

Research on National Image Construction and Communication Strategy of Official Media Short Video from Multi-modal Perspective

-- Take People's Daily's Tik Tok Report on the COVID-19 Outbreak as an Example

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Abstract. With the continuous change of media and information technology, electronic media integrates verbal signs with non-verbal signs, and the mode of information transmission has evolved from a single text discourse mode to a multi-modal discourse mode. In addition, as a new multi-modal communication mode, short video is widely used by mainstream media as a communication tool. In the fierce international competition, how to construct national image through official media short video is a problem that needs to be clarified and solved. Therefore, from the multi-modal perspective, this paper selects the short video of People's Daily Tik Tok account to deeply analyze the change of communication mode and the construction of national image with the development of The Times, and explores communication strategies conducive to the construction of national image.

Keywords: Multi-modal; Short Video; National Image Construction; Communication Strategy.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of network information technology, short video has penetrated deeply into the economy, culture, life and other fields of the public, and is deeply loved by the public, which has become one of the most communicative and influential social media, and also provides a communication platform of news for People's Daily, CCTV News, China Daily and so on. In the context of the changing situation of the pandemic and the dynamic adjustment of national policies, the mass media not only plays a role in conveying epidemic prevention policies and epidemic-related news, but also shows the relevant information of economy and politics between countries. Constructing national image is a very important task for a country in information dissemination, and it is also an inevitable requirement for maintaining social stability and uniting the people. With the rapid development of the Internet, mass media is not only an indispensable condition for national information circulation, but also an indispensable force for constructing national image. Multimodal communication refers to the communication strategy that integrates text, image, video, audio and other information, and has the characteristics of pluralism, holography, dynamics, and placement. This paper considers how to promote the future display of Chinese culture, tell Chinese stories and realize the construction of a good national image in the level of creation and communication of official media short videos. This not only enriches the study of epidemic transmission reports, but also provides a case basis for emergency communication strategies in the post-epidemic era, which has strong practical significance and development prospects.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Multimodal Communication Strategy of Official Short Video

The multimodal communication strategy of official short video platform is a complex and multi-level communicative means, which realizes the effective transmission of information and deep resonance of emotions through the dynamic integration of image, text and sound. We have defined multimodality as the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined - they may for instance reinforce



each other ('say the same thing in different ways'), fulfil complementary roles [1]. The official Tik Tok account of People's Daily cleverly used this strategy during the Covid-19, not only updating content timely to meet the audience's information needs, but also accurately touching the audience's emotions through the integration of multiple modes. With the development of the epidemic and the change of audience emotions, the communication strategy has been optimized and adjusted accordingly to achieve the best transmission effect.

2.1.1. Image Modes

The multimodal semantic system encompasses three dimensions: representation, interaction, and composition, corresponding to the conceptual, interpersonal, and compositional aspects of language. Within the representation dimension, there are narrative and conceptual representations. Narrative representation involves actions, reactions, speech, and psychological processes, while conceptual representation includes categorization, analysis, and symbolic processes [2].

Referring to the image mode, the short video released by the official Tik Tok account of People's Daily was concluded into three stages. According to the change of the epidemic circumstance, People's Daily adopted different transmission methods and achieved remarkable results. In the early stage (from the end of 2019 to the middle of 2020), the content focused on epidemic data, field interviews and relevant policies, and the images were mainly news pictures, accompanied by clear text explanations, aiming to clearly show the epidemic situation and emphasize knowledge to prevent and the objectivity of data. This communication strategy helped the audience intuitively understand the basic situation and information about the epidemic. Later, in the medium term (mid-2020 to the end of 2022), more short videos took advantage of the form of documentary and field interviews to show the situation of the epidemic and people's living conditions, highlighting that China was united and worked together to overcome the difficulties, and thus played a good role in guiding public beliefs. In the later period of the epidemic (from the end of 2022 to the present), the short videos paid more attention to humanistic care, closely integrated the epidemic and life, emphasizing the gains and losses after the epidemic, the efforts and gains made by people to fight the epidemic and getting their lives back on track, and focusing on arousing the emotional resonance of the audience and the characters in the video and promoting positive social energy. Images can create particular relations between viewers and the world inside the picture frame. In this way they interact with viewers and suggest the attitude viewers should take towards what is being represented [3].

