

# *Personalized Social Media Communication Practices of Institutional Representatives*

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**Abstract.** In recent years, some diplomats have opened accounts on social media in their personal capacity, and their content strategies and audience responses still lack empirical investigation. This study takes the personal Weibo account of the Japanese Ambassador to China, Akira Kenji, as the object, and uses a combination of content analysis and audience sentiment type analysis to systematically encode and classify 329 posts and 1560 comments issued by the account from April 2024 to July 2026. The purpose is to examine its content strategy characteristics and audience sentiment tendencies. The findings are as follows. First, the posts cover five themes, with the highest proportion of food shops (32.2%) and the highest average interaction volume for festival cultural experiences. Second, positive comments accounted for 91.7%, and negative comments accounted for only 0.8%. Third, there are significant thematic differences in the distribution of negative comments: the negative proportion of diplomatic official activities is 11.6%, and that of food shops is only 0.3%. The above findings show that the personalized communication strategy characterized by daily and depoliticized content can effectively reduce the negative expression of the audience and create space for interaction at the folk level.

**Keywords:** Personalized communication, social media, content analysis, audience sentiment

## **1. Introduction**

According to the soft power theory proposed by Nye [1], countries can influence other countries through attractiveness, such as culture and values, rather than coercive means. This concept is widely used to understand the operational logic of public diplomacy, and this paper also uses it as an analytical framework. In recent years, with the popularity of social media platforms around the world, the channels and forms of international communication are undergoing profound changes. Social media, represented by Weibo, has not only become the main carrier of public daily information acquisition and social interaction, but has also gradually become one of the channels for embassies and consulates to carry out international communication. The official accounts of diplomatic agencies usually publish information in the name of the agency, and there is a certain distance in communication and identity from the public.

In this context, a phenomenon worthy of attention has emerged: some diplomats have begun to open personal accounts on social media platforms, interact directly with the public of the target country, showing several characteristics worth examining in the form of communication. The

personal Weibo account of Japanese Ambassador to China Akira Kenji is a typical case of this phenomenon. Since the account was opened in April 2024, it has attracted considerable attention in less than three years. The interaction in its comment area has also maintained a high degree of activity and shown a positive trend, forming an empirical space worthy of further investigation in light of the findings of existing research on audience reactions to Japanese-related content on Chinese social media [2].

Based on the above, this study takes the personal Weibo account of Akira Kenji as the research object and examines two issues: the content characteristics of the account posts and the emotional type of audience interaction in its comment area. To solve these two issues, this study aims to answer two research questions: (1) What kind of content strategy features does the personal Weibo account of the Japanese ambassador to China, Akira, have? (i.e., What type of content did he post?) (2) What is the emotional tendency of the audience's comments on Akira's Weibo posts? (i.e., What is the emotional composition of the comment area? Are there any differences in the comment areas of different types of posts?) By answering the above questions, this study attempts to provide an empirical basis for understanding the communication strategies and audience responses in the practice of personalized social media.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Theoretical basis of personalized communications**

The theoretical basis of personalized communication is mainly derived from the two-level communication theory of Katz and Lazarsfeld, that is, information is often received by opinion leaders first and then spread to the general public [3]. As a public communicator with official status, Akira, the Governor, carries out personalized communication practice through Weibo and plays a high role in information diffusion in social media communication networks. Shi et al.'s empirical research based on 8.52 million Weibo user data further shows that the influence of cross-domain voice "generalist" personal accounts is significantly stronger than that of single-domain experts [4].

