

Health Meaning and Internal Expression in Community Public Spaces—Field Investigation Based on the First Village in Yunnan



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Abstract: As a living environment for residents, the community is an important carrier and platform for health communication that cannot be ignored. From a constructivist perspective, the meaning of health can only be expressed through "insiders" in cultural contexts. The participation of individuals, as the target of health mobilization, should not be overlooked, and this bottom-up power is crucial in determining the effectiveness of health mobilization. This article explores the connection between the material and representational dimensions of health communication in community public spaces through the use of identifiers, symbols, and media. It seeks to understand the meaning of health from a collectivist and community level, emphasizing the central role of structural factors and culture in the process of community health communication. The agency of community residents is also highlighted, and the localization context facilitates the stimulation of shared emotions and collective action, thus forming an "internal expression" of health communication within the community.

Keywords: community; health communication; participation; subjectivity

1. Introduce

Over the past three decades, the rapid development of township enterprises and the collective path have made Daying Street Community a notable village. While vigorously promoting economic growth, the community has also actively engaged in the construction of rural civilization and the creation of a happy community. In order to effectively enhance public awareness of risks and improve their understanding of public health incidents, the neighborhood committee of Daying Street Community utilizes the effectiveness of community grid governance to actively disseminate health knowledge. Daying Street Community has also become the "last mile" for the implementation of national power and policy discourse, achieving the goal of health mobilization through grassroots organizations acting as intermediaries in the social mobilization mechanism.

From the perspective of the interplay between space and communication forms, the public nature of

Daying Street Community's space is reflected in the interactions and engagements that people establish through various intermediaries. This includes the relationships formed among individuals who embody this tendency and the process of spatial production known as the "in-between space" (Yu, 2016). Furthermore, this public space encompasses the cultural cognition and collective memory of the natural and architectural environment for the people of Daying Street. It represents their subjective understanding and perspectives towards the environment. Various mediums, such as text signs that convey health information, targeted broadcasts through community loudspeakers, and the presentation of intelligent mobile applications, have become vital carriers of community health promotion. They facilitate the implementation of health mobilization within the community domain and construct a distinctive landscape of health communication within the community's public space.

Therefore, by exploring and investigating the representative and symbolic media carriers within Daying Street Community, we can develop a deeper

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understanding of community health communication. From the perspective of communication anthropology, we can discuss how the new rural communities, in the context of socialist rural development and urbanization, utilize identifiers, symbols, and media to achieve the goal of health communication. How does the public nature of community space establish a connection between the material and representational dimensions of health communication? How do we interpret the potential of space and its association with people's active selection of health information in the daily activities of Daying Street residents? These questions will be the focus of this paper.

2. Understanding the Meaning of Health: Starting from the Community

From a constructivist perspective, health communication is a process in which people create meaning through interaction. In this process, elements such as language, history, social structures, and organizational relationships influence the construction of health meanings. Health meanings can only be expressed through the "insiders" in the cultural context (Sharf & Kahler, 1996). Here, "insiders" refer to members of marginalized communities. Compared to urban residents who have advantages in health information dissemination and reception, rural residents have limited self-health management capabilities. They are considered disadvantaged subjects or communities in the process of health communication and hold a vulnerable position in the production of health discourse. However, as individuals targeted for health mobilization, their participation should not be overlooked. Although their participation practices are often grassroots and informal, this bottom-up power is crucial in determining the effectiveness of mobilization (Laverack & Manoncourt, 2016). Furthermore, health communication and health mobilization do not immediately trigger collective action among individuals; instead, they often achieve results through the "adaptive discourse" of grassroots organizations (Wang & Yang, 2018).

Health communication is a behavior aimed at transforming medical research findings into public health knowledge, and through attitude and behavior change, reducing the incidence and mortality rates of diseases, and effectively improving the quality of life

and health standards of a community or country (Rogers, 1994). The importance of community governance and the cohesion of community emotions is self-evident. Faced with the practical challenges brought by major public health emergencies, it is crucial for communities to strengthen the dissemination and implementation of health information and knowledge, enhance residents' self-health management capabilities, and encourage the public to actively utilize various information channels and knowledge to assess and select risk information, thereby safeguarding the physical and mental health of residents. Addressing and improving these issues is an urgent matter and holds significant importance for the development of community health.

