

**How do knowledge-sharing content producers create visibility and make money
on the Chinese platform Bilibili**

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Master Thesis

June 2022

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1. Introduction

Knowledge-sharing content is a newly developed genre on social media platforms (Tan, 2013). This generally refers to content about complicated scientific and technological issues, business and finance, and general knowledge of humanities and history delivered in a dynamic and exciting video format (Tian, 2021). According to Social Blade's ranking of YouTube content producers in June 2020, knowledge-sharing content producers, MIT OpenCourseWare and ASAP Science are among the top five subscribers base globally (Wang & Zhang, 2022).

Similarly, knowledge-sharing content is also popular in the Chinese social media landscape, especially on the Chinese YouTube-like platform Bilibili (Cao, 2019; Wu, 2020). Bilibili is very relevant as it was first established as an animation-streaming platform in China, which subsequently evolved into a social media platform with 202 million monthly active users (Schneider, 2021). Moreover, the platform set up a "knowledge division" zone in 2020, demonstrating its regard for knowledge-sharing content as an essential part of the platform ecology (Tian, 2021).

However, knowledge-sharing content producers on the Chinese platform Bilibili face many problems. Firstly, they have few alternative options as it is inconvenient for the Chinese audience to access YouTube or other platforms outside China (Xu, 2020). Secondly, knowledge-based content does not conform to the features of other Chinese social media platforms, such as Douyin (Chinese TikTok) or Kuai Shou (a similar platform to TikTok that targets more third- and fourth-tiered cities as well as small towns in China) (Lin & de Kloet, 2019). Therefore, with few alternatives and harsh censorship, knowledge-sharing content producers are forced to stick with Bilibili and adapt to its infrastructure and governance framework.

In terms of platform infrastructure, Bilibili has many distinctive technological features. Firstly, its *danmu* (bullet-chatting) feature, which allows users to send real-time on-screen comments while watching videos, generates a strong feeling of interaction between end-users and content producers (Chen, 2021). Furthermore, in addition to subscriptions, its unique feature *toubi* (coins donation), a virtual coin donated to the video, was claimed by Bilibili to help content creators generate more traffic and earn more money (Wu, 2020). The feature makes monetization more dependent on end-users, but how it functions remains vague.

In terms of governance, Bilibili is constantly subjected to government censorship mainly because *danmu* comments are tricky to regulate and filter. Moreover, the conflict between Bilibili's active community and China's socio-political realities can significantly impact the content producers (Schneider, 2021).

Extensive studies have been conducted concerning content producers' visibility and ability to monetize their content on platforms (Arriagada&Ibáñez, 2020; Bishop, 2018, 2019, 2020). Scholars have pointed out that vloggers, live-streamers, and other types of content creators are flexible in switching between platforms and engage in a variety of revenue-generating techniques(Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Duffy et al., 2021; Glatt, 2021; Hou, 2019; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019). However, research is lacking on knowledge-sharing content producers in particular.

In this context, this research explores how knowledge-sharing content producers create visibility and monetize their content on the Chinese platform Bilibili based on qualitative interviews with influential knowledge-sharing content producers.

2. Theoretical Framework

It is critical to conceptualize specific theoretical notions related to these topics in order to gain a concrete understanding of how knowledge-sharing content producers establish visibility and make money. This chapter begins by reviewing previous studies on platformization and how platforms influence cultural products. Definitions and various aspects of platformization will be discussed, followed by talks on how infrastructures, governance, and platform-specific cultures influence cultural practices. The second section looks at the practices that content producers have evolved to manage visibility and monetization as a result of platformization. The third section reviews previous research on platform Bilibili as well as the unique platform characteristics that make the paper relevant and develop possible directions for Chinese platform studies.

2.1 platformization of cultural production

2.2 visibility on social media

2.3 Bilibili as a platform

China's Bilibili, featuring danmu culture and initially targeting ACG (Anime, Comics, Games) fans, is now China's largest generation Z cultural community (Wu, 2020) and has 2.7 million active content creators, while 42% of them have more than 10,000 followers (Bilibili, 2021). Scholarships are primarily concerned with the *danmu* culture (Jia et al., 2017; Wang, 2021), the sub-culture of this Platform (Cao, 2019; Wu, 2020), and the youngster community feature (Schneider, 2021; Chen, 2021). The research is seldom about the content producers on this platform, let alone knowledge-sharing content producers. Some studies have been conducted about this platform's vloggers (Wang & Picone, 2021). However, as argued in the case of other platforms, vloggers, live-streamers, other types of content creators are more flexible in changing platforms and engage in a variety of revenue-generating techniques (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Duffy et al., 2021; Glatt, 2021; Hou, 2019; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019).

Platforms play a vital part in affecting cultural production in the three layers of infrastructures, governance, and practices (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Knowledge-sharing content is one type of cultural production generated in the platformization process, and it is essential to investigate how platformization shapes cultural production. From content selection to market tactics, cultural content providers are constantly confronted with

seemingly random shifts in platform governance. Simultaneously, new platform services and infrastructure modifications entice these producers (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

How the platform shapes content producers' visibility, and monetization has been discussed in academic papers in various ways. For example, how the infrastructure changes affect content producers' tactics, how platform evolution makes content invisible and thus affects content producers' monetization.

In terms of infrastructures, the gateways of those affordances offered by the platforms, such as interfaces devices, change how content producers practice. For example, to make a clip gain more traffic, TikTok content creators must first study what memes are trendy, what types of videos are famous, and what music is prevalent (Poell et al., 2022). Furthermore, Zhang (2021) explores Douyin (Chinese TikTok) as adopting a new infrastructure to establish a 'video encyclopedia,' content creators generating unique content sharing knowledge about various information would be possibly recommended, thus more easily commercializing. Besides, as it has begun to engage in propaganda and tourism for city branding in collaboration with the national and local governments, it is safe for content creators always to follow the path of governments and generate content in their favor (Zhang, 2021). In order to gain visibility, cultural producers must contend with platforms' enormous potential to exert infrastructural influence over all elements of the development, distribution, marketing, and monetization of cultural production (Poell et al., 2022).

In terms of platform governance, which refers to the set of rules boundaries that can be exchanged on platforms, it also dramatically affects how content producers create, distribute and monetize content (Poell et al., 2022). For example, Bishop carried out several studies about beauty vloggers on YouTube and managing visibility through YouTube algorithms and concluded that even the highest rank content creators are confined by the power of the algorithm and have a discriminative hierarchy of gender and beauty (Bishop, 2018, 2019, 2020). Furthermore, Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020) conducted an empirical study about Instagram influencers in Chile to explore how the content creators adapted to the platform's changes. They concluded that to be an experienced content producer requires constantly producing content across various platforms and adjusting to the platform structures and algorithmic systems (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). Moreover, O'Meara (2019) studied "engagement pods," a practice in which Instagram content creators remark, like, and share their work to circumvent the platform's algorithm and enhance traffic. These findings on content creators' behaviors emphasize the need to understand how platform evolution affects content creators' practices and modify their monetization tactics (O'Meara, 2019).

A study about Adpocalypse, a famous advertisers' boycott of events on YouTube in March 2017, revealed that changing platform policies and strategies would significantly impact content creators' revenue and profits (Kumar, 2019). The Adpocalypse has ushered in a new era of content control, dramatically altering the creator ecosystem and creating an uncertain environment of self-surveillance and constant modification (Bishop, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). YouTube's ambiguous and changing algorithms are responsible for the visibility of content and the profits of creators (Kumar, 2019). Platform curation directs what content and which contributors get visible as more cultural producers distribute and monetize material through platforms (Poell et al., 2022).

For content producers on platform Bilibili, these issues matter because the contents are always under harsh censorship (Kaye et al., 2021), and the platform algorithm is very opaque (Schneider, 2021). Platform infrastructures also play an essential part. However, it is not clear yet how knowledge-sharing content producers develop strategies to deal with these issues to create visibility and make money.

In this context, it is appropriate to take the theoretical framework of platformization of cultural production to address the research question. Therefore, this research will mainly focus on two key points contributing to academic studies. First and foremost, the integration of components that make up Bilibili as a platform—its emphasis on content producers, the strong community connection between end-users and content creators, and its distinct cultures and practices (Chen, 2021), combining to make it a model site for studying the emerging platformization of cultural production. Second, influential content producers will be interviewed as critical methods of this study to shed light on how knowledge-sharing content producers create visibility and monetize their content, which will be explained thoroughly in the following methods section.

3. Methodology

To answer the research question "*how do knowledge-sharing content producers create visibility and make money on the Chinese platform Bilibili,*" twelve influential content producers with a minimum of 10,000 followers were interviewed using in-depth interviews qualitative research method. In addition, the translated interview transcriptions were subjected to a thematic analysis, and the codes were used to help answer the main research question. The methodological procedure was based on Kvale's (2007) stages of interview inquiry: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. The first stage, thematizing, which includes the study's objective, research questions, and theoretical knowledge acquisition, has been discussed in previous chapters of the thesis. The remaining steps will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections of this chapter. In addition, the method for thematic analysis employed in the analysis stage was the one defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which will be explained in-depth in the following sections of this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

This research lends itself to a qualitative study approach because it aims to explore and analyze how content producers create visibility on the unique Chinese platform Bilibili. The way people interpret and give meaning to the things around them, which is produced through social interactions, is a qualitative research methodology (Guest et al., 2012; Schreier, 2013). Furthermore, it is crucial to examine content producers' experiences to access the specific types of "insider knowledge." Producers collect and communicate about platform practices and algorithms over time as a result of their "platformed labor, creative experimentation, and community-building activities" (Baym et al., 2021, p.29). As a result, in-depth interviews are suitable for incorporating creator experience and expertise into platform research and acquiring insider viewpoints.

