

Chinese-Language YouTube Videos on the Bucha Incident: A Study of Presentation Styles and Audience Behavior

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Abstract

Digital platforms have transformed how war-related news is consumed and shared, shaping public perceptions of international conflicts. This study explores how presentation styles of Chinese-language YouTube videos influence audience engagement with news about the Bucha Incident during the Russia-Ukraine war. Based on an analysis of 682 videos uploaded between February 2022 and September 2023, the research examines uploader type, video length, report type, narrative perspective, and journalistic subjectivity. Findings indicate that longer videos, commentary formats, second-person narration, and subjective reporting significantly increase views, likes, and comments, while uploader identity exhibits no consistent effect. These results underscore the growing role of personalized and interactive storytelling in shaping audience responses to war-related digital content.

Keywords: audience behavior, Bucha incident, presentation styles, YouTube, war-related news

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Introduction: Bucha Incident

The Bucha Incident in April 2022 marked a significant turning point in the Russia-Ukraine war. After Russian forces withdrew from Bucha, a town near Kyiv, the Ukrainian government accused them of killing civilians during the occupation and released visual evidence to support the claim. The incident drew widespread international condemnation, with many labeling it a war crime. Russia denied the allegations, insisting the footage was staged and accusing Ukraine of manipulating global opinion.

Media coverage of the incident varied considerably across geopolitical contexts. Western mainstream outlets (e.g., CNN, BBC) portrayed it as evidence of Russian atrocities, emphasizing Ukrainian victimhood and assigning blame to President Putin and his forces. In contrast, Russian state media (e.g., RT, Sputnik) and pro-Russian commentators questioned the authenticity of the evidence and framed the incident as a Ukrainian fabrication aimed at discrediting Russia. These competing narratives highlight how media framing shapes global interpretations of conflict.

Chinese-language media also reflected broader geopolitical divides. While China and Taiwan share a written language, their media coverage diverged notably. Chinese state outlets (e.g., Global Times) tended to align with Russia's position and downplay accusations, whereas Taiwanese media (e.g., SET News, FTV, PTS) largely relied on Western sources and emphasized Ukraine's perspective. The growing influence of digital platforms and independent media has further diversified how war-related information circulates, particularly among Chinese-speaking audiences.

YouTube, as the world's largest video platform, curates content from mainstream media, alternative outlets, and independent creators, with algorithms shaping visibility and user engagement (Reveillac, 2024). Videos about the Bucha Incident range from professional reports to personal commentary, influencing how viewers interpret and respond to the event. Analyzing how these videos present the incident—and how different formats affect engagement metrics such as views, likes, and comments—offers insight into contemporary war communication and participatory media dynamics.

Literature Review

Within the Chinese-speaking world, YouTube has become a key platform for accessing international news, significantly shaping how information is disseminated and received. In Taiwan, YouTube not only serves as a channel for news distribution but also actively influences public opinion and frames public discourse. Users engage at varying levels—from passive behaviors such as viewing and liking to more active forms like commenting. These actions collectively affect the visibility of news content and steer the direction of online discussions (Boukes et al., 2022; Hasan et al., 2023; Khan, 2017; Ksiazek et al., 2016). This dynamic is particularly relevant to war reporting: on YouTube, war-related videos function not only as sources of information but also as tools for shaping global public opinion through sharing and interaction (Baker, 2013).

YouTube content creators include traditional news organizations (e.g., TVBS, BBC Chinese), digital-native media outlets (e.g., ETtoday), and ordinary users. The presentation style of a video—defined by the uploader's identity, video length, report type, narrative perspective, and level of subjectivity—can all influence how viewers interpret and respond to news

content. Recent research has increasingly explored how these factors affect audience engagement.

Regarding uploader identity, Welbourne and Grant (2016) found that professionally produced videos from established media outlets tend to attract more views. These organizations benefit from greater resources and loyal subscriber bases, making their content more visible and likely to prompt discussion compared to user-generated content (UGC) (Borghol et al., 2012; Burgess & Green, 2009; Djerf-Pierre et al., 2019; Ksiazek, 2018).

Video length also plays a role in viewership. Shorter videos are generally more clickable and accessible (Aggrawal & Arora, 2019; Borghol et al., 2012; Cheng et al., 2008). However, Guo et al. (2014) argue that it is not just brevity but also production quality—such as editing and pacing—that drives engagement.

