

Constructing Interaction Rituals in Digital Communication of the Beijing Winter Olympics: Post-Print

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Abstract

Within the social context dominated by digitalization, the structural patterns of information dissemination are increasingly exhibiting interactive characteristics. In the communication practice of the Beijing Winter Olympics as a mega sports event, interactive ritual discourse has become increasingly prominent, thereby shaping a new interactive ritual structure. Within the interactive ritual framework of Beijing Winter Olympics communication, the four dimensions of spatial aggregation, mechanism establishment, symbol production, and identity construction have not only effectively narrated the splendid stories of the Winter Olympics, but also deepened the public's profound understanding of sports communication models.

Full Text

The Construction of Interactive Rituals in Beijing Winter Olympics Communication Under the Digital Context

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Abstract: In a society dominated by digitalization, the structural patterns of information communication increasingly exhibit interactive characteristics. In the communication practices of the Beijing Winter Olympics as a mega sporting spectacle, interactive ritual discourses have become increasingly prominent, thereby shaping a new interactive ritual structure. Within the interactive ritual 脉络 (context) of Beijing Winter Olympics communication, four dimensions—spatial aggregation, mechanism establishment, symbol production, and identity

construction—both tell the wonderful stories of the Winter Olympics and deepen the public’ s understanding of sports communication models.

Keywords: Spatial Aggregation; Mechanism Establishment; Symbol Production; Identity Inter-embedding

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As a globally watched sporting event, the Olympic spectacle narrates the advancement of human civilization and technology, demonstrating the powerful appeal and infectiousness of cultural rituals. The magnificent ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony showcased the rise of a great power to the world, while the romantic and ethereal 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics opening ceremony presented a more confident and composed Chinese image, fully embodying that sports spectacles are important indicators of national comprehensive strength and social civilization level. Alongside the popularization of mobile terminals and digital technology development, the “Smart Olympics” became a key force in the communication of the Beijing Winter Olympics. The culturally Chinese-style communication spectacles—such as the 24 solar terms countdown, “water from the Yellow River descending from heaven,” and the ice and snow 五环 (five rings) “breaking through ice” —while stunning the entire world, also created meaningful links between digital technology, Olympic stories, and audience cognition, allowing audiences to shape their self and social emotional cognition within the ritualized generation mechanism of this mega spectacle. In a sense, digitalization has become embedded in various aspects of the Beijing Winter Olympics, including event broadcasting, news reporting, and storytelling, constructing a social ritual for all citizens through ritualized interactive structures. This article, guided by Interaction Ritual Chain theory, explores the construction of interactive rituals in Beijing Winter Olympics communication, comprehensively outlines the sports stories and national image cognition projected by the Beijing Winter Olympics, and provides important reference value for communication innovation in large-scale sports events under new technological contexts.

1. Spatial Aggregation: Creating a Co-Present Field of Ice and Snow

Marshall McLuhan once proposed in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* that “the medium is the extension of man.” As a speculative viewpoint, McLuhan’ s thinking invisibly drives the progress of human technology, mean-

ing that media and humans together break through the development of social reality, and media technology development builds new frameworks for interactive scene construction, jointly constructing the interactive field and network co-presence landscape of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. In this process, the smart communication of the Beijing Winter Olympics achieves the construction of a disembodied co-present scene among people, providing audiences with a foundation to connect social texts within the co-present field, which also to some extent breaks the temporal and spatial barriers in physical space.