Using a survey method does not allow researchers to have a deeper conversation with the participants and cannot interact with the participants as effectively as the study (James & Busher, 2016). Because the research question needs to be answered based on people's personal experiences and understandings, in-depth interviews can provide the opportunities to get deeper information and the true nature of the participant's understanding of the research field (Johnson, 2001). Besides, researchers can tailor the interview questions to the specific individual experiences of the participants to gain a more in-depth understanding. In this study, compared with just analyzing the videos and products of content creators, in-

depth interviews can lead researchers to gain information and understanding beyond the shown contents and dig more into the thinking process and the inner struggles in cultural production. Thus, it is more suitable and necessary for the research to adopt an in-depth interview method in this case, compared with content analysis or any other qualitative methods.

3.2 Sampling strategy

To achieve a more holistic understanding of the topic, the interviewees needed to have a sufficient, if not professional, comprehension of platform practices, infrastructures, and algorithms related to cultural production and some understanding of creating visibility and monetization. Thus, interviewees were chosen if they had more followers and views than the average number in Bilibili's knowledge division, which is roughly 5k followers and 100k views (Bilibili, 2021).

Through background messages and comments, the researcher aimed to access the knowledge division's top-ranked 30 content producers. The researcher made a list of content producers according to the most-watched videos in the Bilibili knowledge division. In order to reach content producers who fit the sampling specifications, an advertisement was published on social media channels such as WeChat and Weibo.

As the researcher was a pre-media industry practitioner and expert producer, it was possible to contact these content producers through internal resources. After posting the advertisement for two weeks, the researcher got messages back from 20 content producers out of the list.

The researcher contacted every one of the 20 content producers by informing them of the study's purpose and getting a brief idea of their willingness and knowledge concerning the research question. Those who had no autonomy over their contents but followed the instructions of an MCN's guidelines were not included in this research, as this does not apply to this paper's aim.

To achieve a larger sample, the researcher joined a content producer community of Bilibili, and messages were sent to them through WeChat or comments on Weibo. While the sampling was purposeful, it was also done in a combination of convenience and snowball sampling to guarantee that enough interviews were accessible within the research's constrained time frame. The researcher chose 12 with the most willing to share for the official interviews. This sampling strategy is purposive, as specific participants who have a large amount of information and provoking thoughts about a specific topic will be chosen.

As in this case, these sources are limited, so the followers' numbers restriction guarantees the acquisition of valuable outcomes (Bryman, 2012).

Meanwhile, the initial participants also helped the researcher contact other content producers in their communities. As a result, all the interviewees met the sampling criteria that they are among the top-ranked knowledge-sharing content producers with more than 10k followers. The complete list of interviewees had a minimum of 11k followers and a maximum of 4.3 million followers. Three of them had more than 1.5 million followers (see Appendix A), and two of them were also on the list of "Power up 100" in Bilibili 2021, an award held every year for encouraging the most influential content producers (Zhang, 2021).

3.3 Data collection & Operationalization

Due to the geographic distance and the pandemic situation, in-depth interviews were conducted online via Chinese WeChat calls. The calls were recorded under the agreement of the participants. They were asked to take interviews during their relaxing time. The privacy and anonymity of the participants' names and responses were guaranteed. 11 of the interviewees were Chinese, so they were done in mandarin. While one of the interviewees is an American living in China for more than ten years, his Chinese is excellent, and as he prefers to interview in Chinese, so mandarin was used as the primary language. All the records were translated into English and transcribed by the researcher.

The interview recordings ranged in length from 45 to 106 minutes. The translated transcriptions ranged in length from 8,500 to 14,000 words. The interviews were a little longer, and the parts that were not recorded included internet connection checks and a small conversation starter to ensure the interviewees were at ease. Both the interviewer and the interviewees were at home because this was an internet interview. However, the interview was dependent primarily on the quality of the internet connections; certain variables such as voice tone and facial expressions were difficult to identify. Furthermore, the interviews were placed between May and June, during the peak of a new-round Omicron outbreak in major Chinese cities and under a lockdown. It significantly impacted the quality of the calls and the length of the interviews.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. An interview guide was developed according to the theoretical framework and utilized to manage the flow of the questions and ensure that all critical data points were covered (see Appendix B). The first questions are considered ice breakers to understand how the participants' content creation

experience developed, such as how they started being a content producer, why they chose this platform and this particular division of knowledge sharing. The second set focused on the specific creation procedures, how they chose the topics, and how to make the videos. The third set delved into how they use specific features in Bilibili, such as *danmu* (bullet screen chats), *donating coins*, and all the other complicated features such as *charging and magnetic force*. Those features will later be explained in detail in the late sections as ways for content producers to create visibility based on their experience developing their channel and online presence. The fourth set focused on the monetization scheme, the trainee programs, and the content community in Bilibili and how the participants make sense of the platform algorithm. In addition, questions about tactics, practices, and strategies gaining visibility, perceptions of the platform's features or governance, and how they leverage platform infrastructures were asked to understand how they learned to navigate Bilibili and make their content recommended. Then, questions about the regulation rules and the invisible contents were included to find out if and how participants perceived the censorship and governance of the platform. The concluding questions involved future questions regarding their long-term goal for growth and advice as a career of being a knowledge-sharing content producer in Bilibili. The skills evolved as the researcher conducted more interviews and became more confident with the research topic and asked questions during the study project. According to Mack et al. (2005), rapport-building, emphasizing the participant's point of view, and adjusting to distinct personalities are all-important abilities for in-depth interviews. In terms of dialogue, some participants were more open and flowing, while others were more restrained, requiring more time to grow relaxed. For each participant, the researcher changed some interview styles. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for freedom in following the flow of the conversation to get as much pertinent information as feasible.

As a result, the semi-structured interview guide proved to be a reliable scale for gaining a thorough grasp of the cultural production practices on the platform Bilibili and exploring all of the features that are part of the central research question.

3.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data acquired through the interviews. Analyzing the patterns in their answers is ideal for understanding how content producers gain visibility and achieve monetization under platformization. Thematic analysis was considered the most conducive method for this purpose (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Their

insights and experiences came together to form common themes that supplied rich, in-depth data. Because of its code-based methodology, thematic analysis is excellent for classifying and describing data (Guest et al., 2012). Furthermore, the many stages of coding aid in the strategic evaluation of the linkages between the identified patterns and the detailed descriptions, resulting in thorough interpretations of the interview data (Booije, 2009; Guest et al., 2012).

In the meantime, comprehending the meaning, they have made for it and utilizing it to guide their experiences makes the coding procedure connected with thematic analysis ideal for this study (Guest et al., 2012).

Braun & Clarke (2008) suggested six procedures for conducting a successful thematic analysis. The first step was to get familiarized with the data. During transcribing and translating, the researcher paid close attention to the verbal and nonverbal data in the interviews. The generation of initial codes was the second phase. During this step, the data was coded systematically for intriguing qualities that will be useful to answer the research question. Finally, the search for themes was the third part of the investigation. The themes were composed of various codes that combine to generate patterns grouped into an "overarching theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2008; p.89). The codes were investigated in-depth to develop themes and sub-themes at this study stage. Kvale's (2007) recommendation was also followed to begin the analysis during the interview process.

The possible themes and sub-themes were reviewed in the fourth phase. It is critical to check if each code creates logical, understandable patterns from which each theme emerges throughout this phase. The validity of the themes was also assessed during this phase, along with the comprehensive study. As a result, the themes should mirror the theory presented in the theoretical framework. After each theme's validity had been determined, the fifth research focused on identifying and labeling the themes according to the characteristics, themes, and patterns discussed in the fourth phase.

The report is produced in the final phase of the thematic analysis. The identified themes were linked to the research question and recorded in the paper's results and discussion part. In addition, this phase entailed developing a narrative representing the general theme structure's complexity and logic as determined in the previous steps. Finally, the author used the "15-point checklist" developed by Braun and Clarke (2008) to ensure that the thematic analysis was correct. Kvale's (2007) recommendation was also followed to begin the analysis during the interview process.

As for the interview data, some notes were taken and written down so that the researcher would not overlook any essential points. A handful of these observations were translated into codes, then specific essential codes were integrated into significant themes. Thus this was regarded as another level of coding to make sense of the data. The process offered the researcher what to look for during the primary analytic phase and remember while interviewing the next batch of interviewees. The interviews were read several times carefully to identify the codes; The codes were classified according to the themes that emerged from their examination. The data was then examined again for new codes and to see if the codes found in particular groupings of interviews applied to most of the interviews. Every code was defined, and the codes were then organized into sub-themes. The sub-themes were organized into four main themes (see Appendix C).