### **2.2. Differences between personal accounts and institutional accounts**

Existing research has revealed the essential differences between personal accounts and institutional accounts. Palosaari et al. used Twitter data to find that there are systematic differences in activity, connectivity, and retweet network structure between institutional accounts and personal accounts. Institutional accounts are as unified and stable as a "bulletin board," and personal accounts are as flexible and friendly as "real people" [5]. Jin Miao concluded that the "daily content" of personal accounts may have more communication advantages than the "stylized statement" of institutional accounts [6], but this inference still lacks an empirical test. However, there is a paradox in personalized communication: it may weaken the "rational authority" of institutions while narrowing the distance with the audience through emotional connection [7]. Its theoretical basis can be traced back to Shah's classic discussion on the effect of expression, that is, the public's expression behavior itself will reverse-shape its cognitive framework, rather than only reflecting existing attitudes [8]. The Weibo diplomacy evaluation framework proposed by Zhong Xin and Huang Chao examines the dimensions of posting theme, interaction degree, communication influence, and emotional tendency [9]. However, the framework is designed for institutional accounts and cannot be directly used to evaluate individual accounts. The above research shows that the research conclusions of institutional accounts cannot be simply applied to personal accounts. At present, most of these findings come

from the Western context, and there is still a lack of special comparison between the two types of accounts in the cross-cultural context of China and Japan.

### 3. Japan's social media practice of cross-cultural communication

In terms of Japan's social media practice of cross-cultural communication with China, the existing research mainly focuses on institutional accounts. Bjola and Jiang pointed out that the core of new public diplomacy is to achieve two-way interaction, public participation, and decentralization through social media, which is different from the traditional one-way propaganda model [10]. Marini's analysis of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's YouTube channel found that its audience interaction was generally low [11]. Zhang observed the paradox of the "expression effect" in the context of Chinese social media: users' impression of Japan becomes better when browsing Japanese information, but they are more likely to have negative attitudes when commenting and retweeting [2]. The existing research not only confirms the potential advantages of personalized communication [6] but also reveals the negative effects of audience expression behavior [2]. In the context of the complicated bilateral relations between China and Japan, the phenomenon that Akira obtains relatively positive audience interaction on Chinese social platforms with daily content and the existing research findings constitute an empirical space that needs further investigation.

Based on the above literature, the existing research reveals the limitations of institutional communication, the theoretical advantages of personalized content, and the paradox of the "expression effect." However, there is still a lack of systematic investigation into the accounts operated by diplomats in their personal identities, and whether there is also a paradox of the expression effect in their comment areas has not been tested. The difference between personal accounts and institutional accounts also remains in Western cases. Therefore, this study takes the personal Weibo account of the Japanese ambassador to China, Akira Kenji, as the object, and uses the methods of content analysis and audience emotion type analysis to examine the above research gaps.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Research objects and data sources

The object of this study is the personal Weibo account of the Japanese ambassador to China, Akira Kenji (@Akira Kenji). The account was opened in April 2024 and had been in operation for about 27 months by the time of data collection, with about 270,000 fans.

The comment data comes from the comment area of the above 329 posts. Due to the extremely uneven distribution of the number of comments on each post (the number of comments on a single post varies from dozens to hundreds) and the total number of comments exceeds the manual coding ability, this study adopts a hierarchical random extraction method: the comment area of each post is sorted according to the order of comment release time and the comments are extracted equidistantly according to the proportion of 10% -30% of the total number of comments on the post. For posts with a small number of comments, the extraction ratio is taken as the upper limit of 30%; for posts with a large total number of comments, the lower limit of the extraction ratio is 10%, and a total of 1560 comments are finally extracted. The extraction scope covers each topic post to ensure that the comments of each content topic have representative samples.

The account is selected as the research object based on the following considerations: Akira is the first Japanese ambassador to China to operate social media under a personal name system, and the

account still maintains a high degree of interactive activity in the context of complex cases.

## 4.2. Data analysis

This study used both content analysis and thematic analysis. The content analysis was used to systematically describe the content type, presentation form, and interaction characteristics of Akira's Weibo posts in response to research question (1). The unit of analysis is a single post by Akira Kenji. The coding dimensions include content theme (gourmet restaurants, festival cultural experience, diplomatic and official activities, personal life sharing, other), presentation form (pure text, pictures, videos, mixed text and pictures), and interaction volume (likes, comments). All posts were independently coded by the researchers, and doubtful categories were repeatedly compared and confirmed during the coding process.

