

Postprint: Reflections on Media Innovation for “Telling China’ s Stories Well” in the Context of Media Convergence

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Abstract

As China’ s national power and international standing continue to rise, how to extend the economic, political, and cultural achievements generated by its development to benefit ordinary citizens and people in other parts of the world, while simultaneously pursuing peaceful and stable development and building a community with a shared future for mankind, has become an undertaking that urgently requires breakthroughs. “Telling China’ s story well” constitutes one of the key driving forces propelling this endeavor forward. Consequently, how to achieve effective cross-cultural communication and empathetic communication through “telling China’ s story well” will exert a profoundly significant influence on national image construction and the conduct of external publicity work. This article adopts media convergence as its analytical perspective and, through examining media usage patterns and effect observations in the process of “telling China’ s story well,” explores how media innovation and expansion can enhance the communication effectiveness of “telling China’ s story well” from both organizational and individual levels.

Full Text

Media Innovation in “Telling China’ s Story Well” Under the Trend of Media Convergence

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Abstract

As China’ s national power and international status continue to rise, ensuring that the economic, political, and cultural achievements of its development benefit both its citizens and people worldwide—while pursuing peaceful and stable

development and building a community with a shared future for mankind—has become an urgent undertaking. “Telling China’s story well” serves as a crucial driving force for advancing this mission. Therefore, achieving effective cross-cultural and empathetic communication through “telling China’s story well” will profoundly impact national image construction and external publicity efforts. This article examines media usage and observed effects in the process of “telling China’s story well” from the perspective of media convergence, exploring how media innovation and expansion can enhance communication impact from both organizational and individual levels.

Keywords: national image communication; external publicity; media concepts; media convergence; telling China’s story well

1. The Important Value of “Telling China’s Story Well”

Since General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the important concept of “telling China’s story well” at the National Conference on Ideological and Propaganda Work in August 2013, China has achieved notable accomplishments in international image communication fields such as external cultural exchange and national image construction. As international circumstances grow increasingly complex and regional competition intensifies, greater emphasis must be placed on the importance and necessity of “telling China’s story well” to drive innovation in external cultural exchange and national image communication.

1.1 Overview of “Telling China’s Story Well”

Since the reform and opening up, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, China has seized opportunities presented by economic and trade globalization, achieving globally remarkable results in national development. In this context, enabling the world to see and understand China through “telling China’s story well,” and allowing more people to recognize and benefit from China’s development, has become particularly important. Throughout this process, numerous representative organizations and individuals have emerged, introducing and showcasing China to the world through diverse media applications and rich content creation forms from multiple angles, achieving impressive results. However, facing a complex international public opinion environment, the work of “telling China’s story well” also faces challenges of being “stigmatized” and “politicized.” Therefore, continuously innovating theory and practice to enhance the capacity for “telling China’s story well” has been endowed with significant value and even historical importance.

1.2 Communication Practices of “Telling China’s Story Well”

Based on the author’s personal observation of “telling China’s story well” as a communication activity, this section summarizes current common practices

from three main aspects: mainstream media, civil society and individuals, and commercial and cultural transmission, providing a foundation for subsequent analysis of media innovation and expansion.

1.2.1 Mainstream Media Communication Practices On December 31, 2016, China Global Television Network (CGTN) was officially established, marking a new stage of unified management and coordinated operation for CCTV' s various foreign-language channels. Since its establishment, CGTN has achieved impressive developmental results, building a portfolio that includes six multilingual television channels (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Arabic), three overseas bureaus, a video news agency, and a new media cluster, enabling program production and broadcasting in major countries worldwide. With the slogan "See the Different," CGTN views the world through a Chinese perspective and transmits its voice and viewpoints to audiences in different countries. Through professional production standards and rich media communication forms, CGTN has become a typical example of mainstream media in the practice of "telling China' s story well."

In contrast to CGTN' s large-scale information dissemination capacity, other major media outlets typically rely on existing overseas media platforms for content distribution. For instance, many well-known provincial satellite television stations (Hunan TV, Dragon TV, Jiangsu TV, Beijing TV, etc.) commonly establish official accounts on major overseas social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.). This approach satisfies overseas Chinese audiences' demand for quality program content while also attracting foreign viewers through subtitles, conveying an authentic image of China to the world. Mainstream media practices of "telling China' s story well" typically rely on traditional media forms (such as radio, television, newspapers) with new media technologies serving primarily as supplementary information transmission tools. However, with the establishment of CGTN' s integrated media center and the deepening trend of media convergence in the communication field, mainstream media' s communication models in "telling China' s story well" will become increasingly diverse.

