

Construction of China's National Image in the Digital and AI Era: A Study on the Influence of National Language Capacity in Media Narratives

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the construction of China's national image and the influence of national language capacity in this process against the backdrop of the digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) era. With the rapid development of digital and intelligent technologies, the media has undergone profound changes, presenting new challenges and opportunities for the dissemination of national images. The paper first analyzes the definition, components, and evaluation indicators of national language capacity and discusses its significant role in international communication. It is found that national language capacity plays a crucial role in the construction of a national image, as it not only enhances the efficiency of international communication but also strengthens a nation's cultural soft power. The paper proposes that improving national language capacity requires efforts on four levels: policy, media, the public, and international cooperation.

Keywords

National Language Capacity; National Image; Media Narratives.

1. Introduction

The digital and AI era refers to the era characterized by the prominent development of digital technologies and AI, during which the modes of information dissemination and media ecology have undergone profound changes. As an important component of national soft power, the construction and dissemination of the national image hold significant importance in international relations. The national image not only affects a country's international status and influence but also has a profound impact on its economic, cultural, and social development. National language capacity plays a crucial role in this process. Through effective language dissemination strategies, a country can better convey its values, policies, and culture, thereby shaping and enhancing its national image. This paper aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced in the construction of national image in the context of the digital and AI era and to analyze the role of national language capacity in this process. The specific research questions include:

1. What's the impact of changes in the media environment in the digital and AI era on the construction of national image?
2. What's the importance and application of national language capacity in media narratives during the construction of national image?
3. How to optimize strategies of the dissemination of the national image by enhancing national language capacity?

There is quite abundant research on national image, media narratives, and national language capacity both domestically and internationally, but there are still some shortcomings. Existing

research mostly focuses on the traditional media era and lacks in-depth exploration of the construction of national image in the context of the digital and AI era. Additionally, although research on national language capacity has achieved certain results, further exploration is needed on how to specifically apply it to the construction of national image. This study aims to propose new theoretical and practical suggestions based on summarizing existing research results.

2. Media and National Image Construction in the Digital and AI Era

2.1. Characteristics of the Media in the Digital and AI Era

In the digital and AI era, represented by digital technologies and AI, the media has undergone significant transformation. With the widespread application of technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data, media content production no longer solely relies on human effort but increasingly leverages intelligent algorithms and machine generation. New technologies such as Algorithm-Generated Content (AGC), Machine-Generated Content (MGC), and Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) enable the media to analyze user needs in real-time, automatically gather, edit, produce, and disseminate personalized and precise content. Therefore, this greatly enhances the efficiency and accuracy of information dissemination, making it faster, more diverse, and more personalized.

Secondly, the forms of media and dissemination channels have diversified. In the digital and AI era, media forms are no longer limited to traditional newspapers, television, and radio but have expanded to include mobile internet, social media, short video platforms, and other diverse directions. Simultaneously, the widespread adoption of technologies such as 5G and cloud computing has broadened the dissemination channels of media content, with faster speed and wider coverage. This diversification of media forms and dissemination channels provides audiences with richer information acquisition methods and interactive experiences.

Furthermore, the interactivity between media and audiences has been enhanced. In the digital and AI era, interactions between media and audiences are no longer constrained by time and space; audiences can interact and communicate with the media through social media, online forums, and other channels at any time and any place. This enhanced interactivity not only increases audience engagement and loyalty but also enables media to understand their needs and feedback in time and more accurately, thereby optimizing dissemination strategies and content production.

Finally, the intelligent reconstruction of the media ecosystem is underway. In the digital and AI era, the media ecosystem is experiencing a profound intelligent reconstruction. Intelligent algorithms and big data technologies are transforming media operational and business models, driving the media towards greater precision, personalization, and intelligence. Additionally, the competitive and cooperative relationships between media entities are evolving, with cross-border integration and ecosystem co-construction as new trends. These changes have profound impacts on the media ecosystem, challenging the authority and dominance of traditional media while presenting new opportunities and challenges for the dissemination of national images.

2.2. New Requirements for the Construction of National Image

In the digital and AI era, the construction of national image faces new requirements and challenges. With the rapid development of technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing, the speed, breadth, and depth of information dissemination have reached unprecedented levels. This necessitates that nations possess higher levels of intelligence, precision, and interactivity in constructing their images.

