From Discourse to Action: Party Publicity Work and Consensus Building from a Social Construction Perspective

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Abstract: *Drawing on the theoretical paradigm of social construction, this study endeavors to deconstruct the functional transformation and operating mechanism of political communication in modern governance. By establishing a three - dimensional analytical framework of "symbol system - media ecology - governance practice", it uncovers the internal logic of political communication from meaning production to action transformation. The research findings indicate that the cultural encoding of the symbol system constructs a collective cognitive schema; the ecological reconstruction of the media matrix boosts the efficiency of government - public interaction; and the innovative mechanism of governance practice achieves the synergy between value guidance and behavior motivation. This progressive mechanism of "cognitive construction - relationship reshaping - action synergy" reflects the core tenet of interaction and community awareness in social construction theory, highlighting the interaction between individuals and the collective during the policy promotion process.*

Keywords: Political communication, Social construction, Consensus shaping, Collaborative governance.

1. Introduction

Driven by the twin forces of globalization and digital transformation, modern national governance faces the dual challenges of value integration and action coordination. As a crucial part of the national governance system, political communication has evolved from its traditional role of information dissemination to the co - creation and sharing of value consensus (Castells, 2009). This shift is especially evident in contemporary China. The modernization of national governance calls for the establishment of a new communication model that combines political leadership with social participation. Meanwhile, the reshaping of the media ecosystem has led to a transition from a single - authoritative communication subject to a multi - interactive one.

Propaganda work is of utmost importance to the Party. As the saying goes, "Leading cadres should be both doers and propagandists." In 2019, the state issued an official propaganda regulation, which provides strong guidance and legal support for political propaganda through a rigid legal framework.

Promoting Party - building propaganda is essential for unifying thoughts and building consensus. From the perspective of historical institutionalism, the history of the Communist Party of China's struggle is not only a history of battles but also a history of ideological development. From Marx's view that the vanguard nature of a political party is first manifested in the advancement of its ideology and theory, to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era clearly stating that ideological unity serves as the foundation for political and operational unity, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has always regarded publicity work as an outstanding tradition, a distinctive feature, and its most prominent political advantage in achieving ideological unity. Publicity workers have thoroughly studied and implemented the concept of "starting with theory and public opinion" in all historical periods and various undertakings of the CPC's construction and reform.

On the other hand, from the perspective of social institutional construction, national governance not only depends on the coercive "hard power" for social management but also requires the use of various "soft power" influence methods to win people's hearts and gain support. This helps build consensus, gain public recognition of the state, and achieve social mobilization and integration. The rapid development of information technology has pushed human society into the "VUCA era." With the accelerating changes in social structure and the profound evolution of the interest pattern, it is essential to fully leverage the function of the publicity system in building consensus to ensure the participation of diverse social entities in governance practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Propaganda Work

During the long - term governance practice, China has established a set of distinctive propaganda mechanisms. However, Chinese scholars have conducted relatively few studies on the "propaganda system". Domestic scholars' research on propaganda can be mainly divided into two categories:

One category focuses on research from an academic discipline perspective. Representatives include Lin Zhida, Xiang Zairen, Liang Shichun, Zhou Zhenlin, etc. They mainly focus on studying "propaganda as an academic discipline", including the objects, purposes, functions, and classifications studied in propaganda science or journalism and communication studies. These studies contribute to the establishment and development of propaganda studies to some extent, but they fail to reveal the mechanism and significance of propaganda or clarify the relationship between propaganda and political parties.

The other category focuses on research from a historical perspective, which can be further divided into the following three sub - categories based on different contents:

1) Research on the history of propaganda, which mainly offers a macro - level overview of propaganda in various historical periods of Chinese politics.

2) Research on the Communist Party of China's propaganda in a specific historical stage, which reveals the characteristics of the Party's propaganda mechanism.

3) Research on the propaganda ideas of national leaders. Existing studies rarely uncover the significance of propaganda for party leadership and the important functions of propaganda in the field of values, especially in unifying thoughts, building consensus, and creating a value community in the current construction of a social governance community.

