

# *The Effects of Emotional Transmission on Mainstream Social Media – A Case Study of Guangming Daily’s Account on Douyin*

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**Abstract:** Studies on the use of emotional factors by mainstream media mostly start from the perspectives of narrative and content, while few studies focus on the influence of emotional communication. Based on the existing literature on the mainstream media's emotionalized narrative in short videos, this research investigates the influence of this narrative in the process of communication, with a specific focus on the official account of Guangming Daily on Douyin. It combines questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Collected data are analyzed through the tool, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to uncover the effect of emotional content transmission. The result shows that the short videos released by Guangming Daily are characterized by a folk narrative that aims to stimulate emotional resonance. They are of educational significance, providing positive guidance and arousing patriotic feelings.

**Keywords:** Douyin, emotional communication, short video, Guangming Daily, mainstream media.

## 1. Introduction

Since the concept of “New Mainstream Media” was introduced in 2014, many traditional media have been stationed on short video platforms and devoted themselves to disseminating mainstream values with current news as the main content [1]. On the Douyin platform, previous researchers found that the application of short videos by mainstream media can contribute to the significant dissemination of social news [2].

Short video platforms have the features of large-scale users, general target audiences, fast rhyme, and high engagement. These qualities undoubtedly equip mainstream media with important benefits for future development. As a traditional medium with a long history of 72 years, Guangming Daily

ventured into the Douyin short video platform in March 2019 and positioned itself with "news", "culture", and "positive energy" as keywords [3]. As of September 2022, Guangming Daily has totally published 3396 short videos on Douyin. For example, it included the contents about the 40th anniversary of the Reform policy, the situation of Covid-19, and cultural celebrities [3]. According to the Douyin official report of 2022 July, Guangming Daily's Douyin account has 27.5 million followers and more than 1 billion likes of all works.

Therefore, this paper looks into the effect of emotional communication on mainstream media focusing on Guangming Daily's account on Douyin. First, by reviewing and studying the secondary sources about media's emotional communication in China and foreign countries, this paper explores the operation mode and communication effect of emotion created by mainstream media on short video platforms. Second, through questionnaires and interviews, audiences' attitudes towards mainstream media's short video tactics are further uncovered.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Mainstream Media's Emotional Portrayal of Video Content**

The academic community continues to pay attention to the content production and communication strategy of mainstream media on Douyin [4,5]. The research on the use of short videos by mainstream media includes emotional communication, public opinion guidance, and the effect of emotional strategy in public health emergency reporting. From the perspective of "information theory", some scholars believe that emotion permeates information transmission, and short videos transmit both factual information and emotional information [1]. Under this logic, emotional communication is the basis of public opinion guidance, affecting public cognition, especially political cognition [6]. Regarding the hot social events on the internet, emotion is the deepest driving force for the widespread of such events, promoting interaction and empathy [7].

Moreover, the audiences realize group interaction through comments and achieve a sense of solidarity. In this process, the individual emotion is transformed into the collective emotion. The gathering of emotions is more likely to build emotional energy and social culture [8].

### **2.2. The Dominant Influence of Mainstream Media in Emotional Communication**

Some scholars have noticed that governments are also actively exploring new modes of emotional communication to promote the effective transmission of information. Emotional communication is the driving force of mainstream ideology popularization, the path to constructing an authority image and promoting policy effectiveness [9]. People's political identity will be influenced by the generalization, differentiation, and reconstruction of polarized emotion in cyberspace, which is mainly represented by the variation of political cognition, the discourse field of political authority, and the irrationality of political evaluation [10]. At the same time, current research also mentioned that improper emotional transmission may lead to overly emotional expression, which is not conducive to the construction of a harmonious network environment and the government's cyberspace management [8]. Therefore, mainstream media should pay more attention to the influence brought by the emotional communication of short videos when making video content, actively excavate the deep emotion behind short videos, and build an emotional civilization online [8].