First, the construction of virtual scenes satisfies co-presence needs. The “scene” required for bodily co-presence represents a macro-level grasp of the laws of 事物 (thing) development, requiring both profound analysis of current affairs and planning for future development paths. Audiences’ choice to participate in Olympic events is an implementation of selective attention, understanding, and memory. Meanwhile, actively contacting media for interaction also fulfills audiences’ own “uses and gratifications.” Therefore, to meet audiences’ diverse selective needs, modern technology has achieved the transition from “large screen” to “small screen,” from “uniform reception” to “precise push,” with diverse live streaming platforms constantly emerging, fragmented information being integrated, and privatized and personalized communication landscapes being constructed. Virtual co-present fields provide scenes for individual interaction. The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics released ice and snow sports tutorials, safety knowledge, and event news through all-media platforms, upgraded communication technologies for PC and mobile clients, continuously optimized audience participation and experience in watching the Winter Olympics, created a “smart communication” scene for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, strengthened the creation of a Winter Olympics atmosphere, and enriched the discourse system of Chinese sports stories. For example, the competition rules and judgments of short track speed skating have always attracted audience attention. When controversies arise in competitions, audiences spontaneously discuss rules in virtual co-present spaces and use Weibo and WeChat to launch various Winter Olympics topic discussions, better achieving the transformation and interaction of multiple new media technologies.

Second, the outlining of interactive scrolls achieves simulation construction. Mark Poster once pointed out that while electronic media open up new possibilities for communication, they also create new interactive scenarios. The arrival of the 5G era paints a brand-new communication picture for society, breaking down barriers between virtual and reality and granting audiences a new immersive experience. This differs from previous single interaction methods and fixed social scenes. Technologies such as VR, AR, and 4K evolve social scenes into more three-dimensional and simulated spaces, effectively dissolving gaps between different circles, effectively integrating mass communication and interpersonal communication in the digital age, and enabling audiences to shift from social forms of text and language to media social paradigms. For instance, during the Beijing Winter Olympics, events used big data, 5G, and algorithms for smart communication, and audiences could gather individuals who commonly

paid attention to the Olympics and ice and snow sports through interactive comments and forwarding, to some extent compensating for the lack of interactive reality in simulated co-present spaces, and achieving secondary communication effects through flowing stickiness, further broadening circle dimensions and alleviating the communication pain point of “information cocoons” brought by media, replacing traditional physical space bodily presence with more diverse methods and providing reality and authenticity for inter-subjective interaction, opening a new pattern for sports communication.

Finally, simulation space reshapes spatio-temporal relationships. Past material spaces restricted individuals’ bodies, emotions, and spirits, limiting the immersion degree of experienceable events. However, with the development of electronic media technology, the simulation scenes shaped by media transform abstract pictures into participable spaces, and social individuals also escape the constraints of temporal and spatial limitations, with communication spaces forming entirely new relational connections with people. As a bridge between virtual and reality, virtual co-present space breaks traditional linear spatio-temporal concepts. Beijing Winter Olympics audiences manipulate live streaming platforms through the cooperation of inner needs and fingers, and can autonomously switch event live scenes to achieve free selection and continuation of physical spatio-temporal relationships within the same time sequence. In the era of “everything is media,” the Beijing Winter Olympics shared event situations instantly through live broadcasting, enabling people in different spatio-temporal relationships to share pictures in co-present spaces. Meanwhile, viewers could send real-time bullet comments during live broadcasts, achieving bodily co-presence of subjective consciousness and cross-temporal interaction. Furthermore, popular topics about the Winter Olympics on Weibo and WeChat attracted participation and discussion from tens of millions of netizens, and “5G + cloud live broadcasting” realized audiences’ needs to watch multiple events simultaneously, breaking temporal and spatial barriers through media technology.

It can be said that the body is the carrier that generates emotional energy. It is precisely because of bodily presence that individuals can confirm common focus, deepen emotional energy through participation in access rules, and generate emotional resonance with other individuals, thereby completing the interaction ritual chain. Therefore, with technological development and drive, the birth of the internet and digital media completely breaks the monopoly of physical space over individual bodily interaction, and bodily presence has also become a sufficient and necessary condition for establishing interaction ritual chains in mediated society.

