



Research on Empathic Communication Strategies of Mainstream Media Short Videos: A Case of People's Daily Douyin

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Abstract

With the continuous development of technology in the information age, digital technology is constantly evolving, social platforms are constantly expanding, and short videos are playing an increasingly important role in dissemination. Mainstream media can transmit information more quickly and increase the dissemination effect through short videos. The Decision on Further Comprehensively Deepening Reform and Promoting Chinese Path to Modernization adopted at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China clearly stated that it is necessary to promote the systematic change of mainstream media, build a working mechanism and evaluation system suitable for omnimedia production and communication, and promote the systematic change of mainstream media. Empathic communication, as a mainstream media, plays a unique role in guiding public opinion and achieving value recognition, which is crucial for shaping a new pattern of mainstream public opinion. This paper takes the People's Daily Douyin short video account as the research object, and takes the concept of empathic communication as the research point. Through collecting and sorting out the empathy content and strategies of the People's Daily Douyin short videos, this paper analyzes the empathic communication strategies and problems faced by the current mainstream media short video news, and proposes to solve the problems of short video empathic communication from the aspects of deep cultivation of content, innovative mode, rational empathy, and increased interaction, in order to provide some reference for the news practice of the mainstream media.

Subject Areas

Journalism and Communication, Sociology

Keywords

Empathetic Communication, Short Videos, Mainstream Media, People's Daily, Douyin

1. Introduction

Empathetic communication refers to the communication process where communicators, through content creation, trigger the audience's emotional understanding, identification, and resonance towards others or groups, thereby forming emotional connections. Due to the inherent media characteristics of short videos, empathy exhibits unique tension in the dissemination of short videos. Empathetic communication, as one of the commonly used means of short video dissemination, has profound significance in promoting positive energy in mainstream media short video dissemination and establishing connections with the masses. Mainstream media uses short video platforms for empathetic communication, inspiring emotional resonance among the masses through real social events, which is conducive to strengthening public opinion guidance, promoting mainstream values of today's era, forming a stable social atmosphere, promoting social harmony and development, and enhancing communication effectiveness and influence.

As of February 25, 2025, the author conducted a search on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) using the subject of news and media, with "empathetic communication" and "mainstream media short videos" as the main keywords. There were over a thousand relevant articles. In terms of research content, domestic research on short video empathetic communication mainly includes theoretical research on empathetic communication, mainstream media reporting on major public events, public opinion guidance in social media, and research on international communication strategies. The research on mainstream media short videos mainly involves the characteristics and content of short video creation, image shaping, and communication difficulties. Research on empathetic communication abroad mostly focuses on the production of empathetic communication content in short videos. In terms of mainstream media short video news, due to the relatively late development and maturity of mainstream media short video news, there are also some differences in the research of domestic and foreign scholars on it. Chinese scholars' research on the theory of empathetic communication has gradually extended from the initial theoretical foundation to the impact of public opinion and the practical path that empathetic communication brings to the development of media.

Based on the theory of empathetic communication, this paper takes the People's Daily news short video Douyin account as a case, and takes its short video news of the past year as the research object, analyzes its empathetic communication strategies and existing problems, and then explores the news practice of the combina-

tion of empathic communication and mainstream media short video news, with a view to providing some reference for the communication of similar short video news.

2. Theoretical Basis and Development Path of Empathic Communication

2.1. Theoretical Basis of Empathic Communication

Empathy is not sympathy. Empathy is understanding the other person's feelings at this moment from their perspective, feeling the situation that is happening to them, listening first, expressing opinions less, and putting forward one's own ideas from one's own perspective. Compassion is standing in one's own position and facing the other person, giving them more opinions and judgments [1].

In recent years, empathy is no longer limited to the field of psychology. Many scholars have extended and applied the concept of empathy to different fields [2]. Some scholars have noticed the unique value of empathy in the field of news communication, and empathic communication has become a hot topic of concern in the field of communication in recent years. Professor Wu Fei from Zhejiang University introduced "empathy" into the field of news communication and was the first to propose the concept, theoretical basis, and practical path of "empathic communication" in 2019. He pointed out that empathy emphasizes the importance of emotions and resonance in the communication process. He systematically discussed the theoretical basis of empathic communication, pointing out that the emergence of empathy includes three stages: "emotional contagion", "view-point selection", and "empathy concern", and explored the connection between empathy civilization and the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind [3].

