

Reports Analysis of the Associated Press in the Beijing Winter Olympics

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Abstract: The 2022 Winter Olympics, officially called the XXIV Olympic Winter Games, was an international winter multi-sport event held between 4 and 20 February 2022 in Beijing, China, and surrounding areas with competitions in selected events (Britannica, 2023). The competition for the 2022 Winter Olympics was followed with interest by many well-known media including the Associated Press (“AP” hereafter) and Xinhua Press. In order to figure out connections between news coverage and international relations, this paper will analyse the reports from AP on the Beijing Winter Olympics, and discuss in three aspects, which are narrative mode, text and pictures.

Keywords: The Associated Press; Beijing Winter Olympics

1. Introduction

At the beginning, because there are strict standards to be recognized by the International Olympic Committee as a major international news agency and to receive priority coverage status, the AP’s reports on Beijing Winter Olympics were chosen as the main topic of the article. For instance, the reports must cover all the events during the game, not only the events that are considered important (Pan, 2022). However, people should pay attention to the dual characteristics of “nationality and cosmopolitan”, although international news agencies are cosmopolitan, which often become the spokesperson for national interests. Even the Associated Press, which is known as objectivity and neutrality, is not an exception with the national interests becoming the basis of reporting.

The Associated Press has launched a new column called Olympic Live, which is rolling news from morning to night. It is basically continuous news or semi-details of the match or event of the day, with the latest content at the top. Readers of AP Olympic reports can directly access and open the latest “Olympic Live Broadcast”, to view the summary of all reports. It covers not only the performance of all finals, but also the preliminary and qualifying matches, even the finals list of the competition.

2. Reports Analysis

To start with, the AP’s style of the narration influences the audience. They generally release stories based on the individual narrative in order to deliver their stance. They might focus on the story itself instead of telling the audience how directly they look at or think about the story, which guide the readership. This style of reporting throughout the whole period can even separate into pre-competition coverage and the during-the-game one based on the timeline and ideology. The former mainly concentrated on critics about Chinese human rights and the policy of China facing COVID-19, while during the games they focused more on athletes. Taking a pre-competition article called “For Uyghur Torchbearer, China’s Olympic Flame Has Gone Dark” as an example (Hu, 2022), in this news, a young Uyghur torchbearer activist called Kamaltürk Yalqun made a statement for himself, in which he used to embrace the Beijing Summer Olympics Games as a torchbearer with open arms, but after he had witnessed a series of communist “atrocities” towards his people, he moved to the U.S. and urged people to boycott the Winter Olympics in Beijing for human rights (Wu, 2022). By delivering this kind of article not only can they see AP’s sinister intention to slander China, but also implies their discussion of democracy in China. As a matter of fact, it comes with the agenda setting. The core point of agenda setting theory is that mass communication often cannot determine people’s specific views on a certain event or opinion, but it can effectively influence which

facts and opinions people pay attention to and the order in which they talk by providing information and arranging relevant issues (Zhang and Li, 2011).

Moreover, the AP prefers to combine text and pictures to illustrate the news. They show the interests in events as well as carrying it on the medal count that they list the number of gold, silver and bronze medals respectively, which shows the audience very visually how many medals their countries get. Besides, pictures also have the objective values and ideology with the angles of view making a difference sometimes.

When taking “Chinese Teen Su Yiming Takes Silver In Olympic Slopestyle” as an example (Graham, 2022), shown in figure 1 below, taking part in the ceremony with competitors from other countries, Su Yiming walked to the podium to accept the award himself while the other two have prepared for photographing. This photo was captured from an interesting angle by an Associated Press reporter, hinting that he seemed to have been isolated by the Canadian pairs, AP took the opportunity to lampoon China’s alleged international popularity.