2. Mechanism Establishment: Building Winter Olympics Circle Walls

In the meaningful category of mediated social interaction, circle interaction connects their relationships in a special way, mainly manifested as ritualized carnivals in virtual spaces, thereby realizing the construction of ritual access

mechanisms for circles. Nick Couldry once stated that media itself may be a ritualistic existence, and people's media usage behavior itself is a ritual and a kind of dramatic behavior. This ritualized practice carries out various social organization activities related to media in the "belly" of the "media ritual space." In other words, subjects existing in co-present spaces participate in group ebullience through social media, outlining behavioral norms for interactive rituals, further strengthening circle cohesion and the ritualization of access mechanisms.

On the one hand, establishing restrictions for outsiders. In Collins' view, establishing ritual access mechanisms can guarantee the successful quality of interactive rituals, exclude irrelevant outsiders from the interaction process, and thereby improve the precision and efficiency of information dissemination. In a carnival-like interactive ritual, individuals unrelated to it still have the possibility of passive participation. They click on detail pages through information push, accurately judge the representation and positioning of interactive rituals after reading overviews, and thus decide whether to join the relational connection of interactive rituals. For example, in the communication of the Beijing Winter Olympics, audiences can learn about relevant ice and snow sports through event videos, and individuals who can establish interaction should be those interested in ice and snow sports, the Winter Olympics, and participating athletes. In this way, audiences provide interactive feedback on transmitted information, and communicators establish new interaction rules based on feedback. The interaction between the two is a bidirectional feedback focusing relationship, but individuals with no interest at all in this interactive ritual cannot integrate into it. Additionally, language symbols and emoji codes full of interesting meaning, such as "Bing Dwen Dwen," "Cheetah," "Meng Master," "Frog Princess," and "Little Son," establish special identity authentication methods for circle interaction. These symbols also enable independent individuals to generate group identity and circle emotion with each other.

On the other hand, the expansion of structural dimensions. The establishment of ritual access rules clarifies the boundary elements of the circle field with bodily co-presence, forming obvious identity differences between point-to-point interaction among individuals and outsiders. However, the infectiousness of interaction in some sense couples other individuals into it and expands the structural dimensions of group scale. Through the bullet comment areas of online live platforms and comment sections of news information, it can be seen that the scope of subjects interacting with the Beijing Winter Olympics has become increasingly dispersed—students busy with studies, office workers with fast-paced lives, housewives busy with families, leisurely retired elderly... Individuals from different communities can all establish ritual relationships of interaction with the Beijing Winter Olympics and derive content and symbols that better conform to circle interaction norms. When these derivatives are accepted by others, audiences will also develop deeper stickiness to interactive rituals, promoting the interaction of emotional energy and symbolic capital in the interactive ritual process, and continuously attracting large numbers of people outside the interactive ritual chain to integrate into the interaction process under the Matthew

Effect.

Thus, media development provides new venues for social individuals' expressive desires, and the content they express also becomes a kind of identity symbol in the process of group gathering. Individuals with similar symbols gradually aggregate toward groups. Thereafter, the unique cultural symbols and access mechanisms within circles will form powerful radiating energy, thereby forming broader development.

3. Symbol Production: Highlighting Winter Olympics Event Focus

Interaction Ritual Chain theory proposes that in every circle community, there are group symbols jointly maintained, and individuals in the community will maintain these symbols and consciously protect group symbols, thereby constructing interactive rituals in the community. Collins regards common focus as an important link in the Interaction Ritual Chain process. Community construction is deeply related to similar life experiences, interests, and ideological dimensions among different individuals. Therefore, in the 演绎 (deductive) process of interactive rituals, subjects participating in interaction aggregate their focus on common things and transmit or even share relevant information about this focus center with each other.

