Discursive Construction of Nanjing City Image in Public Health Emergency

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Abstract

In this study, the function of "Nanjing Release", the official new media platform of the Nanjing Municipal Government, is analyzed in the construction of the city image in paroxysmal public emergencies from five aspects (e.g., discourse content, discourse form, discourse subject, stylistic style, and emotional orientation) based on the framework of pragmatic identity and cultural discourse studies. This study suggests that the discourse contents of "Nanjing Release" primarily comprise pandemic notification, pandemic prevention, and control measures, saluting anti-pandemic workers, serving people's livelihood, government notification and handling, and pandemic-related science knowledge. Moreover, the forms of discourse are classified into single-modal reports and multi-modal reports. The subjects of discourse primarily include government agencies, anti-pandemic workers, new media organizations, public institutions, and virtual characters. The stylistic styles of discourse are divided into deliberative, formal, casual, and serious styles. Furthermore, the affective orientations include neutral reports, positive reports, and negative reports. This study reveals that the government's WeChat account, "Nanjing Release", has built an image of a warm, loving, and grateful city fighting against the pandemic in the public health emergency. Afterward, the motivation for the discursive construction of the city image is studied.

Keywords: "Nanjing Release", city image, pragmatic identity, cultural discourse studies, public health emergency

1. Introduction

American urban planning expert Kevin Lynch formally proposed the concept of "city image" in his monograph "City image" and described and gained insights into the form of the modern metropolis from the perspective of humanity, emphasizing that the city image is obtained through people's comprehensive perception. He highlighted that "every sense in the city produces a reaction, which becomes an impression when combined". Lewis Mumford also suggested that the image of a city is people's subjective impression of a city, which is formed based on the joint action of mass media, personal experience, interpersonal communication, memory, environment, and other factors. In his book "Urban Development History: Origin, Evolution, and Prospect", he said, "Now the city must reflect the will of its citizens, not the mythical ruler, but the individual and collective will. The best economic model of a city should care for and cultivate people." The research on the city image in China has gradually matured since the 1990s. Compared with foreign theoretical research on the city image, domestic research on the city image has more ways and perspectives, whereas it stresses the role of human perception.

2. Literature Review

The study of identity has shifted from essentialism to constructivism. The concept of identity in accordance with social constructivism highlights that identity is not prespecified but formed and highlighted in intersubjective communication (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Bamberg et al., 2007). On that basis, the concept of "pragmatic identity" is proposed. It is "the contextualized identity of the self or the other party selected by the language user intentionally or unintentionally, and other identities of the social individuals or groups mentioned by the speaker or author in his or her discourse, which are collectively termed pragmatic identity". The selection of pragmatic identity in communicative behaviors in a specific communicative context is a default according to the identity criterion (Chen, 2018), i.e., communicators should choose the pragmatic identity that is consistent with the

current communicative context for communication. This criterion presupposes identity schema as "identity or identity relationship matching the implementation of specific behaviors in detailed communication scenarios, which is manifested as a series of assumptions, expectations, beliefs and others of behavioral norms relating to specific identities". It also presupposes identity discourse, which is "the default or unlabeled pragmatic way of carrying out a particular action consistent with a particular identity, or identity relationship". The mechanism of identity selection is limited by situational factors, rights relations, obligations relations, and social distance in relevant scenarios. The pragmatic identity selected in accordance with identity criteria is termed default identity, and the opposite of default identity is a non-default identity or a variant identity (e.g., strategic identity and problem identity).

Scholars began to investigate the theme slogans of the city image with the shift of language/discourse research in social sciences (Xu & Wang, 2019) and newspaper reports (Hu et al., 2021; Yuan, 2018), television broadcast media reports (Irmgard et al., 2019), with a focus on the role of language/discourse in image construction and communication. Shi (2010) proposed the framework of cultural discourse research: starting from the concept of social events as verbal communication activities, researchers focus on (1) the subject of speech, (2) content/form/social relations, (3) media use, (4) purpose/effect, (5) culture relations and (6) historical relations. Shi (2008) suggested that the content, form, process and power relationship of discourse are capable of determining the direction, strategy, opportunity and even the success of urban development.

