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Study on Empathy Communication Strategies in Typical Character Reporting: A Case Study of “PE Teacher Wang Hongxu’s Last 100-Meter Sprint in Life” Postprint

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Abstract

Empathetic communication provides excellent methodological strategies for mainstream media to control the public opinion arena. The work “The Last 100-Meter Sprint in Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu’s Life” constructs immersive empathetic scenarios through audio-visual elements, awakens emotional resonance among audiences through heroic deeds, and narrates authentic emotions from a first-person perspective, thereby achieving favorable communication effects and exerting positive social effects, thus constituting an exemplary model of empathetic communication.

Full Text

A Study on Empathy Communication Strategies in Typical Character Reporting: A Case Study of “Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu’s Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life”

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Abstract: Empathy communication provides an excellent strategic approach for mainstream media to maintain control over public discourse. The work *Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu’s Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life* creates immersive empathetic scenes through audio-visual elements, awakens emotional resonance through heroic deeds, and conveys genuine feelings through first-person narratives, achieving remarkable communication effects and positive social impact. It stands as an exemplary model of empathy communication.

Keywords: Empathy Communication; Typical Character Reporting; *Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu’s Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life*

The concept of “empathy” was first introduced by humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers from the perspective of treating psychological disorders, referring to an individual’s capacity to accurately understand others’ emotions and respond appropriately in specific situations. Empathy comprises emotional empathy and cognitive empathy—the former involves emotional contagion and recognition, emerging in infancy, while the latter entails feeling and understanding others’ emotional states. Research demonstrates that empathy facilitates communication and coordination between different actors, promotes altruistic and prosocial behavior in individuals, and helps reduce intergroup aggression and conflict while improving intergroup relations at the collective level. As Batson and colleagues argue: “Empathy can build a bridge connecting one’s own emotional experiences with others’ well-being.”

Scholar Wu Fei first proposed the concept of “empathy communication,” introducing psychological empathy into communication practice. In the communication field, empathy not only strengthens audience identification with communicators at the cognitive level but also evokes audience understanding at the emotional level, satisfying the “appeal to emotion” principle proposed by Hovland. For typical character reporting to generate empathy, journalists must not only stand in the interviewee’s position but also experience, think, and express from the audience’s perspective, achieving genuine feeling, precise transmission, and emotional infection through empathetic understanding.

The first-prize winner of the 32nd China News Award, *Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu’s Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life*, recounts how 35-year-old Wang Hongxu, a physical education teacher at Yucai Primary School in Dadukou District, Chongqing, encountered drowning children on Children’s Day 2021. Without hesitation, he leapt into the water at a 100-meter sprint speed, holding up lives before succumbing to exhaustion and never reaching shore again. This typical character report features a clear theme and innovative form, was reprinted by dozens of mainstream media outlets upon release, garnered over 17 million views, triggered strong social empathy, and positively promoted an atmosphere of learning from role models of the era throughout society.

This paper selects this typical character report as its research object to analyze how it constructs an empathetic space, awakens audience emotional empathy, and ultimately achieves effective communication outcomes.

1. Immersion: Creating Empathetic Scenes Through Audio-Visual Elements

In their book *The Age of Context*, Scoble and Israel analyze five technological elements—big data, mobile devices, social media, sensors, and positioning systems—to assert that the internet will enter a new era, the Age of Context, within the next 25 years. This signifies that our contemporary era is indeed an age of context. In internet-based information exchange contexts, traditional

empathetic aesthetics has evolved into immersive, experiential, and synesthetic aesthetic experiences, with emotional resonance between scenes forming the core mechanism of contextual communication. Empathy typically requires an immersive psychological environment or behavioral scenario. *Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu's Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life* innovatively employs animation combined with real-person storytelling to present scenes of Wang Hongxu bidding farewell to relatives, friends, colleagues, and students after his sacrifice.

Sound complements visuals to reconstruct the scene, delivering an immersive viewing experience to audiences. As a medium, sound not only transmits information but also directly stimulates human senses as a physical environment. In *Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu's Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life*, sound operates on two levels. The first consists of direct emotional raw audio from real-person narration, such as the opening statement by Wang Hongxu's wife, her eyes brimming with tears and voice trembling: "I think many years from now, the first thing I'll tell him [our child] won't be that his father was a hero, but that his father was a father who loved him deeply." This layer of sound enables audiences to directly receive emotional information and gradually enter the empathetic scene. The second layer is the ambient audio that consistently accompanies the visuals. Audio effects play a crucial role in rendering emotions and enhancing the work's emotional appeal, constituting an essential component in constructing empathetic scenes. The opening audio is slow and solemn, guiding audiences into the narrative alongside characters' heartfelt expressions; the music then becomes slightly more urgent as visuals of Wang Hongxu's sacrifice appear, foreshadowing tragedy and rendering a heavy atmosphere; the middle section transitions to a melodious tune as animated images of Wang Hongxu bid farewell to loved ones, shifting the emotional tone to warmth; finally, the music rises slightly to highlight the theme: "In the vast sky, there are always stars / Silently burning themselves / Illuminating the night / In this ordinary world, there are always people / Making extraordinary choices / Their names / Are called heroes." As a vital element of "audio-visual communication," sound constructs an enclosed empathetic scene through layered rendering and progression, immersing audiences within it.

2. Role Model: Heroic Deeds Awakening Emotional Resonance

Significant real-life examples and proximity-based reporting that reflects everyday life more readily generate emotional resonance among the masses. "Role Model of the Era" represents a major national advanced exemplar, possessing strong advanced nature, representativeness, contemporaneity, and typicality. These figures bear the important mission of leading social values and building social consensus. Wang Hongxu, who sacrificed his life to save drowning children, was honored by the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China as a "Role Model of the Era," establishing a

behavioral model of great love and righteous courage for the masses.

