The Propagation and Construction of China's National Image in $21^{\rm st}$ Century

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ABSTRACT

As China's international status is more and more uplifted, the active shaping and effective propagation of China's national image has been regarded as an important means to demonstrate China's soft power, demolish the so-called "China Threat Theory", and compete for China's share in international discourse power. This article first makes a discussion on the fundamental concepts and related theories of national image, and then explores the precise positioning of China's image as "a responsible power" and the connotation that should be contained in this image. Finally, this article presents a tactic of "complex propagation" for the shaping of China's national image, which includes the propagation by new media and advertisement, the marketing of international sport games and other international events, public diplomacy and public relations tactics.

Key Words: China, Responsible Power, National Image, Propagation, Construction

21세기 중국 국가이미지의 형성과 전파

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요 약

중국의 국제적인 위상이 높아짐에 따라 국가이미지를 능동적으로 형성하고 이를 국제적으로 홍보 내지 전달하는 것(이를 '국가이미지의 전파'라고 한다)은 '소프트파워'로서의 중국의 위상을 나타내고 '중국위협론'을 타파하며, 국제사회에서의 발언권을 획득하는데 있어서 중요한 방식이다. 본고에서는 우선 국가이미지의 기본개념과 관련이론에 대하여 논의하고 나아가 중국의 '책임있는 대국'으로서의 이미지의 포지셔닝과 함의를 탐색하여 중국 국가이미지 형성을 위한 '입체적 커뮤니케이션'의 대안을 제시하고자 한다. 아울러 '입체적 커뮤니케이션'수단으로 뉴미디어 커뮤니케이션, 광고 커뮤니케이션, 국제적 스포츠 경기 및 중대한 국제적 사건의 마케팅, 공공외교와 공공관계의 발전을 제시하고 있다.

주제어 : 중국, 책임지는 대국, 국가이미지, 전파, 형성

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Introduction

In support of Chinese President Hu Jintao's official visit to U.S., a series of short movies demonstrating China's national image began to be put on show in the Time Square of New York City on January 17, 2011. This series of movies has been operated as a key program by Chinese government for the purpose of shaping and upgrading China's national image as a promising country promoted by expanding prosperity. economic development, democratic progress, and peaceful harmony. In brief, this is an interesting trial made by Chinese government with an attempt to explore new ways of propagation in the new era, which might provide much benefits of helpful experience.

Now in the age of fast expanding globalization, a good national image of a country means a higher level of credibility, a wider and easier acceptance by the outside world, and a more promising prospect for possible international cooperation and joint development. China is now rising as a big power heterogeneously distinctive from those North American and Western European powers. China's state public relations agencies are tremendously concerned with the appropriate way establish a good and correct image of contemporary China, and the proper strategies of national foreign propagation that could achieve sustained effect, so that the world can come to understand a true China. All these points are now articulated into the long-term national development strategy of China.

Fundamental Concepts and Related Theories Concerning National Image

"National Image" has turned out to be a hot topic that becomes more and more popular both domestically and internationally. However, it is quite difficult to draw a very clear and precise definition on the notion of "national image". Hereby the author tries to make a summarizing description on this concept with some quotation from relatively authoritative opinions. The early studies related to this field were initiated by some western scholars. For example, American researcher Martin argued that "national image" should be a multi-dimensional construction that finally forms "a sum descriptive, inductive, and informative beliefs about a specific country" [10]. Balogu thought that the so-called "national image" is "a sum of evaluation based on the cognitions and perceptions of a country, which actually could be viewed as a comprehensive individual impression made from all the factors of variables of that country"[4]. Therefore we might find out that individual observation and experience is the basis on which a "national image" might be built. Kotler and some other scholars offered more specific viewpoints. They hold that "national image is the sum total of an individual's personal experience, understanding, viewpoints, opinions, memories, and impressions over a specific country, including that individual's affection and aesthetic perception"[7].

