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Russia's "WeChat Diplomacy" to China from the Perspective of New Media-Taking the official WeChat of the Russian Embassy in China as an Example

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Abstract

With the rapid development of network technology, the rapid rise of network public diplomacy with social media has gradually become an important form for governments, which carry out public diplomacy to target countries. Under the background of the continuous and in-depth development of China and Russia comprehensive strategic partnership, the Russian Embassy in China has launched a series of new media public diplomacy activities through the WeChat public account. The theory of international communication and public diplomacy adopted to study the official WeChat public number of the Russian Embassy in China specifically by new media. This paper analyzes the topic distribution, dissemination content and dissemination effect of the public article, trying to observe the use of new media in China. The strategy of diplomacy is to conduct new media public diplomacy for other countries as a reference.

Keywords: WeChat diplomacy; new media public diplomacy; Russian Embassy in China; national image.

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Summary of New Media Public Diplomacy

In 1965, American scholar *Edmund Gullion* proposed the term “Public Diplomacy” (Tang & Wang, 2003). Subsequently, scholars from various countries defined “public diplomacy”. Berridge, a famous British diplomatic research and international political scholar, believed that public diplomacy is a direct or indirect publicity campaign hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Berridge, James & Gao, 2005). Jan Melissen, director of the Diplomatic Research Program at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, believed that public diplomacy refers to the exchanges between international political actors and foreign people (Melissen, 2005). Tang defined “public diplomacy” as a form of diplomacy in which a government exerts influence on the people of his country through intelligence, media, and cultural exchanges, aiming at creating public opinion and creating a good national image. Enhance national interests (Tang, 2004).

With the rapid development of Internet technology and new media, the field of diplomatic activities has extended from the real political world to the virtual community. More and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the interaction between public diplomacy and the media. Chinese scholar (Zhang, 2018) believes that traditional public diplomacy is a country that broadcasts, newspapers, telephones, and so on, are used to disseminate targeted news to others, which can enhance the national authority of public diplomacy and improve the image of the country. The new type of public diplomacy refers to the fact that the state and non-state entities cultivate new knowledge of the country through the new media such as mobile phones and the Internet. The purpose is to build a national brand, realize the positive output of the national image, and enhance the country’s soft power.

At present, there is a great deal of research on public diplomacy in Chinese academic circles. New terms such as media diplomacy, digital public diplomacy, new media public diplomacy, and network public diplomacy have emerged. Scholar (Zhao, 2010) divided the public diplomacy of the Internet age into three forms in the “Network Public Diplomacy”: online diplomacy, virtual diplomacy and social network diplomacy or network 2.0 diplomacy. The third type of network diplomacy or network 2.0 diplomacy is the new media diplomacy based on social network media.

Lu puts forward two dimensions concept of media diplomacy, one is the media intervention as a media channel and affects the diplomatic process. The second is that the media has gradually become a participant in diplomatic activities and has become a subject of influence in international relations. The former refers to the mediation of diplomacy and the latter emphasizes the mediation interaction in the diplomatic process (Lu, 2015). Luo and Xie (2018) believe that the interaction between the media and public diplomacy is expressed as media public diplomacy. Media public diplomacy includes traditional media public diplomacy and new media public diplomacy. Among them, the new media public diplomacy refers to

public diplomacy activities carried out by means of online media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Weibo, and WeChat (Luo & Xie, 2018).

The research objects of new media public diplomacy are mostly concentrated in the United States, Britain, Japan, and other countries to explore how a country uses social media to conduct public diplomacy (Sun, 2013; Lin & Yang, 2014; Titarenko & Petrovsky, 2015; Yablokov, 2015; Simons, 2015; Rawnsley, 2015; Lu & Zhang, 2016; Wang, 2017; Li, 2017; Chen, 2018; Zhao, 2018.)

There are few studies on Russia's new media public diplomacy with China. The author will start with the official WeChat public account of the Russian Embassy in China, and Russia's public diplomacy strategy toward China is analyzed in order to provide reference for new media public diplomacy activities in China or other countries.

