A Newly Emerging Non-Verbal Language: The Interaction Relationship Between Social Causes and Popular Trends in Youth Music

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Abstract: For young people in contemporary Chinese society, music has become a new social symbol. They express their emotions and achieve emotional resonance through the Internet, social media, and live music events. The emergence of different popular music genres is not only due to the musical characteristics of the music itself but also serves as a common language to meet the emotional, cultural identity, and social needs of young people. This article attempts to explore the social reasons behind the popularity of emerging music types (such as hip-hop, electronic music, and "new national style" fusion music) and the relationship chain driven by digital platforms by analyzing their popular trends. This provides a new perspective for understanding the interaction between music and social issues and for better understanding contemporary youth culture. At the same time, it critically examines the possibility that algorithm-driven dissemination models may lead to cultural narrowing. It also calls for a balance between pursuing traffic and ensuring cultural diversity in the current context for platforms. Through research, it is found that the algorithmic recommendations and short-video dissemination mechanisms of digital platforms have significantly promoted the popularity of music genres, and young people build cultural identity and relieve social pressure through music consumption.

Keywords: pop music types, youth groups, social problems

1.   Introduction

Under the pressure of the "996" work schedule, high housing prices, and intergenerational value conflicts, young people have turned to non-verbal media to express their emotions, and music, with its anonymity and empathy, has become an ideal medium. Therefore, in recent years, China's music landscape has increasingly shown a trend of "diversification," ranging from hip-hop music that emphasizes individual identity expression to K-pop music that offers an escape from social pressure, from "new national style" music that integrates traditional Chinese and Western elements to folk music that has risen through various social media platforms. The popularity of different types of music not only reflects the innovation and development in music styles but also reveals the different strategies of the youth in dealing with social issues. For instance, songs like "Heroes of Our Time" and "Under the Sea" on short-video platforms have swept through the internet through fragmented dissemination. The former has been adapted as the background music for students' break exercises, becoming a collective slogan for the new generation of youth to confront difficulties or blood pressure.

The latter expresses the helplessness and pain of young people towards life through a unique "sad culture," and a phenomenon of collective healing has emerged in the comment section of the song. The diversification of music types also reflects the active choices of the youth under the influence of multiple factors such as technology, society, and culture. This article explores the reasons behind these trends through literature, focusing on the social issues existing among the youth or the interaction between cultural confidence and the dynamic evolution of Chinese society. By analyzing these aspects, it aims to answer the questions of the correlation between social pressure and the choice of music types, as well as how digital platforms have reshaped the music consumption behavior of the youth.

2.   Literature review

In order to systematically sort out the correlation between music popularity trends and social problems, this study systematically combed Chinese and English periodicals, literature, case studies and industry reports from 2015 to 2024 through four Chinese and English databases, including CNKI, Web of Science and ProQuest. Focusing on the aspects of "social phenomenon and youth culture," "music types and trends," "cultural identity and globalization," etc., the correlation between pop music types and various social problems is analyzed. On the other hand, through the analysis of the open data of digital platforms, it verifies the user behavior characteristics in the electronic music market and the promoting effect of digital technology on music transmission.

2.1.   As an escape medium from social pressure

"The emotions expressed by pop music are mostly true emotions in the course of ordinary people's lives, which cannot only fully satisfy people's psychological needs, but also reflect the current psychological state of the public" [1]. For example, pop music is popular because it is widely based on the daily life of young people and is used to express the "inner voice" of young people. It can arouse strong emotional resonance with the common situation of young people and make them feel that they are understood and sympathized with. "Music serves as a unifying force for Chinese adolescents, fostering group identity and a sense of security. They use music for spiritual relaxation and self-expression, seeking attention and recognition from others" [2]. Similarly, with its emphasis on self-expression, hiphop music addresses social issues in another way with those who wish to challenge traditional norms. To express social grievances in order to gain an identity. At the end of the day, the popularity of certain genres of music reflects the desire of young people to express their feelings of injustice and dissatisfaction, and to express themselves. "Notwithstanding the commodity character of musical expression, music's many diverse styles still constitute the ideological backbones of various youth cultures and subcultures. Young listeners become members of specific social groups vis- a -vis music and form a personal and social identity consistent with the meaning of this music and group membership through what music they consume." [3] Through some live activities, such as music festivals, concerts and soon, a space for young people to communicate with like-minded people face to face is provided. According to statistics, the economic market size of Chinese fans has exceeded 100 billion yuan, and it is still expanding. These gatherings not only promote a specific music genre, but also strengthen the emotional resonance and sense of belonging among participants, providing a place to relieve stress. Through collective participation in music activities, young people who are facing the same social problems and the same pressure collectively build an emotional community.

2.2. Progress of digital platform and innovation of music communication mode

With the popularity of digital platforms such as NetEase Cloud Music and QQ Music, the way of music consumption has undergone great changes, especially for the younger generation. These platforms not only provide massive music resources, but also customize personalized playlists for users through advanced big data algorithms. For example, NetEase Cloud Music's "Daily recommendation" function will push a number of songs that may meet users' tastes every day based on their listening history and preferences, helping users easily discover musicians and   works they are interested in. "Algorithms do not only recommend songs; they actively influence listeners' preferences by promoting content that aligns with listeners' prior behaviors." [4]. Such personalized recommendation mechanism not only improves users' music exploration experience, but also actively intervenes users' behaviors through algorithms. As a result, it provides more creative inspiration and opportunities for niche musicians and independent artists to be noticed.