The 21st century is an era where risks and opportunities erupt simultaneously. Under the construction of a law-based society, people's self-awareness has strengthened, and they understand how to employ various means to secure their own benefits, leading to the rise of individualism. Internet technology has transformed people's behavioral patterns, most notably by breaking through temporal and spatial barriers to enable human connections. However, the limitations of human information processing capacity prevent people from maintaining highly familiar intimate relationships with all connected others, resulting in weak ties replacing strong ties and a shift from an "acquaintance society" to a "stranger society," creating a sense of "emotional indifference." In this context, selfless dedication, sacrificing life for righteousness, and courageous intervention more easily evoke emotional resonance and achieve emotional synchronization. *Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu's Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life* recreates Wang Hongxu's heroic deeds of righteous courage, allowing people to see that ordinary worlds also produce ordinary heroes who step forward, thereby becoming emotionally infected, developing empathy, generating self-other comparison cognition, and producing emotional responses related to behavioral choices.

Furthermore, previous media coverage of all "Role Model of the Era" heroic deeds has already built foundational value consensus and formed an emotional community. This report on Wang Hongxu reinforces people's value identification and deepens consensus through both emotional and cognitive empathy. This "basic consensus-empathy communication-deepened consensus" model does not represent a simple unidirectional cycle but rather a spiraling upward state. Over time, through integrated reporting and empathy communication on "Role Models of the Era," media can effectively connect emotional resonance points between role models and audiences, amplifying communication effects in the converged media environment, thereby facilitating smoother integration of role model images into the environment and people's hearts to achieve the social benefits of leading values and building consensus.

3. Authenticity: First-Person Narratives Conveying Genuine Emotions

Swedish psychologist Ulf Dimberg notes that empathy is unconscious. We do not "decide" to feel what others feel; rather, we "naturally" empathize. *Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu's Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life* employs first-person perspective and monologue shots to express genuine emotions that strike directly at the heart.

First-person narrative perspective more easily expresses personal emotions without the constraints of edited scripts, enabling authentic expression of inner thoughts with strong immersive effects and more intimate, genuine expressive impact. The video's first-person narrators include Wang Hongxu's wife, father,

friends, colleagues, and students, each expressing their genuine feelings about Wang Hongxu from their own perspectives while collectively shaping the “hero” character image. His wife says that many years later, she wants to tell their child first not that his father was a hero but that he was a father who deeply loved his child, shaping the image of a devoted father. His father expresses pride that his son made the right choice, shaping the image of a son who honored family tradition. A colleague reveals lingering hope that he might have survived, conveying deep regret and mourning. Students shout out how much they miss him, shaping the image of a beloved teacher. It is precisely because multi-perspective first-person narration creates a three-dimensional, full-bodied “hero” image that emotional resonance can strike directly at people’s hearts.

Moreover, these heartfelt words spoken directly to the camera without onlookers unconsciously convey emotions to audiences. The actions and emotions displayed during their monologues are authentic and involuntary, achieving emotional resonance with viewers. It is precisely the inadvertently revealed emotions in their expressions that touch audiences’ soft hearts, enabling viewers before their screens to form an emotional community under shared emotional resonance. This approach both guarantees the report’s authenticity and achieves effective communication outcomes.

4. Planning: Timely Communication Generating Public Attention

Emotional communication emphasizes empathetic effects through emotional experience. Applying identical communication strategies to similar events will significantly diminish their impact. *Physical Education Teacher Wang Hongxu’s Final 100-Meter Sprint in Life* achieved both awards and positive social benefits precisely because of its creators’ meticulous planning.

First, the theme is clear and prominent, highlighting Wang Hongxu’s touching deeds while exploring the family tradition inheritance from his teacher family background, making the typical character both relatable and respectable. Second, the reporting is solid and thorough: the production team began following the story on the day of Wang Hongxu’s sacrifice, traveled to Beijing to cover the “Role Model of the Era Release Ceremony,” and interviewed over twenty relatives, friends, and students, recreating his filial piety as a son, loving care as a father, deep affection as a husband, and benevolent heart as a teacher, presenting a comprehensive and three-dimensional ordinary hero. Third, the form is innovative: to minimize secondary trauma to the bereaved from multiple interviews, the work innovatively combines animation reconstruction with real-person storytelling, depicting Teacher Wang bidding farewell to important people in his life, aiming to help relatives, students, and friends move beyond grief, regain courage for life, and move forward bravely.

Additionally, in the converged media era, matrix communication by media outlets facilitates opinion momentum and expands communication effects. The

work was released following the conclusion of Wang Hongxu's story presentation report, once again pushing his "Role Model of the Era" deeds to a climax. The conveyed encouragement to Teacher Wang's relatives, students, and friends demonstrates mainstream media's humanistic care for families in typical character reporting, earning recognition and moving both netizens and Wang's family and friends. After its release, the work was reprinted by dozens of mainstream media outlets, accumulating over 17 million views. The emotional community formed through empathy communication continues expanding, actively promoting an atmosphere of learning from Role Models of the Era throughout society.

Successful planning requires fully discovering news leads, while generating public resonance demands employing empathy communication strategies that consider both narrative perspective and media characteristics to create works with emotional depth and communicative power. The editorial team discovered and reported on this typical subject that embodies teachers' benevolent hearts, human love, and positive energy, triggering emotional identification and attracting public attention.

5. Conclusion

Under the backdrop of technology empowerment, how to firmly maintain control over public opinion positions is a question all mainstream media must consider, and empathy communication provides an excellent strategic approach. Specifically in typical character reporting, empathy enables typical characters' images and spirits to penetrate more deeply into people's hearts, maximizing the exemplary role and value guidance of typical characters and benefiting social stability and core values construction.

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