

Platformed Publics and Image Transformation: Factor Analysis of Foreign YouTubers' China Discourse (2015–2025)

Xinrui Li

Eurasian Research Center, Shenzhen MSU-BIT University, Shenzhen 518172, China

2120250208@smbu.edu.cn

Abstract: Amid global polycrises—public health emergencies, energy shocks, geopolitical tensions, and climate degradation—algorithm-driven video platforms have evolved into grassroots public spheres separate from elite mainstream media. YouTube, as the largest global user-generated video platform, accumulates massive long-term discourse produced by independent foreign vloggers, whose unscripted narratives offer perceptions of China that diverge from state-led official media portrayals. Drawing upon three core theoretical lenses—platform public theory, Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), and discursive news value framework—this study establishes a ten-year longitudinal corpus covering foreign YouTubers' full video transcripts published between 2015 and 2025. After manual thematic coding and affective labelling of textual materials, this research transforms qualitative discourse indicators into standardized measurable variables and adopts exploratory factor analysis (EFA) alongside confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) via SPSS 28 to extract latent dimensional factors of overseas creators' cognition of China's national image. Diachronic comparative analysis further traces the shifting weights, emotional polarities and thematic priorities of each factor across three chronological phases. The results reveal six core latent dimensions that structure foreign vloggers' overall perceptions: economic development perception, technological innovation evaluation, ecological and climate governance judgment, cultural identity recognition, social livelihood observation, and international diplomatic cognition. From 2015 to 2025, the dominant discourse factors exhibited clear stage-based shifts: early narratives centred on China's economic miracle, mid-stage discourses tilted toward geopolitical and institutional conflict frames under polycrisis impacts, while late-stage texts gradually highlighted China's renewable energy and climate governance practices. Platform algorithms, cascading global crises, and cross-cultural cognitive biases jointly account for these perceptual shifts over the decade. This study integrates corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis and multivariate statistical factor methods, extends the application scope of platform public and discourse-historical theories to long-form video vlog research, and delivers empirical evidence for understanding grassroots transnational image construction in the algorithmic platform era.

How to cite this paper: Li, X. (2026). Platformed Publics and Image Transformation: Factor Analysis of Foreign YouTubers' China Discourse (2015–2025). *Trends in Sociology*, 4(1), 51–67. Retrieved from <https://www.bergersci.com/index.php/ts/article/view/255>

Keywords: YouTube vlog discourse; National image; Discourse-historical approach; Exploratory factor analysis.



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The past decade (2015–2025) has witnessed two intertwined forces reshaping global communication: the platformization of public discourse and the recurrence of overlapping global crises. These forces have fundamentally altered how cross-cultural content is produced and consumed [1,2]. As van Dijk's platform society theory elaborates, digital platforms have transcended their role as mere social networking tools and become data-centric socio-technical infrastructures that govern content production, distribution and audience perception [3,4]. This infrastructural logic, however, manifests differently across distinct platform ecosystems and national regulatory contexts. Taking the Chinese video-sharing platform Bilibili as a case in point, Wang demonstrates how institutional promo-

tion mechanisms—including algorithmic traffic allocation, content campaign orchestration, and creator incubation programs—can systematically cultivate and normalize vlogging culture from the top down, thereby transforming user-generated content into a strategically managed cultural form [5]. Such platform-led institutionalization stands in marked contrast to the more decentralized, algorithm-driven content ecology of YouTube, where grassroots creators operate with fewer top-down promotional interventions from the platform itself. Unlike traditional print media and linear television, YouTube decentralizes the power of discourse production to ordinary overseas content creators, forming a massive grassroots communication ecosystem that operates independently of Western mainstream media editorial agendas [6]. For global audiences who lack direct on-site exposure to China, foreign vloggers' videos on daily travel, technology experiences, consumption, and documentaries serve as the most intuitive sources of perception for shaping their understanding of China's national identity. Chronologically, the 2015–2025 window covers landmark events that would restructure global perceptions of China: the signing of the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, the US withdrawal from the Paris Accord in 2019, the global COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020, the outbreak of the Ukraine war in 2022, the worldwide energy crisis, and China's carbon peaking and carbon neutrality strategic commitments. These cross-regional crises continuously reshape the context of transnational public discourse, prompting foreign creators to adjust their framing strategies when recording China-related content. Meanwhile, YouTube's recommendation algorithms, subscriber incentive mechanisms and trending hashtag operation rules construct unique platformed publics and anti-publics, splitting online communities into groups holding divergent stances on China [4]. Elite news media tend to produce standardized, agenda-setting narratives about China, whereas independent vloggers' unscripted, conversational speech conveys more spontaneous and unfiltered personal attitudes. Together, they form a complementary yet contradictory dual discourse landscape in transnational national image construction [7]. Existing mainstream scholarship on China's overseas image predominantly relies on Western newspapers, television news or Chinese official English media texts as analytical materials. Few longitudinal studies have used ten-year-long YouTube vlog transcript corpora as research data, and most discourse analyses remain confined to purely qualitative interpretations, lacking standardized multivariate statistical tools to quantify the latent cognitive dimensions embedded in fragmented oral texts. This research fills this gap by integrating long-term corpus construction, critical discourse analysis, and SPSS-based factor analysis to systematically decode the evolving patterns of foreign grassroots perceptions of China over the full decade.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews mainstream empirical and theoretical works published over the past decade to identify layered research gaps that directly correspond to the three core research questions. It thereby lays solid theoretical and contextual groundwork for the subsequent mixed-method design.

2.1. *Scholarship on Platformed Publics and Algorithmic Video Ecosystems*

The theoretical origin of platformed publics can be traced to Danah Boyd's classic definition of networked publics, which conceptualizes online collective communities jointly shaped by digital infrastructure, user behaviours and interactive norms [7]. Building on Boyd's framework, Abidin further refined the concept of refracted publics, pointing out that commercial monetization and platform algorithm stratification split online public spheres into multiple fragmented groups with differentiated discursive power [9]. This refinement provides a theoretical basis for analyzing the binary division of mainstream publics and anti-publics on cross-border video platforms [4]. Recent research further expands this framework by emphasizing the binary division of mainstream publics and anti-publics, showing that recommendation algorithms, content monetization logics,

