

**Chinese Netizens' Perception of Nepalese Social Life through WeChat Short
Videos: A Cultivation Theory Perspective**

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Abstract

Short videos in digital social media are shaping public opinion and perception about individuals and events today. They are widening international communication and subsequently affecting state-to-state and people-to-people relations. This qualitative research intends to explore the representation of Nepali life and culture in short videos posted in WeChat and how these digital contents are shaping the understanding about Nepal and Nepali people among Chinese netizens. For that, total 512 comments commented on 52 short videos posted by 12 WeChat accounts collected for purposeful sampling are studied as a primary data on the background of 'World Syndrome perspective of the Cultivation Theory' developed by George Gerbner. This study aims to answer two questions- 1) How Chinese WeChat users are understanding Nepal and Nepali social life through WeChat short videos? and 2) How image-shaping about Nepal and Nepali society among Chinese netizen has been affected by the digital media outlets ? Addressing these questions could assist to enhance mutual relation, narrowing mutual misunderstandings and correcting disinformation. It is found that Chinese netizens understand Nepal as an underdeveloped but culturally rich and lively country that reflects Chinese society and life before the beginning of the 21st century. The research contributes in the discourse of China-Nepal people-to-people relation, digital media studies and sociological studies highlighting how the new media can be used as the data sources to study the contemporary social trend.

Keywords: cultivation theory, digital social media, Chinese perception about Nepal

1. Introduction

Digital audio-visual contents expanding from few seconds to few minutes are known as short videos that mostly use different social media platforms as their outlets. Among a number of social media platforms popular in China, WeChat (微信 weixin in Chinese language) is the one that consists of short video platform where users can easily post, watch, react and interact on the short videos.

In 2024, monthly active users of WeChat in China reached 1.37 billion (Statistica, 2019). Since WeChat in China has multiple usages, such as digital payment, communication, news and information, purchasing, travelling etc., it has wider impact among Chinese people. In other words, audio-visual and textual contents posted on WeChat influence widely among Chinese people, playing role on shaping their understanding on any subject-matter. In a specific manner, it shows that the short videos posted in WeChat about Nepali life and society play an imperative role on image-shaping about Nepal and Nepali people among Chinese population. This paper studies the short videos recorded in Nepal about Nepali life and society posted on WeChat with an objective to trace-out their impact on image-shaping of Chinese population about Nepal and Nepali social life. All short videos and comments used for this study were collected on the fourth week of January, 2025.

2. Research Questions

This research set the following questions as the research questions:

- 1) How do Chinese WeChat users understand Nepal and Nepali social life through WeChat short videos?
- 2) How has image-shaping about Nepal among Chinese netizen been affected by the digital media outlets ?

3. Limitation

Short videos from other digital social media platforms equally popular in China such as Douyin, Xiaohongshu etc., are not used for this study.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Short Video and Image Shaping

As creators and consumers of the digital new media are increasing day by day, its impact is deepening, mostly affecting urban life throughout the world (Lang et al., 2023; Lu et al. 2024; Hu et al. 2023). Data published in 2024 December show the

number of internet-using population worldwide has reached 5.5 billion and it is increasing year after year. Among them, 1.6 billion people use short videos, which is 20 percent of the world population (Statista, 2019)

Since the usage of short videos is expanding, various research have been done from multiple aspects to measure the effects. Zhang et al. (2023) argues that excessive use of short videos can cause many negative results, such as impairing other social activities, studies, interpersonal relationships and psychological health. Xue et al. (2025) found a relation between short video addiction (SVA) among the university students with their adverse childhood experiences (ACE), exhibiting that individual with different sorts of ACE are more vulnerable to SVA.

Image construction and cultural communication through promotion of short videos affect the perception of consumers (Zhao, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Statistics show that more than 73 percent, particularly Gen-Z short-video consumers prefer to rely on short videos as inputs for image-shaping about anything (Luo et al., 2025). This indicates that the perception of anything, process and circumstance of the audience today could majorly depend on how all these are presented on short videos, showcasing the possible hegemonic characteristic of short videos with wider political and social repercussions. Against this backdrop, the research shows that the addictive nature and regular consumption of short videos mostly posted by same or similar authors could strengthen the perception of consumers into stronger beliefs.