3. "Words and Deeds": The Strategic Expression of Health Knowledge Through Public Signs

The dissemination of slogans is characterized by their visual presence in physical spaces, which distinguishes them from other forms of communication. The production and reception of their meaning require a specific time and space. With the intervention of slogans, spaces become symbolic and carry meaning, serving as a convergence of various cultural landscapes with real referents (Yan, 2012). The planning layout of Daying Street is divided into five functional zones, such as the residential area in the east and the industrial area in the west. This orderly division of functions provides convenient conditions for the dissemination of health information within the community. In each functional zone, there are signs displaying health knowledge and hygiene information. For example, in the Yuquan Lake community, there are signs along the main road at the entrance, indicating a health trail several hundred meters long, accompanied by catchy slogans. Based on observations, the slogans within the community primarily focus on individual health protection. They often use slogans that emphasize "self-health" and "personal protection" to encourage the adoption of healthy behaviors, shifting individuals from passive acceptance of physical discipline to actively seeking health. On the other hand, the slogans on the streets tend to lean towards "patriotic hygiene relies on everyone" and similar "altruistic motivations," thus forming a resonant relationship between "self-interest motivation" and

"altruistic motivation" within the community health collective.

Through the investigation, it has been found that there is a significant pattern of stratification in the establishment of community slogans. Chinese society revolves around the self, with relationships such as kinship and geographic proximity radiating outward like "water ripples." This social structure, ranging from close to distant, from inner to outer circles, indirectly shapes the expression of community health mobilization strategies. These strategies start from fostering self-health awareness, advocating for the protection and convenience of others, and ultimately extending to collective consciousness at the community and national levels. This forms a health mobilization strategy of "self - others - community - society." The communication ecosystem within the community is primarily based on strong relationships with acquaintances. The hierarchical nature of relationships allows for the continuous expansion of the dissemination of health communication. Health information is partially based on the influence of the disseminators, making it easier to stimulate recipient recognition and learning, thereby generating a demonstration effect that drives action. Moreover, the placement of signs within residential areas and on major roads creates a normalized presence in physical spaces, which supports the transition of health communication from emergency management to regular governance.

4. "Speak Loudly with Reason": The Power Metaphor of Community Loudspeakers in Health Communication

Prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the medical level in Daying Street was relatively low, without dedicated medical institutions. However, there were some folk doctors who engaged in medical activities, and certain remedies for treating illnesses were widely circulated in the area. For example, it was believed that drinking water boiled with carrot leaves and adding brown sugar could treat diarrhea, while consuming ginger soup with brown sugar was thought to prevent and treat colds caused by wind and cold weather (Ma & Sun, 2009, pp. 6, 222–223). Although these remedies were no longer restricted to being passed down within families or to specific individuals, they were still limited to a small group of people.

However, mass media successfully broke through this limitation by transforming medical achievements into public health knowledge and disseminating it widely. This reflects the multidimensional nature of health communication and also represents a transfer of power, as state power became involved in rural governance.

The towering loudspeakers in the vast rural areas have been a metaphor for state power since their inception (Wang, 2013). As a communication medium, they play a similar role to television in national mobilization (Yin, 2016). At the end of 2020, the Daying Street community established an intelligent broadcasting system, primarily aimed at disseminating national, provincial, municipal, and district policies to residents. In terms of broadcasting time and content, it adheres to the propaganda requirements of various government departments. From December 26, 2020, until now, the intelligent broadcasting system has been cyclically broadcasting materials such as "Ten Strict Prohibitions" and "Seven Patriotic Hygiene Campaign Songs" from 11:30 to 12:30 and 17:00 to 19:00 daily. It timely promotes the current work of the community. Among them, "Active Participation in Patriotic Hygiene" is a locally created patriotic hygiene-themed song that uses cheerful and bright nursery rhymes to infect and mobilize residents in the area to actively participate in the patriotic hygiene movement.

"The voice of reason must be loud." As a public medium in rural areas, the loudspeaker itself is an integral part of the construction of political power by the state. It assists the centers of power in establishing an extensive national territory, allowing remote and isolated border regions to maintain close connections with the center. With its advantages of strong influence, wide audience reach, and no language barriers, the loudspeaker gathers all those who can hear its sound, achieving the broadest social mobilization possible (Wang, 2013). To expand the transmission range and deliver information accurately to each neighborhood, the loudspeakers in Daying Street are placed on central pillars at the entrance of each residential area, strategically positioned at high points within the community. Combined with the content broadcasted through the loudspeakers, it meets residents' basic requirements for authoritative and trustworthy health information, effectively gaining entry into the community through

this vivid and approachable method. The delivery of this mainstream voice has become the most reliable information that villagers need during public emergencies or risks. In terms of communication methods, with the significant increase in radio and television coverage, especially the widespread popularity of emerging media such as mobile phones, the rural loudspeakers had temporarily faded from the historical stage. However, they have now re-entered the villagers' field of vision and played a significant role in disseminating emergency health knowledge. This transformation can be seen as a transition in the governance approach of state power within rural communities and as proactive measures taken by local authorities in response to major unexpected risks.

