

# Study on the Communication Effectiveness of the China's Official Publicity

## -- Taking CGTN Channel on YouTube Platform as an Example

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**Abstract.** Since the global epidemic of COVID-19, China has faced a more complex and harsh international public opinion environment. Under this circumstance, China has actively strengthened the construction of national image, promoted the national mainstream media institutions represented by CGTN to settle in the international social networking platform, and extensively carried out official publicity activities including national image building. However, there is still a huge gap between China and other countries, such as Britain, the United States and Japan, in terms of communication power, influence and persuasion, and the communication effectiveness is far from what is expected. This paper takes the CGTN channel as the representative of China's official publicity media as the research object, and uses text analysis and content analysis to summarize and analyze CGTN channel's publicity purpose, reading and listening key data, etc. By horizontal comparison with the current mainstream channels in Britain and the United States, this paper sums up the unfavorable situation and main reasons CGTN channels face in terms of communication effectiveness and puts forward several suggestions on how to improve their communication effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Official Publicity; Communication Effectiveness; YouTube; CGTN.

### 1. Performance of CGTN's Communication Effectiveness in COVID-19

The broad definition of communication effectiveness is the extent to which the information transmitted by media reaches the receiver and is received, understood and internalized by the receiver. China has actively strengthened the construction of its national image. An important link is to promote the entry of national mainstream media institutions represented by CGTN into the international social networking platform, and widely carry out official publicity activities, including the shaping of the national image. CGTN channel on YouTube platform is undoubtedly in the leading position in China's official publicity media matrix.

During the epidemic, CGTN played a positive role in shaping China's national image through the YouTube platform. For example, CGTN launched the first English documentary "Wuhan War Epidemic Chronicle", which shows the process of fighting against the epidemic in Wuhan. Through the improvement and application of theme setting, narrative perspective, narrative language and other aspects in the "War Epidemic" documentary, it plays a very positive role in China's national image during the new epidemic, and provides soft emotional guidance and spiritual comfort to the audience. At the macro level, it transcends cultural barriers and misunderstandings, enhances mutual understanding, and makes the "Chinese story" more profound and comprehensive. In addition, CGTN set up the "Magnifying Glass of Truth" column on the YouTube platform, and launched such programs as "Did the Police Shoot New Coronary Pneumonia Patients in the Street?" Or videos such as Visiting a Shelter Hospital are used to explain the context of relevant events in an orderly manner by means of the anchor's appearance, expert interviews, etc., supplemented by screenshots of overseas reports. Clarify in front of international audiences the false information or untrue statements that some western media used the epidemic to discredit China, and timely and accurately convey the voice of China, so that China's national image is steadily improved and advanced towards positive aspects.

Although CGTN channel has many outstanding performances during the epidemic period, overall, CGTN channel's overall communication effect is limited, and there is still a huge gap between CGTN

channel and mainstream media in Britain, the United States and Japan in terms of product communication ability, content persuasion, value recognition, etc.

## 2. Analysis of CGTN Channel Communication Effectiveness

To analyze the communication effectiveness of CGTN channels, this study obtained the relevant data of CGTN, BBC and CNN channels from March 10, 2021, to April 10, 2021, from the Influencer data analysis website. The communication effectiveness of CGTN is analyzed by building a basic communication effectiveness evaluation framework based on five indicators: number of fans, number of video production, number of video views, video like and dislike ratings, and video review rate. The following conclusions are drawn.

### 2.1 The Number of Fans is Low But Growing Fast

The number of fans is an important indicator to measure whether the channel content matches the audience's interest and whether the content is widely disseminated. The growth of fans is an important manifestation of the expansion of the channel's influence.

As of April 10, 2021, CGTN has about 2.3 million fans. Compared with the BBC channel with 10.9 million fans and CNN channel with 12.3 million fans, CGTN channel has fewer fans. During the research period, the number of fans of the three channels increased by 80000, 200000 and 100000 respectively, which shows that CGTN has made significant progress in the improvement of communication mechanism and content production innovation, and the effective communication scope and the number of sticky audiences are showing a growth trend. However, compared with BBC and CNN, two mainstream media of the same kind in Britain and America, they are still relatively inferior and passive in the fight for international discourse power and cohesive audience.

### 2.2 The Number of Videos Produced is Difficult to be Proportional to the Number of Views

The number of videos produced refers to the number of videos produced by a specific channel on the YouTube platform in a certain period. It is an important indicator to measure the content production efficiency and media transmission intensity of a specific channel. The number of views refers to the specific number of media production content read and accepted by the audience, which is the key data to judge the popularity of media content.