"Nanjing Release" is the official new media platform of the Nanjing Municipal Government, WCI (WeChat Communication Index) is 1213.97 (as of December 27, 2021, Qingbo Index website), and WeChat subscribers have reached one million. The regular nucleic acid detection samples of staff at Nanjing Lukou International Airport were positive on the evening of July 20, 2021. By August 12, 2021, 235 local confirmed cases had been reported in Nanjing, and the pandemic had spread to 9 places in 4 provinces (i.e., Guangdong, Sichuan, Liaoning, and Anhui). "Nanjing Release" immediately issued the news "Notification on Novel Coronavirus Detection Positive in Nanjing Lukou International Airport". On the next day, it issued the notice "Notice of Nanjing COVID-19 Prevention and Control Headquarters on Further Strengthening Pandemic Prevention and Control Work (No. 1)". The whole area of Nanjing was confirmed as a low-risk area on August 19, 2021.

The outbreak of the pandemic in Nanjing has touched the hearts of the Chinese people. During this sudden public crisis, "Nanjing Release"—the official new media platform of the Nanjing Municipal Government takes on a critical significance in the disclosure of government affairs and information reporting. The discourse content and form of its WeChat tweets will significantly affect the construction of the city image. In this study, relevant corpus issued by "Nanjing Release" is taken as the research object to explore the types and motivations for discourse construction of the city image of Nanjing.

3. Case Study and Data

The discourse content, discourse form, discourse subject, stylistic style and emotional orientation of the news issued by "Nanjing Release" are investigated in accordance with the pragmatic identity theory (Chen, 2018) and cultural discourse research framework (Shi, 2010). Moreover, the following questions are primarily analyzed:

(1) What contents does "Nanjing Release" release on WeChat?

(2) Who speaks in the WeChat content launched by "Nanjing Release"?

(3) How "Nanjing Release" launches WeChat content in the form of discourse?

(4) What is the style and emotional orientation of the WeChat content launched by "Nanjing Release"?

(5) What type of city image does "Nanjing Release" construct? What are the motivations for the construction of the city image?

The corpus of this study was collected from 162 epidemic-related reports launched by "Nanjing Release" from July 20, 2021, to August 19, 2021, with a total of 162 articles.

4. Results

4.1 Discourse Content

Epidemic-related reports pushed by "Nanjing Release", a new media platform of the Nanjing Municipal Government, during public health emergencies mainly involve pandemic notification, pandemic prevention and control measures, a tribute to anti-pandemic personnel, serving people's livelihood, government notification and handling, pandemic-related science knowledge, etc. Table 1 lists the details:

Table 1. Classification of discourse content of "Nanjing Release"

notification of the pandemic	pandemic prevention and control measures	salute the workers fighting against the pandemic	reports on serving people's livelihood	government notification and handling	pandemic-related science knowledge
77	51	17	8	5	4
47.5%	31.5%	10.5%	4.9%	3.1%	2.5%

First, notification of the pandemic. The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and the adjustment of the pandemic risk level in some regions have been updated daily to publicize timely, accurate, and objective information since "Nanjing Release" issued the notice "Notification on Novel Coronavirus Test Positive in Nanjing Lukou International Airport" on July 20, 2021.

Second, pandemic prevention and control measures. During the outbreak of the pandemic, "Nanjing Release" has pushed a total of nine notices on pandemic prevention and control (e.g., "Notice on Carrying out nucleic acid detection for the whole City (No. 2)", "Notice on Health Management of People Returning to Nanjing via Lukou Airport (No. 4)", and "Nanjing Municipal Party Committee and Government: It is a race against time to accurately and strictly trace the flow of nucleic acid detection method"), thus indicating that Nanjing people are committed to fighting against the pandemic together.

Third, salute the workers fighting against the pandemic. "Nanjing Release" launches reports (e.g., "Salute them under the camera!" and "Send you a little red flower") to express gratitude to the medical workers who went to Nanjing to help all over the province and pay tribute to all the front-line anti-pandemic workers.

