

# Research on Overseas New Media Communication and Design of Chinese Aviation State-owned Enterprise Brand Image from the Perspective of National Image

Yonghua Jiang\*, Xin Zhang

School of Design and Art, Beijing Technology and Business University, Beijing, China

\*Corresponding author: Yonghua Jiang, jiangyh@th.btbu.edu.cn

**Copyright:** © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

## Abstract:

Currently, the aviation industry is recovering after experiencing a period of stagnation in previous years. Consequently, it has become crucial for airlines to find effective strategies to enhance their brand image on an international scale. This research paper aims to analyze and compare the social media of Air China and China Eastern on popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Additionally, the study examines the interface design of their official websites targeted at overseas audiences. By delving into these aspects, the study seeks to gain insights into the role of new media communication and its influence on the overseas brand image of Chinese airlines.

## Keywords:

National image  
Chinese aviation state-owned enterprise  
Brand image  
Overseas new media communication and design

*Online publication:* September 6, 2024

## 1. Introduction

The aviation industry is currently experiencing burnout due to excessive efforts in early development, resulting in a lack of endurance and stagnation<sup>[12]</sup>. In April 2017, the incident involving United Airlines flight UA3411 brought attention to the inadequate professionalism of airline cabin service management due to overbooking. Additionally, airlines have been facing challenges from high-speed railways and bullet trains, as well as the impact of the epidemic situation. The epidemic situation has had a profound impact on the airline industry, as

well as numerous other sectors, and it increases the risk that the airline industry will face financial difficulties, bankruptcy, or both<sup>[1,6]</sup>. Nigam and Luo think that aviation marketing should be distinct from other forms of marketing, just as airlines are distinct from other brands<sup>[8-9]</sup>. Establishing a strong brand image is crucial for airlines, as it not only enhances their social image but also provides practical benefits. According to Celestine et al., the aviation industry in the 21st Century can effectively influence air passengers through a combination of TV and the Internet, or magazines and the Internet<sup>[2]</sup>. Solanki and

Thomas think that social media serves as a proficient tool for communication and sharing information within the tourism sector<sup>[11]</sup>. To harness the increasing fame of social media and its vast user presence on the Internet, tourism marketing should capitalize on this opportunity and drive technological advancements by fully optimizing the potential that social media offers. Having a positive brand image for aviation enterprises not only demonstrates national strength but also enhances the reputation of the country. In today's digital era, airlines need to focus on effective New Media communication and design to shape their brand image and enhance their communication efforts on an international level.

## 2. Overseas communication of Chinese airline brand image

Airlines are enterprises that utilize various types of air transport aircraft as carriers to transport manpower and materials through spatial means to obtain economic benefits. Currently, there are four major enterprises in China: China International Airlines Co., Ltd., China Eastern Airlines Group Co., Ltd., China Southern Airlines Group Co., Ltd., and Hainan Airlines Holding Co., Ltd., all of which have significant influence domestically and internationally. Chinese airlines have played a crucial role in promoting China's economic development and social progress, contributing to sustainable economic and social growth.

According to Yang and Liang, over the years, brand image design has evolved from a national to an international scale, aligning with global economic and trade development<sup>[13]</sup>. A well-defined brand image strategy serves as the core competitive advantage and a prerequisite for long-term sustainable development. By implementing a clear brand image strategy, an enterprise can effectively promote its development. Healey found that, unlike physical companies that primarily sell products, airlines employ distinct brand image strategies<sup>[4]</sup>. They prioritize branding and showcase their unique brand identity through exceptional service offerings.

The brand image strategy of China's airlines plays a crucial role in their transition from regional to national brands. Through various brand-building systems, airlines have optimized their brand image, capturing a significant

share of domestic and foreign markets while solidifying their own brand identity. China's airlines place great emphasis on brand building, as seen in Air China's Red Phoenix logo, which symbolizes good luck and happiness, representing the idea of basking in the sun and soaring in the blue sky like a phoenix. Air China seamlessly integrates the values of the enterprise with the core of traditional Chinese culture to establish an airline brand that is widely recognized and cherished by both domestic and international users. China's airlines are steadily expanding their global presence. To cater to the needs of international consumers, the airline has created an official Chinese version of its website, available in English and other languages. This website offers a wide range of information and services, and the airline also organizes brand communication activities in select foreign cities to boost its brand recognition among overseas customers.