CGTN channel in YouTube platform was established on January 24, 2013. It has produced about 94000 videos in eight years, with an average annual production of about 11800 videos. Both BBC and CNN have been established for a long time. Since their establishment, they have produced 13100 and 151100 videos respectively, with an average annual production of 80000 and 9400 videos respectively. Although CGTN has been established and operated for a short time, compared with BBC and CNN, its average video production on the YouTube platform is better than the latter two, and it is more prominent in terms of content transmission intensity and content production efficiency.

In terms of the average number of video views, since its establishment, the average number of video views in CGTN channel has been 1944, which is far lower than the 62900 of BBC and 285800 of CNN. To some extent, this shows that the video content of CGTN channel is more difficult to be received by the audience than that of BBC and CNN after production. In terms of popularity, there is a huge gap with the current mainstream media in Britain and America, which forms a strong contrast with the production efficiency of CGTN content.

By comparing the video production, total video viewing, average video viewing and the ratio of video viewing to the total number of fans of CGTN, BBC and CNN channels, the study found that CGTN channels produced 687 videos, harvested 3.81 million views, and each video was viewed about 5540 times on average. The BBC and CNN channels have produced 84 and 229 videos respectively in the past 30 days, which is far lower than the production of CGTN. However, they have harvested 7.21 million and 77.49 million views respectively, as well as 85800 and 338400 average views. From the local level, it once again shows that CGTN has higher video production efficiency than BBC and

CNN, but the popularity and effect of video transmission represented by the number of video views are in direct proportion to the efforts made. In terms of the ratio of video viewing number to number of fans, 0.24% of CGTN is also lower than 0.79% of BBC and 2.75% of CNN, which also shows that the fans in CGTN channel are relatively less active, and the proportion of "zombie fans" and "non sensitive fans" in the channel is relatively high.

**Table 1.** Statistics of relevant data of three channels (March 10 to April 10, 2021)

	video production	total video viewing	average video viewing	Views/fans
CGTN	687	3810000	5540	0.24%
BBC	84	7210000	85800	0.79%
CNN	229	77490000	338400	2.75%

### 2.3 High Praise of Video Content

The ratio of likes, comments, like/dislike, and views in channel videos reflects the audience's recognition and feedback participation of video content, which is of great significance and value in measuring video content quality.

The ratio of likes, comments, and views of CGTN channel video is 4.93% and 2.71% respectively, higher than the ratio of likes and views of BBC and CNN channels of 1.05% and 1.41% respectively, and higher than the ratio of comments and views of BBC and CNN channels of 0.54%, 1.14% respectively. This positively shows that the video content of CGTN channel is more likely to be favored and approved by viewers than BBC and CNN and can also more effectively arouse the enthusiasm of viewers to share their feelings and comments.

In terms of the ratio of dislike and views, the CGTN channel value is 0.18%, which is lower than the BBC channel's 0.22% and CNN's 0.29%. The video content produced by CGTN channel is of relatively high quality and is not easily rated by viewers after being watched.

**Table 2.** Statistics of the ratio of video comments and views (March 10 to April 10, 2021)

	likes/ views	comments / views	dislikes/ views
CGTN	4.93%	2.71%	0.18%
BBC	1.05%	0.54%	0.22%
CNN	1.41%	1.14%	0.29%

In a word, CGTN channel can affect a small audience, and the growth rate of fans is slower than that of BBC, CNN and other mainstream media in Britain and America. In contrast to the higher intensity of video production, the relatively low amount of video viewing is the main disadvantage of "no one pays attention to watching, and no one watches after doing". What is gratifying is that the overall quality of video content produced by CGTN channel is high, and it is easy to get praise and comments from viewers, and the proportion of people who can get trampled on is relatively low. This has laid the strength and psychological foundation for CGTN channel to strengthen its own system and mechanism construction, enhance its influence and communication power.

## 3. Reasons for Low Communication Effectiveness

CGTN channels are mainly faced with such unfavorable situations as small audience coverage, and difficulty in proportional transmission intensity and breadth. The reasons for its low communication effectiveness are as follows.

### 3.1 The Impression of "Political Propaganda Machine" is Difficult to Remove

Media impression is the long-term attitude and view of the audience on the structure, purpose, nature, and behavior of a specific media, which has an important impact on the audience's choice of media, contact with media and the effect after contact. CGTN channel has an obvious tendency of

political propaganda in the process of daily content broadcasting, which is often rejected and blackmailed by international audiences.

