Chapter 26
Tell China's Story Well?
Cultural Framing and Online Contestation

Bingjuan Xiong
University of Colorado, USA

ABSTRACT

The development of new media transforms human communication experiences in ways that are socially, culturally, and politically meaningful. This study investigates the Chinese government's use of new media in response to an international communication crisis, the Ai Weiwei case, in 2011. Through a discourse analysis of China's official online news website, China Daily, as well as Twitter posts, most salient media frames in China's online media discourse are identified. The results suggest that online contestation of media framing in China's official media discourse contributes to the formation of new cultural expectations and norms in Chinese society and challenges the government's ability to tell its own stories without dispute. The author argues that new media foster online discussion and stimulate public debate of China's accountability and transparency in interacting with domestic and global audiences during crisis communication.

INTRODUCTION

The development of new communication technologies transforms human communication experiences in ways that are socially, culturally, and politically meaningful. Not only do individuals worldwide use them for sharing information, constructing identities, building communities, and engaging in political actions, but also at the national level, single-party states like China begin to utilize new media to control the information flow and assert cultural and political influences (Ding, 2007/2008; Herold, 2011). The Chinese government is aware of the importance of new media and their global influences. This fact is reflected in an official statement by Cai Mingzhao, China's propaganda official, on October 10, 2013:

At present, the media sector is digitizing and becoming networked, this is a good opportunity to realize a leapfrogging-style upgrade of dissemination capacity. We must persist in the simultaneous development of traditional media and new media, accelerate the integrated development of traditional media and new media, fully utilize new technologies and new applications, innovate media dissemination methods, and gain the initiative in a new round of dissemination capacity competition… Strengthen discourse system construction; strive to forge new concepts, new categories and new formulations that circulate in China and abroad. To tell China's story well, and spread China's voice well, foreign discourse system construction is extremely important (Cai, 2013).

As some researchers have noted, China has launched large-scale imaging projects around the globe to maintain and increase its soft power reach not only through traditional means such as establishment of Confucius Institutes, but also, more recently, through the use of a "smarter language" in tune with other foreign discourse systems (Yang, 2014; Zhang, 2009). In line with Cai's (2013) statement, the Chinese government aims to take advantage of new media to strengthen its discursive power within the international media environment by adopting a way of speaking that resonates with foreign audiences. However, in view of China's sociocultural and political particularities, questions arise with regard to: (a) how well the Chinese government utilizes new media to manage information flow to facilitate its global influences, and (b) how the online public reacts to the government's usage of new media, its "smarter language" and its self-proclaimed ability to tell a good story.

Communication scholars have emphasized the importance of connections between culture and new media. For example, Shuter (2012) notes that culture influences the social uses of new media but at the same time new media could potentially change culture. Privalova (2012) also points out that mediated communication in a given society has its own socio-cultural bearings and national colorings. Furthermore, Chen (2012) states that "new media does not only influence the form and content of information/messages, but also affects how people understand each other in the process of human communication, especially for those from different cultural or ethnic groups" (p. 3). In accordance with these discussions, scholars have called for a sociocultural approach to intercultural new media research (Cheong, Martin, & Macfadyen, 2012; Shuter, 2014).

The current study adopts a sociocultural perspective to examine the Chinese government's use of new media in coping with communication crises in the international context. More specifically, it analyzes "cultural framing" in the Chinese official media and the comments and responses to this "cultural framing" from the online public concerning the Ai Weiwei case which unfolded on the Internet in 2011. In the following pages, I first present a chronological development of the Ai Weiwei case; explain why it has created a communication crisis for the Chinese government in the international context and how it further prompted the government to use new media to defend its position. Then, I review previous studies that have contributed to our understanding of the Chinese government's use of new media, followed by a discussion of the theoretical and methodological rationale for the current study. Next, I conduct a discourse analysis of the Chinese government's official media discourse surrounding the Ai Weiwei case on the Internet and the comments and responses to this discourse from the online public, so as to identify prevalent media frames that are culturally embedded in the Chinese media discourse. Finally, I discuss the sociocultural and political implications of Chinese government's control and construction of information in the new media age.

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/tell-chinas-story-well/226691

Related Content

Informing About CSR Initiatives on the Corporate Website or Staying Invisible?: SMEs in Controversial and Non-Controversial Industries

Andrea Mangani (2021). *International Journal of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility (pp. 48-63).*

www.irma-international.org/article/informing-about-csr-initiatives-on-the-corporate-website-or-staying-invisible/270472

Demographic Determinants of Youth Entrepreneurial Success

Mufaro Dzingirai (2020). *International Journal of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility (pp. 1-16).*

www.irma-international.org/article/demographic-determinants-of-youth-entrepreneurial-success/259405

Ethical Pitfalls in the Digital Age: When the Desire to "Serve Hot" Gets in the Way of Verification

Tendai Chari (2017). *Media Law, Ethics, and Policy in the Digital Age (pp. 25-43).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/ethical-pitfalls-in-the-digital-age/175438

Financial Market Regulatory Structure in South Asia: An Overview

Amit Kumar Kashyap, Anchit Bhandariand Urvashi Jaswani (2016). *Financial Market Regulations and Legal Challenges in South Asia (pp. 1-18).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/financial-market-regulatory-structure-in-south-asia/147795

Informing About CSR Initiatives on the Corporate Website or Staying Invisible?: SMEs in Controversial and Non-Controversial Industries

Andrea Mangani (2021). *International Journal of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility (pp. 48-63).*

www.irma-international.org/article/informing-about-csr-initiatives-on-the-corporate-website-or-staying-invisible/270472