



A Qualitative Study on the Types of Entrepreneurs' Active Front-stage Behaviors in the Context of New Media: Empirical Evidence Based on Sina Weibo

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Abstract. This research focuses on the new media environment and takes Weibo as an example to conduct a qualitative study on the classification of entrepreneurs' active front-stage behaviors. Through in-depth analysis of a large amount of Weibo data and related materials, this research divides the front-stage behaviors of enterprises into personal-related front-stage behaviors, enterprise-related front-stage behavior and social-related front-stage behaviors. The research results will provide important theoretical basis and practical reference for understanding entrepreneurs' behavior strategies in the new media era and the impact of new media on enterprise development.

Keywords: New media; Entrepreneurs; Active front-stage behaviors; Qualitative research; Weibo.

1 Introduction

With the changes in the historical background and competitive environment, the roles of entrepreneurs have become more multifaceted and intricate. Entrepreneurs are no longer confined to the management of enterprises; instead, they are increasingly visible in the public sphere^[1]. Emerging media platforms such as Weibo offer a more effective medium for entrepreneurs to engage with consumers, thereby introducing a novel form of public-facing behavior. Entrepreneurs exhibit diverse forms and content in their front-stage behaviors on the Weibo platform.

What are the specific manifestations of these active front-stage behaviors among entrepreneurs on Weibo? Currently, research on entrepreneurs' active front-stage behaviors within the new media environment remains limited and lacks comprehensive qualitative analysis. This study aims to enhance and extend the theoretical framework of entrepreneurial behavior, offering novel insights and theoretical foundations for research in enterprise management and communication within the context of new media.

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2 Literature Review

2.1 Entrepreneurs' Active Front-Stage Behaviors

Front-stage behavior refers to the deliberate presentation of actions intended for public observation, with the aim of conveying specific meanings ^[2]. In contrast, back-stage behavior encompasses actions that are concealed from the public to limit external interpretation ^[3]. The distinction between frontstage and backstage is inherently relative; when the public gains access to the backstage, it effectively transforms into the front stage. Consequently, front-stage behaviors can be categorized into two types: those that are actively performed for public view and those that become front-staged due to public exposure.

2.2 The Impact of New Media on Entrepreneurs' Front-Stage Behaviors

The advent of new media has significantly transformed the behavioral patterns of entrepreneurs ^[1]. Specifically, the rise of self-media platforms like Weibo and online forums has furnished entrepreneurs with an expansive arena for their front-stage behaviors ^[4]. In the context of new media, entrepreneurs can engage with consumers more directly, thereby introducing a novel form of visible public behavior. New media facilitates the rapid dissemination and diffusion of these front-stage behaviors ^[5]. Through platforms such as Weibo, entrepreneurs can disseminate information regarding corporate developments, personal perspectives, philanthropic initiatives, and other related content, attracting the attention and participation of consumers. This method of direct interaction facilitates entrepreneurs in cultivating a favorable personal and corporate brand image.

2.3 Classification of Entrepreneurs' Active Front-Stage Behaviors

The existing body of research on the classification of entrepreneurs' active front-stage behaviors is limited. Through a content analysis of news reports from corporate official websites, it has been identified that entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors encompass both market and non-market activities ^[6]. Huang et al. (2013) identified that entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors encompass charitable endeavors, public speaking, endorsements, book publishing, blogging, and television appearances ^[7]. Xie et al. (2014) analyzed entrepreneurs' Weibo activities in relation to corporate brand image, categorizing the content of these posts into those related to the enterprise and those of a personal nature ^[8]. Huang et al. (2014) categorizes this information into two distinct types: "being a person" and "doing things." The "being a person" category encompasses information that entrepreneurs use to express their personal identities and manage interpersonal relationships, thereby demonstrating their individuality ("being oneself") and social conduct ("being a good person"). Conversely, the "doing things" category pertains to information related to the practical activities and professional responsibilities undertaken by entrepreneurs ^[9].

