Construction of Russia's National Image by European and American Media——Taking the Relevant Reports of "Russia-Ukraine War" on BBC News Network as an Example

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Abstract: Since the outbreak in February 2022, the Russia-Ukraine war has been attracting the attention of the whole world. As a typical event of confrontation between the camp and Russia, this modern war has shown unprecedented complexity, because it is not only a "weapon war", but also a "public opinion war". Under this background, will the news media of both camps, which aim at news professionalism, still abide by the principles and present objective, true and fair news reports to the audience? This article will focus on the official website of BBC news, taking the media's reports on the Russian-Ukrainian war as the research object, analyze its construction of Russia's national image, and bring enlightenment to international communication and national image construction.
Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, BBC News, Russia's national image construction

1 Introduction

Since Russia announced its "special military action" against Ukraine in early 2022, this war, which has been protracted and changeable, with conflicts among all parties, has been unknowingly stalemate for more than a year. This is not only a "hot war" with guns and live ammunition, but also an information war and a public opinion war with rhetoric and undercurrents. The major media outlets in Europe and the United States have reported on this conflict with different opinions. On the basis of objective narratives, they also show more or less biased positions, making the roles of the two warring parties even more confusing. So, did the mainstream media in Europe and the United States abide by journalistic professionalism in the process of reporting the Russian-Ukrainian war? What principles do they follow in constructing the national image of other countries? Is it objective and fair?

This article will take the media reflection of the war between Russia and Ukraine as an entry point, focusing on the BBC News' presentation of Russia, a controversial country in the current Western context, in its coverage of the war, to observe and analyze the penmanship of the Western media in constructing the image of other countries from multiple perspectives.

2 Literature review

2.1 Literature review on national image construction

The special geopolitical and historical legacy of Russia and Ukraine predetermines the tension between the two countries. The essence of the Russia-Ukraine issue is a "world chess game", which is the competition and confrontation between Western countries represented by the NATO camp and Russia. As early as 2014, after the Russian-Ukrainian conflict broke out, scholars from various fields in society expressed their professional views on the incident and their hidden worries about the truth behind it. The mainstream media in Europe and the United States seem to be "leaning" to Ukraine, and the discussion of Russia cannot avoid issues such as human rights and democracy, and it is difficult to avoid the stereotyped impression of "dictatorship" and "hegemony". There are also many scholars in the field of journalism and communication who have conducted in-depth research on the image construction of Russia and Ukraine from a professional perspective. In modern warfare, the important position of the media has become increasingly prominent, and public opinion has changed from an auxiliary factor affecting the direction of war to one of the key factors for victory. Chinese scholars Jing Xuemin and Ning Zhiyao (2023) New Features and New Trends of International Political Communication Reflected in the "Russian-Ukrainian Conflict" pointed out that the problem of communication in war is ultimately a problem of political communication. The subject and object of political communication are tied to different political purposes, so that the content of communication contains political awareness of a specific stand. Through the use of political communication means, modern local wars fully affect international attitudes, and then profoundly affect the national image of participating countries. Cheng Xi (2022) Research on the Construction of China's Image by Foreign Internet Celebrities from the Perspective of Frame Theory used the "high, medium and low levels analysis" based on "objective truth, symbolic truth, and subjective truth" to cite cases of how foreign netizens present China's image on social media in the new media era, pointing out that there are differences in the national images constructed at different levels, and it is necessary to improve the understanding and perception of a country from different channels and perspectives. Shang Qiufen and Niu Zeyi (2021) Russia's National Image Construction Experience and Its Reference considered from the perspective of "others' opinion", and believed that a country's image is mainly formed through two ways: "self-shaping" and "other shaping". Russia once reversed the stereotypes of the international community due to its historical origins by "self-molding", grasped the initiative to build a national image in international public opinion, and brought enlightenment to multi-strategic diplomacy and multi-dimensional image building.

