

The reflection of generation Z of leisure practices in Chinese audiovisual media: An analysis based on the YouTube platform

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Abstract: This study explores the reflection of Generation Z leisure culture in Chinese audiovisual media, with a focus on the YouTube platform. As China's Generation Z becomes a key demographic in shaping digital and media consumption patterns, their leisure practices reflect a unique fusion of local and global influences. Through an analysis of content on YouTube, this research examines how audiovisual media portrays the leisure activities of Chinese Generation Z, including entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. By investigating the cultural narratives and visual strategies used to engage this generation, the study reveals how YouTube serves as a platform for identity formation, a strong sense of national identity, and pride in Chinese traditional culture among Chinese Gen Z audiences. The findings contribute to understanding the broader impact of digital platforms on leisure habits and media discourse in contemporary China, highlighting the transformative role of audiovisual media in shaping youth culture. It also plays a significant cultural education function, enhancing the positive perception of Chinese culture on the international stage and elevating China's image.

Keywords: Generation Z, Leisure practices, Social media, Video content analysis, YouTube.

1. Introduction

The world is becoming more and more digital every year, new technologies penetrate into all spheres of human life. Most of the world's population witnesses digitalization in dynamics, from its origins to the latest technological solutions. However, unlike previous generations, only the youngest generation, Generation Z, is going through all the stages of its formation in the digital reality. This experience is unprecedented and is of interest to many researchers. An important part of the life of Generation Z is leisure time. The leisure practices of Generation Z have potentially new characteristics related to the conditions in which they are realized. In the era of digital technologies, the leisure of generation Z is connected with the media, and the phenomena of consumption and hedonism appear in leisure practices in the context of mediatization. (Duskaeva L.R., & Tsvetova N.S, 2011)

Leisure practices may differ according to age group. Different age groups have different interests, depending on the characteristics that they have as individual subjects of leisure. In science there are many theories of generations, some authors group generations of 20-21 centuries, based on the calculation of 20-25 years for each new generation, so distinguished, for example, generation of baby boomers, generation X, generation Y, generation Z. Some Chinese researchers adhere to the classification of generations by decades: "post-70s", "post-80s", "post-90s" and "post-00s". The author of this dissertation research focuses on the generation of young people born between 2000 and 2009, also known as the "post-00s" or Generation Z. Digitalization has a huge impact on the life and the process of formation of the representatives of generation Z, this is the first generation that from birth and at all stages of adulthood is accompanied by the Internet and modern technology. Members of Generation Z are less dependent on traditional media and consume news through mobile devices. (2019) Among leisure practices, Generation Z chooses various *digital forms of entertainment*, be it video games, movies on various Internet services, music on streaming platforms. (2019)

Therefore, this study aims to highlight the characteristics and features of the Generation Z demographic through an analysis of Chinese media. It examines YouTube as the most popular media platform for the audiovisual discourse of Generation Z leisure practices in the context of traditional audiovisual media (television) and innovative media (vlogs).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Typology of Leisure Activities

Philosopher Joseph Pieper believes that leisure is an expression of *human thought, spirit and attitude*, it is not directly determined by external factors and practices. (Pieper J, 2009) Leisure, the portion of extra working time that is left to a person after unchangeable non-productive duties (commuting, sleeping, eating, etc.).

Leisure practices are an integral part of human life and are embodied in both individualistic and public, social forms. Leisure practices can be collective or individual, active or passive, conducted outdoors or indoors, healthy or harmful, positively or negatively affecting the development and condition of society. A significant proportion of leisure practices are labeled as *hobbies* in which a person enjoys on a regular basis. A hobby is a state of activity when a person actively pursues the object of his interest and develops creatively. The range of hobbies of modern people is quite wide, from traditional hobbies (collecting, practice of various arts, etc.) to subcultural phenomena of a new type (graffiti, bikerism, the "hippie" movement, etc.) and extreme sports (surfing, diving, snowboarding, etc.). Examples of hobbies include reading, playing or listening to music, watching movies or television, gardening, cooking gourmet meals, hunting, sports, studying and traveling. (Wang Yaling, & Dong Hongyan, 1992).

