

Article

Positive Discourse Analysis of Official WeChat Public Accounts of Sports Events from the Perspective of the Attitude System: A Case Study of the Lanzhou Marathon

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Abstract: Against the national strategy of mass fitness, official WeChat public accounts have become key channels for sports event communication, yet positive discourse analysis in this field remains insufficient. Based on the attitude system of Appraisal Theory, this paper analyzes attitude resources in original articles from the 2025 Lanzhou Marathon WeChat account using UAM Corpus Tool 6.2. Results show that affect resources dominate, followed by judgment and appreciation. They construct positive discourse via emotional expression, cultural integration and metaphor, enhance emotional resonance and event branding. This study validates the applicability of Appraisal Theory and offers empirical support for interdisciplinary research in sports communication and discourse analysis.

Keywords: Positive Discourse Analysis; Appraisal Theory; Attitude System; Lanzhou Marathon; WeChat Public Account

1. Introduction

Driven by the national strategy of national fitness, marathons have been gaining growing popularity, and WeChat Official Accounts have become an important platform for the promotion of such events. Leveraging its Yellow River race track and regional culture, the Lanzhou Marathon has developed into an International Gold Label event and a national sports industry demonstration project, ranking seventh in the world in terms of participant scale in 2025, with its official WeChat Official Account serving as the core communication channel for the event. At present, there is a lack of research on the discourse of official WeChat Official Accounts of sports events, and particularly scarce are the achievements exploring positive discourse strategies from the perspective of the attitude system.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Positive Discourse Analysis

Proposed by Martin in 1999, Positive Discourse Analysis is a supplement and development of Critical Discourse Analysis. Martin and Rose pointed out that it can reconcile contradictory discourses and fill the gaps in the understanding of objective statements; Martin advocated an active and inclusive approach to discourse analysis, promoting peace linguistics and social harmony; McGilchrist emphasized the necessity of using it to counter the controversial information dominant in mainstream media. Against the backdrop of "peace" being the mainstream theme of the 21st century, Positive Discourse Analysis boasts a broad application prospect [1].

Currently, this theory has been widely applied in various fields. Zhou Ying applied it to college English teaching, providing guidance for analyzing the relationship between discourse and teaching context. Dong Dan used Appraisal Theory to explore the attitudes

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of mainstream international media toward a major political event. Liu Chun analyzed a presidential address by combining positive and critical discourse analysis to examine how national images are constructed in political discourse [2]. In addition, the theory has also been applied in business negotiation, critical language education, literary work analysis, and other fields, demonstrating strong analytical capabilities and providing important support for both theoretical development and practical research [3].

2.2. Appraisal Theory

Developed by Martin, White and others between 1991-1994 from Australia's "Right Writing" project, Appraisal Theory was formalized in 2000 with *Beyond Exchange: Appraisal Systems in English* and its theoretical framework established in 2005 by *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*, which defines appraisal as a "discourse semantic interpersonal system" [4]. It comprises three subsystems-attitude, engagement and graduation, with the attitude system as the core, including affect, judgment and appreciation dimensions: affect conveys emotional reactions to people and things, judgment involves moral evaluation of human behaviors and qualities, and appreciation assesses the value and attributes of things [5]. Widely applied in media, academic and cross-cultural communication research, the theory proves effective in interpreting interpersonal meaning of diverse discourses [6]. Yet it is rarely used in sports discourse research: existing studies only focus on attitude expression in sports event reports, lacking systematic analysis of attitudinal resources in official sports event WeChat Official Account discourse, especially insufficient attention to mass participatory events like marathons [7].

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Overview of Appraisal Theory

Proposed by Martin and White on the basis of systemic functional linguistics, Appraisal Theory is a discourse analysis theory whose core goal is to reveal how linguistic resources in discourse construct and express appraisal meaning. The theory holds that language is not only a tool for information transmission, but also a means of expressing attitudes, establishing interpersonal relationships and constructing social reality. Its appraisal meaning is jointly constructed by three systems (attitude, engagement and graduation) and their subsystems, which interact with each other. Among them, the attitude system occupies a central position and serves as the core theoretical framework of this study. Based on the attitude system and from the perspective of Positive Discourse Analysis, this study will annotate and analyze the attitudinal resources in the discourse of the official WeChat Official Account of the Lanzhou Marathon to explore its attitudinal tendencies.