2.1.2. Graphic Relationship

The study of the relationship between images and text in multimodal discourse originated with the post-structuralist linguist Barthes (1977). He asserted that the meaning of images is inherently ambiguous and must rely on textual explanations for clarification, ultimately requiring language to validate the significance of visual elements. This perspective underscores the significance of investigating the relationship between images and text. Subsequently, Noth introduced the complexity of the image-text relationship, identifying five semantic relationships between the two. Drawing on the dual perspectives of traditional semiotics and social semiotics, Martinec and Salway (2005) established a comprehensive model for analyzing the image-text relationship in multimodal discourse. This model simultaneously examines the image-text status and semantic logical relationships from two perspectives [4].

During the process of the epidemic, short videos posted by the official Tik Tok account of the People's Daily showed a clear change in the relationship between images and text. In the early days, the images were highly correlated with the text, mainly presented by news images or epidemic data, directly presenting the content, and the information was straightforward. In the middle of the epidemic, the video content was mainly about records and interviewing on the spot, and the scene and character shots in the image needed to be presented through text interpretation, and the text interpretation content did not directly correspond to the picture, but analyzed the scene and role through explanation and commentary. In the later period of the epidemic, video content paid more attention to emotional expression and humanistic experience, and the relationship between images and texts became closer.

Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm, and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis [5]. Through the integration of pictures, emotions and plots, a more harmonious state was presented. The touching scenes and characters in the picture strengthen the audience's emotional experience. At the same time, the text expression was also more profound. Through the transformation of the language voice with human touch and the call for the audience's subconscious group cognition, the audience's sense of identity and empathy in the report could be further strengthened, and the communication effect is sublimated.

2.1.3. Sound Modes

The sound track begins to take on an active role that anything really important will be cued by the sound track [6]. In multimodal dynamic discourse, sound mode is one of its main modes. Sound mode can create specific situations for images and texts, thus rendering the atmosphere of dynamic discourse and enhancing its appeal. Official media's short anti-epidemic video is a multi-modal discourse with the theme of fighting the epidemic, so its sound mode is to construct the special situation of characters and events in the anti-epidemic process presented by images and texts, so as to highlight the discourse significance of official media's anti-epidemic documentary.

In the early stage of the epidemic, sound was mainly used as an interpretation tool for images and text content to help explain the severity of the epidemic and disseminate knowledge about prevention and control. In the middle period, the sound is more diversified, using live radio and interviews, and adding music and sound effects to create an atmosphere and enhance emotional expression, focusing on the visual and auditory impact of the content to make the audience more immersive. In the later stage, the sound mode focused more on the transmission of humanistic emotions of mainly character monologues, and strengthened the audience's emotional resonance through narration and background music. This change in sound mode not only highlights the phased change of the epidemic, but also expresses the continuous pursuit and strengthening of the audience's emotional resonance.

2.1.4. Communication Effect

The dissemination effect of the People's Daily TikTok account is reflected in the data of audience likes, comments, and shares. On short video platforms, the audience uses "likes" to show their approval of the video, with a high number of likes serving as a quantifiable indicator of high audience approval; the audience uses "comments" to express their own opinions, and a high number of comments indicates that the video has sparked widespread discussion; the audience uses "shares" to strengthen their identification with the video content, showing their willingness to actively spread it to others [7]. Since its establishment, the official Tik Tok account of "People's Daily" has gained more than 100 million followers and up to 12 billion likes, which shows its high popularity on the Tik Tok short video platform. In addition, the content of the "People's Daily" Tiktok account has also been forwarded and shared by the audience to social platforms such as Wechat moments, Weibo and Douban, which has expanded the communication effect of the platform to a certain extent and promoted the development of short videos in the field of social platforms.

3. Multimodal Rhetoric Analysis of Official Short Video

The use of multimodal rhetoric in short videos of official media subtly promotes the transmission of information, and at the same time helps the audience to understand the event more deeply and have emotional resonance. The figures of speech play multiple roles, including enhancing sensory experience, growing content appeal, and promoting audience engagement. Through this communication strategy, official media can better connect with the audience and deliver appealing and influential content more profoundly.

3.1. Multimodal Metaphor

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action [8]. In contrast to monomodal metaphors, multimodal metaphors are metaphors whose target and source are each represented exclusively or predominantly in different modes. The qualification “exclusively or predominantly” is necessary because non-verbal metaphors often have targets and/or sources that are cued in more than one mode simultaneously [9]. Multimodal metaphor is constituted by a mapping, or blending, of domains from different modes, e.g., visual and verbal, or visual and acoustic which focuses on the interaction of pictorial and written signs [10]. According to this, after literature review and specific identification and statistics of multi-modal dynamic corpus, it is found that three metaphors, namely war metaphor, hero metaphor and gesture metaphor, are mainly used in the videos related to the new corona virus outbreak on the official Tik Tok account of People's Daily.