The impact of short videos today is not constrained within individual and societal level in micro-level; rather, it has shown its effects in wider horizon of perception and image-shaping of certain communities and nations as an effective tool of cultural (mis)communication. Li (2024) argues that in the digital age, short videos have become a powerful medium for cultural dissemination, especially in bridging diverse cultural contexts. Zhao (2023) found Chinese traditional culture connects with international communication through short video platforms. Similarly Lu and Ba (2024) found that social media, short videos, and digitization exhibit better degree of efficacy and feasibility than traditional methods of international communication.

4.2 Cultivation Theory in Digital Media

Cultivation Theory developed in 1960s by US researcher George Gerbner 'addresses the broader question of the role of media in shaping a culture, primarily through the media's storytelling function' (Shrum, 2017). Shrum studies the

psychological processes of cultivation as a complex process relying more upon mental shortcuts than careful reasoning.

Ruddock (2020) has employed the Cultivation Theory as a theoretical framework to analyse media normalization of Islamophobia and hostile online behaviour towards aging women. He presented the Cultivation Theory as a flexible framework shifting Gerbner's quantitative model to the use of textual analysis of present days digital media. Ruddock's work widens the scope of the Cultivation Theory, not constraining within the conventional electronic media such as television rather expanding to the contemporary digital media, including social media outlets.

5. Theoretical Framework

Gerbner's Cultivation Theory originally was based on influence and effects of television on viewers' perceptions of social reality. It essentially focuses on the phase which analyse media messages that influence recipients' conception of the real world. The theory argues that the time spent by the people watching TV has direct relation with the beliefs that viewers hold about the world. Storytelling characteristic of the electronic media has stronger impact on the audiences, making them believe on what they see on the TV whereas the world on TV might be different than the real and practical sphere. Gerbner's research found that the people who watch certain thematic contents on electronic media such as TV regularly and for longer time perceive the real world much worse than the actual one. This process of perception is known as the World Syndrome Perspective of the Cultivation Theory. However, Gerbner focused on the collective effects of the mass media that produce 'a common culture through which communities cultivate shared and public notions about facts, values, and contingencies of human existence' (Potter, 2014), rather than limitedly dealing about media effect on an individual. World Syndrome Perspective is, therefore, not constrained up to an individual level, rather it is a collective phenomenon.

Stacks et al. (2015) have widened the influence of electronic media from an individual to the society as a whole as the fundamental manifestation of the mainstream culture. When the cultivation effects of electronic media evolve into collective understanding, they contribute to manifest the mainstream perception, stretching its effects in multiple dynamics.

When Gerbner was working on the theory, TV was a popular electronic media. Today though TV still is in existence but it is no more a dominant electronic media rather digital media such as short videos have substituted TV programs in many ways. Different than Gerbner's proposition of institutional analysis of the message

produced by the media, the new mass digital media such as short videos normally are not institutional. Particularly short videos are largely run individually than institutionally. But this does not affect 'the longitudinal and comparative in analysis of the process and consequences of the institutionalized public acculturation (Gerbner et al., 1973), because the consumption of short videos though in a different pattern, has similar characteristics of consuming for longer and regular trajectory.

Thus, Cultivation Theory is applicable to understand the effects of contemporary forms of media, among which short video is the most effective one. Different from traditional media, short videos are much easier to film and stream with wider accessibility. Lin (2023) says short videos have gained significant popularity due to their concise and easily consumable format, allowing users to quickly engage with content and share their own creations that can capture attention quickly and deliver engaging and entertaining content in a short span of time. Data show that short video consumers spend 1 hour and 16 minutes daily in average, watching short video contents and it is expected that 82 percent of internet traffic is covered by videos, of which massive chunk is of short form (Easdon-Smith, 2024) Simple smart phones are enough for not only watching but even creating short video posts. This handiness makes the impact of short videos much wider than TV, thus creating much deeper cultivation effects on audiences than TV does.