To analyze the audience's emotional type, this study used thematic analysis to examine the distribution of emotional tendencies in the comment area in response to research question (2). The analysis unit is a single comment in the comment area of the post. The sentiment classification of this study refers to the positive/neutral/negative method commonly used in social media sentiment analysis [12], and divides the comments into the following three categories: positive comments refer to the expression of positive attitudes such as love, support, fun, or appreciation. Neutral comments refer to objective statements, questions, or non-emotional content; negative comments refer to content that expresses negative attitudes such as criticism, ridicule, questioning, or dissatisfaction.

All comments were classified by researchers one by one according to the unified coding scheme. To test the internal consistency of the classification criteria, the researchers randomly selected 10% of the comments (156) from the samples. Two weeks after the first classification, the same batch of samples was retested. The Cohen's  $\kappa$  of the two classifications reached 0.90, indicating that the classification results had high stability. Then all the remaining samples were annotated.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Content analysis

There are differences in engagement levels across posts on different themes (Table 1). Posts on festive cultural experiences had higher average numbers of "likes" (approximately 310) and comments (approximately 52) than those on other themes, indicating that cultural experience content is most effective at stimulating audience participation. Although posts on dining and restaurant reviews were the most numerous, their engagement levels were moderate (approximately 265/48); meanwhile, engagement levels for posts on diplomatic and official activities were relatively low (approximately 185/28), which may be related to the formal nature of the content and the sensitivity of the topics covered.

Table 1. Distribution of content theme

| content theme                        | number of articles | proportion |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| food exploration                     | 106                | 32.2%      |
| festival-related cultural experience | 71                 | 21.6%      |
| diplomatic and official events       | 66                 | 20.0%      |
| personal life sharing                | 48                 | 14.6%      |

Table 1. (continued)

|        |     |        |
|--------|-----|--------|
| others | 38  | 11.6%  |
| total  | 329 | 100.0% |

As shown in Table 2, video and image-text hybrid formats accounted for over 98 percent of the total, whilst text-only posts made up just 1.5 percent. Visual content dominated, with video-text hybrid formats accounting for the highest proportion (50.8 percent), slightly higher than image-text hybrid formats (47.7 percent). This indicates that the account has consciously prioritized video storytelling in its content presentation to enhance the intuitiveness and impact of its messaging.

Table 2. Distribution of presentation formats

| presentation format | number of articles | proportion |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| image-text mix      | 157                | 47.7%      |
| video-text mix      | 167                | 50.8%      |
| pure text           | 5                  | 1.5%       |
| total               | 329                | 100.0%     |

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Table 3. Average engagement for posts on different themes

| content theme                | average likes | average comments |
|------------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| food exploration             | ≈ 265         | ≈ 48             |
| festival cultural experience | ≈ 310         | ≈ 52             |
| Diplomatic Official Events   | ≈ 185         | ≈ 28             |
| Personal Life Sharing        | ≈ 220         | ≈ 35             |
| Others                       | ≈ 130         | ≈ 18             |

## 5.2. Analysis of audience emotional types

The sentiment distribution of comments is overwhelmingly positive, with positive comments accounting for over 90 percent (91.7 percent) and negative comments accounting for just 0.8 percent (Table 4). There is more than a hundred-fold difference in volume between positive and negative comments, indicating that the overall atmosphere in this account's comments section is friendly. Neutral comments account for 7.5 percent and consist mainly of factual queries or objective statements.

Table 4. Overall distribution of audience sentiment

| sentiment type | number of comments | proportion |
|----------------|--------------------|------------|
| positive       | 1431               | 91.7%      |
| neutral        | 117                | 7.5%       |
| negative       | 12                 | 0.8%       |
| total          | 1560               | 100.0%     |

Positive comments mostly expressed appreciation of the account holder's personal style and positive expectations for people-to-people exchange; neutral comments were largely questions or statements about specific post content.

Negative comments were rare (0.8%) and generally not directed at the account holder; most were users' emotional expressions on topics related to historical memory and cultural identity. Following the ethical norms of social media research (anonymization and paraphrasing rather than verbatim quotation), original comments are summarized thematically rather than reproduced.

