

An Exploration of Topic Selection Strategies for TV Outreach Programs in the New Era

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Abstract: As China's international communication capacity building enters a new era, the performance of TV foreign propaganda programs in promoting Chinese culture and presenting the image of a great nation is remarkable. However, this type of program still suffers from the problems of insufficient closeness of the selected topics and insufficiently prominent news features. By discussing the current situation of topic selection and the optimization path, this paper aims to provide a reference for the topic selection strategy of TV foreign propaganda programs in the new era, to promote the effective dissemination of the excellent traditional Chinese culture and the national image, to enhance the power of international discourse, and to build a more harmonious and diversified international communication pattern.

Keywords: International Communication; Outreach Media; Topic Selection Strategies

1. Introduction

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee has attached great importance to international communication work, comprehensively enhanced the effectiveness of international communication, created media clusters with international influence and appeal, and initially constructed a large foreign propaganda pattern for television. However, at the same time, the international public opinion environment is becoming more and more intricate and complex, and China's international communication is facing new tasks and challenges.

Nowadays, when the development of new media is so rapid, TV programs are still the main way for foreign audiences to get information and learn about domestic and foreign information. Among the many types of TV programs, the most popular ones among overseas viewers are cultural and historical programs, and more than 90% of them think that the theme of the program is the main reason that attracts them to watch the program.^[1] Against this background, the selection of topics for TV outreach programs is particularly important. The success or failure of topic selection determines the attraction of the program to the audience, the degree of resonance with overseas viewers, and the communication effect. Optimizing the topic selection strategy of foreign propaganda TV programs is of great significance in attracting and retaining overseas viewers and strengthening international communication capacity building.

2. Characteristics of Selected Topics of TV Outreach Programs in the New Era

To optimize the selection of topics for outreach programs, it is first necessary to understand the current characteristics of the selection of topics for TV outreach programs, which can be summarized as the following three.

2.1. Firming Political Stance and Keeping up with National Policies

Firming political stance and keeping up with national policies are the basic principles that TV outreach programs in the new era have been adhering to. In today's globalization, the world's economy and culture are becoming more and more closely connected. As an important channel for shaping the country's image and transmitting its values, TV foreign propaganda programs are actively adapted to the orientation of the country's foreign policy and play an important role in spreading China's voice and enhancing China's international discourse power.

Profoundly and accurately reflecting and transmitting the core values of the country is the key to selecting topics for foreign language programs. At present, TV foreign propaganda programs are based on the fundamental interests and value pursuits of the country, and actively convey the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics, including patriotism, collectivism, the scientific concept of development, etc., through the selection of program content, presentation methods and other aspects of in-depth dissemination, to present to the world unique cultural values that can be accepted by the world and can profoundly affect the world's development.

Interpretation and publicity of the national governance system is also one of the important contents of TV foreign propaganda programs in the new era. Such programs usually adopt a lively and interesting format, coupled with professional explanations and in-depth interviews, to transform complex policy content into easy-to-understand language, and help the majority of overseas viewers gain an in-depth understanding of China's development path and direction. The first season of CCTV English Channel's program "Chinese Terminology" is themed on the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), with the vocabulary topics focusing on politics, as well as economic and cultural aspects with Chinese characteristics. Topics include "Eight Rules", "New Era", "Community of Shared Future", "New Normal", "Precise Poverty Alleviation", and "New Normal". "Precision Poverty Alleviation", "Beautiful China", "The Chinese Dream" and so on. By interpreting national policies and highlighting the actual effectiveness of China's national governance, we present the real state of China's development and its prospects, thus enhancing the understanding and recognition of China's development path by international audiences, and disseminating China's values more effectively.

2.2. Focusing on History and Culture and Promoting Chinese Civilization

China is a cultural power, thousands of years of cultural history have created today's great country and nation of etiquette. In the long history, although constantly influenced by foreign culture and even invasion, but have not been able to change the roots of China's indigenous culture, therefore, Chinese culture has a strong vitality and cohesion and the traditional Chinese culture is not only the outstanding advantage of the Chinese nation, but also our most profound cultural soft power.

