

Research Overview and Reflection on the Evaluation System of China's Mainstream Media Going Global

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Abstract: As China's "external publicity strategy" and "going global project" continue to exert force, examining the effects of mainstream Chinese media on international communication and constructing a scientific, objective, and operable effect evaluation system have become the top priority. In recent years, both the academic circles and the industry have realized the importance of this issue and carried out related researches. However, there exist ubiquitous problems such as more focus on qualitative researches and less emphasis on quantitative researches, more focus on the transmission effect, and less emphasis on economic effect. Thus, this paper sorts out these researches and proposes some thoughts.

1. Introduction

In recent years, China's mainstream media have conducted increasingly diversified activities of going global. Chinese government attaches great importance to the effect of telling good stories and disseminating China's voice by mainstream media such as People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television, and China Daily, and invests a lot of funds, manpower and material resources. As of now, Chinese media's array of going global has initially formed. These mainstream media as important carriers for China's external communication have been consciously responsible for effectively enhancing China's soft power and competing for the right to speak in the world's public opinion pattern. They have become the vanguard in China media matrix. Despite their important role, how is the communication competitiveness, social influence, and value orientation of China's mainstream media in the international public opinion field? How to build an objective, scientific and exercisable effect evaluation system? These issues are worthy of careful examination and prudent consideration.

In recent years, both the academic circles and the industry have realized the importance of this issue and carried out relevant researches. However, there exist ubiquitous problems such as more focus on qualitative researches and less emphasis on quantitative researches, more focus on the transmission effect, and less emphasis on economic effect. Thus, this paper sorts out these researches and proposes some thoughts.

2. Relevant Researches of Academic Circles on China's Mainstream Media Going Global

According to the communication process, communication can be divided into subject research, control research, means research, content research, effect research, etc., of which effect research is considered as the core problem-- to establish clear and a comprehensive measurement index system through various quantitative and qualitative communication research methods, to measure the attitudes and behavior changes of the recipient of the communication, and to explore what communication methods and communication techniques can be used to achieve the purpose of persuading the audience.

Some scholars have sorted out the changes in the context of communication. In the external communication activities, Chinese news practitioners once advocated the concept of "propaganda", which is neutral word in Chinese culture stressing the initiative of communication subject. However,

in Western culture, “propaganda” is a derogatory word with the meaning of imposing views on others. According to American communication master Lasswell, propaganda means “the dissemination for deliberately controlling and manipulation”. As it emphasizes subjectivity and neglects the needs of the audience, the external propaganda model has aroused the suspicion and denial of China's information transmitted to the outside world by many Western audiences so that the effect of external communication has been greatly reduced. As Chinese news authorities and news practitioners further understand news dissemination activities, China has replaced “external propaganda” with “foreign communication”. The change of concept indicates the respect for the law of news communication and attention to the audience and the communication effect.

Guo Ke was a scholar who conducted studies on communication effect in China at an early stage. He first analyzed and elaborated the communication effect of mainland Chinese English media from positive and negative perspectives through evaluation in virtue of empirical investigation method. On this basis, he discussed the causes of the poor communication effect of English media in China (Guo Ke, 2002). This study with important reference significance has the flaw of not constructing an evaluation model and indicator system for international communication capability.

In 2004, Hu Angang et al designed an index system for evaluating the strength of media, calculated and compared the strength of media in major countries, including China. The research indicates that the strength of China's media has ranked second in the world in 2000, and it is believed that China has grown into a major media power in the world. He also pointed out that China's media has an unbalanced strength structure, with relevantly poor economic strength of international communication and media, which is only 14% and 6.5% of United States. There even exists a large gap with Japan, the United Kingdom, India and Germany and other countries.

Ke Huixin et al discussed the framework of the evaluation system of the external communication effect of China's media, including the process of external communication, evaluation criteria, evaluation index system, and evaluation operation system. These explorations from the early mathematical model to the later classification research method are worthy of reference. The advantages of Ke Huixin's studies lie in the classification of the audience into ordinary people and opinion leaders by means of quantitative and qualitative methods respectively, which can provide some references. Also, the methods of evaluation with operability are conducted by entrusting third parties. It also proposed to conduct evaluation once a year at the beginning and to take semi-annual or quarterly evaluation after accumulating enough experience. When conducting sample surveys of the general foreign citizens, it is feasible to use online surveys, telephone surveys, and face-to-face surveys to know netizens' behaviors (Ke Huixin, 2009). On this basis, the evaluation indicators are operationally defined in combination with different media types to establish an audience-dimension effect evaluation indicator system (Wang Juan, Ke Huixin, 2012), which is the first comprehensive evaluation index system at audience dimension in Chinese academic circles.

