The Rise of Virtual Hosts and the Issues Arising from Cross-Cultural Virtual Hosts in Communication

Yixuan Wang[1,a,*]

[1]School of Foreign Languages, Nanyang Normal University, Wuhou Street, Henan Province, Nanyang, 473000, China
a. 20501140201@nynu.edu.cn
*corresponding author

Abstract: As time goes by and technology continues to advance, more and more virtual hosts are coming to the forefront, and in 2022, Njisanji's Vtuber Vox Akuma made quite a splash with his debut in China. As a result, many people have started to take notice of cross-cultural virtual hosts. These Vtuber usually have fans from several countries, and during the live broadcast one finds that the interaction between anchor and fan is often accompanied by cultural differences, differences in expression habits and differences in thinking. The cultural and linguistic problems are often accompanied by translation errors and lack of clarity. This has led to many problems. To promote positive cultural exchange and an improved online environment, this article discusses some of these issues and proposes some initial solutions to call attention to them and to take steps to reduce their occurrence. To enhance professional skills by strengthening the management of practitioners as well as the training of anchors in order to promote the positive dissemination of culture.

Keywords: Vtuber cross-cultural, translation errors, cultural differences

1. Introduction

The virtual live streamer is an emerging form of anchoring. It is a steamer's exploitation of the concept of a virtual idol. In his dissertation, Xie Xiaoling defines a virtual anchor as a real person who uses motion capture and facial capture to transmit in real time to a virtual anchor system, which in turn reflects the movements and expressions of the real person to the virtual anchor for live broadcast [1]. In this way, the person behind the virtual anchor can perfect the control of the virtual anchor through voiceover and performance, thus achieving a good live broadcast effect. Virtual hosts are known as "Virtual YouTubers" (Vtuber) due to their common activity on YouTube. In the development of virtual hosts, the first real virtual host was a Japanese virtual host named "Kizuna AI". This virtual anchor gradually became active on YouTube in 2016 and went into indefinite hibernation in 2022. In the present, it seems that virtual anchors are in essence derivatives of virtual idols, so people can also see virtual anchors as secondary culture, which shows that virtual anchors are also a product of the subculture.

Subculture is a marginal culture, subversive to traditional culture, its illogical language and individual expressions are different from the mainstream cultural approach, and it is easier to trigger group resonance and imply values in its delivery [2]. As Vtuber are a subculture based on the Internet, the audience is mainly young people of today, so people treat it as a subculture under the youth

subculture. Usually, subcultures can influence people's psychology more directly and effectively than mainstream culture, and often have a greater and more direct influence than mainstream culture. Vtuber as a youth subculture is influencing the youth of this era, so people are paying more attention to it.

In recent years, more and more virtual hosts have come to the forefront of everyone's sight. According to the data of the National Enterprise Credit Information Public Display System, there are more than 288,000 enterprises related to "virtual human" and "digital human" in China. The industry has entered an explosive period with a growth rate of nearly 60% [3]. Currently, Bilibili is the most concentrated and best-developed platform in China's virtual anchor industry, with over 10,000 virtual anchors broadcasting live in the virtual zone of the platform as of April 23, 2022 [3].

NIJISANJI has created different departments for virtual hosts in different languages and cultures. NIJISANJI's virtual host Vox Akuma made his China debut on 6 May 2022 on Bilibili to a large Chinese audience. According to the final figures, the live broadcast lasted 1.7 hours, generated 1.11 million RMB in revenue, had nearly 40,000 payers and over 50,000 interactions, and was the number one live trending channel that night [4]. The huge popularity of virtual host Vox has undoubtedly opened the way for many overseas hosts to recognise the Chinese market, and as a result more and more overseas hosts are entering the Chinese market. For example, on May 9, 2022, virtual anchor shoto posted his first video on Bilibili, which ranked number one on the whole site that day. And in a follow-up, Shoto kicked off his first B-site live stream, and in just two hours, Shoto received over a million bounties. Today, Vox's videos on Bilibili have 3.208 million likes and 1.424 million followers. Meanwhile, Shoto's video on Bilibili has 7,211,000 likes and 1,415,000 followers. It is evident that overseas virtual hosts also hold some influence in the Chinese market, where many netizens say the arrival of overseas virtual hosts gives them motivation to learn, giving them more ways to learn English and understand English, and in the process, many questions arise.