However, most of the above studies analyze the effect of communication based on the "propagandist leading", but seldom analyze why the audience can easily accept the transmitted information from the perspective of the recipients, instead of making further rational criticism or rejection. To complete such a grand construction of "national image" in the hearts of the audience, it is difficult to quickly realize it only by means of mass communication. Moreover, different countries have different national conditions, and there are great differences in international relations and cultural backgrounds. Under the circumstances of the changing international situation, there must be some special way of communication, which finally makes the effect of communication "rooted in the hearts of the people".

2.2 Literature review on the research on national image construction under the "frame theory"

Goffman introduced the concept of "framework" in 1974, which refers to the knowledge structure that people use to recognize and interpret objective reality, derived from existing experience and acquired information. He believes that frame is an important way for people to transform social reality into subjective reality. Relying on a certain framework, people can better classify, locate, and pre-store a lot of information in their brains in order to build awareness of new things. News framing is to make the audience focus on certain aspects, form a fixed thinking, or deeply agree with a certain idea by influencing the audience's cognition and the way of processing and storing information. Subtle input can easily limit the audience's cognitive activities on the subjective world, thus ignoring the world outside the frame. Cheng Xi (2022) Research on the Construction of China's Image by "Foreign Internet Celebrities" from the Perspective of Frame Theory draws on the three-level analysis method of news framework to sort out the propaganda content of "foreign Internet celebrities" about China, from themes, ideology, narrative strategies and audio-visual language rhetoric and other perspectives explore its construction of China's image. Compared with other similar studies, this article takes both macro and micro perspectives into account, and mainly analyzes the effect of national image communication from the micro perspective. However, in the cases cited in the study, the standpoint of the subject of communication is objective and the starting point is good intentions, so it cannot explain how the communicator can make the audience naturally accept his own point of view and achieve the purpose of communication under the controversial premise.

2.3 Raising questions

This article will start from the "framework theory" and try to answer the following questions: Did BBC News boldly and clearly express its position in its reports on the Russian-Ukrainian war? If so, how did they use the framework theory and internalize the "cultivation effect" in their communication, so as to infiltrate the concept to their audience? Are old communication strategies still applicable in the specific context of warfare? Is it because of the existence of other special factors that the transmission effect has changed?

3 Research methods

3.1 Content Analysis Method

3.1.1 Research questions

The research subject of this article is highly discussed globally and politically sensitive, making it a "perfect subject for news reports", and it is also easy to arouse people's deep thinking:

As time goes by and the stages of the war advance, will BBC News report on the Russia-Ukraine war from more diverse angles? Will the proportion of positive or negative evaluations of Russia's national image by the BBC News Network show a "one-sided" trend? Has BBC News successfully structured the news framework in its communication strategy? Will their dissemination effect on the construction of Russia's national image become more and more significant?

In this regard, this article will be based on the above questions, and conduct research on the research object on the basis of frame theory. In order to verify the questions raised, this study is expected to adopt content analysis method, sample the reports and conduct data analysis.

3.1.2 Sampling method

This paper takes the national image of Russia in the BBC news network's reports about the Russia-Ukraine war as the research object. The author select all relevant reports by the media within a given time range as the research sample, and adopt the content analysis method for coding design. As the mainstream media in the UK, the BBC has a long history and profound qualifications. It has a relatively high voice in the European and American media circles. It can accurately reflect the reaction of European and American countries to the Russian-Ukrainian war, so it is relatively representative.

According to the official news certification and authoritative media reports of various countries, the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war will be February 24, 2022. Considering the media's ability to see changes and capture hotspots, they will definitely do a good job of pre-publicity and follow-up coverage before and after the outbreak of war. Therefore, in order to comprehensively collect and study the reports with various characteristics, this paper sets the deadline for sample selection as the pre-war period before the outbreak of war to about one year after the outbreak.

After browsing, the author found that the search function of the BBC news website is not yet perfect, and the results obtained by manual search of entries are rather confusing. However, in the process of reading the sample articles, it was found that the reports were clearly arranged according to time and covered a wide range of fields, and there was no obvious pattern in the selection of the perspective, content, and genre of the reported material, which facilitated the sampling flexibility of the study. Therefore, in order to ensure the objectivity and fairness of the sample collection process and the completeness and effectiveness of the sample content, this paper decided to use Python data capture technology to capture and list all samples under the topics of "Russia", "Ukraine" and "War in Ukraine". By manually eliminating texts that do not fit the time scope, have too little word frequency or are not directly related to the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and removing duplicate values separately, the author obtained a total of 2911 search results. The author took a systematic sampling of the total sample, with a limit of 8 days as a cycle for the start and end of the report across the total number of days. An equal number of samples were taken for each cycle (depending on the website). After sampling, a total of 143 valid samples were obtained.