3.1.1. War Metaphor

Many of the epidemic videos on the People's Daily's official Tik Tok account use metaphorical symbols of "fighting", such as using language about military and showing scenes resembling war. This metaphorical symbol compares the fight against the epidemic to a battle, and compares the anti-epidemic personnel such as medical workers, volunteers and government officials to battle heroes, emphasizing the seriousness of the epidemic situation and the importance and urgency of fighting the epidemic, so as to encourage people's morale. For example, on February 6, 2020, in the video titled "Zhang Wenhong: From now on everyone is a soldier, to" suffocate "the virus" in two weeks, the people are compared to "soldiers", and the anti-epidemic action is compared to a war, highlighting the urgency and severity of the anti-epidemic action. In addition, the People's Daily on March 10, 2020, a video titled "We will strengthen confidence together, will win the battle against the epidemic!" People's Daily used the homophonic word "war" to compare the prevention and control work of the corona virus epidemic to a war without smoke of gunpowder to highlight the importance of fighting the epidemic. In this way, the efforts have inspired people and highly praised the strength and spirit of the Chinese nation to unite as one and fight the epidemic together.

3.1.2. Heroic Metaphor

During the epidemic period, the video on the official Tik Tok account of People's Daily existed many metaphorical symbols of heroes, comparing medical workers, volunteers and other anti-epidemic personnel to heroes, showing many medical workers working day and night to treat patients, emphasizing their virtuous quality and great spirit. For example, the title of the video in the February 28, 2020 is: "A post-2000s nurse: Put on a protective suit, I'm not a child!" There are no superheroes, just a bunch of kids wearing these clothes and fighting death... Salute!" This video was based on the interview of a female nurse born after 2000, accompanied by lyrical music, and at the end of the video, the word "salute" was highlighted in yellow font, which fully reflected the selfless dedication of the medical staff to sacrifice myself to achieve our goal and the gratitude of the people. In a video released on March 22, 2020, the yellow bold font at the top of the video wrote "Yunnan medical team evacuated, Xianning people rushed ten miles to escort heroes" and directly used the word "hero" to pay tribute to medical staff, volunteers and relevant staff and other excellent groups fighting the epidemic. They're highly praised for their heroism and selfless dedication.

3.2. Multimodal Metonymy

Multimodal Metonymy is a cognitive mechanism characterized by using specific elements from various modes such as images, text, and sound to represent a whole, specific parts to represent other parts, or representing specific parts with the whole. In the identification and interpretation of metonymy, the source domain plays a pivotal role. The concepts and content represented by modes like images and sound within the source domain are often intricate. Hence, identifying the source

domain requires a deeper understanding of the cultural and social context within which the source domain exists.

3.2.1. Single Entity Represents the Whole Entity

The concept of a single entity representing the whole entity is to symbolize or represent the whole group, society, or a situation through an individual or single representative entity. Screenshots of the People's Daily TikTok account on May 11, 2022, and January 7, 2021, are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows a husband and wife volunteer in the lockdown area of Zhengzhou, Henan Province, kneeling on the ground and kowtowing to the air when they learned of their father's death. Figure 2 shows volunteers from Dalian Ocean University delivering supplies to students in their dormitories on a snowy day. The concept of metonymy here extends the individual of each enthusiastic and kind volunteer to the group of volunteers who have contributed their modest efforts during the epidemic. The official media of the People's Daily spread the concept of volunteers to the masses, motivating the masses and letting everyone understand that people are not cold and ruthless in this invisible battle, but full of warmth.

3.2.2. Space Represents the Whole



(1)

(2)

Fig 1. a husband-and-wife volunteer in the lockdown area of Zhengzhou, Henan Province, kneeling on the ground and kowtowing to the air when they learned of their father's death

Fig 2. volunteers from Dalian Ocean University delivering supplies to students in their dormitories on a snowy day



(3)

(4)

Fig 3. The Oriental Pearl Tower in Shanghai under the epidemic situation

Fig 4. The streets of Shanghai under the epidemic situation

As shown in Figures 3 and 4, screenshots from the People's Daily's Douyin video on May 2, 2022, show the Oriental Pearl, a landmark building in Shanghai shining in the night, and the streets of Shanghai's small western-style buildings full of Shanghai flavor. These two locations are iconic areas of Shanghai, and the video represents the outbreak of the epidemic in Shanghai during May 2022 through a metonymic model of space instead of the whole, and the subtitle says: "Come on Shanghai, we are all here!" It shows that the people are concerned about the trend of the epidemic and support the aid to Shanghai, showing the people's determination to resist the epidemic wholeheartedly.