Fourth, reports on serving people's livelihood. "Nanjing Release" has launched the news "The latest list of nucleic acid detection and sampling service points in Nanjing area!", "A matter of water and electricity supply! Here comes the latest reminder", and other relevant reports, showing the Nanjing municipal government's timely response to public concerns during the pandemic. There would be no victory in the fight against the pandemic without the people's understanding and cooperation.

Fifth, the government's handling process. "Nanjing release" launched the reports about "Discipline Inspection and Supervision of Jiangsu Province reports the handling situation of related personnel at Nanjing Lukou International Airport who lacks management responsibilities on pandemic prevention and control", "East Airport Group co., LTD., deputy party secretary, general manager Xu accept discipline examination and supervision survey" as a response to public concern, thus revealing the government's determination to deal with those who have failed to fight the pandemic.

Sixth, pandemic-related science knowledge. "Nanjing Release" issued a series of reports such as "a new change in mask wearing requirements!", "During the pandemic, how to enhance your immunity!", "Do this when taking taxis and online ride-hailing during the pandemic!" Such reports can help the public to protect themselves from the novel coronavirus.

4.2 Discourse Subject

According to the different subjects of discourse, the reports from "Nanjing Release" can be divided into five categories: government agencies, anti-pandemic workers, new media organizations, public institutions, and virtual characters. The specific situation is shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Classification of discourse subjects of "Nanjing Release"

government agencies	anti-pandemic workers	new media organizations	public institutions	virtual characters
132	15	8	5	2
81.5%	9.3%	4.9%	3.1%	1.2%

As depicted in Table 2, most of the reports, accounting for 81.5%, have taken government agencies as the subject of discourse. The above reports have primarily involved daily pandemic data reporting and pandemic prevention and control measures (e.g., "New confirmed COVID-19 cases in our city from 00:00 to 24:00 on July 26" as well as "Notice on Further strengthening pandemic prevention and control work in communities (natural villages)"). The reports that have taken anti-pandemic workers as the subject of discourse rank second, accounting for 9.3%. This type of report has largely expressed respect and thanks to the frontline medical workers and volunteers involved in the fight against the pandemic (e.g., "Salute!" and "Thank you for protecting

Nanjing!"). The reports taking new media organizations as the subject of discourse rank third, taking up 4.9%, which mostly involve activities organized by new media platforms (e.g., "Today, please accept this little red flower!" and "How should people wear masks properly?"). The reports with public institution organizations as the subject of discourse rank fourth, taking up 3.1%. This type of report has mainly served people's livelihood (e.g., "Cloud clinic, super convenient!" and "@Nanking home class begins!"). The reports using online virtual characters as the subject of discourse rank fifth, accounting for 1.2%, in which the cartoon characters of Ning Xiaohu (宁小护) and Ning Xiaowei (宁小卫) have been employed to publicize the pandemic prevention measures (e.g., "There are new changes in wearing masks!", "Do this when taking taxis and online ride-hailing during the pandemic!").

4.3 Discourse Form

According to Zhu Yongsheng's (2007) multi-modal discourse judgment standard, the news from "Nanjing Release" can be classified into a single-modal report with pure text and a multi-modal report with "text + pictures/video" based on the different forms of reporting. Table 3 lists the specific situation:

Table 3. Classification of discourse forms of "Nanjing Release"

Single-modal reports	Multi-modal reports	
Text	Text+picture	Text+video
86	60	16
53.1%	37%	9.9%

As depicted in Table 3, unimodal reports with pure text take up 53.1% of the reports released by "Nanjing Release". The above reports have primarily involved pandemic data notification and pandemic prevention and control measures (e.g., "Two COVID-19 cases have been newly confirmed in our city from 19:00 to 24:00 on July 21" and "Nanjing: Resolutely win the two tough battles of pandemic prevention and flood control to safeguard the safety of the city and people's health"). The "text + picture" multimodal report is the next, accounting for 37%. These reports have largely covered serving people's livelihood and paying tribute to anti-pandemic workers (e.g., "271 People's special adventure" and "Learning to listen to the voices of the people"). The reports with "text + video" have been the least, accounting for 9.9%, which have mostly involved pandemic science reports and nationwide anti-pandemic reports (e.g., "how should the public wear masks properly?" and "Everyone in Nanjing is YYDS (the best)!").

