

Article

The Effect of University News Production Practices in Large Sports Events - A Study of Zhejiang Gongshang University's Coverage of the Hangzhou Asian Games from User/Producer Perspective

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Abstract: The Hangzhou Asian Games, a key international sports event in 2023, provides China with an opportunity to showcase its global standing, following the Beijing Olympic Games and Shanghai World Expo. Zhejiang Gongshang University's Culture and Sports Centre serves as the handball competition venue, with about 1,200 teachers and volunteers engaged across various Asian Games sites. Despite this, the university's media impact falls short compared to peers in Hangzhou with Asian Games venues. This research explores the news production practices of universities during large-scale international sports events, focusing on improving Zhejiang Gongshang University's media coverage and influence. Utilizing in-depth interviews and The Uses and Gratifications theory, the study analyzes news production related to the Asian Games on the university's official website, social media, and newspapers. Interviews include both producers and audiences of this news. Findings indicate a disconnect between media reports and the diverse needs of media users, with news production primarily driven by informational and promotional objectives. Recommendations include diversifying themes and forms of media coverage, enhancing creativity and interactivity, adopting a proactive and strategic approach to media communication, and leveraging new media platforms for more engaging content.

Keywords: Asian games; universities; news production practices; media; new media platforms

Introduction

The Hangzhou Asian Games is not only a sports event, but also a cultural event that reflects the social, economic, and political development of China and the world (Fu, 2022). As a host university, Zhejiang Gongshang University has a unique opportunity to participate in and contribute to the Hangzhou Asian Games, and to demonstrate its academic excellence, social responsibility, and cultural diversity (Liu & Zhang, 2023). Media communication is an essential tool for the university to disseminate its messages, stories, and values to the public, and to build its brand and reputation (Deacon et al., 2021). However, media communication is also a complex and dynamic process that involves various factors, such as media platforms, media content, media audiences, and media effects. Therefore, it is necessary and meaningful to study the effect of news production practice of

Zhejiang Gongshang University in the context of the Hangzhou Asian Games, and to evaluate the media coverage and impact of the university.

The Asian Games, also known as Asiad, is a continental multi-sport event held every four years among athletes from all over Asia. The Asian Games is the second largest sporting event in the world after the Olympic Games, and is recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as part of the Olympic Movement. The Asian Games aims to promote unity, friendship, and cooperation among Asian countries, as well as to showcase the cultural diversity and sports achievements of the Asian continent (OCA, 2023).

The 19th Asian Games will be held in Hangzhou, China, from September 23 to October 8, 2023 (Xu, 2023). Hangzhou is the capital and largest city of Zhejiang Province and is one of the most developed and prosperous cities in China. Hangzhou is also known for its rich history, culture, and natural beauty, which has been preparing for the Asian Games since 2015, when it was officially awarded the hosting rights by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). Hangzhou has invested heavily in the construction and renovation of sports venues, transportation infrastructure, urban environment, and public services, in order to provide a high-quality and memorable experience for the athletes, officials, media, and spectators of the Asian Games (Zhang et al., 2023).

Zhejiang Gongshang University (ZJSU) is a public university located in Hangzhou and is one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in China. ZJSU is a comprehensive university with a focus on economics, management, law, and engineering, and has a strong reputation in the fields of business administration, accounting, finance, and tourism. ZJSU has more than 30,000 students and 2,000 faculty members. ZJSU is the venue for the handball competition. ZJSU has also mobilized more than 1,200 teachers and students to serve as volunteers for the Asian Games, in various positions such as protocol, registration, service, and media. ZJSU has taken the opportunity of the Asian Games to showcase its academic excellence, social responsibility, and cultural charm, and to enhance its international visibility and influence (Dong, 2023).