Firstly, intelligence is a new trend in national image construction. Nations need to fully utilize new technologies from the digital and AI era, such as artificial intelligence, to achieve intelligent

and automated information processing. This allows for a more efficient and precise presentation of the nation's developmental achievements, cultural charm, and social landscape. By intelligently analyzing audience needs and pushing customized content, nations can more accurately reach their target groups and enhance dissemination effectiveness.

Secondly, precision is key to shaping the national image. In the face of massive information, audience attention becomes a scarce resource. Therefore, the country must focus on precise delivery and dissemination of information, ensuring that each piece of information reaches the target audience accurately and has a positive impact. This requires nations to deeply understand the psychological needs and cognitive characteristics of domestic and international audiences and to formulate targeted dissemination strategies.

Finally, interaction is an important feature of national image dissemination. The digital and AI era provides more interactive channels and platforms for information dissemination. The country should fully utilize these resources to enhance interaction and communication with audiences. Through channels such as social media and online forums, the country can promptly understand audience feedback and opinions, adjust dissemination strategies, and enhance dissemination effectiveness. Moreover, interaction can foster emotional resonance and mutual understanding between the nation and its audience, laying a solid foundation for constructing a more positive national image.

2.3. The Role of Media in the Construction of National Image

Media plays a crucial role in the construction of national image, serving not only as a bridge for information transmission but also as a primary driver for shaping and disseminating the national image. Through news reports, special programs, social media, and other forms, media convey the nation's voice and image. As the "spokesperson" for the national image, the objectivity, fairness, and comprehensiveness of media reports directly influence external perceptions and evaluations of the nation. A responsible and influential media can deeply explore and highlight the nation's developmental achievements, actively spread positive energy, and present a good image of the nation. At the same time, it can objectively report on the challenges and issues faced by the nation, guiding the public to view them rationally and promoting the resolution and improvement of these issues. Nations can utilize media platforms to showcase their cultural, economic, and social development achievements and convey their core values and policy propositions.

Moreover, media plays a vital role in crisis management and public opinion guidance. Through timely and effective information release and public opinion guidance, media can maintain and enhance the national image. Media also extend the nation's voice and stories to the world through international dissemination, enhancing the nation's discourse power and influence on the international stage. By participating in international reporting and hosting international exchange activities, media promote exchanges and understanding between different cultures, foster friendship and mutual trust among peoples of various countries and contribute to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

3. National Language Capacity and its Application in Media Narratives

3.1. Definition, connotation, and role of national language capacity

National language capacity refers to "the language ability required by a government to handle all domestic and foreign affairs". This concept was first proposed by R. D. Brecht and A. R. Walton in 1993, and defined as "the ability of a nation to respond to specific language needs" [1]. Subsequently, this concept has been further elaborated and supplemented, emphasizing the close relationship between national language competence, language supply and demand, and language resources. Professor Li Yuming (2011), Deputy Director of the National Language

Commission and Director of the Language and Information Division of the Ministry of Education, pointed out that national language competence is the language ability that a country possesses to handle domestic and foreign affairs (including the language ability needed for national development), and includes five aspects: management abilities of dealing with strategic issues by national discourses, discourse abilities of a country's leaders, discourse abilities of governmental agencies, discourse abilities of national media, the abilities of translating national discourses into foreign languages [4] [5]. In 2016, Professor Wen Qiufang combined previous research on national language competence and reinterpreted the definition of national language competence: the language ability required by the government to handle matters involving national strategic interests at home and abroad, and formulated five new evaluation criteria for national language competence (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1 National Language Competency Assessment Indicators (Wen Qiufang, 2016)[10]

	Competence	Evaluation Indicators	Explanation
1	Managing Competence	Structuring ability	The layout of the governing body and the reasonableness of its tasks
		Planning ability	The prediction of future demand and the planning of response plans
		Implementing ability	The speed and efficiency of implementing the plan
		Responding ability	The ability to deal with emergencies at home and abroad
2	Monitoring Competence	Controlling ability	Familiarity with the variety and quality of language resources owned by the country
		Mobilizing ability	The speed and accuracy with which language resources are invoked to serve national needs
3	Producing Competence	Practicing ability	The ability to implement the plan to train the national shortage of language talents
		Effectuating ability	The effectiveness of training language talents in shortage
4	Exploring Competence	Data-mining ability	The automation and accuracy of mining public (open source) intelligence
		Machine-translating ability	The speed and quality of using machines to translate languages
5	Expanding Competence	Influencing ability	The breadth and depth of the use of Chinese in international communication
		Disseminating ability	The ability of Chinese to create or promote new knowledge

