Research on National Identity Construction: An Analysis of Narrative Game and Audience Emotional Mobilization on TikTok Short Videos in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of intertwined global digital communication and international geopolitical conflicts, short-video platforms represented by TikTok have become a crucial field for international public opinion games, cognitive confrontations, and national identity construction. Taking TikTok short videos during the Russia-Ukraine conflict as the research object, this study focuses on the issue of national identity construction from the perspective of Generation Z, and systematically explores the visual narrative strategies, discourse game mechanisms, and audience emotional mobilization paths of national identity on short-video platforms. It finds that the decentralized communication structure, algorithm-driven content distribution, and circle-based audience interaction have jointly promoted the transformation of national identity from a single official-led construction to a dynamic reconstruction involving multiple actors. This study aims to reveal the inherent laws of international conflict communication in the digital age, enrich the theoretical connotation of new media international communication and national image research to a certain extent, and provide practical references for improving a country's cross-cultural communication capabilities and responding to international cognitive wars and public opinion games.

Keywords: TikTok, National Identity, Narrative Game, Russia-Ukraine Conflict.

1. Introduction

In an era when the global digital communication landscape is reshaping rapidly, short-video platforms centered on algorithmic recommendation and featured by real-time interaction are transforming the modes of international information flow and the logic of global public opinion formation. As a globally influential short-video social platform, TikTok has gradually evolved from an entertainment-oriented social space into a vital arena for international political games, ideological clashes, and national identity construction. For instance, studies on TikTok as a new field of global political communication note that its algorithm-driven mechanism and fragmented content form have reshaped expressive patterns of global youth culture and turned it into a new digital territory for transnational information flow and geopolitical competition (Chen & Zhang, 2024, p. 15). Research on TikTok's role in national identity construction points out that short-video platforms lower barriers to cross-cultural communication significantly through visual and emotional narrative strategies, making TikTok a key channel for countries to shape soft power and display national images (Wang & Li, 2023, p. 28). Research on TikTok's impact on international public opinion and values argues that its global expansion has exceeded pure entertainment functions and become an important battlefield for international public opinion clashes and ideological competition, profoundly shaping the value perceptions of global audiences (Smith & Johnson, 2025, p. 42). In a reality marked by frequent international conflicts and intensifying geopolitical games, the public opinion, emotional, and political functions carried by short videos have become increasingly prominent, comprehensively impacting and reshaping traditional international communication orders and pathways of national image building.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is not only a practical game of geopolitics but also a full-scale public opinion war, cognitive war, and image war in the digital space. On TikTok, creators from different countries, positions, and identities have produced massive short-video contents around the conflict. These contents are documentary, emotional, and symbolic, and construct biased war narratives and

national images through editing, music, text, and hashtags. Different from the traditional media model of official dominance, professional production, and one-way communication, short-video communication is decentralized, low-threshold, highly interactive, and strongly penetrating. National identity is no longer a single, stable, and officially defined holistic image, but is constantly generated, changed, and reconstructed through discourse struggles, emotional collisions, and cognitive interactions among multiple actors. This shift has not only altered global perceptions of the conflicting parties but also deeply shaped the emotional stances, value judgments, and behavioral choices of global publics, emerging as a key force in digital-era international conflict communication that cannot be ignored.

Accordingly, this study takes TikTok short videos during the Russia-Ukraine conflict as the research object, systematically examines the construction paths, narrative strategies, and discourse game forms of national identity on short-video platforms, deeply analyzes the role of Generation Z in content production, emotional communication, and public opinion mobilization, and reveals the profound impacts of algorithmic environments, visual symbols, and cultural contexts on international conflict communication. Theoretically, this study seeks to enrich the theoretical framework of international communication and national image research in the digital age. Practically, it provides insights for understanding digital public opinion wars in the globalization era, improving cross-cultural communication capabilities, and enhancing national image building. It also lays a foundation for further exploring communication governance and rational dialogue mechanisms for international conflicts in the new media environment.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework: Platform Political Philosophy Beyond Media Instrumentalism

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Limitations of Traditional Theories of International Communication and Public Diplomacy

Traditional theories of international communication and public diplomacy have long been based on the dual frameworks of state-centrism and media instrumentalism, which formed the mainstream paradigm for understanding transnational information flow, national image building, and international public opinion competition for a long time. Under this paradigm, communication is regarded as a rational activity serving national strategic goals, and media are positioned as neutral, transparent, and controllable information channels that deliver official discourse, shape external perceptions, enhance cultural appeal, and strengthen international discourse power. Studies on soft power, public diplomacy strategies, international communication effects, and media framing and agenda-setting mostly take states, governments, official media, or authoritative institutions as communication subjects, view communication paths as top-down one-way output, and focus on cognitive attitude change and identity formation. This theoretical system centered on rationality, authority, linearity, and purpose was highly explanatory in the traditional media-dominated communication landscape and provided important theoretical support for international communication practices of various countries.