However, despite its active participation and contribution to the Asian Games, ZJSU has not received sufficient and effective media coverage and attention, compared with other universities in Hangzhou that also host the Asian Games. During the period from 23rd September to 27th October, Zhejiang Gongshang University released a total of 27 pieces of news on the official website, microblog, WeChat public number and other media platforms (as shown in Table 1), with a total of 104843 views, 849 likes and 81 comments. The form of news involves text, pictures, videos, etc., and the combined use of the above three accounted for 20.6%, and the use of pictures and text form accounted for 68.9%. The news production practices of ZJSU during the Asian Games is mainly limited to the handball competition, the volunteer service, and the campus culture, but lacks diversity, creativity, and interaction. Meanwhile, research on news production practices in colleges and universities is scarce in theoretical aspect, and the implications of this research for university are enormous, because the news production practice of university has a significant impact on enhancing the image, reputation and influence of the university. This study is based on such a realistic problem, aiming to understand the effectiveness of Zhejiang Gongshang University's news production practices during the Hangzhou Asian Games.

Table 1. The selected news in this research

No.	Title	Date	Media Platform	Format	Views	Likes	Comments
1	Stunning Opening! The "ZJSU Power" Shines in the Asian Games	23-Sep-23	Zhejiang Gongshang University Official Weibo	Image, Text	13000	99	42
2	ZJSU is Super Popular! China Men's Handball Team's First Asian Games Match Tonight!	24-Sep-23	Zhejiang Gongshang University Official WeChat	Image, Text	15000	132	0
3	Just Now! China Men's Handball Team Won the First Match!	24-Sep-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	4532	54	1
4	Just Now, China Men's Handball Team Won the First Match!	24-Sep-23	Zhejiang Gongshang University Alumni	Image, Text	530	2	0

			Association Official WeChat				
5	“Little Green Lotus”, I Heard You Have a V-home	26-Sep-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	2359	30	0
6	China Team Gold Medal! The “Little Green Lotus” of Soft Cube from ZJSU	26-Sep-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	1303	4	0
7	A Letter to the Parents of ZJSU Volunteers for the 19th Hangzhou Asian Games and the 4th Asian Para Games	27-Sep-23	Youth ZJSU	Text	1812	23	1
8	Youth Dedicated to the Asian Games, The Shining ZJSU “Little Green Lotus”	27-Sep-23	“Zhejiang Gongshang University Sports Center” Official WeChat	Image, Text	346	7	0
9	This Mooncake, Is Forever the Most Beautiful in Our Hearts!	28-Sep-23	YouthZJSU	Video, Image, Text	2200	12	0
10	“Little Green Lotus” Volunteers Come to the Rest Area to Change Shifts, and Have a “Flying Flower Order” with the Moon!	29-Sep-23	Youth ZJSU	Video, Image, Text	997	3	0
11	[ZJSU Youth] Chen Guowei: China Handball Team Flag Bearer for the Asian Games Opening Ceremony	1-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	1675	21	13
12	ZJSU’s “Her”: An Asian Games Story Spanning 33 Years	3-Oct-23	Zhejiang Gongshang University Official WeChat	Video, Image, Text	7643	57	0
13	Multiple Media Outlets Pay Attention to ZJSU’s “Little Green Lotus” Volunteers’ Special Activities During the Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day of the Asian Games	3-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Video, Image, Text	1093	10	0
14	[ZJSU Youth] Shen Lijiao: A Family’s Asian Games Volunteer Passion	4-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	1955	17	0
15	Stop Scrolling, It’s Me! I Found the ZJSU “Little Green Lotus” with the Same Name and Surname!	5-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	2768	15	0
16	+1! Cheer for the China Women’s Handball Team!	5-Oct-23	Zhejiang Gongshang University Official WeChat	Image, Text	8783	66	0
17	You from ZJSU, Are Our Pride	6-Oct-23	Zhejiang Gongshang University Official WeChat	Image, Text	13000	111	0
18	Closing But Not Ending,ZJSU People Strive and Never Stop	8-Oct-23	Zhejiang Gongshang University Official WeChat	Image, Text	11000	61	0
19	At the End of the Asian Games, ZJSU’s “Little Green Lotus” Spent Time with Them	8-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Video, Image, Text	1264	7	0
20	You from ZJSU, Are Our Pride	8-Oct-23	“Zhejiang Gongshang University Volunteers” Official WeChat	Image, Text	582	1	0
21	ZJSU’s “Little Green Lotus” Asian Games Time	8-Oct-23	ZJSU News	Video, Image, Text	1618	16	0
22	Wonderful Review: ZJSU People’s Asian Games Moments	11-Oct-23	Zhejiang Gongshang University Official WeChat	Image, Text	5317	52	0
23	ZJSU People’s Asian Games Moments	12-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	702	4	0