Although scholars have different kinds of Weibo content, it is not difficult to find that it mainly involves two types of Weibo information related to individuals and enterprises. By synthesizing the literature and observing new phenomena and behaviors in entrepreneurs' Weibo content, this study identifies that the behavioral categories exhibited by entrepreneurs on Weibo can be further delineated beyond enterprise-related and personal-related content. This allows for a more precise definition and understanding of entrepreneurs' activities on Weibo. An analysis of entrepreneurs' Weibo accounts reveals that, in addition to promoting corporate brands and sharing aspects of their personal lives ^[10-11], some entrepreneurs also engage with topics such as current political issues. For instance, Guowei Cao focused on issues such as drunk driving and international politics, alongside Minhong Yu prioritized education, which indicates that entrepreneurs are increasingly prioritizing social development over mere individual or corporate interests.

3 Selection and Methods of Research Objects

According to the 2017 Hurun China Rich List Sina Weibo follower count rankings, published by the China Business Industry Research Institute, the list includes 17 entrepreneurs, such as Jack Ma. Of these, there are 2 female entrepreneurs and 15 male entrepreneurs. The sample for this study comprises the Sina Weibo content posted by these entrepreneurs between July 2018 and July 2019. Notably, Wensheng Cai did not post any content on Weibo during this period. The number of Weibo fans is counted until July 2019. See table 1 below for details.

To ensure the representativeness of the Weibo samples, a stratified sampling approach was employed, organized by month. Sampling commenced with the first Weibo post of each month, proceeding sequentially in chronological order. A minimum interval of more than two days (excluding two days) was maintained between consecutive samples. A maximum of four Weibo samples were extracted per month. This sampling strategy was implemented to mitigate the influence of temporally proximate posts with homogeneous content on the representativeness of the sample. Consequently, this study successfully obtained a total of 521 Weibo samples.

This study employs an inductive category construction research methodology. Initially, a comprehensive review of all collected Weibo samples is conducted to gain a holistic understanding of the entrepreneurs' Weibo. Subsequently, 30% of the samples from each entrepreneur's Weibo posts are selected for preliminary coding. Each Weibo post is analyzed in conjunction with its specific contextual background and the individual characteristics of the entrepreneur. The content and format of each post are dissected, and, when combined with the contextual background, the sampling characteristics are identified. The concept articulated in each Weibo post is systematically extracted, and the words encapsulating this core concept are documented to establish the initial coding framework. Subsequently, codes with analogous meanings are aggregated into meaningful clusters. Utilizing correlation methodologies pertinent to various codes, these codes are categorized into distinct key categories, informed by the entrepreneur's front-stage behavior theory, to derive the initial coding schema. In conclusion,

following the establishment of the initial coding scheme, all samples were systematically coded. Throughout the coding process, the coding methodology was iteratively refined in response to the incorporation of newly identified categories, necessitating the recoding of samples. This cyclical process ultimately led to the development of the final coding method, culminating in the comprehensive coding of all samples. Consequently, the dimensional structure of entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors on Weibo was elucidated.

Table 1. Overview of Sampling of Entrepreneurs' Sina Weibo Accounts.

Entrepreneur Weibo account	Number of fans (million)	Number of Weibo samples
Ma Jack	24.86	7
Shiyi Pan	19.76	50
Yueting Jia	16.68	5
Jun Lei	21.40	48
Minhong Yu	15.16	39
Hongyi Zhou	12.21	44
Xiaoping Xu	11.69	14
Xin Zhang	10.32	28
Changtian Wang	9.00	50
Nanchun Jiang	12.81	41
Yuzhu Shi	8.58	20
Yifei Li	7.27	15
Xipei Jiang	6.98	46
Chaoyong Wang	5.29	15
Wensheng Cai	4.74	None
Guangbiao Chen	5.77	50
Guoqing Li	5.12	49

The coding process was independently conducted by three physicians specializing in the marketing domain, in a successive manner. Through a comprehensive analysis of the dimensions of entrepreneurs' public behaviors as reflected in the Weibo samples, several open coding categories were identified.

Subsequently, by employing comparative analysis and classification of the codes, 14 key categories and three principal axis categories were identified. The coding scheme is detailed in Table 2. Based on the principal axis and key categories, enterprise front-stage behaviors on new media are categorized into three primary dimensions: personal-related front-stage behaviors, enterprise-related front-stage behaviors, and social-related front-stage behaviors. Among them, personal-related front-stage behaviors include six sub-dimensions, enterprise-related front-stage behaviors include four sub-dimensions, and social-related front-stage behaviors include four sub-dimensions.