### 3. Research Methods

#### 3.1. Questionnaires

This paper mainly adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods. A questionnaire survey is conducted to obtain first-hand information. After summarizing and investigating the overall video data of Guangming Daily's Douyin account, a questionnaire was designed. It covers basic personal information and people's attitudes towards the influence of short videos on emotional communication. The respondents are between 15 and 60 years old, often surf the Internet, and have a high usage rate of Douyin. A total of 62 valid questionnaires were collected, and among them 36 are men and 26 are women.

#### 3.2. Interviews

This paper also adopted in-depth interviews. There are three interviewees, born in the 1970s, 1990s, and 2000s, respectively. They represent different audience groups. All of them use Douyin and are familiar with Guangming Daily's videos on Douyin. All of them are women. Interviewee 1 is a self-employed household born in the 1970s; Interviewee 2 is a college student born in the 1990s; Interviewee 3 from the 2000s is a high school student. The qualitative research method of the in-depth interview can deeply reflect the detailed influence of emotional communication on the audiences, on the basis of the questionnaire survey. However, due to the small number of interviewees, the answers may be personalized to some extent, and the overall representativeness is slightly lacking. Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, complementary research can be completed and relatively accurate and universal research results can be obtained.

### 4. The Influence of Emotional Communication

#### 4.1. The Use of a Folk Narrative

According to the Likert scale, the majority of respondents, about 95%, who have watched the content posted by Guangming Daily on Douyin, agreed that they have an emotional resonance with the content to varying degrees (see Figure 1). This is consistent with most previous studies. As the first interviewee thought, she would resonate emotionally with the folk narrative used by Guangming Daily.

Douyin short videos, with their huge audiences and objective traffic data, have promoted the active transformation of many mainstream media's communication methods. As a content and social platform, Douyin is positioned to "record the good life", distinguishing itself from the overly serious and rigid limitations brought to the audiences by traditional media. The content of Douyin cleverly integrates the ecological environment of communication in the new era and focuses on the ordinary people in daily life by using a civilian and individualized narrative style to improve the acceptance of the audiences and achieve the effect of emotional communication [1]. Guangming Daily uses exactly this style through "silent" content presentation. For example, a poster titled *Henan, You Can Do That* and a collection of 13 videos titled *Ordinary Glimmers Converge into Heroic Light Aid Henan, May Everyone Be Safe!* recorded a heavy rain event and touching rescue moments in July 2021 in Zhengzhou. They were narrated from a folk perspective and through the most direct shooting lenses. In the interview, when the first interviewee talked about this video collection in 2021, she said that she was deeply touched by a scene where a person knelt down in tears to give food to rescue workers.

On Guangming Daily's Douyin account, such videos are not just in compilation albums. The so-called folk narrative mode is exactly reshaping the traditional stereotype of mainstream media.

Guangming Daily uses the characteristics of short videos to present powerful scenes and positive characters, arousing emotions and resonating with viewers. For example, when Interviewee 1 watched a video of a fireman rescuing a girl who was about to commit suicide, she said, “this is the heart of the common people, a grateful heart. I cried, too, and I was so moved because of that”.