The national language proficiency is both a soft power and a hard power, playing a crucial role in maintaining national unity, social stability, national security, cultural security, information security, biosecurity, etc [2]. Firstly, language serves as a bridge for communication, and national language proficiency directly impacts the accuracy and efficiency of international information transmission. In the context of globalization, cooperation between countries is becoming increasingly close, requiring language for information dissemination and consensus building in activities such as business meetings, international conferences, and collaborative

projects. Possessing strong national language proficiency can ensure accurate information transmission, reduce misunderstandings and communication barriers, thereby enhancing work efficiency and cooperation effectiveness. Secondly, national language proficiency is an essential component of a country's soft power [3]. By communicating in multiple languages on the international stage, a country can demonstrate its openness and inclusivity, strengthening international recognition and goodwill toward the country. This sense of recognition helps enhance a country's international status and influence, garnering more support and understanding for its diplomatic policies and development strategies. Furthermore, language is a crucial tool for cultural dissemination. By learning and using foreign languages, a country can better promote its own culture and values. This cultural output contributes to enhancing the attractiveness and influence of a country's culture in the international community. Additionally, through exchanges and mutual learning with other cultures, a country can drive innovation and development in its own culture [6].

3.2. The application of national language capacity in media narratives

Professor Wen Qiufang (2017) redefined the connotation of national language capacity in the context of media narrative, dividing it into National Language Competence and National Language Performance (also called National Discourse Ability) based on Chomsky's classification of competence and performance[9]. Essentially, the two are interdependent and equally important, but only the National Discourse Ability can test the effectiveness of handling language affairs related to national strategy. National Discourse Ability refers to the language expression capabilities required by the government to uphold national strategic interests, categorized as management abilities of dealing with strategic issues by national discourses, discourse abilities of a country's leaders, discourse abilities of governmental agencies, discourse abilities of national media, the abilities of translating national discourses into foreign languages (Wen Qiufang, 2017) [8]. The discourse abilities of national media refers to the ability of government agencies responsible for print media, broadcasting, television, new media, etc., to communicate national policies both domestically and internationally and manage domestic and international crises. Therefore, how the media comprehensively showcases the national image is also the best embodiment of national language capacity.

The national language capacity is first manifested in the media's ability to narrate in multiple languages. With the advancement of globalization, the media needs to communicate information to audiences with different language backgrounds worldwide. National language proficiency is ensured by cultivating professional multilingual talents to provide multilingual narrative services for the media, ensuring that information can transcend language barriers and achieve global dissemination. This capability goes beyond simple translation of text, including a profound understanding of culture, context, and audience psychology to ensure accurate communication and effective reception of information. During major international news events such as global summits, international sports events, or natural disasters, the media often needs to conduct multilingual live broadcasts to meet the needs of diverse language audiences worldwide. National language proficiency becomes particularly crucial at such moments. For instance, China's CCTV News not only provides live broadcasts in Chinese but also conducts real-time translation and reporting through its multilingual channels such as English, Spanish, and French (as shown in Figure 1). These channels not only translate news content but also adjust narrative style and language expression based on the cultural background and interests of the target audience to ensure accurate and easily understandable information.



Figure 1: Printscreen from the CCTV News

Media narrative is not just a stack of words or images, but also the transmission and communication of culture. National language capacity plays an important role in cross-cultural storytelling. It requires media practitioners to have sensitivity and understanding of different cultures, able to integrate elements and perspectives of different cultures into narratives, making reports more relatable to the audience and enhancing the communication effect. For example, when telling Chinese stories, media can use national language proficiency to present the essence and characteristics of Chinese culture in a way that is easy for foreigners to understand and accept, thereby enhancing international understanding and recognition of China. The documentary *Masters in the Forbidden City* has not only been well-received domestically, but has also been released in multiple language versions such as English, French, and German, and broadcasted on international platforms. In producing these versions, the production team fully considered the cultural backgrounds and viewing habits of different language audiences, appropriately editing and redubbing the original film to ensure coherent storytelling that appeals to the target audience. The National Geographic Channel launched a large-scale human geography documentary series *Extreme China* (as shown in Figure 2). The series, produced jointly by Wuzhou Communication Center and National Geographic Channel, was broadcasted in over 170 countries globally in 43 languages. After being launched on the domestic Internet, the total online views reached 100 million. The series consists of three episodes, exploring China's extreme natural landscapes such as snow mountains, oceans, and sinkholes, as well as related human geography and folk customs. By inviting American explorer and photographer Ben Horton as the host, and pairing with top Chinese extreme sports enthusiasts as partners, the series successfully presents a more comprehensive and three-dimensional China to the world.