2.2. The Path Strategy of Empathic Communication in Mainstream Media

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed to "strengthen the construction of the comprehensive media communication system and shape a new pattern of mainstream public opinion". The construction of a comprehensive media communication system for mainstream media plays an extremely important role in promoting the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. Mainstream media mainly reports positive articles promoting socialist core values and enhancing social cohesion. In the process of strengthening public opinion guidance, empathy intellectual property rights are elaborated, empathic communication skills are improved, emotional needs of users are met, and emotional resonance is triggered in specific groups and even the entire society.

The mainstream media's empathic communication strategy is mainly reflected in three aspects: first, shaping characters and creating atmosphere. Strengthen ideological education under the backdrop of character images, and drive public

emotions and opinions; The second is to construct a context and create a sense of presence [4]. In the long run, it can win the love of more people, improve the effectiveness of communication, better guide the values and direction of public opinion, and deeply integrate into the new era of community social management. The third is to implement mainstream ideology and build a comprehensive media communication system.

3. Empathy Content Presentation of the People's Daily Douyin Short Videos

To better investigate how mainstream media short videos conduct positive public opinion guidance and dissemination, this study primarily selects relevant cases from the People's Daily Douyin short video platform for analysis. We selected a total of 520 short videos published between January 1, 2024 and February 28, 2025 as the analysis objects. Hierarchical random sampling is adopted. First, all videos are divided into three categories of topics, such as "character stories", "current affairs" and "people's livelihood", according to the content tags provided by the Douyin platform, and then 20% of videos are randomly selected from each theme layer to ensure the representativeness of all types of content. Based on a preset framework, the study annotated whether the videos contained empathetic content (such as character portrayal, audiovisual language, scene setting, content presentation, etc.), types of empathetic strategies (audience experience, narrative style, content selection, emotional expression, etc.), and interaction data (likes, shares). The analysis results revealed that the empathetic content of The People's Daily Douyin short videos is presented through the following elements.

3.1. Character Images

In the process of film and television performance, the success or failure of character portrayal largely determines the overall effect. Different character images can enable users to see their own group image in the group, stimulate common value pursuit and emotional resonance. On short video platforms, short and concise videos require more empathy at the character level in character development.

The People's Daily Douyin short videos show a variety of identities, mainly including national leaders, foreign leaders, government officials, scientists, militarists, doctors, firefighters, and the masses. Among them, national leaders appear more frequently in videos. The People's Daily Douyin short videos use a lot of first-hand materials, such as the simultaneous voice of leaders' speeches and on-site videos, and combine the on-site original sound, such as crowd interaction, applause, and environmental sound, which is more friendly than subtitles and on-site commentary. In terms of narrative, we approach it from a small perspective and incorporate simple and straightforward language into the main theme, making the character images more three-dimensional and vivid. In terms of national defense themes, there are both grand scenes such as leader reviews and military training and preparation, as well as daily life scenes. These diverse reports also

make the character images more full and multi-faceted.

Due to the concise and short nature of short videos, the content presented to users in the videos is often emotionally charged, with strong storylines and typical character stories often having a positive impact. In specific short video content, such as “A little girl in the earthquake-stricken area recalls her rescue experience and thanks the firefighter uncle. @ China Fire”, the firefighters’ courage and responsibility in advance shock the viewers’ hearts; For example, the short video news “Jumping 10 meters into an icy river, his body instantly turned red from the cold. After rescuing the person and bringing them to shore, he put on his clothes and quietly left. Veteran Mao Shunlong, give you a thumbs up!” uses typical personal stories to stimulate the audience’s empathy effect. These two videos have garnered a total of 2.106 million likes and 56,000 shares.

