

A Study on Affective Communication Strategies for Customs Government Short Videos: A Case Study of the “Customs Release” Douyin Account (Postprint)

Authors: Meng Defu, Meng Defu

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Abstract

【目的】 Nowadays, short videos are regarded as the “light cavalry” of the internet, and some government-affiliated new media Douyin accounts have achieved considerable success by employing emotional communication strategies. Therefore, understanding and researching the role of emotion in short videos is of significant value.

【方法】 This paper takes the official Douyin account of the General Administration of Customs, “Customs Release”, as its research object. Based on the emotional analysis framework by foreign scholars Hart and Andrew Ross, which categorizes emotions into “baseline emotions” and “state emotions”, this study conducts a content analysis of its short video news to summarize its emotional communication strategies.

【结果】 The study finds that the emotional communication strategies of the “Customs Release” Douyin account include: conducting emotional communication on the basis of narrative, evoking emotions in the audience through visual and auditory layers, constructing national identity among the audience through baseline emotions such as patriotism, people’s sentiment, and heroes of the national gate, and guiding audience emotions through positive state emotions.

【结论】 Currently, the “Customs Release” Douyin account still needs to continuously innovate its content and forms to better fulfill the propaganda function of government-affiliated new media.

Full Text

Research on Emotional Communication Strategies of Government Short Videos in the Customs Category: A Case Study of the “Customs Release” Douyin Account

(General Administration of Customs Office, Government Affairs Disclosure Division, Dongcheng District, Beijing, 100730)

Abstract:

[Objective] Today, short videos are regarded as the “light cavalry” of the internet. Some government new media Douyin accounts have achieved considerable success by employing emotional communication methods. Therefore, understanding and studying the role of emotion in short videos holds significant value. **[Method]** This paper takes the official Douyin account of the General Administration of Customs—Customs Release—as its research object. Based on the emotional analysis framework of foreign scholars Hart and Andrew Ross, which categorizes emotions into “baseline emotions” and “state emotions,” it conducts content analysis of its short video news to summarize its emotional communication strategies. **[Result]** The study finds that the emotional communication strategies of the Customs Release Douyin account include: conducting emotional communication on the basis of narrative, emotionally arousing audiences at visual and auditory levels, constructing audience national identity through baseline emotions of patriotism, people’s sentiment, and border heroism, and guiding audience emotions through positive state emotions. **[Conclusion]** The current Customs Release Douyin account needs to continuously innovate content and forms to better fulfill the propaganda function of government new media.

Keywords: government short video; Customs Release; Douyin; emotional communication; baseline emotion

(1) Government Short Videos

Government short videos refer to a new media form with durations ranging from a few seconds to several minutes, disseminated through mobile intelligent terminals and network platforms, with short video apps as the platform [1]. According to the definition of government new media in the “Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Promoting the Healthy and Orderly Development of Government New Media” issued in December 2018, the concept of government short videos can be summarized as: government accounts opened by administrative organs at all levels, public institutions with administrative nature, and their affiliated institutions on short video platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou, and WeChat Channels. The content published by these government accounts focuses on government information disclosure, building a bridge between government and people, and safeguarding public rights and interests.

(2) Emotional Communication

Emotion describes advanced social feelings with stable and profound social meanings, such as patriotism, sense of responsibility, and material desires. Some scholars consider emotion as a type of information from the perspective of “information theory” [2]. Other researchers, from the interactive ritual theory, believe that the stage of “interactive rituals” creates an interactive emotional space and disseminates emotional culture [3]. Among various viewpoints, the author tends to favor the definition proposed by Li Jianjun et al. based on the dialectical relationship between emotional communication and rational communication: compared with rational communication, the subject of emotional communication activities adopts emotional logic structures and directional methods, influencing the communication receptor through emotional subject activities, and using emotion as the basis and bond of communication to strive to achieve the purpose of communication activities [4].