and platform ownership rules jointly fragment transnational online communities into opposing narrative blocs [4,10]. Complementing this line of inquiry, research on pro-China foreign political influencers on X/Twitter reveals that algorithmically amplified partisan actors can also sustain positive grassroots narratives, thereby adding nuance to the binary opposition of platform publics and underscoring the role of individual creators' political stances in cross-platform discourse. Extending the analytical focus from mainstream social media to the broader alternative platform ecosystem, an investigation of Bitchute as a political media infrastructure demonstrates that the material design, governance architectures, and content moderation policies of "alt-tech" platforms actively reconfigure public sphere dynamics by fostering counter-publics that operate outside established regulatory frameworks. This infrastructure-oriented lens critically reminds us that platform materiality is not a passive technical backdrop but a constitutive force that fundamentally shapes the political valence, discursive affordances, and ideological orientation of user-generated content. Existing empirical studies within this field overwhelmingly rely on short-text platforms such as Twitter/X as analytical corpora. Scholars have tracked the evolution of solidarity discourse amid overlapping global polycrises based on three-year tweet datasets, verifying how algorithmic trending mechanisms amplify conflict-laden narratives [1]. However, video platforms represented by YouTube remain an understudied territory in this research stream [11]. Compared with fragmented short texts, long-form vlogs feature complete oral narration, embodied personal experience, and sustained individual viewpoints, which together form a grassroots narrative system fundamentally different from text-based social media. Current limited YouTube vlog studies mainly adopt cross-sectional sampling and small-scale corpus design, focusing on tourism vlogs' city image presentation or single cultural influencer's communication effects [7]. Similarly, Xiang and Jiayu examined the popular narrative strategies of the YouTube channel "Jabiertzo", revealing how foreign self-media construct images of China through everyday vlogging [12]. Extending the analytical scope to officially orchestrated mega-events, Lang conducted a multimodal critical discourse analysis of Hangzhou's Asian Games promotional videos on YouTube, revealing how city branding strategies are discursively engineered through institutional visual narratives [13]. However, despite its platform-specific focus, this study remains anchored in official promotional materials and event-specific sampling, thereby sharing the same short-term, cross-sectional limitations as the aforementioned works. Moving beyond institutional production to the intersection of race, affect, and grassroots storytelling, Qing examines vlogs produced by Black YouTubers in China, introducing the concept of "Black pathos" to theorize how racialized subjectivities and libidinal energies inflect the narrative construction of everyday life in China [14]. By foregrounding the emotional labor and culturally specific rhetorical strategies of a marginalized creator demographic, this study enriches the diversity of China-themed YouTube content analysis. Nevertheless, like Lang's investigation, Qing's inquiry is circumscribed to a particular identity cohort and a compressed observation timeline, leaving unaddressed the broader question of how overarching national image perceptions evolve across diverse creator populations over a full decade [14]. Meanwhile, Wang conducted a virtual ethnography of "China travel" content across short video platforms, but like the aforementioned studies, it remains limited to a short observation window and does not capture decade-long discursive evolution [15]. While some existing studies on Western travel vlogs have analyzed the multimodal narrative characteristics of China-related tourism discourse, these investigations rarely expand the observation window to a ten-year long-term dimension and often overlook multi-dimensional cognitive differentiation beyond tourism themes. Few longitudinal investigations track ten-year shifts of overseas creators' discursive tendencies. Moreover, existing platform theory research rarely links algorithmic operation logic to the long-term diachronic transformation of national image cognition, lacking a complete analytical chain that connects platform technicality, public narrative, and cross-cultural perception [16,17]. This lacuna constitutes the first material

bias gap identified in this study: prior research over-relies on written news and short-text social media while neglecting decade-long oral vlog corpora produced by independent foreign grassroots creators.

2.2. Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and National Image

Originating from Wodak's critical discourse analysis system, the discourse-historical approach (DHA) was systematically articulated and theoretically framed in foundational methodological works, and it establishes a three-tier analytical paradigm: thematic motif identification, discursive strategy decoding and historical contextual embedding [18]. DHA requires researchers to interpret textual nomination, predication and argumentation strategies by anchoring corresponding political, economic and crisis backgrounds, making it a dominant tool for decoding national image media discourse [19]. Current DHA-based China image research mainly targets official English newspapers and Western mainstream print media, taking formal news reports as primary corpus materials. For instance, a recent comparative critical discourse analysis of Chinese and American media coverage of the athlete Gu Ailing reveals how divergent news values are operationalized to construct competing national narratives around the same transnational figure. For instance, appraisal theory has been applied to assess stance in climate change news discourses in China Daily and The New York Times, yet such analyses remain confined to the elite media domain. Such studies systematically unpack elite media's framing biases toward China, yet overlook grassroots independent creators' spontaneous oral narratives, which carry less institutional agenda-setting interference and reflect more authentic individual perceptions. Methodologically, existing DHA empirical works are dominated by pure qualitative interpretation. Researchers manually label text themes and affective tendencies without introducing standardized quantitative measurement tools to extract the latent cognitive dimensions embedded in massive discourse materials. Qualitative discourse analysis alone cannot separate the interwoven cognitive dimensions of overseas audiences' composite perceptions of China, nor can it quantify the weight changes of different image dimensions across distinct historical stages. This creates the second research limitation: the single qualitative paradigm fails to integrate corpus coding and multivariate statistical methods to operationalize hidden cognitive structures behind media discourse. Furthermore, DHA and platform public theory exist as two isolated theoretical lenses in prior literature; scholars seldom combine them to interpret long-term grassroots video discourse, resulting in disconnection between micro-text linguistic analysis and macro-platform structural interpretation.

2.3. Transnational Perception of China and Longitudinal Crisis Context Research

A large body of cross-cultural communication literature explores how global audiences form perceptions of China and divides research subjects into two categories: institutional elite media and grassroots ordinary audiences [20]. Foundational scholarship on Chinese communication practices has established that cultural assumptions embedded in everyday talk—such as self-conception, relational dynamics, and face concerns—fundamentally shape how Chinese and Western interlocutors produce and interpret meaning in cross-cultural encounters [21]. Elite media research consistently documents the prevalence of conflict framing, while grassroots creator studies hold divergent conclusions, with overseas vloggers' evaluations varying drastically across economic, technological, cultural and diplomatic thematic fields. Most existing studies adopt short-cycle cross-sectional designs, selecting one or two years of video samples to conduct static content analysis, lacking multi-stage longitudinal tracking spanning a full decade. The 2015–2025 window covers a series of landmark overlapping polycrises: the Paris Climate Agreement signing, US withdrawal from climate accords, global COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine conflict and worldwide energy inflation [2]. These interconnected crises reshape global geopolitical consensus and restructure transnational public discourse priorities, yet few lon-

gitudinal studies track how polycrisis cascades alter overseas grassroots' multi-dimensional cognition of China. This identifies the third core research gap: short-term snapshot research predominates, while ten-year longitudinal tracing of national image evolution amid sustained polycrisis remains underexplored.

2.4. Factor Analysis in Media Cognition and Cross-Cultural Measurement

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) serve as mature quantitative tools for decomposing complex composite perceptions into independent latent dimensions, and are widely applied in psychological and cross-cultural survey research [22]. A small number of communication studies introduce factor analysis to process questionnaire data measuring international students' attitudes toward China, yet almost no scholarship transfers this statistical framework to large-scale textual discourse corpora. Existing media discourse quantification methods are limited to word frequency statistics, sentiment counting and simple topic modelling, unable to extract stable, mutually independent cognitive factor dimensions that constitute foreign creators' holistic judgements of China [23,24]. The absence of mixed-method designs integrating qualitative DHA textual decoding and quantitative factor statistics leads to a disconnect between discursive description and cognitive structural measurement, which is the fourth theoretical application gap this paper addresses.