3.2. Audio-Visual Languages

The People’s Daily Douyin short videos are mainly introduced through 15 to 30 seconds short videos, together with background music and live sound, to drive people’s emotions and enter an atmosphere of empathy. Background music is the essence of short videos, and a crucial part. It can improve the viewing of videos, convey feelings, and increase the atmosphere. Appropriate background music and sound effects can improve the quality of videos. In the video “Heroic and Handsome! Post-2000s Girls Dance Red Lanterns, Showcasing the Charm of Nezha’s Fire Spear!”, the explosive voice over of “Nezha 2” is used to immerse viewers in the Nezha scene, as if returning to the moment of watching the film, leaving an endless aftertaste.

Visual language is a key technique in short video creation, and good visual effects and editing rhythm determine the viewing experience of the video. The composition of the picture should follow the principle of thirds to ensure that the subject is prominent; Color matching should consider emotional expression and use contrasting colors to enhance visual impact; The camera movement should be smooth and natural, avoiding excessive shaking. The People’s Daily’s news short videos are not simply pursuing technical effects, but rather using editing to serve content expression, with comprehensive, accurate, and useful visuals.

3.3. Specific Situations

The so-called “situation” includes the environment in which the characters are located, the situations they encounter, and their relationships. In storytelling, a good situation can often drive the audience. The display of images in news short videos can provide users with an immersive communication environment, allowing them to directly experience the emotions and atmosphere, thereby effectively enhancing the communication effect and influence of short videos. The People’s Daily Douyin videos mainly include military news, current affairs news, cultural and entertainment news, reports of major disasters, international diplomacy, science and education news, etc. Each specific news video has its own different cur-

rent affairs hot spots and reporting methods, and users can feel different effects in different scenes. At the 2025 Private Enterprise Symposium, representatives from six private enterprise leaders including Ren Zhengfei, Wang Chuanfu, Liu Yonghao, and Lei Jun delivered speeches, laying a solid foundation for the development and growth of China's private enterprises and reflecting the trend of national private economy development. It received 1.081 million likes and 131,000 shares. For example, the ordinary and simple news about people's daily lives, such as "Mom Recording Baby Eating Apples: 'Laughing So Sweet'", has also been presented to people. In such specific environments, coupled with accurate and truthful news reports, it is often possible to drive communication and emotional empathy with the audience, and 1.208 million people liked it and 545,000 people shared it.

3.4. Realistic Display

Each of the People's Daily Douyin short video is indispensable to authenticity. By showing true stories, it focuses on the feelings and lives of ordinary people, arouses the emotional resonance of the public, and truly makes short videos resonate with real life. The real incident of a child throwing firecrackers causing a fire and voluntarily reporting to the police to admit their mistake. "Netizens: Knowing their mistake and being able to change is a good child. @ China Fire Protection" has made netizens feel the same and have the same experience. Focusing on the user's own perspective, telling the ongoing positive stories of society in a warm and gentle way, presenting the daily lives of the people. News reports on major disaster events are often true and shocking [5]. These true stories can win the audience's sense of recognition.

4. Analysis of Empathic Communication Strategy of the People's Daily Douyin Short Videos

The People's Daily Douyin short videos have attracted wide attention and have their own unique communication strategies. In summary, there are several main characteristics.

4.1. Immersive Experience to Meet Audio-Visual Needs

The audiovisual characteristics of short videos enable them to create a strong sense of immersion through the combination of various elements such as visuals, music, and text. The People's Daily Douyin short videos meet the audience's audio-visual needs through immersive experience and enhance emotional resonance. When reporting on major events or touching stories, such as a video report on February 22 titled "A truck lost control and overturned, a passing driver stopped and climbed onto the front of the car to rescue. Give a thumb-up to those who stood up! @ Beautiful Zhejiang", People's Daily often uses high-definition images, adapted background music, and concise text to quickly display key parts of the event, especially some major disaster and accident reports, using the most im-

portant 15 to 30 seconds to attract the audience's attention and immerse them in the content. This immersive experience not only enhances the dissemination effect, but also creates a deep emotional connection between the audience and the content. It got 906,000 likes and 33,000 shares.