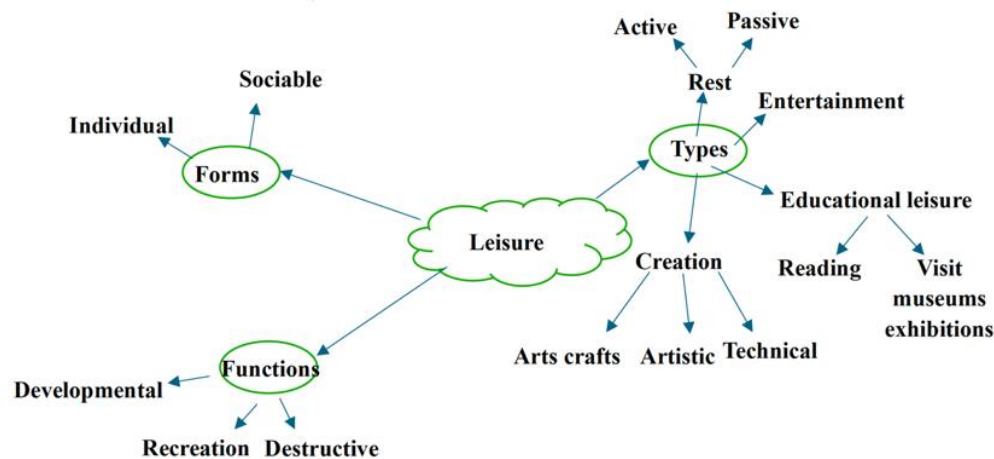


Figure 1.
Structures of leisure models E. V. Sokolova.

The simplest form of leisure is rest. Its purpose is to restore the strength expended during work, and it is divided into *active* and *passive*. (Golod S.I., & Sokolov E.V, 1977)

Passive leisure is characterized by a state of rest that alleviates fatigue and restores physical strength. (Stebbins R.A, 1994) In contrast, active rest can lead to recovery above an initial level of strength. It involves muscle activity and psychological functions that are not utilized in work. Active recreation is different from passive recreation and requires a certain minimum level of fresh strength, will and training. It includes sports, physical exercise, mental exercise, travel, games, watching movies, visiting exhibitions, theaters, museums, listening to music, reading, making friends, etc.

The next level is entertainment. Entertainment means activities in free time, which brings pleasure, distracts from worries and brings joy, it is entertainment that always requires activity, unlike rest, which can be passive or semi-passive. It is also worth noting that in the process of rest, the physical state is restored, and entertainment is necessary to relieve psychological fatigue.

The third level – cognitive activity, stemming from active leisure, includes systematic reading of serious literature, visiting museums and exhibitions. This type of leisure is purposeful and systematic; it is the mastering of the world of cultural values, expanding the boundaries of the spiritual world of young people. Within the framework of cognitive activity, the most serious way of spending free time is not for the sake of consumption, but for the sake of creating cultural values, it is getting power – creativity.

Hypothesis₁: The proportion of creative leisure practices among the leisure practices of Generation Z in China is the highest.

2.2. Leisure Activities of generation z in the Context of Mediatization

Media has become an element of lifestyle; when people are removed from their familiar media environments, they often feel anxious, confused, and lonely. In the rapidly changing flow of information, individuals often convey their sense of existence through alternative symbolic forms, constantly concerned with their connection to the surrounding environment. They continuously read updates on Weibo or WeChat, comment on or share posts, and express their presence through communication. Mediatization becomes a more authentic and personalized experience than actual contact with conversational partners.

The impact of media on the alienation of leisure manifests primarily in two aspects. From the perspective of productive labor, this alienation stems from the essence of leisure itself. With the arrival of the post-industrial information society, which Castells refers to as the *network society*, the distinction between work and leisure has been erased. (Shkaratana O. I, 2000) Work can be transferred to the home at any time through the internet, blurring the boundaries between home and workspaces and diminishing the differences in behavior between being at home and at work.

Secondly, there is the commodification of leisure. In modern society, individuals engaged in leisure activities unconsciously fall into the traps of objectification and commercialization. Leisure initially sought physical and mental pleasure and self-fulfillment but gradually strayed from its essence, leading to fleeting sensory stimulation through entertainment and consumption, diverging from its original meaning and moving towards the opposite of leisure.

The problem with the commodification of leisure in modern society lies in excessive consumption demands, which do not necessarily meet individuals' basic needs. The consumption process becomes a form of self-expression and entertainment, with shopping perceived as a leisure activity. This consumerism-driven leisure distorts the true purpose of leisure. The entertainment lifestyle promoted by the media is heavily influenced by consumerism, primarily reflected in the endorsement of a luxurious lifestyle defined by opinion leaders, shaped by media discourse, and pursued blindly for fashion. As the pursuit of self-development, spiritual freedom, and pleasure gradually transforms into a fashionable consumption of luxury goods, leisure also deviates from its true meaning, taking on a trajectory of alienation influenced by certain media content.

Hypothesis₂: The leisure practices of Generation Z exhibit phenomena of alienation in the context of Mediatization.

2.3. National Culture

National culture is not only a key component of identity for Generation Z in their leisure practices but also serves as a tool for self-expression and dialogue with the world. (Wang Haijian, 2018) This generation showcases, innovates, and transmits culture through leisure activities, preserving traditions while adapting them to new contexts through modern media forms. This cultural expression contributes to the construction of ethnic identity and offers new possibilities for the sustainable development of ethnic culture in a globalized context.

Hypothesis₃: Media texts that reflect Generation Z's leisure practices are dominated by leisure themes related to Chinese culture, particularly traditional culture.

Hypothesis₄: National culture plays a positive role in shaping the identity of Generation Z.