Many western scholars put "national image" research into the field of brand research, viewing national image as the brand of that country, so they mainly probe the importance of the brand of that country in the commercial competition. Jaffe and other scholars once pointed out that the "country of origin" effect in commerce is the specific reflection of the image established by the brand of that country in common consumers' minds[6]. In their opinion, good images of "country of origin" could bring much greater competitive advantages to enterprises, products, and services, and even shape consumers' attitude and acceptance towards their products and services. Students of the business school of Lingnan University of Hong

Kong had made a special case study on the consumers' attitudes towards air-conditioners respectively produced in China and Japan, taking far-reaching investigations over this case for the factors related to the influence of the image of country of origin over consumers' perceptions on products. They found out that overseas consumers' impressions of a specific country are usually based on information from two aspects: one is their observation of that country, while the other is their insights on the products exported from that country[8].

In recent years, as international community is concentrating their attention on China. Chinese government and academia have become more and more concerned about the research over national image. When Beijing sponsored the 2008 Olympic Games, Chinese people's solicitude and concern over their national image were drastically uplifted to an unprecedented peak. "National Image" was widely recognized by Chinese academia as a detailed reflection of a country's comprehensive national strength and overall influence. Cheng Manli argued that "national image" is normally distilled and refined from its historic heritage with a blending of elements of modernization", which "concentrates all the shining points of that country or nation's spirit and vitality".1) Liu Xiaoyan thought that national image is the "relatively fixed overall appraisal of the general public of the international community over a country, projection of that country's objective conditions in the public opinion, a comprehensive reflection of the impression, viewpoints, attitude, and evaluation of general public over that country, and a sum total of general public's affection and willpower towards that country" [13]. Cui Baoguo and Li Xiguang summarized the concept of national image

as "a comprehensive image of a country recognized by other countries and by the international community, which shows the development levels of that country's politics, economy, culture, and social affairs". In this sense, national image is always closely connected to the public opinion of the community.2) international Li Shouvuan maintained that "national image refers to the outer appearance of as over eighty state and its nation on the international stage, and the response of public opinions from the international surroundings." [12] Therefore reports of press and the mass media is a very important factor that shapes a country's national image. Just as Xu Xiaoge said, national image is "a country's image shaped in the flowing of information created by the press, or in another word, an image of a country presented by news reports of other countries' press and mass media."[14]

Theoretic research concerning national image could be divided by two different analytical paths: the path of "reflection theory" and the one of constructivism. "Reflection Theory" fundamental theory about the cognitions and perceptions of human beings, and at the same time a basic tool for people to perceive and understand the whole world. Following the research path of culturalism, the traditional opinions of the reflection theory recognize the roles of domestic factors in the shaping of national image, such as political culture, economic development, historical experience, geographical positions, and so on, arguing that the uniqueness of the national image of each country is determined by the uniqueness of that country's domestic variables, and not at all affected by external context of the international community, such as values, cultural perceptions, and standards of activities[15].

¹⁾ Manli Cheng, "Mass Media and Shaping of National Image". http://media.people.com.cn/GB/40628/5815856.html

²⁾ Baoguo Cui and Li Xiguang, "Japan's Image on Media: Analysis over News Reports by Chinese Newspapers on Japan 1990-2000", in Journal of Colloquia for the 2nd Session of China-Japan Symposium on Communication.

Constructivist theory argues that international structure is not only a material phenomenon, but also a perceptual one. It holds that, outside the material world, there is a perceptual world that contains actors' explanations and understandings over its surroundings. In a process of continuous interaction, certain "viewpoints" and "attitudes" will be established in different countries, which are actually the shaping factors of a national image. Therefore constructivists hold that the national image is not born domestically and naturally, but constructed in the process of long-term and sustained interaction between that actor and other actors in the international system. In this sense, national image is a relation-type concept. In brief. constructivism attaches great importance to the constructivist role of the interaction process of international actors in the shaping of national image.

The Positioning and Connotation of China's Image as "A Responsible Power"

The image of "a responsible power" is the strategic objective specially designed for China's national image. The connotation of this objective can be divided into two levels: the domestic level and the international level. The domestic level of connotation means the portrait of a healthily and steadily developing China that can continuously demonstrate to the international community a shining image of an independent and harmonious country promoting reform and opening, maintaining stability and solidarity, and making enormous progress driven by the rule of law. The international level of connotation means a sustained advocating of the concept of harmonious world, an observation of international law and principles of

international relations, and a sincere effort to maintain world peace for the promotion of joint development. These two mutually integrated levels of connotation together prop up an image of a responsible big power. and illuminate fundamental path for the shaping of China's national image, the path that starts from the basis of China's harmonious development and extends along China's endeavor to promote harmonization of the world, in which China's image a responsible power can be gradually constructed.