2.2 The Social Construction Theory of the Target Group

The constructivist theory offers a crucial framework for comprehending the context of social propaganda. Social constructivism centers on the interaction between individuals and the social environment, highlighting that social identity and consensus are gradually established through such interactions. The development of social constructivism theory can be traced back to the mid - 20th century, with significant advancements made particularly in the interdisciplinary research of sociology, psychology, and anthropology. In their book The Social Construction of Reality, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann stated that "reality is co - constructed through social interaction." This theory has not only exerted a profound influence on Western social sciences but also laid a theoretical foundation for subsequent research. In China, the social construction theory has been shaped by traditional culture and Marxist theory, resulting in a distinctive understanding of collectivism and social identity.

In recent years, with the advancement of globalization and information technology, the application of the social construction theory has extended to the domains of social propaganda and policy communication. This theory has witnessed new development, especially in enhancing policy acceptance through discourse and interaction and fostering the awareness of cooperation and co - governance across society in social governance.

Against this backdrop, the issues that concern researchers have extended to the following:

1) How to promote policy acceptance through the use of language and discourse, and how interactive communication influences the collective consciousness of social groups to achieve the goal of co - governance.

2) How the differences in propaganda strategies and effects across different cultural and social backgrounds impact social construction.

The core tenet of social constructivism theory posits that "society" is a continuous dynamic process, and individuals constantly revise and reshape their understanding of the surrounding social phenomena through social interaction. In response to the contemporary changes in the Party's propaganda work, researchers have identified several key factors.

First, the significance of interaction cannot be overlooked. Effective two - way communication can facilitate the understanding and acceptance of information. Zhang Yi pointed out that the Party's policies are more likely to gain acceptance and support through interaction with the public.

Second, the establishment of co - governance awareness has also drawn extensive attention. By incorporating community participation and policy feedback mechanisms into policy propaganda, the public's sense of responsibility towards policies is strengthened, thereby promoting the formation of a sense of community in society. For instance, Li Wenzhao argues that the public's sense of participation and acceptance are closely linked to the effectiveness of policies. Enhancing the sense of participation can promote more effective policy implementation and social cooperation. This view aligns with that of foreign scholars. Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram proposed in their research that public participation not only helps to enhance policy transparency but also contributes to building trust and support for policy implementation.

Meanwhile, Erving Goffman explored the roles of individuals in social interaction and how to shape social reality through discourse in his "Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", while Jürgen Habermas discussed the core concept of the "public sphere" and its significance in social and political life, emphasizing the crucial role of rational dialogue in consensus - building. Furthermore, in his research on the relationship between power and knowledge, Foucault pointed out that the formation of social discourse is closely linked to the power structure. This offers a new philosophical perspective for understanding the power dynamics in policy communication.

Regarding the research on policy communication and publicity, the existing literature offers a rich background and framework for research at various levels. The social construction theory of the target group provides a new theoretical dialogue point for understanding this change from the perspectives of identity and participation. The shift from discourse to action is not just a simple dissemination of policies; rather, it is about establishing a relationship of mutual trust and resonance with the target group.

In addition, the emergence of new media has presented new opportunities for the publicity of Party and government work. The application of new media technology in government services not only boosts the public's sense of participation and identity but also enables decision - makers to better address social needs.

An important objective of publicity work is to reach a consensus on values and build psychological identity. Relying on new technological platforms, through the creation of role models and emotional guidance, the new publicity mechanism can have a deeper impact on people's attitudes and behaviors and contribute to social stability and harmony.

3. Ways of Social Construction: Symbols, Tools, and Consensus

How can publicity work be extended to the grassroots society and the spiritual souls of individuals, thereby opening up the spiritual channels between the upper - level and the grassroots, as well as between the state and the society, and establishing an integrated and interconnected spiritual consciousness network? The internal operating mechanism is condensed in a series of publicity work mechanisms.In practice, the cohesion of values is closely related to public behavior. Integrating consensus not only involves the transmission and exchange of policy information but also serves as an important way to influence social psychological cognition and specific behaviors. In the current international social context, "publicity" is not merely a process of information transmission but also a key mechanism for constructing social reality through specific discourses and symbols.By analyzing three aspects - the power of specific symbols, the evolution of publicity tools, and publicity behaviors - we can clarify how to play a key role in achieving policy goals and building social consensus.