However, with the global rise of digital platforms, new communication forms represented by short videos, algorithmic recommendations, and user-generated content have completely changed the generation and operation logic of international public opinion, and the explanatory power of traditional international communication theories has declined significantly. Facing complex international disputes such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, traditional theories cannot explain why massive unofficial, unprofessional, and fragmented short videos can achieve greater public opinion penetration than official releases, why young people prefer algorithm-recommended on-site footage to fact-checks by authoritative media, and how war narratives are constantly restructured, amplified, simplified, and polarized within platforms. Fundamentally, the core limitation of the traditional

paradigm is that it always treats media as external tools and fails to recognize that platforms have become environmental forces that construct reality, define perception, reshape subjects, and reorganize relationships. Platforms no longer merely serve existing political goals but redefine the ways, spaces, and logics of politics.

2.1.2. Visual Culture, the Affective Turn, and Political Communication Research

Visual culture studies and the affective turn in political communication provide critical theoretical supplements for understanding the inherent logic of contemporary war communication and largely break the closed framework of rationalist political communication. Visual politics research clearly states that power operation in modern society increasingly relies on the production and circulation of visual symbols. Major events such as wars, conflicts, and disasters are no longer perceived only through words and languages but through visual elements including images, scenes, bodies, lighting, and angles. Vision is not just a representation of reality but a cutting, screening, restructuring, and construction of reality. It directly shapes how people see the world, draws boundary lines of positions, forms moral judgments, and even constructs new political subjects. In international conflicts, struggles in the visual field are as critical as struggles on the actual battlefield. Whoever dominates visual presentation controls the initiative of public opinion.

At the same time, affect theory reveals the underlying driving forces of political operation at a deeper level and breaks the traditional cognition that takes rationality as the core of politics. Affect is not an irrelevant psychological accessory at the individual level but a collective force with sociality, directionality, and mobilization power. It acts directly on the body prior to cognition, discourse, and logic, forming position-taking, group belonging, and moral boundaries. Emotions such as anger, sympathy, sorrow, fear, and pride are the most direct, fastest, and effective forces driving collective action, constructing communities, and strengthening identity boundaries. In war communication, affect often reaches audiences before facts, completes mobilization before rationality, and forms positions before argumentation. Although visual studies and affect theory have greatly expanded the explanatory boundaries of war communication, existing results mostly stay at the cultural, psychological, and symbolic levels and lack deep integration with platform technologies, algorithmic logic, interface materiality, and traffic mechanisms. Thus, they cannot systematically explain why affect is accelerated, amplified, commercialized, and circulated repeatedly in short-video environments, nor can they reveal the inherent laws that visual content inevitably becomes decontextualized, fragmented, and highly affective under platform mechanisms.

2.1.3. Platform Studies, Algorithmic Power, and Digital Media Philosophy

Platform studies and digital media philosophy reveal the structural, constructive, and operational power of platforms from the perspective of technological materiality, providing a new theoretical foundation for understanding political communication in the digital age. Relevant studies clearly point out that platforms are not neutral, objective, or passive technical tools but comprehensive power devices integrating algorithmic logic, data rules, interface design, interaction modes, business models, and governance norms. Structural factors such as algorithmic recommendation, content ranking, traffic distribution, visibility control, and interaction mechanism design jointly determine what users see, the order of viewing, the ways of participation, and the intensity of feelings. Platforms not only transmit information but organize, filter, strengthen, and construct information environments, thereby shaping social reality, political cognition, and collective perception in a systematic, automated, and hidden manner.