4.4 Stylistic Style

In accordance with Martin. Joos' *Five clocks* (1967) and Wang Jianhua et al.'s (2020) analysis of the pragmatic expression patterns of new media for government affairs, the functions of the patterns and the pragmatic intention of the subjects have five different styles (e.g., serious, formal, deliberative, casual, and intimate). The authoritative reports correspond to the serious style and the formal style; the government's response to the public represents the deliberative style; the service to people's livelihood represents the casual style. Since Nanjing was in a public crisis from July 20, 2021, to August 19, 2021, the intimate style did not appear in the reports. Table 4 lists the specific situation:

Table 4. Classification of "Nanjing Release" stylistic style

deliberative	formal	casual	serious
95	56	6	5
58.6%	34.6%	3.7%	3.1%

As depicted in Table 4, the deliberative style ranks first in the reports released by "Nanjing Release", accounting for 58.6%. This type of report primarily involves pandemic prevention and control measures (e.g., "Introduction to the launch of the sixth round of nucleic acid detection in some regions of our city"). Reports with the formal style rank second, taking up 34.6%, which are largely related to the notification of pandemic situation (e.g., "the relevant adjustment of pandemic risk level in some areas of Nanjing"). The reports with casual style rank third, accounting for 3.7%, mainly relating to serving people's livelihood and paying tribute to front-line anti-pandemic workers (e.g., "Your name!" and "Cloud clinic, super convenient!"). The serious-style reports rank fourth, accounting for 3.1%, which mainly involve reports of the government's handling process (e.g., "East

Airport Group co., LTD., deputy party secretary, general manager Xu accept discipline examination and supervision survey").

4.5 Emotional Orientation

The news from "Nanjing Release" can be divided into three types (including positive reports, neutral reports, and negative reports) in accordance with the different emotional orientations of report content. Table 5 presents the details:

Table 5. Classification of the emotional orientation of "Nanjing Release"

Neutral report	Positive report	Negative report
79	51	32
48.7%	31.5%	19.8%

As depicted in Table 5, neutral reports rank first among the news pushed by "Nanjing Release", accounting for 48.7%. The neutral reports primarily report pandemic prevention and control measures, including "Notice on carrying out nucleic acid detection for all members of the city (No. 2)." Positive reports rank second, accounting for 31.5%. Such reports mainly include serving people's livelihood and paying tribute to anti-pandemic workers, such as "It's about water and electricity supply! Here comes the latest reminder" and "Salute them under the camera!" Negative reports rank third, accounting for 19.8 percent, which are primarily concerned with the daily pandemic data reporting (e.g., "the situation of 2 new local confirmed COVID-19 cases and 6 local asymptomatic infected cases in Nanjing from 8:00 to 19:00 on July 21," as well as "Notice of adjustment of pandemic risk level in some regions of Nanjing").

5. Discussion

There were hundreds of novel coronavirus test positive cases in Nanjing Lukou International Airport from July 20, 2021, to August 19, 2021. Within one month afterward, Nanjing carried out three rounds of nucleic acid detection for all citizens and six rounds of partial regional nucleic acid detection. With the support of 13 fraternal cities in the province and the support of all Nanjing people, this city managed to contain the spread of the disease in one month. During this period, "Nanjing Release", the WeChat account of the Nanjing Municipal Party Committee and Government, has become a new media for people to learn about government policies, and it is responsible for information disclosure and prevention guidance.

Combining the above five research questions regarding discourse content, discourse form, discourse subject, stylistic feature, and emotional orientation analysis, "Nanjing Release" successfully constructed the discourse image of a united city in the fight against the pandemic through daily pandemic data reporting and timely release of pandemic prevention and control measures. Moreover, "Nanjing Release" adopts multi-modal news reports with varied discourse subjects to construct a warm and loving city image. "Nanjing Release" mostly pushed positive and neutral news reports with a deliberative style in the most difficult period of fighting against the pandemic. The subjects of the reports contained gratitude to the medical staff who came to Nanjing to perform the nucleic acid detection all over the Jiangsu province and gratitude to the Nanjing people for their full support and cooperation. On that basis, the city image of gratitude has been constructed.