(3) Related Research on Emotional Communication

1. Foreign Literature Review First, research on emotional labor of news producers. Foreign scholar OMAR V. ROSAS used semi-structured interviews to conduct empirical research on “journalists’ attitudes toward expressing emotion in reporting,” finding that journalists hold a strategic attitude toward emotion. Therefore, emotional attitudes play an important role in journalists’ reporting.

Second, research on emotion in news texts. British professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen studied Pulitzer Prize-winning articles from 1995 to 2011, discovering that exemplary journalism largely relies on emotional narratives. On the other hand, the systematic structure of emotional strategic rituals also provides a basis for journalists to use emotion strategically, such as avoiding overly sensational images or dramatic elements in news reporting.

2. Domestic Related Research **(1) Theoretical research on emotional communication in news.** Domestic scholar Han Xizhong compared facts to the flesh and bones of news and emotion to the blood of news, believing that emotion runs through the entire news production process and constitutes important content of news works [5]. Ma Lin believes that news emotion is a psychological reaction of journalists stimulated by news sources, reflected in their news works [6].

(2) Research on emotional communication strategies in news. Scholar Liu Jinglin believes that communication strategies refer to certain means and methods adopted by communicators to complete the overall task of communication activities that conform to the psychological activity characteristics and laws of the audience [7]. Scholar Zhang Chunbin believes that communication strategies refer to the specific planning of mass media in applying their socio-cultural functions, including overall planning and the art of control in information dis-

semination [8]. Therefore, the author references these two scholars to define “communication strategy” as: in communication activities, certain means and methods that conform to the audience’s psychological and emotional activities are adopted to achieve communication purposes and strive for good communication effects.

(3) Research on text data mining and emotion recognition in emotional communication from a computer science perspective. Scholar Qi Tianmei et al. used fine-grained emotion analysis methods to study the emotional tendencies and intensities of foreign exchange news to analyze the data characteristics of foreign exchange news in terms of emotion [9].

II. Research Object and Approach

This paper selects the Customs Release Douyin account as its research object, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, and from multidisciplinary perspectives including journalism, sociology, and psychology, studies the role of emotional communication in the news practice of the Customs Release Douyin account. The main research questions are:

Question 1: What role does emotion play in news practice?

Question 2: What emotional strategy mechanisms does the Customs Release Douyin account use to enhance audience patriotism and national identity?

III. Content Characteristics of the Customs Release Douyin Account

1. Theoretical Framework and Research Design

This section primarily employs content analysis to analyze and summarize the content characteristics of emotional communication in the Customs Release Douyin account. This paper adopts the synthetic week sampling method. The author first set the sampling time interval as two complete years, from July 2021 to June 2023, totaling over 700 short videos; then selected 6 synthetic weeks from July 2021 to June 2022 and July 2022 to June 2023 respectively; finally, statistics showed that in the 12 synthetic weeks, the Customs Release Douyin account published a total of 232 short video news items.

2. Descriptive Analysis

Based on existing domestic and foreign research, the analysis categories include: news subject matter, main characters, state emotion, baseline emotion, special effects, background music emotion type, news title, video duration, and communication effectiveness.

(1) News Subject Matter Customs business subject matter includes: inbound and outbound goods, endangered flora and fauna, national biosecurity,

and customs anti-fraud reminders. Subject Matter Statistics Table shows that among the 232 short video samples, videos on inbound and outbound content are the most numerous, with 78 items, accounting for 33.6%. Among these, the supervision and management of inbound items are particularly numerous, mostly exposing illegal behaviors at port passenger inspection sites. For example, the “earth” news “Shatian Customs Seizes 300 Jin of Prohibited Inbound Soil” helps audiences understand that soil often harbors pathogenic microorganisms, nematodes, insect eggs, and other harmful organisms. In addition, content on combating “foreign garbage,” safeguarding national biosecurity, and protecting endangered flora and fauna are also key reporting subjects.

