

The 'Cute' Media Ecology Created by Panda Symbols from the Perspective of New Media

-- Taking Tiktok as an Example

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Abstract

In recent years, with the continuous growth of China's influence, giant pandas have also continued to attract people's attention. With the popularity of many "Internet celebrity" giant pandas, a "cute" media ecology with pandas as the main body of communication has emerged in the field of new media on the Internet. Although the "cute" media ecosystem is also reflected in the field of new media content such as short videos, it has its unique ways of expression and mechanisms of action. This paper takes Tiktok as the representative of new media to analyze the transmission of panda symbols. At the same time, summarize the mode of "panda" symbol in contemporary new media communication to help content break through boundaries, in order to promote good interaction of "panda" in new media.

Keywords

New media; Panda symbol; Media ecology; Tiktok.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the giant panda, as an important national image symbol of China, has frequently boarded the new media platform represented by "Tiktok". The image of the panda and the story of the panda have been sought after and concerned by netizens. This symbol has created a "cute" media ecology in contemporary audiovisual communication in China.

By combining keywords such as "panda media", "panda symbols", "panda short videos", "panda self media", and "dissemination of panda symbols", it can be concluded through literature analysis. There is currently little research on the "panda" ecology in the perspective of new media both domestically and internationally. Previous research on "giant pandas" and "new media communication" has mostly focused on using "pandas" as symbols or studying the techniques and characteristics of audio-visual communication in new media. How to better disseminate panda related new media content in interactive co creation is a problem that needs further research in this field. At the same time, there are numerous categories of new media content created with giant pandas as the main element, with different styles, but the content quality and dissemination effect are not up to par. The existing research cannot summarize the healthy patterns and exemplary cases of the dissemination of such symbols in audio-visual art. Therefore, this study will also attempt to analyze the current "panda" works in the field of new media.

This article reviews the process of assigning meaning to panda symbols and contemporary meanings from the perspective of historical materialism. Using literature content analysis methods, high-quality content in contemporary new media communication phenomena is taken as a case study sample. In order to summarize the more complete expression techniques

of such symbols, analyze the typical advantages and disadvantages of the case, and evaluate their dissemination effectiveness in detail.

2. The Meaning and Extension of Panda Symbols

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China focuses on "enhancing the dissemination and influence of Chinese civilization" and points out that "adhering to the position of Chinese culture, extracting and showcasing the spiritual symbols and cultural essence of Chinese civilization, and forming an international discourse power that matches China's comprehensive national strength and international status". [1] The species of panda has also gone through many historical periods from being known to the "darling" of the Internet. Specifically, it can be summarized into three stages: China's panda diplomacy, Western film and television reconstruction, and the era of diverse new media networks. That is precisely why it has laid the foundation for the current "explosion" of pandas in the field of new media.

In 1869, French Armand David discovered the giant panda in Sichuan. Thus, giant pandas began to make their debut in front of the world. In the 1940s, China, which was undergoing transformation, urgently needed to integrate into the world. Panda diplomacy promoted the giant panda and its symbolic art to the world stage. During this process, the panda symbol initially acquired meaning. Entering the 21st century, the Western world has gained a deeper understanding of China and developed a strong interest in Chinese culture. So, using "Kung Fu Panda" as a medium, cross-cultural reconstruction was carried out on the intentions derived from pandas and their symbols. This kind of reconstruction of meaning carries the nature of "alienation", but it is also a necessary path for culture to go global. So, this reconstruction of meaning pushed the panda symbol onto the screen, gradually becoming mediated and possessing more metaphorical meanings. With the rise of the Internet, new media represented by mobile phones have gradually replaced film and television, moving towards a more fragmented, convenient and efficient direction. Panda media has also developed new ways of expression in this era, thus constructing a "cute" media ecology in the perspective of new media.

3. Research on the Communication Model of "Online Panda Watching" Combining Fast and Slow Modes

The visual new media art form matrix is the specific expression of the "Cute" media ecology. Taking Tiktok as an example, the typical representatives in the panda symbol communication are new media live broadcast and short video. The concept of "slow live streaming" about pandas originated in China from the iPanda Panda channel launched by Chinese network television stations, which provides 24-hour "slow live streaming". Slow live streaming "effectively promotes people's subtle absorption of ecological news, acceptance of ecological education, understanding of ecological policies, and recognition of ecological values. Short videos are more likely to extract key points in a shorter period of time, forming a rapidly spreading trend.