3. Research Methods

To analyze the leisure practice of Generation Z, video materials from YouTube bloggers from different areas of leisure activities, comments to them, quantitative indicators (likes, views) and popular TV programs were used in the media texts. The media were selected for the study based on the following criteria:

- 1) bloggers and programs covering a variety of leisure activities, from entertainment shows to cooking blogs, were selected to provide comprehensive coverage of Generation Z's habits and interests in various leisure activities.
- 2) Channels with the highest number of subscribers and views on YouTube were selected, indicating their popularity and influence among young people.
- 3) selected programs and bloggers cover both entertainment shows and content with national culture, which helps to understand the different leisure needs of Generation Z.

Based on the above principles, the following TV programs were selected for Chinese media:

- 1) *Let's Run* is one of the most popular entertainment shows in China, attracting many young viewers with its entertainment and challenges, reflecting Generation Z's love of adventure and interactive entertainment.
- 2) *The Challenge* is a popular entertainment show emphasizing teamwork and problem solving that appeals to many young people and demonstrates Generation Z's interest in collaboration and intellectual challenges.
- 3) *Chinese Restaurant* combines elements of cooking and social interactions, reflecting Generation Z's interest in culinary culture and social events.
- 4) *National Treasures*, a television program featuring China's historical artifacts and cultural heritage, attracts young viewers interested in history and culture and demonstrates the importance of cultural heritage to Generation Z.
- 5) *Desired Life*, which shows rural life and natural scenery, attracts young people seeking a simple life and the beauty of nature, reflecting Generation Z's desire for nature and a slow lifestyle.

Among the Chinese bloggers selected were:

- 6) *Li Ziqi* known for showcasing traditional Chinese handicrafts and village life, is very popular around the world, especially among young people interested in traditional culture and natural lifestyle.
- 7) *Dianxi Xiaoge* focusing on Yunnan cuisine and village life, attracts Generation Z interested in cooking and natural life.
- 8) *Xiaoyin cuisine* specializing in home cooking, demonstrates Generation Z's interest in cooking and family life.
- 9) *Ms. Yeah* who makes creative cooking videos in an office setting with a humorous style, attracts many young viewers, reflecting Generation Z's interest in creativity and humor.
- 10) *Mr. & Mrs. Gao* known for their discussions of scientific and cultural phenomena, attract young people with a strong interest in knowledge and curiosity, demonstrating Generation Z's passion for exploring the unknown.

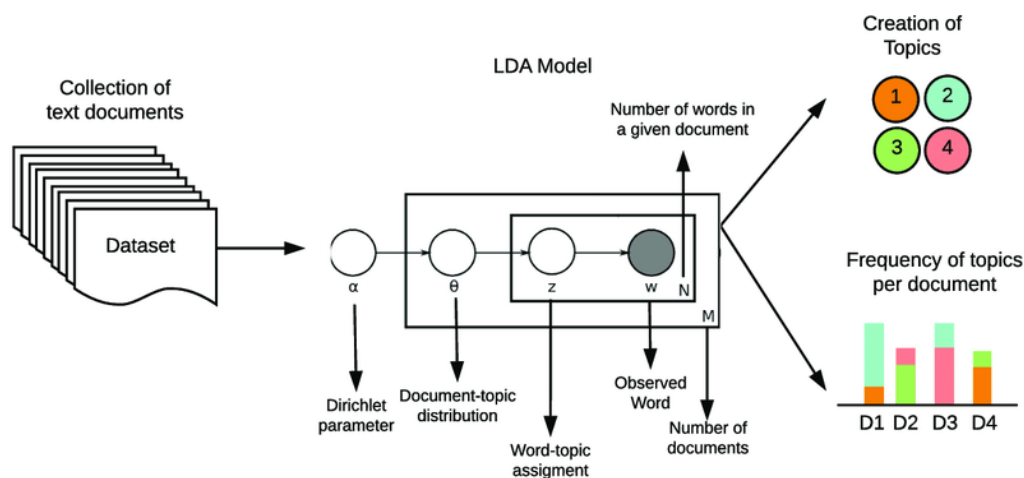


Figure 2.
Model LDA algorithm schematic diagram.

At stage № 2, based on the selected keywords (by frequency), semantic kernels were formed, which were used to collect material for modeling the leisure practices of generation Z. At the initial stage, when developing the methodology of data collection, we should be guided by one or another selected model in order to eventually systematize the information obtained in the course of the research and visualize it by superimposing it on the selected model. In this study the division of leisure practices of generation Z is divided into 5 themes: political, economic, cultural, educational, social, additionally subcategories such as shopping, tourism, sports, national culture were introduced.

Table 1.
Semantic core of the study.

Category	1	2	3	4
Political topics	Elections	Political dialog/interview		
Economic topics	Shopping	Tourism	Sport	Media consumption
Cultural topics	National culture	Artistic and creative	Cultural and spiritual	Subculture
Educational topics	Refresher courses	Learning foreign languages	Computer programming	
Social topics	volunteers	Social activities		

In step № 3, annual time periods were set from 2018 through the end of 2023 - a total of 6 periods over 6 years.