6. Methodology

This qualitative research is based on WeChat short videos portraying Nepali society, culture and livelihood. A number of Chinese citizens visiting Nepal as tourists, employees, business person etc, have recorded and posted WeChat short videos under different handling-accounts. Those short videos are based on what they saw and experienced in Nepal. Short videos found in WeChat show that those Chinese citizens are not constrained within the urban cities of Nepal; rather, they have visited the remotest Nepali villages with various objectives and observed Nepali society, intercommunicated with ordinary Nepali people and experienced Nepali livelihood first-hand. Thus, those short videos are not just recordings of superficial impression; rather, they own serious messages exposing Nepali society in deeper level, making them useful for academic research. Even short videos based on the urban areas mostly depict local social life. Those short videos are shaping images about Nepal, Nepali people and Nepali society among the Chinese netizens, particularly WeChat users. A number of Chinese content-creators involved in creating and posting short videos, telling stories about Nepal through WeChat short

videos have a substantial number of WeChat followers, leading to wider circulation of their content.

A total of 512 comments from 52 WeChat short videos are selected, adopting purposive sampling method to analyze the trend of image-shaping among the Chinese WeChat users about Nepal. Expressive comments embedded with certain ideas, impression, and comparison posted by viewers are purposefully selected from each video, and all comments are classified based on keywords. All classified comments are analyzed to figure out the trend of understanding of Chinese netizens about Nepali life and society. Short videos made for commercial and promotional motives are not included for data collection. Some of the comments are translated from the Chinese language into English and their accuracy is checked with the assistance of the native Chinese speakers and found to be standard. All short videos are selected on the basis of subject matter, number of views, likes and comments. The major concerns and indications of the comments are studied to find image-shaping and perception of Chinese WeChat users about Nepali society.

Gerbner and Gross (1976) write that cultivation is a socio-cultural theory regarding the role of television in shaping viewers' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and values (Shrum, 2017). This definition proposes the classification of the shaping of perception into four categories i.e. (a) viewers perceptions, (b) beliefs, (c) attitudes and (d) values. To trace out the trend of Chinese netizen understanding about Nepal and Nepali society based on the WeChat videos, this research analyzes the collected comments under these four classifications.

Short videos of different contexts and features from different authors (content creators) are selected so that better understanding can be made from different perspectives.

Table (Appendix 1) shows the authors and the areas they covered in their short videos.

7. Finding

Chinese society is changing rapidly as a result of faster infrastructural development and economic growth. Zhang (2024) says that over the past 70 years Chinese people have experienced substantial improvement in material well-being, and the social security system is gradually becoming much comprehensive. Particularly after the introduction of the Reform and Opening-up policy, 'China Gate' for economic development became wider, leading to the upliftment of life-standard of Chinese people. Tisdell (2009) says that since 1978 (the year Reform and opening-

up policy was introduced), China has experienced extraordinary institutional change, which has proven to be effective in promoting its economic growth and is advancing its international status. This has led to widening differences of between Chinese people and people from other third-world countries, though China continues categorizing itself as a developing third-world country.

Consequently, it brought changes in the perception of Chinese people about the life and society of other developing countries that some decades ago, shared almost the same status. In the same manner, the perception of Chinese populace is also gradually changing about Nepali society after China advances toward economic and social development. Moreover, along with economic development of China, the number of Chinese people visiting foreign countries, including Nepal, is increasing which has broadened the exposure and communication of Chinese people with Nepali culture, leading to the obvious and necessary perception-building about local cultures and countries.

The overall perception of Chinese WeChat users about Nepal and Nepali society is of a mixed type. Chinese WeChat Users are mostly found to be nostalgic while watching present-day Nepali life and society on WeChat short videos. They recall their own life from some 30-40 years before while comparing it with the present condition of Nepali people. They think that half a century ago, life in China, particularly in mountainous areas, was as hard as the life Nepali people are living now.

Data show that in China, WeChat is a digital social media platform mostly used by adult and older people. Thomala (2024) writes that as of March 2022, about 22 percent of WeChat users in China were between 31 and 40 years old, whereas another 22.7 percent of users were aged over 51 (Statista, 2019). This is the main reason for the prominence of recollective and comparative comments that find similarities between the life of Nepali people today and the life of Chinese people some decades before.

A number of WeChat users, while commenting on short videos featuring Nepali life and society, express self-pleasure in living life free from rural hardships these days whereas there are also comments that argue about happiness embedded in decency and purity of past life rather than present-day materialistic prosperity. They find past life more natural and satisfying than present-day life, where they think individualism is deep-rooted and material aspects are preferred inter-human relations. Differences in the ways of understanding and evaluating past Chinese life among Chinese netizens surface while they share their perception about life in Nepal. Hence, contradictory comments are found where netizens are arguing what

happiness and hardship actually mean. One who thinks better about life in Nepal argues for the superiority of mental happiness of Nepali life, no matter how materially lacking that could be. But netizens also consider Nepal as one of the under-developed countries where deprived people live with a pile of uncomfortable circumstances. Through the debate, Chinese netizens are arguing on the question of whether life in China today is happier than in the past or not.