3.5 Reliability and Validity

As stated in the operationalization section, the questions analyze the topics within that research question and investigate the research's goal. To provide openness and clarity and ensure the study's validity, every phase of the research process was documented, from collecting data and interviews to analysis. Because the research's results were based on the researcher's reasoning of the data according to the theory, it can be argued that it has validity (Guest et al., 2012).

However, whereas thematic analysis has the main advantage of the flexibility and can process vast volumes of information, reliability is a significant issue because it relies heavily on the researcher's perception, which might be biased (Guest et al., 2012). However, when there was only one researcher, there was less space for potential mistakes in interpreting the codes from the interviews in this article. Furthermore, because qualitative research aims not to duplicate or generalize, reliability is difficult to obtain (Guest et al., 2012). Although semi-structured interviews do not allow for reproducible outcomes, the interview guide was consistent throughout the research. All of the questions in it were asked to the participants. As a result, the guidance can be used for future research. In the case of this research, every attempt had been made to guarantee that the research was reliable and valid, to provide a foundation for future research.

3.6 Ethical considerations and reflexivity

To ensure that the research was carried out ethically, each interviewee was asked to sign a form of informed consent, which provided them with basic information about the

study and gave them the option of declining to participate (Flick, 2011, Kvale, 2007). At the start of each interview, the interviewees were reminded of this. The verbal assent of the subjects was also captured during the interviews. The participants' personal information will be kept private, and the information they supplied has been written entirely and accurately.

As a media practitioner, the researcher maintained a good rapport with the interviewees. The points of connections led to dialogue and a depth that may otherwise not occur (Brown et al., 2009). However, the researcher made sure that it did not alter the data and results, and the researcher's individual experiences and viewpoints on the topic had no impact on the findings. They were primarily utilized as conversation starters during the interview. Furthermore, during the data collection phase, this researcher eliminated any personal biases.

4. Results

4.1 Understanding the characteristics of Bilibili

The most prevalent theme emerging from the interviews was ‘understanding the characteristics of Bilibili’, as all the participants mentioned that Bilibili is a unique platform with many characteristics that distinguish it from other platforms in China. However, among the 12 interviewees, only 7 of them use Bilibili exclusively. While the other five interviewees would post knowledge-sharing content on other platforms like Douyin (Chinese Tik-Tok), they would also tailor their content to fit Bilibili’s features. The sub-themes of this overarching theme include ‘analyzing the interface’, ‘upgrading the creator account’, ‘integrating into the community’, and ‘analyzing metrics data’.

4.1.1. Analyzing the interface

The first sub-theme of the above-mentioned theme is ‘analyzing the interface’. Considering Generation Z's motto of “studying on Bilibili” (Tian, 2021), there are both needs and challenges for knowledge-sharing content producers. Transforming lengthy and sometimes boring knowledge into engaging videos for young viewers on Bilibili remains a challenge for them. As Wang and Laboto (2019) noted, the interfaces of Chinese platforms differ significantly. Each has its distinctive characteristics; thus, it is worth studying each case individually to add value to the study of platforms. Interviewee 2 pointed out that “the interfaces of the platform Bilibili are different from TikTok, which are called information flow.” Interviewee 8 recounts, “those videos keep bumping into your eyes, but Bilibili is different. You choose what to watch according to preference of the cover, title, and introduction, so it is very important to make these appealing.”

Within this context, ‘cute or dramatic images on the cover’, ‘attracting titles’ and ‘controversial or appealing introductions’ are the codes submerged in this subcategory. Interviewee 5 and 9 both mentioned that, as Bilibili features Anime and Comics culture at first, most of its users are Anime fans and therefore essential to incorporate ‘cuteness’ or ‘dramatic’. This aligns with Wang and Picone's (2021) finding that cuteness is a prominent trait of popular culture in east Asia.

...some staff from Bilibili told me to change my cover and title. In one video I shared how to survive in fierce competition. I changed the cover to a picture of

myself crying and made the title *Thanks for all the shits*. The views soared from less than 1,000 to 50k. I do not know why....(Interviewee 5)

Content producers also pay close attention to the titles and introductions. "I always checked how others make their titles and introductions," said Interviewee 4. "Covers should be dramatic; usually, I put colorful pictures or a dark background with colorful words to attract attention," explained Interviewee 3. Some interviewees also struggled with titles, which cost them hours or even a day to think of some appealing and dramatic options. "Usually with a question mark or exclamation mark" and "using some controversial sentences to arouse the interest of audiences," Interviewee 1 offered an example of when he made a video and did not know how to come up with a better title. Eventually, he named it *I do not care about the title because no one will watch this*. This title did arouse the audience's interest. In fact, many end-users of Bilibili enjoy this kind of contradiction, so this video received more than 100,000 views. Interviewee 3 described how he would draft two or three different titles and introductions and do a blind test with classmates before posting. Although each interviewee has a different way of making the covers and titles more appealing, they all struggled to learn the Bilibili interface characteristics and utilize them to make content more visible.

4.1.2 Upgrading the creator account

The second emergent sub-theme of the above-mentioned theme is 'upgrading the creator account'. On platform Bilibili, content producers are situated in a hierarchy according to the electromagnetic force (the power of attraction) their account exudes. As the pull of this electromagnetic force intensifies, content producers are able to unlock different permissions and functions for creators (see Figure 1). According to the interviewees, the means of improving the electromagnetic force is connected to content quality, quantity, as well as credit data. Nevertheless, none of them could explain how exactly this can be achieved. Most of them only know what the rights are when their account reaches a certain level.

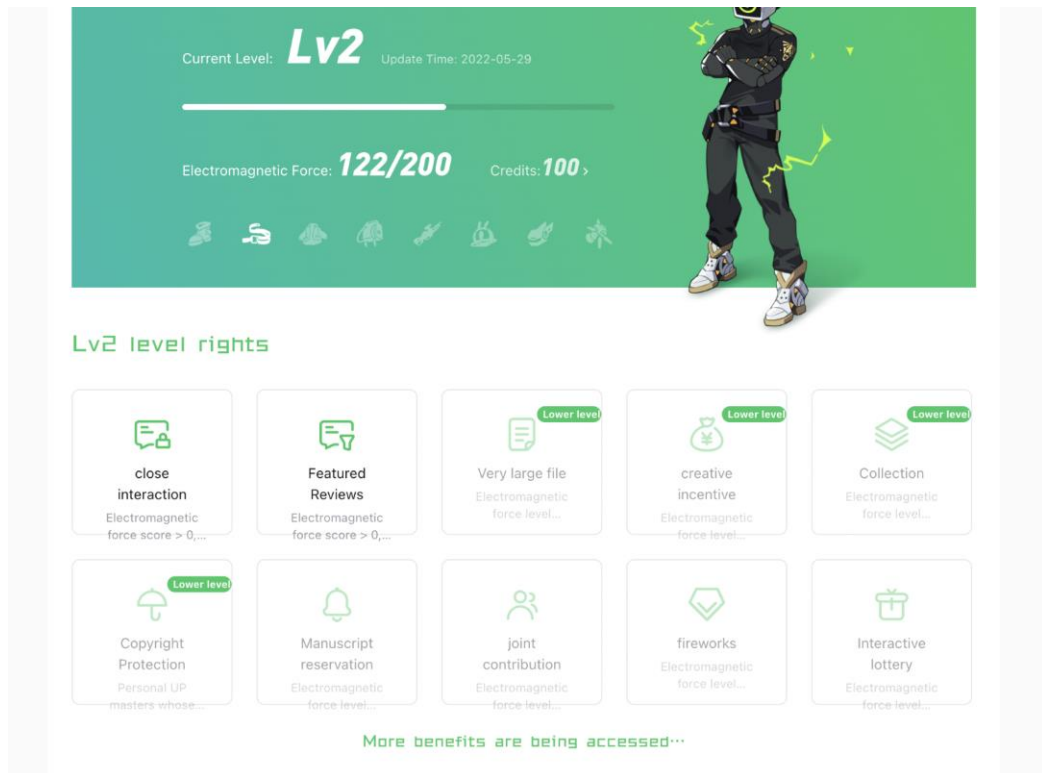


Figure 1. Screenshots of the *electromagnetic force* functions

You can select the *danmu*, choose what you like to show, and delete what you do not like when you reach level 2....When you reach *electromagnetic force* level 5 or 6 -I do not remember exactly-, you have the permission to jointly create content, which will give more traffic to your video. (Interviewee 8)

This statement exemplifies the code of 'joint creation', a particular way of creating content on Bilibili. "It is a very complicated mechanism but useful for your traffic, so you have to know this," explained Interviewee 9. It usually begins with the organization of the official accounts of Bilibili. Subsequently, they will devise some ideas of combining the sources of various influential content creators in different divisions and inviting them to create joint content for a particular event, festival, or some hotly debated issue. For example, at the time of the interviews, the annual college entrance exam (6.7–6.9) was forthcoming, thus Bilibili officials were working with the idea of encouraging high school students. Various influential knowledge-sharing content producers were invited to produce video content about summarizing different disciplines, how to study effectively, how to choose a major, and other specifically exam-related topics. Although the level of electromagnetic force does not correspond to the number of followers, content producers with followers of more than 1 million have got better chances of jointly creating content. In this research

sample, only Interviewees 3 and 9 were invited to create content jointly, and their videos on average reached 2 million views.