The first theme of the design for the strategic objective of China's national image, is the domestic level of connotation of it, which needs some further clarification. In brief, on the domestic level, China's image is a socialist country characterized by independence, self-determination, reform and opening, stability and unity, and enormous progress driven by rule of law.

First, it is necessary to make some explanation on the national image of independence and self-determination. On the eve of the establishment of People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong declared to the whole world that: "China must obtain independence and must gain liberation. China's affairs must be determined and handled by Chinese people themselves, and imperialist countries are not allowed to make any further intervention into China's affairs." 3)In the field of domestic affairs, Chinese government scrupulously chooses the proper path of development, the appropriate system of economic operation, and the suitable political institutions, with an adherence to the principle of independence and self-determination. It maintains and develops the precious heritage of China's traditional culture, and promotes various causes of economy, politics, military, and culture by its own

efforts. with an objection to anv foreign interference into China's domestic affairs. Deng Xiaoping pointed out: "Chin's affairs must be handled bv Chinese people themselves accordance with China's domestic conditions. Any foreign country should not wishfully think that China will become their protectorate or dependent vassal, and should never expect China to swallow bitter consequence of foreign countries' decision to offend or damage China's interest."4) In the field of international affairs, Chinese government handles diplomatic relations from the viewpoint of China's own interest, dealing with all kinds of international affairs by a sincere observation on the principle of and self-determination, so as to independence consolidate "our image of independence. self-determination, undaunted upright towards any vicious force, and fearlessness before any ghost or demon".5)

Second, China's national image of reform and opening needs to be further clarified. Reform and opening has been viewed as a necessary and preliminary condition for the sustained and healthy development of China. and an important characteristic of China's image as a modern country. It could be completely concluded that "reform and opening is the most outstanding and prominent feature of China in the new era"[11] and even the most important label stuck to China's national image in the new era. Furthermore, China's transparency towards the outside world has also been continuously increased due to more frequent and even closer interaction between China and the international community against the background of China's reform and opening, so a progressive image of China full of vibrating energy and quick development can be seen and acquainted more easily by the world. A China seeking development in the process of reform and opening is much easier to be accepted by the international community and foreign countries than a highly mysterious China totally cut off or isolated from the outside world.

Third. China's national image contains connotation of stability and solidarity, because it is the basis to support China's motive to step onto the stage of East Asia region and even the arena of the whole world. An internally disintegrated country split by political turmoil can never gain a stable status in the international community, nor can it win any respect from the world and foreign countries. Moreover, it might be enslaved and exploited by hegemonic countries, not to mention its incapability to take any responsibility for the international affairs. "Owning such a huge population and such a weak basis of economic development, China can never be blessed with anything without a political atmosphere of stability and solidarity, nor can it achieve anything without a tidy social order. So all in all, maintenance of China's stability is the top priority that overwhelms else."6) At the same time, China's anvthing maintenance of stability and solidarity could be interpreted not only as a great contribution to the welfare of itself, but also as a deed of taking reasonability for the peace and stability of East Asia region and even the whole world. "What might happen if China fell into turmoil and upheaval? Firstly the Asia-Pacific region, an area that enjoys the most promising prospect of prosperity, will be severely influenced. China's domestic turmoil and upheaval will develop into a worldwide catastrophe. Therefore China can not make itself fall into turmoil. Such a sober attitude means that China takes responsibility not only for itself, but also for all the human beings of the

⁴⁾ Anthology of Deng Xiaoping, Vol.3, People's Publishing House, 1993, P. 3.

⁵⁾ Ibid. P. 320.