Table 2. Dimension coding of entrepreneur's foreground behavior on Weibo.

Main spin- dle cate- gory	Key cate- gory	Open coding code
Personal-re- lated front- stage be- haviors	Fan engage- ment	Initiating discussions, conducting survey inquiries, giving gifts, thanking fans, sending well wishes, making announce- ments, drawing prizes, soliciting
	Family life	Blessings, thanks, companionship, missing and interactions with family members
	Celebrity interaction	Blessing, thanking, encouraging, mourning, commenting on other celebrities, helping them, promoting them, and in- teracting with them
	Interper- sonal com- munication	Visiting elders
	Daily life	Showing living environment, daily life, pets, travel, personal perception, food, clothing collocation, ridicule, memories of the past, and interests; reading, watching movies, visiting museums, visiting art exhibitions, fitness, personal disco- very, sports, participating in TV programs, personal speeches, awards, congratulations, weight loss, leisure and en- tertainment, personal book, illness, adventure, enjoying dance, health, mountain climbing, getting red envelopes, WeChat public number publicity, publicity for themselves, participating in reading activities, watching documentaries
Enterprise- related front-stage behaviors	Current af- fairs review	Comments on science and technology development, important current affairs and major events
	Business cooperation	Partner, contracting, visiting other enterprises
	Company publicity	Product promotion, service promotion, new product release, corporate values output, lucky draw, activity promotion
	Operation and man- agement	Promotion activities, management adjustment, R&D investment, flagship store opening, branch opening, appreciation dinner, grassroots visits, communicating with employees, staff training, production line visits, statements, investment, business ideas sharing
Social-re- lated front- stage be- haviors	Corporate culture	Team style display, team promotion, staff style display, management style display, team building activities, evening party, enterprise anniversary celebration
	Charity ac- tivity	Poverty alleviation, disability assistance, orphan support, maternal and child assistance, educational donation, medical donation, endowment donation, employment support, community development, charity publicity
	Public wel- fare activity	Ecological environment protection, animal protection, care for life, public welfare, sports sponsorship, cultural spon- sorship, loving donation, participation in public welfare activities
	Participat- ing in and discussing state affairs	Participating in government activities and meetings, expressing views on major social issues, supporting national poli- cies, commenting on and supporting current politics
	Civilization construction	Supporting science and technology, education and academic, culture and art, medical and health care, sports, commu- nity development, knowledge dissemination, system construction and promotion; participation in meetings sponsored by social organizations

4 Results and Analysis

Based on the coding framework, a total of 521 samples were analyzed to determine the compositional distribution across three primary dimensions and 14 sub-dimensions. The proportional distribution of these three primary dimensions was derived through computational analysis using statistical software. Additionally, this study independently calculated the compositional proportion distribution for the sub-dimensions associated with personal-related activities, enterprise-related activities, and social-related activities. See Figure 1.