3.1 Cognitive Construction Mechanism of the Symbol System

In the policy communication system, the power of symbols and symbolism serves as a profound social construction mechanism. It achieves cognitive encoding of value consensus by implementing specific linguistic and visual strategies. According to the social construction theory, reaching a consensus is not a static entity but a dynamic process that is continuously constructed and reconstructed through social interactions. By using symbols, this process makes abstract ideas and concepts tangible, thus influencing the cognition and behavior of individuals and groups.

First, "symbols" contribute to individual value identification. For instance, the national flag and national anthem, as national symbols, represent the identification of citizenship, national unity, and the values of the national community. Through repeated daily visual and auditory stimuli, these symbols foster a deep - rooted cultural identity. In this context, individual citizens not only understand the content of policies but also embrace and appreciate the national - level culture and values behind them. Second, symbolic language is a crucial medium for conveying policy connotations. Language is not only a communication tool but also an important means of shaping reality and guiding public opinion. According to Habermas' theory of rational discourse, rational communication can help establish a common understanding and consensus between the public and leaders. Most policy propaganda uses relatively positive rhetoric, emphasizing expressions of national construction, social progress, and democratic unity. This language strategy can effectively guide the public's emotions and gain their identification, generating support and resonance for policies.

The effects of symbols and symbolism are not static, and their functions also rely on social, historical, and cultural contexts. In different historical periods, certain symbols may gain new meanings and values due to specific social upheavals or national crises. Meanwhile, symbols and symbolism are constantly reproduced through social practices, which further consolidates new value concepts.

Therefore, in the policy communication system, the concretization of ideological concepts is closely linked to the public's actual experiences and identifications. This cycle not only reinforces the legitimacy of policies but also boosts public participation, allowing "consensus" to truly seep into people's daily lives.

3.2 The Ecological Evolution of the Media Matrix

In the historical development of China's reform and construction, ballads, slogans, and catchphrases, as traditional media, effectively disseminated policy ideas and strengthened collective awareness with their concise and powerful expressions. Meanwhile, the development of mass media, especially newspapers, radio, and television, further broadened the coverage of policy promotion, making the national governance concept deeply rooted in people's hearts. However, with the rise of new media platforms, digital communication has shown characteristics like flexibility and immediacy in information dissemination and has become the core front for contemporary policy communication. The transformation of publicity tools not only reflects the trend of technological embedding in the context of the times but also profoundly affects the interaction between publicity strategies and the public.

Symbols and symbolism are not just rhetorical and visual tools; they are also important bridges for the construction and dissemination of ideology. Through these symbols and symbolism, new values can be constructed, spread, and strengthened. Thus, within the framework of social co - governance, the public's awareness of political participation can be cultivated, and a closely - knit spiritual and ideological network can be established.

Generational division	Dominant media	Communication characteristics	Functional positioning
Revolutionary period	Ballads/slogans	Emotional mobilization	Mobilization efficiency > Consensus building
Construction period	Newspapers/radio	Institutional integration	Policy dissemination > Public participation
Reform period	Television/internet	Technology-driven	Information coverage > Relationship reconstruction
New era	Intelligent media	Ecological integration	Consensus production > Action transformation

3.2.1 Ballads

From the intellectuals' advocacy of "going to the countryside" during the May 4th period, to the vigorous peasant movement during the National Revolution, and then to the Communist Party of China's strategy of "encircling the cities from the countryside" after 1927, the revolution gradually seeped into the daily lives of rural people and was reflected in ballads, which were the people's daily emotional expressions. As the revolution spread to the countryside, traditional folk ballads gradually became politicized. This was not only a spontaneous response from the people but, more importantly,

the result of the promotion by the Communist Party of China's revolutionary intellectuals. After recognizing the role of ballads in promoting the revolution, the Party's intellectuals elevated ballad promotion to the policy level, "turning the Party's policy slogans into chanting mountain songs" and promoting ballads as a means of propaganda and education across the vast Soviet areas. The Soviet areas under the Party's leadership gradually established a mature mechanism covering ballad creation, promotion, and mobilization. The ballads created by adapting traditional tunes for revolutionary propaganda and political mobilization in these areas were mainly known as "revolutionary ballads" at that time. They served as an effective medium for the Communist Party of China and the Soviet regime it led to interact with the society and people in the Soviet areas through propaganda.