4.2. Lightweight Narrative, Driving Ideological Guidance

Short videos require concise and clear content. The People's Daily Douyin short videos are using lightweight narrative methods to simplify complex social issues into easy-to-understand content and drive thought leadership. The People's Daily integrates profound ideas into a relaxed form through refined language, vivid images, and infectious expressions. For example, on January 24, 2025, a 36-second video titled "I Want to Hit You" enthusiastically said the most "vicious" words and did the warmest thing! Thumbs up for Ma Qiang and reminds parents to take good care of their children! @ Beautiful Zhejiang succinctly describes a barefoot boy who got lost with his parents in Yiwu, Zhejiang. The two brothers noticed and found his parents, and the detail of using their hands to protect their feet was played in subtitles. The video conveys positive energy through a short and concise story, triggering the audience's thinking and resonance, receiving 1.562 million likes and 96,000 shares. This lightweight narrative approach not only conforms to the dissemination characteristics of short video platforms, but also achieves effective dissemination of mainstream values.

4.3. Report on Major Events to Stimulate Emotional Resonance

In reporting on major events, it is important to capture emotional points and stimulate emotional resonance among the audience. Whether it's the National Day parade, heroic deeds in the fight against the epidemic, or touching moments in natural disasters, People's Daily quickly conveys information and attracts widespread attention through short videos. During the COVID-19, People's Daily released the work scenes and moving stories of the front-line medical staff in the fight against the epidemic, which quickly aroused the emotional resonance of netizens. The comment area was full of homage and blessings to heroes. On February 16, 2025, a news short video report titled "Witness History! Nezha 2: Top 1 in the Global Animation Film Box Office Chart" received 1.172 million likes, 87,000 comments, and 107,000 shares. The host reported that the box office of Nezha 2 exceeded 12.319 billion yuan, topping the global animation film box office chart. This news short video report deeply ignited the confidence of the Chinese people in cultural globalization and sparked a cultural craze worldwide. The continuous follow-up of People's Daily's short video news, the reporting of major events and emotional resonance, promoted the dissemination and development of events. Resonance not only enhances the audience's sense of participation, but also enhances the social influence of People's Daily as a mainstream media.

4.4. Emotional Community, Establishing a Common Context

By building an emotional community, establishing a common context with the

audience, and enhancing emotional connections, short video content often revolves around social hot topics, livelihood issues, and collective memories, evoking a shared emotional experience among the audience. In the end of the Paris Olympic Games in the summer of 2024, the short video released by People's Daily, the short video "Farewell to the Paris Olympic Games with a video" co-created by People's Daily, "Douyin Sports" and "Li Chengyuan Not Far Away", won a total of 6.484 million likes and 906,000 shares. Many users in the comment area commented on "Tears" and "Moved Again". These short video news with the theme of family and country feelings, a community with a shared future for mankind, and competitive spirit triggered collective memories and emotional resonance of the audience. The establishment of this common context not only brings the media closer to the audience, but also strengthens social cohesion and identity.

5. Problems of the Empathic Communication of the People's Daily Douyin Short Videos

The People's Daily Douyin short videos are quite successful in both contents and forms, attracting a large number of viewers, and has obvious advantages in many mainstream media, but there are also some problems.

5.1. Single and Fixed Dissemination Content

According to the analysis of the highly liked videos released by the People's Daily News Douyin, most of the sources of videos are clips of news materials, clips of the edited highlights from various news media reports, intercepts them, adds subtitles and sound effects, and pushes them to the audience; The content mainly focuses on medical staff, heroic role models, military and police personnel, etc. As a mainstream media such as the people's news, it plays an important role in promoting the mainstream values of society through empathic communication on the Douyin short video platform, grasping the direction of ideological communication [6], strengthening the people's recognition of the national image, and shaping the correct world outlook, outlook on life, and values. However, such simple news information is lack of novelty, and the coverage of works with single content and character objects is relatively narrow, and the same kind of information will also cause aesthetic fatigue of the audience.

5.2. Lack of Integration in Communication Forms

Due to the continuous development of information technology today, communication methods are gradually becoming more diverse. Multiple communication paths are realized through technologies such as AI and AR in a media convergence environment. The People's Daily Douyin short videos have a slightly single form of transmission. The time limit of short videos may lead to insufficient depth of content and a shortage of diverse perspectives, with news information mostly staying on the surface and lacking in-depth analysis of the background, causes, and impact of events. The emergence of this drawback is often accompanied by news distortion, which can easily cause changes in public opinion and carries strong

risks. This requires the integration and development of various integrated media, mutual support, while maintaining emotional resonance, enhancing the guiding effect on the audience, and improving the depth of content dissemination and social influence.