3.2. The Attitude System

It was proposed that the purpose of the attitude system is to depict the landscape of emotional meaning, map readers' feelings in the process of text reading, and specifically explore the connection, realization mode and expressive effect of emotional meaning. According to different types of human feelings, the attitude system is divided into three subsystems: affect, judgment and appreciation.

Affect is an inherent human ability with both psychological experience and physiological response attributes. In the discourse context, "affective expression" refers to the disclosure and experience of emotions. As a semantic component of discourse, the meaning of affect is abstract and needs to be inferred through lexicogrammar. Based on this, Martin identified five parameters of affect: positive/negative affect, three affective intensity levels (high, medium, low), sudden/intentional affect, affective/emotional affect, and real/non-real affect, which can be specifically divided into categories such as inclination/disinclination, happiness/unhappiness, security/insecurity, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Judgment is the moral evaluation of people's behaviors, qualities or personalities, involving social norms, ethical principles and values, and is divided into two aspects: social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem focuses on evaluation from three dimensions: behavioral normality, personal capacity and the merit of personal qualities, with positive expressions as praise and negative ones as non-legal criticism. Social sanction assesses behaviors from the perspective of veracity and propriety, with positive expressions as praise and negative ones as the negation of behaviors that violate laws or moral ethics. In sports event discourse, the judgment system is mainly used to make positive evaluations of the behaviors and qualities of participants, volunteers, citizens and other groups, conveying positive energy and promoting social virtues.

Appreciation is the evaluation of the value, attributes and quality of things, phenomena or products. Based on aesthetic categories, it is divided into three sub-dimensions: reaction, composition and valuation. Reaction focuses on the direct feelings that things bring to people; composition involves the formal structure and organization of things; valuation emphasizes the importance and significance of things. In sports event discourse, the appreciation system is mainly used to evaluate the organization, characteristics and significance of the event itself, highlighting the value and charm of the event.

4. Research Methods

4.1. Research Questions

Based on the research background and significance, this study aims to solve the following core questions:

- 1) What main attitudinal resources are used in the content communication of the official WeChat Official Account of the Lanzhou Marathon? What characteristics do these attitudinal resources present in terms of distribution?
- 2) What positive discourse meanings are constructed by the attitudinal resources used in the articles of the official WeChat Official Account of the Lanzhou Marathon?
- 3) What positive roles does the attitude system play in the articles of the official WeChat Official Account of the Lanzhou Marathon?

4.2. Data Collection

The corpus of this study is derived from the official WeChat Official Account of the Lanzhou Marathon, and one original article published by the account after the 2025 Lanzhou Marathon is selected as the research object. The content at this time node carries the official emotional sorting, value refinement and brand shaping of the event, which can fully reflect the application logic of the three types of resources of the attitude system. In addition, it enjoys high public attention, and its discourse strategies directly affect public cognition and willingness to participate, which is highly consistent with the research objectives. After converting the content into text and removing irrelevant information, a corpus with a total of about 587 words is finally determined.

4.3. Data Analysis Tools

This study uses the UAM Corpus Tool 6.2 for corpus annotation and analysis. Developed by Dr. Mick O'Donnell on the basis of systemic functional linguistics, the tool, formerly known as the Systemic Coding Tool, can conduct text analysis within the systemic functional framework. It has multiple functions such as corpus construction, retrieval and statistical analysis, and can effectively annotate and analyze the attitudinal resources in the corpus, helping to explore their distribution characteristics, positive meanings and social functions.