Table 5. Comparison of audience sentiment distribution across different content themes

| content theme                      | number of comments | proportion of positive comments | proportion of neutral comments | proportion of negative comments |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| food exploration                   | 632                | 94.6%                           | 5.1%                           | 0.3%                            |
| festival-cultural experience       | 372                | 93.0%                           | 5.9%                           | 1.1%                            |
| diplomatic and official activities | 311                | 87.8%                           | 10.6%                          | 11.6%                           |
| personal life sharing              | 159                | 91.2%                           | 8.2%                           | 0.6%                            |
| others                             | 86                 | 80.2%                           | 19.8%                          | 0.0%                            |

There were significant differences in the proportion of negative comments across posts on different themes (Table 5). Posts relating to diplomatic and official activities had the highest proportion of negative comments (11.6 percent), whilst those about dining and restaurant reviews had the lowest (0.3 percent), a difference of nearly 40-fold. The proportion of negative comments for posts on festive cultural experiences (1.1 percent) and personal life updates (0.6 percent) was also extremely low. This disparity suggests that the closer the content of a post is to official roles and political issues, the more likely it is to trigger negative emotional responses from the audience;

conversely, everyday, depoliticized content can effectively lower the audience's psychological defenses.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Cross-domain content strategy and its significance

According to the definition of Shi et al., a generalist individual refers to an account with content output in three or more different fields [4]. Akira's posts cover five theme categories: food exploration shop, festival cultural experience, diplomatic official activities, personal life sharing, and others. Each category maintains a certain number of publications, without a single theme monopoly, so it conforms to the generalist characteristics of cross-domain and multi-theme.

The research of Shi et al. also shows that the influence of cross-domain voiced personal accounts is higher than that of single-domain experts in most fields [4]. Akira's post has high coverage, and audiences who pay attention to food, travel, and Japanese culture can find interesting content, which is in contrast to Marini's discovery of the official YouTube channel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: the latter's content is highly unified in the theme of institutional publicity, and the overall level of audience interaction is low [11]. This comparison shows that the content diversity of personal accounts may make up for the coverage limitations of institutional communication to a certain extent. It is worth noting that, according to Kyodo News, Akira's Weibo is planned by the embassy team every week, and the content is consciously expanded around multiple themes [13]. Therefore, this means that the "generalist" features observed here are not the accidental result of personalization, but a strategically organized act.

### 6.2. Commentary on emotional tendency and its paradox

This study found that the positive comments in the comment area of Akira accounted for the majority, and the negative comments were very few. Thematically, negative comments were mainly associated with historical memory and cultural-identity-related topics, and largely took the form of discussion among users rather than reactions to the post content itself. In addition, negative comments are mostly focused on blog posts on topics such as history, political diplomacy, etc., while there are few negative comments on food and restaurant blog posts, which indicates that daily life content has a clear advantage in reducing negative interaction. This finding is not completely consistent with the "expression effect" paradox observed by Zhang in the context of Chinese social media. Zhang found that users are more likely to have negative attitudes when they actively comment on and forward Japanese-related information [2]. According to Zhang's reasoning, as Japan's ambassador, there should be a certain proportion of negative or questionable comments in the comments section of Akira Kenji. However, the empirical data of this study do not find this phenomenon: even in the posts related to diplomatic official activities, the proportion of negative comments is relatively low.

This difference may be due to the different content attributes. Zhang's research examines the expression behavior of users on general Japanese-related content, and its samples may cover complex topics [2]. Akira's posts are mainly based on daily content such as gourmet restaurants and holiday experiences, which naturally have the characteristics of "depoliticization." The discussion framework is shifted from "macro-level issues" to "specific daily cultural experience." The latter is more likely to return to the interaction of the matter. The frame shifts from macro, nation-level topics to concrete everyday cultural experiences; the former more readily activates group identity

and historical memory. However, this explanation still needs to be verified by more comparative studies. The data scope of this study is not sufficient to directly confirm whether the expression of commentators is regulated by the personalized characteristics of accounts.