Technological advancement of China today encourages Chinese netizens to suggest that Nepali people should their upgrade life standard through the usage of modern science and technology. They think Nepali people are still using traditional techniques and methods in their daily life, leading Chinese netizens to see Nepali society as still undeveloped and lagging behind.

Though Nepal and China are two neighboring countries, mutual cultural diversity is largely unrevealed. Screening of local Nepalese cultural rituals and customs on WeChat short videos showcases scores of peculiar and surprising practices for Chinese people. Chinese netizens understand Nepali cultural rituals from two different angles: firstly, many of them perceive it as cultural prosperity and happiness of Nepali people, and secondly, netizens also take it as unwanted wastage of time and money and a cause of under development of the country. Among them a few comments are guided by a senses of superiority of Chinese development and a negative perception of Nepali life and tradition.

For better understanding of the perception of Chinese WeChat users about Nepali society and people, comments are analyzed under four different topics:

7.1 Viewers Perception

Study shows that Chinese netizens largely have appreciative understandings about Nepali society and people. Appreciative words such as hard-working, happy, strong, honest, simple, friendly, natural, genuine, close to family, full of fun, peace, etc. are found frequently used to define Nepali life showed in short videos. Nepali life is understood as a life with many hardships and difficulties, poverty and destitute, but still happy and natural. Spirit of mutual helping existing in Nepali society is appreciated and perceived as a better life and 'life with no pressure.'

Local people carrying heavy loads, girls doing laborious works, people travelling on dangerous roads, children going to the school in poor condition, etc., are seen as the indicators of a hard life. Nevertheless, smiling faces of people, lively social life, genuine group efforts are understood as the happiness flourished amidst hardships.

Natural life of Nepali people in the mountainous areas is commented on as healthy and regarded as having the purity of heart.

Short videos about Nepali traditional and cultural festivals are found posted in adequate numbers. Festivals in Nepal are different from Chinese festivals. That makes every Nepali festival and customs new and unrevealed for Chinese audiences. Putting a red-color dot (*Tika*) on the forehead is a common practice in Nepal, but for Chinese people, that is a never-seen-before custom. Dancing and singing jointly in community are parts of Nepali festivals. These activities are marked colorfully with fun and pleasure, mostly blended with local music and collective entertaining activities. Short videos showing Nepali festivals are viewed by Chinese netizens as the testament of happiness and a prosperous cultural life. They appreciate Nepali life as 'mental cleanliness, purity and happiness.' Nepal is described as a country of songs and dances.

Chinese netizens connect hardship of Nepali people and under development of Nepal with a pure and decent life close to nature. Compared to Chinese life today, life in Nepal is technologically lagging behind and materially lacking. Nonetheless, Chinese netizens think amidst lagging and lacking, Nepali people live happy and peaceful life.

Responding to the commentators who portray Nepal as a poor and backward country, a commentator questioned, 'I would like to ask you respectfully what is the happiness of the rich?' Commenting on a video where a Nepali school kid is dancing with a brightly smiling face, a commentator comments that is how childhood should be like, but on the contrary, Chinese kids are too tired of lots of pressure.

Nostalgic and recollective comments are prominent, where commentators recall their past and compare the situation shown on the short videos with different time periods in China. Such time period extends from 1950s to 2010s. They shared their own past memories and experiences, similar to the conditions shown on the short videos, in their comments. Connecting the hardship of life in Nepal, they shared that life in China in the past was similarly hard or even harder.

China's development is not uniform throughout the country even after 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established. Development of China started from the eastern coastal areas to the inner sides, and infrastructure and economic development there are still uneven. Hence, the lifestyle of Chinese people varies as per the region. Therefore, the perception of development varies accordingly. This is reflected on the recollective comments. Some commentators see the condition of

Nepal as a situation similar to that of China some half a century before, whereas some argue that a similar condition still exists in the rural China.