4.4. Research Steps

The specific research steps of this study are as follows: First, select one original article related to the 2025 event from the official WeChat Official Account of the Lanzhou Marathon, save it in .docx format, and copy the content into the UAM 6.2. Second, click "Layers" in the tool, select "Manual Annotation" and "Attitude Only" to construct a theoretical framework based on the attitude system. Third, manually annotate the attitudinal resources in the corpus. Finally, combine the research questions and the theoretical framework of the attitude system to conduct a case analysis of the corpus. Obtain statistical data through manual annotation and present the types and distribution characteristics of attitudinal resources in the form of tables. Then analyze the positive discourse meanings of the three types of attitudinal resources combined with specific cases, explain their positive social functions and draw research conclusions.

5. Research Conclusions and Analysis

Based on Positive Discourse Analysis and Appraisal Theory, this chapter conducts an in-depth analysis of the attitudinal resources in the articles of the official WeChat Official Account of the Lanzhou Marathon, expounds the distribution characteristics of the attitude system and its three subsystems, carries out Positive Discourse Analysis combined with classic cases, and discusses the positive roles played by attitudinal resources.

5.1. Distribution Characteristics of Attitudinal Resources

Quantitative analysis found 36 valid attitudinal resources in the Lanzhou Marathon's official WeChat corpus, showing an affect-dominated pattern (63.9%), with judgment (27.8%) and appreciation (8.3%) enriching expression from different value perspectives. In affect resources, inclination/disinclination (41.7%) prevails, mirroring participants' active enthusiasm for the event, while happiness/unhappiness and satisfaction/dissatisfaction (11.1% each) add emotional layers for more authentic expression (security/insecurity is 0). For judgmental resources, social sanction (16.7%) outnumbers social esteem (11.1%); veracity (5 cases) in the former affirms the mutual sincerity between citizens and runners, and the latter covers normality, capacity and tenacity, reflecting attention to social interaction and individual value. Only 3 appreciative resources exist, all in the valuation dimension, appreciating the event's humanistic value and runners' participation value via expressions like "more precious than a medal". Though sample-sized limited, it deepens the overall value cognition of the event.

5.2. Positive Discourse Meanings of Attitudinal Resources in the Articles of the Lanzhou Marathon's Official WeChat Official Account

The attitude system is a flexible appraisal system, and the same vocabulary can convey different appraisal meanings in different contexts. The realization forms of attitudinal resources include nouns, verb phrases, adjectives, adverbs and prepositional phrases, which can express the author's value position, views and attitudes, thus influencing and persuading readers. The following analyzes the positive discourse meanings of attitudinal resources in the articles of the Lanzhou Marathon's official WeChat Official Account from the three dimensions of affect, judgment and appreciation.

5.2.1. Affect

Affect are the direct expression of the author's emotions, which can intuitively reflect the official feelings of the Lanzhou Marathon towards the event. Their positive discourse meanings are mainly realized through the combination of "behavior + affect" and regional cultural metaphors. For example, "But those warm and touching moments flow endlessly like the Yellow River water" uses the regional cultural symbol of "the Yellow River water" as a metaphor to extend the emotion of "satisfaction" from a single experience to a lasting influence, elevating the individual's sense of satisfaction into an emotional wealth shared by the group. "Rushing to the race track at half past five in the morning before dawn with full expectation" combines the emotion of "inclination" with specific behavioral details, highlighting citizens' attention and active investment in the Lanzhou Marathon and shaping the image of enthusiastic citizens. "The enthusiasm of the Lanzhou Marathon is the burning heat in every cheering shout against the wind" transforms "happiness" into perceivable temperature and vitality, and conveys the positive information of "the enthusiasm of the Lanzhou Marathon is shared by all participants" through the scope limitation of "every participant" and "every shout".