3.1.3 Code table

In this study, variable X is downscaled into time, from the outbreak of war to early April 2023 . The variable Y was downscaled into reporting perspective, genre of coverage, content of coverage, subject of interest, frame of coverage, national image building, and form of coverage.

Table 3-1 Code table

First-level category	code	Second-level category	Remarks
Cut into perspective	1	1=Military	Battle process, node battle situation, battle clues, events that promote or affect the battle situation, comparison of military strength between the two sides, etc.
		2=Humanities	Mainly focus on the stories of people's livelihood in Russia and Ukraine under the background of war
		3=Politics	International Attitudes and State Relations
		4=Economy	War-related economic and financial policies, changes, consequences, etc.
		5=Sports	Sports events, decisions or disputes affected by war
		6=Society	Public medical charity assistance, public arts and entertainment activities, etc.
		7=Other	Broad fields such as science and technology, media, history, etc.
Report Genre	2	1=News	Brief status report
		2=Communi-cations	Include documentary, casual notes, interviews with relevant people, etc.
		3=News feature	Intercept typical or special space-time scenes and describe them in detail
		4=Criticism	Comments on an aspect of the war from various perspectives
		5=Interview	Conduct interviews and exclusive interviews with people who speak out about the war
		6=Other	Comprehensive forms or columns, short documentaries, etc.

Report content	3	1=interpretation of the war	Including the progress stage of the war, the background of the situation, specific details, stories of related characters, etc.
		2=Official releases	Official statements, policy releases or actions, positions, etc. of countries and the United Nations on war
		3=Response from the public People	People from all over the world express their opinions or positions through narration, comments, appeals, dynamic releases, etc.
		4=Derivatives from wars	Emergencies, character stories, aid operations, public events, etc. with war as the theme, root cause or trigger
		5=Related international politics	Statements, comments, talks and actions of the United Nations and countries around the world on wars
		6=Other	
Concerned subject	4	1=Russian official	Country as a whole, government officials, politicians, official media, army and soldiers, etc.
		2=Ukrainian official	
		3=Russian people	Ordinary people (including refugees) and unofficial people in Russia and Ukraine
		4=Ukrainian people	
		5=Experts	Experts in various fields who interpret and comment on political, economic, military, and cultural issues related to war
		6=The battle itself	Objectively stated battle situation
		7=Other	Officials, people in other countries, and relevant people, things, and objects affected by the war, related to the war, or who have views on the war or comment on it
Reporting frame	5	1=Factual frame	Objectively report the progress of the war, details, etc.
		2=Emotional frame	With obvious emotional color, expressing condemnation, anger, pity, regret, support, etc.
		3=Discussion frame	Discuss the status quo of warfare, future development trends and the problems reflected at various levels
		4=Consequence frame	The impact of war on international relations, possible social consequences, waves of public opinion, changes in people's lives, etc.
		5=Interpretation frame	The title adopts the form of asking questions, and the questions are answered in the article

National Image Building	6	1=Russia Positive Ukraine Negative 2=Russia negative Ukraine positive 3=Neutral or not involved	Positive Shaping: Complimentary words or positions of support appear Negative Shaping: Using Critical or Derogatory Words Neutral or not involved: narrative or description objectively and pertinently, without clearly expressing a position or attitude; the content of the report does not involve or has nothing to do with shaping the country's image
Report format	7	1=Graphic report 2=Video report 3=Graphic +video report	

4 Research findings and discussion points

A total of 143 samples were coded for this content analysis. Through the results of data analysis and against the design and judging criteria of this coding, it can be seen that BBC News' news coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war is mostly from a humanistic perspective, focusing on the lives of people in both countries in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, accounting for 40%. This is followed by the military and political perspectives, which focus on the progress of the war and the impact of the war on the relations between the two countries or international relations, respectively. In terms of reporting genre, concise news accounts for the highest percentage, at 43%, followed by newsletters, at 36%. In terms of content, war content accounts for the highest percentage, at 31%, followed by public reaction and war-related content. In terms of content, BBC News coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war was mainly focused on "other" and "Russian official".