1.2.2 Civil Society and Individual Communication Practices The non-linear and two-way flow patterns of information in the mobile internet era have empowered individuals with the right and conditions for self-expression. The resulting influencer economy has spawned numerous representative content creators. Against the backdrop of "telling China' s story well," many Chinese "internet celebrities" have "gone overseas," establishing accounts on overseas video platforms. While earning revenue through clicks, they have also gained extremely high audience attention, fostering beneficial discussions about China' s image within certain social circles. For example, Li Ziqi and Wang Gang, a food writer, are both representative early-stage food bloggers. They gained extremely high online attention by showcasing the lives of Chinese working people. Although Wang Gang faced significant controversy over his presentation of live

animal slaughter in some videos, through discussion and exchange between Chinese and foreign netizens, both sides gradually recognized the need to properly view lifestyle and conceptual differences derived from cultural diversity.

This grounded, life-oriented information dissemination and communication should be regarded as a positive case of “telling China’s story well.” Civil society and individual communication practices demonstrate that “telling China’s story well” should not be a task-based passive execution but rather an active, positive proactive dissemination built upon reasonable interest appeals.

1.2.3 Commercial and Cultural Communication Practices In observing communication practices of “telling China’s story well,” information dissemination activities through narrow media channels are relatively common. Perhaps influenced by media concepts, broad media communication at the commercial and cultural level has yet to demonstrate significant impact in the field of “telling China’s story well.” In recent years, many domestic films have chosen to enter overseas markets upon release, repeatedly breaking production investment records. However, they often face a lose-lose situation in actual box office performance and reputation. For instance, films like *The Great Wall* and *The Bombing* encountered failures in their “going overseas” process, serving as typical cases.

At the cultural communication level, a common approach involves establishing “Confucius Institutes” and “Confucius Classrooms” for interpersonal cultural transmission through point-to-point forms. The author argues that cultural communication practices of “telling China’s story well” should start from the broad concept of culture, seek more media carriers, and promote development in related fields through formal innovation.

1.3 Media Analysis of “Telling China’s Story Well”

“Telling China’s story well” requires richer information dissemination media. Through the previous review of media in communication practices, it is evident that current cross-cultural communication work such as external publicity and national image building faces not only limitations in media development itself but also external environmental challenges. For example, the UK government revoked CGTN’s license for news activities within its borders in 2021. Facing such unfriendly actions, how to disseminate and establish a true, amiable, friendly, and lovely image of China through “telling China’s story well” becomes particularly important. Only by transmitting China’s image to the world through correct approaches and methods can false statements that deliberately “stigmatize” and “demonize” China in international competition be effectively countered.

Therefore, in external communication of “telling China’s story well,” besides the institutionalized communication activities led by mainstream media, greater attention should be paid to cultural communication topics that audiences in the

public sphere typically enjoy or are willing to see. Jürgen Habermas proposed in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that content of concern to audiences in the information field can be categorized from political and cultural perspectives. The dilemmas currently faced by CGTN and many Chinese diplomats in overseas activities precisely reflect the inevitable predicament caused by overemphasizing political content while neglecting cultural content in public sphere communication. This predicament often stems from audiences' failure to reach "consensus" with the value system producing information before encountering it. The description of "consensus" here originates from the Chicago School representative Louis Wirth's formulation in *Consensus and Mass Communication*. He argued that although the achievement of "consensus" exists almost only in some idealized social environment, people can still approach this social state infinitely through the cultivation of tolerance, respect, and restraint. In such a "consensus society," audience acceptance and tolerance of information will significantly improve. Thus, how to establish value consensus between audiences and Chinese stories is key to whether "telling China's story well" can achieve breakthroughs in the future.

From a broad perspective, internationally renowned cultural events and sports competitions such as the Oscars, Cannes Film Festival, UEFA Champions League, and NBA represent cultural practices in the process of seeking to build a "consensus society." Therefore, in the communication practice of "telling China's story well," it is necessary not only to enhance international discourse power through news communication activities under the mainstream discourse system but also to strengthen the construction and dissemination of cultural soft power by creating internationally influential and appealing events, producing excellent literary and artistic works, and establishing authoritative science and technology awards to enrich the "toolkit" for "telling China's story well."

2. Reflections on Media Innovation for "Telling China's Story Well"

Through the previous review and summary, it is evident that "telling China's story well" has achieved remarkable accomplishments after years of development. However, as the international situation changes and communication technology continues to advance, it is necessary to consider innovative technical means at the media level to ensure better communication effects and expand information channels. The following analysis explores this from organizational and individual levels.