A commentator writes,

Before December 1969, I lived in the countryside, just like them. I used to get up early every day. And eat some very simple food prepared last night. Then I used to walk to the deep mountain where I collect firewood. I used to return home around 10 o'clock and reach only at the midday.

Another respondent notes,

When I saw this video, I remembered my teenage. Life then was really hard. Before and after school, we had to collect and carry firewood. Even during winter vacation, we had to do such works. But we used to tie rope on our shoulders, not on the head!

The commentator thinks carrying a basket ('Doko' in the Nepali language) by placing a rope on the forehead is strange, which is the general practice in Nepal.

Another user says, in 1960s and 1970s, I was in the same condition. The boy (in the video) is wearing rubber shoes but at that time I used to wear straw shoes.

During the last half a century, technological advancement is one of the major changes in Chinese life. The daily life of Chinese people is convenient now even in remote rural China. Transportation is much convenient. Traditional ways of farming and other daily works are outdated, and have been substituted by the modern technologies. The upliftment of national economy upgraded the life-standard of Chinese people. During this period, changes in countries like Nepal have moved at a very slow pace, if not regressing. Thus, this condition has made Chinese older generation view the present situation of Nepal as mirror of their past.

A commentator comments, 'It's so hard! I did this kind of work when I was a youth worker 50 years ago, and I still remember I cried of exhaustion then.'

Though commentators have different views regarding how many years back Nepal is living now in comparison to China, but, in general they think the remotest rural people of Nepal are living some 40-50 years back compared to China today.

To sum up, Chinese netizens feel connected with the Nepali situation presented in the short-videos and frame perceptions about Nepal and Nepali people, mostly rooted in the past memories of Chinese society and life.

7.2 Values

Reflections are generated not only because of differences but also because of commonalities. Commenters, after watching Nepali society in the short videos, also find commonalities leading them to make comparison to seek common values. They identify Nepali features, life and culture with different ethnic groups in China.

As culture and social values are ever-changing phenomenon, Chinese cultural values and customs change with time and particularly with the strides in physical development they have changed widely. Against such a backdrop, commentors find identical values and features in Nepali people and society worth comparing with past values and customs of Chinese people.

Commentors compare Nepali lifestyle, features and appearances with Han people and some other minority groups of China such as Yi, Dai, Mongolian ethnicity, people from Xinjiang, etc. Some even have confusion about the differences between Tibetan (Xizang) and Nepalese people and culture.

A comment says, 'The wedding ceremony is the same as that of the Dai people in Yunnan. Their oil pancake looks like the one made in Gansu.'

Commentors think about religious and cultural practices of Nepali people both in positive and critical ways. Watching short videos that show faith-based superstitious acts such as women being deprived to stay inside home during menstrual period, wives drinking water once used for washing husband's feet, etc, they comment that relying on superstitious acts is one of the major causes of Nepal still remaining under developed. Celebrating festivals and following religious practices are described as waste of time and energy that should instead be invested for the economic development. On the other side, a number of comments show curiosity about peculiar religious functions. One reflective comment says, 'Nepal has too many gods. The god of cows, god of trees, and everybody there says they themselves are gods. Does anyone believe that? Man and God do not live at the same height. Can you see God out of thin air? Haha!'

Chinese netizens debated about the science behind Nepali traditions. While some commentors consider the use of cow dung to 'clean' rooms as ridiculous and primitive, some commentors argue that cow dung is a pure material that rural Chinese people also use to clean their front yards. One comment says, 'Our old house was also made up of cow dung and yellow mud. It is 130 years old and still in very good condition.'

Commentors compare present-day Nepali technology with traditional Chinese technology. They think of Nepali people as the back ward people who are still using traditional modes of technology that their ancestors once used. They think Nepal does not have any factories and Nepali people hardly use modern technologies. While comparing Chinese traditional technology and present-days Nepali technology, Chinese commentors argue that traditional Chinese technology was far advanced than the present-day technology Nepali people are using in the mountainous areas.

'Still our ancestors were clever. There were so many tools for farming in China than they have today.'

Commentors compar conditions in Nepal with some other third-world countries such as India, Pakistan, Africa and West Asian countries. Some commentors think that condition of Nepali cities is better than Indian and Pakistani cities. They compare Nepali music and dance with African songs and dancing steps. And some also comment that the condition of Nepal, though backward and poor, is still far better than West Asian countries. Today, Chinese people are traveling throughout the world for different reasons, so the comparisons they make are mostly based on their first-hand experiences of particular countries.