It is because of the important communication value of Chinese culture in the global context that foreign propaganda programs, especially cultural programs, have been focusing mainly on the inheritance and promotion of traditional Chinese culture, telling the story of China's long history and rich cultural heritage, and giving full play to the cultural advantages to improve the communication effect. As a well-established cultural program on CCTV's Spanish-language channel, "Centre Stage" covers a wide range of Chinese cultural areas in its program selections, allowing Spanish-speaking viewers to learn about the celebrations and cultural connotations of traditional Chinese festivals such as Chinese New Year, Tomb Sweeping Day and Mid-Autumn festivals, to feel the charms of Chinese classical music and traditional dance, to appreciate the skills of traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, to enjoy the wonderful renditions of traditional Chinese opera, and to appreciate the emotional expressions of ancient and modern Chinese literature. Through a rich and diverse selection of content, "Centre Stage" has played a cultural advantage in international communication, enhanced the knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture in Spanish-speaking countries, and strengthened the audience's identification with and appeal to Chinese culture.

Another prominent feature of new-age TV foreign propaganda programs is to attract overseas audiences by selecting the most representative and characteristic national cultural themes of Chinese culture. A prominent feature of foreign audiences is that they like new, strange, and special things. Therefore, the selection of topics for foreign propaganda programs focuses on local characteristics. For more than 20 years, the CGTN's travel program "Travelogue" has been introducing viewers to diverse ethnic cultures in the form of tourist attractions. In the "Pearl River Trace" series, the host introduces Shunde's outstanding traditional ethnic culture and modern civilization during a trip to Shunde. From double-skinned milk, a specialty food originating from Shunde, to the well-known folk cultural activity "Dragon Boat Eye-dotting", "Travelogue" proves to overseas viewers that "the more national, the more worldly", and in the process of digging up national specialties and cultures, it expounds the world's outstanding cultures with Chinese characteristics, embedded with Chinese wisdom and reflecting the spirit of China, attracts international audiences and retains their attention, and enhances the effect of foreign communication.

2.3. Adhering to China's Perspective and Spreading China's Voice

At present, the world is in an era full of challenges and changes, and the General Secretary emphasized in the report of the Twentieth Party Congress that it is necessary to accelerate the construction of Chinese discourse and Chinese narrative system, to tell Chinese stories, to disseminate Chinese voices, and to present a credible, lovable and respectable image of China. In the face of new contradictions and challenges brought about by the intricate international environment, the selection of topics for new-era foreign propaganda programs tends to tell the story of China's development, experiences, and solutions from a Chinese perspective, and to convey to the international audience China's role and contribution in global affairs.

Letting the world hear and listen to China's voice and strengthening national image building is one of the communication purposes of foreign propaganda programs in the new era. Television foreign propaganda programs, as an important window for displaying national soft power, reflect China's national image in program selection, highlight China's advantages in terms of history and culture, social system, and development achievements in terms of creativity and content, and show China's image as a responsible great power, as well as the positive contribution it has made to world peace and development. While reflecting China's development achievements, CGTN thematic series "China's Solutions" focuses on expressing the Chinese approach to the world. The series begins with 15 topics, including comprehensive opening up, poverty eradication, environmental protection, and the community of shared destiny for humanity, and outlines China's great integration, direction, and trend in influencing the world from different perspectives.^[2]

In addition, by responding to international hot topics, TV foreign propaganda programs have guided international public opinion to pay attention to China's perspectives and viewpoints in the context of global governance. In the era of globalization, many international issues have significant global influence. TV foreign propaganda programs focus on issues of concern to the international community, and through in-depth reporting and professional analysis, they convey China's stance and policies on these issues and improve its own international public opinion environment. As one of CGTN's flagship programs, "Global Business" is aired on all CGTN stations around the world. The topics of the program follow the world's financial hot spots closely and insist on interpreting global economic activities from China's point of view, such as "The Expo", "The RCEP", "BRICS Summit", "Innovation Economy Forum", etc. It shows China's economic development while responding to international concerns and presenting China's image from China's perspective.