Digital media philosophy further emphasizes the agency and constructiveness of media technology, arguing that media are no longer merely extensions of human senses but external environments that reshape human concepts of time and space, modes of existence, relationship patterns, and cognitive structures. Human understanding of the world no longer comes directly from real experience but increasingly relies on the mediated reality constructed by platforms. Although platform studies have profoundly revealed the power effects of algorithms and data, existing results mostly focus on Western platform contexts or domestic social scenarios. Few integrate algorithmic logic, war

narratives, national identity construction, transnational public opinion games, and youth group behaviors. There is a lack of comprehensive, systematic, and integrated analysis of the operational laws of platform politics in international conflict scenarios. Nor can they fully explain how platform power works together with vision, affect, and participatory culture to shape new forms of war politics.

2.1.4. Media Use and Political Participation Characteristics of Generation Z

As the first generation raised entirely with digital platforms, Generation Z shows distinct characteristics in media use habits, information reception modes, value cognition patterns, and forms of political participation that differ sharply from previous generations. They are true digital natives, accustomed to visual-first, fragmented reception, lightweight reading, and instant feedback. They are naturally alienated from lengthy, serious, rational, and systematic discourses but highly sensitive to images, sounds, rhythms, on-site sensations, and emotional impacts. In terms of information sources, they trust perspectives from peers, on-site participants, ordinary people, and real experiencers more, while maintaining cautious or even skeptical attitudes toward authoritative institutions, official discourses, and professional expositions.

In political participation, Generation Z no longer relies on institutionalized, rational, and in-depth participation modes but turns to affective expression, symbolic identification, online performance, circle resonance, and instant action. Their political participation is low-threshold, highly fluid, strongly affective, weakly ideological, and highly interactive. They can quickly form collective positions, public opinion momentum, and national identity after the outbreak of international conflicts. However, such identity and participation are often based on emotional resonance, visual shocks, and mood congruence rather than systematic knowledge learning and rational judgment. Existing studies often dismiss Generation Z's participation as superficial, entertaining, depoliticized, or formalistic. They seriously ignore the real political efficacy, strong mobilization capacity, and social shaping power of this new participation model in the digital age, and lack systematic theoretical interpretation of this new type of political subject.

Overall, existing studies provide theoretical foundations for this research from multiple dimensions such as international communication, visual politics, affect theory, platform studies, and youth culture, but there are still gaps and deficiencies overall. First, media instrumentalism still dominates. Most studies still regard platforms as communication channels or amplification tools, ignoring the material, operational, and constructive power of platforms themselves and failing to treat platforms as independent political forces. Second, theoretical perspectives are highly fragmented. Key dimensions such as algorithmic logic, visual mechanisms, emotional mobilization, geopolitics, and national identity have not been integrated into a unified analytical framework, leading to partial understandings of war communication. Third, explanations of national identity construction in international conflict scenarios cannot fully reveal the deep mechanisms by which Generation Z forms war perceptions and national identity on short-video platforms. These constitute the theoretical innovation space of this study.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The operational power of platforms refers to the constructive force through which platforms structurally organize and systematically regulate information, subjects, time and space, relationships, and meanings via material elements such as algorithms, interfaces, interaction rules, and data mechanisms. Different from traditional coercive power or symbolic power, operational power does not rely on mandatory orders or ideological persuasion. It shapes users' perceptions, judgments, behaviors, and identities imperceptibly by setting rules, constructing environments, organizing processes, allocating traffic, and controlling visibility. Platforms do not merely transmit content but operate, define, and present reality. They determine what content can be seen, the intensity of dissemination, the ways of interaction, and the logic of reinforcement. In TikTok's communication environment, recommendation algorithms, infinite scrolling, traffic distribution models, like-comment systems, duet functions, and secondary creation tools together form a highly structured, automated, and closed information environment. This environment is not determined by individual

users or entirely controlled by content producers. It shapes people's understandings of war, positions on conflicts, imaginations of nations, and definitions of self-identity in a hidden, smooth, and daily manner. Operational power forms the basis for understanding short-video war narratives, national identity construction, and audience emotional mobilization, and is the core theoretical fulcrum of this study beyond media instrumentalism.

