

# The International Communication Effectiveness of China's Image from the Perspective of Soft Power Pillars: A Case Study of Internet Celebrity "IShowSpeed"

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## Abstract

The live streams of internet celebrity "IShowSpeed" during his 2025 China Tour have been widely circulated, exerting a significant influence on international audiences' perceptions of China. From the perspective of soft power pillars, this study employed Python for targeted web scraping, collecting the top 100 English high-vote comments from each of his 8 China Tour live streams on YouTube. Through content analysis, it explores how non-traditional communicators craft content for to shape China's national image overseas. Findings indicate that overseas audiences are highly interested in the vitality of Chinese urban life and diverse cultural scenes in the videos. This is reflected in the dual advantages of high penetration rate and high positive sentiment ratio in culture and heritage and sustainable future dimensions. In contrast, governance-related comments present a paradox: high positive sentiment yet low penetration. Comments on culture and sustainable future are mostly positive; few viewers focus on governance, most of those do offer positive feedback. This study concludes that the celebrity offers a new pathway for China's soft power construction. Its core value lies in breaking cultural cognitive barriers through life-oriented content design and scenario-based communication. To maximize such effectiveness, efforts should focus on leveraging strengths, avoiding weaknesses, pursuing precise audience alignment, and synergizing with other communicators to enhance the overseas communication impact of China's national image.

## Keywords

International Communications, IShowSpeed, National Image, Soft Power Pillar

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## 1. Introduction

In the context of a profound transformation in the global communication ecosystem, the surge of short-video platforms such as YouTube has not only reshaped the landscape of international discourse but also facilitated the emergence of grassroots influencers as key actors in the transnational communication of national image. Within scholarship on national image communication, increasing attention has been directed toward non-traditional communicators—particularly social media influencers—the diversity of digital platforms has empowered these influencers to emerge as dynamic content (Sullivan & Wang, 2024). Influencer-driven communication typically centers on everyday life scenarios, with a narrative logic that inherently leans toward depoliticization, thereby enhancing resonance among younger audiences (Xu, Reijnders, & Kim, 2021). Characterized by relatable storytelling and high interactivity, influencer content constructs more accessible and engaging communication environments for youth populations (Xu, 2023). Furthermore, the modes of national image representation are evolving: the fragmented and visually oriented nature of short-form videos aligns closely with the information consumption preferences of younger demographics, positioning such formats as emerging vehicles for cross-cultural exchange (Lin & de Kloet, 2019).

While disseminating information through state-led propaganda may be technically straightforward, yet it proves far more challenging to ensure that such messaging is truly understood and embraced by global audiences. The live-streamed footage documenting his 2025 China tour sparked extensive international discussion and visibility.

Against the long-standing structural imbalance in the global media landscape, international perceptions of China are often shaped by information gaps and limited understanding. In this context, his visit can be interpreted as a form of corrective engagement—an effort to clarify misunderstandings and foster mutual understanding. This study examines his China Visit as a case study, analyzing his content through the theoretical framework of the eight pillars of soft power. Employing content analysis approach, eight livestream video comment sections were systematically coded, using “penetration rate” and “positive sentiment ratio” as core metrics to assess communicative effectiveness across dimensions such as culture and heritage, and sustainable development. The research aims to identify the distinctive strengths and limitations of foreign influencer narratives in shaping China’s international image, offering insights for refining multi-actor strategies in China’s global communication efforts.

## 2. International Communication of National Image Based on Soft Power

### 2.1. Current State of Soft Power Research

In the context of globalization, soft power has emerged as a core indicator of national comprehensive strength, with the international communication of na-

tional image serving as a pivotal pathway for its enhancement. Contemporary scholarship predominantly adopts Joseph S. Nye's theoretical framework, which defines soft power as "the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye, 2004). Its foundational sources are widely recognized as cultural appeal, the legitimacy of political values, and the moral credibility of foreign policy. Building upon this foundation, recent studies advocate for a localized adaptation of soft power theory grounded in the distinctive characteristics of Chinese civilization. Such an approach emphasizes constructing a comprehensive theoretical system encompassing cultural continuity, value resonance, and developmental philosophy—thereby moving beyond overreliance on Western theoretical paradigms (Zhang, 2023).