3.1. Breakthrough propagation under complementary advantages

The reason why seemingly simple "slow live streaming" can rely on mainstream media to make its mark is mainly due to its well-developed network infrastructure. An uninterrupted and high bandwidth live streaming channel is the key to maintaining the influence of "slow live streaming" in events represented by news. At the same time, with the help of the account matrix of mainstream media itself, "slow live streaming" can also achieve linked dissemination in a wider integrated media environment. China Blue is a portal multimedia matrix under Zhejiang Radio and Television. In the event of the return of the giant panda "Yaya" from the United States, China Blue launched "Guardian Yaya Cloud Live", which has attracted widespread attention on

the platform. With the official certification of mainstream media, Panda "Yaya" has gained more attention. At the same time, valuable visual information and fragments of Yaya's activities in "slow live streaming" have been recreated by netizens as short video materials, sparking multiple hot topics such as "Yaya's health status". It can be seen that in terms of information capture, the mainstream media dominated "slow live streaming" has inherent advantages, laying the foundation for the formation of a "cute" media ecology.

Although slow live streaming has certain news attributes and provides an emotional bond between the audience and the target audience, this relationship is relatively subtle and difficult to achieve emotional effects through itself. To truly realize the cultural significance conveyed behind it, it is necessary to use the spontaneous secondary creation of platform short video creators to superimpose and promote emotions, in order to externalize abstract meaning into information with lower acceptance barriers and higher topic popularity. Taking "Yaya" as inspiration, domestic and foreign celebrity pandas have become popular one after another. Chengdu's "Hehua", Beijing's "Menglan", and Chongqing's "Coco and Love" have all appeared on short videos in the same way. Multiple hot short video topics such as "Bear news", "Menglan Connect", and "Ai Lan Hua Group" have been successively launched. Taking the "Bear News" series of short videos launched by the blogger "Hibernation Panda" as an example, the voice and program title of CCTV news broadcast familiar to Chinese netizens are adopted, and from the perspective of hosting bear "Menglan", the daily events in the panda industry are collected, providing more opportunities for panda lovers to learn about pandas. The videos of "Menglan Connect" series were co created by different netizens. From the perspective of Menglan, they established a "panda social circle" with his parents, brothers and sisters, and relatives and friends, and conveyed the friendly and harmonious concept of "Chinese family". These topics, without exception, all combine the "cute" attributes of pandas themselves, leaving a deep impression on the audience and sparking a new wave of "bear watching".

3.2. Fusion Communication in Interactive Context

This "cute" media ecology exists within a certain interactive context as a communication matrix. The so-called "interaction" emphasizes the interconnection, integration, and dissemination of different expression techniques in the new media environment.

Currently, the entire media ecosystem matrix based on new media is actually centered around the creation and dissemination of short videos. As mentioned earlier, "slow live streaming" provides a "meta" material for the re creation of short videos. Meanwhile, 'slow live streaming' also provides a basic narrative blueprint for many short videos. For example, in the "Yaya" incident, the daily activities, movements, and even expressions of the panda "Yaya" at the Memphis Zoo were naturally captured by Chinese audiences for subjective understanding and artistic creation. For example, when a Chinese tourist calls out "Yaya" in Sichuan dialect or Beijing dialect, Yaya happens to turn around, and after being processed by a short video creator, it is easy to show a sense of "homesickness". This kind of accidental and sudden random event may seem like an "over interpretation" of creation, but in fact, it perfectly achieves the goal of "touching people with emotions", and in the context of the theme of "picking up the maid and bringing her home" at that time, it is not abrupt at all.

Although the vast majority of scholars have begun to call for people to "abandon" the consumer attention tendency brought by short videos, according to the "Research Report on the Development of China's Online Audiovisual Industry (2023)", the number of short video users in China has reached 1.012 billion. [2] It can be seen that short video enjoys absolute advantages in the form matrix under the new media communication environment. If we can take advantage of this "flow of people" advantage, it will be more beneficial to maximize the dissemination effect. Due to the core characteristics of verticality and fragmentation in short videos, they have shaped the dissemination field of "media becoming an extension of human

beings". However, "slow live streaming" in the form of long videos often appears dull and boring due to the lack of intuitive narrative clues, and requires the assistance of the user base and traffic of short videos to achieve dissemination effects. After the Panda "Yaya" incident attracted attention, Slow Live was not the first reporting platform. It was precisely short video news that first focused on this event. Subsequently, "Yaya" Live set up a window in the short video matrix, which attracted a large number of viewers to "Slow Live" and had a significant impact.

From this, it can also be seen that in the future, the combination of short videos and slow live streaming will be the key to the transformation of new media communication from passive selective dissemination to active provisioning dissemination. "Slow live broadcast" has the characteristics of no narration, no narration, no artistic processing, and objective and true records, meets the authenticity and timeliness of news, and has great advantages in the spread of emergency news, which has been verified in the construction of Wuhan Huoshenshan Hospital for the "COVID-19" epidemic. On the other hand, short video creation provides users with rich space for recreation, which can facilitate setting topics and developing hot content, and maximize the media's dissemination effect. Thus, the interactive co creation based on the panda symbol has shaped a unique "cute" media ecology in the new era.