The affective turn of visual politics emphasizes that the core mobilization mechanism of short-video war narratives lies not in the transmission of rational information or persuasion at the cognitive level but in the direct activation and mobilization of bodies and emotions through visual-affective devices. Short videos bypass rational censorship and logical judgment through decontextualized image cutting, strong on-site audio, compact editing rhythms, first-person perspectives, shocking scenes, and symbolic visual elements. They directly act on audiences' senses and bodies and quickly trigger moral emotions such as sympathy, anger, sorrow, pride, and justice. In this process, affect is not an add-on or decoration of content but the core driving force of communication, the real foundation for position-taking, group cohesion, moral valuation, and identity reinforcement. In international conflict communication, emotional mobilization often precedes cognitive judgment, visual expression precedes logical argument, and emotional resonance precedes fact-checking. This constitutes a key path for Generation Z to receive war information, form stances, and construct national identity. Vision and affect are no longer external manifestations of politics but core carriers of political operation, turning war communication from the field of rational persuasion into a domain of affective mobilization.

Theories of memetic communication and meaning guerrilla warfare hold that war narratives in platform environments are not top-down one-way indoctrination or linear transmission. They flow rapidly, mutate randomly, and compete multilaterally in forms such as memes, gags, remakes, duets, secondary editing, soundtrack adaptation, and symbol recombination. Users are no longer passive information recipients but reproducers, disseminators, creative transformers, and critical deconstructors of meaning. Official narratives, folk narratives, overseas narratives, personal narratives, positional narratives, and opposing narratives collide, merge, confront, rewrite, and deform in algorithmic flows, forming continuous and endless meaning struggles and discourse games. In this highly fluid process, national identity is no longer defined by a single authoritative subject or presented in a stable, unified, and serious form. It is constantly reconstructed, performed, amplified, strengthened, and reproduced in participatory culture, showing decentralized, highly mutable, highly interactive, and highly penetrating features. Meaning guerrilla warfare profoundly reveals the dynamic, populist, and game-like nature of platform war narratives and provides an important practical perspective for understanding how Generation Z completes national identity construction through participation.

Overall, the above three theoretical perspectives support and embed each other and jointly form the analytical framework of this study. The operational power of platforms provides the structural environment and operational foundation. The visual-affective mechanism supplies the core mobilization power and perceptual path. Memetic meaning guerrilla warfare offers the specific practical form and meaning production method. Together, they systematically explain how TikTok realizes war narrative game, national identity construction, and audience emotional mobilization in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

3. Mechanism Analysis: Three Logics of TikTok's Reconstruction of War Politics

3.1. Reconstruction of Time: From Historical Narrative to the "Eternal Present"

Through algorithmic recommendation feeds and infinite-scrolling interface design, TikTok has transformed the temporal presentation and perceptual structure of war events. It has completely converted the complete historical narrative emphasized in traditional news into the platform-specific experience of the "eternal present". Traditional news reports follow a linear, complete, coherent, and

causal temporal logic. They stress the origin, background, development, evolution, results, and comments of events and seek to present the full picture of conflicts in historical depth and complex contexts, guiding audiences to make rational, comprehensive, and balanced judgments.

In contrast, short-video platforms are characterized by real-time performance, fragmentation, decontextualization, and circularity. Algorithmic mechanisms automatically eliminate historical contexts, causal relationships, and complex backgrounds of events, retaining only constantly refreshed, pushed, and superimposed on-site clips and shocking moments. As users keep scrolling, they receive continuous latest footage, on-site sounds, real-time updates, and personal accounts. They gain a strong sense of presence, immediacy, and immersion, as if they are on a continuously unfolding battlefield, forming a psychological experience synchronized with the event.

At the same time, highly interactive, emotional, and impactful content is repeatedly captured, recommended, and spread by algorithms. Certain iconic images, emotional clips, and symbolic content reappear continuously, forming high-intensity and closed-loop emotional reinforcement. War is no longer a long historical process with historical roots and complex games but cut into countless highly affective and stimulating independent moments. This structure greatly weakens users' ability to understand complex causality, historical contexts, and multiple perspectives. However, it strengthens emotional shocks, instant expressions, and position-taking with maximum efficiency, turning war communication completely from the field of rational cognition into that of emotional stimulation, from long-term judgment into instant mobilization, and from in-depth understanding into rapid resonance.

3.2. Reconstruction of the Subject: From Political Citizens to Emotional Witnesses

TikTok's interface interaction system and operational logic have fundamentally reshaped users' identity positioning, behavioral patterns, and subject forms in war communication. They have completely transformed users from traditional political citizens who rely on rational thinking, independent judgment, and in-depth participation into emotional witnesses characterized by emotional investment, instant expression, lightweight participation, and performative expression. Minimalist operations such as scrolling up, liking, commenting, collecting, and sharing greatly lower the threshold of political participation. Public participation that originally required time, energy, and reflection becomes ubiquitous lightweight behavior.