The diplomatic text analysis of the “WeChat” of the Russian Embassy in China

At the end of 2017, Russian Ambassador in China *Andrei Denisov* announced the official opening of the official WeChat public account of the Embassy. The author intercepts the articles published on the official WeChat public account from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018. It is expected to analyze the specific content of Russian WeChat diplomacy and discover its communication characteristics. The Russian Embassy in China issued 166 WeChat public articles throughout 2018. The author divides the text into four categories, which are political affairs, economic and trade cooperation, humanities exchange and other four categories. Then, the diplomatic texts break down 17 secondary issues. We can see *Table 1* for details.

The distribution Analysis of issues and the issues' content

Looking at Russia's new media public diplomacy activities with China, the content involved is very extensive, including political, economic, cultural, and other aspects of information. These disseminations are comprehensive and cover a wide range of subjects, including serious political and economic issues such as the Russian President's visit to China, the Russian Foreign Ministry's answer to reporters' questions, and the results of Russia-China cooperation. They also include matters involving the interests of ordinary Chinese people, such as visa study guidance. Held a folk song concert and publicized Shenzhen MSU-BIT University. These activities not only allow the Chinese people to know Russia's “national events,” but also solve “small things” that are of vital interest to the Chinese people. The specific content of the communication is shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Distribution of the first and second issues of the WeChat Diplomacy of the Russian Embassy in China

First level issue	Frequency	Proportion	Secondary issue	Frequency	Proportion
Political affairs	86	51.8%	External relations	35	21.1%
			Russia-related conference activities	28	16.9%
			Regional and international affairs	20	12%
			Russian-Chinese congratulatory	3	1.8%
Cultural exchanges	65	39.2%	tourism	13	7.8%
			history	12	7.2%
			Sino-Russian cultural exchanges	9	5.5%
			World cup	9	5.5%
			music	6	3.6%
			education	5	3%
			dance	5	3%
			the film	3	1.8%
religion	3	1.8%			
Economic and Trade Cooperation	9	5.4%	economic Cooperation	6	3.6%
			Energy cooperation	3	1.8%
other	6	3.6%	Embassy or consulate holiday notice	3	1.8%
			Overseas Chinese Affairs	2	1.2%
			Holiday congratulations	1	0.6%
total	166	100%	total	166	100%

As can be seen from *Table 1*, most of the articles in the WeChat public account of the Russian Embassy in China are original articles, with an average of about 0.5 published per day. Russian public diplomacy on China focuses on disseminating information on political affairs and humanities exchanges, which involves less economic, and trade cooperation and other information. Among them, the amount of information related to political affairs is the largest, accounting for the largest proportion, at 51.8%.

It can be seen from this that the Russian Embassy in China uses the WeChat platform as an important platform for expressing political positions to the Chinese people. On this platform, Russia conducts a “communicative war” with countries and political entities that infringe on its national interests, publicizes its political

intentions and opinions to the Chinese people, expresses Russian views in many international affairs, and sends out voices to defend Russia's national interests.

Relevant humanities exchange information ranked second in the total text, accounting for 39.2%. As we all know, Russia has an eclectic mix of Eastern and Western cultures, exuding a unique cultural charm. The Russian Embassy in China focuses on the dissemination of Russian information on humanities, including tourism, history, Russian-Chinese cultural exchanges, the World Cup, music, education, dance, film, and religion. As the host country of the 2018 World Cup, Russia has more information about the World Cup. Therefore, it has listed as a secondary issue separately. Relying on the host country of the World Cup, Russia actively promotes travel-related information to Russia and attracts a large number of Chinese tourists. Among the 166 texts, the "Russian New Year Fair will be opened in Beijing from December 21st to 23rd", which was pushed by the Russian Embassy in China on December 19th, has the highest number of pages, reaching 5,457 times. At the same time, the number of "seeing" was the highest, reaching 144.