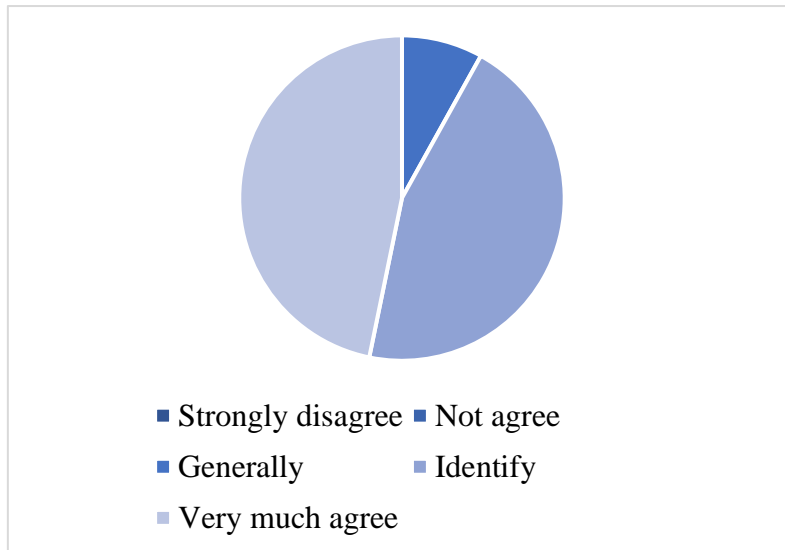


Figure 1: An emotional resonance with the Guangming Daily.

(Figure Credit: Original)

#### 4.2. Promotion of the Transmission of Social News

This paper divided the likelihood of recommending video content to friends into 11 dimensions, from impossible (lowest) to most likely (strongest). As shown in Figure 2, there are 56 participants in the dimension of 6-9, and 46.77 % of the participants said they are very willing to recommend mainstream media video content to their friends.

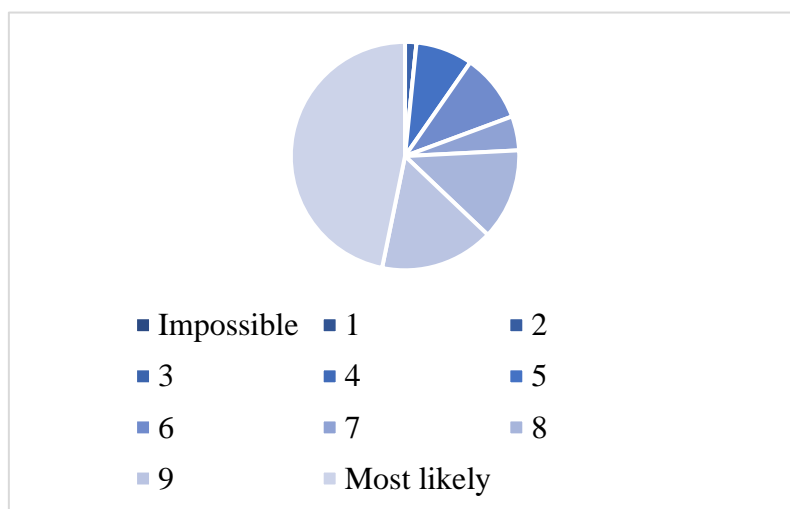


Figure 2: The likelihood of recommending video content to friends.

(Figure Credit: Original)

Douyin applies short videos as its main communication method to achieve high efficiency in information transmission. Compared to traditional media short videos have a wider and faster communication effect. On the one hand, the audiences can quickly know social news within minutes and even seconds and make their judgements. Therefore, it is a crucial factor whether short videos can effectively both attract attention and motivate individual emotions in a short time when they watch social news. On the other hand, the emotional transmission of video content might impact audiences' subjective judgements, which would cause the effect of secondary communication.

The second interviewee stated that Guangming Daily has a powerful effect on spreading social news. During the interview, she talked about her behavior preference and watching frequency with respect to short videos. Born in the 1990s, she basically uses Douyin as an entertainment platform, preferring the contents about makeup instructions and funny jokes. However, she is also interested in following social news and important social events. She said that she is familiar with a few famous mainstream media in China, including Guangming Daily. When she watched some excited and agitated content, she would be affected. She will immediately share them with her family and sometimes she will click "like".

According to Guangming Daily's official data report, the average number of likes for such videos is maintained at around one million. Attributed to the recommendation system of Douyin algorithm, the data of likes, shares, and user interaction develop into a virtuous circle, which contributes to the spreading of social news to wider audiences.