3. Existing Problems in Selecting Topics for TV Outreach Programs in the New Era

Understanding the problems in selecting topics for TV outreach programs in the new era is a prerequisite for identifying targeted solutions. The problems can be summarized into two, namely the existence of homogeneity and lack of timeliness.

3.1. Existence of Homogeneity and Intercultural Communication Barriers

Since the purpose of foreign propaganda programs is to spread China's voice and shape the country's image, the content of the programs often focuses on the Chinese perspective and shows the charm of Chinese culture. However, in a globalized and diversified media environment, where the needs of viewers from different regions and cultural backgrounds vary, unitary program content may be difficult to satisfy the interests of different audiences, resulting in aesthetic fatigue and leading to a weakening of the attention of international viewers.

Whether we can tell China's story and spread China's voice well depends on whether the audience is willing to watch and understand, and whether we can form a benign interaction with the content of TV outreach programs. One of the primary purposes of foreign propaganda programs is to let the international community know China objectively and rationally, which requires that the programs must be close to the discourse system, cultural background, and value orientation of the overseas audience.^[3] At present, foreign propaganda programs, especially cultural programs, are inclined to publicize Chinese history and traditional culture, failing to give full consideration to the cultural orientation and viewing habits of international viewers, making it difficult to get close to the audience, which creates cross-cultural communication barriers, thus restricting the effect of information conveyance, and weakening the influence of the program's international dissemination. Taking CGTN Spanish Channel, which is good at cultural communication, as an example, there are 5 out of 12 programs focusing on the promotion

of Chinese culture, including the educational program "Nihao China", the humanities and geography program "This is China", "Diary of travel", the service program "Tasting China", and the arts program "Centre Stage". These five programs are all very Chinese, but the audience targeting seems to be the local Hispanic viewers in China, and their appeal to overseas Hispanic viewers needs to be strengthened.

3.2. Lack of Timeliness

In the rapidly changing information age, timeliness, as an important feature of news reporting, is of great importance to news media. At present, TV foreign propaganda programs lack timeliness in the selection of news topics, which cannot meet the audience's demand for timely access to international information, resulting in limited communication effects.

With the rapid development of technology and the popularization of social media, the international community's access to news has accelerated like never before. However, the production process of traditional TV outreach programs is relatively cumbersome, including topic selection, planning, recording, and reviewing, which often takes a long time, resulting in the content of the program being likely to be outdated by the time it is broadcast. In addition, television communication is a relatively closed and fixed form of media, which is slower than the Internet and social media. Another reason for the lack of timeliness is the impact of policy restrictions and official censorship. Some foreign propaganda programs are restricted by policies in choosing the topics to cover and cannot directly involve or show some sensitive or urgent international news events, which may lead to relatively conservative and traditional contents of the programs and make it difficult to match with the actual needs of the audience and the hot spots of current affairs. High-quality news reporting ability can reflect the comprehensive strength of a channel. As a "major media country", in the process of "powerful media country", we must further strengthen the news characteristics, pay close attention to the current international and local hot issues, and improve the influence of the program in international news dissemination.

4. The Optimization Path of Selecting Topics for TV Outreach Programs in the New Era

With a clear understanding of the current situation and problems of topic selection for TV outreach programs in the new era, two measures can be taken to optimize the path of topic selection.

4.1. Enhancing Proximity and Developing Empathy with Overseas Audience

Given the current problem of the lack of closeness of TV outreach programs, ensuring that the selected topics resonate with overseas audiences is one of the keys to the success of TV outreach programs in the new era, and it is also the direction in which the outreach programs need to make efforts urgently. First of all, program producers need to have strong cultural sensitivity and conduct in-depth research on the cultural background, values, and interests of overseas viewers, so as to understand the cultural characteristics of different countries and regions as well as the psychological needs of local viewers, and to find topics that are closely related to them, and to differentiate and customize them in order to achieve a more accurate and targeted communication. The topics should show the local culture, development achievements and social changes from China's point of view, so as to trigger the resonance of local audiences and make them feel a sense of identity.