4. Analysis of the Transmission and Reception Interaction of Panda Symbols in the "Cute" Media Ecology

The formation of the "cute" media ecosystem benefits from the interaction between the transmitting and receiving parties on new media platforms. The theory of "interactive ritual chain" proposed by renowned sociologist Randall Collins states that "interactive rituals are based on emotional connections, have causal connections, and are a cyclical process. [3] It can be seen that this ritualistic interaction constitutes the core law of new media content dissemination and also determines the final effect of content output.

4.1. Interactive mechanism in the dissemination of panda symbols in the new media environment

The new media platform represented by Tiktok has created a "virtual presence" interaction ceremony for users, which is the key to trigger high-frequency interaction of panda symbols in new media communication. Collins has provided a detailed interpretation of how interpersonal interactions that occur in specific contexts are driven, carried out, and ultimately come to an end, explaining the internal mechanisms behind the dissemination of interactive rituals. [4] In his research, he pointed out that the influencing factors of interaction include the degree of inequality in individual symbol cognition, social density, and the objects of interaction. Face to face interaction is the primary prerequisite for interactive ceremonies, but new media platforms have used methods such as liking, following, commenting, bookmarking, reposting, and bullet comments to provide users with a "virtual" presence ceremony.

The joint participation of multiple parties and channels is a concrete manifestation of interaction on new media platforms. Among the audience participating in the interactive content of panda videos, there are bloggers, tourists, nature conservationists, and colleagues in panda conservation who publish video content. At the same time, the forms and lengths of videos are also diverse, ranging from "one shot to the end" shooting with a duration of a few seconds, to science popularization videos and funny videos with a duration of a few minutes. These diverse forms provide users from different groups with rich choices and are more likely to play an emotional rendering role.

Accurately serving users and excluding 'outsiders' is also a major characteristic of new media interaction. Through the precise positioning and push of big data, people who are interested in "Panda" will be more likely to "brush" video content related to Panda, while uninterested

viewers will be automatically blocked. This mode allows interactive users to determine their identity based on their own needs.

By analyzing the user comment data of panda video accounts with large fan groups such as "iPanda Panda Channel", "Big Panda Dinner", and "Round panda", it can be found that when users see others with the same focus as themselves, they are more likely to like, comment, and even share their feelings. This indicates that through the creation of panda videos, the audience can be well drawn into the "cuteness" of pandas. In such interactions, users resonate emotionally with numerous 'others', facilitating the completion of interactive rituals in the 'cute' media ecosystem.

4.2. Interactive effects of panda symbol dissemination in the "cute" media ecosystem

The "cute" media interaction mechanism under the dominance of interactive ritual chain not only enables intense discussions among users, but also benefits video creators and bloggers. When a video or account receives a high number of likes or positive comments on the corresponding platform, the video creator can gain extremely high emotional value from it, which can drive the creator to continue actively creating new works, and even bring traffic monetization, thus providing a certain income reward for the creator.

The formation of a "cute" media ecosystem mainly depends on a large number of audiences with a strong interest in pandas attracted by short video content and live streaming matrices featuring "pandas". These audiences gathered together and triggered many agenda discussions and network hot spots. With their unique comment style and audience personality characteristics, they formed a unique wave of communication in the Internet. When faced with topics related to "pandas", netizens have greatly changed their previous "double-edged sword" style of spreading criticism and praise towards a topic. This media ecosystem, in a virtuous cycle, has also created a sense of belonging among more audiences to belong to the 'panda loving community'.

Influenced by the cute behavior of pandas, many symbols with group significance have also been generated in the interactive communication of Internet content. These symbols include not only "ee" (in Chinese, the letter "E" sounds the same as "auntie", which is a nickname given by Chinese netizens in the voice of a panda after anthropomorphizing it), which is a self deprecating praise for pandas by Chinese netizens, but also some unique language symbols. For example, when the "Hehua" at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding hears the keeper's name "Guolai Guolai", it will fly towards the keeper. In fact, 'Guolai' is a term for 'coming over' in Sichuan dialect. Subsequently, 'Guolai' became a specific symbol representing the panda flower, which largely represents the rich Chinese cultural elements of panda media in the province.

Finally, in the process of interactive dissemination of panda videos, it has also prompted a large number of netizens to spontaneously maintain the moral sense of the group. With the explosive popularity of pandas in various regions, they have once again become the "stars" of zoos or conservation bases, leading to an increasing number of uncivilized phenomena. Video creators and live streamers usually label the video or live room interface with the words "Civilized Panda Watching". At the same time, whenever incidents such as feeding, harassment, or hitting glass occur in short videos, users will collectively condemn them in the comment section.

5. Conclusion

In the long process of assigning meanings and spreading symbols related to giant pandas, pandas have attracted more and more panda enthusiasts with their own "cute" characteristics, forming a unique communication ecology. This kind of communication ecology is manifested in

rich forms represented by "slow live streaming" and "short videos". Different forms complement and influence each other, forming unique user interaction rituals. This is not only the unique communication advantage of Panda Media, but also the fundamental reason for its success.

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