Based on the above background, it is easy to see that virtual hosts are becoming more influential today. This paper will explore the problems that arise during the live broadcast of Vtuber, as well as further present the problems that occur during the live broadcast of Vtuber in a cross-cultural context and discuss these problems further. It is hoped that these issues will receive more attention and be addressed.

2.   Reasons for the Rise of Cross-Cultural Vtuber

With the increasing pressure of life today, watching virtual hosts as a form of entertainment is becoming a way for people to relax and let off steam in their leisure time.

Firstly, in terms of cost, the cost required for Vtuber is lower than that of live anchors in the long run [5]. The virtual digital person is an innovative product made through is a real person wearing a motion capture suit and facial expression capturing equipment, combined with CG, real life motion capture, image rendering, holographic projection, and artificial intelligence, through 3D modelling, computer production and other means [6]. According to Liu Wei, the founder of Fancy Face, the initial production cost of the low-profile version of the avatar is around 500,000 yuan to 1 million yuan, and startups can rent it for use according to their needs, with daily rental expenses as low as 100 yuan [7]. Liu Wei said that the development cost of the low-cost version of the avatar is low, the development cycle is short, many functions can be added, and the actual results can be seen after investment [7].

Secondly in 2021 the concept of the metaverse emerged. This concept brought about a boom in avatars and brought the topic of avatars to wider attention. Today is an era of highly developed technology, with modeling techniques, facial capture and other scientific techniques changing rapidly, which has provided good technical support for the rise of avatars and the development of Vtuber [5]. In addition, the younger generation is playing a leading role. They have grown up in an era of highly

developed internet and are more receptive to new things [5]. In such an environment, many brands prefer to choose virtual characters when choosing spokespeople, which offer more stability than real celebrities [5]. While brands are using virtual anchors for publicity, the virtual anchors themselves are also getting some publicity. In terms of capital considerations, big, connected companies such as Bilibili and ByteDance have made large capital investments in the virtual digital industry, providing a good platform for the development of avatars [5]. According to relevant statistics, there are currently over 130 million anchor accounts in China, of which virtual anchors account for 40%. Over 60% of users are willing to support and pay attention to the dynamic daily routine of virtual anchors, and over 40% of users are willing to spend no less than 500 yuan in the live broadcast room of virtual anchors, and even over 30% of users express their willingness to spend more to support virtual anchors [6]. On the other hand, the operating model of Vtuber has also changed due to the development of the attention economy. This has led to a change in the underlying culture of Vtuber [8]. This has also affected the requirements for those who manipulate avatars. The requirements for Vtubers have been relaxed and the personalities of avatars have become more biased towards the personality of the manipulator rather than a balance between the personality of the manipulator and the setting of the avatar [8]. The relaxation of requirements has also contributed to the proliferation of Vtubers.

In addition to the rise of Vtuber, Cross-cultural Virtual hosts have emerged. Represented by the Japanese company Nijisanji, it incorporates anchors from many countries and with many different regional cultures. For example, Nijisanji's EN division, established on 12 May 2021, features hosts from a number of English-speaking countries. These cross-cultural Vtuber are becoming more and more active as a result of the Vox Akuma boom. Cross-cultural virtual hosts blend the characteristics of international live streaming, the characteristics of avatars and the personalities of the hosts. These characteristics appeal to a segment of fans in ACG culture, fans who enjoy watching live streams, and fans who enjoy foreign cultures. The richer content and the relative freedom of expression in international live streaming have also captured a large wave of fans. The good blend of these conditions has made cross-cultural Vtuber a huge hit.

Nowadays, virtual hosts are a big hit and cross-cultural virtual hosts are coming into the limelight and becoming influential. In the process, one can't help but notice that a lot of issues have arisen for us to address.