Every content creator has their fans, but by jointly creating content, you can attract fans of others, which will certainly lead to more views...but it is unfair to those content creators with fewer followers, as they do not have the rights to do that. (Interviewee 3)

There are still ways for content producers to upgrade their electromagnetic force level and generate high traffic continuously. Similar to YouTube's creator academy to teach people how to be YouTubers, and make and monetize content, Bilibili also has a creator academy (van Es, 2019). This academy offers instruction and trainee programs. Additionally, it offers various other services ranging from guidance on what kind of activities to participate in and how to leverage Bilibili's editing software, to detailed analyses of the most-viewed video per division every week.

4.1.3 Integrating into the community

Many practices mentioned by interviewees were amalgamated into the sub-theme 'integrating into the community' in the aforementioned context. Content producers need to integrate into the community by joining the academy. "It is more than an academy where you just learn passively; it is more of an interactive community where you can learn from each other and have close contact with the official operator of Bilibili," said Interviewee 9.

According to most interviewees, they would be invited into a WeChat group when their follower count reaches a certain threshold. Each division operator in Bilibili sets up the WeChat group. In the group chat, content producers are informed about what events they can attend, what competitions they can participate in to win some bonus traffic, and some tactics or practices they will be taught using hot examples from each week. Moreover, content producers share their videos in this group chat, soliciting likes and advice from their peers. This is similar to what O'Meara (2019) described as 'engagement pods,' with the difference that engagement pods are ways Instagram content creators discovered to tweak the algorithm. In contrast, the interactive activities within the group chat of Bilibili are endorsed by the official platform. Occasionally, operators offer advice on content that does not seem to be popular. Among the activities in Bilibili, the most fixed ones in the knowledge division are called 'universal knowledge research institute' and 'knowledge

sharing agency'. Some of the activities even open the channel for any content creator to score an opportunity for joint creation, undoubtedly generating traffic for their videos.

You have no choice other than actively learning, involving [yourself] in the community, and participating in those numerous activities... Bilibili will encourage you to produce a kind of content, attend a kind of activity, or even use your videos as an example for the training program if you are influential enough...you see the content producers who made some good, funny videos. However, in fact, there is the platform behind it, every hot video you see has a tendency of the platform, or with the platform being directly involved. (Interviewee 10)

Considering the community group and all the associated activities are a means of moderating content producers, they are unique mechanisms under platform governance. Whether this has become a common practice of platform governance in the Chinese context is an avenue for further research. Regardless, most interviewees will integrate some of the moderating practices during cultural production to gain more views. "I will edit my video using other software and then upload the video via Bilibili's self-promotion editing software and add some hashtags," said Interviewee 6.

Their testimonies reinforce the finding of Duffy and Hund (2019) that creators have to rely on the platform's built-in features, such as the available tools and infrastructures. Interviewee 4 and 9 observed that they always check what activities Bilibili is promoting and how they can combine those with their unique area of knowledge-sharing. This is in line with Morris' (2020) research denoting that content producers consciously and deliberately adapt to platform governance in order to increase visibility.

4.1.4 Analyzing Bilibili metrics data

The last sub-theme of the above-mentioned theme is 'analyzing Bilibili metrics data'. As stated by many researchers, the platform provides background metrics for content producers to analyze their content, such as the audience proportion of gender, educational background, the data flow of the video as well as the most commented part of the video. Furthermore, this metrics data provides more concrete guidance for future cultural production (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Poell et al., 2022; Zhang, 2021).

"It is imperative to understand and make full use of the metric data," said Interviewee 3. "Whenever there are more visitors than fans watching my video, there is a big possibility

that this video is going viral." Background metrics data reveal to content producers the number of people who watched the whole video, what percentage of the audience left partway, and the number of comments and *danmu* end-users that were generated at specific points.

I did all the analyzing work myself when I had fewer than 20k followers... Now I hire a data analyst to do the job for me as I can focus more on creating content. He gives real-time data monitoring and figuring out how many views this video will eventually have. We compare the data with the metrics Bilibili provides later, so we can know quickly whether or not the content is good .(Interviewee 7)

These sub-themes and codes are internally connected. Content producers have to analyze the interface, adjust their covers, titles and introductions continually to attract the end-users of this unique platform in addition to upgrading their account level (electromagnetic force) to enable more functions. All the while, they have to integrate into the community continuously, participate in the various platform-endorsed activities, and analyze the metrics data. All these elements formulate a virtuous circulation as content producers continuously ‘understand the characteristics of Bilibili’ to create visibility.

4.2 Producing trendy content

The second most prevalent theme that emerged from the data was ‘producing trendy content’. This includes the creative practices and content creation that interviewees developed and summarized while gaining views. This main theme has three sub-themes: generating memetic content, which refers to the production of memetic content in line with the characteristics of Bilibili; following the social trend, which denotes interviewees’ practices for choosing topics as well as their perceptions of how to gain visibility on Bilibili; and finally, continuous iteration, which means the expansion of the content’s category and the exploration of broader circles of fans.

4.2.1 Generating memetic content

This sub-theme is translated from Chinese, and it is a concept to which interviewees have continually referred. The concept of ‘造梗’ (Zao geng) directly translates to ‘funnily creating something viral’. Previous research has touched on the memes of TikTok (Zeng et al., 2020), and the word *geng* has some similarities with the word ‘meme’. Thus, here the

researcher defines this subcategory as ‘generating memetic content’. This subcategory has two codes: “unique audio-visual language in Bilibili” and “subcultural recreation”.

As Chen(2021) states, Bilibili targets ACG fans at first. Hence, they have particular linguistic and cultural symbols on this platform. For example, the first code refers to the audio and visual language used on this platform. “There are many special vocabularies used in Bilibili. If you do not use them or do not understand them, we know you do not belong to us,” said Interviewee 10, a user of Bilibili since it was founded in 2009.

Her statements echoed what Interviewee 7 and 8 emphasized in their respective interviews. According to them, Bilibili has a set of discourse systems, which is continuously evolving and changing, so end-users and content producers have to know them and make full use of them to keep up with the trend. Interviewee 8 offered a detailed example elaborating on how memetic content was formulated and how it could be used in his practice:

Chen Rui, the founder of Bilibili, sent a message on his Bilibili account. However, netizens were a little dissatisfied with him. Then, one netizen called Mongolia Shangdan commented under Chen Rui's post using some dirty words like fuck or something. Then many people liked the comments, and this dirty comment became the number 1. However, it is not in line with the *danmu* etiquette to say dirty words, so from then on, the ID name of the user, Mongolia, became a widespread meme in Bilibili. Many people will comment or generate *danmu* saying “Mongolia” if they want to say something bad or criticize something, which forms an amusing community culture...Although it is hard for knowledge-sharing content creators to combine those funny things, you have to think of a tactic. When producing a video about the news about aerospace events, in script-writing, I will use the unique slang and words of the platform as much as possible.

Several interviewees remarked on one influential content producer who is skilled at producing memetic content. He is a professor of criminal law at a noteworthy university in China. At the beginning, he merely uploaded clips of himself teaching, using a character he made up called Zhang San as an example of someone who violated the law and made up interesting stories to explain complicated lawsuits and doctrines. Due to his amusing teaching methods and the captivating stories of Zhang San, his videos went viral on Bilibili. Now he is the number 1 influential content creator on Bilibili. Since then, Zhang San has

inspired memetic content, symbolizing law cases and other funny anecdotes. "I also shared knowledge about studying law, but, of course, I am not as professional as him. Nevertheless, I will always use the name of Zhang San and some of his examples if I want to explain some cases," admitted Interviewee 1.

Zhang San and the ID Mongolia shangdan exemplify the *geng* generated in the process of cultural production, and the memetic content on Bilibili, forming a unique audio-visual language that content producers have to learn and adopt. Apart from language, two-dimensional recreation is also worth paying close attention to. As researchers interested in Bilibili's sub-cultural features have stated, the history of the recreation of ACG videos dates back to the foundation of this platform. 'Two-dimensional' here means ACG culture and funny, postmodern recreations go viral on Bilibili. These recreations offer some funny and strange ways of interpreting the existing and familiar anime, comics, and even some popular culture products (Cai, 2019; Wu, 2020). Interviewee 9 is also a 13-year user of Bilibili and claims, "I know every popular anime and comic on this platform. When I make videos about language learning, I use examples and combine them with my topic. This recreation certainly adds traffic to my content", she said. In one of her viral videos, she used many popular anime cuts and edited her audio sounds into them. This video has a view count of 25 million.

Of course, the traffic is not that good compared with funny vloggers, lifestyle vloggers, because language learning has certain barriers, but my traffic is larger than other content producers of the same category. This is maybe because I know how to leverage the subcultural recreation. (Interviewee 9)

Setting up some persona and creating a meme is also a good practice. For example, Interviewee 6 explained that he once saw a popular video recommended to him, it was some college graduates always complaining about his life as a blue-collar worker. In that video, the content creator made himself a persona, a pessimistic but funny guy and he created the meme that, studying from 211 (representing the distinctive universities in China) mechanical engineering to mechanical worker, *my 211 worker* and it became a meme. However, these practices are easier said than done. "As Bilibili is now dominated by millennials and post-millennials, this memetic content is suitable and viral for younger generations, but it is very hard for me, someone older than 35, to follow this," said Interviewee 12. This sentiment was echoed with Interviewee 4. They both indicated that "you don't have so many choices if you

want to demonstrate or share knowledge clearly. It couldn't be done in one or two minutes like those on TikTok. There is only one Bilibili, the most influential platform for long videos in China."