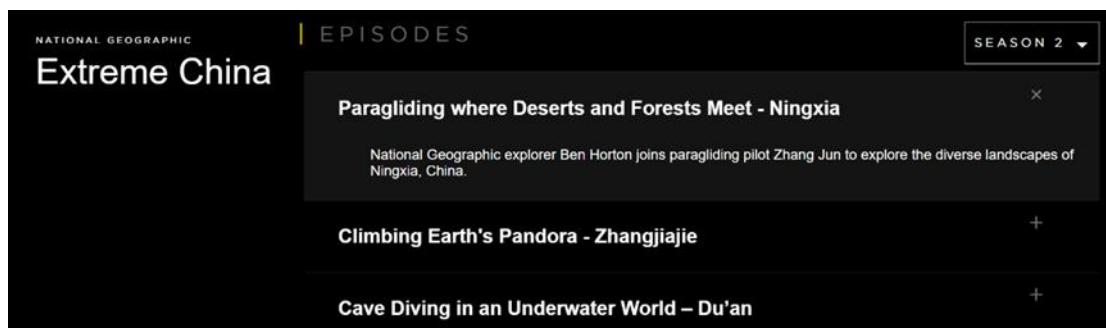


Figure 2: Printscreen from the National Greographic

National language capacity is also reflected in accurate storytelling. In the process of narration, the media needs to select appropriate language and expressions based on the characteristics and needs of the audience. The national language proficiency helps the media achieve precise storytelling by providing rich language resources and professional language services. In

international cooperation projects in the media field, language support is indispensable. The national language proficiency provides solid support for these projects by offering professional language services. Co-produced film projects require a significant amount of translation, dubbing, and subtitling work during the preparation and production processes. The national language proficiency offers comprehensive language support for these projects by cultivating professional translators and dubbing talents, establishing efficient language processing workflows, and more. Additionally, the national language proficiency promotes cultural exchange and mutual learning between different countries and regions during the cooperation process, laying a solid foundation for the successful implementation of projects. For example, co-produced films like *The Great Wall* and *Kung Fu Panda 3* not only integrate elements and styles of Chinese and Western cultures but also push Chinese stories to the global market through international production teams and distribution channels. This international cooperation and communication not only enhance the production level and global influence of Chinese films but also facilitate mutual understanding and respect between Chinese and foreign cultures.

4. Suggestions for Enhancing the National Language Capacity

4.1. Policy Design

Enhancing the national language capacity is a complex task that involves multiple aspects. It not only relates to the country's international competitiveness but also directly impacts various areas such as the economy, culture, diplomacy, among others, thereby influencing the national image construction [7]. Starting from the policy level, a country should establish a comprehensive and multi-level language strategic planning system. The government should formulate a comprehensive language policy, specifying the essence, goals, and strategic directions of the country's language proficiency. This includes the inheritance and promotion of indigenous languages as well as the promotion and application of internationally common languages. Policies should cover various aspects including language education, language dissemination, language application, and international communication. In 2021, the General Office of the State Council officially issued the "Guiding Opinions on Strengthening Language and Writing Work in the New Era." In Chapter Six "Significantly Enhancing the International Status and Influence of the Chinese Language", the document clearly outlines an important strategic direction: "Promoting the increased use and proportion of Chinese in international organizations and conferences, and advancing the international application of Chinese Pinyin." This measure profoundly demonstrates the influence of the Chinese language on the international language policy stage. It is not only a key indicator to measure the effectiveness of expanding the country's language proficiency but also an indispensable element in building an international discourse power system commensurate with the comprehensive national strength and international status of our country. This initiative is closely related to enhancing the effectiveness of international communication and is a core goal pursued by the country in its efforts to build language capacity.

Firstly, we need to strengthen the formulation and improvement of national language policies, clarify the strategic position and development goals of language proficiency, incorporate language education into national development planning. Meanwhile, we can increase support for language technology research and application, leverage modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data to enhance language processing, translation, and dissemination efficiency. Furthermore, language resource protection and development are promoted, so as to enhance the documentation and research of endangered languages and enrich the national language resource database. Last but not least, more international language exchange and cooperation would elevate the international influence and soft power of national

language and culture through organizing international language and cultural festivals, supporting activities of international language organizations, etc.