In the 21st century, as historical memories, revolutionary ballads have been re - fashioned into new propaganda carriers due to the dynamics of memory and the influence of the contemporary environment, deviating from the original revolutionary ballads. However, the fact that revolutionary ballads are an important medium for the penetration of the Communist Party of China's ideology and institutional system into folk culture and the people's psychology will not fade with the passage of time. Ballads still remain a crucial tool for political propaganda and mobilization, carrying political significance and fulfilling new functions in the governance practices of the new era.

3.2.2 Slogans and Catchphrases

Since its founding, our Party has placed great emphasis on using slogans and catchphrases to transform public opinion and influence people's minds. The slogans and catchphrases have differed across various important periods. For example, during the Agrarian Revolution, the slogans were "Overthrow the local tyrants and distribute the land" and "All power to the Soviets"; during the land reform, they were "Land for the peasants" and "Peasants' liberation"; during the People's Commune era, they were "The People's Commune is wonderful" and "Surpass Britain and catch up with the United States"; after the reform and opening - up, it was "Get rich and achieve a moderately prosperous life, thank the Communist Party"; since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it has been "Forge ahead on a new journey and make contributions in the new era", etc.

Generally speaking, when the Party Central Committee pays special attention to ideological and political work during a certain period, the number of corresponding slogans and catchphrases with clear propaganda purposes will increase significantly. Such concise and straightforward slogans make it easier for the public to accept and understand national policies and guidelines. In particular, slogans and catchphrases can create a social public opinion with strong appeal and influence, guiding the public to build a new social consensus.

3.2.3 Mass media

The publicity work of mass media across all aspects of society is two - way. On one hand, mass media publicizes the efforts in promoting spiritual civilization, discussing policy theories,

as well as highlighting exemplary figures and their deeds through various media such as newspapers, television, Weibo, blogs, and forums. It also expands and extends information dissemination to ensure that the general public understands policies, cares about government work, and forms a spiritual synergy for the co - construction, co - governance, and sharing between the state and society.

On the other hand, mass media uses a variety of forms to disseminate the Party's lines, principles, policies, scientific theories, advanced cultures, and noble spirits to the public. This allows the "voice" of the Party Central Committee to reach the hearts of the people, influencing their thinking, encouraging their participation in social governance, and promoting the construction and development of the social governance community.

In general, mass media can efficiently convey the will of the Party and the government to the public. The public can not only hear the voices of Party and state leaders but also see their images on a daily basis, which significantly strengthens the awareness of the Party and the state, as well as citizens' sense of citizenship.

3.2.4 New media platforms

The emergence of new media platforms has provided technological support for value guidance and spiritual cultivation. In recent years, Party organizations at all levels have actively utilized new media to build platforms and innovate Party building publicity work. For instance, they have set up Party building websites as the main front for education and publicity, launched online forums for Party affairs to address ideological concerns, and formed an online work team to defuse public opinion crises.

With the emergence and development of new media, especially the message boards of leaders at all levels on the Internet, e - government services, and e - mail boxes of various departments, opinions can be directly submitted to relevant decision - making institutions. The trend of the times has not only diversified the content of Party building publicity but also, through new media technology, established a comprehensive "new media + Party building" communication channel, enabling every member of the public to provide feedback.

The establishment of websites like the Anhui Pioneer Network has created a new platform for organizational departments to consult the public on governance, seek advice, and understand their needs. More and more officials are going online to listen to public opinions, which shows that leading cadres are more willing to hear the truth and get to the bottom of things. On new media platforms, the public's needs and suggestions can be exchanged with the thinking and feedback of leading cadres, realizing two - way interaction between society and the state.

3.3 Collaborative Innovation Path of Governance Practice

Propaganda is a way of influencing people's thoughts and psychology through a series of actions. The Communist Party of China's propaganda efforts have extremely distinct

characteristics.

