COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES THROUGH THE DOUYIN PLATFORM: A CASE STUDY OF THE DONGFANG INTEGRATED MEDIA CENTER, HAINAN PROVINCE, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the communication strategies employed through the Douyin platform by the Dongfang Integrated Media Center, Hainan Province, People's Republic of China. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research collected data through content analysis of posts and videos published on the Center's official Douyin account, in-depth interviews with key informants, and systematic observations. Data was analyzed using directed content analysis and thematic analysis, with triangulation applied to ensure credibility.

The findings reveal that Douyin is strategically utilized as a primary channel to disseminate public information and services, directly supporting government communication objectives. Core strategies include (1) prioritizing grassroots audiences, (2) producing creative short-form video content that is concise, engaging, and aligned with local events or issues, (3) applying a positive-negative narrative framing technique to inspire and educate audiences, (4) integrating media content with public services and community engagement activities to increase participation, and (5) adopting a cross-platform approach to reinforce brand image and outreach.

These strategies have enhanced the Center's capacity to reach a wide and diverse local audience swiftly, increase citizen engagement, and improve the effectiveness of disseminating government policies in both routine and crisis contexts. The study recommends expanding content and distribution channels to reach populations with limited technological access and encouraging co-creational participation between senders and receivers to foster sustainable strategic communication in the digital era.

Keywords: Communication Strategy, Douyin, Integrated Media Center, Dongfang City

Introduction

Globalization and rapid technological change have transformed communication strategies into a core operational instrument for organizations, requiring the integration of modern language use and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence to effectively reach diverse audiences (Muangnuan et al., 2025).

Social media has reshaped the communication landscape; studies conducted with higher-education institutions reveal common patterns such as concise messaging, the use of hashtags, short-form visual or video content, posting frequency of 1–3 times per day, and strategy design based on platform, format, frequency, content, and communicative attributes (Boonprawes et al., 2025).

In the business sector, digital marketing communication emphasizes promotions and content designed to stimulate consumer decision-making (e.g., GrabFood and foodpanda). In contrast, in the political sphere, the Move Forward Party employs TikTok to communicate with youth and first-time voters, reflecting a transition toward interactive, two-way media that enhances public engagement (Methavorananchai & Wannarumon, 2023).

Douyin, China's leading short-video platform, launched in 2016, has rapidly grown into a dominant digital media outlet. As of 2023, it boasts over 600 million daily active users and more than 750 million monthly active users, with exceptionally high average usage time. Consequently, it has become a critical source of news, information, and entertainment particularly in secondary cities and rural areas (Lu et al., 2025).

The Chinese government has promoted Douyin as a tool for propaganda dissemination and state communication under its media-integration policy. More than 18,000 government and state-media accounts collectively produce around five million videos per year, competing to capture public attention in the online environment (Lu et al., 2025).

Its semi-decentralized model allows local media outlets to create content about everyday life and civic virtues that consistently attract higher engagement than centrally produced ideological messages. This underscores the communicative power of content aligned with community contexts (Lu et al., 2025).

Although existing studies on communication strategies span multiple contexts, most remain situated within Thai cultural settings and provide limited insight into the Chinese context particularly concerning the strategic use of Chinese social media platforms by government bodies and local media.

Research Objectives

To examine the communication strategies employed on Douyin by the Integrated Media Center of Dongfang City, Hainan Province, People's Republic of China.

Literature Review

This study is structured around four principal theoretical pillars Strategic Communication, Uses and Gratifications, Diffusion of Innovations, and Media Convergence to systematically analyze digital communication on platform-based media within the Chinese context, using Dongfang City as the case study. This theoretical synthesis is integrated with empirical evidence concerning the upgrading of Integrated Media Centers and the role of Douyin within China's local state-media architecture, thereby providing a coherent foundation for examining communication strategies and their effectiveness.

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication refers to the purposeful use of communication to advance organizational goals through a process of situational analysis, objective setting, audience identification, message and channel strategy formulation, and evaluation. It emphasizes outcome-oriented planning and accountability to organizational objectives (Hallahan et al., 2007; Benjarongkij, 2011). Its defining characteristics include systematic planning, multi-channel integration, message consistency, audience-centeredness, situational adaptability, and the use of clear performance indicators such as reach, engagement, attitudes, and behavioral responses.