To conclude, Chinese netizens trace similarities and differences between Nepali and Chinese social values and practices based on short-videos and make comparisons to draw impressions about Nepali values and social practices.

7.3 Beliefs

Commentors, after watching short-videos about life in Nepal, have suggested different relevant ways based on their beliefs, intending to improve the living conditions. These comments are based on genuine intention of assistance for people living in hardship, while some of them are practical and some are impractical in Nepali context. Some comments are encouraging what the characters of the short videos are doing so and some are discouraging such practices. For instance, commentors suggest people continuing organic farming and not using chemical fertilizers while other commentors advise not to follow the superstition of drinking water that has been to wash husband's feet. Some commentors are worried about possible destruction of natural forest in mountainous areas because people still use firewood for cooking, while some commentors criticize Chinese fellows for thinking much about foreigners instead of caring about their own poor conditions in China. A comment says, 'Don't care about foreigners. We also have a lot of poor children in China.'

Commentors complain about the low wages for hardworking Nepali laborers, describing it as an oppression. Some commentors also advise Nepali people to use certain methods to improve their daily life. For instance,

In the countryside of Nepal, people don't know how to make fertilizer of leaves. After March or April of the Lunar New Year, when the pure brightness comes out, tender and oily leave grow. Those leaves can fertilize the fields.

Many commentors suggest building good roads for development. This suggestion is based on Chinese experience as convenient transportation is the main cause of China's economic advancement. Therefore, commentors suggest, 'Building a road first is necessary to be rich. Construction of village-to-village roads in China is a wise decision for the benefit of the people.'

One of the issues in most of comments is the concern for hygiene. Chinese commentors perceive Nepali life as dirty and unhygienic. Therefore, certain commentors suggest improving hygiene conditions.

Alongside, this commentors express their sympathy towards the characters in the short-videos who, according to their perception, are living a hard life and facing difficulties with sympathetic tones. Mostly the short- videos showing the hard life of remote rural areas generate such comments. Some comments are just idealistic quotations, some pray for them and some express sorrowful words. Feeling of pity, hardship and suffering are articulated through words such as 'Oh my God!', 'God is not fair!', 'Amitabh!' etc.

Some commentors even show their desire to donate something to those people. Some ask the content creators to help the needy people.

To sum up, commentors show their well-wishing toward Nepali people and present their experiences to uplift life standard. Their friendly gestures are based on sympathetic feelings towards Nepali people after watching hardships of Nepali life and society.

7.4 Attitude

Highlighting the differences in conditions between Nepal and China, a number of comments reflect the attitudes of the commentors. Those comments make fun of the conditions, express dissatisfaction towards dire conditions where commentors express anger, dissatisfaction and disagreement using funny words, derogatory description and dual meanings. For instance, commenting on a video that shows

people crawling into a tree trunk, believing to get cured of illness, a commentator commented '*As long as this tree exists in Nepal, no one will die.*'

Commentors use derogatory terms with negative and dual meanings. Particularly, comments on short videos about Chinese youths searching Nepali girls for marriage and poor condition of Nepali life carry negative connotations. WeChat short videos show that many Chinese men visit Nepal in search of girls to marry. Some videos even show that a number of Chinese men are working as match-makers based in Kathmandu and Pokhara.

In the short videos that show happy marital life between Chinese and Nepali couples, a number of comments are found where Nepal is presented as a place where girls can be easily lured into marrying Chinese men. Such comments carry derogatory connotations for Nepali girls and society.

Commentors even use negative words for Chinese boys and girls who get married with Nepali boys and girls, asking why they choose spouses from such a poor country. They describe the hard life of remote rural areas as poverty and backwardness. Some traditional practices of Nepali people are portrayed as backward and superstitious.

A number of comments are based on the cultural differences and curiosity. Many commentors question Nepali people using the right hand to eat food and not using chopsticks or spoons. They considered it as unhygienic and unhealthy. They ask the content creators to teach Nepali people to use chopsticks. Some commentors are curious about those piercing of Nepali women. Queries such as the red dot (*Tika*) on forehead, walking on the left side of the road, a Nepali mother-in-law combing the hair of a daughter-in-law, and not using toilet paper in toilets, etc., make Chinese WeChat users comment with a sense of curiosity and amazement.