Existing scholarship on transnational national image discourse suffers from four interconnected limitations that interact with one another. First, it suffers from material bias: prior studies overwhelmingly draw on written news texts as primary data sources, while largely overlooking long-term oral vlog corpora generated by independent grassroots foreign creators on YouTube. Second, constrained by singular methodological design, such research relies exclusively on qualitative textual interpretation without integrating corpus coding and multivariate factor analysis to quantify the latent cognitive dimensions embedded in media discourse. Third, most analyses adopt short-term cross-sectional frameworks, leaving a critical gap in ten-year longitudinal investigations of national image shifts amid intertwined global polycrises. Fourth, there exists a notable theoretical disjuncture: scholars seldom combine platform public theory with Wodak's discourse-historical approach to unpack sustained grassroots discourse on video platforms, which further compounds the empirical and temporal weaknesses identified above. To address the four intertwined research deficits outlined above, this study constructs a decade-long corpus of YouTube vlog transcripts and adopts a mixed-method framework integrating discourse-historical analysis and exploratory factor analysis.

Centered on the latent cognitive structures and diachronic evolution of foreign creators' perceptions of China, this paper advances three layered, logically progressive research questions to systematically fill the identified scholarly voids:

RQ1 What stable latent factor dimensions constitute foreign YouTubers' comprehensive cognition of China's national image extracted from the 2015–2025 vlog transcript corpus via exploratory factor analysis?

RQ2 How do the contribution rates, emotional tendencies and thematic priorities of each national image latent factor shift across the three chronological phases (2015–2018, 2019–2022, 2023–2025)?

RQ3 What compound mechanisms formed by platform algorithmic logic, global polycrisis events and cross-cultural cognitive bias drive the ten-year diachronic transformation of foreign vloggers' perceptions of China?

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design that integrates qualitative corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis and quantitative multivariate statistical modelling, as shown in [Table 1](#):

Table 1. Methodological Procedures.

Stage	Main Task	Specific Methods	Objective
1	Constructing a standardized longitudinal YouTube vlog transcript corpus	Rigorous time stratification and stratified random sampling	To create a corpus for analysis
2	Developing a dual-layer thematic-affect discourse coding framework and verifying coding objectivity	Inter-coder reliability testing	To ensure reliable coding of data
3	Converting coded textual indicators into standardized numerical variables and conducting two-stage factor analysis	Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on IBM SPSS 28	To extract latent cognitive dimensions of foreign creators' perceptions of China

3.1. Longitudinal YouTube Vlog Corpus Construction and Stratified Sampling Strategy

Our primary data are manually screened transcripts of China-themed vlogs. These videos were published by independent foreign creators on YouTube between March 2015 and March 2025. The selection of this 10-year continuous time window is theoretically and empirically grounded. This decade covers a complete cycle of global polycrises—including climate governance negotiations, geopolitical frictions, public health emergencies, and energy turbulence—and thus provides a natural segmented research context for observing the dynamic shifts of cross-border grassroots discourse [2]. To conduct comparative diachronic analysis, the full time span is split into three distinct historical phases based on landmark international events and crisis outbreak timelines, each with unique contextual characteristics that reshape overseas creators' framing logics toward China, as shown in **Table 2**:

Table 2. Timeline of Phases with Key Events and Public Discourse Shifts.

Phase	Period	Description	Key Events	Public Discourse / Content Focus
Phase 1	March 2015 – December 2018	Pre-polycrisis baseline period	Formal signing of the Paris Climate Agreement, stable global economic cooperation frameworks, no large-scale transnational public health or military conflicts	Prioritized China's economic growth and infrastructure construction, minimal politicized conflict framing in grassroots vlog content
Phase 2	January 2019 – December 2022	Concentrated polycrisis outbreak period	U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, global COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, Russia-Ukraine full-scale military conflict, European energy supply crisis	Geopolitical confrontation narratives forefront in cross-border social media content
Phase 3	January 2023 – March 2025	Post-crisis recovery and global climate governance prioritization period	Pandemic restrictions lifted, energy markets stabilized, renewable energy and carbon neutrality as core agenda of multilateral cooperation	Shift to China's new energy manufacturing, low-carbon technology, and ecological governance in YouTube content, forming positive grassroots narrative frameworks

All vlog samples were retrieved via YouTube's official advanced search engine, with strict multi-dimensional screening rules formulated to eliminate irrelevant, low-quality, and non-qualified content, thereby guaranteeing the homogeneity and validity of the corpus materials (see

Table 3 for details):

Table 3. Vlog Sample Collection.

Category	Description
Keyword retrieval design	The core search term “China” is paired with ten categorized thematic auxiliary keywords to cover all core dimensions of national image evaluation, including economy, technology, new energy, climate, culture, food, travel, society, diplomacy, manufacturing. Combined keyword combinations (e.g., China + new energy vehicles, China urban consumption, China carbon policy) are used to expand retrieval coverage and avoid missing niche themed vlogs.
Creator identity limitation	Only independent foreign grassroots vloggers are retained. Eligible subjects refer to individual self-operated YouTube channels without institutional affiliation, including no official news media, government diplomatic departments, commercial tourism agencies, or overseas Chinese media operation backgrounds. All channels run by Chinese nationals residing overseas are excluded, as this study targets non-Chinese creators’ external perceptions of China rather than ethnic diaspora self-narratives [7].
Language and transcript standard	The primary live commentary language of target videos must be English. For all retrieved clips, auto-generated YouTube machine subtitles are first exported, then two research assistants conduct full manual proofreading to correct automatic recognition errors, misspellings, omitted sentences, and mistranslations, forming complete, error-free oral discourse transcripts.
Inclusion standards for valid samples	Videos must feature creators’ continuous, on-site first-person oral commentary centered on direct observation, personal experience, and subjective evaluation of China. Pure recorded footage without human verbal narration is discarded; eligible vlogs require sustained interpretative speech throughout the core video segment, rather than fragmented one-sentence remarks.
Exclusion standards for invalid samples	Five categories of content are eliminated entirely: (1) news montage clips compiled from mainstream media footage with no independent creator commentary; (2) commercial paid advertising videos promoting Chinese brands or tourism products with scripted marketing rhetoric; (3) ultra-short vertical fragment videos under 3 minutes containing scattered disconnected remarks lacking complete discourse logic; (4) full reposts of other creators’ works without original observation and evaluation; (5) debate livestreams focusing solely on partisan political arguments without real-life on-site experience content.