24	[ZJSU Youth] The “Meticulous” Duo of Asian Games Volunteer Service	13-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	22	24	0
25	Let Me Put It This Way, The Last Time I Received a Thank You Letter Was in the Last...	18-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	2021	19	0
26	“Mom, I Worked with the Minister!”	23-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	1519	4	0
27	[ZJSU Youth] Chang Xueqi: Asian Para Games Award Ceremony Etiquette Volunteer	29-Oct-23	Youth ZJSU	Image, Text	1824	19	1
Total					104843	849	81

This research is based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which is a widely used theoretical framework in media studies. UGT assumes that media users are active and rational, and that they use different media to satisfy their various needs and gratifications (Kim et al., 2022). UGT also suggests that media users have different expectations and evaluations of the media content and effects, and that they can influence the media production and consumption processes. UGT can help to explain the motivations, behaviors, and outcomes of the media users, as well as the media communication strategies and utility of the media producers (Menon, 2022).

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it can provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the news production practices of ZJSU during the Hangzhou Asian Games, and reveal the problems and challenges that the university faces in the media environment. Second, it can offer some useful and practical suggestions for improving the effect of university news production practices, and help the university to achieve better media coverage and influence during the large sports events. Third, it can contribute to the theoretical and empirical knowledge of the news production practices of universities in international large-scale sports events, and provide some insights and implications for other universities that may host or participate in similar events in the future.

Literature Review

The literature on news production practices in the context of universities participating in international large-scale sports events is both extensive and multifaceted. This review will synthesize the existing body of knowledge, focusing on the theoretical underpinnings of news production practices, the practical applications of these production practices in the context of sports events, and the utility derived by universities from such engagements.

1. The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) serves as a cornerstone for understanding the media consumption behaviors of individuals during large-scale sports events (Kujur & Singh, 2020). Originating in the 1940s, UGT has evolved to account for the active role of media users in selecting and interpreting media content to satisfy their specific needs. According to Menon (2022), Uses and Gratifications Theory is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. UGT is an audience-centered approach to understanding mass communication (Menon, 2022).

In the context of sports events, UGT can be applied to analyze how universities leverage media to meet the informational and promotional needs of different stakeholders, including students, faculty, alumni, and the general public (Kim et al., 2022). As some scholars argue that the theory aids in understanding the motivations behind media coverage strategies and the satisfaction derived from such coverage by the university community (Ahiabor et al., 2023). According to the research of Shabbirhusain et al. (2023), UGT can be applied to understand the impact of content orientation, media type, and information richness on fan engagement in multi-sport global events. A case study conducted by Redzuwan et al. (2022) revealed that there was a significant relationship between customer-perceived value and the propensity to use the websites.

2. University News Production Practices in Sports Events

Research on university news production practices in sports events highlights the importance of a proactive and strategic approach to maximize the visibility and impact of media coverage (Parent & Ruetsch, 2020). A study by the University of Stirling emphasizes the 'soft-infrastructure' provided by volunteers in sports events and the intangible benefits, such as enhanced community image and psychic income, that can be derived from effective media communication (Robinson & Minikin, 2023).

Apart from intangible benefits, scholars also perceive that another aspect of university news production practices in international sports events is the utilization of local and international press to attract a global audience (Pedersen et al., 2020). Educational institutions often build strong media relations within their home countries but may overlook the potential of engaging with international media to reach a broader demographic (Hutchins & Boyle, 2020).