At the structural level, empirical research employing network analysis has demonstrated a dynamic interplay between hard and soft power, revealing mechanisms of mutual reinforcement and reciprocal transformation (Hu & Ouyang, 2023). With the advancement of new media technologies, theoretical innovation in soft power research has continued apace. Notably, the concept of "generative soft power" has been introduced, expanding both the conceptual boundaries and analytical scope of the field (Fang, 2025). Concurrently, soft power communication within the framework of new public diplomacy has become a focal point of academic inquiry. In the new era, soft power construction must transcend the traditional state-led model and establish a collaborative communication system involving multiple actors, including government, civil society, and the media (Shao, 2021).

The formulation of practical strategies constitutes a central objective of current research. From the perspective of national image construction, scholars emphasize the need for a dual-track approach: actively shaping self-representations while remaining responsive to external perceptions. While proactively constructing an ideal national image, it is essential to focus on cognitive feedback and interaction from the international community (Ye, 2023).

To date, much of the existing literature remains rooted in qualitative analysis. Globally, soft power assessment frameworks face multiple challenges, including inconsistent data collection standards and insufficiently comprehensive evaluation dimensions. Domestically, China has not yet established a quantitative soft power evaluation framework that is contextually tailored to its national conditions, systematically validated, and internationally credible. This hinders the accurate measurement of soft power enhancement effects and impedes strategy optimization (Shi & Zhu, 2022). To address the deficiencies in quantitative soft power research, the soft power pillar perspective offers a new direction. Soft power pillars can transform the abstract concept of soft power into measurable and comparable specific indicators, providing a precise analytical framework for soft power research and effectively compensating for the subjective limitations of qualitative research (Shi & Zhu, 2022).

## 2.2. Current Status of National Image International Communication Based on the Soft Power Index

Research on the international communication of national image has developed a relatively systematic research trajectory, with relevant discussions focusing on multiple dimensions, including core interconnections, communication subjects, strategy formulation, and technological empowerment. It serves as the core pathway for boosting the soft power index, with a significant dynamic positive interaction between the two. The core elements of national image cover politics, economy, culture, society, and other dimensions, which are highly aligned with the assessment dimensions of the soft power index. The quality of national image international communication is directly reflected in changes in the soft power index (Fan & Hu, 2016); high-quality communication can strengthen international recognition of Chinese culture and development concepts, thereby driving up the soft power index (Cheng, 2020).

Research on communication subjects has shifted from a single state-led model to a multi-stakeholder collaborative paradigm. Early studies focused primarily on the communicative roles of official institutions and mainstream media. With the rise of new public diplomacy and the self-media era, the research scope has gradually expanded. In the study of non-governmental actors, the communicative value of online celebrities has garnered attention. For instance, a study citing Chinese YouTuber Li Ziqi confirmed that non-governmental online celebrities can effectively enhance the international appeal of Chinese culture through life-oriented and contextualized content dissemination (Zhang & Wang, 2021). Another study noted that the “other-shaped” perspective of international online celebrities can break down cognitive biases among Western audiences and improve the credibility of national image communication (Tang & Tian, 2021).

Research on communication strategies is increasingly moving toward precision and systematization, in line with the quantitative assessment requirements of the soft power index. The academic community has put forward a array of practically viable strategic proposals. For example, a systems-based mindset should be adopted to build a new landscape of international communication, which balances the precise matching of content, channels, and audiences to maximize communication efficacy (Cheng, 2020). Meanwhile, a case study on Pakistan confirmed that national image international communication must prioritize cultural adaptation, adjusting content in light of the target audience’s cultural attributes and cognitive habits to effectively enhance communication outcomes (Zhang, 2023). Additionally, a study traced the historical trajectory of China’s national image construction, proposing that communication strategies in different historical stages should align with the core needs of soft power development, optimizing communication priorities and methods in response to the characteristics of the times (Qi, 2023).

## 2.3. National Image Construction Based on the Soft Power Index

The national image embodies both “objectivity” and “subjectivity.” Objectivity re-

fers to the tangible manifestations of a nation's political, economic, and cultural realities, while subjectivity arises from audiences' cultural backgrounds and cognitive biases (Fan & Hu, 2016). Rather than being an inherent or naturally occurring phenomenon, national image is a socially constructed composite impression that emerges in the minds of international audiences through sustained information dissemination and discursive meaning-making (Tang, 2023).