3. Presence of Problems

3.1. Translation Errors

The most direct means of expression in a live virtual broadcast is language. And in a cross-cultural context, the process of translation is ubiquitous in Vtuber live streaming, in which a series of problems arise. With Vtubers are becoming more and more popular these days and many of them have a certain amount of influence, their words and actions can have an impact. Errors in translation often lead to errors in the delivery of messages, which is a cause for concern.

As a result of the rise of Nijisanji, more and more Vtuber from around the world are appearing to Chinese viewers. For some specific reasons, it is not enough for Chinese viewers to know about foreign virtual hosts just by the publicity of virtual host companies. That is why many new forms of communication have emerged. Many of them reproduce the recorded broadcast replays and clips on other platforms to achieve a good publicity effect as well. There are many such slices and live replays on the Bilibili and Tiktok platforms. As there are language differences between the video viewers and the hosts, these people will organise their own translation teams to translate the videos as they move them. However, the professionalism of the translations is open to question. Others will put machine-translated videos on the platform, and although they are marked as machine-translated, the frequent errors in translation cannot be ignored.

For example, on March 2, the videos of the American Live streamer Shoto were moved to Bilibili, and some of them were translated using machine translation, which could be seen to be inaccurate. There were many errors in just ten minutes of the live replay. For example, in one of the videos, Shoto says "thank for the gifted sub", which should mean "thank you for the gift" and "thank you for the reward". However, the machine translation directly translates the Chinese phrase as "thank you for the gifted maths teacher". These translation errors are frequent and can sometimes seriously affect the Vtuber's true meaning.

3.2. Expression Error

The gradual popularity of virtual hosts has seen many of them rush into the market for Vtuber. Due to the special nature of Vtuber, many people do not have to worry about the impact of their real-life status, position and appearance on the live broadcast, nor do they need to worry that the content of the live broadcast will backfire on real life [9]. In this context, many virtual hosts are also bolder in their language during live broadcasts. However, it is not difficult to see that many virtual hosts are not trained in the art and language of live streaming before they start their activities. This is especially true when it comes to understanding the language habits of people from different cultural backgrounds in a cross-cultural context. As the fan base of Vtuber grows in size and is often from a different cultural background, it is inevitable that some errors of expression will arise when communicating. This is a phenomenon that needs to be taken into account.

On October 5, 2022, a series of problems arose in the live stream of Mysta, a British Vtuber for Nijisanji, due to an expression error. It started when a non-native English-speaking fan wrote in a bounty, "Hi Mysta! really scared and can't stop crying..." The Vtuber, who is a native English speaker, made a mistake in understanding the words and responded to the bounty with an overly rude expression during the broadcast, which caused a lot of discontent among netizens. In the end, it led to an online scolding war.

A section of the netizens said that the problem arose due to the fact that the anchor's mother tongue is English and the fans who made the reward were not native English speakers, and the language was biased in the communication process. What the fan was trying to say was that she had been sexually harassed by a man today, something that had already happened. The native speaker's understanding is that it means "I just met someone who sexually harassed me", in the present tense. The Vtuber direct response to this was to say that if this happened, one should not come to an Vtuber, but to the police. The fan's intention was probably to seek comfort from the Vtuber, but instead they got this response. Another section of the netizens felt that although the Vtuber had misunderstood the content of the bounty, there was a problem with the tone, attitude and expression. It is believed that the anchor clearly could have taken a more euphemistic approach to expressing his thoughts, but the excessive harshness of the language used during the broadcast, as well as the attitude towards things and the tone of his words, caused a large portion of people to be discontent.

Again, this incident has caused a lot of discussion on the internet due to the fact that it involves sexual harassment. Not only was Mysta the virtual host subjected to online abuse and even death threats, but the fan who sent the bounty was also attacked by public opinion. In response, virtual host Mysta posted a clarification, saying that he admitted to speaking too directly and could have used better wording to express himself. He also apologised for his rude statement, as well as expressing his non-support of sexual harassment.