3. Utility of Universities in Sports Events

The utility of universities in sports events extends beyond the provision of venues and volunteer support (Aizawa et al., 2023). It encompasses the opportunity to showcase academic excellence, promote cultural exchange, and enhance the institution's reputation on a global stage (Thomson et al., 2020). However, the literature also points to the challenges faced by universities in achieving effective media coverage (Skey, 2023). These challenges include the need for diversity in coverage topics, creativity in presentation, and interaction with the audience.

Despite the wealth of research, there remains a gap in understanding the specific media communication strategies employed by universities during sports events and their effectiveness. There is a need for more empirical studies that examine the outcomes of media strategies in terms of audience reach, engagement, and the overall enhancement of the university's image and reputation.

In conclusion, the literature review underscores the significance of news production practices for universities participating in international sports events. It also identifies the need for further research to refine these production practices and maximize their utility. The upcoming sections of this paper will delve into the methodology, results, and discussion of Zhejiang Gongshang University's media coverage during the Hangzhou Asian Games, providing a practical examination of the theories and strategies discussed herein.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study used the qualitative research method. This method was chosen because the aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the news production practices of universities during large-scale international sports events (Yin, 2011). Qualitative research methods help to obtain the most direct, real and concrete understanding, to reveal the meaning and value thereof, to analyse the complex relationship between the object of study and the elements of the environment, and thus to better describe, generalise and explain the practical actions of the object of study (Chen, 2000). The main methods of data collection in this study were participant observation or in-depth interviews. This research employed the in-depth interview method to investigate the media communication strategies of Zhejiang Gongshang University (ZJSU) during the Hangzhou Asian Games. The study aimed to compare these strategies with those of other universities in Hangzhou that also hosted the Asian Games.

2. Sample

The researcher collected a total of 27 news reports from newspapers, official websites, and social media platforms of Zhejiang Gongshang University all about the Asian Games since the start of the Hangzhou Asian Games from 23 September to 27 October 2023, and invited the producers and audiences who wrote or watched the news stories, and then conducted in-depth interviews with them. The researcher purposively selected twenty interviewees, including the director of the media center, the PR person in charge, individuals responsible for

social media, journalists, photographers, cameramen, and others. The selection was based on their roles and experiences related to the media communication and coverage of the Hangzhou Asian Games.

3.Data Collection Method

In-depth interviews were conducted with the selected participants, who were both producers and audiences of the news stories. The interviews sought insights into ZJSU's media communication strategies during the Hangzhou Asian Games. Open-ended and flexible questions were posed to explore perceptions, challenges faced, achievements, and areas for improvement. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, depending on the availability and preference of the interviewees.

4.Data Analysis

The interviews, lasting between 30 minutes to one hour, were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. Transcriptions were done verbatim, and NVivo software was employed for coding. Thematic analysis principles were followed, involving the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within the data. The researcher familiarized themselves with the data, generated initial codes, sorted them into potential themes, and reviewed and refined the themes for coherence and consistency. The final themes were named and defined, with illustrative quotes selected to support the analysis.

Findings

1. Media Users: Did Not Meet Their Diverse and Complex Needs and Gratifications

According to the Uses and Gratifications theory, media users are active and rational in their media consumption, and they seek to satisfy their various needs and gratifications through different media content and platforms. However, this study found that Zhejiang Gongshang University's news production practices of the Hangzhou Asian Games did not meet the diverse and complex needs and gratifications of media users, such as students, teachers, alumni, and the general public. The media users expressed their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the media coverage in the in-depth interviews.

The researchers were surprised to find that many audiences felt that the media users did not show much interest or attention to the news and did not have a positive or favorable attitude or evaluation of the media coverage during the interviews. When asked what they thought of the reports about the Asian Games from Zhejiang Gongshang University, they usually responded that Zhejiang Gongshang University's news production practices of the Hangzhou Asian Games failed to satisfy the media users' needs and gratifications for information, entertainment, social interaction, personal identity, and surveillance.