4.2. Media Transmission

To effectively improve the national language capacity from the perspective of media, we should strengthen the leading role of mainstream media in spreading the national language and culture, by setting up language learning columns, produce high-quality language teaching programs and documentaries, in a vivid and interesting way to popularize language knowledge and cultural connotations. What's more, advanced technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence are employed to analyze audience interests and focus points, in order to achieve precise communication. And differentiated communication strategies must be tailored to the characteristics and audience needs of different countries and regions. We must encourage cross-media integration and innovate language communication forms with the aid of internet, social media, and other emerging platforms, such as developing language learning apps, interactive live courses, etc., to enhance audience engagement and learning motivation. In addition, it is necessary to promote international media exchanges and cooperation to show the charm of a country's language through joint production and mutual broadcasting of programs, and to enhance the international community's understanding and recognition of a country's language and culture. Finally, we should establish and improve the evaluation mechanism of language communication effect, timely adjust the communication strategy, and ensure the maximum effectiveness of the media in improving the national language ability.

4.3. The Public Attitude

In order to effectively enhance the national language capacity, we should adopt diverse and participatory strategies.

Firstly, it is essential to enhance the emphasis on language education within the basic education system, focusing not only on foreign language acquisition but also on elevating the standard of mother tongue education in order to foster bilingual or multilingual capabilities among citizens. Secondly, there should be encouragement for various sectors of society to engage in language and cultural exchange activities such as language corners, cultural festivals, and international exchange forums with the aim of deepening public understanding and respect for diverse linguistic and cultural traditions. Furthermore, leveraging modern technological tools such as online language learning platforms and AI-assisted language teaching aids can help reduce barriers to language acquisition while enhancing learning efficiency, thereby facilitating more widespread access to language education. Additionally, government intervention through policy support for the development of the language industry including translation, publishing, and international communication sectors can contribute to fostering a thriving linguistic economy. Lastly, intensifying efforts in promoting awareness about the significance of linguistic proficiency through robust advocacy of language policies will help create a conducive societal environment that values comprehensive improvement in national linguistic abilities.

4.4. International Cooperation

At the international level, enhancing national language capabilities should be an integral part of a country's strategic planning. To achieve this, it is recommended to establish a multi-level and wide-ranging mechanism for international language exchange and cooperation.

Firstly, there should be efforts to strengthen collaboration with international language education institutions by introducing advanced language teaching methods and technologies to improve the quality and efficiency of domestic language education. Secondly, initiatives should be taken to promote bilateral and multilateral language cooperation projects such as exchanging language teachers, facilitating scholarly exchanges, and jointly developing textbooks in order to enhance mutual understanding and friendship among people from

different countries. Additionally, leveraging international organizations and multilateral platforms like the United Nations and the European Union can help advocate for the protection of linguistic diversity while promoting the sharing and utilization of global language resources on a wider scale. Furthermore, it is important to encourage participation from enterprises, non-governmental organizations, and other social forces in international language cooperation projects—especially in key economic, technological, cultural fields—to facilitate international trade promotion through linguistic services that foster scientific innovation as well as cultural exchange. Lastly but not least, strengthening efforts towards setting up internationally recognized standards for languages will elevate a country's recognition globally while also boosting its competitiveness—a crucial step towards laying a solid foundation for deepening international cooperation[11].

5. Conclusion

This study starts with the media environment in the era of digital intelligence, delving into the importance of national image building and the new challenges it faces. By analyzing the definition of national language proficiency, evaluation system, and its role in international communication, it reveals the critical role of national language proficiency in national image building. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in expanding the research framework of national image building and national language proficiency; the practical significance lies in providing valuable reference for countries to better shape and communicate their image in the new media environment. However, this study also has certain limitations. The limitations of the research objects and case selection may mean that the results of the study may not fully explain the situation of all countries or regions. Moreover, with the development of technology and the continuous changes in the media environment, research conclusions may need continuous updates and adjustments.

By further exploring the enhancement path of national language proficiency and the development and application of multilingual communication technologies, exploring ways to enhance national language learning and usage abilities, discussing the application of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data in language services, or researching policy support measures for countries to enhance language proficiency, it will provide more solid theoretical and practical support for China's national image communication in the era of digital intelligence.

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