Based on the impression generated about Nepali society and life through the WeChat short videos, Chinese netizens articulate certain attitudes making judgement about Nepali social practices, and even questioning them. Their attitudes even express a critical outlook of Chinese netizens about Nepali society.

8. Discussion

Cultivation Theory has theorized the influence of electronic mass media devices, particularly television, on image-shaping and perception making. Today, short videos are taking the role of TV on shaping such perceptions of the world. Like TV, short videos are also simultaneously auditory and visual and do not require literacy (Perera, 2023), and access to such videos these days is much wider than TV in 1978

when the theory evolved. Narrating or story-telling styles of short videos capture the viewers' attention and engagement easily than the TV programs. Additionally, short videos can be watched, created and commented easily using simple smart phones, extending impact of short videos in society. As audiences can comment on short videos, gauging of their impact on audiences is easier and accurate compared to TV, where commenting facility is not feasible.

An examination of short videos about Nepali society and people, posted on the WeChat, employing the Cultivation Theory, shows that such short videos are playing an imperative role in shaping images about Nepal and Nepali society among Chinese WeChat users. An examination of selected 512 comments commented by Chinese users on the short videos posted in WeChat shows how the process of image shaping about Nepal is going on through short videos. Most of the short videos posted on WeChat about Nepal show small country, lagged behind in terms of infrastructural development where life is harder and messed-up with 'strange cultural practices.'

A number of commentators compare the present condition of Nepali people with the condition that Chinese people used to live some fifty years ago. After watching short videos about Nepal, many commentators are found expressing the feelings of pride of being Chinese and thanking their ancestors. Commentors criticize the Chinese girls who got married with Nepali boys for marrying men from such a poor country. They think a child of Chinese mother and Nepali father can't survive in Nepal and advise bringing the baby back to China for better future. Some are even surprised of the baby's skin getting darker after they start living in Nepal. Such perceptions about Nepali society are cultivation effects on the Chinese commentators frequently watching short videos that portray Nepal as a backward and undeveloped country.

On the other hand, as content creators post a numbers of short videos about Nepali people celebrating different festivals, the impression generated among WeChat users from such contents is mostly adverse. The intention of posting such videos by the creators is to show the cultural prosperity of Nepali society, but audiences perceive them as 'wastage of time', 'reason for being poor', 'superstition.' Here, a wide difference can be seen between the objectives of the content creators and the perception of the audiences. The gap between content production and dissemination and its influence on recipients' conception of the real world is another cause of message distortion that Cultivation Theory talks about.

In a number of short videos, Chinese boys are shown finding beautiful Nepali wives in Nepal. Those videos show how Chinese boys are spending time with

Nepali girls and their families. They highlight how Chinese boys are helping Nepali girls and their families and consequently agree to marry with them. These videos mostly focus on the faces and activities of girls than the speakers or the content creators themselves, which creates a visual effect on highlighting appearance of Nepali girls. They can definitely give WeChat users an impression that Nepal a country where beautiful girls be easily married. A numbers of comments asking the content-creators of such videos to help find wives in Nepal clearly show the image shaping about Nepal through short videos.

The frequency of short videos showing Nepal as a poor, undeveloped and backward country has created an image of Nepal as a country living some half a century behind than living in China today, among WeChat users. Most videos posted to show the condition of the remote rural areas of Nepal and the extreme condition there are perceived as the general condition of Nepal.

Understanding of Nepali life style and economic status as worse and more miserable than the real condition, after watching a number of short videos about Nepali life and society reflects the World Syndrome effect of Cultivation Theory. This syndrome effect leads Chinese netizens to perceive Nepal as a poor, superstitious, backward, unhygienic and primitive country in general.

On the other hand, based on short videos that show the cultural prosperity, happy faces, natural scenic beauty and hard working Nepali people, the understanding of Nepal as a happy country is another one-sided perception about Nepal. It also lacks the holistic understanding of Nepali people, creating a gap between the real and imagined world. Understanding Nepali people living stress-free peaceful life is another aspect of World Syndrome effect of Cultivation Theory.