According to the 2022 Report on the Construction of Overseas Network Communication Capacity of Central Enterprises, China Southern Airlines Group Co., Ltd. and China Eastern Airlines Group Co., Ltd. have both ranked in the top ten central enterprises in the comprehensive index of overseas communication capacity in 2022. China Southern Airlines and China Eastern Airlines have consistently been at the forefront for six consecutive years. China Eastern Airlines has made significant progress in building its overseas network communication capacity, with a comprehensive distribution of communication channels, and the airlines have consistently maintained a leading position. It can be seen that Chinese airlines have a more comprehensive platform construction and stronger overseas communication awareness, making them more powerful in terms of new media communication for enterprise brands. The dissemination of the brand image of Chinese airlines overseas plays a crucial role in China's "going global" economy, culture, and public diplomacy. Given the rapidly changing international situation, airlines must focus on shaping their overseas brand image, improving their reputation abroad, expanding their brand's influence globally, and establishing a positive national image of China among overseas users.

## 3. Case selection and methods

This study selected Air China and China Eastern as

the research objects to analyze their data and content comparisons on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and also compared the interface design of their official websites for overseas audiences.

### **3.1. The important role of social media in the brand image communication of China Eastern Airlines**

Through years of development, China Eastern Airlines has established a comprehensive brand-building system<sup>[5]</sup>. As the brand image of China Eastern continues to improve, the traditional public relations model is becoming less effective. With advancements in technology and the rise of the Internet and new media, airlines now have the opportunity to communicate more independently and engage better with the public. China Eastern Airlines is keeping up with this trend by actively participating in online platforms and strengthening interaction with the public. They are also exploring social media channels abroad, such as Facebook and Twitter, to enhance communication with the local public and increase their brand influence.

### **3.2. The analysis of China Eastern on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook**

SNS, or social networking sites, emerged in the 1990s and gained widespread usage by 2010, with Facebook being the dominant platform<sup>[7]</sup>. In 2015, China Eastern expanded its operations beyond Shanghai and formed a partnership with Facebook, the world's largest marketing platform. Using the target audience group function on Facebook, China Eastern implemented the "funnel principle" strategy to accurately target audience users based on their region, age, interests, and other labels. This approach effectively mined and transformed a portion of potential users, facilitating the expansion of the overseas market. It has consistently published content on mainstream overseas social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. China Eastern had amassed 6.2 million followers on its Facebook social platform in 2024.

An analysis of China Eastern tweets on Twitter reveals diverse and rich content. The tweets published on their official account primarily consist of illustrations combined with text and videos accompanied by text briefs. These tweets serve various purposes such

as corporate information publicity, showcasing and promoting China's exceptional traditional culture, announcing enterprise activities, and presenting business capabilities. Through these tweets, China Eastern effectively promotes and showcases the image of China. The company is dedicated to displaying its brand image through innovative short video formats, aiming to enhance the company's visibility and influence. Every aspect of the video production, including script design, lens composition, dubbing text, and post-color adjustment, is meticulously executed. On the Twitter platform, China Eastern conducted a voting campaign among overseas netizens to determine their preference for the "Plum Blossom Cup" and the "Spirit Cup" among the souvenir cups offered to passengers. The collected data was then utilized to design souvenirs that would be more aesthetically pleasing to overseas users. On the Instagram platform, China Eastern successfully disseminated traditional Chinese culture through the release of the "My Favorite Chinese Characters" video. Based on the brand of China Eastern Airlines, the company actively organizes online activities during traditional Chinese festivals like the Winter Solstice and the Spring Festival. These activities include adding links to the official website of China Eastern on visual game pages, which allows users to conveniently select and purchase air tickets.

China Eastern enhances its brand image through various means, including updating flight attendants' uniforms, changing the logo, repainting aircraft, and hiring spokespersons. These efforts aim to create a classic, calm, mature, and elegant brand identity that highlights China Eastern's exceptional quality. The new logo design is concise and vibrant, reflecting the values of openness, wisdom, and generosity. The SkyTeam fuselage painting now better represents China the brand image of China Eastern. Additionally, the company has collaborated with a group of idols who possess artistic cultivation and strength to promote the brand internationally, making it more appealing and accessible. This successful practice demonstrates effective overseas communication of the brand image.

