Sports Symbols and Public Participation: A Study on the Effect of La'eeb's Interactive Ritual Chain

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Abstract: In 2022, the first "zero carbon mascot" of the World Cup, La'eeb, was unveiled at the opening ceremony and caused discussion among netizens and fans. A large number of netizens were attracted by it, and there was a continuous stream of forwarding, discussion, and short videos in the circle of friends, even setting off a wave of imitation on the internet. Therefore, this article will study the good communication effect and interactive ritual chain formed by the micro social symbol La'eeb in social media networks through the questionnaire. It is found that during the Qatar World Cup, topics triggered by the dissemination and selection of La'eeb gathered and engaged in relatively hot and lasting interactions between Internet users and viewers watching the World Cup, which reflects the development of micro social communication symbols on the theory of interactive rituals in the micro context of interpersonal interaction. To a certain extent, La'eeb has a significant effect on the promotion of Qatar World Cup events.

Key words: Interactive ritual chain; Symbolic interaction; Communication effect

1 Introduction

In the winter of 2022, the 22nd FIFA World Cup - Qatar World Cup came to an end. Influenced by the event, the mascot "La'eeb" of this World Cup has set off a wave of imitation on the internet. From highly skilled craftsmen to national imitation shows, netizens are celebrating the World Cup event in their own ways. Under the group carnival, the spontaneous creation and dissemination on La'eeb by netizens has become a breath of fresh air. We observed that the reason why La'eeb, the mascot of the World Cup, became popular was mainly because of its friendly image of "dumpling (Wonton) skin", the regional characteristics rich in Middle East culture, and the impact of the bright and simple music rhythm on social media such as Tiktok, which continuously repeated La'eeb. This mode of operation, basic elements, and dynamic mechanism can easily form an interactive ritual chain, resulting in reposts and ultimately explosion. We were curious about this: why does La'eeb have a good communication effect? which key factor is at work in the process of producing good communication effects? how do these motivations affect the spread of La'eeb, making it typical and specific? how effective is it?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Communication of sports symbols

Symbols are perceived as perceptions that carry meaning, and the role of sports symbols in mass communication has attracted research from multiple perspectives in academia. In his Mythology Collection published in 1957, foreign scholar Bart started with The World of Wrestling, and made an overall analysis of sports games from the perspective of micro semiotics. He pointed out that performances of sports events materialize the meaning of body "language" and make it become a visible ideographic practice for the audience.[1] In the book Olympics - Agenda Analysis published in 1992 by foreign scholar Bourdieu, from the perspective of semiotics, he pointed out that the scene displayed on the sports field, as a double hidden object, appears and develops in a symbolic form by analyzing the relationship between signifier and signified, extension and connotation.

Chinese scholar Zhou Ersan has conducted a more detailed study of China's sports activities from a macro semiotic perspective using the signifier and signified relationship of Roland Bart (Feng, 2022). His research shows that sports are symbols of competition, health, communication, and leisure and entertainment. [2] In his Discussion on Non verbal Symbols in Sports (He, 2009), a Chinese scholar, He Pingxiang, conducted a more detailed study of various symbols in sports competitions, including gestures and body language, from the perspective of linguistic research. His research shows that non verbal symbols in sports also have the functions of language substitution, supplementation, emphasis, negation, and repetition. [3] Although these studies have conducted research from the macro perspective of sports symbol communication, they have neglected the research and discussion from the micro level.

2.2 Literature review of interactive ritual theory

After being proposed by American social psychologist Cooley (1909) in 1909, the idea of symbolic interaction has received high attention from scholars at home and abroad, and has achieved many research results. In the field of interpersonal communication, Thomas, a foreign scholar, studied the importance of human subjective factors in determining their social behavior,which complements the theory from the inner intellect of people in participating in the process of social construction . [4] In the field of psychology, foreign scholar Mead supplemented this theory by studying the relationship between individual thoughts and actions, explaining individual consciousness through social actions. [5] Brummer, a foreign scholar, complements this theory in the field of symbolic interaction by studying individual interaction phenomena.In his Interactive Ritual Chain [6] published in 2004, Randall Collins systematically elaborated the origin, constituent elements, operating mechanism, and application of the interactive ritual chain theory in combination with relevant sociological theoretical traditions. He proposed the so-called "interaction ritual chains" theory, attempting to unify micro sociology and macro sociology. He believes that in the micro process, interactive ritual (IR) is the most basic activity of people and

the basis of all sociological research.