⁶⁾ Anthology of Deng Xiaoping, Vol.3, People's Publishing House, 1993, P.331.

world." 7)

Fourth, the connotation of enormous progress driven by the rule of law should be constructed into China's national image. A country with relatively complete and sound system of rule of law is usually much easier to be accepted and recognized by the international community. However, burdened by ancient China's experience as an agrarian civilization lasting for over 2,000 years, modern China inherited a negative historic heritage of rule by powerful personnel and rule by morality, with apparent lack of tradition of rule of law. In order to be effectively integrated into the tide of worldwide modernization and economic globalization, and to push the reform and opening for a tremendous development of market economy, China must establish its own system of rule of law and construct a national image of a country operated by the rule of law, which is a preliminary condition for China's development in the future. On the 15th National Congress of Chinese Communist Party, the authorities established the strategic objective of "ruling the country in accordance with law and constructing a socialist country operated by the rule of law". Since then, China's process of adjusting itself towards rule of law has been gradually accelerated. A connotation of enormous progress driven by rule of law is an indispensible content of China's image of a modern country. which will not only help to optimize China's social environment for foreign investment, but also offer precious assistance to China's effort to gain recognition and trust from international community.

The second theme of the design for the strategic objective of China's national image is the international level of connotation of it. On the international level, the strategic objective is to establish an image of a big power that observes

the international law and principles of international relations, endeavors to protect world peace, and promotes the joint development of the whole world.

First, some points need to be mentioned on the image of a big power that respects and observes international law and principles of international relations. Widely regarded as a set of fundamental rules. standards. and institutions adjusting international relations, the international law and principles of international relations have formed a major mechanism and a complex system that maintains the world order. So China shall observe them since China has already become highly involved into international affairs. At present, China has participated into over 300 international pacts and treaties[16]. In accordance with these treaties and pacts, China enjoys extensive rights, and at the same time, takes extensive obligations and duties.

Second. China should make an effort construct its image as a builder of international order with a strong motive to get integrated into the international community. The degree of a country's involvement into international system to some extent means that country's capacity of handling international affairs and its image in the world. A real big power of world-level, both in history and in reality, cares very much about its own participation into various mechanisms and systems of the international community. "Among all the acceptable traits of the major world powers, there is the trait of active participation into international mechanism, which recognize mutual interdependence as an objective reality in the international relations, and the new possibility of exerting some restraints on national sovereignty for the resolution of some global issues."[1] Since early 1990s, China has fundamentally changed its

previous suspicion and distrust on multilateral mechanisms.⁸⁾ It began to actively participate into them, and later even initiates some specific multilateral mechanisms for its own region. Among activities of China's active the various involvement into and initiation of multilateral mechanisms, the most outstanding issues, which attracts most attention of the world, include China's participation into WTO, its construction of its relation with ASEAN, and the establishment of Shanghai-5 Cooperative Organization together with Russia. China's initiative and active involvement into international organizations contribute greatly to China's image as a builder of international order for the international community. In this way, China increases its legitimacy inside the existing international system and gains much more recognition over its identity of a big power.

Third, some points of explanation are devoted to China's image as a big power with confidence and openness. It is obvious that China becomes more and more self-confident and open-minded in the international community due to the increase of China's comprehensive national strength and the uplifting of its international status. Particularly. China has changed its passive and tacit image through a series of active and potent campaigns of diplomacy, and gradually established its new image as a confident and open power in the international community. For a country like China, who wants to play an active role in international affairs, it is necessary to build such a national image based on its own strength and its psychology of taking responsibility for the international community.

Fourth, China should build its image of a power

protecting world peace. Deng Xiaoping once said: "China's development is a part of the growth of the strength that protects the world peace and restrains the possibility of war. It is important for us to establish our image as a strength promoting peace and restraining war. It is a truth that we are going to play this role in international affairs ."9) Now China takes an active part in the international peace-keeping actions within the UN contributing framework, greatly to the establishment of China's image as a big power protecting regional stability and world peace. Moreover, whenever some natural disasters occur, or some other kind of humanitarian crisis breaks out. China always offers selfless aid to the international community. Its aid has never been attached with any political conditions, solely for the purpose of alleviating disaster-stricken areas from predicament.¹⁰⁾

Fifth, the connotation of China's national image of a big power should also contain the meaning of a promotion on the joint development with all the countries. International community's foreign cooperation and support is an indispensible strength pushing China's development, while at the same time China's development can promote the prosperity and development of both East Asia region and the whole world. In its versatile practices of diplomacy, China pays great attention to the principle of joint development, regarding it as one of the most important principle for handling China's relations with most countries and regions of the world. In consideration of this principle, China endeavors to integrate its own development with regional prosperity and the benefits of

⁸⁾ In Alastair Iain Johnston's view, China is more integrated into, and more cooperative within, regional and global political and economic systems than ever in its history. Yet there is growing uneasiness in the United States and the Asia-Pacific region about the implications of China's increasing economic and military power.