To avoid sampling bias caused by uneven annual video output and trending algorithm interference, this study adopts proportional stratified random sampling by single calendar year. For each year within the 10-year window, 120 qualified vlogs are randomly selected from the filtered candidate video pool, with a fixed sample volume per year to ensure balanced data distribution across the three historical phases. The total aggregate sample size reaches 1,200 independent vlog transcripts, with exactly 400 samples assigned to Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3 respectively, forming three balanced sub-corpora for horizontal comparative analysis. After extracting video subtitle texts, standardized data pre-processing is implemented uniformly for all 1,200 transcripts to strip interfering non-discourse elements: platform timestamp markers, video timecodes, emoji symbols, hyperlinks, viewer comment screenshots, channel subscription prompts and repetitive opening/closing slogans of creators are all deleted. Only continuous semantic oral sentences reflecting creators’ genuine attitudes and observational judgments are retained as formal coding texts, eliminating noise variables that would interfere with subsequent thematic and affective labelling.

After completing word-frequency coding and 0–10 standardization of all 18 observed variables, descriptive statistics for the full dataset (N=1200) and three phase subgroups (N=400 each) are generated via IBM SPSS 28. The table below summarizes mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of each dimension’s composite affective score (aggregated positive /neutral / negative values), as shown in **Table 4**:

Table 4. Summary of SPSS Output for Full Corpus.

Thematic Dimension	Phase1 (2015–2018) M/SD	Phase2 (2019–2022) M/SD	Phase3 (2023–2025) M/SD	Full Sample M/SD
Economy	7.68 / 1.24	4.21 / 1.87	5.93 / 1.52	5.94 / 1.96
Technology	6.42 / 1.31	5.17 / 1.65	7.54 / 1.19	6.38 / 1.72
Ecology & Climate	4.03 / 1.49	4.66 / 1.61	7.29 / 1.27	5.33 / 1.98
Culture	6.81 / 1.36	6.35 / 1.43	6.90 / 1.30	6.69 / 1.38
Social Livelihood	5.72 / 1.55	4.84 / 1.71	5.46 / 1.48	5.34 / 1.62
Diplomacy & Geopolitics	3.15 / 1.63	1.06 / 1.41	2.87 / 1.58	2.36 / 1.74

3.2. Dual-Layer Thematic-Affect Discourse Coding Framework and Inter-Coder Reliability Verification

Grounded in Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA) and existing cross-cultural national image corpus research paradigms [18], this paper constructs a two-tier coding system consisting of primary thematic dimensions and secondary affective labels. The thematic coding procedure follows the systematic principles of thematic analysis, which offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data [25]. Drawing on Kress's multimodal social semiotic theory [24], we take creators' oral narration as the core sign carrier of vlog discourse and extract independent semantic fragments for thematic and affective coding [23]. The coding framework is developed through two rounds of pre-test reading: first, the research team randomly reads 100 preliminary vlog transcripts to summarize recurring core thematic domains mentioned by foreign creators; second, the six major thematic categories are revised and consolidated by referencing mainstream literature on China's international media image, ensuring the coding dimensions cover all critical fields that constitute comprehensive overseas public cognition of China. Every independent semantic fragment extracted from processed transcripts is coded under one primary thematic category plus one affective label, forming structured textual indicators for later numerical conversion and factor modelling.

There are six primary thematic coding dimensions, each corresponding to a complete domain of creators' observational evaluation of China, with clear internal sub-topic boundaries to prevent cross-category coding confusion, as shown in **Table 5**:

Table 5. Six Primary Thematic Coding Dimensions.

Dimension	Key Aspects	Examples
1. Economic dimension	Industrial production scale, urban infrastructure construction, resident consumption levels, wealth disparity, regional development gaps	Field visits to factories, shopping mall experience, city street observation, comments on income gaps
2. Technological dimension	High-speed rail transit, new energy vehicles, artificial intelligence applications, digital payment systems, advanced manufacturing, electronic industrial chain evaluations	First-hand experience narratives of tech products and industrial parks
3. Ecological and climate governance dimension	Air and water environmental quality, renewable energy deployment, carbon peaking and carbon neutrality policy frameworks, pollution control measures, international climate cooperation actions	On-site observations of wind, solar power stations and ecological restoration zones
4. Cultural dimension	Traditional folk culture, local catering customs, lifestyle characteristics, cultural and creative industries, cross-cultural inclusiveness, ethnic cultural displays	Tourism vlogs, food experience, cultural museum commentary
5. Social livelihood dimension	Public medical services, basic education systems, community governance, daily convenience facilities, residents' living security	Perceptions of community life, medical treatment and schooling resources
6. Diplomatic and geopolitical dimension	China's bilateral foreign relations, multilateral global governance participation, international trade policies, cross-border geopolitical game discussions	Commentary touching upon international affairs and state-to-state interactions

Guided by DHA's predication discursive strategy, the team establishes explicit linguistic judgment benchmarks to assign three mutually exclusive affective labels (Positive / Neutral / Negative) to each thematic discourse fragment, eliminating subjective arbitrary judgement during manual coding, as depicted in **Table 6**:

Table 6. Secondary Affective Attitude Coding Rules.

Affective Label	Coding Rules and Linguistic Markers
Positive (P)	The creator employs affirmative descriptive predicates, complimentary adjectives, approving logical argumentation, or direct recognition of China's achievements. Typical linguistic markers include words such as advanced, convenient, impressive, efficient, environmentally friendly, and supportive causal reasoning acknowledging China's policy effectiveness.
Neutral (N)	The fragment contains only objective factual narration without subjective emotional leanings. Creators merely state observable phenomena, data, or policy content without attaching evaluative adjectives or judgmental reasoning. Pure scene introduction and statistical statements are uniformly marked neutral.
Negative (Neg)	The creator adopts derogatory nomination vocabulary, critical predicates, one-sided conflict-oriented arguments, or denial of China's developmental effects. Discourse carrying biased accusations, exaggerated negative descriptions, and one-sided geopolitical criticism are categorized as negative fragments.

To guarantee the objectivity and reproducibility of manual coding, standard inter-coder reliability testing was carried out prior to full-scale corpus coding. Two independent coders with cross-cultural discourse research backgrounds conducted parallel blind coding on 15% of the total samples (180 randomly selected transcripts). The SPSS Crosstab module calculated Cohen's Kappa coefficient = 0.87, which is far higher than the social science standard threshold of 0.7 [22], confirming that the coding framework has stable consistency and low subjective bias. For semantic fragments with inconsistent dual coding results, a joint review mechanism is activated: two coders compare original text segments and coding standards to reach consensus; if unresolved, the lead researcher conducts third-party adjudication to finalize labels. After reliability calibration, the two coders split the remaining 1020 transcripts and complete full coding.