First, frontstage event topic attention. American sociologist Erving Goffman proposed the concept of "frontstage and backstage" in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He believed that society is a performance stage, which is divided into frontstage and backstage. People construct frontstage landscapes according to scripts but also prepare for stage construction backstage. The Beijing Winter Olympics arena serves as the frontstage, and what attracts the most audience attention is undoubtedly the athletes themselves. Among the content presented on major social platforms, the largest proportion consists of audience discussions about athletes' in-competition performance, honors, achievements, and other frontstage topics. The Winter Olympics itself is the medium through which audiences establish connections with athletes. Audiences even directly evaluate frontstage presentation results: analyzing competition situations based on previous viewing experiences, associating athletes' past performance and achievements for analytical demonstration, and making subjective thinking-based praise and judgments about athletes themselves.

Second, backstage derivative content focus presentation. Feuerbach once stated that in today's era, the public prefers to use symbols to replace the meaning of things, use copies to replace originals, use illusions to replace reality, and use appearances to replace essence. Thus, symbols are used by the public and transmitted through certain media, and symbols also become the common focus of communication parties to achieve mutual meaning exchange. The relevant derivative content shaped by the Beijing Winter Olympics forms symbolic group symbols for the "secondary communication" of ice and snow events. For example,

the Beijing Winter Olympics mascot “Bing Dwen Dwen” was loved by people worldwide, and “when can each household have one 墩 (Dwen)” became a hot topic during the Winter Olympics period. Another example is Chinese female freestyle skier Eileen Gu, whose nationality change to compete for China in the Olympic arena and achieve excellent results received widespread attention, and her personality and life attitude were even more beloved by everyone. Netizens also continuously explored the life growth experiences and life stories of Olympic champions in the media field, all of which became backstage focuses of the Winter Olympics arena. The interaction between this content and the public in some sense meets the social needs of the mediated era. In other words, all individuals in the Winter Olympics circle use backstage derivatives to establish meaningful connection relationships with them, adding interesting meaning to virtual presence interaction.

Finally, national symbols strengthen focus energy. Collins once stated that in real space, the group gathering spirit of circle groups shows a weak relationship trend, with different individuals participating in each social interaction, creating strange walls between people. Therefore, even if common symbols exist in the community, group cohesion can only be a weak and variable relationship. However, in the mediated field of the “Smart Winter Olympics,” this kind of weak relationship connection does not exist. The virtual bodily presence of audience groups determines its criticality and meaningfulness at the spiritual level. Moreover, members couple their personal emotions and collective solidarity spirit, shaping them into group symbols that integrate into the interaction links of the Interaction Ritual Chain, thereby forming high-level group solidarity consciousness and spirit. For example, in Beijing Winter Olympics events, all information disseminated in social media has its invisible symbol–national spirit. All Winter Olympics-related content has its specific communication connotation during dissemination, and audiences can feel the national spirit and group belief behind the content through its symbolic symbols or behavioral representations, thereby constructing group identity. Meanwhile, audiences interpret the codes of Olympic spirit, value meaning, and Chinese national spirit contained in the “Smart Olympics,” enabling them to communicate and interact about the common focus, interpret the national spirit of striving and the Chinese sports story.

It can be seen that only when groups form a certain common focus can a relatively high degree of group solidarity be manifested. Therefore, under the effect of interactive rituals, the focused common focus paves the way for emotional sharing, and members can also obtain deeper intimacy and belonging in it.

4. Identity Construction: Empathetic Communication of “Chinese Emotion”

Emotion plays a key role in constructing social relations. Social members have a deep dependence on emotion when constructing social relations and structures. Collective emotion is the foundation and bond for society to shape communities,

interpreting social order through the emotional imprint of collectivism as the basis for society to formulate behavioral norms. Therefore, “emotional energy” is regarded as the driving force and key factor of the Interaction Ritual Chain—the core of the entire interactive ritual.