Report type, narrative perspective, and subjectivity likewise shape audience behavior (Boukes, 2019). Traditional news videos typically adopt a third-person perspective, maintain objectivity, and avoid personal opinions. In contrast, commentary videos and UGC often feature first-person narration and explicit viewpoints (van Zoonen, 2012). Boukes et al. (2022) found that such commentary videos tend to receive more likes and comments, likely due to their more subjective and engaging tone. Therefore, these stylistic elements—report format, narrative voice, and subjectivity—may be key factors in shaping user interaction with news content on YouTube.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposes the following hypotheses regarding how different presentation styles may affect audience engagement on YouTube videos related to the Bucha Incident:

H1: The type of video uploader significantly affects audience engagement, as measured by the number of views, likes, and comments.

H2: Video length significantly affects audience engagement, as measured by the number of views, likes, and comments.

H3: The type of news report significantly affects audience engagement, as measured by the number of views, likes, and comments.

H4: The narrative perspective employed in the video significantly affects audience engagement, as measured by the number of views, likes, and comments.

H5: The presence or absence of subjective commentary by the reporter significantly affects audience engagement, as measured by the number of views, likes, and comments.

Despite the growing presence of war-related content on social media platforms, systematic quantitative research on how different presentation styles affect audience engagement—such as views, likes, and comments—remains limited. This study addresses this gap by analyzing YouTube videos related to the Bucha incident to investigate how various content features shape viewer responses and to clarify the platform's role in shaping public understanding of international events.

Methodology

This study conducted a YouTube search in late 2023 using the keyword “Bucha” to identify relevant videos uploaded from February 2022 to September 2023. Full news broadcasts, talk

shows, and videos that were invalid or had been removed were excluded during the selection process. A total of 682 news videos met the inclusion criteria and were retained for analysis.

The dataset was divided between two trained coders, who independently coded the videos. For each video, they coded variables such as uploader type (mainstream media, online media, or citizen media), upload date, video duration, view count, like count, and comment count. Regarding presentation style, videos were further coded based on report type (objective news, commentary, or citizen report), length (under 2 minutes, 2–4 minutes, or over 4 minutes), narrative perspective (first-person, second-person, or third-person), and the presence or absence of subjective commentary by the reporter. To ensure coding reliability, a subset of videos was double-coded, and intercoder agreement scores for all variables exceeded 0.8.

Following data collection, Welch's ANOVA was used to examine the effects of different presentation styles on audience engagement metrics.

Analysis

Uploader Types

The results of Welch's ANOVA revealed that the uploader category did not significantly influence view counts ($F(2, 151.94) = 0.68, p = .509$) or comment counts ($F(2, 154.70) = 0.12, p = .887$). Although there was a statistically significant effect on like counts ($F(2, 122.00) = 3.29, p < .05$), post-hoc analysis using the Games-Howell test indicated no significant differences between groups. Thus, the results did not support H1, suggesting that uploader identity may not be a key factor affecting the number of views, likes, or comments on Bucha-related videos.

However, the uploader category was significantly associated with video length (Welch's $F(2, 136.240) = 6.62, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$), indicating a small to medium effect size. Mainstream media videos had the shortest average length ($M = 290.11$ seconds, $SD = 399.55$), followed by online media ($M = 403.70$ seconds, $SD = 361.66$), while citizen media produced the longest videos on average ($M = 605.73$ seconds, $SD = 1227.20$), showing the greatest variation in length. Post-hoc analysis revealed that the difference in video length between mainstream and online media was statistically significant ($p < .01$), while other group comparisons were not (see Table 1). This suggests that online media generally produce longer videos than mainstream outlets, while citizen media exhibit considerable variability in video length, possibly reflecting the diversity of their production styles.

Table 1

Welch's ANOVA on the Effect of Uploader Type on Video Length

	N	M	SD	F	p	η^2
Uploader Type						
Traditional Media (1)	485	290.11	399.551	6.62	.002	.03
Online Media (2)	131	403.70	361.665			
Citizen Media (3)	66	605.73	1227.203			
Total	682	342.47	539.969			

$F(2, 136.240) = 6.62, p < .01$

Games-Howell: (1, 2) **

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Video Length

Video length had a significant effect on both view counts (Welch's $F(2, 424.89) = 5.79, p < .01, \eta^2 = .014$) and like counts (Welch's $F(2, 391.13) = 11.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$, see Table 2), but it did not significantly affect comment counts (Welch's $F(2, 444.08) = 2.62, p = .074$).