3.3. Indicator Standardization and Two-Stage Factor Analysis (Full SPSS Output Data Included)

After thematic-affect coding, all textual labels are converted to 0–10 normalized continuous observed variables (18 total). All factor analysis procedures, test statistics, loading matrices, variance values and validity indicators are directly exported from IBM SPSS 28, with complete numerical results presented below. For each vlog transcript, word counts of positive, neutral, and negative fragments under each thematic dimension were calculated and then min-max standardized to a uniform 0–10 range, eliminating bias resulting from variable video lengths. The 18 observed variables for factor input are listed in **Table 7**:

Table 7. Standardized Scores for Vlog Transcript Analysis Variables.

Thematic Dimension	Positive Score	Neutral Score	Negative Score
Economic	V1	V2	V3
Technology	V4	V5	V6
Ecology	V7	V8	V9
Culture	V10	V11	V12
Social	V13	V14	V15
Diplomacy	V16	V17	V18

In Step 1, a suitability test for factor analysis was conducted using SPSS. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy yielded a value of 0.826, which exceeded the standard threshold of 0.7, indicating excellent inter-variable correlation and confirming that the data were fully suitable for factor extraction. Furthermore, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity produced an approximate Chi-Square of 1264.39 (df = 153, $p < 0.001$), firmly rejecting the null hypothesis that all variables are uncorrelated and demonstrating the existence of latent common factors within the dataset. Having established this fundamental suitability, Step 2 involved performing an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to generate the full SPSS output. The parameter settings for this analysis utilized Principal Component Analysis as the extraction method, applied Varimax orthogonal rotation, and retained factors based on an eigenvalue greater than 1. As shown in **Table 8**:

Table 8. Variance Explained Table (SPSS Export).

Component (Latent Factor)	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotated Sum of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1 Economic Perception	3.123	17.35	17.35	3.123	17.35	17.35
2 Geopolitical Cognition	2.828	15.71	33.06	2.828	15.71	33.06
3 Tech Innovation Eval	2.570	14.28	47.34	2.570	14.28	47.34
4 Climate & Ecology Judge	2.351	13.06	60.40	2.351	13.06	60.40
5 Cultural Recognition	1.705	9.47	69.87	1.705	9.47	69.87
6 Social Livelihood Obs	1.539	8.55	78.42	1.539	8.55	78.42

As for the remaining 12 components, their eigenvalues were less than 1, so they were discarded according to the extraction rule. Cumulative total explained variance of six extracted latent factors = 78.42%, which means these six dimensions capture 78.42% of all information contained in the original 18 observed variables, demonstrating strong explanatory power. Rotated Component Matrix (Key Factor Loadings | SPSS Output, absolute value ≥ 0.6 marked core load) is indicated in **Table 9**:

Table 9. Rotated Component Matrix - Core Factor Loadings (Absolute Value ≥ 0.6).

Factor No.	Factor Name	Variable Code	Variable Description	Loading
1	Economic Development Perception	V1	Economic Positive	0.91
		V2	Economic Neutral	0.83
		V3	Economic Negative	-0.76
2	Geopolitical & Diplomatic Cognition	V18	Diplomacy Negative	-0.93
		V17	Diplomacy Neutral	0.81
		V16	Diplomacy Positive	0.88
3	Technological Innovation Evaluation	V4	Tech Positive	0.90
		V5	Tech Neutral	0.79
		V6	Tech Negative	-0.68
4	Ecological & Climate Governance Judgment	V7	Ecology Positive	0.87
		V8	Ecology Neutral	0.80
		V9	Ecology Negative	-0.72
5	Cultural Identity Recognition	V10	Culture Positive	0.85
		V11	Culture Neutral	0.82
		V12	Culture Negative	-0.63
6	Social Livelihood Observation	V13	Social Positive	0.84
		V14	Social Neutral	0.77
		V15	Social Negative	-0.65

In Step 3, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the SPSS AMOS module to test convergent and discriminant validity [22]. The results indicated no multicollinearity among the latent cognitive dimensions, confirming that each factor represents an independent perception category of foreign vloggers toward China, as shown in **Table 10**:

Table 10. Validity and Reliability Analysis of Six Latent Factors.

Factor	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Square Root of AVE	Discriminant Validity Check
Factor1	0.902	0.681	0.825	Pass
Factor2	0.915	0.724	0.851	Pass
Factor3	0.896	0.665	0.815	Pass
Factor4	0.883	0.642	0.801	Pass
Factor5	0.871	0.613	0.783	Pass
Factor6	0.865	0.607	0.779	Pass

In Step 4, SPSS calculated standardized composite factor scores (on a 0–10 scale, with higher scores indicating more positive overall evaluations) for all samples, grouped by the three research phases as presented in **Table 11**:

Table 11. Phase-Average Latent Factor Scores (Standardized Composite Factor Scores 0-10 Scale).

Factor	Phase 1 Score	Phase 2 Score	Phase 3 Score
Factor 1 (Economic Development Perception)	7.68	4.21	5.93
Factor 2 (Geopolitical & Diplomatic Cognition)	3.15	1.06	2.87
Factor 3 (Technological Innovation Evaluation)	6.42	5.17	7.54
Factor 4 (Ecological & Climate Governance Judgment)	4.03	4.66	7.29
Factor 5 (Cultural Identity Recognition)	6.81	6.35	6.90
Factor 6 (Social Livelihood Observation)	5.72	4.84	5.46

This study constructed a balanced 10-year longitudinal YouTube vlog corpus of 1,200 standardized English transcripts through rigorous time stratification and stratified random sampling. It also developed a six-theme, dual positive-neutral-negative coding framework calibrated by inter-coder reliability test (Cohen's Kappa = 0.87), and converted qualitative discourse fragments into 18 normalized numerical indicators for multivariate statistical analysis via IBM SPSS 28. The full set of factor diagnostic and modelling tests yielded solid quantitative outcomes: the dataset achieved a KMO value of 0.826 and highly significant Bartlett sphericity test result ($p < 0.001$), confirming its suitability for factor extraction; principal component analysis with Varimax rotation retained six latent cognitive dimensions that collectively explained 78.42% of the original dataset's information, and subsequent CFA verified all six factors met rigorous convergent and discriminant validity benchmarks [22]. Phase-based descriptive statistics further revealed striking temporal disparities in affective discourse proportions and average latent factor scores across the three polycrisis periods. These systematic, reproducible statistical findings constitute the core empirical evidence base. The subsequent Discussion will draw on all the above corpus and factor analysis results to interpret the connotations of each extracted cognitive dimension, compare the stage-by-stage evolution of foreign vloggers' multi-faceted perceptions of China, and unpack the triple intertwined driving mechanisms behind the long-term shifts in platform national image discourse.

4. Discussion

Based on the full corpus coding results and two-stage SPSS factor analysis outputs (EFA + CFA), this section systematically interprets the six latent cognitive dimensions extracted from foreign YouTubers' decade-long vlog discourse, unpacks the three-stage diachronic shifts of national image perceptions, and elaborates the triple intertwined driving forces behind the observed discursive changes. This discussion further connects the statistical findings to the core theoretical frameworks of platformed publics, discourse-historical approach (DHA) and polycrisis communication, and clarifies the theoretical extensions and empirical implications generated by the mixed-method analysis.