In step № 4 was the initial processing of key expressions and their translation into a suitable format for the work of technical specialists, for example, for the key search query "food" for a particular publication -food site: <https://www.youtube.com/> In fact, we combined the semantic core of the study and the list of sources (5 bloggers) for 6 annual periods. As a result of such an operation, we obtained 935 queries for which we collected empirical data.

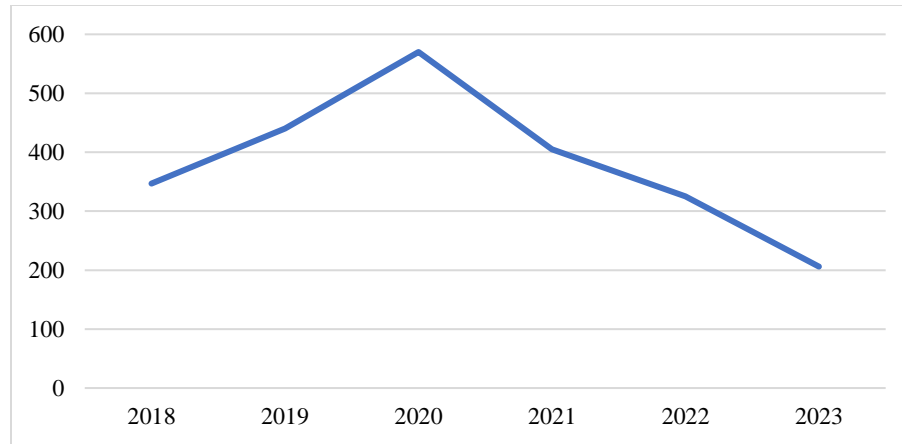


Figure 3.
Dynamics of publications on leisure topics of Generation Z in the period 2018–2023.

4. Research Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Over the past 6 years, in the selected sample of Chinese media texts, the amount of Generation Z leisure content on YouTube platform gradually increased, especially in 2020, and then showed a decreasing trend after the pandemic in 2020. The thematic peak was related to Chinese traditional food. One of the most popular were the videos of cooking blogger *Li Ziqi*.

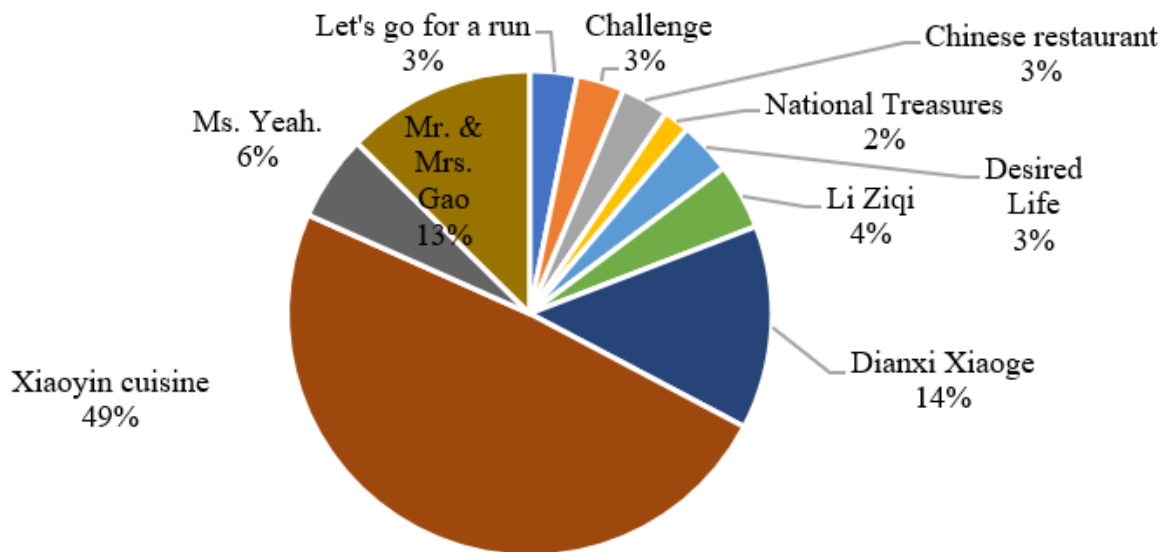


Figure 4.
Distribution of publications on leisure activities of Generation Z by sources within the Chinese sample.

As the survey results show, the most common posting of Generation Z's leisure practices is on Chinese food bloggers' YouTube channel. Here, *Xiaoyin Cuisine* ranks first with 49%, blogger *Dianxi Xiaoge* ranks second with 14%, blogger *MsYeah* ranks third, and blogger *Li Ziqi* ranks fourth. And TV shows *Let's Run*, *Challenge*, *Chinese Restaurant*, and *Desired Life* are ranked fifth. From this we can see that the weight of publications of opinion leaders' leisure discourse on YouTube significantly exceeds the share of corresponding materials in TV programs and traditional media.