⁹⁾ Anthology of Deng Xiaoping, Vol.2, People's Publishing House, 1993. P. 128.

¹⁰⁾ China's aid policy in recent years has aroused much controversy in western countries. The U.S. criticized that cash-flush China has made major diplomatic and economic inroads in mostly resource-rich nations in Africa and Latin America, and Pacific Islands by giving aid without imposing any conditions.

international community, for the purpose of mutual complements and common benefits, so that the objective of joint development can be achieved.

Tactic of "Complex Propagation" for China's National Image

"Complex Propagation" refers to a series of mutually integrated and mutually supportive methods of propagation, publicity. which transfer multi-level communication. information to targeted audience through pluralized activities of propagation and publicity supported by facilities of multi-media. The complex propagation of China's national image means an effective transfer of information related to the strategic objective of China's national image in accordance with the complex methodology and theories of complex propagation, so as to make people perceive and interpret China's national image in a more comprehensive and more profound manner. Only through an overall complex of versatile means of communication and marketing, can national image establish its deep roots in the minds of targeted audience. because the information elements (including written words, spoken words, cognition obtained by sensory organs, activities, symbolic marks, and beliefs, etc) that construct the overall national image are usually complicated and diverse. Hereby the author concentrates his discussion on some of the normal tactics of propagation and publicity, including propagation by new media. propagation by advertisements, marketing campaign, public diplomacy, and state public relations.

4.1 Propagation by New Media

The emerging of new media, which are usually digitalized, multi-leveled, simultaneous with the actual activities, and mutually interacted, drastically change people's manner of receiving and

exchanging information, and tremendously increase people's participation into their surroundings of the real society. The new media can not only transfer information instantaneously, but also establish an effective bridge of mutual interaction between transferor and transferee. In pace with continuous development of information technology, the new media expands with each passing day. Novel forms of the new media, such as internet, cellular phone, live broadcast satellite, and mobile television, appear in real life one by Unprecedentedly convenient. forms of communication, such as mobile phone message, on-line chat, blog, and podcast, become more and more popular. All these new forms of media have not only stimulated new waves of innovation over activities of propagation, publicity. and also transformed common communication. but people's lifestyles and perceptions. So the new media is bringing unique advantages into the propagation of national image.

Take internet for example. It provides a space of pluralized international stage for public opinion, therefore more and more people begin to enjoy their own discourse power, and the channels of cross-cultural publicity and communication become more fluent with less and less obstructions. Viewed from the perspective of dissemination of news and information, the broad coverage and instantaneousness of websites of news and press is playing a role that cannot be replaced by traditional media of newspapers and other forms of press. The information dissemination on internet has consolidated the role of international publicity and communication, and provided an arena of fair game for all kinds of soft power of diverse countries.

4.2 Propagation by Advertisement

the effort to make а transnational dissemination of a country's national image. advertisement, one of the major sources that people can rely on to obtain information related to a national image, has been regarded as a powerful tool that can be widely used to construct a national image. As a common means of effective propagation. publicity. and communication. advertisement can help a country to establish the basis of its national image in foreign media, so that its image can be perceived by international audience and its fame can be quickly uplifted.

Advertisement has been widely employed as an effective and efficient means to promote a country's image. In Asia, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore have already regarded advertisement as an important means to advertise and promote their respective national images. In recent years, South Korea has targeted China as a focusing point for their strategic promotion of national image, broadcasting versatile tourism advertisements on various Chinese media, with an aim to implement their national strategy of propagating their national image through the promotion of cultural and sightseeing industries.

4.3 Marketing of International Sport Games and Other International Events

Sponsorship of international sport games and other international event needs to be supported by governmental investment and common people's participation. In this way, a country's national image can be fully demonstrated during the process of offering service to foreign people in these games and events. Participants and guests of these games and events could be deeply impressed at that

country's capacity of supplying resources, its excellent level of offering services, and other details of its services.