Russia and China have frequent exchanges of economic and trade, and the cooperation has been fruitful. The two governments have actively strengthened cooperation within the framework of the Russian-Chinese Government Energy Cooperation Committee, the Russian-Chinese Intergovernmental Investment Cooperation Committee, and the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. On November 13, 2018, the Russian Embassy in China pushed the article "The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of Russia on the Progress of Sino-Russian Trade and Financial Cooperation" and talked about the further strengthening of investment cooperation between the two countries. In the year of 2018, the total investment has doubled. Among other information, Russia mainly publishes notices of embassies and consulates' holidays, and sends Chinese New Year blessings to the Chinese people. The Russian Embassy in China respects the cultural habits of the Chinese people and facilitates their trip abroad. It helps the two sides to build intimate relationships in the virtual network community, draw closer to the distance between the two sides, and foster friendship between Russia and China.

Analysis of communication effects

The communication effect of WeChat public number is mainly related to the number of articles, the amount of reading, and the amount of "seeing", and the three interact to influence the effect of communication.

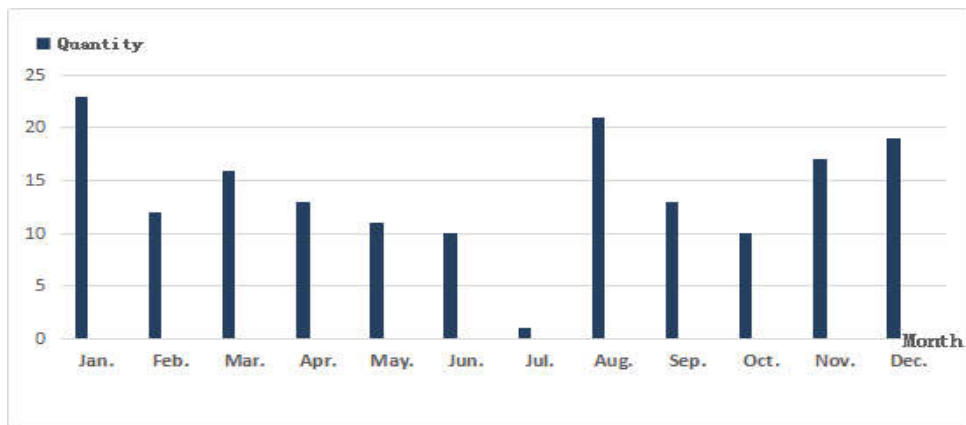
Analysis of the amount of articles

Figure 1: Quantitative statistics of the WeChat public article of the Russian Embassy in 2018

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the tweets of the WeChat public account of the Russian Embassy in 2018. It can be seen that there are more articles in January, August, and December, and only one public article was pushed in July. This unbalanced push habit is not conducive to absorbing new fans, consolidating old fans, and even some users find that the public number will not push the public number for a long time without pushing the new message. The above situation will greatly reduce the effect of communication.

Reading volume and “seeing” volume analysis

In 2018, the total number of visitors to the official WeChat public account of the Russian Embassy in China was 67112, with an average of 404.3 views per article, and 53 articles above the average, accounting for 32%. Below are the top five articles in the sample, as shown in *Table 2*.

From *Table 2*, we can find that four of the top five articles in the article are related to China, and conveyed to the Chinese people a strong signal of friendly exchanges between Russia and China. Such articles are more likely to receive the attention of Chinese audiences. The article “On the history of the United States violating or abolishing major international treaties” comes at a time when the United States imposed sanctions on Russia, and the articles pushed by the Russian Embassy in China directly indicated Russia’s dissatisfaction and resentment against the US sanctions. This direct and sharp diplomatic position also supported by the Chinese people.