Constructing a national image is a highly complex undertaking. To address this challenge, some scholars have advocated for a branding approach to China's international image communication. Given the current imbalanced global communication order, which is unlikely to change in the short term—commonly described as “Western dominance and Eastern disadvantage”—leveraging grassroots channels may serve as a strategic breakthrough for national brand communication. Specifically, deploying ordinary individuals as communicators, emphasizing diverse personal narratives as content, and utilizing social media platforms can enhance the effectiveness of national brand promotion (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Other scholars argue that national image construction primarily occurs through two complementary processes: self-representation and external representation (Qi, 2023). Nevertheless, national image, as an abstract qualitative construct, demands quantitative measurement. In this regard, the soft power index serves as a critical metric and reference framework.

In 2025, Brand Finance, a UK-based consultancy, released the Global Soft Power Index 2025, in which China rose to second place globally—an outcome reflecting growing international recognition. As one of the world's most authoritative and influential assessment frameworks, this index evaluates nations across eight key pillars: Business and Trade, Education and Science, Culture and Heritage, Governance, Media and Communication, Sustainable Future, People and Values, and International Relations. This study adopts these eight dimensions to examine how foreign influencers, a non-traditional group of communication actors, shape China's international image.

While existing domestic research on foreign influencers has predominantly focused on cross-cultural and trans-cultural communication perspectives, few studies have adopted a soft power framework. This study selects the soft power index as its theoretical lens for two principal reasons. First, the multidimensional structure of the soft power index enables a precise dissection of the thematic focus within influencers-generated content, thereby avoiding overly generalized claims about “influencers shaping national image.” Second, empirical findings derived from this framework provide a robust theoretical basis for analyzing variations in communication effectiveness, enhancing the scientific rigor and analytical specificity of the research outcomes. Furthermore, research on foreign influencers can enrich the research perspectives of China's international image communication, construct a theoretical framework for international influencer communication, improve the communication effect evaluation system from the soft power index perspective, and drive relevant research toward greater refinement and systematization.

### 3. Research Questions

Academic community has clearly established the connection between the international dissemination of national image and soft power index, quantitative research on the quantitative correlation between the two remains scarce. Despite some attention being paid to individual cases such as Jerry Kowal among the emerging group of international influencers, most of the related discussions are isolated case studies. Existing research on the international dissemination of China's national image often overlooks the third-party perspective of foreign communicators (Nur Mutia & de Archellie, 2023), that is, the exploration of the "international communication effectiveness of internet celebrities" mostly focuses on outbound communication by domestic internet celebrities, while paying insufficient attention to the narratives about China from the "outsider's perspective" by foreign internet celebrities. Additionally, although some studies have mentioned the "de-politicization" feature of internet celebrity communication, there is a lack of quantitative research on their international communication effectiveness, such as multi-dimensional measurement of communication effectiveness (Xu & Zhang, 2023). This study aims to uncover the potential value of grassroots internet celebrities in international communication through a systematic deconstruction of the "IShowSpeed's China Tour" case ([https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPw\\_exBR8r3AOE-2xMRRnNnO-BrCXbUkGE](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPw_exBR8r3AOE-2xMRRnNnO-BrCXbUkGE)). The research findings will help guide all sectors of society to recognize the power of non-governmental actors in international communication, explore the construction of a multi-dimensional international communication system that combines official and grassroots efforts and complements traditional and new media, and assist China in shaping a more authentic, multi-dimensional, and vivid national image in the global public opinion arena. Based on this, the following research questions are proposed: What characteristics do the dissemination data of the "IShowSpeed's China Tour" series on YouTube exhibit? For instance, what are the views, comments, and likes? How do the penetration rate and sentiment of video comments perform in various dimensions of the soft power index? As a direct carrier of audience feedback, can the interactive comments under the his China Tour videos reflect the effectiveness of grassroots internet celebrities in international communication?