From left, silver medalist China's Su Yiming, gold medalist Canada's Max Parrot and bronze medalist Canada's Mark McMorris celebrate during the award ceremony for the men's slopestyle at the 2022 Winter Olympics, Monday, Feb. 7, 2022, in Zhangjiakou, China. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press via AP)
Feb. 07, 2022 02:55 AM EST

Figure 1: Su Yiming walks to the podium

The Associated Press’s propaganda, reporting length and emphasis on its own advantage, especially the gold medal, is undoubtedly the biggest. Athletes themselves play an important role in sports communication, which is also the most intuitive presentation of the communication effect. Many viewers pay more attention to the athletes themselves when they are watching sports events. Therefore, it is particularly important for athletes’ achievements, especially for the spread of gold medal athletes’ personalities. Therefore, the media will consciously tap into the athletes’ inner personalities and the mainstream value of the case, in order to strengthen reporting. While viewers focus on the gold medal athletes, the AP’s strategy for covering the non-gold medal athletes is somewhat different. How to weaken the consciousness of champion and gold medal, strengthen the in-depth excavation and vivid display of athletes’ stories, humanity and spirit, and make the political communication carried by sports more diversified, vivid and humanized, so as to achieve better results.

However, surprisingly, in comparison, the AP’s coverage of Eileen Gu in the three major Western news agencies was neutral, and it quoted various viewpoints in accordance with the news principle. The report is basically completed by on-site reporters, surrounding reporters and reporting forces far from home. Including the competition scene, the press conference, the views of international sports people in Beijing, the reactions of Beijing citizens and the opinions of some experts and scholars who are far away from home. An American university professor said that Gu’s gold medal was given to China, but her success inspired young people all over the world (Pells, 2022).

How to make complicated foreign events readable and relevant has been a common concern of foreign correspondents everywhere. But that task has been particularly challenging at the AP, which prioritizes speed and economy as exemplified by the “AP style” of the inverted pyramid, beginning with the summary lead followed by a ranking of facts in order of diminishing importance (Seo, 2014). The contemporary AP also faces many major challenges, of which technological change, the onslaught of commercialization, and changing perceptions of news reporting are the most important. The Associated Press also performed strongly in two major media businesses,

namely, international TV and the Internet. In 1999, the Associated Press merged with Global Telnet, an international television information exchange organization headquartered in London, England, and established Associated Press TV Service Company. Together with Reuters TV Station, it attracted more viewers for the Associated Press and made great contributions to its business.

The Associated Press has formed the two largest TV news providers in the world. These two institutions provide about 50% of the world's TV news. Since the beginning of the new century, AP has spared no effort in network technical services and successively launched products such as online editing tools, online photo archiving services, and database services. In 2006, the Nielsen Company ranked the fastest-growing Internet brand in the United States, and AP's network was among them. Faced with the impact of the commercialization of contemporary media, The Associated Press has a unique way to deal with it, which is mainly manifested in expanding its global business, changing its traditional service mode, and expanding its new media business and coverage. However, many western media, which have been impacted by commercialization, tend to reduce their international news coverage. On the contrary, the Associated Press has accelerated the pace of global growth against the wind in recent years, not only expanding its global news source in its accredited places but also beginning to make a transition from reporting explosive events to focusing on comprehensive coverage (Liu and Fu, 2009). The Beijing Olympic Games is a good example. Long-term penetration and wide diffusion of information are key if a country's values are to win out in the international community and influence other countries. In other words, only through the depth of information radiation can the values precipitated in people's thinking and behaviour patterns be influenced. If a government tries influence and win public attention internationally after a major event, it needs to use modern media to set agenda and framework and creates public opinion, which are conducive to its own development. Modern media shows the public stories and have the ability to influence the public's position and action on emergencies or major issues when choosing topics and sources, and tendentially providing information and opinions.

3. Conclusion

The modern media is a force to be reckoned with in the field of international political struggle and economic competition. There should be strong capabilities of a nation so that the state can make full use of the social media to influence public policy. Fundamentally speaking, a country's diplomatic ability is determined by its comprehensive national strength. If a country has strong scientific and technological capabilities, its economic strength will inevitably become stronger, which will provide a solid material foundation for the development of its diplomatic activities, thus making it make achievements in the diplomatic arena. If a country lacks scientific and technological strength, its economic capabilities cannot be strong, and its diplomatic performance will inevitably be greatly restricted. On the other hand, if a country has advanced technology, its diplomacy will certainly be greatly improved, and even it will innovate frequently, especially in the field of social media.

In effect, the demonstration of soft power is very important. Modern countries today should inspire patriotism and national identity in citizens, and display own cultural features at a time when modern communication technology is fast changing and mass media is rapidly increasing. Only by constantly advancing with the times and continuously improving national capability as well as soft power and hard power can Chinese people ultimately achieve the great rejuvenation of the nation.

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