In the platform environment, every interaction is no longer a simple mechanical operation but a public registration of position, moral expression, identity confirmation, and social performance. Liking represents approval, commenting represents intervention, sharing represents diffusion, and duetting represents joint voice. All behaviors are endowed with clear political significance under the dual effects of algorithms and social relations. Functions such as national flag filters, background music, and text effects further enable ordinary users to transform grand, distant, and abstract international conflicts into embodied and daily expressions and performances. Users align with war footage, express support, take positions, and comment, turning distant geopolitical events into extensions of self-identity, projections of emotion, and displays of image.

In this process, the status of traditional authoritative sources is continuously weakened. The on-site sensation, authenticity, emotion, and personal expression of ordinary users are more likely to gain traffic support and group recognition. Ordinary people, participants, and creators replace experts, officials, and journalists as important definers and disseminators of war narratives. Users are no longer silent information recipients but deeply embedded in the chain of war communication through emotional, symbolic, and performative participation, becoming indispensable actors in the digital war field.

3.3. Reconstruction of Space: From Geopolitical Territory to Algorithmic Proximity

TikTok's data-driven and interest-recommended algorithmic logic has redefined the spatial relationship and belonging structure between users and war events. Physical space based on traditional geographical boundaries has completely given way to the platform-specific space of

"algorithmic proximity". In traditional international politics and communication patterns, the distance between individuals and events is determined by national affiliation and cultural differences, with clear, stable, and predictable spatial boundaries.

In the platform environment, the relationship between users and war is no longer determined by physical location but jointly shaped by data behaviors such as clicks, dwells, and interactions. Algorithms continuously capture user behaviors and push content consistent with their preferences, positions, and emotions. They constantly strengthen users' existing cognitions and affective tendencies, eventually building a highly closed, homogeneous, and condensed information environment in digital space. Users with similar positions, interests in the same information, and comparable affective structures automatically gather on the platform across geography, boundaries, cultures, and languages, forming virtual but real, loose but cohesive, fluid but firm affective tribes.

In this space, national identity and value preferences no longer rely mainly on traditional education, official propaganda, and institutional discipline. They are constantly stimulated, strengthened, and consolidated in the digital space constructed by algorithms. Physical distance is completely eliminated, cultural differences are continuously weakened, and algorithmic distance becomes new political, identity, and position boundaries. Young people worldwide quickly form cross-regional, highly cohesive, and strongly opposing digital camps on the platform. The game of war narratives has completely shifted from the field of real geopolitics to that of digital geopolitics.

4. Theoretical Dialogue and Critical Reflection

4.1. Key Features of Platformized Conflict

Emotional Capitalization refers to the transformation of users' emotional states—such as mood, empathy, anger, sorrow, and pride—into calculable, recommendable, transmissible, and realizable core resources driven by the combined logic of traffic, data, and commerce on platforms. In the platform ecosystem, traffic and interaction are core criteria for measuring content value. Highly emotional, conflicting, morally tense, and sensorially stimulating content naturally has higher communication advantages and is more likely to gain high likes, comments, shares, and completion rates. Platforms do not directly produce affect but continuously guide, encourage, and amplify the production and diffusion of high-affect content through algorithmic mechanisms, recommendation rules, and traffic allocation. Affect becomes a core commodity for attracting attention, accumulating traffic, and improving activity. During the communication of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, highly emotional content such as war footage, traumatic scenes, heroic narratives, suffering narratives, and opposing narratives are constantly screened, strengthened, and pushed. Affect itself changes from an accessory of politics into core fuel for the platform economy. The flow of affect no longer merely serves public values and moral positions but largely obeys the internal logic of traffic accumulation, user retention, and platform expansion, forming a unique form where affect is captured by capital logic, disciplined by data mechanisms, and organized by platform power.