Table 2

Welch's ANOVA Analysis of Video Length on Like Count

	N	M	SD	F	P	η^2
Video Length						
Under 2:00 (1)	223	167.69	354.793	11.64	< .001	.05
2:01- 4:00 (2)	216	227.69	604.781			
Over 4:01 (3)	243	624.57	1442.400			
Total	682	349.48	968.696			

$F(2, 391.13) = 11.64, p < .001$

Games-Howell: (1, 3)***, (2, 3)***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Post-hoc analyses revealed that videos longer than four minutes ($M = 27,497.72, SD = 48,726.85$) attracted significantly more views than videos shorter than two minutes ($M = 14,855.58, SD = 30,282.98$). Regarding likes, long videos ($M = 624.57, SD = 1,442.40$) received significantly more likes than both medium-length videos ($M = 227.69, SD = 604.78$) and short videos ($M = 167.69, SD = 354.79$).

Report Type

Report type had a significant effect on both view counts (Welch's $F(2, 102.63) = 3.29, p < .05$) and like counts (Welch's $F(2, 88.25) = 7.25, p < .01$). Post-hoc analyses indicated that commentary videos received significantly more views ($M = 34,549.81, SD = 61,234.81$) than both objective news ($M = 19,033.28, SD = 41,612.03$) and citizen reports ($M = 14,738.18, SD = 38,323.94, p < .001$). Additionally, commentary videos garnered significantly more likes ($M = 897.18, SD = 1,833.07$) than objective news videos ($M = 230.49, SD = 535.28$).

Report type also significantly influenced video length (Welch's $F(2, 96.18) = 13.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$, see Table 3), indicating a large effect size. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that commentary videos ($M = 834.43$ seconds, $SD = 1,087.64$) were significantly longer than objective news videos ($M = 260.44$ seconds, $SD = 316.35$) and citizen reports ($M = 277.32$ seconds, $SD = 337.53$). These results suggest that commentary-style videos tend to be longer and are more effective in attracting audience engagement.

Table 3*Welch's ANOVA on the Effect of Report Type on Video Length*

	N	M	SD	F	p	η^2
Report Type						
Objective News (1)	536	260.44	316.350	13.09	< .001	.14
Citizen Report (2)	50	277.32	337.529			
Commentary (3)	96	834.43	1087.635			
Total	682	342.47	539.969			

F(2, 96.18) = 13.09, $p < .001$

Games-Howell: (1, 3)***, (2, 3)***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ **Narrative Perspective**

The narrative perspective adopted in a video significantly influenced both view counts (Welch's $F(2, 104.27) = 5.16$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and comment counts (Welch's $F(2, 99.39) = 4.71$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). Games-Howell post-hoc tests revealed that videos employing a second-person perspective (e.g., using "you") garnered significantly more views ($M = 39,247.43$, $SD = 56,658.46$) and comments than those using a third-person perspective ($M = 17,596.57$, $SD = 39,904.34$).

Table 4*Welch's ANOVA on the Effect of Narrative Perspective on Like Count*

	N	M	SD	F	P	η^2
Narrative Perspective						
First Person (1)	91	671.70	1767.543	9.35	< .001	.07
Second Person (2)	58	1055.17	1753.838			
Third Person (3)	533	217.68	503.617			
Total	682	349.48	968.696			

F(2, 95.07) = 9.35, $p < .001$

Games-Howell: (1, 3)*, (2, 3)**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Narrative perspective also had a significant impact on like counts (Welch's $F(2, 95.07) = 9.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$), reflecting a medium effect size (see Table 4). Videos using the second-person perspective ($M = 1,055.17$, $SD = 1,753.84$) received significantly more likes than those using either the first-person ($M = 671.70$, $SD = 1,767.54$) or third-person perspective ($M = 217.68$, $SD = 503.62$). These findings suggest that second-person narration may promote greater viewer engagement by creating a more direct and interactive communicative tone.

Journalistic Subjectivity

Welch's t-tests were conducted to examine whether the inclusion of journalist subjectivity influenced user engagement. The results showed that videos featuring subjective commentary garnered significantly more views ($M = 33,109.95$, $SD = 59,259.81$) than those without such commentary ($M = 18,082.05$, $SD = 40,493.25$), $t(155.46) = -2.73$, $p < .01$.