Luo Xue (2016) constructed an evaluation framework integrating traditional media and new media by starting from with the three-stage communication effect of audience perception, attitude and behavior. Cognition is the preliminary stage of influence, attitude is the middle stage of influence, and behavior is the advanced stage of influence. On this basis, an evaluation system composed of four quantitative indicators of communication width, depth, accuracy, and interaction is designed.

Moreover, the study on the effect of new media is becoming a new hot spot. Compared with issue volume, audience rating and other implicit data, clicks, broadcasts, reposts, likes and other data on the new media platform become more real-time and direct, which facilitates researchers' studies. Many scholars think it necessary to strengthen the research on the effect of Internet international group communication.

In the end of 2016, “BNU China Media Thinktank Release” released “Central Media Overseas Network Communication Report (2016)” at Beijing Normal University. The research group of the New Media Research Center of Beijing Normal University excavated the data of 24 central-level media on five websites, Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Wikipedia from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015, and combined CNN, BBC, KBS, Asahi Shimbun and other 8 overseas media as reference media of the central-level traditional media, analyzed from 20 indicators. By assigning

different weights to various indicators, the overseas communication power of central-level traditional media and the central news website's network are calculated and evaluated. The survey indicates that there exists a huge gap between the overseas communication power of the central-level traditional media and that of the mainstream media in Europe and America, but the gap with the mainstream media in Asia is small. There is an unbalanced communication power between the central-level traditional media and overseas mainstream media. Some news sites lack awareness of overseas communication, and the utilization of overseas social media is poor.

On the whole, despite of breakthroughs in the research on external communication effect and the construction of the evaluation index system in China's academic circles, it is at the exploratory experiment stage. The existing researches still focus on work summary. The indicator system has not undergone extensive practical examination, adjustment and improvement. Some indicators in the indicator system are difficult to be converted into indicators that can be quantitatively investigated. Therefore, there still exist problems in practical operation.

3. Research and Self-Evaluation of the Effect of Chinese Mainstream Media Going Global

At present, principal parts of Chinese media going global include “People's Daily”, Xinhua News Agency, “China Daily”, China Radio and Television Station, etc. In 2009, the national-level online audiovisual media agencies, China Xinhua Network TV and China Internet TV officially started to broadcast; at the end of 2016, China Global TV Network also joined the team of external communication; in 2018, the English client-side of People's Daily was officially launched and marked a major move of China's mainstream media going global. In addition, with the mainstream Chinese media have settled in Facebook and Twitter, and other overseas social media, established specialized agencies and personnel for communication, China's mainstream media matrix for external communication is becoming more and more powerful.

In 2007, CCTV carried out a questionnaire on 50,000 sample households in the United States to know the audience's viewing intention. Xinhua net conducted audience research through server monitoring data and found that overseas audiences accounted for 25% of the total audience, the majority of which were highly intelligent people such as sinologists and government think tanks.

“People's Daily” and “People's Daily Overseas Edition” conducted real-time monitoring of the situation of external communication through central kitchen mode and ranked them. According to incomplete statistics, over the past five years, 200 major Chinese and English media in the world have quoted and referred to “People's Daily”, which showed a generally increasing trend in article publication, with an annual average of more than 2,000 articles. Statistics from 18 mainstream international media including New York Times, the United Kingdom, the Times, and Agence France-France indicate that 920 articles were quoted and forwarded by People's Daily in 2014. What changes are happening in contemporary China? What kind of impact will the developing China bring to the world? These are becoming issues extensively concerned by the international community and becoming a strong growth point for China's external communications.

Global Times, a subsidiary of People's Daily, has established a public opinion center to con the effects of Global Times' external reports through statistics and analysis of the overseas mainstream media's referrals. Then, an evaluation framework for China's news media's external communication effect has been preliminarily constructed for quantitative evaluation of the external communication effect of Global Times from four dimensions of the breadth, equilibrium, identity and synergy of communication.