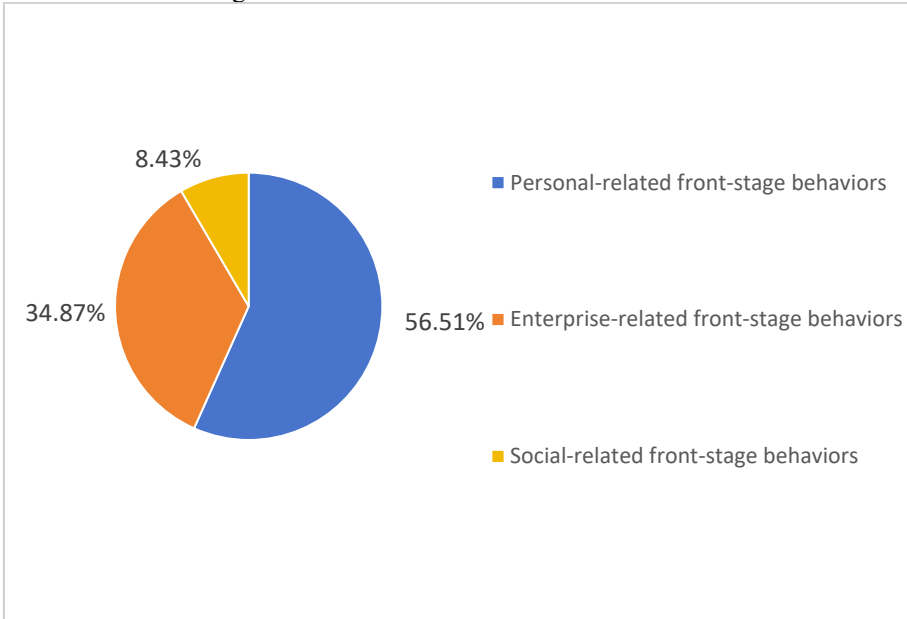


Fig. 1. The proportional distribution of entrepreneurial front-stage behaviors.

Personal-related front-stage behaviors refer to activities mainly related to individuals. This dimension accounts for 56.51% of entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors and includes six sub-dimensions: daily life, current affairs review, celebrity interaction, family life, fan engagement interpersonal communication, accounting for 75.25%, 11.53%, 8.14%, 3.73%, 1.02% and 0.34% of personal-related front-stage behaviors respectively. See Figure 2.

Enterprise-related front-stage behaviors refer to the content mainly related to the industry and work that entrepreneurs are engaged in and mentioned on Weibo. This dimension accounts for 34.87% of entrepreneurs' front-stage behaviors and includes four sub-dimensions: operation and management, company publicity, corporate culture, and business cooperation, accounting for 74.73%, 19.78%, 4.40% and 1.10% of entrepreneurs' enterprise-related front-stage behaviors respectively. See Figure 3.

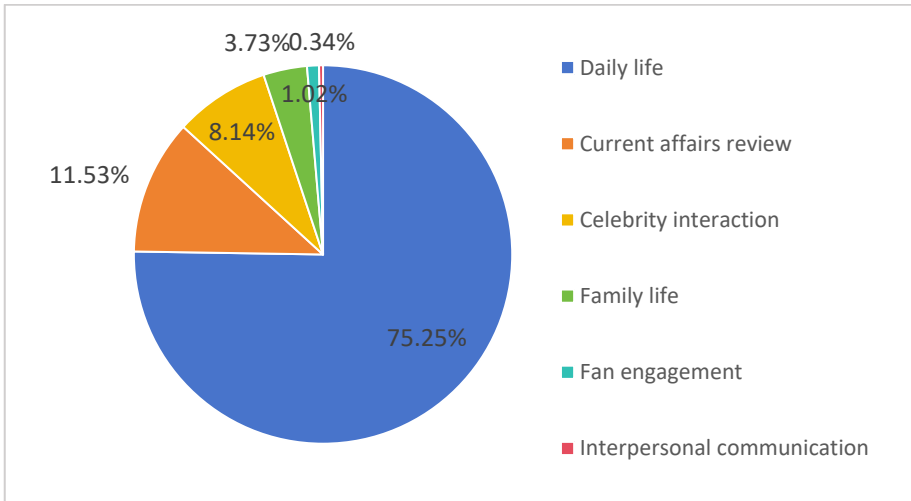


Fig. 2. Dimension composition of personal-related front-stage behaviors.