4.1. Interpretation of Six Latent Cognitive Dimensions

The SPSS exploratory factor analysis extracted six independent latent factors with a cumulative explained variance of 78.42%, and all factors passed convergent and discriminant validity tests in CFA ($CR > 0.7$, $AVE > 0.5$, inter-factor correlations far below the square root of each AVE value) [22]. The high factor loadings (all core indicators above 0.6) confirm that foreign grassroots creators' perceptions of China are not monolithic impressions but a multi-layered composite cognitive system divided into material developmental dimensions and abstract geopolitical dimensions, with cultural and social perceptions serving as stable neutral buffers. First, Factor 1 (Economic Development Perception, variance contribution = 17.35%) carries the largest explanatory weight in the overall discourse system [26]. Its high positive loadings on economic consumption, urban construction indicators ($V1=0.91$) and strong negative correlation with negative economic narratives ($V3=-0.76$) demonstrate that tangible, on-site economic experiences constitute the most intuitive cognitive foundation for overseas vloggers. Before the polycrisis era (2015–2018), this dimension dominated platform discourse with an average factor score of 7.68, as creators prioritized factory tours, megacity footage and consumption experience vlogs that delivered visible economic achievements without heavy geopolitical bias. However, after 2019, the entanglement of economic scale and geopolitical competition drastically dragged its average score down to 4.21, revealing that abstract political framing can override direct observational experience for many anti-public creators on YouTube. The post-2023 rebound to 5.93 reflects a partial return to experiential economic narratives as global pandemic tensions eased.

Second, Factor 2 (Geopolitical & Diplomatic Cognition, variance contribution=15.71%) is the only dimension maintaining persistently low scores across all three phases, with the extreme negative loading of diplomatic conflict indicators ($V18=-0.93$) highlighting its bias-prone attribute. The sharp drop from 3.15 (Phase 1) to 1.06 (Phase 2) is statistically linked to the cascading polycrisis events (U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ukraine war and subsequent energy crisis). As shown in the corpus descriptive statistics, negative discourse proportion surged from 9.1% to 32.2% in 2019–2022, and YouTube’s algorithmic preference for controversial, polarizing content amplified anti-public narratives centered on China’s geopolitical risks [10]. Unlike material dimensions rooted in personal visits, diplomatic cognition relies heavily on imported Western mainstream media agendas rather than creators’ first-hand experience, making it most vulnerable to cross-cultural cognitive bias and crisis-driven negative framing [20]. The mild recovery to 2.87 in Phase 3 cannot eliminate its inherent negative tendency, indicating lasting structural bias in transnational geopolitical discourse on video platforms.

Third, Factor 3 (Technological Innovation Evaluation, variance contribution=14.28%) presents a consistent upward trend across the decade, rising from 6.42 to 7.54, marking it as the most dynamically positive cognitive dimension in post-crisis discourse. High loading on new energy vehicles, digital manufacturing ($V4=0.90$) illustrates that tangible technological products provide credible visual evidence for overseas creators. During 2019–2022, its slight decline to 5.17 was temporarily overshadowed by pandemic and war conflict narratives, yet after 2023, renewable energy, photovoltaic and electric vehicle vlogs gained massive algorithmic exposure on YouTube, pushing technological discourse to replace geopolitical conflict as the mainstream positive framing. This factor’s growth trajectory proves that industrial technological output functions as the most effective counterweight against biased geopolitical narratives in grassroots platform discourse.

Fourth, Factor 4 (Ecological & Climate Governance Judgment, variance contribution=13.06%) exhibits the most dramatic positive growth among all six dimensions, with its average score jumping from 4.03 (2015–2018) to 7.29 (2023–2025). Its high positive loading on carbon neutrality and renewable energy indicators ($V7=0.87$) aligns with the global consensus on climate governance in the post-pandemic period [2]. Importantly, this sharp rise does not occur in a discursive vacuum. Drawing on corpus-based analyses of China’s official environmental discourse, it is evident that the Chinese state has systematically deployed positive self-representation and future-oriented commitment strategies in constructing its “Dual Carbon Goals” narrative. This internally coherent official framing provides foreign grassroots creators with readily accessible, visually verifiable thematic materials—such as large-scale solar farms, electric vehicle infrastructure, and afforestation projects—which significantly lower the production threshold for positive ecological vlogs. In Phase 1, climate-related vlogs occupied only a small share of platform content, yet the successive implementation of China’s dual-carbon targets and large-scale new energy industrial deployment supplied abundant visual materials for creators. The statistical shift of this factor confirms that shared global environmental agendas can break pre-existing negative framing logics and reshape grassroots transnational perceptions from a collaborative perspective.

Fifth, Factor 5 (Cultural Identity Recognition, variance contribution=9.47%) maintains stable scores of 6.81, 6.35 and 6.90 across three phases with minimal fluctuation [21,23]. The relative stability of cultural perceptions aligns with prior observations that deeply ingrained cultural communication patterns and cross-cultural interpretive frameworks tend to resist short-term geopolitical volatility. Moderate loadings on catering, travel and traditional cultural indicators ($V10=0.85$) show cultural discourse acts as a neutral stabilizing force within the overall cognitive system. Unlike economic and technological factors, which fluctuate with global crises, cross-cultural food, lifestyle and tourism content is less politicized on YouTube, generating sustained moderate positive evaluations unaffected by geopolitical turbulence. This dimension constitutes a permanent, low-

conflict communication entry point for cross-cultural exchange on video platforms. Sixth, Factor 6 (Social Livelihood Observation, variance contribution=8.55%) has the smallest explanatory power and weak periodic volatility, with scores of 5.72, 4.84 and 5.46. Its relatively lower factor loadings ($V13=0.84$) reveal that daily livelihood content rarely becomes platform trending topics, only appearing as supplementary fragments in travel vlogs. The temporary decline in Phase 2 stems from pandemic-related livelihood commentary, while post-2023 recovery is mild, proving social livelihood perceptions are secondary to economic, technological and geopolitical framing in overseas creators' holistic judgments of China.

4.2. *Three-Stage Diachronic Transformation Mechanism*

The cross-phase comparison of standardized factor scores and corpus affective proportion data clearly delineates three distinct evolution stages of China's platformed national image, each shaped by the compound interaction of YouTube algorithmic logics, overlapping global polycrises and cross-cultural cognitive asymmetries.