From the perspective of report frame, more than 50% of the news reports on the Russian-Ukraine war on BBC News mainly adopt the factual frame, but nearly 30% of the reports choose to use the emotional frame, revealing more obvious emotions in the report. In terms of national image, the BBC tends to present the characteristics of "a negative image of Russia but a positive image of Ukraine", which is similar to the attitude of mainstream media in Europe and the United States. In terms of report form, 90% of the news reports are in the form of graphic reports, which show the current situation of the war and the lives of the people by means of vivid and intuitive pictures and detailed text supplements.

In addition, reports under the explanatory framework also bring readers a lot of practical popular science content. BBC's analysis of relevant political and military issues is vivid, logical, and targeted, which deepens the audience's understanding of the background figures of the war and the analysis of the battle situation and perception of war scenes.

4.1 Using a humanistic perspective to cut into popular discourse

A major feature of the report is the use of a humanistic perspective, taking the common people of the two warring countries as the target of news reports, showing the living conditions of people with different occupations, identities, and personalities in the context of war. The unique content display method brings multi-perspective fun to reading, and sees the big event from the small perspective, and reflects a more grand narrative pattern through the little things. However, these reports are not purely humanistic stories. They portray people who are either righteous, loving or innocent. Ultimately, they all point to one purpose: to reflect the brutality of the war and the injustice of the Russian "invasion," with a tendency for the former to be an outgrowth of the latter. This theme is expressed in a variety of forms, including newsletters, interviews, features and even columns. The topics covered are diverse, and the writing style is unique. The creators draw on the accounts of those who lived through the war and on follow-up reports to add credibility to the news content. These reports make use of the human instinct to sympathize with the weak and glorify justice, thus provoking stronger and stronger dissatisfaction with the subject of the negativity. The framework gradually built up, although it does not seem to inculcate a certain position or point of view, actually fits the perception of the audience under the framework of the negative image of Russia, achieves the interaction between transmission and reception, successfully transforms the social reality and psychological reconstruction of the reality, and completes the reinforcement of the negative image of Russia and the solidification of this perception.

4.2 Relying on the emotional framework to guide the audience to read

Obviously, the factual framework could not fully satisfy the communication effect of the Russian national image construction that the BBC wanted to convey. Therefore, the BBC gave full play to the role of the emotional frame, using the resonance of human prayers for peace and the common emotions of family and friendship to present a variety of stories about people's livelihoods during the war in a professional and artistic way, so that readers can deeply feel the evil of war and the profound suffering it brings. In this way, it provides a convenient premise for the image building of both warring parties. In addition to the countries and people on both sides of the war, BBC News also attaches great importance to reporting on international attitudes and evaluations of the war and related military and political trends. The BBC's subtle approach to framing the news for its audience adds further assurance to the effectiveness of the communication approach.

4.3 The image of the country is highly malleable

This study uses the content analysis method to study the characteristics of the BBC News Network's reports on the Russian-Ukrainian war on the basis of frame theory, and tries to answer its strategic issues in the process of building Russia's national image.

The study found that BBC News did not describe the images of the two warring parties directly and made less overall evaluations. It tried to avoid excessive disclosure of positions and attitudes in news discourse. In the reports that did not mention the image of Russia, they often

called for anti-war and peace. They are especially good at reporting wars from a humanistic perspective, avoiding too much grand, unfamiliar, and serious communication content to weaken the communication effect. But they start from familiar, specific, and common human emotions, create emotional connections for the audience and break down communication barriers obstacles. BBC News provides detailed background interpretation, covering politics, military, people and more, invisibly building a complete rational framework and filling it with emotional content. This makes it difficult for readers with "human emotions" to break out of such a seemingly transparent "cocoon".