The Militarization of Attention emerges in a platform environment of information overload and content explosion, where user attention becomes the scarcest, core, and most competitive resource. International conflicts and war narratives gradually evolve into highly fierce, confrontational, and strategic attention contests on platforms. To be seen, remembered, and spread amid massive content, war-related content is forced to adopt more shocking, dramatic, bloody, morally impactful, and positionally confrontational expressions. Content producers continuously intensify visual stimuli, emotional intensity, positional clarity, and symbolic confrontation to seize users' attention, occupy emotional high grounds, consolidate cognitive circles, and exclude opposing information as quickly as possible. This competition for attention shows obvious militaristic features: seizing traffic positions, occupying emotional battlefields, consolidating cognitive defenses, launching public opinion offensives, and forming group encirclements. War communication has completely shifted from traditional information transmission, public discussion, and rational communication to the contest of

attention, confrontation of affect, and siege of cognition. Attention itself is weaponized, militarized, and strategized, becoming the core field of international public opinion games in the digital age.

The Discretization of Authority structurally breaks the traditional monopoly of authority over war narratives, fact definition, and meaning interpretation in the platform environment, realizing the decentralization, populism, and discretization of authority sources. In the traditional communication pattern, governments, militaries, official media, professional journalists, and authoritative institutions monopolize the release, verification, and interpretation of war information. Authority is highly centralized, stable, and legitimate. On short-video platforms, the threshold for information release is minimized. Ordinary people, on-site witnesses, internet celebrities, anonymous users, and grassroots creators can all become information producers, disseminators, and meaning definers. The source of authority no longer depends on identity, status, power, and professionalism but on on-site sensation, authenticity, emotional appeal, circle recognition, and communication penetration. On the one hand, the discretization of authority greatly enhances the discourse power and expression rights of ordinary people, enriches information sources, and breaks information monopolies. On the other hand, it brings problems such as chaotic sources, blurred facts, rumor diffusion, and narrative opposition, making the war public opinion field present a complex state of diversity, chaos, fragmentation, and high game-play. The decline of traditional authority and the rise of populist authority together constitute an important structural feature of platformized war communication.

The Performativity of Participation characterizes users' political participation in TikTok's communication environment as highly performative, demonstrative, and social. Users' behaviors such as liking, commenting, sharing, duetting, adapting, and expressing positions are not only internal expressions of personal attitudes but public performances for circles, others, and social spaces. Participatory behaviors have clear demonstrative, ornamental, social, and identity functions. Their core purpose is to gain recognition within circles, strengthen a sense of belonging, display positional identity, and complete image management. Performative participation has advantages such as low thresholds, fast dissemination, strong appeal, and high mobilization efficiency. It can form large-scale collective actions and strong public opinion momentum in a very short time, becoming an important way for Generation Z to construct national identity. At the same time, performative participation easily leads to superficiality, formalism, peer pressure, and symbolism. Political participation stays at the level of visual symbols and emotional expression without sustained in-depth investment, rational reflection, and long-term action support, forming a participation model of high momentum, low sustainability, strong emotion, and weak thinking.

4.2. The Dilemma of Digital Affective Politics

The Paradox of Empathy arises when platformized affective communication brings large-scale empathy and moral mobilization while falling into a profound paradox with high contradictions and internal tensions. On the one hand, short videos, with strong visual penetration and emotional mobilization, can cross geographical boundaries, cultural differences, and language barriers. They enable a large number of ordinary users to quickly feel genuine sympathy for sufferings, traumas, and victims in the war and pay high attention to the conflict, achieving unprecedented large-scale emotional awakening and moral mobilization. They bring distant wars into the daily life and emotional world of ordinary people. On the other hand, high-speed, high-intensity, fragmented, and circular emotional stimulation continuously consumes users' emotional resources, easily leading to emotional fatigue, empathy numbness, moral weariness, and selective avoidance. When massive traumatic images, suffering narratives, and opposing content are continuously pushed and repeated by algorithms, users may gradually turn from initial shock, sympathy, and anger to numbness, weariness, indifference, and resistance. Short and intense emotional outbursts are often difficult to transform into long-term, stable, sustained, and in-depth moral care and action support. They may even cause reverse indifference and alienation after high-intensity stimulation, forming a paradox: the stronger the empathy, the faster the cooling, the shorter the attention, and the quicker the forgetting.