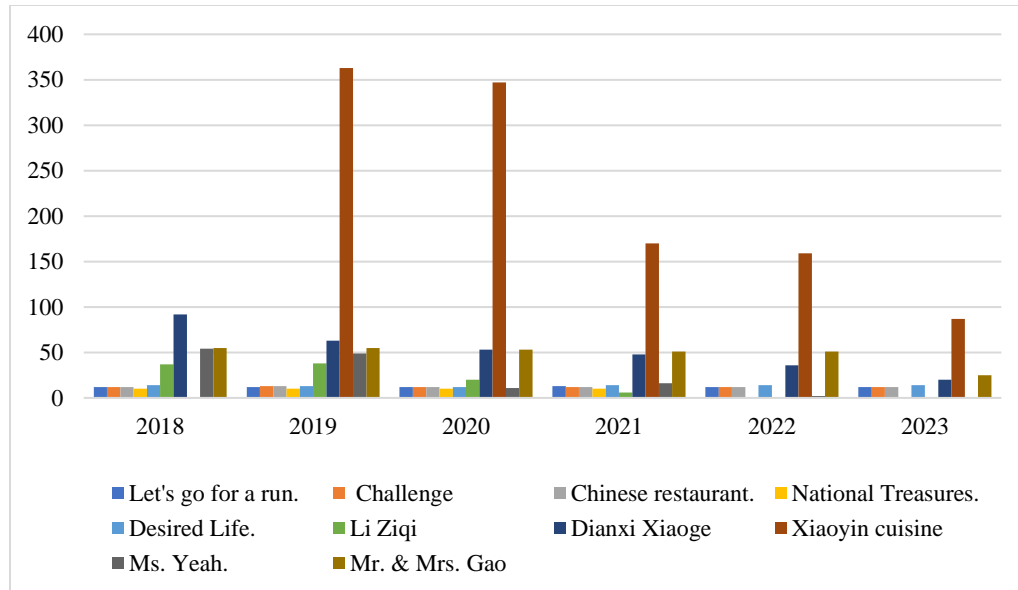


Figure 5.
Ratio of generation Z leisure media texts in the Chinese media sample by year.

After the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020, the total number of Generation Z leisure publications in the Chinese media sample showed a downward trend, which is mainly reflected in the decreasing number of videos from opinion leaders. The number of videos from *Xiaoying Cuisine* decreased from 363 to 347, and that of *Dianxi Xiaoge* decreased from 63 to 53. Due to measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns were imposed in the PRC, resulting in a significant reduction in outdoor leisure practices. We can say that in Chinese media sampling, the reflection of Generation Z's leisure practices is influenced by the current agenda.

In 2019, two Chinese girls 12 and 14 years old even got hurt trying to follow the recipe of blogger *Ms Yeah*. One of the girls died. Blogger *Ms Yeah* paid monetary compensation to the families for hospital bills and damages but denies her guilt as she warned in every video about not repeating the recipe on her own at home and the possible dangers, and the children did not follow the recommendations properly. () After the accident, she reportedly she reportedly she considered quitting hosting the channel as netizens (net users - online citizens) accused her of being responsible for the girl's death, but after a month's hiatus, she continued posting videos until 2023.

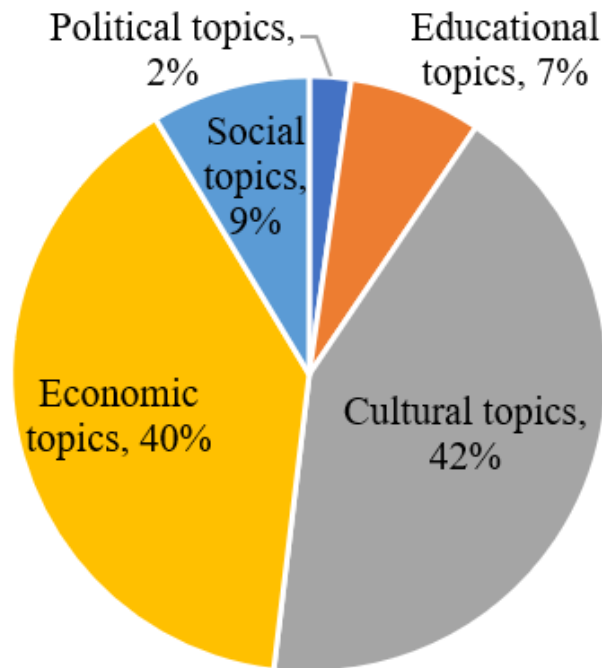


Figure 6.
Distribution of generation Z leisure publications by category in the Chinese media sample.

