the content on the platform will become more diversified and complex. Xiaohongshu needs to address the challenges of content moderation in diverse cultural contexts, ensuring compliance with platform rules and domestic as well as local laws and regulations, while also avoiding cultural misunderstandings and conflicts. This paper only provides a superficial exploration of the existing Xiaohongshu ecosystem, and further in-depth research is needed in the future.

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