### 4. Research Methods

This study mainly adopts content analysis as the research method, systematically designs the research object, data collection and sample processing procedures, and employs Python as the data collection tool to complete the operational definition of the core variables. Among them, the penetration rate refers to the proportion of valid comments related to a certain research dimension to the total number of valid analysis samples, with the calculation formula being: Penetration rate = Number of valid comments in a certain dimension ÷ Total number of valid analysis samples × 100%; The positive emotion ratio refers to the proportion of comments with positive emotional tendencies in a certain research dimension to the

total number of relevant comments in that dimension, with the calculation formula being: Positive emotion ratio = Number of positive emotion comments in a certain dimension  $\div$  Total number of relevant comments in that dimension  $\times$  100%; Contradictory emotions refer to the mixed attitude expressions in a single comment that simultaneously contain positive and negative emotional expressions towards the same research dimension, or present differentiated emotional tendencies towards different dimensions. Such comments are separately coded into the “contradictory emotions” category and not included in the statistics of single positive/negative emotions. For multi-topic comments, if a single comment involves two or more research dimensions (such as simultaneously mentioning cultural heritage and urban governance), then the comment is dimensionally split and coded, and respectively included in the comment statistics of the corresponding dimensions to ensure the comprehensiveness and accuracy of data statistics for each dimension. To facilitate understanding and replication, an example is provided: If the total number of valid samples is 300, among which there are 120 comments related to the “cultural heritage” dimension, including 108 positive emotion comments, and 1 comment simultaneously mentions “cultural heritage” and “sustainable future”, and 1 comment expresses both positive and negative views on the “governance” dimension, then the penetration rate of the cultural heritage dimension =  $120 \div 300 \times 100\% = 40\%$ , the positive emotion ratio of the cultural heritage dimension =  $108 \div 120 \times 100\% = 90\%$ .

To focus on the research topic, the comment samples are further selectively screened: with the 100 most highly upvoted comments extracted from each of the 8 China tour live-stream videos on IShowSpeed’s channel, a total of 800 top-liked comments were sampled, and the data collection cutoff time was June 6, 2025. Given the researchers’ language constraints and the study’s focus on overseas English-speaking audiences’ cognitive feedback on China’s city image, English comments in the samples are selected for coding analysis to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the comment interpretation. Non-English comments (e.g., Japanese, French) are excluded from the study due to potential semantic deviations from language translation barriers. At the same time, comments that are meaningless emojis, emoticons, or invalid characters are further removed to complete the initial data cleaning and ensure the reliability of sample quality.

After eliminating comments irrelevant to the research topic, 354 valid analysis samples are ultimately formed. While highly-liked comments cannot fully cover the full spectrum of audience attitudes, each like serves as an implicit attitude vote. The popularity of their dissemination and the concentration of opinions can largely reflect the emotional tendencies and cognitive preferences of the mainstream audience, providing an empirical basis for the subsequent coding and analysis of related dimensions of soft power. After determining the samples, manual coding is conducted on the samples. An example of the coding is shown in **Table 1**:

**Table 1.** Examples of manual coding.

Name	Code	Examples
Culture & Heritage	1 = mentioned 0 = not mentioned	After watching this video, I love China's culture, we love its people. The humble, the disciple, the art. We want peace. We want to live together as one. Blessings to all the people in this video. Masters, guides, and kids. Thank you speed for showing us this face of China.
Sustainable Future	1 = mentioned 0 = not mentioned	I noticed many electric vehicles on the road in Shenzhen, this city is leading in clean energy. The subway in Chongqing is so convenient and clean, it's much better than the messy traffic in my country.
Governance	1 = mentioned 0 = not mentioned	Just because a country is big and has a big population doesn't mean it's dirty. From what I've seen, Chinese women can walk around freely on the streets, the streets are very clean. There are two main reasons for this: they are educated and cultured. Comparing China to that country would be the most absurd comparison.
International Relations	1 = mentioned 0 = not mentioned	Man!! China looks absolutely stunning! I really hope our countries' relations improve so I can visit someday and experience its beauty firsthand.
Irrelevant Comments	1 = mentioned	Uncle just happy to give everyone food, look at him! dude is pure joy How could someone like Master Liang just show up randomly and be the kindest, modest, respectful person in the world huge respect.
Positive Sentiment	1 = positive	Master Liang saved the entire stream with his humbleness and kindness. really, we all gotta pay respect to him. The energy of this city is so drastically different to the others. Chengdu feels like what western cities feel like with the energy of the crowd.
Negative Sentiment	2 = negative	Feel bad for Speed because his tour guide not only bring him to the worse places but also shamelessly promote his family business. He has done nothing to show anything cultural in Hongkong.
Neutral Sentiment	0 = neutral	Speed already tired climbing those long stairs in Great Wall, the translator guy isn't. He's just a chill guy Speed entered the cam of a local streamer and that lady just said "a foreign friend just joined us".
Contradiction Sentiment	3 = contradiction	The live stream in China is exciting, but the translation is really terrible. It's just like he didn't have a Chinese guide at all. For example, the part where he was eating hotpot. If you agree, please give a like.