4.2.2 Following the social trend

The second emergent sub-theme is 'following the social trend'. This is an issue faced on all social platforms; many scholars have explored the issue of content producers endeavoring to keep up with the social trend (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Bishop, 2019). However, notable trends exist for Bilibili. Two vital codes of this sub-theme are 'contents concerning self-made films, TV series or shows' and 'patriotic sentiments appeals.'

The first code is related to the new business model of Bilibili. As Bilibili aims to compete with three other prominent live-streaming platforms in China, namely Tencent, IQiyi, and Youku, it is expanding its boundaries into films, TV series, and documentaries (Wu, 2020). Every newly self-made film, series, or TV show is premiered on Bilibili. In addition, they will launch activities and video-making competitions in which content producers can participate. Content producers have the option to create content related to those series from various aspects or create funny recreation content. This way, these self-made entertainment shows get free publicity and become known to audiences, while the content producers get traffic for their videos. "They inform you via group chat, and it is easy to see the activities on the front page. You can see how many views those videos got; we joke about these as secret traffic codes," revealed Interviewee 10.

I often wonder if the recommendation algorithm is not always data driven on Bilibili. You can see there is a hint of editors' opinions behind it. With one Bilibili self-made TV series, I never saw one video criticizing it. It is not to say that no one ever makes videos criticizing it, but they have a lower chance of being recommended, thus less traffic. (Interviewee 7)

Many interviewees expressed their concerns during the interviews. In their opinion, "for lifestyle vloggers, entertainment content creators, maybe it is easy, but it is hard to conform to the social trend if you want to elaborate on serious knowledge, like science," explained Interviewee 6. However, there can be unexpected traffic for content producers if their topics fall in line with the trend.

My usual views are between 100k and 500k because aerospace events are not that familiar among the masses. One video of mine suddenly received 2 million views; I was astonished, then I found out it happened to coincide with a popular domestic drama [series], called *You are my Glory*. The male protagonist is in the aerospace industry, which explains why I got the traffic. (Interviewee 8)

There is another emanant trend on Bilibili: topics related to patriotic sentiments. The platform promises a direct channel to Chinese youths, some of whom seem to appreciate patriotic content provided it suits their aesthetic and thematic tastes (Schneider, 2021).

Unlike YouTube, a universal streaming platform, Bilibili specifically targets the Chinese market. Several content producers revealed their interpretation of the so-called "Chinese characteristic appraisal themes" in their respective interviews. "Conforming to the themes advocated by the Chinese government will certainly gain you traffic," explained Interviewee 12. As a foreigner who has been living in China for ten years, he knows the media landscape and understands the market well. He attempted to upload the same content on YouTube and Bilibili at first, but it did not work well.

I shot two or three films about vaccines. I gave credit to China's strict vaccination policy and compared the well-functioning management system in China with the echoes in the USA. These videos have only a few thousand views on YouTube, but there are nearly 900,000 views on average on Bilibili. These videos easily got recommended on Bilibili, especially from the American's perspective. (Interviewee 12)

This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee 3. He made a video explaining the principles of the 5G network and the excellent functioning of 5G in China, as well as comparisons with the USA. This video went viral on Bilibili but was seldom viewed on YouTube. "Bilibili is more confined to the Chinese market; sometimes audiences like to hear everything good about China," explained Interviewee 3. This statement also testifies to what Wu (2020) observed in her research that Bilibili has strong patriotic undertones; even irrelevant videos like food and scenery introductions can be imbued with patriot *danmu* comments. Interviewee 8 explained in his interview that he knows this trend in Bilibili well and how he will fully utilize it during screenwriting.

When I am writing the scripts explaining some aerospace events, I will try my best to compare the events with situations in China. If we are truly lagging in certain aspects, it's wise to appeal to strong emotions. It works very well for the end-users of Bilibili. They like these kinds of themes. (Interviewee 8)

However, some interviewees struggle to follow this patriotic trend. On one hand, some of them, such as Interviewees 2 and 5, do not believe this so-called "secret traffic code", a concept generated by content producers themselves. Instead, they assume this trend to be a kind of "algorithmic gossip" (Bishop, 2019), a term generally accepted by content producers to mean figuring out the algorithmic regime of the platform. "Algorithms are so complicated and continuously changing, patriotic themes may be useful for one or two videos, but it's not going to apply to everyone," said Interviewee 2. On the other hand, Interviewees 4 and 10 emphasized the importance of rationality and found it hard to combine patriotic trends with their knowledge-sharing videos. "The essence of the documentary is objectivity and rationality. So I want my knowledge-sharing to be objective, rational, and not appealing to some sentimental appeals. This isn't in line with my values," proclaimed Interviewee 4.

However, what Interviewee 4 referred to as "sentimental appeals" appeared in one of his most viewed videos—his documentary about a rural area in northwest China, one of the poorest districts in the country. The Chinese government has prioritized rural area development for its 2020-2025 work plan and set the ultimate goal of rural revitalization to transform China, which is still heavily dependent on agriculture, into a modernized and economically prosperous and powerful country (Donnellon-May, 2022). In this context, a year after he uploaded the documentary, his video was suddenly promoted to the front recommendation page and received 100,000 views. "I was astonished by the sudden burst of views. Then I quickly made one more video explaining how I made the documentary, and that video also got 50,000 views," explained Interviewee 4. Nowadays, Bilibili has a subdivision under the main *showroom* area called Documentary. In this Documentary subdivision, end-users can find a number of documentaries produced by the BBC, Discovery, CCTV, most of them with scientific or knowledge-oriented themes (Wu, 2020). "To me, you can't find real documentaries on Bilibili, which is why I am insisting on sharing my knowledge about documentaries," said Interviewee 4. He is not alone in facing this complex dilemma. Interviewee 12 also struggled with the dichotomy of objectivity and sentimental appeals.

Some MCN[multi-channel networks] has reached out to me, saying if I can always make videos about the differences between China and America and have some appraisal themes in between from time to time, they can promise me traffic. But, of course, I don't buy it, and of course, I don't want this traffic. (Interviewee 12)

According to the interviewees, content producers can gain more visibility if they continuously conform to this trend of creating content such as self-made films, TV series, or shows and embedding patriotic themes in their videos. They came up with the so-called “secret traffic codes” from their experiences and observations. The question of whether or not this kind of platform curation is only present on this particular platform warrants further research.

4.2.3 Continuous iteration

The third sub-theme emerging from the interviews is ‘continuous iteration’. It was summarized by Interviewee 3 but was referred to in varying ways in others' interviews. In the business world, iteration means adding new value to one product, refining it to meet customers' needs and desires, rather than launching a whole new product to keep up with the market. Continuous iterations also work for cultural producers running their online accounts, and the ability to implement them is crucial as the media products market is more challenging and has different characteristics from others (Picard, 2005). As research about Twitch and TikTok shows, content creators continuously seek to expand the boundaries, such as exploring live-streaming and extending their reach to broader audiences (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019; Zhang, 2021). This applies to Bilibili’s content creators as well. "I always do live-streaming if I want to explain complicated themes, and it is one of my ways to iterate as I will get more chances to reach new audiences," said Interviewee 1.

"Knowledge-sharing is very hard sometimes because you have to continuously expand your boundaries and reach out to as many audiences as possible," explained Interviewee 3. "Some themes are bound to be a niche market, and only a bunch of end-users like it." In his case, he specializes in sharing editing skills, and once he had reached 200k fans, he endured a period of stagnation wherein his videos could not get more views and visibility. During this time, he made a video sharing his genuine motivations for sharing editing skills, the problems he was facing with visibility, and how much he earned as a content producer. This video became popular, and his fan following increased by 450,000 in

as short as one week. From then on, he explored producing videos in more fields such as technology, editing software, and entertainment industries. He made videos explaining how these TV shows do their editing work, a backstage series of some famous films, and how to use the newest technology products. This expansion and iteration revitalized his account and enriched the knowledge content, thus earning him more followers and more views.

Interviewees 3, 7 and 9 shared similarities in that their follower counts surpass 1 million, they all suffered periods of stagnation when they reached over 100k followers, and they struggled to expand their content boundaries.

There are just a certain number of people on Bilibili who are interested in your specific field. You reach the maximum if they all become fans and watch your videos. If you want more visibility, you must produce new content to attract new fans. (Interviewee 7)

For some content producers, this is easier said than done. During the interview with Interviewee 6, he expressed concern about iterations of content. "Meteorological photography is such a niche market; not many people know this," continued Interviewee 6, "when I reach 100,000 fans, it is hard for me to surpass it." Fortunately, he was offered an opportunity to collaborate with Bilibili's official account on the themed activity of "World Earth Day" photography. As a result, the most influential media in China forwarded his video. The World Earth Day video received 1.769 million views in total and consequently earned him fame and visibility on the platform. However, he is clear on where his limitations lie. "I am reaching the bottleneck. Maybe all the people interested in this field have already watched my videos—I do not know what else to share if I want more views."

