An Analysis of China's Tactics of International Public Opinion Warfare Against the Epidemic in the Context of "Post-truth"

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Abstract: *Since the emergence of the COVID-19 and its global spread, some Western media have produced a large number of news reports that detracted from the image of China in accordance with the narrative logic of "post-truth", which has brought a negative impact on China's anti-epidemic actions. In the context of "post-truth", to win this international anti-epidemic public opinion war, it is necessary to reveal the truth of partiality, incitement, value supremacy and subjective prediction, formulate response strategies, and report China comprehensively, rationally and truthfully. The truth about the fight against the epidemic, the spread of the facts about China's fight against the epidemic, and the creation of an image of a big country that is honest and responsible.*

Keywords: "Post-truth", International public opinion war, COVID-19, Tactics.

1. The Definition of "Post-truth"

The original meaning of "post-truth" means "after the truth is revealed." The American magazine "National" used this term in an article on the Gulf War in 1992, and gave it the semantics of "emotions overwhelming facts." Since then, this definition has become the mainstream. The Oxford Dictionary (Post-truth) defines "post-truth" as: "It refers to situations in which appeal to emotions and personal beliefs is greater than objective facts in shaping public opinion." In "Post-truth Era", Hector Mac Donald (Hector Mac Donald) summarized "post-truth" as a situation in which truth and logic are ignored, and public opinion is dominated by emotions. Domestic scholars Zhi Tingrong and Luo Min believe that "the post-truth" mainly stems from the political culture formed by concealing disgraceful facts from the people, making selective disclosures, resorting to emotional stimulation, and even deliberate deception in Western political operations. It is used to refer to the behavioral mechanism of processing, embellishing or lying about the truth in social life[1].

2. Western Media Reports on China's Anti-epidemic in the "Post-truth" Era

2.1 A Partial Truth

The general truth refers to the media "blind people touching the elephant", regardless of the complexity and integrity of the incident, and purposefully selecting and tailoring the spread of the truth. According to the comment of Lu Gang, a reporter from the South China Morning Post, under the reporting framework of the US media, China "can never do it right." They only criticized China's problems in handling the early epidemic, but they were not sure of China's rapid response, orderly organization, and solidarity in the face of the epidemic. Psychology also has the theory of "confirmation bias". People

will always subconsciously believe in information that supports the original subjective opinions. When some Western media only report negative information about China, it happens to cater to the original views of some audiences. Prejudice has deepened the public's perception of China's "autocratic, closed, and backward", and it is also easier to form a stereotype of China.

2.2 The Truth about Emotions

The emotion-led truth refers to the media "inciting and inciting", mobilizing the audience's emotions through text processing, atmosphere rendering, and scene interpretation, encouraging them to look at problems in an irrational way. An important feature of "post-truth" is that "viewpoints precede facts, and rational discussion gives way to emotional appeals." Western media mainly use the following three ways to mobilize emotions: hatred narrative, tragic narrative, and spoof narrative. Take hatred narratives as an example. If the identity of the person involved involves strong-weak oppositions, it is easy to trigger hate narratives. The public will infiltrate stereotypes and negative collective memories into emotional expressions, and use various information assimilation, omission, and prominence. Strategies to vilify the perpetrator or beautify the victim in order to achieve the purpose of deepening the hatred of the perpetrator. Some Western media have placed Westerners in the status of "victims" and Chinese people in the status of "harmful perpetrators", and even insisted that the Chinese government had established biological laboratories to deliberately spread the virus in an attempt to stir up people's hatred of China. In addition, the actions of Chinese law enforcement officers to deal with certain foreigners who do not obey the epidemic prevention regulations in accordance with laws and regulations have also been interpreted by foreign media as "racial discrimination" and "collective xenophobia", which has had extremely negative effects at home and abroad.

2.3 The Truth about Value

The truth of value supremacy refers to the fact that the media “save others by oneself” and judge events based on the country’s political needs, value preferences, and thinking modes, which violates the principles of objective neutrality and value non-involvement. “The New York Times” also reported on the closure of the city. “The New York Times” showed obvious “dual standards”, while praising Italy for “taking into account the overall situation and taking risks,” while China was “defying human rights and depriving freedom,” and it was also reporting on the onset of the epidemic. Some media expressed sympathy and care for Western countries, while the Chinese people who fought against the epidemic made great sarcasm. This has a lot to do with the special emphasis on “identity definition” in the West. Unlike China, which advocates harmony and is different, most Western countries tend to doubt and resist “others” with different ideologies, political systems, and cultural traditions, and strive to maintain the “capitalist alliance” at the psychological and political levels. This behavior seriously violated the professionalism of journalists and created obstacles to the international community to set aside differences and cooperate in the fight against the epidemic.

