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Multimedia Critical Analysis

**Plight of missing persons, blind and left-behind children
in the context of Chinese society**

Word count: 2188

Content

1.0 Introduction	3
2.0 Media Activism In The Context Of Chinese Society	4
2.1 Media Activism From Grassroots Initiative	4
2.2 Media Activism From Individual Creators.....	5
2.3 Media Activism From International Journalism	7
3.0 Conclusion	8
4.0 Reference	9
5.0 Web Addresses For Three Media Contents	10

1.0 Introduction

In an era where media increasingly shapes public perceptions and catalyzes social change, the concept of media activism has gained critical importance. Activism in sociology is generally defined as a series of contentious performances by which ordinary people strive to change social issues through collective action (Tilly, 2015). Cammaerts (2015) builds upon this, describing how media platforms amplify marginalized voices, challenge systemic injustices, and inspire collective action. In the context of China, where rapid digitization intersects with profound social issues, media activism serves as both a mirror and a catalyst for societal transformation, demonstrating how digital communication redistributes power within society (Castells, 2013) , particularly on issues related to diversity and inclusion.

This essay focuses on how three distinct media texts portray activism and diversity in the Chinese context, each highlights unique social challenges. The first content is website *Baby back home*, established in 2007 as a online platform dedicated to reuniting missing persons with their families. Over time, it has evolved into China's largest grassroots initiative in this domain. The second video, *What Does Good Accessibility Feature Look Like? A Blind Person's Review of Guangzhou Subway System*, created by Bilibili content creator “Nuozi Meow,” explores accessibility issues from the perspective of the visually impaired through a first-person narrative. The third video, *Left Behind: Young Children on Their Own in China*, produced by the Wall Street Journal, delves into the emotional and structural challenges faced by left-behind children in rural China. These three texts were chosen for their diverse origins and distinct narrative styles—ranging from grassroots initiative to individual digital creators and international journalism—offering a comprehensive lens to examine how media activism operates across platforms. By analyzing their narrative techniques, representations of diversity, and engagement with audiences, this essay will discuss how the media can be used as an activist tool, show the values and communication strategies of the creators, reveal the roles of different creative agents in promoting public participation and shaping social perceptions.

2.0 Media Activism In The Context Of Chinese Society

2.1 Media Activism From Grassroots Initiative

Established in 2007, *Baby Back Home* initially focused on locating missing children. Over time, it attracted increasing public participation and has since evolved into China's largest platform for reuniting missing persons with their families. By integrating social resources and internet technologies, the platform has become a critical bridge connecting families seeking their loved ones with volunteers.

The website adopts a clean and efficient design to present extensive information about missing persons. Key sections include search information, success stories, volunteer areas, and recent updates. Each search case is accompanied by detailed textual descriptions (e.g., time, location, and physical features of disappearance) and real photographs, offering users a reliable and accessible search experience. The success stories section leverages photos and videos of reunions to evoke strong emotional responses and enhance the platform's credibility (Couldry, 2010). The website organizes information into clear categories, such as "Missing Person Information," "Family Search Information," and "Homeless and Begging Individuals," improving accessibility for users. Moreover, its interactive features, such as volunteer registration and clue submissions, empower the public to actively participate in searches.

The platform's interactive features are its cornerstone in implementing media activism. Digital media platforms enable users to transition from passive consumers to active producers (Jenkins, 2006). The platform provides a space for discussions and experience sharing, creating a decentralized information-sharing network. Users can participate directly through functions like volunteer registration, clue submission, and online forums, enabling ordinary people to become active contributors rather than passive observers, strengthening the connection between digital and physical actions. However, this approach also has limitations, including varying information quality and a lack of formal connections to policymakers, potentially affecting the long-term efficacy of its efforts. As a model of grassroots public welfare initiatives, *Baby Back Home* not only disseminates information but also relies on widespread public participation to advance its search efforts. From the perspective of diversity, the platform covers various cases, including missing children, homeless individuals, and trafficking victims, reflecting the complexity of the issue. But this diversity is primarily evident in the presentation of missing persons' information,

with less attention given to the backgrounds and roles of participants and volunteers. Effective participatory communication requires the representation of diverse actors to broaden the societal reach of an agenda (Tufte, 2017) . Enhancing the platform's inclusivity in this aspect could significantly increase its social impact.