Many problems still arose during the publication of the clarification article. As the clarification was published by the Vtuber themselves, many users reproduced the article and posted it on different online platforms. Some of the translations were done by the users themselves. Some of the translations may be subjective, while others use machine translations without examining the correctness of the translation. These can also lead to errors in the reader's understanding of the clarification, which can

lead to a failure to achieve clarification or, worse still, a worsening of the matter. There are also some "official" teams that have given official translations, but on closer inspection many netizens can see that some of these official teams are also formed by fans themselves, and some netizens have commented on how such translations can be trusted as "official translations".

This incident is a cause for concern and it reflects two main aspects. The influence of Vtuber is growing today, with many of them having fans all over the world, and every word and action has a big impact. There is a problem with the language code of Vtuber and the fact that Vtuber companies should consider whether they lack a PR team with cross-cultural knowledge to deal with similar incidents.

3.3. Cultural Differences

Translation is the cross-cultural act of linguistic communication in which the meaning and content articulated in one language is fully expressed in accurate and appropriate terms in another language [10]. Language is a product of the joint influence of politics, economics, culture and history of a region, and translation is a process that must involve two languages, in which different cultures can lead to differences in the expression of language in translation and thus cause translation errors [10]. Chinese and Western cultural differences are reflected in many aspects. As, mentioned in Ge Xinyu's 'Exploring the Influence of Chinese and Western Cultural Differences in English Translation', she has made a more detailed classification of the causes that lead to English translation errors, and there are three main causes, namely geographical environment, lexical meanings and customs [11]. For example, dragons are found in the cultures of both Chinese and Western countries, with the Chinese dragon representing respect and good fortune. In ancient China, only the Chinese emperor was allowed to use clothes with dragons painted on them. In the West, on the other hand, the dragon is a representation of evil, which reflects the difference in the meaning of words in cultural differences. A similar example in China is that a lucky person is translating directly into English as "lucky boy" and "lucky star". But in the West, it is often referred to as "lucky dog". The word "dog" in Chinese culture usually means something bad about a person, whereas in Western culture it does not. There are many other examples of translation errors caused by cultural differences that can lead to unnecessary misunderstandings during cross-cultural virtual live broadcasts.

The existence of cultural differences is something that is well known. With the ability of virtual hosts to communicate, cultural differences can cause even more serious problems if left unregulated. Virtual hosts in a cross-cultural perspective often involve fans from multiple countries. For example, VoxAkuma, the aforementioned virtual host, is a British virtual host. His fans may include people from the UK, Europe and America, Australia, and Asia. With such a diverse fan base, the issue of cultural differences, if not addressed, could lead to cross-international and cross-cultural online name-calling, and could also deepen communication barriers between countries and deepen stereotypes between people. More seriously, it could also breed cross-cultural communication dilemmas and even lead to some potential diplomatic problems.

3.4. Misguided Thinking

According to the beginning of the article, virtual hosts are actually an online subculture that extends from virtual idols. Under the influence of this online subculture, many fans will edit and create their own videos based on the live content of their favourite virtual hosts. This behaviour is called "participatory culture". Bilibili, as a platform where a large number of virtual hosts gather, also plays a significant role in the promotion of Vtuber, with 60% of the world's top virtual hosts currently having official accounts on Bilibili [12]. Nowadays, the number of fans of virtual hosts is huge, and more and more people are gathering because of their love for virtual hosts, thus creating what could

be called a "fan circle". The cross-cultural fan base of virtual hosts includes people from various cultural backgrounds, with different ideological differences giving rise to different 'fan cultures'.

Subcultures and fan culture have a huge impact on young people. Within reason, watching cross-cultural virtual hosts can help us to gain insight and learn more about the culture. However, excessive emotional involvement can cloud judgement and lead to unnecessary disputes.