As the main media for external communication in China, China Radio International carried out multimedia communication business to more than 160 countries and regions in 65 languages. From 2009, CRI initiated the evaluation of key projects in international communication capability construction, mainly consisting of two parts, i.e., qualitative summary and quantitative index evaluation. Scores are made through objective data monitoring or expert appraisal, while project reports on key indicator dimensions are composed. The evaluation reports mainly discuss advantages, disadvantages, problems and improvements of the project implementation from aspects of media

scale, public opinion influence, and brand building, and decision-making suggestions are provided. In terms of evaluation and scoring, scores are calculated according to the first-level indicators, second-level indicators and evaluation points and other three-level indicators. Evaluation focuses on the most specific scoring indicators, including quantitative evaluation points and qualitative evaluation points. Quantitative evaluation points are often evaluated by using year-on-year data. In 2015, CRI adjusted and improved statistics and release of audience feedback and communication effect indicator data. The improved indicator data covering multimedia multilingual communication are closer to the actual development situation of international communication.

Overall, the evaluation systems of these mainstream media with a comprehensive coverage and strong professionalism have played a positive role in promoting China's main media to go global. However, there still exist defects of fragmentation. It is necessary to strengthen the guidance, systematicness and timeliness, extract key indicators, and reduce operating costs to better serve journalism practice.

4. Deficiencies in Related Researches and Further Thinking

If is found after sorting that the academic community and the industry have laid a solid foundation for the research and evaluation system of the mainstream Chinese media's going global. However, it is still at the initial stage with deficiencies.

First, more focus is on the mechanical application of western theories, and theoretical innovation is neglected. Existing studies lack a certain systematic and academic research of theoretical system construction. First, theoretical researches of external communication lack originality, and more researches of soft power, national image, and cross-cultural research emerging from abroad are introduced without theoretical innovation based on China's national conditions. In addition, from the perspective of research orientation, scholars usually raised questions on phenomenon description and guidance-oriented question. There are less questions on theoretical construction. The investigation and evaluation of the external communication ability are more focused on the description of the communication system and the discussion of the external communication strategy and practice. Therefore, most of the research results remain at the level of experience summary or work plan assumption. In-depth theoretical and solid empirical research results are insufficient.

Second, there are more qualitative researches and less quantitative researches. From the perspective of research methods, the research methods adopted by domestic scholars are mainly speculative and qualitative. There are less quantitative analysis and empirical researches. The few quantitative analysis lacks the qualitative basis so that the research results just about the obscure mathematical model indexes and their values. It is easy to deviate and it is difficult to operate. Some quantitative researches fall into another mistake, that is, to define growth by quantitative data and to promote regardless of audience acceptance.

Third, more focus is on traditional media and new media is neglected. With the popularization of the Internet, mobile phones, tablet computers and other new media, the time and space barriers have been broken and the borders between countries are becoming unclear. This has undoubtedly facilitated international communication activities and further broken the barriers of culture and national boundaries. In addition, in the Internet cause, developing countries represented by China have almost kept in line with developed countries, and have even walk ahead of developed countries due to policy support and other favorable factors. Therefore, the communication effect of new media cannot be underestimated.

Fourth, more focus is on communication capabilities and media capital operation is neglected. The main modes of international communication strategy include product and service export, brand franchise transactions, strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions, founding of brand-new subsidiaries in target countries, as well as other methods integrating above modes. However, at present, the evaluation China's media effect still remains at communication capability. The asset effects and economic effects are seldom concerned.

5. Summary

In addition, after sorting out literature, it can be found that researches on the effect of China's mainstream media going global, especially the existing researches on the evaluation index system of the effect, involve a relatively single research object or audience, lack evaluation embodiment, extensive inspection and verification. Some final-level indicators are difficult for quantification without strong feasibility. Some indicators are designed to be static with limited universality. Generally, a set of widely recognized and relatively scientific index system has not yet been established. Therefore, it is necessary to further explore how to carry out the top-level design of the research on the effect of China's media going global, including the communication objective, communication framework construction, communication paradigm, communication indicator system, and the implementation of communication so as to adapt to the new changes in the ever-changing international communication environment.

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