As China's largest platform for reuniting missing persons with their families, exemplifies how grassroots initiatives can transform individual needs into collective actions. Connective action networks emphasize the sharing of personalized content across digital platforms, bypassing traditional hierarchical structures to foster more flexible and inclusive forms of collective participation (Bennett, 2013). Through its multimedia storytelling and interactive features, the platform has mobilized widespread public participation, highlighting its pivotal role in media activism. However, enhancing the diversity of participants and establishing stronger connections with policymakers remain areas for improvement. *Baby Back Home* showcases the unique potential of grassroots public welfare actions in media activism by fostering collaboration and collective awareness, offering a sustainable model for addressing social issues.

2.2 Media Activism From Individual Creators

The video *What Does Good Accessibility Feature Look Like? A Blind Person's Review of Guangzhou Subway System*, created by Bilibili content creator "Nuozi Meow", is a typical example of how the rights of the blind and accessibility features are explored in China's digital media.

Through the first-person perspective narrative approach, the video immerses viewers in the daily experiences of a blind individual, offering a highly realistic and emotional representation. This aligns with McLuhan's (2013) concept of "the medium is the message," which posits that the medium itself profoundly shapes how information is perceived. As in one of the impressive scenes in the video, the tactile paving suddenly disappears in the middle of the road. This not only conveys information, but also allows the viewer to visualize the systemic challenges that blind people face, reshapes the social role of the blind in public perception through the medium, so that they are no longer just recipients but active voices in society.

From the perspective of media activism, this video realizes the core concept of framing theory. The language and narration of this video framed accessibility as a systemic challenge and a solvable problem, skillfully found a balance between criticism and affirmation. By selectively emphasizing certain aspects of an issue, the media can effectively shape the public's perception of the topic (Entman, 1993). This video not only reduces the viewer's psychological resistance to serious social problem, but also effectively triggers the public's empathy through emotional expression. At the same time, many viewers shared the current state of accessibility features in their cities in the comments section, with one user commenting, “We have a tactile paving that goes right through the parking lot, it's outrageous.” This form of communication further strengthens the social effects of activism.

In contrast, this video has limitations in representing the diversity of the blind, as Hall (1997) notes in his “representation theory” that media texts tend to undermine the complexity of marginalized groups by presenting a single narrative. This video is mainly based on the creator's personal perspective, which, although it has a strong sense of realism, may have overlooked the diverse needs of other blind people in different scenarios. Similarly, the viewers' comments are mostly based on personal experience, which builds a sense of community but may not effectively reach the decision makers who have the power to push for policy change. Meanwhile, the lack of in-depth discussion at the policy level is a major pity. For example, citing or comparing Guangzhou's accessibility features with China's national accessibility standards or international standards might have added stronger advocacy power to the video.

By using a first-person narrative approach, Nuozi Meow's video successfully turns personal life experiences into social issues that the public can easily understand. At the same time, the video uses features like comment sections and bullet screens to engage viewers and encourage discussions, making the topic more relatable and widely shared. These interactions enable individual creators to play the dual roles of storytellers and community builders. In the context of media activism, individual creators excel at reaching ordinary audiences and connecting public awareness to potential social change. With the flexibility and reach of digital platforms, they transform activism from a one-way message into a dynamic, interactive process.

2.3 Media Activism From International Journalism

The video *Left Behind: Young Children on Their Own in China*, released by the Wall Street Journal, shows the daily lives and emotional needs of left-behind children in rural China through an emotional narrative.