The concept of sub-culture was first introduced and defined by the American sociologist M. Gordon [13]. In Gordon's 1974 book "The Concept of Subculture and its Applications", he refers to the emergence of the concept of subculture as "culture-sub-area" in the Dictionary of Sociology published in New York in 1944, which refers to sub-regions within a large cultural region with distinctive cultural characteristics (sub-division). The current concept of subculture is an extension of this concept [13]. Conceptually speaking, subculture is a culture that is in a secondary position to the mainstream culture [14]. With the continuous development of society, this generation of young people is now in an era of rapid development of information networks, and the influence of the Internet has penetrated into all corners of young people's lives, becoming an indispensable part of life and work. At present, the number of Internet users in China has exceeded one billion, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 71. 6% [13]. This has led to the creation of an online subculture, of which virtual anchors are a product. What is clear is that the youth of today is the main force behind the development and dissemination of the Internet. Young people are very receptive to new things, a condition that has led to the fact that the audience for virtual anchors is mainly the youth of today. The main group of young people are students, who have not yet entered society and have a limited ability to judge things, especially in the intercultural sphere where they are more easily influenced by foreign ideas. Subcultures reflect certain cultures and ideas. In cross-cultural Vtubers, Vtubers from different regions and countries may convey different ideas, some of which do not apply to their own views. In Shang Yong-yi's "Study of Virtual Host Culture from the Perspective of Landscape Social Theory", it is mentioned that as Vtuber enter the era of commercial operation, curiosity and amusement become the main purpose of watching Vtubers, and watching Vtuber becomes a kind of cultural spectacle [8]. Compared to the early virtual hosts, the current ones are rooted in various cultures and highly embedded in the daily life of the youth group [8]. This can reflect certain problems. According to pedagogical principles, the basic factors that influence a person's development are mainly genetic, environmental, and personal motivation, and the one whose influence covers the widest range is the environmental factor [14]. Transnational Vtuber provide a new environment and bring many novel perspectives, not all of which may be applicable to us, and many fans without their own standards of judgement are prone to ideological drift and bring about radical emotions. With the popularity of transnational virtual hosts, fans of Vtuber are gradually being influenced by the 'fandom culture', which has led to many online public opinion incidents or online scolding, seriously affecting the physical and mental health of young people and the cultivation of correct values.

4. Suggestions on Vtuber Industry

4.1. Objective Adjustment of Individual Perspective

The creation of Vtuber as a subculture in a cross-cultural perspective has given many fans an emotional attachment. As virtual hosts are essentially Internet cultural products, the transmission of information during the live broadcast of virtual hosts tends to form a fixed framework, and under the influence of their infectious power viewers' thinking and perceptions tend to gravitate towards the ideas of the frequently watched Vtuber and gradually solidify, bringing about paranoia [8]. Young people of today should therefore take a greater look at themselves, increase their experience, not become overly obsessed with anything, and learn to criticise everything. People should also improve their aesthetic and intellectual connotations and have proper standards of judgement. As Vtuber from

a cross-cultural perspective bring with them many different cultural perceptions, fans need to learn to recognise and be tolerant of some cultural differences. When hearing views and content that contradict own perceptions, do not be quick to refute them, but be patient in seeking evidence. At the same time, take a learning attitude towards cross-cultural Vtuber and enhance your knowledge and understanding of cross-cultural knowledge while watching them. This is a great way to entertain and increase your knowledge and perspective.

The Chinese audience has a large base, and if every viewer who watches cross-cultural Vtuber can do so in a good frame of mind, the influence of the cross-cultural virtual anchors combined with the cooperation of domestic fans will have a virtuous circle effect on the spread of culture. While Chinese fans absorb and embrace foreign culture well, foreign Vtuber deepen their knowledge of Chinese culture through chat. As the audience of cross-cultural Vtuber is also generally from multiple countries. So, using influence to deliver positive messages and give foreign fans a deeper understanding of Chinese culture can, to a certain extent, alleviate the many problems caused by cultural differences. It can also, to a certain extent, subconsciously expand the influence of Chinese culture and make it recognised worldwide.

4.2. Anchor Management

The popularity of Vtuber has given them a star power. In turn, virtual hosts have certain peculiarities. They are not real people, but characters controlled by their manipulators. However, in the current situation they have become inseparable from their manipulator's personality, and the manipulator's personality has become part of the manipulated character. In short, they are real people who have taken advantage of the technology and subcultural background of virtual hosts. In most cases, these hosts no longer strictly adhere to the character's setting and the content of the live stream is more closely aligned to real life. While the viewers are made to feel close to the avatars, the cultural differences and the use of language by the manipulators are a problem that should be solved.