5.3. Lack of Guidance in the Dissemination Process

After the release of short video news, mainstream media have problems with one-way dissemination and imperfect feedback mechanisms in the dissemination process. Although the platform provides functions such as commenting and liking, it is mostly one-way dissemination and lacks deep interaction with the audience, resulting in insufficient audience participation. At the same time, there is a lack of effective audience feedback mechanisms, making it difficult to timely understand the needs and reactions of the audience [7]. Judging from the high popularity videos of the People's Daily Douyin, emotional narration is one of the main reasons for the popularity of the videos. However, excessive emotional agitation can also gradually decrease users' empathy ability, and the effectiveness of news dissemination will naturally decline. Therefore, communication guidance methods with warmth and power, as well as subsequent reporting and responses, can enhance the effectiveness of empathic communication.

5.4. Lack of Interaction on Communication Platforms

In traditional news services, the public is the passive recipient of information, neither participating in the generation of information nor controlling the flow of information they see or cannot see. The content promoted by print media inevitably lacks strong reporting that is close to the audience. Users not only need to read high-quality content, but authors also crave user feedback. There needs to be interaction between authors and users, which requires providing more communication platforms and effective communication with users.

6. Empathic Communication Improvement Measures of the People's Daily Douyin Short Videos

The People's Daily Douyin short videos have both successful experience and shortcomings. Based on the theory and practice of empathic communication, it is suggested to improve from the following aspects:

6.1. Deeply Cultivating Content and Strengthening the Dissemination of Mainstream Values

In the construction of the omnimedia communication system, mainstream media should apply advanced media technology to narrative empathy expression, deeply cultivate content, and strengthen the dissemination of mainstream values. Empathic communication is beneficial for mainstream media to utilize communication links, establish deeper connections with audiences, understand audience feedback and needs, optimize communication content and methods, and improve

the short video communication system of mainstream media [8].

In the specific practice of mainstream media, first of all, we should innovate content, create distinctive content and communication forms, fully consider emotional factors in content production, and use new technologies to segment and express different audience groups. The second is to adhere to a realistic narrative perspective, approach users as closely as possible, and generate a basic emotional resonance, reducing reliance on pure emotional storytelling. Introduce different perspectives and explanations to help the audience understand the event correctly and solve problems. For example, introducing multiple perspectives of news to accurately and effectively interpret events. Participate in the narrative structure of news in multiple identities, integrate into the narrative, present through various media, and generate emotional resonance in the dissemination process, thereby achieving an empathetic effect in influencing news narrative.

6.2. Innovative Models Promoting Immersive Experiences

With the development of emerging technologies such as AI in the era of intelligence, the presentation format of video content on short video platforms is also constantly changing. At present, the People's Daily Douyin short videos are mainly account materials from multiple local and professional media platforms. The second integration and processing of such reports is relatively monotonous, and the audience will inevitably have some aesthetic fatigue after a long time of acceptance.

In order to enhance novelty and user stickiness, it is necessary to continuously innovate new models of People's Daily short videos. On the one hand, the People's Daily short videos can open new column channels, such as the various topic entries launched by the People's Daily Douyin short videos in recent years, and open columns, such as the national leader's speech column, to co-create and interact with other accounts, and open characteristic theme documentary columns to enhance the immersion and interactive experience of content, enhance empathy, enrich narrative methods, enhance the sense of story, and promote the development of content models. On the other hand, integrating the new mode of Douyin platform, using VR and AR technology, People's Daily can use emerging technologies to deeply cultivate content, create personalized short videos, enhance the emotional expression of content through the integration of multimedia elements such as pictures, music, subtitles, etc., and produce diversified content and products. For example, CCTV will release AI mini skits "Monkey King" and "Adventures in the Future" in 2025 to interpret Chinese culture in new forms. In the current era, the short videos of People's Daily need to create distinctive content, continuously expand in-depth reporting, create popular videos, and continuously create content from an empathetic perspective.