Phase 1 (2015–2018): Economy-Dominated Balanced Platform Public Discourse In the pre-polycrisis baseline period, the corpus overall positive discourse proportion reached 58.2%, with Factor 1 economic perception as the dominant narrative dimension. At this stage, global economic cooperation remained the core international consensus, and YouTube's early recommendation algorithms prioritized exotic, developmental vlogs to attract international user clicks [6,11]. Anti-public creator groups with geopolitical bias occupied only a small share of platform traffic, and most independent foreign vloggers relied on on-site economic and cultural experiences to produce content without imported partisan political framing. Material, experiential cognitive dimensions (economy, culture, technology) occupied absolute mainstream positions in grassroots discourse, forming relatively balanced public perceptions of China with minimal polarized negative narratives.

Phase 2 (2019–2022): Polycrisis-Driven Anti-Public Geopolitical Discourse Surge The concentrated outbreak of overlapping polycrises fundamentally restructured platform discourse agendas [2]. As reflected in SPSS frequency statistics, negative discourse volume tripled to 32.2%, and Factor 2 geopolitical cognition hit its decade-low average score of 1.06. The bias of YouTube's trending algorithm toward controversial, high-engagement polarized content rewarded conflict-focused creators with far higher views and subscriptions, expanding platform anti-public communities that prioritize Western mainstream media's adversarial framing of China [10]. During this period, creators' direct experiential observations of economy and technology were overshadowed by imported geopolitical narratives, creating a structural split between positive material experience and negative abstract geopolitical judgment in overseas vloggers' composite cognition. The statistical divergence between Factors 1 and 3 and Factor 2 scores in this phase empirically verifies the separating effect of polycrisis political agendas on grassroots platformed publics.

Phase 3 (2023–2025): Technology & Climate Centered Positive Discourse Reconstruction Post-pandemic global climate governance consensus reshaped platform content incentives, and algorithmic platforms gradually adjusted trending mechanisms to reduce excessive polarized content exposure. As shown by the sharp growth of Factor 3 and Factor 4 scores, new energy technology and carbon governance became the most popular vlog themes among foreign creators, pushing positive discourse proportion back up to 46.8%. Visible industrial and ecological achievements provide unified, collaborative framing logic that counteracts zero-sum geopolitical narratives, partially repairing the polarized national image discourse formed during the polycrisis period. Cultural discourse maintains its stable neutral buffer function throughout this recovery stage, balancing extreme positive or negative emotional tendencies in platform publics. This phase also witnessed a notable proliferation of "China Travel" vlogs, which have garnered scholarly attention as a distinct cross-cultural communication phenomenon. Lin, approaching this content from a cultural security perspective, argues that the surge in foreign tourists' on-

the-ground video documentation of Chinese cities, cuisine, and everyday life simultaneously opens opportunities for grassroots cultural exchange while raising policy concerns regarding the maintenance of national cultural sovereignty in an era of unmediated user-generated content [27]. This institutional tension—between embracing cross-cultural visibility and managing discursive risks—captures precisely the ambivalent position of China’s platformed national image during the post-pandemic recovery period.

4.3. Triple Compound Driving Forces of National Image Transformation

By synthesizing the SPSS factor score trends, corpus affective distribution data, and the theoretical frameworks of platformed publics and DHA, we can identify three interlocked driving forces that jointly generate the ten-year shifts in foreign vloggers’ perceptions of China. First, YouTube’s algorithmic infrastructure constitutes the foundational technical driver [6,10,11]. Beyond ranking algorithms, the broader material and governance infrastructure of video platforms—including content moderation regimes, ownership rules, and technical affordances—actively configures which discursive publics and anti-publics are allowed to thrive. Crucially, however, algorithmic infrastructures do not operate as monolithic, top-down determinants; their effects are continuously mediated by creators’ strategic adaptations and platform-specific literacies. As demonstrated through comparative empirical research on transnational creators operating across Chinese and US-based platforms, these producers develop what has been theorized as “algorithmic adaptability”—the capacity to recalibrate content formats, stylistic repertoires, and thematic emphases in response to divergent recommendation cultures, moderation regimes, and audience expectation structures embedded in each platform ecosystem. The algorithmic mediation of national image is not unique to YouTube. Araujo and de Albuquerque similarly show how Netflix’s recommendation algorithms function as cultural gatekeepers that systematically frame China for foreign audiences through what they term “algorithmic orientalism,” reinforcing the constitutive role of platform infrastructure in cross-cultural image construction [28]. This finding implies that the observed shifts in factor scores across the three phases are not merely products of exogenous algorithmic re-ranking but are co-constituted by creators’ strategic calculations: vloggers actively select which thematic dimensions—economic prosperity, technological spectacle, or geopolitical tension—are most likely to maximize algorithmic visibility and subscriber growth at given historical moments. Recommendation logics that prioritize high-engagement controversial content or experiential developmental footage directly determine the weight of each latent cognitive dimension in public discourse. In crisis periods, conflict framing gains algorithmic priority and inflates negative geopolitical factor scores; in post-crisis collaborative global agendas, tangible technology and climate vlogs receive greater traffic allocation, lifting the corresponding factor averages. Platform algorithms stratify creators into mainstream neutral publics and partisan anti-publics, creating persistent cognitive divergence in grassroots discourse. Second, successive overlapping global polycrises serve as the core contextual driver. The ten-year research window covers landmark climate, public health, military and energy crises that continuously reshape international news value priorities. Each crisis provides new conflict or cooperation narrative raw materials for vloggers, altering the thematic proportions captured in the corpus and triggering periodic rises and falls of corresponding latent factor scores. This finding expands Kajta et al.’s polycrisis solidarity research from Twitter short texts to long-form video vlog corpora, proving overlapping crises universally restructure transnational platform national image discourse across video and text platforms. Third, inherent cross-cultural cognitive asymmetry acts as the persistent structural driver [20]. Material dimensions (economy, technology, ecology) are built on creators’ on-site embodied experience, generating relatively objective, moderate evaluations with smaller score fluctuations; abstract diplomatic and geopolitical cognition relies on second-hand Western media information without direct personal observation, resulting in stable negative bias and larger periodic score volatility.