Taking cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation as the theme is also one of the strategies to strengthen the closeness of foreign propaganda programs in the new era. First of all, Chinese culture has a strong ability to integrate foreign cultures, and many foreign cultures have realized organic fusion with Chinese culture. We are good at absorbing foreign cultures and using them for our own purposes, as well as carrying out creative transformation and innovative development of traditional cultures, so the selection of cross-cultural topics can help to show the inclusiveness and richness of Chinese culture. In addition, selecting cases of Chinese and foreign cultures influencing and exchanging with each other in foreign propaganda programs can better meet the needs of different audience groups, achieve precise positioning, and arouse their resonance and interest, which will help to enhance international cultural exchanges and understanding, and promote the dissemination and influence of Chinese culture in the international arena. The program can focus on transnational art projects, transnational cultural activities, results of cultural cooperation projects, challenges and opportunities of cultural exchanges, etc. The program can be selected to show the mingling and collision of Chinese and foreign cultures, to emphasize the important role of cultural cooperation in promoting international friendship and cooperation, to

deepen the viewer's knowledge of the world's cultural diversity, and to promote the audience's thoughts and reflections on cross-cultural communication.

Topics should also have innovative perspectives and dig deeper into the theme to achieve emotional resonance through storytelling. A comprehensive analysis of the results of the study shows that the tastes of international audiences for programs are mainly reflected in digging for facts, expanding horizons, seeking curiosity, and pursuing creativity. Therefore, the selection should start from a unique perspective and provide novel content. By digging deep into China's history, culture and social phenomena, the emotional elements in the stories should be combined with the life experiences of overseas viewers, so that they can emotionally resonate and empathize with the stories. Finally, it is vital for program producers to maintain interaction with overseas viewers and listen to their feedback. They can utilize social media, online platforms and other channels to actively interact with viewers, understand their views and needs, and promptly adjust the direction of selection and content to ensure that the program's resonance with viewers continues to be solid.

4.2. Strengthening Journalistic Identity to Achieve an Equal Emphasis on News and Culture

Strengthening news features and enhancing the timeliness of news programs is a crucial part of expanding the influence of international media. In selecting topics, the first thing to focus on is real-time and hot topics. News programs need to pay attention to current hot spots and emergencies and choose topics with a high degree of concern and discussion to ensure the timeliness and attractiveness of the programs.

To achieve this, the production team of foreign propaganda programs should strengthen their editorial capacity and obtain more authentic and three-dimensional news reports by establishing a wide range of news resource channels, including setting up overseas press stations, cooperating with domestic and foreign news organizations, keeping in touch with authoritative experts and scholars, and strengthening field interviews, so as to enhance the newsworthiness and persuasiveness of the programs.

Secondly, the selection of topics should have an international perspective and be characterized by pluralism. In selecting topics, it is necessary to cover news in many fields at home and abroad, avoid single propaganda, and include news content in many fields such as society, culture, science and technology, and environmental protection, in addition to focusing on hard news such as politics and economy. Outreach programs can be richer and more engaging by incorporating different types of news. In addition, based on traditional news coverage, foreign propaganda programs can explore innovative program formats, such as current affairs debates, in-depth reports, and thematic interviews, etc., to present the news content in a more comprehensive and diversified way, and to explore the background, impact, and development trend of events in depth. Such innovations help to stimulate viewers' interest, expand the program's influence and audience attention, and increase the depth and breadth of the news program while ensuring its authority and reliability.

Finally, international news should be wary of the "domestication" bias in the selection of topics. The local relevance of important international news is usually an important consideration for the media, and therefore, planning topics are usually an extension of the international perspective of domestic news issues, with strong domestication and local relevance.^[4] Therefore, foreign propaganda programs in the new era should gradually reduce the dependence on local second-hand sources, avoid homogenization and fragmentation in topic selection, and further enhance the objectivity and professionalism of international news.

5. Conclusions

Currently, the selection of topics for new-age foreign propaganda programs is mainly characterized by three features: a firm political stance, a tendency towards traditional Chinese history and culture, and a focus on Chinese perspectives. While foreign propaganda programs are gradually improving their international communication ability, they also suffer from the problems of singularity and lack of timeliness in topic selection. To deal with these two problems, TV foreign propaganda programs in the new era need to strengthen the resonance with the international audience and news characteristics in the process of selecting topics to make the topics more relevant and timely.

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