Table 2: The top five articles in the official WeChat public account of the Russian Embassy in China

Ranking	Date	Article name	Pageviews	“Looking at” quantity
1	December 9, 2018	“Russian New Year Fair will open in Beijing from December 21st to 23rd”	5457	144
2	November 13, 2018	“History of the United States Violating or Abolishing Major International Treaties”	3599	66
3	April 2, 2018	“Mr. Liu Jie, Director of the Heihe Civil Affairs Bureau, won the “Remembrance of the Defenders of the Deceased Motherland” Medal by the Russian Ministry of Defense.	1616	57
4	August 17, 2018	“Putin Meets with Yang Jiechi, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Working Committee in Sochi”	1501	30
5	December 11, 2018	“Russian Ambassador to China Awards Friendship Medal to Former Finance Minister Lou Jiwei”	1381	35

“Looking at” quantity analysis

“Looking at” is a new change after the launch of WeChat 7.0. WeChat 7.0 will change the “Like” button in the lower right corner of the public number article to the “Look at” button. The WeChat friend will click on the “Look at” column to display it in the “Look at” column. On March 16, 2019, WeChat changed the “Like” button to the “Look at” button, and the “Look at it” column was changed to “Friends are watching.” In this way, WeChat encourages users to express their opinions, strengthen user connections, promote the process of users distributing content and activating user traffic redistribution. In 2018, the total number of “seeing” of the Russian Embassy’s public tweets was 2,599, and an average of 15.7 “looking” per article. However, 102 of the 166 articles were below the average “watching” volume, accounting for 66.4% of the total. There are some words that are “watching” and the number is “higher than the average”, and the “highest” is even 144. Below are the top five articles in the sample, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The official WeChat public number of the Russian Embassy in China won the top five articles in the seeing number

Ranking	Date	Article name	Pageviews	"Looking at" quantity
1	December 9, 2018	"Russian New Year Fair will open in Beijing from December 21st to 23rd"	5457	144
2	November 13, 2018	"History of the United States Violating or Abolishing Major International Treaties"	3599	66
3	April 2, 2018	"Mr. Liu Jie, Director of the Heihe Civil Affairs Bureau, won the "Remembrance of the Defenders of the Deceased Motherland" Medal by the Russian Ministry of Defense.	1616	57
4	February 15, 2018	"Russian Ambassador to China Visits Chinese People"	559	54
5	April 24, 2018	Notice of the "Monument of the Immortal Legion" in Beijing on May 9, 2018	1358	50

Comparing *Tables 2* and *3*, it is not difficult to find that there is a great correlation between the amount of tweets and the articles that are "viewing". There are also a large number of articles that are viewed in high volume. The Chinese people expressed their appreciation for the friendly exchanges between Russia and China through praise, and expressed their support for Russia's tough and direct political stance.

Analysis of the correlation between reading volume and "seeing" volume

After analyzing the amount of tweets and the amount of "seeing", the author finds that the images with high readings often get more "seeing". By comparing and analyzing the readings of the WeChat public account of the Russian Embassy in 2018 and the "seeing amount". Figure 2 is obtained.