## 5. Research Results

This study conducts coding and statistical analysis on the comment content of live-stream videos covering eight cities/regions—Hong Kong SAR, Chongqing, Beijing, Henan, Chengdu, Changsha, Shenzhen, and Shanghai—on overseas social media platforms. Combined with indicators such as view count, comment volume, penetration rate, and positive sentiment ratio, it examines the characteristics

and differences in the representation of various soft power dimensions during communication.

### 5.1. Distribution Characteristics of View Count and Comment Volume by Region

The eight videos exhibit certain disparities in communication reach:

View count: Hong Kong SAR ranks first with 11.2 million views, followed by Changsha (9.52 million) and Chongqing (9.41 million); Beijing and Chengdu record the lowest view counts (both at 6.02 million).

Comment volume: Chongqing leads with 15,802 comments, followed by Shanghai (15,452) and Hong Kong SAR (15,178); Shenzhen has the fewest comments (11,044).

### 5.2. Differences in Soft Power Penetration in Comments

Among the 354 valid comment samples:

Culture & Heritage is mentioned 193 times, with a penetration rate of 55%;

Sustainable Future is mentioned 114 times, with a penetration rate of 32%;

Governance is mentioned 68 times, with a penetration rate of 19%;

International Relations is mentioned 21 times, with a penetration rate of 6%

(Figure 1).

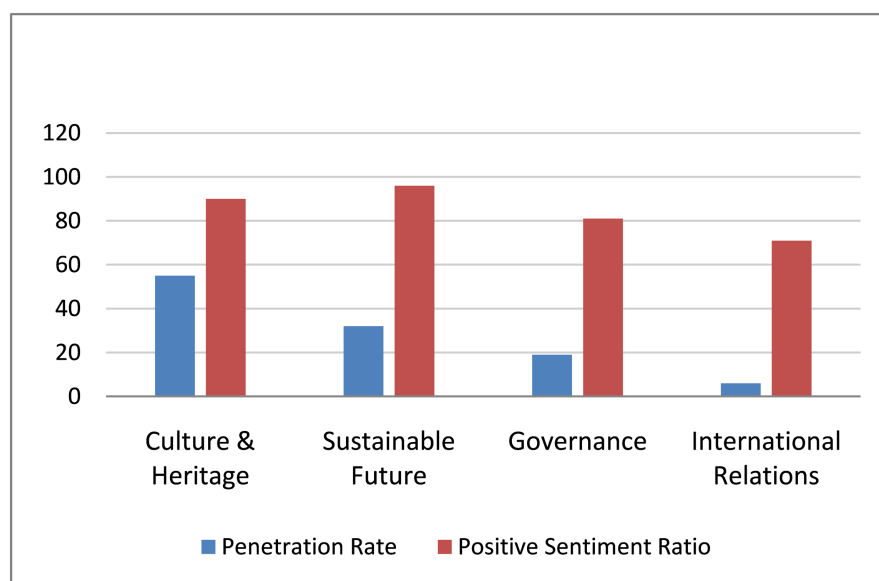


Figure 1. Proportional diagram.

Notably, other soft power pillars in the index—including Media & Communication and People & Values—are not mentioned at all in the comments, indicating that the videos failed to activate audience attention to these dimensions.

### 5.3. Differences in Positive Sentiment Ratio across Dimensions

Based on penetration rates, the positive sentiment ratio (number of positive com-

ments divided by the number of mentions for a dimension) is calculated to reveal divergent positive evaluations across dimensions:

Sustainable Future: 110 positive comments, positive ratio 96%;

Culture & Heritage: 174 positive comments, positive ratio 90%;

Governance: 55 positive comments, positive ratio 81%;

International Relations: 15 positive comments, positive ratio 71% (**Figure 1**).

## 6. Research Findings

A content coding analysis of the top-liked comments from live-stream videos across the above eight cities and regions reveals that, in terms of both penetration rate and positive sentiment ratio, cultural export and sustainable future the most effective dimensions of influencer-mediated communication. However, behind their high efficacy lie differentiated activation pathways.