3.3.1 Political Movements

A political movement is a social activity initiated and led by a political party or political group of a certain class to achieve a specific political objective. It has clear goals, strict planning, and strong organization. In particular, such political movements are marked by wide - ranging influence, mass participation, and regular occurrence. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Communist Party of China became the ruling party and still preferred to use political movements to attain political goals. For instance, there were the Land Reform Movement and the Cooperative Movement. A political movement itself is a process of arousing, mobilizing, and educating the masses. Political movements are large - scale, highly participatory, and forceful. It is precisely through regular "campaign - style" approaches that the Party's will can be effectively transmitted to grass - roots society, thereby transforming the existing social consciousness and shaping a collective consciousness among the public that aligns with the will of the Party and the state.

3.3.2 Establishing Role Models

Influencing social psychology by publicizing various advanced exemplary figures and establishing role models is an important activity in publicity work. In each period, the Party establishes and commends role models according to its guiding will and standards to encourage people to learn from them.

At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, rural China faced serious economic difficulties, and the advantages of the people's commune system were questioned. Just when the leadership of the ruling Party had differences in the direction of rural policies, under the leadership of Chen Yonggui, the Party branch secretary of Dazhai Brigade in Xiyang County, Shanxi Province, the brigade relied on collective strength to overcome difficulties and achieve a good agricultural harvest. This feat soon caught the attention of the top leadership of the ruling Party, and Dazhai became a model for the rural collectivization path. As a result, the whole country was called on to "learn from Dazhai in agriculture".

In December 1964, Premier Zhou Enlai of the State Council summarized the experience of Dazhai at the First Session of the Third National People's Congress. He pointed out that "the principles of putting politics first and emphasizing ideology, the spirit of self - reliance and hard work, and the communist spirit of loving the country and the collective that Dazhai Brigade adheres to are all worth promoting." Since then, "learning from Dazhai in agriculture" has become a political movement that lasted for more than 10 years.

3.3.3 Psychological identification

The term "identification" originated from the Latin word "idem" and is translated from the English word "identity". It encompasses both the objective similarity or sameness and the psychological consistency and the relationships formed as a result. Its basic meaning is recognition and confirmation. Freud believed that "identification is the process in which an individual emotionally and psychologically aligns with others, a group, or an imitated figure." That is, identification is "seen as a psychological process, a process in which an individual imitates and internalizes the values, norms, and appearances of another person or group and forms their own behavior patterns, and is the primary form of emotional connection between an individual and others." Analyzed from the perspective of psychological processes, for propaganda work to achieve psychological identification in the ideological field, it is mainly influenced by four psychological factors: cognition, emotion, needs, and behavior. The psychological identification of the general public with the ideology led by the political party means that the general public aligns with Marxist ideology in terms of cognition, emotion, needs, and behavior. It emphasizes that this ideology can meet the general public's requirements in these four aspects, thus gaining the general public's voluntary compliance with it. There are mainly the following four ways to strengthen the dissemination of the ideology led by the political party from the perspective of psychological identification:

1) Construct and improve ideological concepts that match the schema according to the changes in the audience's cognitive structure.

2) Cultivate and stimulate positive ideological emotions based on the audience's perception of the relationship between the subject and the object.

3) Consolidate and strengthen the construction of the ideological guarantee system based on an analysis of the audience's needs hierarchy.

4) Initiate and deepen the behavioral guidance of the ideology based on the mechanism of how behavioral reinforcement affects the formation of concepts.

4. Conclusion

The Party's publicity work has transcended simple information dissemination and evolved into a complex and dynamic process related to social identity and collective action. From the perspective of social construction theory, we can understand how the Party's publicity shapes public psychological identity, guides individual and collective actions, and thereby achieves the goal of cohesion and integration of collective ideology. The Party's publicity can not only effectively turn words into actions but also significantly enhance public recognition of policies and stimulate the enthusiasm for participating in social governance. In this process, the application of new media and interactive communication strategies offer new opportunities for publicity work, showing great potential to promote public participation and feedback.

Ultimately, social construction theory emphasizes the interaction between individuals and the collective, confirming that public participation and feedback are important factors in promoting the formation of social consensus during policy promotion. Therefore, the Party's publicity work should continue to focus on action-oriented practices to meet the rapidly changing social needs. In the context of increasing globalization and informatization, how to more effectively

carry out the Party's publicity and enhance social identity and co-governance awareness may become an issue that urgently requires in-depth exploration.

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