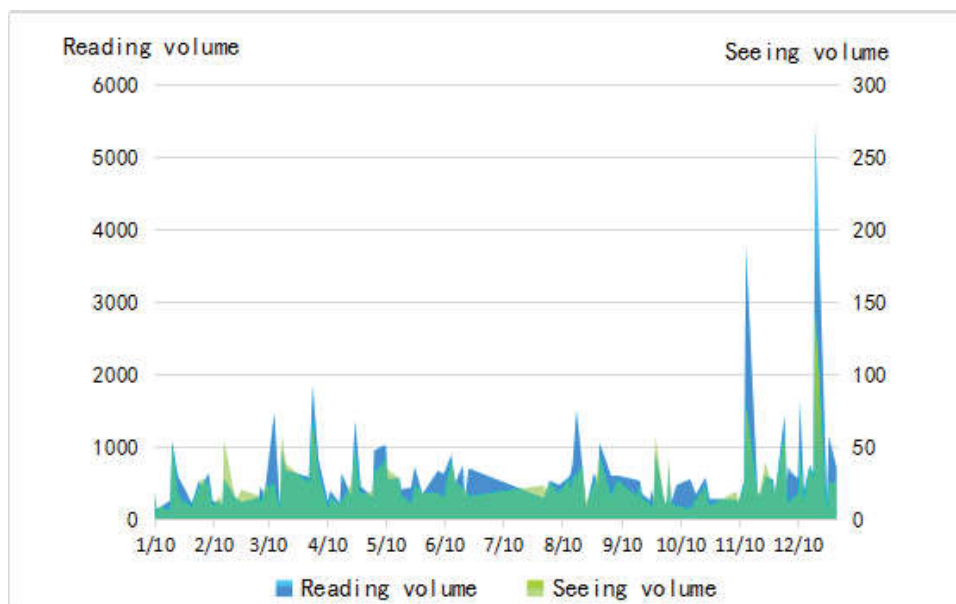


Figure 2: Correlation analysis between the amount of tweets and the number of “seeing” in the WeChat public account of the Russian Embassy in 2018

Analysis of the peak line in *Figure 2* can be seen as follows. First, throughout the year, the amount of reading and “watching” of the WeChat public account of the Russian Embassy in China has continuously improved. Second, there is a strong positive correlation between the amount of public tweets and the amount of “seeing”. It can be seen that the effect of the “WeChat diplomacy” carried out by the Russian Embassy in China has become stronger and stronger over time. This shows that the Russian government has gradually figured out the psychology of the Chinese people and mastered the skills of public diplomacy toward China. As can be seen from *Table 2*, *Table 3*, and *Figure 2*, the Russian Embassy in China’s “Russian New Year Fair will open in Beijing from December 21st to 23rd” will read the most in all samples. The most “seeing” is also obtained.

According to *Guangming Daily*, the Russian New Year market held at Chaoyang Park in Beijing on December 21, 2018 attracted a large number of Beijing citizens. Some scholars believe that the goal of strategic communication has a phased nature, from cognitive improvement, image shaping, identity construction, attitude change, value identification to behavioral transformation. The Russian government has always attached importance to the role of the media, leveraging social media, guiding public opinion, changing the attitude of key audiences, and attracting audiences to participate in practice. The Moscow City Government, through the joint hosting of the New Year market activities with the Beijing Municipal Government, issued a signal of Sino-Russian friendship to the Chinese people,

promoting the transformation of the Chinese people from the ideology level to the practical level, strengthening the positive output of their national image and realizing national interests. It can be seen that the new media public diplomacy practice carried out by the Russian Embassy in China has strong appeal and practical significance.

The Russian Embassy in China's WeChat Diplomacy Communication Strategy

Skilled in using Chinese local media to issue Russian voices

Looking at the new media public diplomacy activities carried out by the Russian Embassy in China, the foreign relations in government affairs accounted for the largest proportion, accounting for 21.1%. Because of the national character, unlike other countries, the Russian Embassy in China always indicates its own diplomatic position when it comes to sensitive issues such as politics, and does not strike the ball. In 2018, Russia still has not got rid of the Western world's chasing, whether it is the US sanctions against Russia, or the British accusation of Russian spies trying to assassinate Scripal, or the Strait of Straits, Russia has timely conveyed its views through WeChat to the Chinese people. It shows the position of Russia and thus the support of the Chinese people. It is worth mentioning that in recent years, with the close cooperation between Russia and China, in their government affairs information, the news of the Russian-Chinese government summit meeting and affirming the friendly relations between the two countries accounted for a large proportion. On September 24, 2018, the Russian Embassy in China reprinted an exclusive interview with the Russian ambassador by China News Weekly. In this article, Russian Ambassador to China Andrei Denisov said that in recent years, the heads of state of Russia and China have met on average five times a year, setting a model of peace, mutual benefit, and friendly cooperation throughout the world.

Actively conveying the signal of friendly exchanges between Russia and China

At present, Sino-Russian relations have entered a new era of history. The Sino-Russian strategic partnership of cooperation has continued to deepen. The two governments attach great importance to bilateral relations and exchange visits continuously, and continue to promote pragmatic cooperation between China and Russia in all aspects, at various levels and in a wide range of fields including politics, economy, trade, diplomacy, culture, and military. In April 2018, the Russian Ministry of National Defense issued the Medal of Commemoration of the Defend of the Defender of the Defend of the State for the Director of the Heihe Civil Affairs Bureau. "The country is in the hands of the people", 2018 is the Sino-

Russian local exchange and cooperation year. The “Moscow New Year Fair” under the framework of the Sino-Russian local exchange and cooperation year was held in Beijing Chaoyang Park, attracting a large number of Beijing citizens to visit.