(2) Main Characters Among the sample short videos, customs law enforcement personnel constitute the vast majority, with their law enforcement reports actively shaping the image of customs as a quasi-military disciplined force.

(3) Emotional State According to emotional value, emotions can be divided into positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions are those generated by people when positive value increases or negative value decreases. The state emotional tone of the sample short videos is primarily positive, accounting for 70%, neutral or ambiguous emotions account for 10%, and negative emotion short video news items number 46, accounting for 20%.

Positive emotions total 162 items, mainly including awe, inspiration, joy, satisfaction, and gratification. Awe-type videos number 18 items, accounting for 6.4%. This category covers content on national sovereignty and border actions, such as “Not a Single Bit of the China Map Can Be Wrong!” Gratification-type short videos number 37 items, accounting for 17.2%: these are passenger inspection videos like “Rich and Willful” and “Moutai Porter.”

Negative emotions are those generated by people when positive value decreases or negative value increases. Negative emotions total 46 items, including regret, suspicion, and vigilance. Vigilance-type short videos number 20 items, accounting for 8.6%: such as “This Time It’s the Driver with Abnormal Expression.”

(4) Baseline Emotion News promoting border heroes and patriotism totals 113 items, accounting for 48.7%. One category concerns national sovereignty, such as “Not a Single Bit of the China Map Can Be Wrong!” Another involves border security content, demonstrating customs’ zero-tolerance policy toward criminal activities.

News serving the economy and people’s sentiment totals 87 items, accounting for 37.5%. This is roughly divided into three categories: first, inbound and outbound health quarantine, animal and plant quarantine, and inspection and quarantine, such as the series “Border Epidemic Battle: A Day in Dad’s Life” and “Old Ding Guards the Border.” Second, national biosecurity, such as Changsha Post Office Customs seizing plant seeds containing live insects (Indian meal

moths). Third, statutory inspection of import and export commodities, such as inspection, quarantine, and supervision of imported food and cosmetics.

Short video news serving “national priorities” numbers 32 items, accounting for 13.8%. One category includes announcements, such as “Head of Customs General Administration Port Supervision Department Answers Reporter Questions on Health Declaration Card Revision.” Another covers national and social events, such as “Beijing Winter Olympics Customs Cheerleading Team Is Here.” Additionally, there are warm stories: In December 2019, Hong Kong police officer Chen Liansheng, injured in an operation in Tsuen Wan and arranged for treatment at a Shenzhen hospital, was saluted by a customs officer when passing through Shenzhen Bay Port on his return to Hong Kong. Officer Chen never forgot this salute. On July 1, 2022, Global Times and Customs Release jointly interacted: “#It Was Him Who Saluted Hong Kong Police# Found! It Was Him Who Saluted Hong Kong Police! #Shenzhen Customs Officer Who Saluted Hong Kong Police Found#,” sparking a wave of warmth. Another category includes international friendly interactions, such as “The Story of ‘Sihai’ and ‘Jingjing’ Going Abroad.”

(5) Special Effects The Customs Release Douyin account uses few special effects in its short videos but does employ special effect subtitles: explosions, rays, etc., to convey emotions such as vigilance and warning.

(6) Background Music Emotion Background Music Emotion Type Statistics Table shows that all 232 short video samples contain background music, covering five emotional types, with tense music being the most common, used in 93 short videos, accounting for 40% of the total sample. Such videos mainly focus on on-site seizure reports, with background music rendering a tense atmosphere and emphasizing the urgency and serious harmfulness of the situation, such as Pudong Airport Customs seizing 300 aggressive 野蛮收获蚁 (barbarian harvester ants) in inbound express shipments.

Light-hearted background music appears in 38 videos, accounting for 16.4%. For example, “Bizarre Smuggling Is Really Addictive” showcases strange smuggling methods like mobile phones hidden in waist bindings, red wine in cookie boxes, and mobile phones in shower gel bottles, with slightly humorous music.