### 6.1. The Scenographic Characteristics of Internet Celebrity-Mediated International Communication Have Become Increasingly Evident

The distribution of view counts and comment numbers across eight cities and regions exhibits a marked asymmetric pattern. Hong Kong ranks first with 11.2 million views, followed by Changsha and Chongqing, whereas Beijing and Chengdu register relatively lower view counts. This disparity is primarily attributable to differences in the degree of visual representability of urban scenes across cities. Hong Kong's diverse cultural landscapes, Changsha's entertainment-oriented vibe, and Chongqing's three-dimensional urban layout align closely with the communication logic of "strong visual impact and highly engaging interaction" in influencer live streaming, thereby effectively arousing overseas audiences' viewing interest. In contrast, the cultural connotations and urban traits of Beijing and Chengdu lean more toward profundity and daily life, lacking immediate visual highlights, which places them at a relative disadvantage in the attention competition of short-video communication.

Disparities in comment engagement further corroborate this logic: Chongqing leads with 15,802 comments, followed by Shanghai and Hong Kong, while Shenzhen records the lowest interaction volume. Chongqing's "cyberpunk" urban landscape, Shanghai's modern urban imagery, and Hong Kong's multicultural experiences provide audiences with abundant interactive talking points, whereas Shenzhen's content tends to focus more on technological scenarios, resulting in relatively weak topic extensibility. Notably, although Changsha surpasses Shanghai in view count, it lags significantly behind in comment volume—a divergence that reflects the separation between "passive viewing interest" and "active expressive intent". Changsha's entertainment-driven content is more likely to attract passive viewership, yet Shanghai's modern scenes resonate more strongly with the cognitive frameworks of overseas audiences, more readily stimulating their willingness to express. This asymmetric relationship suggests that the efficacy of in-

ternet celebrity-mediated international communication should not be evaluated solely by coverage, but must also prioritize the dual enhancement of scene fit and topic extensibility.

In terms of both penetration rate and positive sentiment ratio, culture and cultural heritage and sustainable futures emerge as the core effective dimensions of influencer-led communication, characterized by the dual advantages of high penetration and high positive sentiment. Culture and cultural heritage top the list with a penetration rate of 55% and a positive sentiment ratio of 90%; sustainable futures, with a slightly lower penetration rate of 32%, boasts an exceptionally high positive sentiment ratio of 96%. Both dimensions perform outstandingly in terms of audience attention and recognition.

These findings highlight the distinct communicative advantages of everyday-life contexts. Frequently mentioned themes in comments—such as “cyber cities,” “traditional craftsmanship,” and “cuisine culture”—are deeply integrated into daily social scenarios. For instance, international viewers have shown pronounced interest in life-based depictions in short videos, such as “drone-based food delivery” and “Speed learning Chinese martial arts,” illustrating the strong appeal of life-integrated symbols to young foreign audiences. The high penetration rates of these two dimensions are closely linked to the “lightweight and entertaining” nature of influencer short videos. With an influence of over 38 million followers, Speed successfully embeds Chinese cultural elements into youth-oriented digital narratives, achieving communication effects far superior to those of official narrative channels. The fragmented, visual-driven nature of short-form video content aligns well with the information consumption habits of young demographics, positioning it as an emerging popular medium for cross-cultural communication.

Further regional comparative analysis reveals that the high penetration of culture and cultural heritage is particularly prominent in live streams from Henan and Beijing, while discussions around sustainable futures are more frequently observed in content from Shenzhen and Chongqing. This indicates that the efficacy of influencer-mediated communication is also contingent upon the alignment between local distinctive resources and the thematic focus of digital content.

## 6.2. Communication Differentiation across Dimensions

Everyday-life symbols have emerged as a core bridge for cross-cultural communication, whereas the governance dimension exhibits a striking paradox: it boasts a high positive sentiment ratio of 81% but a penetration rate of only 19%. This means that among the small share of audiences who engage with this dimension, most offer positive evaluations, yet overall attention remains extremely low. This also indicates that the core logic of influencer communication lies in depoliticized, life-oriented narratives, making it difficult for governance-related content—such as policy effectiveness and institutional advantages—to fit into the framework of engaging, entertaining communication.