In contrast to Interviewee 6's pessimistic outlook, Interviewee 10 constantly seeks iteration to expand her content. Initially, she shared film history content but did not receive many views. "Film history may be boring to the audiences," remarked Interviewee 10. Knowing she needed to reinvent her content, she started making a series explaining the differences between various disciplines and what can be learned from each discipline. This series is in line with the interests of most Bilibili users, and this is reflected in the number of views she received. "I am continually exploring new fields. My followers are so few right now, leaving me great room for improvement."

To sum up, the sub-themes under the theme 'producing trendy content' are interconnected. To establish a clear way for continuous iterations, content producers must

adapt to the platform curations of Bilibili by following the unique trends and producing memetic content. Only through creative iteration, and keeping up with the trends, can they survive the fierce competition and gain more visibility.

4.3 Integrating interactive culture

The third theme emerging from the interviews is ‘integrating interactive culture’. It is closely bound up with the prominent characteristics of Bilibili and is also the most attractive aspect of the platform to many interviewees. This central theme includes two sub-themes: ‘stimulating *danmu* interaction’, referring to the practices content producers developed in the process of cultural production for generating *danmu*, and ‘actions implications’, which denotes interviewees' practices for garnering likes, comments, or donated coins from end-users.

4.3.1 Stimulating *danmu* interaction

The preliminary *danmu* (bullet chatting) function, a real-time commentary tool that enables the expression of opinions and sentiments of audiences watching the same video, has revolutionized the viewing experience. It is the most distinctive feature making Bilibili stand out among other platforms (Zhang & Cassany, 2020). All the interviewees stated in their interviews that they would pay close attention to *danmu* interactions and produce various practices to stimulate *danmu*. The codes emerging from the interviews include "self-generating *danmu*" and "designing plots for *danmu*".

"Self-generating *danmu*" means that content producers generate *danmu* themselves or ask their friends to generate *danmu* for the videos. Usually, these *danmu* comments are anonymous. According to Interviewee 1, "self-generating *danmu*" happens when content producers think Bilibili highly values *danmu*. "There is gossip that one *danmu* equals ten likes. Therefore, the more *danmu* comments your video gets, the more easily it will be recommended," explained Interviewee 1. In this context, many interviewees shared their numerous tactics for "self-generating *danmu*".

Usually, I will generate 200 *danmu* comments myself. I will ask questions, share my opinions, pretend to be an audience, and ask my parents and good friends to watch and generate *danmu*. However, I have to tell them they must have finished watching the video, or they can play it for a while and then leave their *danmu*

somewhere. Otherwise, it will be recognized as cheating behavior by the system.
(Interviewee 10)

This admission reiterates Interviewee 7's practices. He watches his videos multiple times on different days, and if he sees some exciting *danmu*, he then also creates many *danmu*. "*Danmu* could help you identify when audiences have comments on your videos, and the interactions could be more direct. This kind of feedback and interaction cannot be accomplished on any other platforms," explained Interviewee 7.

Interviewees 3, 6 and 8 generate *danmu* in a way that leads audiences to notice something they think audiences might have missed or ignored.

For example, when I talk about the history of aerospace in China, the background picture is a monumental milestone event, but there is no chance for me to mention that in my video. If I find that no one has noticed this in the *danmu*, I will guide the *danmu* myself as a viewer, leading people to discover and discuss.
(Interviewee 8)

In the beginning, *danmu* comments on Bilibili were anonymous. Later, Bilibili enabled content producers with the function of showing *danmu* with their ID and image (Wu, 2020) (see Figure 2 as an example). According to Interviewee 8, it is also one of the functions content accounts are awarded when their *electromagnetic force* reaches a certain level. Suppose the content producer chooses to show his or her ID with *danmu*. In that case, the audiences would see which piece of *danmu* comes from the content creators, get excited, and realize that the content producer is also watching the *danmu*, thus becoming more willing to interact. "It is amazing! I do not know why they get excited just seeing me replying to one of the *danmu*," said Interviewee 5. This infrastructure provides content producers with a new way of interacting with the audiences, so it is vital that they learn how to capitalize on it.

I cherish the interaction of the *danmu*. In the past, when the number of fans was not so many, and the amount of *danmu* was not so great, I would often reply to some interesting ones or send some questions using my ID, and I knew this would lead to more *danmu* interaction. However, now there are too many fans, and the *danmu* are often too much to read, so I can only occasionally send a random

sentence. However, it is also a very effective way to interact with the audiences.
(Interviewee 3)

The second code of the sub-theme ‘stimulating *danmu* interaction’ is "designing plots for *danmu*". The interviewees explained that *danmu* has specific trigger points that the content producers must incorporate. In one aspect, it is connected with the unique audio-visual language used in Bilibili, as users are willing to interact and leave comments when they hear or see these. "For example, Bilibili likes to spoil the audience, and the audiences like to be called lords. So, I will say, 'hello my lords' at the beginning of every video; my audiences like it, and they will happily reply to that via *danmu*," Interviewee 5 elaborated. In another aspect, content producers, especially knowledge-sharing ones, raise questions, actively soliciting some interaction on *danmu*. They usually start the video with a question and lead the audience to interaction by replying with numbers or specific phrases. "For me, I will start with ‘Those who know the poem type 1 on *danmu*, type 2 if you do not, and type 6666 if you do not like it at all’," offered Interviewee 9. She designs this kind of interaction two or three times more during the whole video and always ends with "next time I am gonna share about the next poem; if you are interested, type 1 on *danmu*". "In this way, I also get a rough view of the proportion of the audience that is interested in this," she added. These practices have become so prevalent among content producers that Bilibili has already made a poll function for this.

...Whenever you reach a certain level of *the electromagnetic force*, you have access to the poll function. It is just a tool you can add to your video without the need to say it in the videos. In this way, it will not spoil the overall rhythm of your video or interrupt you when discussing something serious. (Interviewee 2)

Moreover, as Bilibili users enjoy funny reactions and exciting content, some content producers design something funny for a break during the lengthy knowledge-sharing videos.

I design some plots like this. For example, when I am thrilled, my cat suddenly breaks in and breaks my deadlock, and then I stare at him and freeze the picture. I stared at him for three seconds, and he stared at me for three seconds, and I would then cut something like this. You would find that many users would explode

in the danmu comment section at that time. Bilibili users like these funny things, even when learning knowledge. (Interviewee 8)

This experience echoed what Interviewee 7 discussed. Once during his video, when he was sharing something important, a painting on the wall fell and it scared him. However, he thought it was an exciting snippet of content and kept that in the editing. The audience liked the reaction and generated a lot of *danmu*, such as "did I miss something," "what is wrong with that part," and "shall I pay for watching more." These interesting *danmu* comments inspired him, and from that point on, he designed plots to make him nervous from time to time. "I expect that it will trigger some interesting interactions," said Interviewee 7.

As a vital and distinctive infrastructure provided by Bilibili, *danmu* interactions formulate a strong community culture. This community culture gives content producers a sense of belonging and strong connections with their audiences. "It is fascinating to see these interactions," said Interviewee 1. Content producers willingly integrate various practices of stimulating *danmu* and often enjoy the process of doing so.

4.3.2 Actions implications

The sub-theme 'actions implications' refers to the practices content producers develop to gain other forms of interaction such as likes, shares, and donated coins to add value to their visibility. The emergent codes are "one-click triplets" and "generating conflicts".

The code "one-click triplets" refers to a particular infrastructure on Bilibili. Before expounding on the meaning of one-click triplets, there is another feature of Bilibili that needs to be addressed here. Apart from likes, shares, and comments as found on Instagram, Bilibili has several other essential features that aim to intensify interactions between end-users and content producers (Wu, 2020). For example, *Toubi* (coin donations), a virtual coin donated to the video, was claimed by Bilibili to help content creators generate more traffic and earn more money (Wu, 2020). It is similar to the virtual gifts on Twitch or TikTok; however, according to the interviewees, the coins cannot be transferred to real money. One-click triplets mean that with one click, end-users like, donate coins, and favor one video all at the same time (see Figure 2 as an example).



Figure 2. Screenshot of one video showing one-click triplets

According to the interviewees, coins, likes, and favorites—or one-click triplets—impact the video's weight regarding recommendations and directly affect their videos' visibility. However, no one can explain precisely what the conversion ratio is between them. As a senior knowledge area content producer on Bilibili, Interviewee 3 believes that the highest weight is given to one-click triplets, followed by coins, followed by favorites and, finally, likes. However, Interviewee 9 disagrees with that; she thinks that likes are essential. "If my video is liked and favored by another influential content producer, then all his followers will see that he liked one video, and they may go and check it, which will lead to more views of my video," proclaimed Interviewee 9. This proclamation aligns with the observation of Interviewees 7 and 9. "I feel that if the number of likes is more than 10% of the broadcast volume, it may be recommended on the front page. So what matters is how many likes you get," observed Interviewee 7.