The pie chart shows (see Figure 6) that in the structure of Generation Z's leisure practices in terms of weight of representation in the Chinese media sample, cultural topics rank first with 42.63%, followed by economic topics with 39.63%.

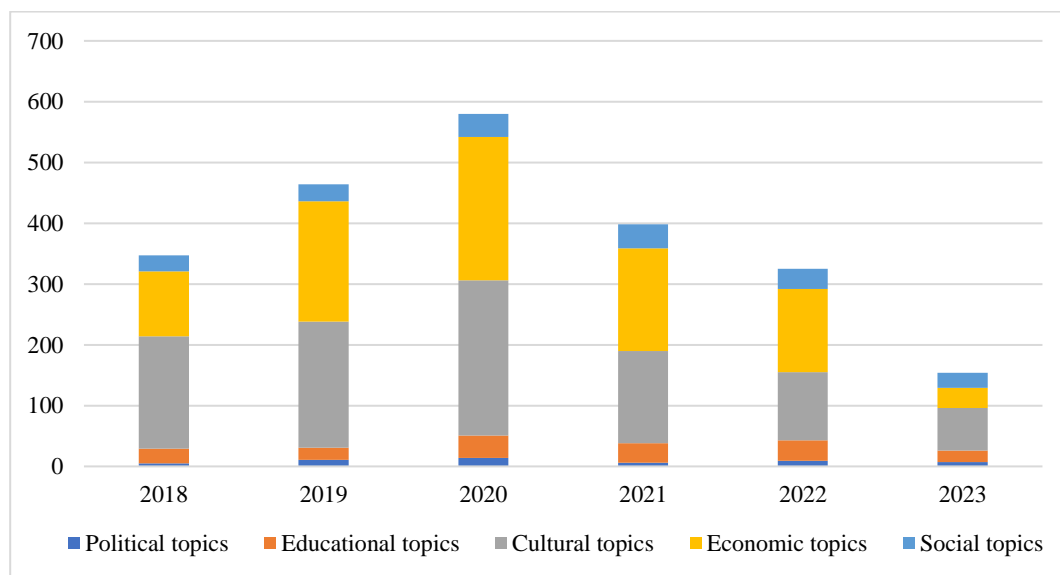


Figure 7.
Ratio of generation Z leisure topics by year in the Chinese media sample.

In 2020, political topics increased in popularity in the analyzed sample due to the election of Tsai Ing-wen as Taiwan's regional leader, and a discussion between vloggers on YouTube about this issue

unfolded. There has been a general decline in the number of posts in the Chinese media selection, with some vloggers, such as *Li Ziqi*, having stopped updating their videos due to copyright and other reasons. In 2018, 185 videos were on cultural topics, and in 2020, this topic reaches 236 videos.