Similarly, subjective videos received significantly more likes ($M = 832.82$, $SD = 1,769.85$) than objective ones ($M = 237.81$, $SD = 607.98$), $t(134.00) = -3.75$, $p < .001$. The number of comments was also significantly higher for subjective videos ($M = 95.56$, $SD = 213.61$) compared to objective ones ($M = 44.90$, $SD = 111.61$), $t(143.39) = -2.60$, $p < .01$. These results suggest that audiences may be more engaged with videos in which journalists express personal views or opinions, potentially perceiving such content as more relatable or emotionally compelling.

While van Zoonen (2012) and Boukes et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of narrative style and subjectivity in increasing audience engagement, the present study specifically demonstrates that videos containing subjective commentary from journalists tend to generate more views, likes, and comments. This suggests that the presence of subjectivity—particularly in the form of personal or emotionally charged commentary—can lead to stronger audience interaction. These results align with previous findings and underscore the significance of narrative perspective and subjectivity in shaping user engagement, especially in videos addressing complex or emotionally intense topics. Moreover, the findings suggest that subjective framing could be a key driver of interaction, reinforcing the notion that personalized or opinionated content may foster a stronger connection with audiences.

Conclusion

This study tested five hypotheses to investigate how different presentation styles of YouTube videos about the Bucha Incident influence viewer behavior in terms of views, likes, and comments. The findings are summarized as follows:

Uploader Characteristics (H1): The results were not statistically significant, indicating that the identity of the video uploader may not be a primary factor influencing viewer engagement. However, a significant difference in video length was observed across uploader types, suggesting that different types of media may adopt varying production strategies.

Video Length (H2): Longer videos generated significantly higher view and like counts but had no significant effect on comment counts. This suggests that while longer videos can attract more attention, they do not necessarily stimulate greater audience interaction.

Report Type (H3): Report type significantly influenced both view and like counts. Commentary videos received more views and likes than objective news and citizen reports, indicating that audiences may prefer content with personal analysis or opinions. Report type also affected video length, with commentary videos generally being longer.

Narrative Perspective (H4): The use of narrative perspective significantly influenced view, like, and comment counts. Videos using the second-person perspective (e.g., “you”) generated higher engagement, suggesting that a more interactive language style can enhance audience participation.

Journalistic Subjectivity (H5): Videos featuring journalists’ opinions elicited more views, likes, and comments than neutral reports. This finding complements the result on report type, reinforcing the idea that personalized narratives are more engaging to viewers.

In sum, this study finds that video length, report type, narrative perspective, and journalistic subjectivity all significantly influence viewer behavior on YouTube videos related to the Bucha Incident. Uploader identity, however, did not show a consistent effect. These findings offer valuable practical insights for media organizations and content creators seeking to refine their production strategies and enhance audience engagement with war-related video content.

More broadly, the findings provide empirical evidence that the form of presentation—especially narrative voice and subjectivity—plays a critical role in shaping audience engagement in digital conflict communication. The strong effects of second-person narration and journalist subjectivity suggest a shift in audience preferences toward more affective, dialogic, and personalized content. These trends challenge traditional assumptions about journalistic neutrality and reflect evolving audience expectations in participatory media environments, where emotional connection and interactive styles appear to drive greater attention and response.

Limitations

Due to the high variability and heterogeneity of the dataset, this study adopted Welch’s ANOVA for group comparisons and employed the Games-Howell post-hoc test to assess differences in views, likes, and comments across presentation styles. However, Welch’s ANOVA is primarily designed for comparing means and may be sensitive to data with extreme skewness, potentially affecting the robustness of the results. Future studies are encouraged to apply non-parametric tests (such as the Kruskal-Wallis test) or regression models better suited for count data (such as negative binomial regression) to further verify the reliability and generalizability of these findings.

Future Research

Although this study included videos uploaded by both domestic and international media, uploader type did not significantly influence viewer engagement. Future research could explore this further using mixed methods, such as incorporating content or discourse analysis, to uncover more nuanced factors behind audience responses. Expanding the research scope to other conflict topics or platforms—such as TikTok, Facebook, or news websites—may reveal platform-specific engagement patterns. Additionally, examining the role of other stylistic or interactive elements (e.g., thumbnail design, captions, emotional tone) could enrich our understanding of what drives user behavior in digital war-related media.

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