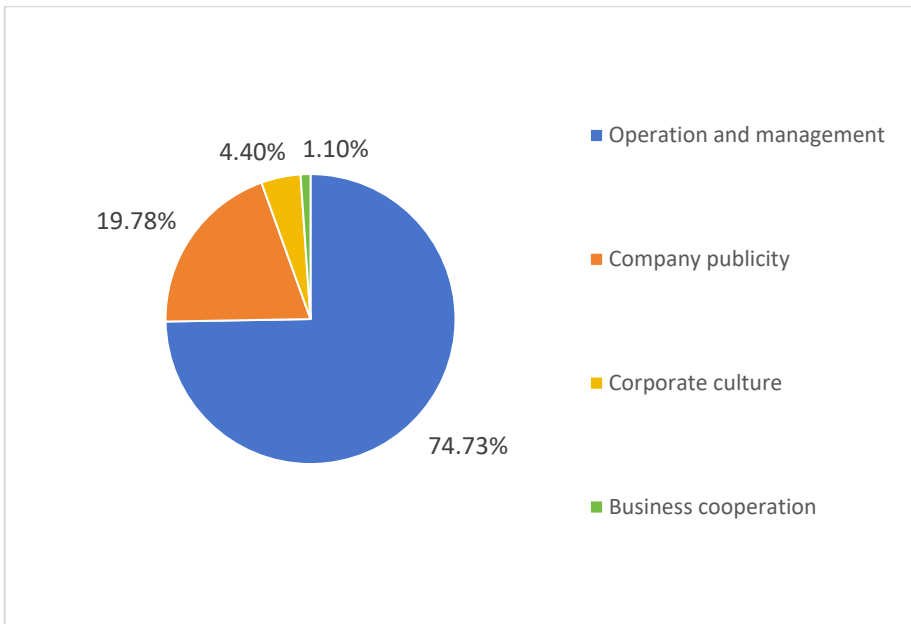


Fig. 3. Dimension composition of enterprise-related front-stage behaviors.

Social-related front-stage behaviors refer to some non-market, non-enterprise, and non-personal behaviors that entrepreneurs participate in. This dimension accounts for 8.43% of entrepreneurs' front-stage and mainly includes four sub-dimensions: participating in and discussing state affairs, civilization construction, charity activity, and

public welfare activity, accounting for 65.91%, 18.18%, 11.36%, and 4.55% of social-related front-stage behaviors respectively. See Figure 4.

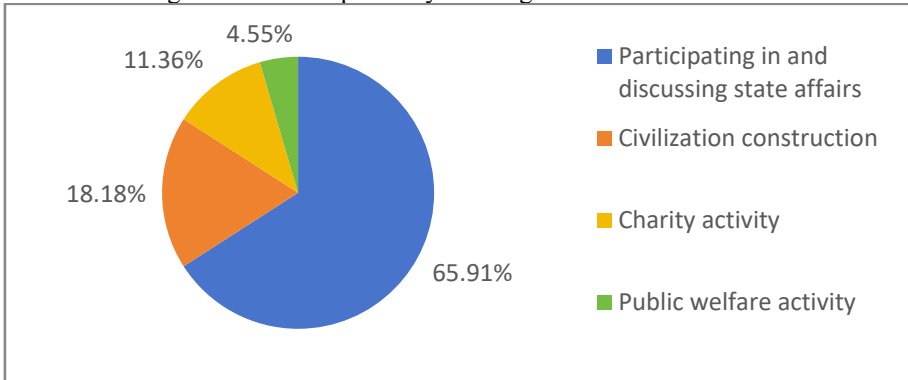


Fig. 4. Dimension composition of social-related front-stage behaviors.

5 Discussion

5.1 Conclusion

This qualitative research has deeply explored entrepreneurs' active front-stage behaviors in the new media environment and successfully classified them into three categories: personal-related active front-stage behaviors, enterprise-related active front-stage behaviors, and social-related active front-stage behaviors.

5.2 Implication

First, it enriches the theory of entrepreneurial behavior. This research provides a new classification perspective for the study of entrepreneurs' behaviors in the new media environment, helping to further understand entrepreneurs' behavior patterns in the new media era. Second, it expands the research field of new media. Through the classification research on entrepreneurs' active front-stage behaviors on new media platforms, it provides new cases for the application and impact research of new media.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Based on qualitative methods, this paper constructs a theoretical framework through content analysis and category induction. While this method can dig deeper into the meaning behind the data, it lacks the support of quantitative data, which can lead to subjective. Future research should include quantitative methods to supplement qualitative analysis. In the data pre-processing stage, although stratified sampling and interval sampling methods are adopted, they may still be affected by data homogeneity and representativeness, leading to bias in analysis results. Future research should explore

more advanced sampling methods that better address data homogeneity and representativeness. The new media environment changes rapidly, and entrepreneurs' active front-stage behaviors are also constantly evolving. The classification results of this research may change over time and with the development of new media technologies and need continuous tracking and research.

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