In this study, Hou Yi data collector was used to capture the latest 50 videos broadcast by CGTN and BBC as of April 10, and then Nvivo11 was used to classify the captured video titles, that is, the CGTN and BBC video titles were read one by one and marked with reference points, followed by conceptual integration. For example, "song", "film", etc. are merged into "entertainment", and "China", "present", etc. are summarized into "politics", which ultimately leads to four themes: politics, society, entertainment, and novelty hunting. The analysis results show that among the 50 newly released videos sampled, CGTN channels broadcast 20 political videos, accounting for about 40%, which is much higher than the three BBC channels and 6% of the total. CGTN channel has obvious political propaganda tendency in the process of daily video production and release.

### **3.2 Trapped in the Concept of "Magic Bullet Theory", The Utilitarian Tendency is Obvious**

At present, China is facing a very bad public opinion environment in the international arena. Many media practitioners believe that this disadvantage is caused by inadequate publicity. Therefore, if frequent external publicity is carried out, a better national image can be quickly established. This falls into the trap of the concept of "magic bullet theory".

The construction of the national image is not a short-term, overnight problem, which requires the joint efforts of all parties and long-term maintenance. From the perspective of international audiences, the image of China in their mind has been affected by long-term one-sided and distorted communication. To improve or even reshape China's national image, patience and long-term communication are required.

### **3.3 It is Difficult for Ordinary People to become the Main Body of Propaganda**

China's foreign publicity media are mainly the official media represented by CGTN and China daily, with little participation of ordinary people. On the technical level, China's Great Firewall blocked access to international well-known social media, including YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, etc. The possibility for ordinary people to use international social and media platforms for publicity and information exchange is very small. At the level of administrative regulations, there are relevant provisions in China that no unit or individual may establish and use other channels for international networking. These have affected the enthusiasm and creativity of ordinary people in spontaneously publicizing the image of China to a certain extent.

## **4. Suggestions on Improving the Communication Effectiveness of CGTN**

### **4.1 Pay Attention to the Dual Hints of Political Content and Highlight the Objectivity**

For a long time, the official publicity media represented by CGTN only paid attention to the positive publicity of political content in the mind of international audiences, leading to the confrontational interpretation of international audiences. From the perspective of video content category and discourse tendency, CNN can publish both positive and negative information in political videos, hiding its political propaganda intention in the proportion control of positive and negative information. It is difficult for international audiences who support or oppose CNN's position to feel CNN's own political propaganda tendency, which is conducive to the construction of its "neutral" and objective image, thus serving to improve the international discourse power and influence.

Therefore, when planning and publishing video content, China's official foreign media should avoid attacking the preset position properly in full accordance with the political content of "great, glorious and correct". Create a more neutral, objective, authentic and diversified media image, and reduce the rejection, hostility and rebellious psychology of international audiences who hold opposing positions.

#### **4.2 Increase Entertainment and Novelty Seeking Short Videos to Enhance Audience Interest**

Since 2015, short videos have gradually developed, which is conducive to the audience to forward and share after watching. In the statistics of this study, from the perspective of video theme categories, 14 of the 50 videos with the highest broadcast volume on BBC channels are novelty seeking videos and 27 entertainment videos, accounting for about 28% and 54% respectively; Among the 50 videos with the highest broadcast volume on CNN channel, there are 25 strange hunting videos and 17 entertainment videos, accounting for about 50% and 34% respectively. Among the 50 videos with the highest broadcast volume in CGTN channel, 17 are adventure videos, and none are entertainment videos, accounting for 34% and 0% respectively. In general, among the videos broadcasted most frequently on these three channels, entertainment and novelty seeking videos account for a relatively high proportion. Entertainment and novelty seeking videos are more favored by the audience in a longer period.

Therefore, China's official publicity media, represented by CGTN channel, should reasonably adjust their focus of work, pay more attention to China related novelty hunting and entertainment events, and present them in the form of short videos. This will stimulate the interest of potential audiences in reading and listening, improve the stickiness of existing audiences, and create a more three-dimensional and diversified national and media image.

#### **4.3 Mobilize Ordinary People to Fill the Blind Spot of Official Publicity**

With the development of Internet technology, many individuals of the public participate in the external publicity activities in various ways, such as Li Ziqi. They show more Chinese life clips to international audiences in short videos and other ways, which, to a certain extent, make up for the official publicity activities.

The key to effectively improve the communication effectiveness of China's official publicity media is to be able to flexibly use various effective persuasion methods, including "two faced tips", to reverse their unfavorable media image; Accelerate the agenda setting rate of international hot events and topics; Enhance the output of entertainment and novelty seeking short video content with a duration of less than five minutes, improve the audience's interest in reading and listening, and highlight a more relaxed and three-dimensional channel tone; widely mobilize the enthusiasm and creativity of ordinary people.

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