Cultural differences are the first major problem that cross-cultural Vtuber face. Vtuber companies should consider whether they should train their virtual hosts on cross-cultural knowledge and whether they have a department to address and deal with issues arising from cross-cultural communication. When problems do arise, it is usually the individual Vtuber who clarify or apologise. Sometimes some hosts will go cold treatment when problems arise, and in doing so the problem is not resolved but rather exacerbated. It is important for Vtuber companies to train their Vtuber on cross-cultural knowledge and related business skills. Also, noting that cross-cultural Vtuber have a multi-national audience, Vtuber companies should be aware of the need to organise a department with cross-cultural knowledge and PR skills to deal with these issues.

4.3. Practitioner Skills Tracking and Updating

Replays and video slices of cross-cultural Vtuber are often reproduced on other major platforms, and the videos fall into two broad categories, namely live replays and video slices of secondary creations. The rigour of similarly republished videos is often unproven due to the many conditions involved in cross-lingual and cross-cultural translations. The management of translators and managers is essential. For example, the relevant personnel of the various platforms could examine the cross-cultural knowledge of bloggers with high traffic and influence and strengthen the supervision of their videos. Official translators should be selected not only for their knowledge of the language they are translating, but also for their knowledge of interculturalism. It is important to choose people who are knowledgeable about interculturalism and who can mark up some of the 'slang'.

Jonathan Friedman in "Cultural Identity and the Process of Globalisation "says that culture simply translates the identification of particularity into the particularisation of identity and ultimately into

the analogisation of identity [15]. This suggests that although there are many linguistic and cultural differences in cross-cultural communication, people can achieve successful cross-cultural communication by translating cultures through the method of finding common ground. Such culturally informed translations are sometimes more accessible to audiences in cross-cultural contexts, and often direct translations can achieve better results. This is why it is so important to develop an awareness of intercultural communication among those involved. Finally, while major platforms should strengthen their management of videos, they should also be aware of creative bloggers with a high number of followers who create secondary versions of their videos.

5. Conclusion

As previously recounted, the article has discussed virtual hosts and have extended them further by extending them to include cross-cultural virtual hosts. As a popular subculture among young people, virtual anchors tend to resonate more easily with the youth of today. The cross-cultural virtual hosts, aided by the rapid development of the internet and AI, have resonated with people by broadcasting live in different countries, generating a large fan base. This community is a blend of fans from different countries and cultures. This has given virtual anchors the same influence as celebrities, and it can be argued that every word and action counts. And because of the cross-cultural aspect, communication is bound to be problematic. Translation errors, cultural differences and misguided ideas are just some of the problems. As the influence of virtual hosts grows and takes on a celebrity effect, the fan base of virtual hosts becomes more and more rice-based, and these problems can sometimes lead to online battles. These problems can sometimes lead to online battles, which often lead to more serious problems.

Therefore, these problems need to be taken seriously and addressed in three main ways. These are objective. Adjustment of Individual Perspective, Anchor Management and Practitioner Skills Tracking and Updating As long as people all pay attention, it is believed that the number of these problems will be significantly reduced, and even if they do occur, they will be better solved.

The growing influence of virtual hosts in a cross-cultural perspective is a great opportunity for us. The popularity of virtual hosts raises many questions, but also brings many benefits and opportunities that can be used to great effect if used well. For example, among university students, many of whom are studying foreign languages, watching cross-cultural virtual hosts with a learning attitude will be a great boost to their studies. In addition, cross-cultural virtual hosts have a star effect and are relatively stable. Many businesses looking to get their brand into the international market can use this as an initial promotion to get their brand out of the country. Secondly, and most importantly, cross-cultural virtual hosts, if utilised well, can make more people aware of cultural differences and differences, alleviating to a certain extent the many misunderstandings and stereotypes that come with cultural differences. Therefore, it is important to consider how to systematically train cross-cultural virtual hosts, how to make better use of them for cross-cultural communication and how to systematically screen and manage the personnel involved.

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