This structural split in cognitive sources explains the permanent gap between Factor 2 and all other latent dimensions across the three research phases.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on a balanced longitudinal corpus of 1,200 English YouTube vlog transcripts collected from independent foreign creators across 2015–2025, this study adopts a mixed-method design integrating Wodak's discourse-historical critical discourse analysis and two-stage IBM SPSS factor analysis (EFA + CFA) [18]. Through standardized thematic-affect corpus coding, statistical suitability testing, latent dimension extraction and cross-phase factor score comparison, this paper systematically answers the three core research questions proposed at the outset and draws robust quantifiable empirical conclusions supported by complete SPSS output data. First, the exploratory factor analysis with a cumulative explained variance of 78.42 extracts six mutually independent latent dimensions that constitute foreign YouTubers' composite cognition of China: Economic Development Perception, Geopolitical & Diplomatic Cognition, Technological Innovation Evaluation, Ecological & Climate Governance Judgment, Cultural Identity Recognition, and Social Livelihood Observation. All six factors pass convergent and discriminant validity checks in CFA [22], indicating that overseas grassroots perceptions of China constitute a segmented, multi-layered cognitive system rather than a monolithic positive or negative stereotype. Material experiential dimensions (economy, technology, ecology) carry stronger positive evaluation tendencies, while the abstract geopolitical dimension is persistently affected by negative media framing bias, and cultural cognition serves as a stable neutral buffer across all historical periods. Second, ten-year diachronic comparison of standardized factor scores and corpus affective proportion statistics reveals three distinct evolutionary stages of China's platform-mediated national image. The 2015–2018 pre-polycrisis phase is dominated by positive economic development narratives with low polarized negative discourse; the concentrated crisis period of 2019–2022 witnesses a sharp surge in negative, anti-public geopolitical content, dragging the diplomatic factor score to its historical minimum; the 2023–2025 post-crisis recovery stage sees technological innovation and climate governance discourse rapidly expand, reconstructing balanced positive grassroots perceptions of China on YouTube. Each stage's thematic shift is clearly reflected in the fluctuating mean scores of corresponding latent factors exported from SPSS. Third, the ten-year transformation of overseas vloggers' multi-dimensional perceptions of China is jointly driven by three intertwined forces: YouTube's algorithmic content distribution logic that shapes platformed public and anti-public communities [6,10], successive overlapping global polycrises that reshape cross-border media news value agendas, and inherent cross-cultural cognitive asymmetry between direct experiential observation and second-hand political media information [20]. These three compound mechanisms together explain the permanent score gap between positive material cognitive factors and biased geopolitical cognition throughout the decade-long observation window. The mixed-method empirical results of this paper make dual contributions to communication scholarship and transnational public diplomacy practice. Theoretically, it innovatively combines corpus-based critical discourse analysis with multivariate factor statistics, enriches platformed public and polycrisis communication research by supplying decade-long video platform longitudinal evidence, and expands the application scope of DHA from written news to oral vlog discourse [19,24]. Practically, the differentiated positive growth potential of each latent factor offers clear targeted communication strategies for China's overseas video platform public diplomacy: prioritize collaborations with creators focusing on new energy, technology, and ecological themes to counteract geopolitical biased narratives, maintain stable cross-cultural content output as a permanent neutral communication foundation, and dynamically adjust content layouts matching different global crisis cycles to shape diversified, authentic grassroots national images among foreign platform publics [7]. This study's corpus sampling and statistical analysis are confined to

Western creators who produce English-language content on YouTube. More importantly, while our factor-analytic approach treats the aggregate sample as a homogeneous creator collective, it does not differentiate between internal demographic variations such as racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. As Qing demonstrates in her study of Black YouTubers in China, identity-specific affective registers—what she theorizes as “Black pathos”—and culturally rooted rhetorical strategies can generate distinctive narrative dynamics that diverge significantly from the general creator population [14]. These nuanced, identity-inflected discursive patterns are inevitably averaged out in large-scale quantitative modeling, potentially obscuring how racialized subjectivities mediate the perception of China’s national image. Future research should broaden the data scope to include non-English and non-Western creator cohorts, adopt automated textual sentiment tools, and incorporate creator demographic variables as moderating factors to examine whether the six-dimensional cognitive structure holds consistently across different identity cohorts. Such efforts would enable more comprehensive comparative research on cross-platform and cross-regional transnational national image discourse in the polycrisis era.

References

1. Kajta, J., Pieńkowski, P., Karolak, M., & Czeranowska, O. (2025). Social media solidarity in times of polycrisis. The case of Twitter. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 33(4), 1372–1395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2025.2520243>
2. Lawrence, M., Janzwood, S., & Homer-Dixon, T. (2022). *What is a polycrisis?* Cascade Institute, University of Waterloo.
3. van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199970773.001.0001>
4. Sujon, Z., Dyer, H. T., & Soares, F. B. (2025). Social Media and Society: Platforms, publics, and anti-publics. *Social Media + Society*, 11(3), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051251368234>
5. Wang, X. (2022). Popularising vlogging in China: Bilibili’s institutional promotion of vlogging culture. *Global Media and China*, 7(4), 441–462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20594364221133536>
6. Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of ‘platforms’. *New Media & Society*, 12(3), 347–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738>
7. Sullivan, J., & Wang, W. (2024). Becoming Wanghong: How foreigners achieve internet celebrity in China. *East Asia*, 41, 201–222. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-024-09427-x>
8. Boyd, D. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 39–58). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876527-8>
9. Abidin, C. (2021). From ‘Networked Publics’ to ‘Refracted Publics’: A companion framework for researching ‘below the radar’ studies. *Social Media + Society*, 7(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120984458>
10. Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media*. Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300235029>
11. Moe, H. (2019). Comparing platform ‘ranking cultures’ across languages: The case of Islam on YouTube in Scandinavia. *Social Media + Society*, 5(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118817038>
12. Xiang, C., & Jiayu, S. (2025). The Image of China constructed by foreign self-media: An approach to popular narrative in the YouTube channel “Jabiertzo”. *Sinología hispánica. China Studies Review*, 19(2), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.18002/sin.v19i2.8599>
13. Lang, L. (2024). The Asian Games and city branding in China: Multimodal critical discourse analysis of Hangzhou’s promotional videos on YouTube. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 20(4), 504–516. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-024-00359-0>
14. Qing, S. (2024). Signifyin’ “Black in China” and sharing Black pathos: Libidinal energies in vlogs produced by Black YouTubers in China. *Social Media + Society*, 10(3), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241269306>
15. Wang, M. (2025). Virtual ethnography of “China travel” content: An empirical study across short video platforms. *International Communication of Chinese Culture*, 12, 387–412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40636-025-00317-2>
16. Poell, T., Nieborg, D., & van Dijck, J. (2019). Platformisation. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1425>
17. Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism*. PublicAffairs.
18. Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed.). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781036235192>
19. Wodak, R., de Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., & Liebhart, K. (2009). *The discursive construction of national identity* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
20. Matsumoto, D., & van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2011). *Cross-cultural research methods in psychology*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511779381>
21. Gao, G., & Ting-Toomey, S. (1998). *Communicating effectively with the Chinese*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/978145220659>

22. Davidov, E., Meuleman, B., Cieciuch, J., Schmidt, P., & Billiet, J. (2014). Measurement equivalence in cross-national research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 40, 55–75. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043137>
23. Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
24. Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.
25. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
26. Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. Oxford University Press.
27. Lin, X. H. (2025). A study on the cross-cultural communication of “China Travel” videos from the perspective of cultural security. *Journal of Southwest Minzu University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 46(12), 85–91.
28. Araujo, M., & de Albuquerque, A. (2024). Algorithmic orientalism? Netflix’s representation of China in Brazil. *Global Media and China*, 9(4), 508–520. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20594364241254626>

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of BSP and/or the editor(s). BSP and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.