

Emotional Mobilization for National Branding: Reaction Videos of “Foreigners Watching China” on Media Platforms

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Abstract

The phenomenon of reaction videos with individuals from different cultural backgrounds seeing and commenting on many aspects of Chinese society has gained significant traction on media platforms. These videos, sometimes referred to as “Foreigners Watching China,” have garnered substantial attention and engagement from viewers worldwide. Nevertheless, it is imperative to thoroughly investigate its role in political and emotional mobilization.

The current body of research on emotional mobilization can be broadly categorized into three main areas: individual-focused, group-focused, and country-focused emotional mobilization. These categories largely revolve on the themes of social resistance, social movements, and social conflicts. (David Ost, 2016; Craig Calhoun, 2001; ...) In the contemporary landscape of mobile social media, a range of communication techniques centered around emotional mobilization have emerged. These practices manifest in the forms of “productization,” “visualization,” and “trans-nationalization.”

This study aims to investigate the role of reaction videos in national branding and its global implementation in China. Specifically, it examines how these movies elicit emotional responses from viewers within diverse social and political contexts, thereby contributing to the overall national branding efforts. Therefore, the present study employed cross-cultural communication theories and emotional mobilization analysis as the underlying theoretical framework. In the methodology section, this study utilizes narrative analysis and content analysis to examine the top 100 most viewed videos on *Bilibili* and *YouTube*. These videos are tagged with phrases such as “foreigners seeing China” and “foreigners’ reactions towards China.”

The results of the study indicate that the utilization of reaction videos efficiently utilizes emotional mobilization in the context of cross-cultural communication. This is primarily achieved through the implementation of the following strategies: The reaction video primarily focuses on cultural differences as the central theme, emphasizing the unique characteristics and difficulties arising from Chinese features. Furthermore, reaction videos are skillfully crafted to include immersive and interactive elements, with a specific focus on political and cultural disputes. These elements serve to offer consumers a greater range of opportunities for engaging in thoughtful and meaningful discussions. Moreover, the interpretive spaces of reaction videos facilitate a “connection” among individuals, society, and nations by means of their capacity to mobilize emotions.

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Bio

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