Examination of comments in this study shows over-highlighting of certain factors of Nepali society has led WeChat users to perceive it either negatively or on an exaggerated way. The understanding that Nepali people are poor and living a harsh life because they are lazy, or they are poor but also happy, are both conditions are not objective understanding. Similarly, the perception of Nepali people remains undeveloped because they celebrate many festivals is also questionable.

Since even an ordinary individual can easily and freely comment and express his/her opinions, suggestions, impressions and critiques on such short video posts, from where the prevailing gap of perception and understanding about each other can be figured out and consequently help to narrow down the gap. Understanding the condition of Nepal much direly than it actually is in reality can create misunderstandings and mis-judgements in bilateral relation.

9. Conclusion

Short videos, as a contemporary powerful digital platform cannot be denied for their effective roles in the social image-shaping process that once TV used to do. Therefore, Gerbner's Cultivation Theory is equally implementable to study the role of short videos in image-shaping and generating perception today. Unlike most of existing research that presents the adverse effects of short videos in digital media, this research finds both positive and negative aspects, particularly while exploring their role in shaping transnational cognition.

This study shows that Chinese WeChat users perceive Nepal as a poor and backward country with inadequate infrastructure and a low standard life-style, comparable to the life of Chinese people some fifty years ago. They perceive Nepali people as poor but hardworking, living a peaceful and stress-free life. All such positive and negative perceptions hold meaning for the enhancement of bilateral relationship between Nepal and China as they can figure out the problems and positive sides of people-to-people relation between two countries.

The study of WeChat comments as a data source to understand the perception of Chinese consumers of WeChat short videos about Nepal has highlighted otherwise scattered and not collectively analyzed understandings of Chinese netizens. This study sheds light on the otherwise shadowed ways of understanding of Chinese people about Nepal, that can help to understand the entire picture of bilateral relation between people of two neighboring countries. Besides, official and Government-to-Government (G-to-G) relations between two countries, people-to-people relation and mutual understandings are equally imperative in international relations.

Certainly, all conditions portrayed in short videos and viewers' comments might not necessarily be accurate and objective. Nevertheless, the collective analysis of impressions through the WeChat comments indicates the way of the social undercurrent that can again contribute to the enhancement of mutual relations between two countries.

Nepal and China have a long history of formal and informal bilateral and multilateral relations. However, this study shows that perception and understanding about each other still have a wide gap. Image-shaping and perception of Nepal, Nepali people and Nepali society among Chinese people is a significant part of bilateral relations between Nepal and China. Correct message flowing and accurate understanding about each other are highly important factors for smooth bilateral

relations. The more people understand each other accurately, the better the neighborly relation will be.

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Appendix-1

S.N.	Name of Author	No. of S. V.	No. of comments	Subject matter of Short Videos
1	Chong Qing Xiao Huo Zai Niboer Shan Qu 重庆小伙在尼泊尔山区	11	84	Life of rural mountain area of Nepal showing hardship and local culture
2	Chao ge zai niboer 超哥在尼泊尔	10	107	Life of ordinary Nepali people mostly from rural areas of Hilly and terai region
3	Zhong Ni Jia Ting Aa Su Yi Jia 中尼家庭啊苏一家	10	100	Inner Mongolian girl married with Nepali boy shows the life of her husband family
4	Fen Xiang Shi pin jing shi 分享视频景视	5	55	Life of Nepali rural hilly area of Nepal.
5	Ta ming zai hai wai 大明在海外	4	37	Difficult life of Nepali mountain area.
6	A tian xai hai wai 啊天在海外	3	31	Chinese boy in Nepal seeking girl to marry found a girl, shows his days in Nepal
7	An An Zaa 安安 zaa	3	30	Chinese boy married with a Nepali boy shows his days in Nepal
8	Xi Ma La Ya Shan Qu Pai Ke 西马拉雅山区拍客	2	20	Life of Nepali people in hilly areas of Nepal
9	Zhong ni fu fu kan di he luo 中尼夫妇坎迪和罗	2	18	Shanghai girl married with Nepali boy go to Nepal and shows life there.

10	A lang he ni sha yi Zhong ni fu qi	1	11	Chinese boy married with a Nepali girl and shows their life after marriage
11	Yan Jie Quanqui ZhenXuan 严姐全球甄选	1	4	Chinese tourist in Kathmandu valley shows the life there.
12	Other		15	Different contexts
	Total	52	512	