2.4 The Truth of Subjective Prediction

The truth of subjective prediction refers to the fact that the media “spoken words”, without obtaining comprehensive information or carefully reviewing existing information, subjectively predicting the development of the event and taking action based on this. As the COVID-19 is contained, the ensuing secondary public opinion crisis cannot be separated from the irresponsible predictions of Western media and scholars. According to the Observer.com report, many foreign media have hyped up the theory of “inflation out of control”, “social consumption collapse”, “foreign trade suspension theory”, “debt risk high theory”, “small and medium enterprise bankruptcy theory”, and “China-US decoupling acceleration theory”. The theory of “sudden decline in economic growth” and “theory of global companies escaping from China” believe that the new crown virus will make China’s economy doomed. However, it seems that these forecasts are not in line with reality. The British philosopher Hume once put forward the “symbolic reaction theory”, that is, people have never experienced something or seen something, but if they listen to others speak too much, they will be consistent with other people’s descriptions of something and something. View. Mulza also pointed out in the book “On the Manipulation of Consciousness” that any medium has the power to impose its assumptions on people who are not alert. Once people accept nonsense, experts or media dedicated to refuting rumors or correcting facts are likely to be triggering a “backfire effect” (backfire effect), but will deepen their trust and prejudice against misinformation. If most investors hold “pessimistic” predictions about China’s economy, then these people are more inclined to “evade China” and “withdraw capital”. Once this happens in large numbers, foreign media will be promoted. “Verification” has caused substantial damage to China’s economic development [1].

3. How does China Win the Initiative in the International Public Opinion Battle Against the Epidemic in the Context of “Post-truth”

3.1 Be One Step Ahead

American social psychologist Festinger proposed the theory of cognitive dissonance in 1957. He believed that when people’s related cognitive factors (including cognition of behavior) conflict, in order to maintain balance or coordination between them. It will change one’s original behavior or beliefs and attitudes. The greater the intensity of incoordination between cognitive factors, the stronger the motivation for people to alleviate or remove the incoordination. The public has been influenced by the strong emotional factors and opinions in the previous issues and formed an established position. With this position, they will examine the newly emerged facts and influence their judgments [2].

In the era of proliferation of false information, the news media must be the first to win: first, without violating the correct orientation, disclose some news facts first, follow up the follow-up progress dynamically, share the latest research results, and broadcast quickly when verified. The progress of the investigation prevents the Western media from “making a big fuss” and clinging to certain details. The second is to add emotional narratives on the basis of not deviating from facts. In a context where facts are scarce, news reports of all parties need to rely on content attraction and emotional mobilization to compete for the attention of the public. In this kind of public opinion wars, the vivid descriptions and the tear-jerking opinion articles and stories are often popular, while the declarative reports and explanatory articles on the matter have few viewers. The third is to block the dissemination channels of public opinion information from certain media with ulterior motives. The best defense is offense. Blocking information dissemination channels can block the dissemination of false information through technical means, track the origin of the information, block certain reactionary websites and planners, and revoke the credentials of some unscrupulous reporters according to legal means. In accordance with the “Network Security Law of the People’s Republic of China” to investigate the legal responsibilities of organizations and individuals that cause bad social impacts.

3.2 Stick to the Position

President Xi Jinping pointed out, “The collapse of a regime often starts in the ideological realm. Political turmoil and regime change may occur overnight, but ideological evolution is a long-term process. If the ideological defense line is breached, other defense lines will be difficult to hold. Ideological leadership, management, and discourse must be firmly in our hands.” In response to the news attack wrapped in “post-truth”, China’s news media must firmly hold the bottom line and cannot be assimilated into the context of “post-truth”.

First of all, we must hold the bottom line of responsibility. News spokespersons must abide by professional standards, attach importance to fact-checking, and release information in a timely manner. They must not go sloppy in pursuit of the “eyeball effect.” Second, we must keep the bottom line of the law. Journalists must strictly abide by the “Network Security Law of the People’s Republic of China” and “Several Provisions on Strictly Preventing False News Reports” and other laws and regulations, and at the same time integrate legal constraints, industry supervision and public supervision. Once again, we must hold the complete bottom line. When translating and interpreting third-party information, one should not take out of context, misread or omit reading, and wrap the original and complete information into a “truth” that is both true and false. Finally, we must hold the bottom line of seeking truth. This bottom line has received the strongest impact in the context of “post-truth”, because the proliferation of profit-driven false news has increased the cost of revealing the truth, and the rapid reversal of events has made people unwilling to believe in any information. These chaotic appearances actually put forward higher requirements for truth-seeking in news, and journalists are required to guide the public to transform instinctive doubts about news reports into a kind of rational thinking, and jointly “see the bottom line” about news facts.

3.3 Attract Congenial Friends

The sympathy mobilization in the international public opinion war usually involves identity attribution and moral judgment. In international reports, Western media tend to position themselves on the side of “vulnerable victims”, hype their country’s “feat” in fighting the epidemic, the government’s “do everything possible” and China’s “continuous pressure”, defining China as The “culprit” and “strong perpetrator” of all disasters.