According to the identity criterion (Chen, 2018), the selection of pragmatic identity in communicative behaviors in a specific communicative context is the default, i.e., communicators should choose the pragmatic identity matching the current communicative context for communication. The pandemic was comprehensively controlled in 2021 in China, and people's lives gradually recovered. The outbreak of the pandemic in Nanjing has touched the hearts of people nationwide. Nanjing called on all citizens to join the fight against the pandemic to strengthen the national defense against the pandemic and satisfy the needs of the people to resume work, production, and school. The image of the city as a concentric anti-pandemic city is in line with the current communication situation and belongs to the default status, which shows the determination and confidence of the Nanjing government to win the anti-pandemic war in the shortest time.

When initiating a specific discourse, a speaker, driven by communicative needs (e.g., agent needs and interpersonal needs), should make a pragmatic identity choice with a higher or lower level of consciousness for himself or other parties. Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu province, has undergone the disaster of war numerous times and repeatedly recovered from rubbles and smoke. History has left a mark of "universal love" in Nanjing, i.e., the symbol of the city spirit and the civic spirit of Nanjing. In 2020, Nanjing sent 998 medical workers to support Hubei and Wuhan to fight against the pandemic, ranking first among all Chinese cities. Nanjing, as the

city of fraternity, has been advocating that "we isolate the virus, but not the love". The image of a warm and loving city helps alleviate the negative emotions of people during the pandemic, deepen the close relationship among fraternal cities in the fight against the pandemic, and ultimately win the battle against the pandemic. Moreover, it echoes the cultural tradition of Nanjing, which is inclusive and loving.

The mechanism of identity selection is hindered by situational factors, power relations, obligations relations, and social distance in relevant scenarios. The pragmatic identity selected in accordance with identity criteria is termed default identity, and the opposite of default identity is a non-default identity or a variant identity (e.g., strategic identity and problem identity). On July 20, 2021, nine positive nucleic acid samples were reported from the staff of Lukou International Airport. A total of 235 local confirmed cases had been reported in Nanjing by August 12th, 2021. In one month, over 8,000 medical workers from 12 fraternal cities in Jiangsu came to help complete three rounds of nucleic acid detection for all citizens and six rounds of partial regional nucleic acid detection. The support and help of the people of the whole province take on a critical significance in victory in the fight against the pandemic, even the more contagious Delta virus. In the above context, the grateful city image of Nanjing belongs to the strategic identity, thus narrowing the interpersonal distance between Nanjing and the fraternal cities and playing a specific pragmatic role.

6. Conclusions

In this study, epidemic-related reports released by "Nanjing Release" and the official new media platform of the Nanjing Municipal Government, from July 20, 2021 to August 19, 2021 are taken as the corpus and analyzed from five aspects (including discourse content, discourse subject, discourse form, stylistic style, and emotional orientation) in accordance with the pragmatic identity theory of Chen Xinren (2013) and the cultural discourse research framework proposed by Shi (2010). The construction of the city image of Nanjing in public health emergencies was investigated using qualitative and quantitative methods. It was found that the discourse content mainly focused on pandemic notification, pandemic prevention, and control measures. The unimodal reports of pure text are slightly more than the multi-modal reports of "text + picture/video". Government agencies are still the major discourse subject, and there have been a few reports with individuals and new media organizations as the discourse subjects. For stylistic style, deliberative style and formal style reports are the most. Neutral reports and positive reports accounted for more than 80%. The "Nanjing Release" of the government timely reported the development of the pandemic in public health emergencies. Its major responsibility is to ensure pandemic prevention and public service. On that basis, it has successfully constructed the united, warm, loving, and grateful city image against the pandemic. Furthermore, the motivation for the discursive construction of the city image is discussed in accordance with the pragmatic identity theory. This study provides a reference for the construction of the city image in institutional discourse.

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