In addition, the background of the People's Daily's TikTok account on January 25-28, 2020 is the Tianxingzhou Yangtze River Bridge, a river crossing channel connecting Qingshan District and Jiang'an District in Wuhan. The basic meaning of a bridge is connection. The river in the picture is the Yangtze River, and Wuhan is the place where the Yangtze River flows, so the image presents the calm lake surface of the Tianxingzhou Bridge and the Yangtze River, and the target is Wuhan. The meaning of this image is that the epidemic is mainly spreading in Wuhan, and it is necessary to pay attention to protection. This image points to the Wuhan Bridge and the Yangtze River in Tianxingzhou using a metonymic model of the place of Wuhan.



Fig 5. The background of the People's Daily's TikTok account on January 25-28, 2020

3.2.3. Sub-Events Represents Complex Events

China has been fighting against the epidemic for a long time, and the whole matter of fighting the epidemic is too grand to be fully expressed in a short video of dozens of seconds. Thus, on People's Daily's official TikTok account, multiple crucial events were depicted to complement various aspects of the fight against the epidemic. This exemplifies the representation of sub-events for complex events within the conceptual framework of metaphors.

During the epidemic, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has always put the health and life safety of the people in the first place. Holding numerous meetings, they delved deep into studying the epidemic, continually deploying and mobilizing efforts in disease prevention and control. President Xi Jinping put forward the overall principle of strengthening confidence and solidarity and taking science-based and targeted measures. Under the leadership of the Central Committee, we fought a people's war against the outbreak. On July 28th, 2020, in a TikTok video by People's Daily, General Secretary Xi emphasized, " Only mutual support, solidarity, and cooperation is the right way to overcome the crisis." This speech expressed China's attitude towards the epidemic and its desire to cooperate with countries around the world to regard the whole earth as a community with a shared future for mankind. These instances symbolize the concept of representing complex events by likening crucial stages in pandemic response to key segments, showcasing the idea of metaphorical representation.

4. The Construction of National Image

During the epidemic, the official TikTok account, People's Daily, the official media selected in this article, has increased the reporting of the epidemic through its multimodal short video account and

displayed the anti-epidemic situation at home and abroad from multiple angles. This not only serves as crucial documentation of China's war against the epidemic but also helps to resolve the crisis of public opinion domestic and international public opinion crises. Consequently, the dissemination of official media anti-epidemic short videos as a media carrier promotes the construction of a new Chinese national image.

4.1. Image of a Responsible Power

As a visual carrier, a national image identifier profoundly reflects a country's core values, spiritual traits, and symbolic representation. It highlights the core concept and unique temperament of the national image in the form of words, patterns, and core slogans. In the process of design and dissemination of the national image, it should be fully considered to convey the national values and attract domestic and foreign audiences, to create a national image with distinctive characteristics and profound connotations.

Moreover, despite facing formidable challenges in its epidemic control efforts, China chose to send medical teams to provide medical supplies to other countries and regions that were also suffering epidemics in the world. This exemplifies the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, China shows its responsible image as a major nation actively engaged in collective efforts to combat the pandemic.

4.2. Image of Efficient Government

Efficient and people-oriented governance by the government can effectively cultivate a positive national image. The administrative and service capabilities of the government directly impact the assessments of a country by various sectors both domestically and internationally. With the development of the internet, information has become increasingly transparent, and public expectations of governments have risen. Additionally, in the current international environment marked by close interactions and collaborations among nations, a government's international image significantly impacts the overall international perception of a country.

By reporting on the daily lives of the people during the pandemic period and integrating individual stories and experiences within the national context of combating the outbreak, emotional resonance among the public can be evoked. At the same time, with different modes and complementary relationships between modes, we insist the principle of people's life and health should be the first. It reflects the efficiency, scientific policymaking, and precise strategies of the government led by the Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core during this significant public health emergency.

4.3. Spirit of Solidarity and Unity

The national spirit of solidarity and unity is an important cornerstone for building a national image. The 5,000 years of history and rich cultural heritage of the Chinese nation have formed the national spirit of patriotism. It is deeply rooted in China's profound culture, and embodies the social life of the Chinese people, serving as a spiritual pursuit—a vital bond essential for their existence. A nation's spirit reflects its cultural soft power, national cohesion, and vitality. If a country is to play an important role on the world stage, it must inspire the national spirit and enhance its sense of identity and pride.