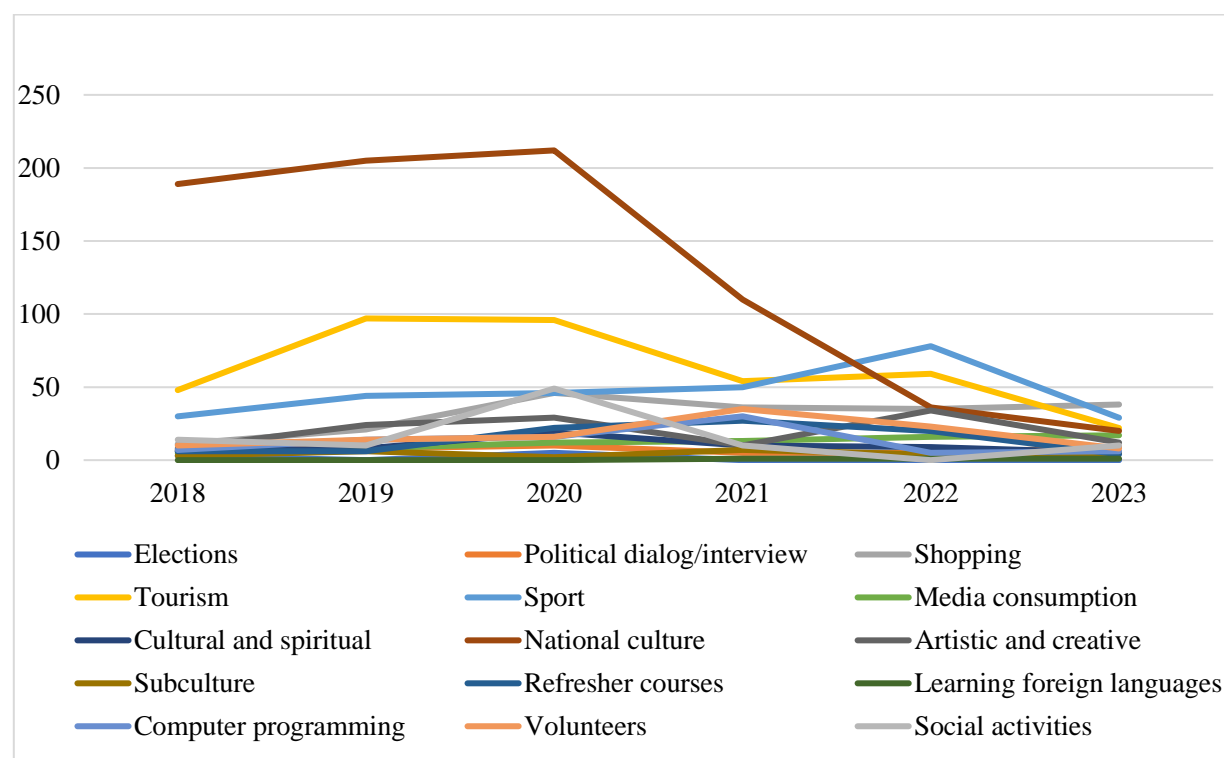


Figure 8.

Dynamics of generation Z leisure publications by subcategory by year in the Chinese media sample.

The dynamics of subcategories for 2018–2023 shows that the Chinese media sample is dominated by the topics of national culture, tourism and sports. This means that about 90% of the publications focus on culture and economy, either combining these two topics in one text or discussing the three aspects of culture, economy and society together in the context of Generation Z's leisure time. (Figure 8) Similarly, the proportion of "national culture" topics peaks in 2020, starting in 2018 when blogger *Li Ziqi* became popular, bringing the Chinese culture boom to 2021. When *Li Ziqi* ceases her activity, the number of culture-related videos decreases and the representation of volunteering topics grows during the coronavirus epidemic in 2020, with an increase in social welfare and social protection authors. The development of coverage of Chinese culture, arts and leisure is changing with the dynamics of the national agenda. Self-development information is gradually increasing with the development of technology, and coverage of sports events and sports leisure is increasing in the run-up to the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

4.2. The Relationship of Leisure Practices of Generation Z

4.2.1. The LDA Model Test Results for the Scale

The study conducted a comprehensive investigation on the categorization of leisure practices of Generation Z. Using the LDA model to identify themes, we obtained 56 keywords for all subcategories collected in the Chinese media section.

Table 2.
Author's classification of keywords.

Elections	Leaders, government, communist party
Political dialog/interview	Taiwan, election, territory, sovereignty
Shopping	Cosmetics, clothing, perfume, dresses, wedding.
Tourism	Friends, family, village, trip abroad, vacation, relaxation
Sport	Running, racing, yoga, skiing, fitness, challenge, competition
Media consumption	Online games, music, movies, e-books, videos,
Cultural and spiritual sphere	Art exhibition, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, book club, movie exhibition
National culture	Chinese culture, food culture, traditional culture, traditional culture, methods, Chinese food
Artistic and creative sphere	Painting, sculpture, calligraphy
Subcultures	Cosplay, K-pop, emo,
Refresher courses	Consultant, data analyst
Learning foreign languages	English, Chinese
Computer programming	Software, learning, artificial intelligence
Volunteers	Volunteering, helping orphans, the disabled,
Social activities	Environmental organizations, red cross

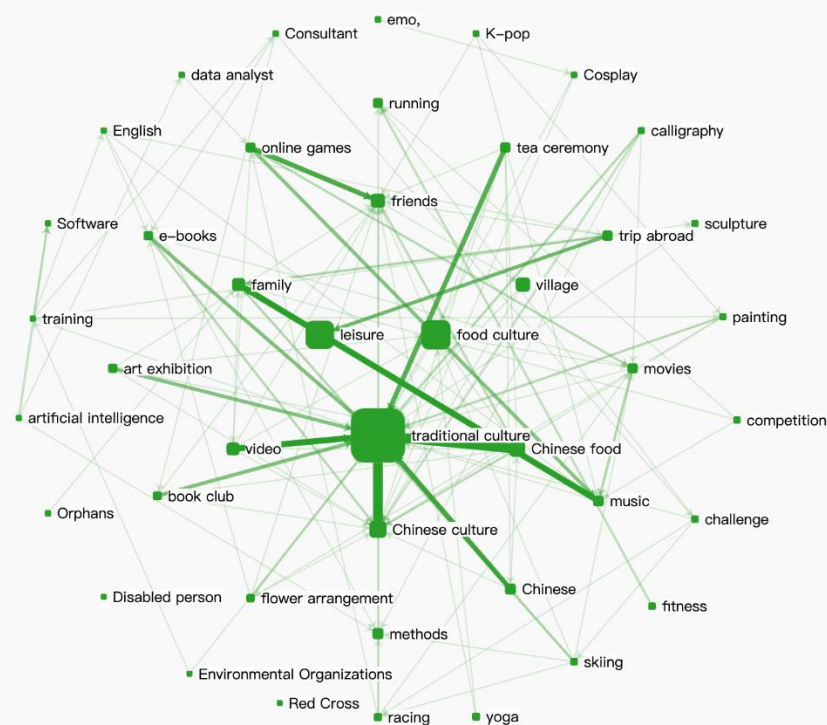


Figure 9.
Visualization of the cluster analysis results for the Chinese media sample.