On December 3, 2018, the Russian Embassy in China pushed President Putin to meet with President Xi Jinping in Buenos Aires, which featured Putin and Xi Jinping during a separate meeting in Buenos Aires. The heads of China and Russia are very positive about China and Russia’s current strategic partnership of cooperation and express a strong desire for future cooperation between the two countries in all fields. Xi Jinping said that 2019 is the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China and the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Russia. Taking this opportunity, China and Russia can cooperate in various fields and achieve tangible results.

Paying attention to the image spread of “Putin”

Russia attaches great importance to the shaping and dissemination of Putin’s good image. After Putin was elected president of the country for the first time, he began to reorganize the Russian media. Through the promulgation of the “Russian Federal Mass Media Law” and other measures, the media served the country and served its political propaganda. The concept of media service for politics goes deep into the practice of the Russian government in conducting public diplomacy. The image of a good national leader is not only the perfect embodiment of Putin himself and the united Russian party he represents, but also the meeting point of the Russian people’s heart. It is also a beautiful postcard of Russia on the international stage.

Among the 166 articles published by the Russian Embassy in China’s WeChat public account, there are 27 articles with the title “Putin”, accounting for 16.3% of the total sample, accounting for a relatively high proportion. On August 29, 2018, the “Putin spent the weekend in the Republic of Tuva” pushed by the Russian Embassy in China attached a large number of photos of Putin’s vacation, showing Putin’s extraordinary personal charm to Russia and the world. Referring to propaganda photos of Putin, it can be found that Putin pays great attention to the shaping and propaganda of his political image. Through the shaping of its own image, the introverts show the toughness of the ruling party and cater to the Russian national sentiment; build the image of the Russian state and show the revival and prosperity of Russia.

The shortcomings of the “WeChat Diplomacy” of the Russian Embassy in China

The Russian government’s use of the WeChat platform to carry out public diplomacy with China is an important step in its new media public diplomacy.

There are many lessons to learn, but there are also many shortcomings. First, the Russian Embassy in China ignored the powerful interactive function of WeChat, did not open the user message function, and only used WeChat as a platform to convey opinions. This is not conducive to communicating emotions with the audience and understanding their inner wishes. It is conceivable that the expected political effects will have greatly reduced. If only some political articles or social news are pushed on the embassy public number, then this new form of public diplomacy is not substantially different from traditional diplomacy, and it becomes sensitive and fragile, unable to play the powerful function of new media public diplomacy.

Second, the official WeChat article title of the Russian Embassy in China is monotonous and has a strong Russian color. Most of them are Russian-Chinese literal translations, which are not in line with the reading habits of Chinese audiences. For example, on November 13, 2018, the title of the article “The History of Violation or Abolition of Major International Treaties by the United States” and the December 4, 2018 title of “The Information on the Implementation of the Tax Free System in the Russian Federation”. Third, the Russian Embassy in China has no fixed time to push articles, lacking continuity. For example, in July 2018, only one article was pushed. This intermittent push rhythm is easy for the audience to lose interest in reading and reduce the attention to Russia.

The enlightenment of Russia’s new media public diplomacy to China

The emergence and progress of new media technology has provided more possibilities for the development of public diplomacy. Actively carrying out new media public diplomacy is conducive to a country shaping a good international image, promoting the international community’s cultural identity to the country and enhancing its national soft power. By studying the official WeChat public article of the Russian Embassy in China, we can find out that the Russian Embassy in China has many references to public diplomacy in China.