### **3.3. The analysis of Air China on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook**

Since its establishment in 1988, Air China has been

actively expanding into overseas markets for nearly 40 years, and the size of its fleet is on a continuous upward trend. As a customer-focused airline, Air China has strategically placed numerous advertisements on popular platforms like Google and Facebook to enhance the customer experience. The airline joined Twitter, a popular overseas social networking platform in 2011. Air China has received 1.1 million followers on Facebook in 2024, its update frequency is similar to that of China Eastern. The content of the tweets mainly consists of videos, often presented as video posters with accompanying text. The focus is on Air China flights, with a communication style that is simple, formal, and precise. Compared to China Eastern, Air China's content and new media design convey a more serious and official image, resulting in relatively lower user viewing and interaction rates.

### 3.4. Interactive comparison in social media between Air China and China Eastern

Piller found that the intended audience of bilingual advertisements is not just national citizens, but also transnational consumers<sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, according to Décaudin and Lacoste, if the airline operates in a different country, promotional communications must be standardized<sup>[3]</sup>. China's airlines enhance the impact of new media communication by increasing interaction with overseas users. They timely obtain user feedback to better adjust their new media communication and design strategies, thereby strengthening the communication power of airlines. On the Facebook platform, Air China engages with overseas users through participation in activities to win prizes. They successfully promote Chinese culture through the "Find a Difference" game, gaining more attention, likes, and shares. China Eastern enriches its interaction with users by regularly soliciting contributions from them. On new media social platforms, Air China primarily releases content based on traditional Chinese culture poster videos and flight-related content. In comparison, China Eastern's tweets have a more diverse range of content forms and are more interactive with users, creating a brand image with greater affinity and promoting Chinese culture. This breaks the traditional perception of enterprises as solely formal and serious. However, most of the video content released by Air China consists mainly of dynamic posters and lacks interactivity

with users. In the context of promoting overseas brand image, airlines should prioritize three key aspects: information transmission, information understanding, and information identification. By enhancing their capabilities in overseas network communication, airlines can effectively address the collaborative challenges of visibility, comprehension, interaction, and feedback. This will ultimately contribute to the success and growth of aviation brands.

### 3.5. Comparison of visual design and interface of the official website overseas version of Air China and China Eastern

Airlines can address national identity concerns by incorporating localized visual elements while also catering to the international market. The visualization of homepage designs on official websites serves as a means to convey information and facilitate the organization and discovery of relationships within the content. It helps structure scattered information and simplifies the user experience. The interface design of Air China and China Eastern's overseas official websites is simple and elegant but lacks interactive guidance. For instance, Air China's overseas homepage design features a concise style with visually appealing flight charts, providing users with a pleasant visual experience. However, the interactive experience on the website interface is insufficient. In comparison, China Eastern Airlines' overseas homepage design follows a minimalist style, using images from various destinations to guide users. The color scheme is more vibrant, with adequate white space that complements the main elements. Utilizing color contrast, different fonts, and font sizes can enhance users' engagement with the content. Color, as the most impactful visual element in interface design, directly influences users' initial impressions.

From an epistemological standpoint, the different psychological sensations evoked by color serve as the primary representation of the objective world. The homepage of Air China Overseas Edition official website incorporates a blue tone, complemented by red as an accent color, which aligns with the brand logo color. The cool color scheme of the official website contributes to a formal overall visual effect. While this effectively portrays the atmospheric and dignified brand image of Air China, it also creates a sense of distance and lacks

a sense of familiarity for the viewer. On the other hand, China Eastern Airlines utilizes two main colors, blue and yellow, and incorporates more images on its overseas official website, effectively showcasing the warmth and hospitality that China Eastern Airlines' services offer to passengers and bridging the gap between the company and its customers. As a result, the overseas version of China Eastern Airlines' official website appears more approachable and interactive.

#### 4. Conclusion

Firstly, Chinese airlines have effectively diversified their communication content and demonstrated a strong design affinity on new media platforms. They go beyond disseminating serious content related to their brand image, consumer services, and development history on overseas social platforms. For instance, China Eastern Airlines actively integrates traditional Chinese festivals with aviation services, showcasing dynamic creative posters and videos to engage with international audiences.