In addition, the BBC News Network obviously made more negative comments on Russia's national image. Or in other words, from the beginning of the war, the BBC had already set a "negative" tone for Russia, so it is difficult to deviate from it in the follow-up. The loyal audience of the Ukrainian war report not only deeply understood the war through all-round interpretation, but also outlined the general outline of each subject: "injustice" Russia, "tenacious resistance" Ukraine, "deep suffering" refugees, the NATO countries that "helped with all their money"... All subsequent reports only deepened and solidified these impressions in the process of following up the war. Under "post-truth politics", emotion is more likely to become a criterion for judging right and wrong and form a solid cognition. The website provides long-term audiences with content in line with their views and interests. The audience's own judgment and attitude gradually weaken, and they tend to follow and chase the content. The acculturation effect is continuously strengthened in this process, which strengthens the connotation effect in the process and makes the communication effect of this national image building more and more significant.

5 Summary and reflection

5.1 Summary

It is difficult to judge whether the image construction and comments on Russia in the BBC report are completely subjective. Due to the ideology and value of the media, its news discourse must have a certain tendency. The political position of the country and the social status of the media are also doomed to BBC news. The Internet will become one of the media weapons for the NATO camp to compete with the Russian government and media.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to prove the important role of "other-shaping" of national image, that is, under the situation of increasingly frequent international exchanges and diversified international communication channels, it is necessary to pay attention to external evaluation, understand the image of the country from "other's perspective" in the international In other words, with the increasing frequency of international exchanges and diversified channels of international communication, we should pay attention to the external evaluation, understand the image of our country under the international lens from the "other's perspective", make timely affirmation or criticism, and send the signal of cooperation and exchange, mutual benefit and win-win. On the other hand, the only way to fully demonstrate that "self-shaping" is fundamental, especially in the context of the rapid development of network communication, the

scale of communication content is huge, and it is difficult to distinguish the true from the false, the only way to be "one step ahead" and to gain a favorable position is to keep the initiative of communication discourse from falling into the hands of others. The only way to keep the initiative of communication discourse from falling into the hands of others is to be "one step ahead" and gain a favorable position.

At the 30th collective study of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the construction of the "five forces" of international communication, providing fundamental guidelines and directions for the improvement of China's international communication capacity in the new era. Breaking the old framework and using the reform achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and an active and open communication attitude to convey the newly constructed national image of China to the world has become one of the important international communication tasks of China nowadays. Based on the background of the "Russia-Ukraine War", the construction of Russia's national image by European and American media, represented by BBC News, has also given us profound inspiration to build an international communication narrative system with national characteristics and promote communication and cooperation with international media in new media platforms. At the same time, we should also pay attention to improving the level of foreign propaganda, enhancing international communication influence, improving national cultural soft power and national competitiveness, so that we can be invincible in the public opinion field in any special context.

5.2 Reflection

There are still some deficiencies in this research. First of all, the research method is relatively simple, and the results of the research mainly come from the analysis of a large number of texts by individuals, and there may be deviations in subjectivity and understanding and narration. Due to practical factors such as environmental considerations and the special nature of warfare, it is difficult to go deep into the field to verify the source of the research object. After that, more convincing and creative methods should be adopted, such as buttressing interviews with relevant people and media to collect first-hand materials, etc. Therefore, in future writing and research, we should focus on collecting a wide range of information and multiple supporting evidence.

Secondly, in terms of sample selection, in order to ensure the probability is as accurate as possible, a sample with as large a number as possible is required. However, the overall irregularity in the timing of the samples encountered in this study and the lack of a more refined classification of topics resulted in arbitrary sample selection, making the subsequent analysis prone to large variations. The author will continue to improve in the subsequent writing process to study a more appropriate sample selection method.

Finally, in terms of theoretical analysis, this paper deals with fewer professionally relevant theories and mainly uses the framework theory. The theory fits well with the study, but cannot fully explain the issues raised at the beginning of the study. This reflects the weakness of the professional theoretical aspects, which needs to be studied more.

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