Discursive Strategies of Reports on Rural Revitalization: An Interpretation From the Perspective of Discourse-Historical Approach

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Since China's rural revitalization was established as a national strategy in 2017, numerous reports have emerged on the topic. This paper aims to uncover the discursive strategies employed in news reports on rural revitalization by analyzing a selected report on the relationship between digital commerce and rural revitalization, using the discourse-historical approach. The study seeks to interpret the discursive strategies used by the media to construct the discourse of rural revitalization and examine how these strategies shape the portrayal of the government, society, and individuals. The analysis reveals that the media predominantly employ nomination, predication, and argumentation strategies to frame the image of rural revitalization, while strategies such as perspectivization, intensification, and mitigation are rarely used. Through an examination of the media's discursive choices, the active roles of the government, society, and individuals in promoting rural revitalization are made evident.

Keywords: rural revitalization, discourse-historical approach, discursive strategies

Introduction

In 2017, General Secretary of CPC Xi Jinping proposed the rural revitalization at the 19th session of the National Congress of the Communist Party of China. As it was put forward, it gradually attracted the attention of media and led to an increase in the number and frequency of its coverage, forming a variety of news reports on it. In recent years, scholars in China and abroad have conducted many researches on rural revitalization discourse, with a focus on the following aspects. The first is the analysis of discursive characteristics of news. For example, Liu (2024) found *China Daily* mainly uses the engagement resources to portray a positive, responsible, and objective image of China. The second is the role of news reports on rural revitalization: Niu (2023) and Yao (2023) found that the mainstream media tend to represent the rural revitalization strategy conveniently and accurately with data, which enhances public's understanding of it. While progress has been made in the study of rural revitalization discourse, existing researches often pay less attention to analyzing the discursive strategies employed by the media in presenting this discourse, as well as the functions these strategies serve.

This paper employs the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to examine the discursive strategies utilized in a news report on rural revitalization in *People's Daily Online*, seeking to explore how the media construct the

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discourse of rural revitalization and how these strategies function in building different roles in rural revitalization. The selected report, titled "Digital Commerce Brings New Opportunities to China's Rural Revitalization" was released at 09:47 on April 17, 2023 in *People's Daily Online* (people.com.cn). With 797 words in total and real-life examples, it focuses on how China is advancing agricultural development and rural revitalization by promoting digital commerce in rural areas. To help to understand how the media construct rural revitalization discourse through discursive strategies, this study addresses two key questions: (1) What discursive strategies are employed in the news report? (2) What are the effects of discursive strategies?

Discourse-Historical Approach

Discourse-historical approach was proposed by Wodak with the aim of objectively revealing the relationship between language, power, and ideology. As Wodak (2015) notes, DHA is "problem-oriented", meaning that understanding the linguistic dimension is only part of the research process. This linguistic development must be analyzed in relation to its broader context, which includes the linguistic features of the text, its connections to other discourses, the situational context, and the historical and sociopolitical conditions within which the discourse is situated. In other words, DHA seeks to integrate a wide range of information concerning the historical sources and the social and political contexts in which discursive "events" occur. Crucially, this approach incorporates social theories to explain the context of discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Reisigl and Wodak (2009) proposed a method for analyzing five key discursive strategies, which can be used as a general analytical framework. The nomination strategy involves discursive constructions of social actors, objects (or phenomena/events), and processes or actions, realized through membership categorization (e.g., dividing social participants into in-group or out-group members), tropes (e.g., metaphor and metonymy), and nouns (phrases). The predication strategy refers to positive or negative linguistic descriptions of social actors, objects (or phenomena/events), and processes or actions, realized in diverse forms, including predicate verbs (phrases), predicative nouns/adjectives, prepositional phrases, and relational clauses. The argumentation strategy aims to justify or question the claims of truth and normative rightness by using topoi or fallacies. Topoi, as the main form, which connect the arguments with the conclusion or the claim, involve usefulness and uselessness, benefit and non-benefit, humanitarianism, justice, responsibility, data, law and power and so on. The perspectivization strategy attempts to position the speaker's or writer's point of view and express involvement or distance, mainly achieved by analyzing quotations, such as direct, indirect, and free indirect quotations. Finally, the intensification and mitigation strategies aim to strengthen or weaken the illocutionary force of utterances, thereby altering their cognitive or deontic status, and are realized through devices like tag questions, subjunctives, hyperbole, and hesitations.

Analysis and Discussion

In today's information age, live streaming has garnered increasing attention. This report begins with an introduction to two key state-issued documents, along with other ongoing efforts, aiming at promoting rural revitalization through the expansion of e-commerce in rural areas. It then focuses on the key figure, Liu Yuanjie, who utilizes live stream to boost the economic prosperity of peasants, illustrating the practical application and efficacy of e-commerce in rural revitalization. Furthermore, the report cites two experts and a city to underscore the significance and positive influence of e-commerce in advancing the rural revitalization.