Secondly, Chinese airlines actively engage with users on new media social platforms, frequently releasing interactive content. During significant Chinese festivals such as the Spring Festival and Lantern Festival, airlines celebrate alongside overseas users, providing them with an opportunity to immerse themselves in the rich cultural heritage of China.

Thirdly, the overseas version of China Airlines' official website should offer a more appealing interactive experience. As an important platform for enterprises to showcase their external brand image and convey information, it should be regularly updated and upgraded. The website should feature a more interactive and attractive page design, moving away from the traditional

stereotype of enterprises and actively showcasing the airlines' affinity. This will provide overseas users with a visually pleasing and engaging interactive experience, making their overall experience more comfortable. Ultimately, this will help promote the overseas dissemination of the airlines' brand image.

#### 5. Discussion

In an era of continuous development and maturity of new media, the use of various new media can effectively help enterprises spread their brand image. Settling on mainstream social media platforms overseas can better integrate airlines into overseas social circles, providing more opportunities for brand image dissemination. This article primarily analyzes and compares the data, content, and interface design of Air China and China Eastern Airlines on overseas mainstream social platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, as well as their overseas official websites. The study summarizes the characteristics of new media communication and design in Chinese airlines' overseas brand images. During the process of overseas brand image dissemination by airlines, clear communication of new media content and design to users is essential. While focusing on disseminating their brand image, it is also important to consider the presentation form of the design and strike a balance between content and form. Different airlines have variations in new media designs. In the future, airlines can concentrate on factors such as technological leadership, service leadership, diversity, and internationalism to better showcase their brand advantages through new media and achieve more effective brand promotion.

#### Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

#### References

- [1] Çalli L, Calli F, 2023, Understanding Airline Passengers during Covid-19 Outbreak to Improve Service Quality: Topic Modeling Approach to Complaints with Latent Dirichlet Allocation Algorithm. *Transportation Research Record*,

- 2677(4): 656–673. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03611981221112096>
- [2] Celestine GV, Sanusi BO, Adefemi VO, et al., 2022, Persuading them to Fly: Modeling the Impact of Airline Advertisements on the Travel Behaviour of Air Passengers in Nigeria. *Vision: The Journal of Business Perspective*, 2022(0): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09722629221113241>
- [3] Decaudin JM, Lacoste D, 2023, Airlines: Standardize Your International Advertising! *Journal of Travel Research*, 62(5): 1090–1104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875221115176>
- [4] Healey M, 2010, *What Is Branding?* Rotovision/Quarto Group, London.
- [5] Jin L, 2022, The Way and Technique of China Eastern Airlines Brand Management. *Shanghai State-owned Assets*, 256(01): 40–43.
- [6] Kiraci K, Tanriverdi G, Akan E, 2023, Analysis of Factors Affecting the Sustainable Success of Airlines during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Transportation Research Record*, 2677(4): 350–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03611981221104462>
- [7] Loos E, Ivan L, 2022, Not only People are Getting Old, the New Media are too: Technology Generations and the Changes in New Media Use. *New Media & Society*, 26(6): 3588–3613.
- [8] Luo Y, 2017, Research on Airline Brand Image Design. *Civil Aviation Management*, 318(04): 20–22.
- [9] Nigam S, 2016, *Soar: How the Best Airline Brands Delight Customers and Inspire Employees*. IdeaPress Publishing, Virginia.
- [10] Piller I, 2011, *Intercultural Communication: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.
- [11] Solanki MS, Thomas J, 2023, Evaluation of Social Media Marketing Literature in the Tourism Industry Using PRISMA. *Journal of Creative Communications*, 2023(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/09732586231202610>
- [12] Sun JY, 2017, On the Significance of Professional Quality of Airline Cabin Service Management Personnel to the Brand Image of Aviation Enterprises. *Journal of Chifeng University (Natural Science Edition)*, 33(23): 126–128.
- [13] Yang C, Liang L, 2021, Expression of “Integrating Ethnicities” in International Brand Image Design. *Packaging Engineering*, 42(22): 359–366.

***Publisher’s note***

*Art & Technology Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.*