Deterrent warning background music appears in 40 videos, accounting for 17.2%. For instance, “Not a Single Bit of the China Map Can Be Wrong” uses music to enhance deterrent effects.

Victory and relaxed background music appears in 16 videos, accounting for 6.8%. For example, “Trailer Has Been Locked” creates a sense of victory despite difficulties.

Tense and suspenseful background music appears in 45 videos, accounting for 20%, used in content such as on-site opening inspections at ports and boarding vehicles and ships. For example, “This Time It’s the Driver with Abnormal

Expression” uses low, tense music to make the on-site tension and the suspect’s nervousness obvious.

(7) News Titles Punctuation marks are symbols that assist in recording language, used to indicate pauses, tone, and the nature and function of words. Among the sample videos, 30% use exclamation marks “!”, and 30 videos use question marks “?”. For example, titles like “Cure-all?” and “143 Tons of Waste Tires, Return!” use “?!” to express mockery and warning emotions.

Videos using “#”

On the Douyin short video platform, hashtags with “#” enhance sociality and interactivity. The Customs Release Douyin account created or participated in topics such as #Customs, Government Original Content Creator Alliance, and Anti-smuggling. For example, “#Customs Foreign Garbage Go Back Where You Came From! Huangpu Customs Returns 160 Tons of ‘Foreign Garbage’ ” constructs such positive “scenes” or “situations,” which is more conducive to achieving the role of leading mainstream values and public opinion guidance.

Videos using trendy internet slang

The Customs Release Douyin account’s titles adopt many current internet hot words, such as “Leopard Print, Red Legs, Black Socks, But It’s a Good Turtle” and “You’re So Toxic, You’re So Toxic, You’re So Toxic Toxic Toxic Toxic,” narrowing the distance with the public and achieving emotional connection.

(8) Video Duration Video Duration Statistics Table shows that among the 232 short video samples, 16-30 second videos are the most numerous, with 98 items, accounting for 42.2%, catering to the audience’s habit of quickly scrolling through short videos. However, due to the short length, the video content is often limited, fitting the characteristics of one-sentence news, such as “Guangzhou Customs Seizes 10 Live Beetles in Inbound Mail Channel.”

The second most numerous are 31-45 second short video news items, with 70 items, accounting for 30.1%. Compared with videos under 15 seconds, this duration can relatively more completely express news elements and narratives. Next are 46-60 second short videos, with 24 items, accounting for 10.3%. Videos over 60 seconds are the least numerous.

(9) Communication Effectiveness Top 3 Liked and Commented Short Videos Statistics Table shows examples of high-engagement posts.

IV. Emotional Communication Strategies of the Customs Release Douyin Account

The purpose of the Customs Release Douyin account’s emotional communication activities is to enhance its influence and ability to guide values. The application

of two baseline emotions—patriotism and people’s sentiment—is relatively common in Customs Release Douyin videos. When disseminating positive, energy-filled news, the Customs Release Douyin account excels at adding positive state emotions such as awe, inspiration, and victory. These state emotions form an organic combination and resonance effect with long-term baseline emotions of patriotism and people’s sentiment, thereby strengthening the audience’s cognitive and emotional identification with customs personnel as border guardians and homeland protectors, and maximizing the communication effect of the Customs Release Douyin account.

(1) Conveying Emotion in Authoritative Releases

Government new media possesses dual identities as official and media entities, providing important government services to society with the main purpose of providing consultation and services. The emotions contained in the Customs Release Douyin account are mostly awe, inspiration, joy, satisfaction, and gratification, with 72.4% promoting the patriotic spirit of border guardians. Thus, in the Douyin communication environment, Customs Release also attempts to use more colloquial and emotional expressions to increase human interest and appeal, reducing the difficulty of understanding traditional government information and improving audience acceptance.