By showing the frontline workers' efforts, stories of their interactions with patients and families, as well as commemorations for the sacrifice of frontline workers, a comprehensive portrayal of their unity and dedication in the fight against the epidemic. It not only arouses the emotional resonance of the Chinese people, but also allows foreign people to understand and feel our united national spirit, and expand the influence of cultural soft power in the image of the international country to a certain extent.

5. Suggestion of Multimodal Communication Strategies

In an era of profound media integration and transformative communication patterns, major international events necessitate leveraging cloud-based platforms to facilitate interactive learning, presenting novel challenges to the construction of national images and international communication strategies among nations. The experience of China's official media during the epidemic has provided a useful reference for future international communication practice.

5.1. Triggering Public Emotional Resonance

According to the way of thinking and psychological orientation of communication, the communication form can be divided into rational communication and emotional communication. Rational communication refers to the use of rational thinking in the subject's thinking of communication activities, while emotional communication refers to the influence of the recipients of communication activities through emotional logic and guidance modes, and strives to achieve the needs and goals of communication activities based on emotions.

Short videos possess an "emotional attribute" due to their integration of audio-visual language with new media, allowing emotions to be deeply embedded and maximally released [11]. This implies that compared to text, short videos have a stronger "emotional attribute" as they not only serve the purpose of textual information but also enrich the content and meaning presented by the media through visual and auditory elements. Some scholars argue that "mainstream media should disseminate positive energy through short videos not by preaching or superficial expressions but by focusing more on ordinary people, to narrow the emotional distance with users and stimulate users' interest and resonance." [12]. A richer emotional content also signifies expression through "appealing to emotions." "Appealing to emotions" is a persuasive technique commonly used in films and television productions. It infects the audience by creating a certain atmosphere or using emotionally rich symbols to achieve persuasion. This technique is often utilized in narrative short videos, establishing an emotional bridge between the video and the audience, fostering 'empathetic communication,' making it easier for the audience to accept the content being communicated [13]. Multi-modal short videos present facts while also directing emotions. The emotional attitudes displayed by the characters in the material create an emotional foundation between the characters and the viewers. Consequently, viewers' emotions resonate with those of the characters, significantly enhancing the emotional impact of official media anti-epidemic short videos.

5.2. Dependent on Public Participation

The shaping and dissemination of a national image involve a multifaceted and interactive process encompassing various levels and roles. Compared to government-led communication approaches, the private self-media exhibits greater flexibility, provides richer content, covers a wider range of topics, and is more closely aligned with the actual lives of ordinary citizens. The empowerment derived from internet technology allows civil initiatives to achieve better results when spreading China's image and stories, a communication method that is subtle yet profoundly enduring. Furthermore, the authenticity and simplicity of short videos created by the public self-media contribute to dispelling certain misconceptions held by overseas audiences about China.

Government departments should make full use of non-governmental forces to enhance people's participation in the dissemination of the national image. Experts, scholars, and opinion leaders are encouraged to use short video technology to make China's voice heard on the international stage. The government also needs to cooperate with the short video platform to train and guide self-media individuals in an all-round and multi-channel manner, improving short video production skills and content quality. This collaborative effort aims to enhance the country's capability and proficiency in disseminating its national image.

5.3. Construction of National Image

According to Bourdieu, a differentiated society is not a seamlessly integrated totality governed by systemic functions. Instead, it is comprised of a set of objectives, historical relations between positions rooted in specific forms of power, often referred to as "fields" [14]. Consequently, in the international arena, the quality of a nation's image becomes a crucial factor in the context of international competition.

A broad perspective and forceful communication might evoke resistance of recipients regarding the dissemination of a country's image while interactive communication from an ordinary perspective may be more efficient. Therefore, creators of short video content should focus on real societal issues, and give full play to their advantages of interactivity and friendliness. Searching for stories closely related to people's lives that evoke emotions can enhance overseas audiences' positive perception of a country's image. Short videos have become a key platform for building a national image during the epidemic because of their multi-channel and multi-creator characteristics, which help to reduce misunderstandings in global information dissemination and confirm China's image as a "sunny, confident, open and hopeful" country through successful communication practices. In cross-cultural communication, employing empathetic storytelling and incorporating elements such as animation and music into short videos can help make the content more engaging and attractive. These elements easily transcend language and cultural barriers, effectively increasing the emotional impact and persuasiveness of short video content.

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