6.3. Rational Empathy, Adhering to the Correct Direction of Public Opinion

As a fast-paced, pan-entertainment short video platform, Douyin platform, emo-

tion and rationality in such fast-paced video content, the mainstream media is extremely likely to cause imbalance, and the intensification of group emotions leads to the overflow of public opinion [9].

Events should be treated rationally, emotions and rationality should be balanced, rational analysis should be maintained while narrating emotionally, and the one-sided content caused by excessive emotionalization should be avoided. When reporting on social hot topics, it is important to focus on emotional resonance while also providing rational analysis and diverse perspectives. Through in-depth interpretation, the audience will be helped to fully understand the event and avoid cognitive biases caused by emotional storytelling. Correct public opinion guidance, through emotional storytelling, guides public opinion and promotes social consensus. For example, as a representative sports media event, the attention of the Paris Olympics is influenced by the characteristics of the event. During the Olympics, the domestic attention is extremely high. The controversy surrounding the women's table tennis at the Paris Olympics has sparked fan fandom, igniting public opinion. The emotional manipulation and extensive media coverage have led to a loss of balance in the conservation law of empathic communication. Therefore, emotional storytelling should be used to guide rational thinking and discussion among the public for public education, in order to enhance their cognitive level and quality.

6.4. Enhancing Interaction and Strengthening Equal Communication among Users

The dissemination of ideas and ideologies largely relies on interaction, a good state of interaction, from input to the audience, to receiving feedback, and then summarizing and outputting based on the feedback results. Faced with the continuous emergence of emerging media, the traditional media communication situation is constantly being impacted, and enhancing interactive functions is a necessary strategy.

In the short video comment section of People's Daily, it can be seen that a timely and effective platform for interactive communication has not yet been established between users and the media. Under the People's Daily Douyin short videos, only users' comments are available in the comment area. There are few speeches and replies on the official account. Some comments of users that are likely to cause group polarization have not been guided or deleted. If we only emphasize content innovation without paying attention to interaction with users, although we have the architecture of mainstream media, it is easy to reduce users' enthusiasm for interaction and it is difficult to gain their attention and recognition. Therefore, on the one hand, we need to strengthen the construction of the comment section, build a friendly and approachable image, and meet the diverse and personalized information and emotional needs of the audience. On the other hand, it is necessary to establish a feedback mechanism, use real-time feedback mechanism, timely understand the audience's reactions and needs, innovate and adjust content strat-

egies based on users' preferences and concerns, understand the audience's needs and interests, and optimize content strategies. For example, the new media account of the Shenzhen Health Commission uses a highly networked discourse mode to attract young people with youthful expressions, provides online services, responds promptly, actively responds to user questions and entertainment exchanges, and enhances participation and account interaction.

7. Conclusions

As a national media organization, the People's Daily Douyin short video account is a good platform for propaganda and news dissemination for so many young people. This paper takes the People's Daily Douyin short video account as a representative to analyze the empathic communication strategy of short video news in the mainstream media, discuss the difficulties and problems faced by short video news, make it "regain the microphone" in the field of public opinion where multiple communicators coexist, awaken people's empathy, urge people to send out pro-social behavior, stimulate social positive energy, form a wide range of cohesion, and provide some reference for the emotional processing of news communication practice.

We should also recognize that the use of the People's Daily Douyin short video as a single platform for analysis has certain limitations. A single platform itself is influenced by factors such as user profiles, content forms, and even platform rules, and research results are difficult to reflect the overall empathic communication logic of the media. The researchers themselves have subjective biases in interpreting coding standards, case selection, and audience feedback, leading to misjudgments of empathy effects. Therefore, in order to improve the dissemination effect of empathy in short videos, other factors that affect the research conclusions need to be considered in the research process, including other mainstream media such as Xinhua News Agency and CCTV News, cross platform comparative analysis such as WeChat and Weibo, expanding the research object and time range, and improving the research design.

In short, whether it is daily news or positive energy video, from the perspective of attention rate and comment rate, Douyin may be the best promotion platform at present, as the introduction of People's Daily Douyin said, participating in, communicating and recording the era. How to use empathic communication to provide an effective channel for news dissemination is exactly what we need to constantly strive for in this era of rapid development of informatization.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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