Excellent short video works such as “Every Dot and Line Is Territory: Putian Customs Seizes ‘Problematic Globe’” and “Can’t Cut It, Can’t Untangle It: 4 Bags of Old Yarn” fully utilize the powerful platform resources and first-mover advantages of Customs Release, using close-up shots and details of inspected items to highlight the loyal image of border guardians, and using rapid editing and cadenced voice to convey the country’s consistent firm attitude and stance.

(2) Interactive Rituals Triggering Emotional Identification

Sociologist Collins’ interactive ritual chain theory posits that “interaction and rituals can continuously generate emotional energy, associate this emotion with symbols, and thus form the basis of organizational beliefs, organizational thoughts, organizational moral norms, and organizational culture.” According to Collins, people share common emotional and affective experiences in interactive rituals.

On October 28, 2022, “Alashankou Customs Intercepts 3,300 kg of Foreign Soil Hidden in Transport Vehicles” began trending, actively setting two netizen topics: “So scary, who brought it in, detention and sentencing” and “This kind of biological warfare is even more harmful if not noticed,” generating hundreds of mutual replies and explanations, with the topic of national biosecurity receiving tens of thousands of likes, further strengthening emotional identification with maintaining overall national security concepts.

The Customs Release Douyin account also excels at using conversational interaction in titles for emotional narratives, such as “Bringing So Many E-cigarettes,

I'm Really Speechless," "Can't Finish Taking Out Mobile Phones, Simply Can't Finish," and "Thick Waist Family." These news items use slightly playful and humorous conversational interactive discourse, enabling content to more effectively play the role of emotional communication and connection in the public opinion space.

(3) Clever Use of Emotional Expression in Titles

The Customs Release Douyin account commonly uses a structure of "emotional sentence pattern + verb-object sentence pattern" in titles. For example, "Who Understands This, Why Send Gas Tanks?" The first sentence "Who understands this" is a rhetorical question conveying helplessness, while the second sentence "Why send gas tanks" clarifies some elements of the news, serving as a lead to guide the audience to watch how the inspection scene unfolds. Another example is "Don't Be Too Ridiculous, Canned Marijuana Over 8 kg"—the first sentence is a strong emotional expression, while the second is standard one-sentence news. In other words, the Customs Release Douyin account's news titles adopt a mixed expression of narrative and emotion, which is quite different from traditional news that only allows narrative.

Some short videos even use reversal sentences within narrative sentences for emotional expression, such as "Cute, But a Killer," where the red-eared slider turtle is a globally recognized ecological killer.

(4) Audio-Visual Expression for Emotional Arousal

1. Visually constructing diverse visual expressions

With the increasing popularity of mobile devices, the ways of information transmission are also changing. Text, sound, images, video, etc., are increasingly showing a trend of integration. For example, the title "'Girlfriend Injection' Really Tied to Legs" uses bold golden-yellow large fonts, a series of long shots focusing on "girlfriend injections" covering a table and the injections being opened by customs officers, plus multiple close-ups of injections, creating a mysterious and thrilling on-site feeling that can influence the audience's subjective experience and physiological arousal of emotion.

2. Auditory amplification of audience emotions

To better integrate into the Douyin platform and conform to its communication characteristics, Customs Release adds appropriate background music to every news video. These music emotional types—low and suspenseful, deterrent warning, and light-hearted—can quickly attract and infect viewing users. For example, in the news "Raiding the Trunk," the internet hit song "Black Cauldron" is used. "Family Education Awakening" and "Deli Et Beni" are commonly used for on-site inspections, with the organic combination of video content and music quickly immersing viewers in the content.

(5) Guiding User Emotions with Positive State Emotions

State emotions are brief, concentrated, stress-induced emotions in a given situation. The Customs Release Douyin account's reports on sudden events and important time nodes often contain state emotions such as awe, inspiration, joy, satisfaction, and gratification, effectively boosting the structural emotional communication of the Customs Release Douyin account.