### 4.3. A Positive Guidance and a Negative Influence

The official Douyin account of Guangming Daily has the characteristics of both traditional mainstream media and new media. It not only shoulders the heavy responsibility of news dissemination but also has the characteristic of being popular with people. Compared with traditional communication methods, it has a range of wider audience. The main functions of mainstream media include not only timely reporting of news and dissemination of political guidelines but also universal education through video content. Through the analysis of the questionnaire results, the video account of Guangming Daily has a positive effect on social value construction (see Figure 3). 90% believe that the video content produced and transmitted by Guangming Daily can have a positive impact on social values by using emotional factors.

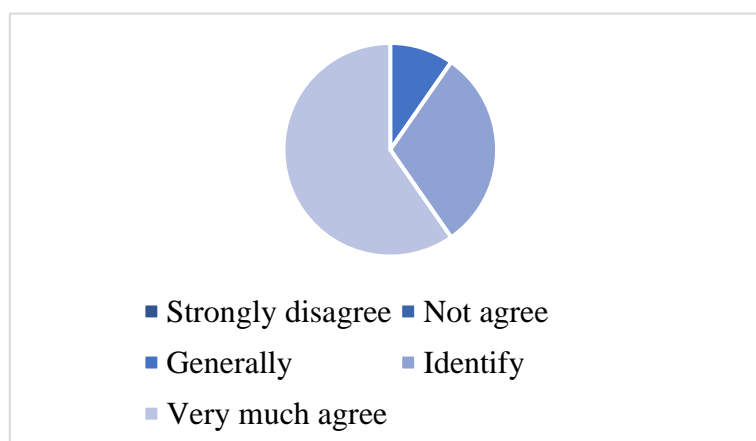


Figure 3: Guangming Daily's positive effect on social value construction.

(Figure Credit: Original)

Interviewee 2 born in the 1990s also watches many videos with positive or negative energy, and her emotions obviously fluctuate according to the content of the videos. Sometimes she sees people helping stray animals and is moved by the greatness of life. In her words, “the pure love between humans and animals really makes me feel moved”. Promoting excellent positive energy can play a good guiding role and create a good social atmosphere. However, sometimes she is also angry about the abuse of animals and other bad social events. These are the negative events in society. Mainstream media can guide the audiences through appropriate communication, carry out ideological education to the audiences, and promote positive social thoughts to avoid the occurrence of malignant events.

In addition, the third interviewee born in the 2000s thought the content of Guangming Daily on Douyin is deeply educational. The post-00s generation is still in the stage of students, who have not been exposed to society and have not yet fully matured. They love to socialize with friends and are the main force of "hot chat" on Douyin. They all live in a world with the advanced network, and without subjective rigorous judgment, they are easy to be influenced by the words and comments on the network. Driven by popular mainstream short videos, their emotions are also easily stimulated.

#### 4.4. Arousal of Patriotic Feeling

On major national holidays, Guangming Daily's official account on Douyin will release videos on relevant issues. In the strong atmosphere of the festivals, people are more likely to be infected by the relevant video content, have individual consciousness to collective consciousness, and feel the national pride and national identity brought by history, culture, national martyrs, and heroes [1]. In the emotional content of Guangming Daily, political news is the majority, followed by social news. The main figures in the news are national leaders, diplomatic spokesmen, and the people's army, and the emotions conveyed are mainly positive emotions such as respect, praise, and patriotism.

The videos with the most views and likes of Guangming Daily all belong to “national events”. For example, the short video with more than 8.775 million is about the deputy director of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Department's response to a journalist's question to defend national dignity. Also, a short video titled *Today, In Memory of a Great Man!* with more than 2.057 million likes is about the story of former president Mao Zedong.

In addition to that, there are videos celebrating the 25th Anniversary of Hong Kong's Return. This kind of video greatly mobilizes audiences' national identity, enhances national cohesion, and enables the audiences to get the correct ideological guidance. This emotional influence happened to all interviewees from different generations. For example, the first interviewee indicated that “the practice of one country, two systems have been recognized as a success in Hong Kong because the motherland brings them happy families”! In addition, the second interviewee also mentioned that watching all kinds of good news about China makes her feel that China has become very strong.