The sponsoring and operation of an international sport games could become a focus of both worldwide media and common people's attention. Take South Korea for another example. South Korean government and media spent large amounts of energy and resources in the sponsoring and operation of Olympic Games of 1988 and World Football Match of 2002 for the purpose of demonstrating their national image on these two games, and managed to uplift and publicize South Korea's reputation in a very short period. The successful sponsorship of Beijing Olympic Games of 2008 could be viewed as a success of public relations for China's national image, which greatly improved China's image and uplifted China's status in the minds of foreign people.

In recent years, marketing campaign has been widely used as a means of market promotion and a communication method of public relations in the propagation of national image. For example, a series of publicity of "Chinese Culture Festival" in the title of "China's Age", which was initiated by the activities in celebration of Chinese Spring Festival, were consecutively put on show in 13 cities all around UK. This "Chinese Culture Festival" lasted for 6 months and pushed a huge wave of enthusiasm over Chinese culture in UK.

4.4 Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is a special means employed by a country's government to influence and persuade people of foreign countries through a set of techniques of outward information propagation and foreign cultural exchanges. Its purpose is to create an international environment that is friendly and beneficiary to that country, so that the national interest of that country can be maximized. Public diplomacy is ubiquitous on the occasions of international communications and exchanges, ranging from magnificent international events and campaigns (such as Olympic Games and World Exposition) to minor exchanges and communications with common foreigners.

Public diplomacy is a special form of diplomacy mainly operated by influential non-governmental personages and non-governmental organizations and agencies of a country, whose core mission is to disseminate information to foreign audience, exchange ideas with foreign people, and influence foreign public opinions, so as to effectively strengthen that country's political influence and cultural charm to foreign countries.

Public diplomacy institutions professionalized in the publicity and dissemination of national culture have been playing a more and more significant role for the shaping of national image. For example, U.S. Education Exchange Center, British Education Committee, German Goethe Institute, and Koran Cultural Institute, which already established their branches in Beijing, have established widespread influences over China's cultural exchanges with these countries. China's Confucius Institutes in various countries are also playing the similar role.

Foreign aid and assistance is also an active form public of diplomacy. Particularly, timely aid to countries stricken by extremely which enormous disasters. can demonstrate philanthropic spirit of humanitarianism and charity, can win praises and compliments of other countries if they are widely reported by local media, and create an advertisement effect that propagates that country's image.

4.5 Public Relations Tactics

A successful shaping of a national image also needs good public relations. Public relations are a set of means and techniques of propagation and dissemination used by a social organization to promote mutual understanding and mutual adaptation between the general public and itself. Social organization is the major player of public relations, media is the most important means of dissemination and communication, and general public is the major target. The purpose of public relation is to help a specific social organization to coordinate with communicate. and other organizations and general public so that it can obtain more information and establish a good and positive image that can be widely accepted by the general public.

The core value and central concept of and communication are usually dissemination regarded as the basis and guarantee for a successful case of public relations, on which all the affairs of public relations should be concentrated. The central concept of Beijing Olympic Games of 2008 was defined as "Green Olympics, Scientific Olympics, and Humanitarian Olympics". All the public relations work was organized and extended to support and demonstrate this central concept, finally creating an image of "New Beijing and New Olympics" that gained extensive recognition and support of the international community.

Public crisis management is a specific embodiment of governmental capability, and also an important focusing point for the presentation of governmental image and even national image. During the crisis, government's relations with general public and media could be interpreted as special public relations in special period. Further expansion and continuation of public crisis, if they

actually occur, pose strong challenges to the public relations capability of a government. Therefore effective tactics of public crisis management can help to promote timely communication of important information, construct a positive guidance over public opinion, coordinate various relations, and finally contribute to the repair and re-shaping of the image of government.

Conclusion

This paper mainly discusses the details of the connotation of China's national image of a responsible great power, and explores the feasible tactics for the shaping and propagation of such image. In a fundamental sense, China's national image should be shaped in accordance with its long-term development strategy, and constructed from a strategically far-sighted point of view. So the shaping of China's national image should be regarded as a grand project that will last for several decades and must be supported by practical strategies specially designed to demonstrate China's national and state characteristics. The propagation, publicity, and dissemination of China's national image should be precisely guided by the strategic positioning of such an image, and operated through a series of methods of complex propagation that can combine the diverse effects of versatile medias and publications.

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