Chinese scholars Liu Fengfeng and Shi Wenrui have combined the actual phenomenon of politeness research in China (Liu, Shi, 2022) with the theory of interactive ritual pragmatics, proposing that future research on interactive ritual pragmatics in China can be more combined with Chinese localization research, contributing to "telling good stories in China and making good voices in China". [7] The Chinese scholar Yang Jiaxin has conducted a more detailed research on the interactive ritual chain of sports event communication in China from the perspective of scene narration. His research (Yang, 2022) shows that in the context of the all-media, the role of mimetic scenes and narrative mechanisms in the construction of the interactive ritual chain of sports events is conducive to understanding the deep motivation behind the intersection of new and old media at the level of inter media and cultural dialogue, and provides a replicable model. [8] However, these studies have not studied the phenomenon of interactive rituals from the perspective of micro symbolic communication in the social field,[9] and therefore have not answered questions about the role of micro social symbols in forming interactive ritual chains and achieving good communication effects. [10]

2.3 Question raising

Therefore, this article will start from the interactive ritual chain theory and attempt to answer the following questions: which key factor is at play in the good communication effect of La'eeb? How effective is it? What are the operating modes, basic elements, and dynamic mechanisms of these ritual activities? How to explain the spread of the mascot La'eeb from the perspective of "interactive ritual chain theory"? What factors strengthen/weaken/change the social, cultural, emotional, and other impacts of the specificity of the spread of La'eeb□

3 Research Methods and Data Analysis

This article attempts to answer the above questions using the research method of questionnaire survey. During the survey, questionnaires were sent to the audience who watched this World Cup mainly by a combination of online and offline methods such as mail, individual distribution or collective distribution.

3.1 Questionnaire survey method

3.1.1 Assumption establishment

Based on the above questions, corresponding assumptions are proposed here:

H1: The more specific and perceptible the designed IP image is, the more viewers are inclined to browse and watch it;

H2: The more distinct the cultural characteristics conveyed, the more viewers are inclined to share (like [11], forward, comment, select);

H3: The brighter the rhythm of the matched music, the more likely it is to be played repeatedly;

In order to prove the hypothesis, this study used a questionnaire survey method to sample the population and prepare a questionnaire.

3.2 Research findings and discussion points

3.2.1 Description of sample characteristics

A total of 221 questionnaires were collected in this questionnaire survey, with a gender ratio of 49.32% for men and 50.68% for women. The youth group aged 23-26 accounted for the highest proportion, 41.2%. According to the distribution of the first-record of college, the majority of the samples are junior college students, with a total of 90, accounting for 40.72%.

3.2.2 Description of Structural Analysis Results

(1) The more specific and perceptible the designed IP image is, the more likely the audience is to browse and watch it

Through Pearson's correlation analysis, the specific perceptibility of IP image and the browsing tendency of the audience are analyzed, and the result shows that $p=0.029<0.05$, indicating that the two are significantly correlated,, with a correlation coefficient of -0.147 *. Hypothesis 1 holds, that is, "the more specific and perceptible the designed IP image, the more inclined the audience is to browse and watch it.".

This is mainly because with the development trend of deep integration of contemporary information society media, digital media has shown its advantages in channel communication and information competition, transforming planar and static art into three-dimensional and dynamic forms [12]. It not only broadens the expression of traditional media, but also enhances the expressiveness and infectiousness of communication content to a great extent. [13]

In the process of La'eeb's communication, digital media, as the carrier of its brand communication, has played a significant role in achieving its image building and promotion. This can be confirmed in the research, where the production and dissemination of La'eeb, the contact with the spectators of the World Cup in Qatar and the interpersonal communication and interaction evoked by La'eeb are done precisely in the digital context. The external image of La'eeb is the appearance of its soul. Its charmingly naive and dynamic appearance has created a certain degree of attraction and freshness for the World Cup audience, and calls on the audience to consciously or unconsciously communicate with each other, thereby promoting a higher degree of brand loyalty among the audience. [14]

(2) The more distinct the cultural characteristics conveyed, the more viewers inclined to share (like, forward, comment, select)

By analyzing the perceived degree of distinct cultural characteristics conveyed and the audience's desire to share, the result shows that $p=0.009<0.01$, with a correlation coefficient of -0.113 *, indicating a significant correlation between the two. H2 is established, meaning that

"the more distinct the cultural characteristics conveyed, the more viewers inclined to share (like, forward, comment, select)".