In addition to algorithm recommendation, the visual communication of short video platforms has further restructured the music consumption scene. With the rise of short video platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou and Bilibili,a unique "music slice" culture has been formed by combining music clips with visual elements to produce short and appealing video content. For example, the popular "divine melody" of Douyin is often composed of a 10-15 second piece of music, which is widely circulated with its unique appeal and melody lines by intercepting the chorus or the rhythmic part of the music. By imitating, reproducing or re-creating the music, young people make these music clips get a lot of topics in a short period of time and achieve viral spread. Songs like "Grain in Ear" and "See you again," which often appear on short video platforms, have quickly become popular among young people in a short period of time through the promotion of short video platforms.

Similarly, the continuous development of short video or live broadcast platforms enables some inheritors of traditional music who are close to being lost to have a platform for a wider audience to seek opportunities to publicize or continue this culture. Guo-style music comes into being. "Music Moving China: An In-depth Interpretation of Chinese Traditional Musical Instruments" was launched on June 24, 2023, and accumulated more than 50 million live views in just 5 months, and more than 500 million reads on the whole platform, and was searched on Weibo six times, becoming the hottest music program at that time" [5].

"Live streaming quickly emerged as a popular alternative to traditional live performances, offering a way for artists to reach their audience virtually while adhering to safety guidelines. Platforms like Instagram Live, Facebook Live, YouTube, Twitch, and dedicated streaming services provided artists with the tools to broadcast performances directly from their homes, studios, or empty venues" [6]. Social media has expanded the distribution and promotion of music to online platforms, and audiences have responded enthusiastically. This has helped niche artists promote their works in cheaper ways such as live streaming and short-form video platforms, making the original music scene more popular. It is this trend to encourage ordinary people to create their own music that has brought together richer and more diverse art forms, given young musicians the freedom to experiment with diverse and creative genres, and promoted a vibrant and inclusive cultural environment.

Overall, the proliferation of digital platforms has not only changed the way young people consume music, but also reshaped the way music is created, distributed and promoted. Through big data recommendations and the viral spread of short videos, music is no longer just for auditory enjoyment, but has become an important part of fashion, social and cultural expression.

2.3. The trend of cultural exchange towards mixing and globalization

The same attitude toward cultural exchange, "discard the dross and discard the essence," applies to the field of music. The influence of global culture on Chinese young people cannot be ignored. With

the spread of the Internet and social media, Chinese youth groups have been exposed to a wide variety of international music genres. For example, the "idol" culture promoted by K-pop music has become a favorite among many young people, and hiphop music has become a symbol of rebellion and self-expression.

"Against the backdrop of international exchanges, Chinese music has gradually entered the world music stage, becoming an important carrier to showcase the charm of Chinese culture and promote cultural exchanges. Attempts such as the combination of folk music and symphonic music and the fusion of traditional music and modern pop elements have not only enriched the connotation of world music, but also promoted the mutual influence and integration of different music systems, "he said [7]. The extensive communication between Chinese music culture and global music culture has led to the emergence of music types such as "new national style music". Works such as Lotus, composed by the popular Zhang Yixing, combine hip-hop and pop music with traditional Chinese themes. Alternatively, concertos and various instrumental ensembles by young composer Zhang Chao, based on themes such as Chinese legends or ethnic folksongs, combined with Western notation organized by the traditional Chinese "five tones", create a unique sound that appeals to local audiences and promotes Chinese musical culture to the world. "Music cannot only mark meaningful experiences, but also fundamentally motivate their autobiographical significance" [8]. It shows that this kind of fusion pop music plays an instrumental role in the exploration of cross-cultural identity under the effect of globalization. This innovative fusion music not only reflects the cultural openness of Chinese young people, but also reflects their desire to establish a unique cultural identity in the globalized world.

3.   Discussion

This article reveals the pop music culture driven by factors such as rising social pressures, advances in digital platforms, and the globalization of cultural exchanges. As a culture different from or even beyond language, pop music has become a powerful tool for young people to face   different social changes, self-expression and cultural exploration. The music identity has shifted   from "individual choice" to "platform oriented". For example, NetEase Cloud Music's "daily push" playlist not only reflects user preferences but also strengthens emotional resonance through community comments to form a "data-driven collective identity". However, this kind of collective identity under the algorithm recommendation mechanism may lead to the aggravation of "information cocoon", and young people's excessive reliance on algorithms may exacerbate cultural narrowing. The study found that the viral spread of Tiktok's "Divine Melody" often relies on repetitive refrain fragments, resulting in the depth of the music being dissolved into "aural FMCG". This suggests that platforms need to pay more attention to balancing traffic targets with cultural responsibilities, such as setting a "diversity recommendation" weight to avoid the marginalization of independent musicians and niche art forms. At the sametime, care should be taken to preserve the diversity of reviews for a particular piece of music, rather than just skewing them into one kind of review.

The limitation of this paper is that the sample mainly focuses on urban youth, and the comparative case analysis of rural groups is not included. In addition, emerging technologies such as virtual idol music and AI composition have not been involved, which is also the direction of sustainable research in the future.

4.   Conclusion

Through a series of analysis of the popular trend of youth music, it is not difficult to see that the reasons for the popularity of these music types include not only the social and personal problems that young people are facing, but also the sincere feelings of young people trying to promote cultural

confidence and participate in the tide of globalization. If the use of music to vent emotions and express oneself is an attempt to break free from the social cage (employment, marriage, etc.) of the rebellious psychology, then actively promoting Chinese music culture, promoting the integration of Chinese and Western music is an attempt to open up a unique road for young people. On the one hand, young people seek the "utopian" escape space in music, and on the other hand, they use music as a powerful weapon to shout their own voice to the world. The emergence of various digital platforms has made the ecological trend of pop music more rich, and the excellent algorithm recommendation mechanism has greatly improved the user experience. It breaks the time and space restriction of traditional music consumption and encourages more people to enter the field of music creation.

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