Nomination

The nomination strategy designates the various ways in which entities are named or referred to in discourse. In the context of China's rural revitalization, it is the people who are the primary actors, striving to advance and realize this goal through concrete actions. There are three individuals in the report, i.e. Liu Yuanjie, Ouyang Rihui, as well as Liu Dacheng, and the event is "digital commerce in rural areas". Both the individuals and event will be analyzed to reveal how the media shape their identities in the process of rural revitalization.

This report refers to the three individuals based on their professional roles or statuses. Specifically, Liu Yuanjie is described as "a live streamer", Ouyang Rihui is identified as "assistant dean of the China Center for Internet Economy Research at the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing", and Liu Dacheng is introduced as "deputy director of the Institute of Internet Industry at Tsinghua University". This approach not only provides relevant background information about each individual, but also clarifies why they are well-positioned to offer insights into e-commerce and rural revitalization. Furthermore, it enhances the report's persuasiveness by centering the narrative around both experts and practitioners, making the coverage more focused and comprehensive.

Regarding the event, "digital commerce in rural areas", the report uses "a/the campaign" for 10 times to refer it. In the Collins Dictionary, "campaign" is defined as a planned series of activities undertaken over a period of time with the objective of affecting social or political change. This repetitive phrasing effectively highlights the central role of e-commerce in the development of rural areas. Additionally, such frequent references also hint at the government's determination in promoting the development of rural e-commerce, signaling its national-level importance. In this way, the report conveys the urgency and far-reaching impact of e-commerce for rural revitalization, highlighting its significance across economic, social, and infrastructural dimensions.

Predication

The predication strategy assigns positive or negative characteristics to the participants in a social event through the use of predicate verbs (or verb phrases), predicative nouns/adjectives, prepositional phrases, and relational clauses. This section will focus on the first two forms, examining how they describe Liu Yuanjie, the event, as well as China, including the Chinese government or relevant departments and Zhaodong City in this report. Predicate verbs refer to verbs that can stand alone as the main verb in a sentence, while predicate verb phrases consist of a verb plus one or more particles, forming a phrase that functions as a predicate. Predicative nouns and adjectives, on the other hand, are nouns or adjectives that serve as the predicate in a sentence. Table 1 lists 36 predicate verbs or verb phrases and six predicative nouns/adjectives.

Table 1

Predicates of This Report

	Predicate verbs (phrases)	Predicative nouns/adjectives
China	has continuously carried out; would implement; are embracing; has significantly improved; had set up; had been connected to; have begun to attach importance to nurturing; have provided ..., adopted ..., and improved; has offered	
The event	has also boosted; has also brought; can enhance; will increase; will accelerate ... and improve; can facilitate (2) ..., promote ..., and help upgrade ... and advance (2); spread ..., and offer	implementation; (has) made ... smarter and more digitalized; will be an inevitable trend
Liu Yuanjie	traveled to; found; wanted to try to increase; has promoted; said (2); helped...sell; aims to sell; has established; offer; will build	is a ...; has become popular; is most concerned about

Firstly, it is clear that the present perfect tense is used 13 times, accounting for nearly 31% of the total, effectively highlighting the progress and positive outcomes of rural revitalization efforts. In addition, the simple present and simple future tenses appear 17 times, conveying a sense of urgency and underscoring the need for continued focus and effort in sustaining rural revitalization. The varied use of tenses provides readers with a comprehensive perspective that not only reflects the history and current state of rural revitalization, but also anticipates and analyzes its future trends and challenges.

Secondly, the verbs used in the passage describe a series of actions, all of which are inherently positive. These predicate verbs and phrases collectively illustrate the broad and far-reaching efforts at the national, local, and individual levels, all aimed at achieving the overall prosperity of rural areas and improving the living standards of villagers through a range of integrated measures. Moreover, predicative nouns and adjectives, such as "smarter and more digitalized" and "an inevitable trend", highlight the accomplishments of rural revitalization. These terms encapsulate the significant progress China has made in this area.

Argumentation

Wodak (2015) identifies that argumentation strategy often involves appeals to authority or legitimacy. This means that speakers may support their arguments by referencing expert opinions, official documents, or historical precedents. These appeals aim to position the speaker's argument as credible and aligned with established norms, laws, or expert consensus, hence justifying positive or negative attributions, such as usefulness and uselessness, benefit and non-benefit, humanitarianism and non-humanitarianism, justice and injustice, responsibility and irresponsibility, lawfulness and unlawfulness. In the construction of digital commerce in rural revitalization, the media tend to appeal to topoi of benefit and data. The benefit topoi are those that are positive and can stimulate valuable discussion and reflection, just like examples (1) and (2); and data topoi are those using quantitative information such as numbers, statistics, and research results to support an argument, just like (3).

(1) More and more regions across China have begun to attach importance to nurturing e-commerce talent to advance rural revitalization across the board. They have provided policy support, adopted non-profit and market-oriented training methods, and improved the abilities of rural e-commerce talent.