Nevertheless, the 81% positive sentiment ratio also suggests that governance

efficacy has not fallen outside the scope of influencer communication. Instead, audiences tend to perceive it indirectly: comments like “It’s very safe to travel in China” implicitly reflect public security governance, while remarks such as “China’s streets are extremely clean” hint at infrastructure governance. Although these evaluations do not explicitly mention governance, they represent implicit recognition of governance effectiveness. This demonstrates that while influencer communication is replete with depoliticized content, it is not entirely depoliticized; rather, it exerts indirect influence through politicized interpretations of everyday-life scenes.

The international relations dimension records a penetration rate of merely 6% and a positive sentiment ratio of 71%, reflecting the topic limitations of influencer communication. As a macro-political issue, international relations is inherently distinct from the life-oriented scenarios of influencer communication, making it hard to activate effectively through live-stream content. Yet the 71% positive comment ratio also indicates that overseas audiences hold a basically positive perception of China’s international role.

## **7. Conclusion and Implications**

In the field of international communication, the traditional “check-in-style communication” often only brings short-term traffic surges and heightened attention, yet fails to establish a long-term mechanism for transforming influence into sustained impact. This model tends to focus on the superficial presentation of iconic landscapes or events, lacking deep engagement with audiences, resulting in ephemeral communication effects that cannot provide sustained support for the continuous shaping of national image. The case study of “Brother Hyperthyroidism’s Trip to China” points to new possibilities for China’s communication pathways: through empathetic communication, technological empowerment, and the synergy of “civil society, government, and platforms,” short-term traffic can be converted into sustainable communication momentum, helping international communication break through its existing circles and thereby building a stable ecosystem for Chinese discourse.

First, empathy addresses narrative dilemmas through supplementary value. While influencer-mediated communication cannot cover all dimensions of the soft power pillars, it can serve as a vital supplement to official communication by virtue of its unique strengths in everyday-life representation.

Influencer communication is characterized by “selective efficiency” rather than comprehensive coverage. It can precisely capture the interests of overseas audiences, and this focused communication can instead generate profound impact in specific domains.

Official and influencer communication can achieve a synergistic effect of “each shining in its own beauty, and all shining together.” Influencers excel at presenting national image through visual, life-oriented means, translating grand national soft power elements into concrete, perceptible scenes; official communication is better

suiting for systematic interpretation of dimensions requiring in-depth elaboration, such as policies, education, and diplomacy. The two play their respective roles while complementing each other.

Leveraging the “supplementary value” of influencer communication is particularly evident in resolving the dilemma of national empathetic narratives. When official narratives articulate institutional advantages and other content, they risk being interpreted as political propaganda, whereas influencer communication can transform these grand narratives into everyday expressions. Such a narrative approach is more penetrating than official discourse, enabling overseas audiences to develop identification subtly and imperceptibly.

Second, technological empowerment enhances communication efficacy. Technological support is key to maximizing communication effects. On the one hand, efforts should be made to strengthen the construction of integrated urban culture and technology facilities, such as promoting urban cultural AR experience projects, enabling overseas viewers and tourists to immerse themselves in the charm of Chinese culture and technology, and enhancing their sense of experience and participation. On the other hand, the development of cross-border creative platforms should be intensified—for instance, building on platforms like TikTok to provide more convenient and efficient carriers for influencer content creation and dissemination, helping Chinese stories transcend geographical and cultural boundaries.

Third, a tripartite collaboration of civil society, government, and platforms constructs a communication ecosystem. The government should act as a “scene curator”: rather than directly guiding influencer creation, it should transform cultural, technological, policy, and other elements into visually appealing scenes, providing rich creative materials for influencers. As content producers, civil influencers can translate the grand narratives of national soft power into vivid, small stories from a life-oriented perspective, enhancing the affinity and appeal of communication. Platforms assume the role of “traffic amplifiers,” using precise algorithmic recommendations to deliver countless small stories to target audiences accurately.

Influencer communication’s supplementation to official empathetic narratives is like a flame, providing initial heat for communication; technological empowerment is like a blower, helping the fire spread; tripartite synergy is like an endless supply of firewood, providing sustained energy for communication. Only when the three work in tandem can the fire of Chinese discourse burn eternally, enabling a more comprehensive, in-depth, and enduring presentation of China’s image on the international stage.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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