On the one hand, the cross-cultural circulation of “Chinese emotion.” The emotion produced by individuals through interactive rituals is usually a continuous and long-term positive state, which is significant for groups and circles to perceive solidarity and is also a kind of attachment to group gathering, not a fleeting short-term emotion. Interactive rituals can transform group members’ short-term emotional investment into continuous emotional resonance, enabling individual members to develop belonging and dependence on the group, thereby achieving the purpose of maintaining internal group solidarity and stability. For example, CCTV once reported and positively praised Japanese figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu on media platforms, gaining universal goodwill from his domestic and international fans, making a large number of fans increase their love for Yuzuru Hanyu and generating high goodwill toward China and Chinese media. Another example is a certain American snowboarder who documented her Winter Olympics journey through video, praising all Chinese staff and volunteers who contributed to the Winter Olympics, and Chinese netizens expressed to the athlete that “all love will gather because of the Winter Olympics,” making all individuals closer through two-way interaction. It is evident that the Winter Olympics plays an important role in the narrative process of condensing a global “emotional community,” developing the value consensus of Chinese sports stories in the world, thereby forming a narrative structure and discourse system belonging to the Winter Olympics ritual, which has positive significance and forward energy for optimizing China’s national image and enhancing China’s international discourse power.

On the other hand, the internal performance of “Chinese emotion.” Under the orderly operation of interactive rituals, members in the group will further burst forth with honorable emotions to maintain collective solidarity, and members who have already obtained group identity and emotional sharing will especially respect the “common code,” actively taking specific measures to protect the common rights and interests of the group from external breakthroughs. In today’s society, Chinese people’s patriotic emotional energy is rising daily, actively expressing pride and identity in “national symbolic symbols,” and actively taking concrete actions in the virtual co-present field constructed by social media to safeguard national image and discourse power. For example, during the Beijing Winter Olympics hosted by China, when statements about China’s image appeared on foreign websites, Chinese audiences would argue strongly and resolutely defend the image and dignity of national symbols. Meanwhile, the Winter Olympics audience group derived high participation enthusiasm and emotional connections for the Winter Olympics through common attention to subjects such as “nation,” “events,” and “athletes” in information sent by mainstream media, and audiences and other participants were continuously strengthening collective identity and emotion.

It can be seen that in sports event interactive rituals, individual emotion evolves into collectively shared emotion through interaction, and circles also achieve emotional connections with regularity and structure, thereby ensuring the 演绎 (deductive) performance of interactive rituals. This emotional consensus reached through virtual media interactive rituals more easily reaches individuals' deep inner selves, further strengthening individuals' cognitive discourse and behavioral schemas, and exerting indicative influence on their practical activities in co-present spaces. Thus, individuals who have experienced interactive rituals can obtain the infiltration of collective emotional energy and the filling of belonging consciousness, and maintain common emotion through specific media practice interactions, further consolidating group identity with continuity.

Mediated interactive rituals represent the reshaping of social cognition under media technology development, not only providing behavioral map guidance for individuals and groups but also having reshaping significance for cultural cognitive structures. As Anthony Giddens once stated, the process of media modernization is the result of "time-space distancing," where time-space relationships are placed in virtual space, and people and things need to be disembedded from concrete physical space to enter the space virtualized by media technology. In the communication feast of the Beijing Winter Olympics, a complete Interaction Ritual Chain runs through the entire process, with bodily co-presence, access mechanisms, common focus, and emotional resonance all being key components of interactive rituals.

Media's construction of co-present fields and depiction of national discourse are not only carriers of the national "imagined community." Their deep logic is the cultural confidence brought by the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and international status. Therefore, interactive rituals should become a stable and continuous identity system, becoming long-term and stable relationship chains in real society, not just temporary "signifier carnival rituals." Consequently, during the Beijing Winter Olympics, the magnificent ritual performances, elaborate venue construction and arrangement, and meaningful official and social exchanges realized China's image as a peaceful, friendly, responsible, and accountable major power, also becoming an important opportunity to enhance China's discourse influence. Thus, Winter Olympics competition allows world ice and snow athletes to 跨越 (transcend) geopolitical relations to form long-term stable "imagined community" relationships, strengthening the infectious energy of Chinese sports stories and enhancing value consensus of Chinese sports stories worldwide.

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

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