Paying attention to the role of new media public diplomacy in enhancing national softness

With the in-depth development of network technology, the new media platform has gradually become an important field for a country to carry out public diplomacy practice. New media public diplomacy is an experiment in shaping the national image in a broad and open virtual political space and capturing the right of international discourse. It is closely related to the construction of national soft power. The new media public diplomacy has changed the traditional rigid and rigid propaganda methods of traditional diplomacy, providing more

vivid communication content, more flexible communication methods, and more channels of communication for public diplomacy. This is conducive to the public diplomacy countries to strengthen communication and exchanges with the target country's audience, strengthen two-way interaction, resolve their hostility and resistance, show a true, three-dimensional, comprehensive national image, and enhance international soft power.

More and more countries are joining the ranks. However, everything has a double-sided nature. In a free network environment, various complex political and economic forces are intertwined. The government should be more cautious in conducting public diplomacy activities, focusing on integrating national resources and coordinating all sectors of society. Therefore, it is imperative to improve the strategic position of public diplomacy and play the role of new media public diplomacy in shaping and disseminating the image of the country.

Localized social media that is good at using the target country

Social media belongs to new media, which is characterized by convenience, speed, and good communication. Therefore, in order to shape and spread their own good image and enhance their international voice, countries have turned their public diplomacy activities into new media. By the localized new media platform of the target country to carry out public diplomacy, a series of interactive discourse attempts to construct between the country and the country and the people of other countries are carried out. The use of the localized new media platform of the target country will help alleviate the nervous, sensitive, and hostile sentiments of the people in other countries, and use the way that other people like to see and hear, and realize the positive output of their national image, and enhance cultural attraction and national influence. Therefore, it is very important to build a team of outsiders who are skilled in using new media platforms.

First, the ability of the foreign embassies and consulates to use the new media platform should be cultivated, their language skills should be improved, the use of social media in the target country should be clarified, and the customs and habits of the target countries should be familiar.

Second, focus on grasping the audience of the dissemination and placing the ordinary people in the target country in the main position of the new media public diplomacy. Maintain continuous and effective interaction with the people of the target countries and disseminate the national image and national culture in a relaxed and intimate way.

Third, accurately locate the content of interest to the target country's audience, disseminate the information of the audience's attention, and disseminate the information exchanged between the two countries. Strengthen the setting of the agenda, and guide the public opinion by controlling the information to realize the control of the right to speak.

Fourth, integrate the superior resources of the country's external communication, and promote the coordination and cooperation between the social media and the mainstream media to form a joint force for external communication.

Giving full play to the role of summit-style public diplomacy

Referring to Russia's public communication strategy with China, the author found that President Putin played a big role in shaping the image of Russia. The head of state is the representative of the national image and the enrichment of the national will, so it is very important to build a national leader brand. Under the public diplomacy system, the mass media is used to integrate and market the national leader's brand, which gives full play to the personal charm of the state leaders, to eliminate misunderstandings of other countries, to build the value recognition and understand of the target countries. In addition, even the international community to the public diplomacy countries enhances the international discourse power. In the process of shaping and disseminating the image of the country's leaders, attention should be paid to the aura of the "god" of the national leader, highlighting its charm as a "person". Through the Westerners' habits of shaping the personal image of the head of state in a small and big way, the "soft" spread of the summit-style public diplomacy is achieved. While carrying out the summit diplomacy, it should also combine various forms of public diplomacy such as economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and civil diplomacy to enhance the flexibility, mobility, and sensitivity of China's diplomatic work and improve the efficiency of diplomatic work.

Conclusion

The official WeChat tweet of the Russian Embassy in China is closely related to China, which has received wide attention from the Chinese people and has become an important position for Russia's new media public diplomacy. Russia's international communication mechanism and public diplomacy mechanism are relatively mature, and its successful experience of "WeChat diplomacy" in China has certain reference significance for other countries to carry out public diplomacy activities. Today, with the deepening of globalization and informatization, international communication capabilities and diplomatic capabilities are of great significance to a country's promotion of international status and international voice. Carrying out new media public diplomacy is an important supplement and new development of traditional diplomatic activities. Therefore, if we can fully absorb the experience of Russia's international communication and new media public diplomacy, and carry out localization practice in light of the national conditions of each country, it will help shape and improve its national image, which enhance international influence.

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