This explanation also echoes the finding of Ecker-Ehrhardt that the personalized communication of international organization officials can narrow the distance with the audience through emotional expression [7]. Akira's "food blogger" also constructs an emotional connection. This image makes it easier for the audience to have a sense of intimacy and proximity. When the audience is wrapped in this emotional atmosphere, the content of the comment area tends to be positive or neutral.

### 6.3. Theoretical enlightenment: The understanding of personalized public diplomacy

Based on the findings, Akira's Weibo account presents a core feature: it is highly "de-institutionalized" in content form, but highly organized at the operational level. Deliberately avoiding stylized official statements results in positive-oriented comments on the audience side, but this is also the clear youth audience positioning of the embassy team [13].

This finding suggests that the communication logic of personalized diplomat accounts is fundamentally different from that of institutional accounts. Palosaari et al. pointed out that there are systematic differences in behavior patterns between institutional accounts and personal accounts, and that analyzing only institutional accounts will lead to an incomplete organizational image [5]. The empirical findings of this study support this judgment: Akira's personal account follows a set of content logic that is different from institutional accounts; he prioritizes topics that can cause emotional resonance.

However, personalization is not without limitations. Ecker-Ehrhardt reminds people that the personalized communication of officials in international organizations may simultaneously weaken the "rational-legal authority" of the organization [7]. In this study, Akira's official identity has not been completely hidden. He opened an account as "Japan's ambassador to China," and the post also contains content about official activities. This means that the case of Akira shows a kind of bounded personalization: on the premise of keeping the official identity visible, the content focuses on the daily theme. This balance may be a prerequisite for the effectiveness of its strategy. If the accounts are too personal and completely out of official status, they may lose their unique value as an "ambassador account"; if they still adopt institutional-style expression, they may lose the communication advantage compared to institutional accounts.

## 7. Conclusion

Based on the content analysis and audience sentiment analysis of the personal Weibo of Japanese Ambassador to China Akira Kenji, this study examines the content strategy characteristics and the emotional tendency of audience comments of the personal accounts of diplomats.

First, the Weibo content of Akira presents significant cross-domain characteristics and covers multiple topics. Among them, posts about food restaurants account for the highest proportion, and posts about festival cultural experiences have the highest interaction. This content structure conforms to the characteristics of a "generalist" and is a conscious strategic choice. Secondly, the comment area of Akira's Weibo is dominated by positive comments, and the proportion of negative comments is very low, which further verifies that "personalized" content helps to reduce the tendency of negative expression of the audience. Third, Akira's Weibo practice shows an organized "de-institutionalization" path. Its content form is highly personalized, but the operational level is promoted by team planning, which provides a supplementary channel for folk emotional interaction.

At the theoretical level, this study takes Akira's personal account as the object, provides a systematic empirical case for the personalized dimension of new public diplomacy, and fills the research gap in this field that focuses more on institutional accounts. At the same time, the applicability of the "expression effect" paradox in the personal account scenario is tested, and it is found that the characteristics of the communication subject may have a regulatory effect on it.

At the practical level, this study found that the content selection of personalized accounts can give priority to topics with a strong emotional connection and close to daily life (such as food and cultural experience). It also needs to have clear audience positioning and content planning, rather than relying on individuals to share at will.

This study has the following limitations. First, this study is a single case (Akira's Weibo account), and the generalization of its conclusions needs to be verified by more empirical research on the personal accounts of diplomats. Secondly, this study only covers a single platform of Weibo, and the conclusion is not necessarily applicable to other social platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Third, although the trichotomy framework used in sentiment classification is widely used in this field, it simplifies complex emotions into three categories that may lose some text information.

In view of the above limitations, future research can be carried out in the following directions. First, the analysis framework is extended to more diplomats' personal accounts, and multi-case comparisons are conducted to test the applicability of the "organized personalization" strategy in different contexts. Second, combined with interviews or questionnaires, the demographic information and deep motivation of the reviewers are obtained to further understand the driving factors of the audience's different emotional responses to personalized communication content.

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