Uses and Gratifications

UGT posits that media users actively select specific media to satisfy particular needs knowledge and information, emotional experience, personal identity, social interaction, and relaxation. The theory shifts the central question from "What do media do to people?" to "What do people do with media?" (Herzog, 1944; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; McQuail et al., 1972). Contemporary research further indicates that motivations in social media and short-video platforms include self-presentation, memory documentation, social connectedness, and escapism, as well as passive consumption aimed at entertainment or stress relief (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Omar & Dequan, 2020). These insights help hypothesize the types of Douyin content that best respond to audience motivations.

Diffusion of Innovations

Rogers' (2003) theory explains how innovations are adopted through their perceived attributes, communication channels, time, and social systems, resulting in adopter categories and the characteristic S-curve. In the Douyin context, this framework helps elucidate how both state media organizations and the public adopt the platform, as well as the factors accelerating its diffusion such as relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, and the social consequences of digital media innovations.

Media Convergence

Media convergence refers to the fusion of technologies, industries, content, and consumer behaviors between traditional and new media, producing a convergent culture in which audiences co-produce and extend meaning (Pool, 1983; Negroponte, 1995; Jenkins, 2006). In China, this concept materialized through the "one screen, multiple platforms, N terminals" structure, centralized news hubs, unified workflows that capture content once and produce it in multiple formats, and mobile-first strategies that integrate television, radio, WeChat applications, websites, and Douyin into a seamless ecosystem.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically adopting a case study approach.

Population / Sample

1. Research Population

The population comprises personnel directly involved in managing the Douyin account and media operations of the Dongfang Integrated Media Center, including directors and deputy directors, news editors, producers, Douyin administrators, and corporate communication / public relations officers.

2. Sample Group

The sample consists of key informants who are staff members of the Dongfang Integrated Media Center. A purposive sampling method is used in combination with snowball sampling to reach all actors across the workflow. The sample includes:

1. policy- and strategy-level executives,

2. editors, producers, and news-desk heads,

3. content creators, video editors, graphic designers, Douyin administrators, and

4. evaluation, statistics, and corporate communication officers.

Research Instruments

Multiple instruments were employed to gather diverse and comprehensive data, grouped into three main categories:

1. Content Analysis Record Form

Used to collect data from videos and posts on the Douyin account of the Dongfang Integrated Media Center. The form was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling analysis of the components of communication strategies and assessing communication outcomes based on the theoretical framework.

2. In-depth Interview Guide

Used to conduct interviews with personnel responsible for planning, producing, and disseminating content on Douyin. The guide aims to elicit in-depth insights reflecting the perspectives and rationales of content creators.

3. Observation Record Form

Used for non-participant observation of content presentation characteristics and audience engagement behaviors on Douyin, allowing the collection of behavioral data and real communicative patterns occurring on the platform.

Research Results

In an era in which social media has become a central instrument of global communication, government agencies and public organizations worldwide have increasingly recognized the necessity of adapting to digital platforms in order to reach their citizens effectively. The Dongfang Integrated Media Center in Hainan Province, People's Republic of China, therefore, represents a salient case for examining communication strategies on Douyin, China's leading short-video platform. This study explores the processes, effectiveness, success factors, and constraints of these strategies, highlighting the importance of positive content creation, multi-platform integration, and message design that resonates with the lifestyles and values of target audiences within the digital community.

Synthesis of Findings

1. Communication Models and Strategies on Douyin

The study reveals that the Dongfang Integrated Media Center has adopted Douyin as its primary channel for communicating with local residents. With over 600 million daily active users in China, Douyin offers substantial potential for broad and rapid public outreach. The Center's communication emphasizes concise, easily comprehensible storytelling through creative short-form videos incorporating background music, hashtags, and narrative techniques aligned with digital user behaviors. Key strategies employed by the Center include:

1.1 Selecting positive, everyday-life–related content such as public service activities and stories that highlight exemplary officials or citizens.

1.2 Creating citizen-centered experiences by prioritizing issues of public concern and encouraging participation, for example, community-based video features, local problem reporting, and informative yet creative content.

1.3 Implementing a media convergence strategy in which Douyin is integrated with WeChat, local websites, and traditional media such as television and radio to ensure message consistency and deepen audience reach.