This means that Guangming Daily is a major newspaper of ideology, theory, and culture. Its clear-cut stance and fearless reporting demonstrate its authority and professionalism in this field. After entering the short video platform in 2019, Guangming Daily's Douyin videos have skillfully combined the innovation and entertainment of new media, using lens language to intercept the most exciting scenes and dialogues in stories and stimulate viewers' patriotism in a short time.

#### 4.5. Video Audience's Scale

##### 4.5.1. Editing Methods and the Use of Music

Douyin, as a short video platform, has a huge audience base. The fragmentation and flexibility of video duration as well as the precise push of content become the main reasons for its popularity. By putting forward reasonable countermeasures to solve the negative effects of video content on young

people in the new era, Douyin becomes a favorable medium. In this environment, Guangming Daily has broadened its audiences by producing more original videos and has gained many fans who are still students. For instance, Interviewee 3 stated that “the short videos on Douyin, which use diversified background music and editing techniques are particularly appealing to high school students”. It can be seen that the mainstream media such as Guangming Daily selects reasonable clips and edits music effectively to attract audiences and bring positive emotion to them.

#### **4.5.2. The Promotion of Socialization**

Socialization has become a significant part of Generation Z. In fact, almost 80% of user interaction on Douyin is from young people. Guangming Daily's short videos also have extremely high rates of sharing and retweeting. Considering the experience of participating in interactions, the youngest interviewee said that students have heated discussions with each other based on the short videos of Guangming Daily shared by teachers.

With the advantage of interaction function on Douyin, mainstream media, such as Guangming Daily, have broadened the volume of video viewers with a profound impact on Generation Z who are frequently socialized. Based on the characteristics of this generation, it is recommended to combine news content with creative post-production, including modern elements and hot topics. In order to produce a more positive effect on young audiences, the mainstream media need to make creative changes and adapt for different audiences' preference.

### **5. Guangming Daily's Communication Limitations**

Guangming Daily's short videos have the limitation of behavior feedback and audience breadth. Firstly, the comment section is dominated by relatively unified emotion, mainly responding to patriotism and using praising emojis, while constructive and pluralistic opinions are rare. This has a drawback of group blind obedience, which makes it difficult to strengthen behaviors and produce sustained effects through practice. Secondly, there is a “generation gap” between the video tone of mainstream media and young people's entertainment thinking, and there is still a lack of new elements in which young people are interested in terms of expression form and content. In view of these limitations, it is suggested that Guangming Daily's short videos should pay more attention to personal emotion and individual thinking ability, such as enhancing the interactivity of the comment area and actively promoting the initiative of listening to public opinion. In addition, Guangming Daily's short videos need continuous innovation in content and form to attract young people and better achieve the emotional communication practice of mainstream media.

### **6. Conclusion**

Through the combination of quantitative research and qualitative research, this research considers the breadth and depth of the research object. It finds that the audiences will have a strong emotional resonance with the video content narrated by mainstream media through folk language, especially patriotic feelings and national pride. At the same time, the way of emotional communication will motivate the audiences to spontaneously spread the video content, expand the spread of social news, and carry out subtle ideological education in a more effective way. Guangming Daily's short videos should strengthen the diversity of expression forms and contents and pay attention to the audiences' personal feelings. Regarding the communication effect of its own videos, it should also enhance interactive comments and reduce group blindness.

In this paper, questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to collect primary data. Due to the lack of a total sample amount and unbalanced sample groups, the data obtained were incomplete to some extent, and more accurate data are needed. Moreover, it mainly combined the List scale, single

choice, and multiple choice to design the question types in the questionnaire survey. Future research can use more measurement indicators to further broaden the details of the questions and examine more perspectives on emotional transmission to enrich the conclusion.

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