(2) Zhaodong city in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, for instance, has offered free training to eligible college students, young entrepreneurs, rural residents and ex-servicemen to cultivate e-commerce talent by leveraging platforms such as ...

(3) According to data from the State Post Bureau, as of the end of 2022, the country had set up 990 county-level delivery centers and 278,000 village-level courier stations, and 95 percent of all administrative villages across the country had been connected to express delivery services.

In examples (1) and (2), several terms reflect the benefit topoi. Sentence (1), with phrases like "e-commerce talents", "across the board", and "training methods", invites readers to consider the e-commerce talent development model, the optimization of training methods, and the widespread promotion of e-commerce expertise across various areas of rural revitalization. Meanwhile, "free training" and "leveraging platform" in (2) raise important issues such as tailored training strategies for different groups, the assessment of resource input effectiveness, platform utilization and innovation, among other discussions. These terms effectively highlight the broad applicability, tangible outcomes, and positive impacts of the "campaign", helping to promote its wider implementation in rural areas. By citing specific figures such as "990 (county-level delivery centers)" and "278,000 (village-level courier stations)" in (3), the report not only showcases China's significant progress in

enhancing e-commerce infrastructure in rural areas but also strengthens the argument's authority and objectivity, as these statistics are sourced from reliable and official data.

Perspectivization

The perspectivization strategy aims to identify the speaker's or writer's point of view, assessing their level of involvement or distance through various forms of quotation, such as direct, indirect, and free indirect quotations. This section focuses on the ways and sources of quotations to better understand the media's perspective. In the selected case, nine quotations are used, all sourced from specific and credible references.

Two direct quotations, from Liu Yuanjie in (4) and (5), reflect the reporter's distance from the subject. These direct quotations minimize the risk of bias, misinterpretation, or over-interpretation by the reporter, allowing readers to engage directly with Liu Yuanjie's views and emotions. Regarding indirect quotations, three key verbs are employed—"point out", "proposed", and "according to" in (3)—which enhance the transparency and accountability of the report. According to Coulthard's framework (1994), these verbs can be categorized as metapropositional verbs, signaling the reporter's interpretation of the speaker's viewpoint. This allows journalists to organize information more objectively, while still shaping it to fit the report's structure and focus. Additionally, indirect quotation verbs like "said" (used twice) and "adding/added" in (6) suggest the addition of more information, though in practice, the content may be similar. By choosing indirect quotations, the reporter demonstrates subjective judgment in selecting and interpreting information, while constructing a coherent and fluid narrative for the report.

(4) "Methods including live-streaming e-commerce quickly expanded the sales channels for honey," Liu said, ...

(5) "We offer skills training sessions on new-media operations and e-commerce marketing at a live-streaming center in the county," Liu said, ...

(6) Ouyang added that the campaign will accelerate the construction of new infrastructure in rural areas and ...

Wodak (2015) posits that intensification and mitigation strategies are designed to "intensify or mitigate the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances" (p. 8). In combination with the case, it originates from the *People's Daily Online*, which is more authoritative in source and more formal in language. There is no evidence of the use of tag questions, subjunctive forms, or other expressions of these strategies. Accordingly, no further elucidation is required.

Discussion

As demonstrated by the analysis above, the selected news report employs a variety of strategies, including nomination, prediction, and argumentation, to construct the discourse on rural revitalization. However, strategies such as perspectivization and intensification/mitigation are less prevalent. The choice of discursive strategies serves multiple purposes and achieves significant effects. Firstly, it enhances the credibility and authority of the report by highlighting expert opinions and professional figures, establishing the report as a reliable source of information on rural revitalization. Secondly, the positive predication and argumentation strategies emphasize the progress and benefits of rural revitalization, fostering optimism and confidence in its effectiveness. This not only informs the public about its positive outcomes but also encourages continued support for rural revitalization efforts. Finally, the perspectivization strategy allows the reporter to present a balanced view, reducing potential

bias and providing readers with access to the perspectives and sentiments of the actual speakers. In sum, these strategies not only inform but also motivate action and support for rural revitalization, shaping readers' understanding of the importance and impact of digital commerce in this process.

Conclusion

This paper has employed the discourse-historical approach to analyze a report on the relationship between digital commerce and rural revitalization. The analysis reveals that the report primarily employs nomination, predication, and argumentation strategies. These strategies are evident in the naming of entities, the characteristics attributed to social actors, and the arguments constructed to highlight the positive aspects of digital commerce in rural areas. Moreover, these strategies convey a favorable view of rural revitalization, emphasizing its significant progress, development support, and optimistic trends. This approach plays a crucial role in garnering public support and encouraging collective action toward the shared goal of rural revitalization.

In conclusion, the media's reporting of rural revitalization discourse strategically uses language to shape the narrative. This not only reflects China's national policy orientation but also captures the specific practices implemented at the local level. Through the media's discursive choices, we can discern the active roles of the government, society, and individuals in driving rural revitalization forward.

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