5.2.2. Judgment

Judgment resources assess human behaviors by ethical standards, falling into social esteem and social sanction. Their positive discourse meanings are achieved by integrating individual behaviors with urban culture and social values, forming the effect of "behavior evaluation → emotional resonance → value recognition". For instance, "Welcome to the Lanzhou Marathon" is linked to the Yellow River, affirming citizens' expression in the "capacity" dimension of social esteem and connecting individual acts to urban culture. Lanzhou citizens' careful act of catching runners' names reflects their "tenacity" and embodies urban warmth. "Mutual sincere commitment" emphasizes the runner-citizen interaction, affirming sincerity's ethical legitimacy and conveying two-way sincerity values. Besides, metaphorizing the Lanzhou Marathon as a festival and spiritual home endows participation with cultural legitimacy, laying a cultural foundation for the event's brand recognition.

5.2.3. Appreciation

The valuation dimension of appreciation evaluates the spiritual significance and long-term influence of the event, materializing the abstract positive value through comparison and metaphor, and conveying the in-depth significance of the Lanzhou Marathon beyond competition itself. For example, "Having written a story more precious than a medal" compares the spiritual and emotional connection represented by the "story" with the competitive honor represented by the "medal", emphasizing that the core value of the Lanzhou Marathon lies in the spiritual resonance between people and between people and the city. "The lasting influence is the 'finisher bag' left by the Lanzhou Marathon for all runners" uses the "finisher bag" as a metaphor for the long-term spiritual influence of the event, reflecting the spiritual nourishment effect of the Lanzhou Marathon on runners and deepening the public's recognition of the "long-term value" of the event.

5.3. Positive Functions of Attitudinal Resources in the Articles of the Lanzhou Marathon's Official WeChat Official Account

With "constructiveness" as its goal, Positive Discourse Analysis is committed to creating a social atmosphere of joint efforts and building an equal and harmonious society. The positive attitudinal resources in the articles of the Lanzhou Marathon's official WeChat Official Account exert multiple positive functions, as follows:

5.3.1. Stimulating Readers' Emotional Resonance

The frequent appearance of "inclination" in affect resources conveys the strong yearning and participation enthusiasm of citizens and runners for the Lanzhou Marathon. Expressions such as "coming for dreams" and "rushing to the race track early" can quickly narrow the distance between readers and the event, making readers feel the charm of the event. A small number of emotional elements such as "happiness" and "satisfaction" enrich the emotional levels, making the emotional expression of the articles more authentic and three-dimensional, enabling readers to better empathize with various experiences in the event and thus triggering emotional resonance.

5.3.2. Helping Readers Form a Positive Consensus on Values

Judgmental attitudinal resources strengthen social value recognition. Veracity in social sanction affirms the social communication norms of honesty and trustworthiness, conveying a positive and healthy concept of interpersonal interaction. The recognition of runners' qualities such as "tenacity" in social esteem highlights the positive values of striving and perseverance, guiding readers to identify with these social values, encouraging people to pursue excellent qualities in life, and at the same time improving the social and cultural connotation of the event.

5.3.3. Enhancing the Event Brand Image

The valuation evaluation of appreciative attitudinal resources elevates the significance of the Lanzhou Marathon from a simple sports event to a platform carrying emotions, memories and social values, exploring the unique humanistic and emotional value of the event. This value elevation helps to shape a "warm and in-depth" brand image of the Lanzhou Marathon, making it stand out among numerous events, enhancing its status and reputation in the public mind, attracting more people to participate in and support the event, and promoting the sustainable development of the event.

6. Conclusion

Based on the attitude system of Appraisal Theory and the perspective of Positive Discourse Analysis, this study systematically analyzed attitudinal resources in the core original article of the 2025 Lanzhou Marathon's official WeChat Official Account and drew three core conclusions. Firstly, its 36 valid attitudinal resources show the feature of "affect-dominated, judgment-assisted and appreciation-supplemented", with respective proportions of 63.9%, 27.8% and 8.3% and their own core dimensions. Secondly, the three types construct positive discourse meanings through different paths via behavior binding, social norm mapping and comparison metaphor respectively. Thirdly, they exert multiple positive functions like stimulating emotional resonance and enhancing event brand image. The study also verifies Appraisal Theory's applicability in sports event official social media discourse analysis, offering empirical evidence for relevant interdisciplinary research.

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