While doing the interview process, the researcher discovered that the media users may also have different gratifications, such as learning, enjoyment, self-expression, and belonging, depending on their emotional and cognitive responses to the media content. The media users may also have different expectations and evaluations of the media content and effects, depending on their prior knowledge, experience, and attitude. The media users may also influence the media production and consumption processes, by selecting, interpreting, and providing feedback to the media content. One of the interviewees Qin (female, students, 22 years old), a member of the general public who is a sports enthusiast, claimed that he was curious about the impact and influence of the Hangzhou Asian Games on Zhejiang Gongshang University, and how it enhanced its reputation and image in the domestic and international arena, but most of the reports were just descriptive and factual, and did not provide any analysis or evaluation of the media effects. During the interview, two of the informants, Liu (female, volunteer coordinator, 31 years old) and Wang (male, sports commentator, 30 years old) claimed that what he expects to see is a real and vibrant Chinese story against the backdrop of a grand narrative like the Asian Games.

“I was expecting to see more stories and insights about the handball matches, the players, the coaches, and the history and culture of handball, but most of the reports were just boring and repetitive, and did not provide any new or interesting information.”

(Qin, female, 22 years old)

“I was hoping to learn more about the volunteer services and the campus culture of Zhejiang Gongshang University, and how they contributed to the success of the Hangzhou Asian Games, but most of the reports were just superficial and promotional and did not show the real and vivid experiences and emotions of the volunteers and the campus community.”

(Liu, female, 31 years old)

“I was interested in seeing more creative and interactive media content, such as videos, live broadcasts, quizzes, polls, and games, that could engage and attract the audience, but most of the reports were just plain and traditional and did not make use of the potential and advantages of the new media platform.”

(Wang, male, 30 years old)

However, according to the in-depth interviews, the media coverage of ZJSU during the Hangzhou Asian Games did not cater to the diverse and complex needs and gratifications of the media users. Yu (male, university professor, 51 years old), who is a very successful professor in China, claimed that the news production practices was mainly focused on the handball competition, the volunteer service, and the campus culture, but did not cover other topics and perspectives related to the Asian Games, such as the academic, social, and cultural aspects of ZJSU. The new production practices was predominantly in the form of news, which provided factual information, but did not provide much entertainment, personal identity, or social integration for the media users. Qiu (male, journalist, 26 years old) who is a journalist from CCTV, believed that this news did not elicit much opinion, emotion, or story from the audience, which could have enhanced their learning, enjoyment, self-expression, and belonging. Qiu claimed that news production practices effect was relatively low and did not reflect the expectations and evaluations of the media users. The media coverage did not foster a two-way communication and feedback mechanism with the audience and did not encourage their participation and involvement.

2. Media Producers: Mainly Driven by the Informational and Promotional Objectives

The study interviewed some of the writers and organisers of these news stories and found that what they consensued was that putting informational and promotional objectives as priority, most of the respondents, such as Ge (male, university news stuff, 26 years old) and Zhang (female, staff of university's social media platform, 29 years old) claimed that the university leaders' work for Asian Games was focus of news.

“Our main objective was to provide accurate and timely information about the handball matches, the volunteer services, and the campus culture of Zhejiang Gongshang University during the Hangzhou Asian Games, and to report the facts and events as they happened. There's no denying that we need to prioritise our leaders' work”

(Ge, male, 26 years old)

“Our main goal was to promote the positive and favorable image and reputation of Zhejiang Gongshang University during the Hangzhou Asian Games, to show everyone that our preparations are very effective under the right leadership, and to showcase its achievements and contributions to the success of the sports event.”

(Zhang, female, 29 years old)

Huang (male, staff of the university's newspaper, 30 years old), who is a staff member of the university's newspaper, says

“We faced many difficulties and limitations in producing more diverse, creative, and interactive media content, such as the lack of resources, time, skills, and support, and the pressure of censorship, regulation, and standardization.”