4.2.2. The Results of Emotional Analysis

We created Table 3, which presents the tone coding based on the video and descriptions of analytical headlines popular among the Generation Z audience of Chinese media and based on the specifically mentioned words of the most frequently occurring words in the headlines and their descriptions.

Table 3.

Tone coding.

Negative (Chinese)	Positive (Chinese)
垃圾 Trash	学习 study
污垢 dirt	休闲 Leisure.
沮丧 frustrated.	创作 creativity
罚款 fine.	娱乐 entertainment
失业 unemployment	休息 vacation
压力 stress	志愿者 volunteer
问题 question	美食 delicious dishes
危机 crisis	大厨 cook
惩罚 punishment	成员 member
	节目 program
	上桌 to serve
	兄弟 brother
	挑战 test
	任务 Task
	嘉宾 Guest
	油炸 fried
	孩子 child
	游戏 game
	体验 experience
	客人 guest
	音乐 music

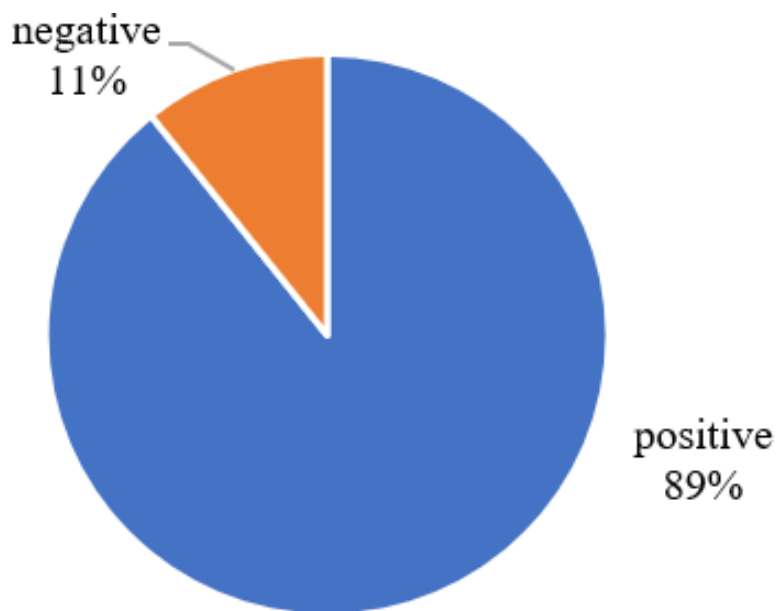


Figure 10.
Ratio of tones (positive and negative) in relation to leisure practices of Generation Z in Chinese media sample between 2018 and 2023.

Over the past six years, the Chinese media sample has been dominated by a positive agenda related to Generation Z's leisure activities. Across all empirical data, 89% of headlines and descriptions contain words associated with positive meaning. Only 11% of the cases contain words from "negative" meaning series. The total number of words classified as "positive" was 2931 and those classified as "negative" were 362.

5. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that cultural themes are prominently reflected in the media discourse surrounding Generation Z leisure practices. Although globalization has influenced the leisure habits of Generation Z, the data show that Chinese Generation Z retains unique localized forms of leisure. In the sample of Chinese media related to Generation Z leisure practices, social media and online platforms are the main driving forces.

The media discourse on Generation Z leisure practices in China primarily focuses on themes in the cultural and economic domains, with cultural topics encompassing various aspects of national traditional culture. Chinese opinion leaders actively promote national culture through leisure activities, with their influence on cultural international communication surpassing that of traditional media. In the Chinese media sample, reflections on Generation Z leisure practices often concentrate on traditional culture, cooking, handicrafts, and the lifestyles of ethnic minorities. The content of television programs is not only entertaining but also provides positive cultural interpretations, with social themes increasing after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chinese media discourse showcases the integration of traditional culture and modern technology, presenting a unique cultural landscape. Opinion leaders on Chinese social media have successfully highlighted traditional handicrafts, cooking, and agriculture, while also reinforcing global audiences' understanding and appreciation of the diversity of Chinese culture. The representation of leisure practices in Chinese traditional cultural television programs has awakened a sense of national identity, particularly among the younger generation, enhancing their pride in Chinese traditional culture. These materials are not merely entertaining; they also play a significant cultural education role, strengthening the positive perception of Chinese culture on the international stage and enhancing China's image.

We summarize the characteristics of Chinese vlogs in the leisure era:

1. In the context of globalization, vlogs serve as a bridge connecting international audiences with Chinese traditional culture.
2. In the context of cross-cultural communication, opinion leaders help shape a positive and multifaceted image of China.
3. In the digital age, vlogs successfully leverage modern technology to showcase Chinese traditional culture to global audiences through platforms like YouTube.

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