2. Content Strategy and Presentation

Analysis shows that the most widely viewed and highly engaged Douyin content produced by the Center adheres closely to the principles of strategic communication. Its distinguishing features include:

2.1 Conciseness and impact, with each clip focusing on a few core ideas, using accessible language, and ending within 30–60 seconds.

2.2 Emotional resonance and inspiration, presenting content that projects positive imagery and affirms community and national values.

2.3 Relevance to current agendas or events, such as key incidents, commemorations, or local developments.

2.4 Use of modern audiovisual techniques including effects, innovative camera angles, and trending background music.

2.5 Two-way engagement, offering audiences opportunities to comment, react, and share.

3. Outcomes of the Communication Strategies

3.1 The official Douyin account of the Dongfang Integrated Media Center has accumulated over 264,000 followers and 6.45 million likes (as of 2023), signifying strong public reach within Dongfang and neighboring areas.

3.2 Content that features everyday life and moral values consistently generates higher views, shares, and comments than centrally produced ideological or propaganda-style materials demonstrating the potential of locally crafted, community-oriented content.

3.3 The synergy among multiple media platforms Douyin, WeChat, and traditional media has enhanced message effectiveness and strengthened trust-based relationships between government institutions and local citizens.

Success Factors and Constraints

1. Success Factors

1.1 The scale and capability of Douyin, which serves as a major platform with extensive reach, particularly among younger demographics.

1.2 Strong government support, as national policy promotes media integration and encourages both central and local agencies to utilize digital platforms such as Douyin for policy communication and public engagement.

1.3 Audience insight, as the Dongfang Center actively analyzes behavior, listens to public feedback, and adapts formats to align with audience preferences and evolving trends.

1.4 Content diversity and technological innovation, including modern, non-repetitive formats and updated video techniques that help capture viewer attention.

2. Challenges and Limitations

2.1 High competition on the platform, with the need to contend with central government accounts and independent creators, requiring constant innovation to remain distinctive.

2.2 Content regulation constraints, as some types of materials must undergo governmental review, potentially reducing flexibility in production.

2.3 Contextual and linguistic differences, which limit the transferability of Dongfang content to other regions with differing cultures and audience profiles.

2.4 Coordination challenges between new and traditional media, where integrating legacy systems and new technologies may lead to conflicts or technical bottlenecks.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The findings suggest that digital communication strategies adopted by local and governmental agencies in China especially in the case of the Dongfang Integrated Media Center provide valuable insights in two major dimensions:

1. Theoretical Contributions

1.1 They advance the understanding of Media Convergence and Strategic Communication, clarifying the role and value of strategy-driven media planning.

1.2 They confirm that real-life, human-interest, and moral-based narratives generate significantly higher engagement than ideological or centrally produced messaging.

1.3 They highlight the increasing significance of the co-creational perspective, wherein message creation and public participation become shared endeavors.

2. Practical Contributions

2.1 They offer a strategic framework for governmental or organizational entities domestic or international seeking to engage Chinese audiences or communicate via digital platforms.

2.2 They provide guidance on constructing approachable and credible organizational images through strategic integration of new and traditional media, fostering participation and building stronger ties with the public.

2.3 They suggest effective approaches for message design, including topic selection, presentational methods, and optimal timing and rhythm for communication dissemination.

Policy Recommendations and Future Directions

1. Promote co-creational content involving both agencies and citizens, enabling public participation in message production and dialogue to build stronger online communities.

2. Enhance creative-team capabilities to ensure staff can produce modern content, adapt to new technologies, and understand emerging audience trends.

3. Fully integrate new-media and traditional-media policies, aligning workflows and strategies for example, promoting Douyin videos through television or radio spots.

4. Develop continuous evaluation systems to refine content strategies using audience engagement insights for ongoing improvement.

Conclusion

The Dongfang Integrated Media Center stands as a compelling example of a government agency that has successfully transitioned into the digital communication era, leveraging Douyin and integrated media channels to deliver relatable and accessible content that fosters public trust and connection. This study demonstrates that communication strategies grounded in local context, audience behavior, and multi-platform integration yield effective and sustainable outcomes for organizational reputation and communication performance in the digital age.

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