This is mainly because when the brand culture of a region (country or area) dovetails with the regional cultural traits of that place, it is easier to trigger emphatic experiences based on consumers' non-functional value appeals [15]. Thus consumers' i.e. audiences' dual identification with the brand culture and regional culture can be achieved.

The design of the World Cup mascot often represents the cultural, regional, and customary characteristics of the host country. Looking back at the mascot images of previous World Cup mascots, it is easy to find some common points among them: first, it should be related to football, and second, it should have distinctive and typical cultural characteristics, so as to enable people to form memories. During the communication process of La'eeb, it is precisely because of its unique design inspiration and positive and beautiful messages that it conveys. It provides a natural psychological care to the audience, thereby establishing a two-way emotional and value communication bridge between the brand and customers. [16]

It is reported that the design inspiration for the mascot of this World Cup, La'eeb, comes from the iconic white headscarf of Arabs. This headscarf is different from the traditional headscarf in the past, but a flying, dynamic and interesting headscarf. Their facial expressions are rich and varied, but most of the time they greet people with a smile, giving them a pleasant and relaxed feeling during contact. At the same time, in the Arabic word, La'eeb means "a highly skilled player," which conveys a beautiful hope for enjoying the joy of football. It can be said that such a mascot with rich cultural connotations and distinctive regional characteristics has given birth to the desire of the World Cup audience to share during watching the event. With a positive symbolic significance, La'eeb helped the players create some unforgettable moments and landmark goals in the history of the World Cup, while also working with the audience to promote the arrival of the Qatar World Cup watching tide.

(3) The brighter the rhythm of the matched music is, the more likely the audience is to repeat it

By analyzing the rhythm of matched music and the audience's tendency to repeat, the result shows that $p=0.003<0.01$, and the correlation coefficient is 0.061. H3 is established, which means that "the brighter the rhythm of the matched music is, the more likely the audience is to repeat.".

This is mainly because with the advancement of metaverse technology, users' needs become more diverse. And the dramatic changes in the way humans access information, experience, and perceive from the perspective of the metaverse will also significantly change the human communication paradigm, namely, from the existing communication paradigm oriented by information sharing to the future communication paradigm oriented by common experience [17]. At the same time, the telepresence attached to media technology has also been continuously improved with the development of technology and the iterative upgrading of network technology.

In the dissemination process of La'eeb, as a micro social symbol, La'eeb is transmitted to the audience through matching certain musical rhythms with its lively and vivid appearance. This is an art of vocal language, and the rhythm of music played by La'eeb plays a crucial role in its dissemination. [18]

From an artistic perspective, rhythm is the core factor that plays a key and leading role, and

is the soul of language art. In the specific communication process, the division of rhythm, the cadence of rhythm, the repetition of priorities, and the emotion they represent will all be important dimensions that affect the dissemination of video related to La'eeb. The combination of perceptible images, perfect visual images, and lively musical rhythms is precisely the combination of these multidimensional positive factors that have a certain impact on the audience's vision, hearing, and soul, which can greatly enhance its communication effect.

Descriptive analysis of independent and dependent variables yielded the following results:

From the perspective of descriptive analysis, among the reasons why La'eeb was so attractive, 39.8% of the audience chose rich cultural characteristics, accounting for the highest proportion. In response to the question "Choose the importance of whether the cultural characteristics conveyed by the Qatar World Cup are distinctive in your opinion", 34.84% of the audience chose "very important", accounting for the highest proportion.

It can be seen from the above results. Specific analysis shows that among the influences on La'eeb, most people believe that as a micro social symbol, La'eeb has a significant effect on the promotion of the Qatar World Cup. At the same time, topics triggered by the dissemination and selection of La'eeb have gathered and interacted between netizens and viewers watching the World Cup. And in this process, netizens and viewers have continuously devoted attention and their emotions, unconsciously forming an identity of group members. [19]

This shows that as the mascot of the Qatar World Cup, La'eeb's vivid and lovely appearance, coupled with distinctive cultural characteristics and lively music rhythm, has played a certain role in the micro scene of interpersonal interaction. It encourages the World Cup audience to gather and interact in real space, while the main participants in the interaction process, namely, the audience, will devote a certain amount of attention and emotion, and feel the attention and emotional input of others during the gathering and contact, thereby forming emotion and affective resonance among individuals, forming a sense of identity among group members and collective excitement to take joint action. The sharing of La'eeb related videos in specific contexts (like, forward, comment, select) is a product of this collective excitement. Therefore, as a micro social symbol, La'eeb has played an important role in consolidating social consensus and resolving the plight of individual identity in the context of social networks.