The Crisis of Truth emerges under the platform logic of visual priority, affective priority, and traffic priority, where objective facts, complete truths, and complex realities are continuously eroded and dissolved, constituting a profound crisis of truth. To pursue communication efficiency, emotional impact, and attention attraction, a large amount of war-related content is deliberately decontextualized, one-sided, exaggerated, and selectively presented. Elements such as filters, soundtracks, editing, angles, rhythms, and subtitles together construct a highly realistic and infectious "experiential truth" rather than a comprehensive, balanced, and rigorous "factual truth". On platforms, users are more likely to trust personal feelings, emotional experiences, and visual intuitions rather than fact-checks, evidence chains, and multiple perspectives. They are more easily persuaded by emotion than by facts and remember images more than backgrounds. This makes truth vague, pluralistic, malleable, and adaptable. Fact-checks are difficult to reach the public in a short time, while false information, one-sided narratives, inflammatory content, and opposing narratives gain communication advantages more easily. The crisis of truth not only erodes the foundation of public discussion but also continuously weakens the possibility of rational dialogue, pluralistic understanding, and complex thinking, trapping the war public opinion field in a dilemma where emotion overwhelms facts, positions overwhelm truth, and performance overwhelms essence.

The four features and two paradoxes above intertwine and eventually point to the fate of the politicization of entertainment. When serious international conflicts, war issues, and geopolitics enter platform communication, they have to obey the communication rules of entertainment, lightweight, performativity, and visualization, thus falling into an inescapable fate of the entertainment of politics. The solemnity, tragedy, historicity, and complexity of war are continuously simplified, compressed, and weakened. Grand geopolitical games, profound interest conflicts, and complex historical roots are transformed into content products available for viewing, consumption, liking, and performance. In-depth thinking gives way to quick responses, rational debate gives way to emotional confrontation, long-term values give way to instant pleasure, and serious politics gives way to entertainment performances. While improving participation, communication power, and youth affinity, the entertainment of politics continuously dissolves the historical weight, moral solemnity, and political profundity of war itself. It gives rise to superficial participation, symbolic action, cynicism, and political nihilism. When war becomes content that can be scrolled, liked, duetted, and performed, the depth, power, and sustainability of public politics are continuously weakened, eventually forming a digital political model of high heat, low thinking, strong emotion, and weak rationality.

5. Conclusion

Taking TikTok short-video communication during the Russia-Ukraine conflict as the research object, this study conducts systematic theoretical and mechanism analyses around Generation Z's national identity construction, war narrative game, and audience emotional mobilization. The study finds that TikTok is not a simple communication tool or information channel but a formative environment with powerful operational power. Through the triple reconstruction of time, subject, and space, it fundamentally changes the production mode of war narratives, the subject form of political participation, the formation logic of national identity, and the operation rules of international public opinion. Based on algorithmic structures, driven by visual-affective mobilization, and practiced through memetic participation, platformized international conflict communication presents key features of emotional capitalization, attention militarization, authority discretization, and participation performativity. This new political model—mediated by platforms, centered on affect, carried by vision, and formalized by participation—has greatly enhanced young people's enthusiasm for political participation, intensity of national identity, and capacity for public opinion mobilization. At the same time, it brings inherent contradictions and dilemmas such as empathy fatigue and the entertainment of politics.

The theoretical contributions of this study are mainly reflected in three levels. First, it breaks the shackles of traditional media instrumentalism, proposes the concept of platform operational power,

reveals the deep constructive role of platforms as environmental forces in war politics, and provides a new theoretical perspective for international communication research. Second, it integrates platform studies, visual politics, affect theory, and participatory culture research to build an integrated analytical framework applicable to short-video international conflict communication, realizing the integration and innovation of theoretical perspectives. Third, it proposes the theoretical direction of digital geopolitical phenomenology, emphasizing the understanding of new war communication from the perspectives of perception, experience, affect, algorithms, and subjective practice. It provides a new knowledge path for understanding Generation Z's national identity, platformized politics, and digital geopolitics.

In an era when digital platforms fully penetrate daily life and reshape human perception, war no longer occurs only on geographical territories, military battlefields, and geopolitics. It also unfolds profoundly in algorithmic recommendations, short-video footage, affective flows, and countless scrolling fingers. The process by which Generation Z watches wars, understands conflicts, expresses positions, performs identities, and constructs national images on platforms represents the formation of a new political form, communication form, and identity form. Understanding the inherent logic, powerful forces, and deep dilemmas of this digital affective politics is not only related to the cognition of the new generation of young people but also to the future of international communication, public diplomacy, geopolitics, and the global public opinion landscape. Facing this irreversible digital trend, only by facing its complexity, contradiction, and transformativeness and maintaining clear rational judgment and profound theoretical consciousness can we find a more constructive and future-oriented thinking direction among technology, affect, politics, and values.

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