In mid-2023, the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission and the General Administration of Customs launched the 2023 "Discover the Most Beautiful Border Guardians • Assist the Transformation and Development of Northeast China's Old Industrial Base" online commentary brand activity. Through on-site visits and investigations, and field exploration of customs work, it was filled with intertwined state emotions of inspiration and joy. The release of "Discover the Most Beautiful Border Guardians • Assist the Transformation and Development of Northeast China's Old Industrial Base" and "#Discover the Most Beautiful You Comment I Discuss #I'm on the Border Frontline" immediately sparked heated discussion. User "Minzi" commented: "Keep it up, Northeast China. Pride of the Republic. Made indelible contributions to the Republic's construction." User "Juai" commented: "Support Northeast Revitalization!!! Eldest Son of the Republic." The number of comments and video likes both proved that emotional communication achieved good results.

(6) Constructing National Identity with Patriotism, People's Sentiment, and Border Heroes as Main Baseline Emotions

Patriotism, people's sentiment, and heroism are the main baseline emotions in Customs Release Douyin short video communication. News promoting patriotic spirit and border hero image totals 113 items, accounting for 48.7%.

The Customs Release Douyin account uses close-up shots to "intimately" display inspection scenes, condensing the topic elements most interesting to the audience into short videos, allowing audiences to cultivate a sense of national identity while watching. Videos such as "#Customs #ForeignGarbage: Even Blowing Up the Hype Is Still 'Foreign Garbage'" and "Changing the 'Vest' Is Still 'Foreign Garbage'" display shocking amounts of foreign garbage seized at border ports, conveying the firm stance and belief in patriotism and people's sentiment.

In videos conveying heroic baseline emotions, the Customs Release Douyin account mainly portrays professional heroes: border heroes. For example, in "Fake Fishing Tour, Real Smuggling," customs officers pursue fleeing yachts on turbulent seas, regarding their own flesh and blood as the "steel body" safeguarding people's lives and property. Their heroic deeds not only bring audiences feelings of being moved and trusted but also inspire more young people to join the customs ranks.

V. Conclusion

Faced with limited visual resources, how to better voice customs' message and tell customs stories well, Customs Release is constantly innovating and practicing content, understanding and catering to audience viewing preferences, and striving to convey news facts and mainstream social values in newer and more interesting ways.

In the emotional communication content of the Customs Release Douyin account, news subjects are mostly inbound and outbound inspection news, followed by animal, plant, and food quarantine news. Through these work contents, it shapes the image of border guardians protecting the country and people. The main characters are ordinary public servants. The contained state emotions are mainly positive emotions such as awe, inspiration, and gratification. In terms of baseline emotions, it mainly promotes patriotic spirit and heroism. It uses few special effect images to render atmosphere. Background music emotions are mainly tense, suspenseful, and victorious. In news titles, interrogative and exclamatory sentences are the most commonly used patterns, with titles using more people-friendly discourse to dissolve the distance with the public. Video duration is around 30 seconds, conforming to the media communication characteristics of the Douyin platform.

The study finds that the Customs Release Douyin account mainly conducts emotional communication in the following aspects: First, emotional expression on the basis of narrative, conveying emotion in authoritative releases, triggering emotional identification through interactive rituals, and clever use of emotional expression in titles. Second, emotionally arousing audiences at visual and auditory levels. Third, guiding audience emotions with positive state emotions such as awe and inspiration, and constructing national identity with patriotism, people's sentiment, and border heroes as main baseline emotions.

Due to time constraints and the author's limited academic ability, this study still has many shortcomings that require further learning and improvement. Due to the scarcity of relevant literature on emotional communication research in customs short videos, this study failed to conduct in-depth analysis using relevant theories from psychology and sociology, remaining at a relatively superficial level and being somewhat weak theoretically.

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Author Bio: Meng Defu (1984-), male, from Yunnan, holds a graduate degree, is a senior editor, research direction: TV legal programs, new media micro-videos.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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