4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Focusing on common experiences: redefining the theory of interactive ritual chains

This study conducted a theoretical study on the interaction forms and communication effects of the public in social media communication through a questionnaire survey, attempting to answer the question of "which key factor is at work and how much is its role in producing good communication effects?". Through research, it is found that hypothesis 1, hypothesis 2, and hypothesis 3 are all valid. Therefore, to some extent, the mascot of the Qatar World Cup, La'eeb, has achieved a phased success in helping to spread the event.

This is mainly because during the Qatar World Cup, when the mascot La'eeb was disseminated

as a micro social symbol, its specific and perceptible IP image, the transmission of distinctive cultural characteristics, and the accompanying lively music rhythm were all factors that promoted the dissemination process of La'eeb, and netizens were willing to participate in the second dissemination.

During the Qatar World Cup, sports fans who have been following football for a long time and "pseudo fans" who only enthusiastically participated during the World Cup gathered on social networks to express their opinions on the specific game process, results, star coaches, techniques, and related news of the World Cup. The enthusiasm for participating in the World Cup football lottery can be promoted through social networks to promote national sharing. The emergence and promotion of the communication symbol La'eeb in sport events that integrates high recognition, high cultural value, and strong matching rhythm can help modern people achieve a sense of belonging and cultural identity.

This study proposes the strong communication effect of La'eeb as a micro social communication symbol among audiences during the World Cup and its social impact on La'eeb's interpersonal communication, reflecting the development of micro social communication symbols on the theory of interactive rituals in the micro context of the formation of interpersonal interaction. Besides, it also provides a reference for the new concept of integrating traditional elements with modern culture in cross-cultural communication, enriching the communication channels for the integration of Arab culture in Qatar in the beautiful game of football.

4.2 Beware of group carnival: rethinking the theory of interactive ritual

It is worth noting that this study also found that the phenomenon of sports symbol communication among the public in social media communication can bring certain negative impacts. For example, when investigating the issue of "What impact has the explosion of La'eeb brought", 37.56% of the audience believed that it would lead to a "crisis of minority cultural survival and ethnic cultural identity", while 29.86% of the public believed that it would lead to a negative impact of "aesthetic simplification, reducing aesthetic level and appreciation", The proportion of both is high, which is worthy of vigilance and reflection. Especially in the era of transformation with increasingly diverse values and chaotic social conditions, we need to call for the return of the excellent traditional culture of the country and nation.

The 2022 Qatar World Cup is a football feast as well as a social networking feast, in which a special interactive ritual chain is formed for the dissemination and sharing of the mascot La'eeb among the audience. In the current information society, the advent of the era of intelligent communication has spawned a new type of information dissemination model, which can be shared by the whole people through social networks. At the same time, this dissemination model is gradually becoming a social awareness and consumption culture that guides the public. Therefore, we have to be vigilant about the popularization and dissemination of media technology. And whether the control of media power over the consumption field is swallowing or has already swallowed up our subjective consciousness as individuals. To this end, we need to correctly utilize online media, balance perceptual consumption and rational consumption in the era of intelligent communication, return to self subjectivity, and accumulate efforts to achieve rational return and

reconstruction of consensus.

5 Summary

As this study was conducted during the COVID-19 epidemic, the audience of Qatar World Cup was mostly in the stage of home isolation prevention and control. The access to the Internet and the time of using the Internet were greatly increased compared with the previous periods, and the frequency of media contact increased a certain degree of contingency. In addition, due to the short period of this research, there are certain deficiencies in the analysis and investigation of the effects of La'eeb communication. In future theoretical research on interactive ritual chains, researchers in this field may need to focus on studying the phenomenon of symbolic communication in a more general social field. To expand research and practice in this area, they should note that the significance of symbolic communication lies not only in the symbol itself, but also in the entire process and link of human communication.

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