The video materializes the issue of left-behind children into concrete individual experiences through the personal story of a child. Media activism makes grand social issues more accessible to the public by highlighting individual experiences (Cammaerts, 2012). This video opens with a scene of Yang's life at home alone, which not only quickly triggers the viewers' emotional empathy, but also sets a heavy tone for the subsequent narrative. Through the personalized narrative, viewers are able to more intuitively feel the severity of the problem, and establish a connection between the individual story and the structural problems of society. In terms of visual presentation, this video uses a large number of low-saturated colors and close-up shots, highlight the dilapidated rural environment and the children's lonely state. For example, the shot of Yang cooking alone after school vividly presents the erosion of family separation on the child's daily life. Interplay of visual elements and narrative structures can evoke powerful emotional responses, shaping audience perceptions of social realities (Barthes, 1977) , and the empty scene in the video further creates a sense of isolation faced by left-behind children.

The video attempts to present diversity by covering different types of left-behind children's experiences, but its main focus remains on emotional problems. For example, this video mentions that Yang takes on the responsibility of caring for her younger brother, a detail that reflects the gendered division of labor in the family. Without considering intersectionality, media representations risk oversimplifying the unique and diverse experiences of marginalized groups, highlighting the need for inclusive and nuanced portrayals (Crenshaw, 1991). This video reveals how the gender factor intersects with the phenomenon of left-behind children, which not only expands the social significance of the problem, but also enables the viewer to realize the gender inequality of the phenomenon of left-behind covered by the cultural context.

However, viewer interaction in video is mainly at the level of emotional guidance and lacks a direct call to action. Chouliaraki (2008) in his theory of the “mediatization of suffering”, states that by allowing the viewer to “witness the suffering of others”, the media can stimulate empathy. In the video, Yang's difficult life is shown in detail, which not only shortens the psychological

distance between the viewer and the disadvantaged group, but also triggers a strong emotional response of “this should not happened”. However, the video fails to go further in translating this empathy into concrete action by providing pathways to solutions.

Through methodical storytelling, the video connects personal stories to broader societal challenges, making the subject both accessible and understandable to a global audience. The video's expert use of visual techniques and narrative highlights the isolation and emotional struggles faced by children left behind. While international media lacks the interactive element compared to individual creators, it excels at using more precise narratives and specialized techniques to amplify local issues on a global scale. They play a crucial role in media activism—connecting local experiences with global perspectives and facilitating cross-cultural dialog.

3.0 Conclusion

Media activism in contemporary China demonstrates a unique capacity to connect diverse voices, mobilize public participation, and drive societal transformation. Through the analysis of three distinct media texts—*Baby Back Home*, a grassroots digital initiative; *What Does Good Accessibility Feature Look Like?*, a video by individual content creator Nuozi Meow; and *Left Behind: Young Children on Their Own in China*, an international journalistic production—this essay has explored how media platforms frame and represent activism and diversity.

The analysis reveals that grassroots public welfare initiatives, like *Baby Back Home*, highlight the collective power of participatory culture, transforming fragmented individual actions into coordinated community-driven efforts. Individual creators excel in leveraging digital platforms to establish a personal connection with their audience, turning everyday experiences into broader social issues. Meanwhile, international media exemplifies the precision and narrative sophistication necessary to amplify local issues on a global scale, fostering cross-cultural understanding and advocacy.

However, the limitations of these media texts highlight areas for growth. Individual creators often lack diversity in their representations, grassroots platforms face challenges in sustaining long-term impacts without policy support, and traditional media struggles to engage audiences

interactively. These findings suggest that effective media activism requires a synergy between emotional resonance, strategic storytelling, and participatory frameworks.

As China continues to navigate the complexities of its social fabric, media activism will remain a critical tool for fostering diversity, inclusivity, and social justice. By combining technological advancements with creative and inclusive narratives, media practitioners and platforms can further bridge the gap between awareness and action, inspiring collective solutions to pressing societal challenges.

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5.0 Web Addresses For Three Media Contents

Baby back home

<https://www.baobeihuijia.com/bbhj/en/>

What Does Good Accessibility Feature Look Like? A Blind Person's Review of Guangzhou Subway System

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ps4y1Q7Yy/?spm_id_from=333.788.videopod.sections&vd_source=ea13ea35dd134f5394ff3a625e965575

Left Behind: Young Children on Their Own in China

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22cDgXj6K98>