From the perspective of the media producers, the results suggest that the news production practice of ZJSU during the Hangzhou Asian Games were mainly passive, reactive, and conventional, and did not fully utilize the potential and advantages of the new media platforms. The media communication strategies of ZJSU were mainly driven by the informational and promotional objectives but did not achieve the reputational objective. The news production practice of ZJSU faced various challenges, such as the lack of diversity, creativity, and interaction, which affected the effectiveness and utility of the news production practices.

According to UGT, the media producers can also be seen as media users, who have their own needs and gratifications, expectations and evaluations, and influences on the media production and consumption processes (Majeed et al., 2021). The media producers can use different media platforms, formats, and contents to achieve their desired media effects and outcomes, such as informing, persuading, entertaining, or educating the audience (Menon, 2022). The media producers can also adapt and innovate their media communication strategies according to the changing media environment and audience preferences (Ahiabor et al., 2023). However, during the interview, the researcher discovered that the media communication strategies of ZJSU during the Hangzhou Asian Games did not reflect the needs and gratifications, expectations and evaluations, and influences of the media producers. The news production practices of ZJSU were mainly passive, reactive, and conventional, and did not take advantage of the new media platforms, such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin, which offer more flexibility, interactivity, and creativity.

The interviews with the audiences and news producers of the media coverage indicated that they had different media use and gratification patterns and preferences. Some of the audiences and news producers appreciated the media coverage for providing them with useful and interesting information and stories about ZJSU and the Asian Games, for showcasing the achievements and spirit of ZJSU and its students and staff. However, most of the informants were indifferent and dissatisfied with ZJSU's news of the Hangzhou Asian Games, as they felt that the news did not meet their needs and gratifications for curiosity, novelty, diversity and participation. They criticised the news production practices for being boring and repetitive, for lacking originality and innovation, and for ignoring the feedback and opinions of the audience.

Discussion

The study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Firstly, it enriches the literature on the news production practices of universities during large-scale international sports events in mainland China. It offers a nuanced understanding of production practices, shedding light on the effects on both producers and subjects while emphasizing the challenges and opportunities encountered. Secondly, it provides insights for news production practices of universities, particularly for reporter involved in news production practices of universities. Recommendations are offered to enhance the attractiveness and readability aspects of production, providing valuable insights for universities planning to host or participate in similar events in the future. This study significantly contributes to both theoretical and empirical knowledge concerning the news production practices and utility of universities in international large-scale sports events.

Based on the study's findings, a call for action is proposed. Diversifying media coverage topics and forms, including academic, social, and cultural aspects, is recommended. Enhancing creativity, interaction, and the production of engaging content, such as videos, live broadcasts, podcasts, and blogs, is essential (Majeed et al., 2021). Establishing a two-way communication and feedback mechanism with the audience, adopting proactive and innovative media communication approaches, and leveraging new media platforms are emphasized. Strengthening media relations locally and internationally is advised to gain global exposure and recognition

(Thomson et al., 2020). The media coverage should be utilized not only to showcase academic excellence but also to promote cultural exchange and enhance ZJSU's reputation.

Conclusion

The primary findings of this research highlight that Zhejiang Gongshang University's (ZJSU) media coverage during the Hangzhou Asian Games focused predominantly on the handball competition, volunteer service, and campus culture. However, it lacked diversity, creativity, and interaction. The news production practices, primarily in the form of factual information, failed to elicit much opinion, emotion, or storytelling from the audience. The impact of these production practices was relatively low and consistent across different themes, forms, and content. ZJSU's media production practices were characterized as passive, reactive, and conventional, not fully capitalizing on the potential and advantages of new media platforms. The theoretical implication of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of ZJSU's news production practices during the Hangzhou Asian Games, revealing challenges faced in the media environment. On a practical level, the study offers actionable suggestions to enhance production practices and utility, aiming to improve ZJSU's social impact and reputation.

Acknowledging the limitations, the research suggests future studies should expand sample size and data sources, including various media platforms such as blogs, podcasts, and online forums. Addressing these limitations will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of university media coverage and communication in sports events.

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