2.1 Organizational-Level Media Concept Innovation

The author argues that enhancing cross-cultural communication influence is an effective entry point for media innovation at the organizational level. Currently, due to ideological and capital influences, Western mainstream media increas-

ingly exhibits the characteristics described by Horkheimer and Adorno in their classic media analysis text *The Culture Industry*, where mass media creates a so-called utopian pathway through instrumental rationality to control audiences. Under this information production model, most audiences indulge in the pleasure brought by cultural industrial products while neglecting the power they have ceded to obtain information.

2.1.1 Innovation in Media Universality Concepts Against this ideological background, when mainstream media conduct external publicity such as “telling China’ s story well” in organizational form, they should not only focus on the content itself but also adapt to different audiences’ information reception capacities and habits. Specifically, when CGTN and similar mainstream media conduct national image building and external publicity work, they should strive to align with local information dissemination forms and language habits in target regions to promote mutual trust and communication between information senders and receivers. The renowned communication scholar Marshall McLuhan offered two classic observations about media concepts: the medium is the extension of man and the medium is the message. Without media innovation awareness or profound understanding of media concepts, television news commentary programs can easily limit their effectiveness evaluation to ratings statistics.

However, as television news commentary programs, the true information producers are the guest commentators participating in topic discussions and the hosts who drive the program forward. Taking CGTN as an example, although current news commentary programs also invite professional guests for interviews, their communication effects remain to be strengthened due to lack of on-site interaction and limited space for topic development between guests and hosts constrained by agenda-setting and program formats. However, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’ s (ABC) program *Q&A* incorporates random audience Q&A sessions on-site based on news commentary and invites more guests than typical news commentary programs, which can be seen as an enhanced version of Phoenix TV’ s veteran commentary program *One Tiger, One Seat*. The popularity of *Q&A* in Australia demonstrates the importance of media universality concepts—that individuals as natural media should not be neglected for their unique agency in information dissemination, especially cross-cultural communication. This requires that in organizational-level external publicity, reliance on external packaging should not be the sole approach. Instead, media innovation should be reflected in content creation from the perspective of personalized media to strengthen information dissemination effects.

2.1.2 Innovation in Media Technical Concepts Beyond media existence concept innovation derived from media universality, media technology concept innovation should not be overlooked. In the communication practice of “telling China’ s story well,” should media be viewed as intermediary, connection, and focus, or as tool, means, and carrier? This communication approach based on

technical intermediary and technical instrumental views will also affect final communication outcomes. The author argues that appropriately strengthening the media technical intermediary view can enhance the positive effects of information dissemination content. From the media technical intermediary perspective, humans as information dissemination subjects can freely interact with institutions, systems, society, media, and even the environment. This media concept, free from the constraints of instrumental usage thinking, can better achieve effective information transmission in cross-cultural communication.

2.2 Individual-Level Media Convergence Innovation

Any country's external publicity activity is essentially a public relations activity aimed at forming conceptual consensus with more audiences. The rapidly developing new media technologies and media convergence trends provide excellent technical and theoretical support for individual-level information exchange and communication. Successful cross-cultural communication cases such as Li Ziqi and Wang Gang, the food writer, provide broad thematic space for individual-level practice of "telling China's story well."

Beyond beautiful pastoral life and rich regional cuisines, many excellent self-media bloggers such as "Prosperity in the Fields" and "Moon Theft Society" can introduce and showcase the lives of ordinary Chinese people to the world through short video creation. Under the media convergence trend, outstanding self-media bloggers should also broaden their horizons and attempt to use more diverse media channels for information dissemination. They can even expand their influence and communication power by building personal IPs and launching physical products or souvenirs, thereby introducing cultural communication activities from online to offline to achieve three-dimensional, in-depth communication effects. Integrating virtual and reality and connecting online and offline can not only expand the coverage and influence of individual-level information dissemination but also enhance the credibility of Chinese culture and ordinary Chinese people's images represented by individual personas.

China's long and profound history and culture contain numerous materials and promotional angles waiting to be explored. As individuals in the information age, we should fully utilize advanced technological means to record and disseminate the beautiful moments around us. Only through the cumulative efforts of countless individuals can "telling China's story well" be conducted authentically, credibly, and amiably.

As an important component of China's national image building and external publicity work in the new era, "telling China's story well" holds significant practical value and communication meaning at both official and civil levels. "Telling China's story well" is not only the task of mainstream media but also a call to action for the entire society; it is not only a window to showcase national construction achievements but also a pathway for the world to understand China more comprehensively; it is not only the primary method for national im-

age building but also a powerful means for Chinese people in the new era to strengthen cultural consciousness and enhance national confidence. Therefore, both organizations and individuals must establish media innovation awareness in the communication practice of “telling China’ s story well” to continuously enhance its communication effectiveness.

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

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