I think the most difficult to get is likes. As for the audience, they do not need to pay any cost for coins or favorites. Nevertheless, likes are different; when you like something, it is a sign to show your interest, and people get to know you by seeing what content you like. As a user, I cherish every like I give out. It is a display of my personal preference. When I see good content, I will toubi, and I can also favorite it,

but I will not necessarily like it. So as a content producer, I think likes are important.
(Interviewee 9)

Content producers have developed various practices for stimulating users to interact with them via likes, *toubi*, favorites, or one-click triplets. Verbal repetition and behavior rewards are the most common practices.

...I will remind my audiences in the middle and at the end of my video, 'Do not forget to like or toubi or one-click triplets', and emphasize that all these interactions are a kind of encouragement to me... I think it is useful because many audiences forget to do so when immersed with my sharing or think they have already done it. (Interviewee 2)

Apart from verbal repetition, they also have so-called behavior rewards for audiences. "For example, if I have gotten 20,000 likes for this video, the consequent video will be released in a week," explained Interviewee 5. "I will upload the next video within a week whether I get 20,000 likes or not, but it is thrilling to see your audiences like it and take these as a reward," she added.

In addition, as Bilibili users like funny content, sometimes promising fun reactions works for the audience. "If this video is viewed by 20,000 by tomorrow, I will dance a very rustic dance in front of my beloved girl," described Interviewee 6 as one of the behavior rewards in one of his videos. "The official also likes to see this; they will push traffic for me. You cannot just share knowledge seriously every time; you must make some funny interactions," he added.

Another code of the sub-theme, as mentioned earlier, is "generating conflicts". This code relates to the "patriotic sentiments" of Bilibili but is not confined to conflicts between different countries, parties and opinions. There is gossip that if the video has more conflict and comments, it will be more visible and thus garner more views. "Sometimes controversy can be good, not only for your traffic," explained Interviewee 3, "...if everyone agrees with what you said, it is boring. You should leave some space for discussion and conflicts."

...There is a category of videos recommended by the campus sharing activity, which is particularly popular. In these videos, Chinese students in foreign universities go to the local canteen to see what they eat. They share their knowledge

about cultural differences, but they will say the food there is disgusting, very hard to eat, and expensive. I know sometimes they do not think it is this way, but they are just generating conflict. That conflict leads to comments, discussion and thus, views. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 4 reckons regional discrimination is a straightforward method of generating conflict and thus increases traffic for the video. "There are clear chains of contempt in each city and province of China, and there are also consensual stereotypes about some regions. When sharing some knowledge of human geography, adding some information about such stereotypes can easily lead to controversy," explained Interviewee 10. Aside from regional discrimination, there is also one conflict which is popular among the younger generations: the rivalry between universities. One type of video has become popular on Bilibili. Graduates or students from noteworthy universities in China or abroad, make fun of themselves and mock their "useless" lives even after they have graduated from famous universities. Interviewee 1 elaborated on this, "...young people are anxious now, so what they want to see more is that other people may not live so well, to alleviate some of their own anxiety... They like to comfort themselves that going to famous universities won't make your life easier."

However, some content producers are very uncomfortable with the implications of these actions.

I think YouTube encourages creators to create freely. However, on Bilibili, you need to keep reminding users to toubi, like, and favorite, much like the behavior of beggars, keep saying, give me money, give me money. I think this puts content producers in a very vulnerable state. (Interviewee 12)

Whether content producers like it or not does not matter—Bilibili puts users and the interaction community as the priority of its culture, Bilibili's Chief Executive Officer Chen Rui clarified (Chen, 2021). The overall tone of Bilibili is so interactive that content producers keep coming up with creative ways of generating interaction. Content producers continuously involve and integrate their creative practices into the regimes of the platform algorithm.

4.4 Facing a monetization dilemma

The last main theme of the interviews is 'facing monetization dilemma.' It does not have any sub-themes but four codes related to the theme: the reason for doing knowledge-sharing, which refers to the interceptions of the content producers have towards their account; the difficulty of monetization, formulated by interviewees regarding the hardness of getting content monetized; account positioning, referring to what kind of achievement they want to make and death triangle of quantity, quality, and creativity, which is generated by the interviewees and refers to the dilemma content producers face when they want to make a career out of this. These four codes are about what kind of attitude content producers take toward cultural production, and how they are interconnected will be addressed in the following paragraphs.

As iterated in the previous sections, unlike vloggers, beauty bloggers or current popular pan-entertainment content creators, knowledge-sharing content producers cannot easily switch between platforms in China to accommodate the length of their videos because there are few alternatives in China. Why Bilibili content producers choose to share knowledge is worth exploring. According to the interviewees, the reasons for becoming knowledge-sharing content producers can be organized into three categories. Firstly, they become knowledge-sharing content producers out of interest: they enjoy the process of sharing. This is the case for Interviewees 1, 2, 9 and 10. They have been experienced users of the platform Bilibili since it was founded. They enjoy learning knowledge through watching videos, thus when they have the chance to share their experiences and knowledge about whatever topic, they are willing (and pleased) to do so.

"...I never think that for me, this is an Internet celebrity thing. It just happens that I share my knowledge about learning law, providing some learning methods and some knowledge about the college entrance exams. Some people go to see it and quite a lot of people like it... Bilibili is my circle of friends; I am just a recorder of life and devout chant." (Interviewee 1)

"I am just using the output to push back the input knowledge. I have been self-learning about film history, about all kinds of knowledge, and presenting what I have learned on my own in a more accessible and interesting video way. This facilitates my learning. If some people like it and understand it, it's the best; if not, it's their loss, not mine." (Interviewee 10)

Secondly, some content producers, such as Interviewees 3,4,6, 8 and 12, think that there is still a gap for good knowledge-sharing content, and they want to fill it. As an influential content producer in the knowledge division, Interviewee 3 holds the view that there are good opportunities but also significant challenges for knowledge-sharing content producers on Bilibili, as "the whole atmosphere is turning more towards entertainment. We have influential live-streaming stars, beauty vloggers, but we never know anyone who is famous for sharing knowledge—maybe that's the gap," he suggested. Interviewee 8 echoed Interviewee 3's opinion on the subject.

I know the overall traffic of the Bilibili knowledge division is lower than other divisions, and I believe that it is not only on Bilibili. Other platforms are biased towards the lifestyle area. Everyone really needs to relax and find something to decompress themselves. But the knowledge area will always lack high-end players. It still has its user groups. (Interviewee 8)

Interviewee 4 also shared his opinions on this:

In China, we don't have the habit of reading. The form of self-media has penetrated all aspects of our lives... They rely more on videos, most people rely on Douyin, and students rely on Bilibili... so I also want to use this medium to influence young people, and I hope it can affect people's thinking a little more. (Interviewee 4)

Thirdly, some content producers have or want to make a living out of making videos, such as Interviewees 5, 7 and 11. Although they have varying reasons for starting to share knowledge on Bilibili, they now share the commonality of being full-time content producers, thus they rely on the income and profit generated from their content.

I have almost given up on Bilibili now. I am gradually making videos that are not only for this platform... For the whole year, I got about 2000 Yuan from all the views I got. (Interviewee 7)

This concern exemplifies the second code of this sub-theme: “the difficulty of monetization”. All the interviewees mentioned that it is difficult to monetize content on Bilibili even when they are considered influential content producers. “There are two ways of monetization on Bilibili, first is through Bilibili’s creation incentive, second is through advertisements or commercial cooperation,” explained Interviewee 8. Bilibili has an incentive plan to provide better monetization ways and services as the bridge connecting brands, merchants, and content producers (Bilibili, 2021). van Es(2019) researched the monetization of content on YouTube. He found that views are the means through which material is monetized on YouTube, even though it is evaluated in various ways, including clicks and other types of interactions. What is the case of Bilibili remains unclear. However, according to the interviews, the incentive money of Bilibili is also based on the view numbers, with the numbers of likes, coins, and favorites having different weights contributing to the calculation of the incentives. The interviewees found it hard to figure out how exactly these are weighed. For example, Interviewee 9 shared that the revenue of her video with 4 million views in only one or two hundred yuan more than that of 2.5 million views. “it is not in line with the regular portion, so maybe it is because of the differences of the likes or coins received from each view... I am confused, cannot understand”, explained Interviewee 9.

“The average money for the views on Bilibili is 20 yuan [nearly 3\$] out of 10,000 views at the very beginning of 2017 or 2018, ”explained Interviewee 1, “ but then I heard that the overall profit of Bilibili is declining, so the platform cut the money, and now I think it is 8-12 yuan per 10k views.” According to Interviewee 1, he got less than 3000 yuan from the incentive plans of Bilibili; regardless, he had a total number of views of all videos reaching 3 million. Although monetization is not a problem for Interviewee 1, as he only values the process of sharing and interacting, it worries Interviewee 6 a lot.

...my views total was 19.6 million, and I earned about 20,000 yuan [3000 \$] in total. This is not that bad for a student. However, it cannot cover my costs for the videos...not to take into account the depreciation rate of my cameras and equipment...you cannot just produce content you like, you have to make advertisements...otherwise you will not be able to survive. (Interviewee 6)

What Interviewee 6 said echoed Interviewee 12’s experience. He uploaded the same video both on YouTube and Bilibili. On Bilibili, he got 1,965,000 views but only earned 300

yuan, while On Youtube, he received less than 900,000 views and got revenue of 1500-2000 dollars. “ This is crazy; I did not understand how they calculate this,” complained Interviewee 12.