In order to avoid becoming a target of public criticism, China can “rule its own body by its own way.” First of all, China should “take the initiative to show weakness,” exposing Western media’s slander on China’s fight against the epidemic and personal attacks on Chinese and overseas Chinese, and put itself in the position of “victim”. Secondly, China should “go online” and raise the western media’s reporting attitude towards China’s fight against the epidemic to the question of the right to speak of developing countries, to the question of international order and fairness and justice, and to the tragedy of “post-truth” politics. problem. The essence of garnering sympathy is to find “allies” so that more countries can unite with China and thus gain more support from public opinion. To achieve this goal, China’s anti-epidemic incident must be raised as a universal concern of the international community, arousing emotional resonance from more people, and allowing developing countries and some developed countries with weaker national power to realize the dilemma of China’s “not thankful” It is not an individual problem, but a group problem. If you take an attitude of sitting on the sidelines, you may harm yourself. Finally, we must uphold the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, use the concept of “relief

journalism” to respond to the “scapegoat” psychology of Western countries, find common interests and concerns, turn enemies into friends, actively provide the international community with “Chinese solutions”, and direct the focus of public opinion to “solving problems” instead of “pointing fingers at each other.”

3.4 Expose the Conspiracy

Some Western media interpreted the Chinese government’s foreign aid as the “new version of the Marshall Plan” to explain China’s diplomatic motives. On the surface, conspiracy theories can help people understand how the world works when the situation is out of control, anxious, and feel deprived, and seek “reasonable” explanations for the hard-to-face reality. The acculturation theory proposes that if society is to exist and develop as a unified whole, it needs members of society to have a “consensus” on the society. The people have a consensus. In fact, conspiracy theories are a means for Western countries to limit their own crises to a “controllable range” and try to disperse the people’s grievances about their own country’s ineffectiveness in fighting the epidemic and to “relocate” internal conflicts.

To justify China’s humanitarian aid behavior, it is necessary to expose the “conspiracy” of the Western media. First, the Chinese media must grasp the “handle” of the Western government and be able to refute the “Chinese conspiracy theory” when the Western media throws out the “Chinese conspiracy theory.” At the same time, we must be cautious in our words and deeds to prevent Western media from seizing the “handle.” Second, when conducting anti-epidemic propaganda, Chinese media should not only state facts, but also pay attention to explanations to prevent hearsay. In an experiment conducted in Norway, subjects were tested and asked to make comments after they fully understood the content of the reading. It was found that this practice made people not eager to explain their positions, but would calmly think and return to reading. The original meaning of the content. Finally, Western people must be guided to choose more credible information sources. One is to encourage some relatively objective and true Western media to report on the spot in China, and the other is to allow Western people to obtain more information from Chinese media reports, change their positions, and think differently.

3.5 Enhance Strength

Russian President Vladimir Putin once mentioned: “The anger without strength is meaningless.” Mr. Zhou Youguang concluded: “The United States leads the natural sciences and social sciences, and science develops in an all-round and balanced manner. This is the source of American strength.” If you want to switch from defensive to offensive in the international public opinion war, you must focus on the accumulation of soft and hard power.

In terms of strengthening its hard power, China should be a bigger and stronger media group and a wider and wider range of communication. Most influential media groups in the

United States are privately owned, but the government can still effectively supervise them. China's media industry should integrate domestic media resources to expand the territory of the media business, and at the same time, it can strengthen the unity of public opinion between countries and expand the communication camp. At present, China's CCTV has hundreds of millions of viewers in the world, and more than 40 million in the United States. China accounts for four of the "Top Ten Global" Internet companies, laying the technical and mass foundation for Chinese media to achieve "curve overtaking".

In terms of enhancing soft power, we must first improve the media's ability to "issue setting" and "issue management", refine and plan issues for major international events involving China in stages, adopt a variety of communication strategies, and use various communication channels. To form a topical effect step by step. Proactively set up issues that are conducive to Chinese public opinion. Second, we must pay attention to the creation of media products. As a media superpower, the United States is not only because of capital injection and government support, but more importantly, American media products are deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Chinese media should extend their influence from news dissemination to the field of culture and entertainment. Pursuing commercial profits through themed cultural products, and subtly influencing the thinking, lifestyle and values of foreign people through products with Chinese characteristics, making foreign people "sinicize". Finally, Chinese media should focus on refined management, determine complementary audience markets and strategic goals, and should pay attention to their strengths and avoid weaknesses when competing with foreign media.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, international public opinion has paid close attention to China, and China's international image has faced severe challenges. While doing a good job in the prevention and control of the epidemic, we must also deal with the secondary public opinion crisis brought about by the epidemic, and we must build a positive image of China's anti-epidemic in the context of post-truth.

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