What the interviewees said was in line with Stokel-Walker (2019)’s observation on YouTube that only less than 3 percent of content producers make a living wage out of being YouTubers. As a result, careers as content producers are precarious, and the situation is even worse in Bilibili.

The third code of “account positioning” is related to the previous two codes. It is the concern shared by all the interviewees as they learned the difficulty of monetization and rethought their ambition, what they wanted to convey to the audiences, and what goal they wanted to achieve. Those content producers who choose to generate content out of interest are joking about “generating electricity out of love.” On the other hand, those who want to pursue a career or make fame out of content creations will seek out various ways to increase visibility while also making money.

To have a sound output of content sharing, I usually need to do two to three weeks of homework, check information, organize notes, and strive to make the information shared lively, exciting, and knowledgeable. In addition, I need to spend a week on drawing and editing to make it more aligned with the characteristics of Bilibili. If it is an advertisement, I also need to think of a clever way to implant the advertisement without showing any traces. It is challenging to achieve a balance between traffic and monetization. (Interviewee 9)

This statement also echoed Interviewee 12. He shared one of his stories about how to implant an advertisement. He once made a video about the cultural differences between China and the USA. He talked about how the Chinese are very fond of fortune-telling so that he will experience it. However, the whole fortune-telling process is an advertisement for translation software. This advertising idea was not explicitly thought of for a translation software ad. However, he thought of advertising brands that might interest him when he was studying the cultural differences between Chinese and American fortune-telling. He went looking for exciting brands to work with, thus reducing his expenses and bringing in more revenue. “I do not know if this is worthy of praise; a content producer needs to always think with an advertising mindset to have the opportunity to monetize by creating content, ” explained Interviewee 12.

Interviewee 12's problem leads to the fourth code: death triangle of quantity, quality, and creativity, summarizing the problems knowledge-sharing content producers are facing.

To survive in the fierce competition of being a knowledge-sharing content producer, you need continuous and high-quality content of vertical tracks, as well as good data flow of most of your videos and keep a steady rate of updating. However, it is hard to balance quantity, quality, and creativity. That is why I call it the death triangle. (Interviewee 3)

5. Conclusion

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Appendix A. Table of in-depth interviews participants

| Interviewee No. | Pseudonyms | Gender | Age | Date of Interview | Main Content Fields | Numbers of followers |
|-----------------|------------|--------|-----|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | 777 | male | 22 | 05/05/2022 | Law Studying | 226k |
| 2 | Jay | female | 29 | 06/05/2022 | cultural differences | 12.5k |

| | | | | | | |
|----|--------|--------|----|------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| 3 | Tim | male | 25 | 08/05/2022 | Technology & editing skills | 4.35 m |
| 4 | Juan | male | 30 | 10/05/2022 | culture & Documentary | 19.8k |
| 5 | coco | female | 31 | 10/05/2022 | career experience | 13k |
| 6 | sdk | male | 22 | 12/05/2022 | photography | 236k |
| 7 | kang | male | 26 | 13/05/2022 | campus learning | 1.69m |
| 8 | kaka | male | 21 | 14/05/2022 | aerospace events | 12.7k |
| 9 | Melaun | female | 21 | 18/05/2022 | language study | 1.6m |
| 10 | zhuzhu | female | 20 | 19/05/2022 | Film history | 11k |
| 11 | deyang | male | 23 | 20/05/2022 | Popular science | 268k |
| 12 | Jim | male | 35 | 23/05/2022 | Technology& cultural differences | 22k |

Appendix B – Interview Guide

I. Introduction

1. Explanation of consent form.
2. Explanation of research.
3. Icebreaker questions/conversation to build rapport.
 - 3.1. Can you introduce yourself briefly?
 - 3.2 Under what kind of circumstances, did you start being a cultural producer?
 - 3.3 How long have you been a cultural producer? How long have you been a cultural producer on Bilibili?
 - 3.3 What is your favorite aspect of being a content producer?

- 3.4 Is the income you earned as a cultural producer your main source of income?
4. How did you envision your account on Bilibili?
6. What is your content about? What is your specialty?

II. Production on Bilibili

1. Why did you choose knowledge sharing content?
2. Can you give a specific example, like the video you are creating now, to elaborate on your production process?
 - 2.1 How do you start with choosing a topic?
 - 2.2 How long does it take to do the research and make the videos?
 - 2.3 What other aspects have been considered in the process?
 - 2.4. How actively do you create content or how long does it take for you to create one video?
3. Do you specialize in platform Bilibili or do you get involved in other platforms as well?
4. What do you think are the most important reasons why you chose Bilibili? Compared with other platforms, like zhihu, mooc, or other video-sharing platforms?
5. How do you find Bilibili compared to other social platforms?

III. Infrastructures of Bilibili

1. How do you make use of the *danmu* feature when making videos?
2. Bilibili has its own platform characteristics and community culture as a platform that focuses primarily on ACG (Anime, Comics, Games) and two-dimensional contents initially since its foundation in 2009, how do you utilize the community and sub-cultural features of Bilibili when generating contents? (Using some examples of specific videos entailed to different content creators)
3. Have you ever attended some of the training courses in how to do editing, how to generate content provided by the platform? If so, detail the courses.
 - 3.1 Do you find the courses useful for gaining traffic for your video?
 - 3.2 What do you learn most from the courses?
4. Have you ever been part of those activities on the platform, like # graduation season, #leaning with Bilibili, etc.?
 - 4.1 Do you find attending those activities useful for gaining traffic for your video?

- 4.2 How do you perceive those activities?
- 4.3. Do you always check what kind of activities you could attend on Bilibili?
- 4.4 Will you create videos according to those activities?
- 5. How do you perceive the “donating coins” mechanisms in platform Bilibili?
- 5.1 How do the numbers of coins relate to your income?
- 5.2 How do the numbers of coins relate to visibility, the traffic, like in the videos?
- 5.3 Do you have some creative ways to encourage audiences for more coins?
- 6. Do you know the “power charging” plan of Bilibili? How do you perceive that?
- 6.1 How does the power number you get relate to your income?
- 6.2 How do the power numbers you get relate to the traffic, like in the videos?
- 7. How many likes and coins do you usually get for your videos?
- 7.1 What are the videos that get the most likes and coins? What do you think are the main reasons for that?
- 7.2 What are the videos that get the least likes and coins? What do you think is the reason?
- 7.3 What more is expected of you regarding all these mechanisms in Bilibili? How different is your production strategy compared to others?

IV. Governance of Bilibili

- 1. Have you ever read the terms of service of platform Bilibili?
- 2. Have you ever read the content producers’ regulation rule? Do you like it or not?
- 3. Do you have any experience of changing some video contents because of regulation rules? If so, please elaborate.
- 3.1 Do you have any experience of uploaded videos being invisible on the platform? If so, please elaborate.
- 4. Do you usually check the analytics and/ or audience metrics of the videos you have uploaded?
- 4.1 How do you find the metrics useful?
- 4.2 What kind of changes will you make according to the metrics? Please give some specific examples.
- 5. Do you get any videos recommended to the front page by Bilibili’s algorithm? If so, what are they mainly about? And what do you think are the main reasons for that?

5.1 How do you like the algorithm of Bilibili? Do you have any clue or idea of how it works?

5.2 What do you think of the primary features of videos getting promoted or high traffic according to algorithms?

5.3 What kind of strategies have you developed for getting more visibility of your videos?

6. Have you ever developed relationships or joined a community of other content producers?

6.1 what kind of experiences do you exchange with each other?

7. Have you ever produced videos labeled as commercial or working with brands?

7.1 How do you get the chance? please elaborate?

7.2 What are the differences of the production process?

7.3 How do you find the traffic, likes, and coins of those videos compared to others?

8. Do you know some effective ways of monetization on this platform?

V. Conclusion

1. How do you plan to sustain your presence and career in Bilibili?

2. What do you think of platform Bilibili in general?

3. What piece of advice would you share for an individual who is passionate about knowledge-sharing and would like to make it a full-time career through Bilibili?

4. What do you love the most about sharing your knowledge on this platform?

5. What do you hate most about this platform?

Appendix C-coding schema

| Main themes | Sub-themes | Codes |
|-------------|------------|-------|
|-------------|------------|-------|

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Understanding the characteristics of Bilibili | Analyzing the interface Upgrading the creator account Integrating into community Analyzing Bilibili metrics data | Cute images on the cover Appealing introductions Attracting titles Electromagnetic force Joint creation participating in the activities Group chat community |
| Producing trendy content | Generating memetic content following the social trend Continuous iteration | Unique audio-visual language Two-dimensional recreation Bilibili self-made films and TV series Patriotic sentiments |
| Integrating interactive culture | Stimulating <i>danmu</i> interaction Actions implications | Self-generating <i>danmu</i> Designing plots for <i>danmu</i> one-click triplets generating conflicts |
| Facing monetization dilemma | | Positioning of the account The difficulty of monetization Death triangle Generating content for love |