5. "Catch Them All in One Swoop": Clearing the Last Mile of Health Communication

Health communication is the effective transmission of knowledge related to health, influencing changes in people's attitudes and behaviors, and effectively achieving disease prevention, improving the quality of life, and raising the health level of the population (Yan, 2003). To ensure the effectiveness of health communication, it is necessary to establish smooth and convenient channels of communication. In addition, from a subjective perspective, the subject in health communication should not be "educated" and "persuaded." They have the right and ability to establish understanding, develop knowledge, and take action. A single flow of information is no longer sufficient for the accurate dissemination of health knowledge in the community. The construction of supportive social networks is more conducive to dialogue with the community and enhancing the effectiveness of health communication in localized contexts.

In terms of community governance, Daying Street implements the "integration" of online group building grids and comprehensive governance grids. The community is divided into nine grids, with online group branches established within each grid. Grid defense teams are formed, consisting of community police officers, community online group members, and community security volunteers. Each grid area is assigned two grid managers, a street contact leader, and 4-10 street contact officials. Each

grid is responsible for a certain number of households, restaurants, construction sites, and other business establishments. For example, the fifth grid area has the highest number of households, with 2010 households. The eighth grid area has the most diverse types of establishments, including 224 households, one street, one comprehensive cultural station, one community, one new era civilized practice station, one primary school, one extracurricular tutoring institution, one scenic spot, two internet cafes, one construction site, 51 restaurants, and one other business establishment. As a result, Daying Street achieves comprehensive network coverage in community management, which facilitates the dissemination of national public health and safety governance policies and the popularization of health knowledge.

In addition, the Daying Street community has designed and developed an app that combines grassroots social governance with media-based governance, enabling timely and effective communication of information to residents in the face of public health emergencies. "This app was jointly developed by the Municipal Online-group Committee Organization Department and Political and Legal Affairs Committee. All functional departments in the street and city are here. In other words, if anyone encounters any issues, they can report it through this app, and the corresponding functional departments will be notified to help resolve the issues. If our community cannot solve a problem, we report it to the street. If the street cannot solve it, we will continue to report it until the issue is addressed by the relevant functional departments." (July 25, 2021, at the Residents' Representative Conference of Daying Street Community, the police station director gave instructions on the use of the intelligent app for online group building-led grassroots social governance). The person in charge of app promotion has consistently emphasized the need for everyone to scan the QR code and register, especially urging the grid managers to take the lead.

The "Daying Street Community" mini-program is also an important achievement in promoting intelligent governance within the community. It includes basic sections such as community introduction, public notices, welfare policies, community honor roll, local news, and other essential items. It also includes additional sections introduced

during the pandemic, such as registration for returning residents and reporting of vehicles from other areas, as well as a self-fill section for residents to report issues and seek assistance. The main interface of the program displays the most important messages from the "Community Loudspeaker," which provide information about the community's regular pandemic prevention and control measures regarding "preventing external input and internal rebound." To avoid excessive close contact, residents are encouraged to use the WeChat mini-program for self-reporting. Additionally, there are various local information available, including a series of notifications from the Yuxi City Epidemic Response Command Office regarding epidemic prevention and control, news reports from Huixi Cable TV on epidemic prevention and control, and the dissemination of health and hygiene knowledge.

The community, as an area where residents live together, is an essential carrier for health communication from a governance perspective. At the same time, residents are the main participants in this carrier. Effective health communication may involve integrating residents into community health and safety governance. Through technological services, residents' proactiveness and initiative can be amplified while enhancing the information responsiveness of grassroots society in handling emergencies. This can be achieved by establishing a community information collection mechanism. The community's strong promotion of smart apps and mini-programs can be seen as Daying Street Community addressing the coordination between grid units using modern information technology. With detailed divisions in physical and logical grids, the social public management information platform serves as support for dynamic and all-round management of each specific grid. By leveraging the influence of grid managers and representative members, epidemic prevention and control documents are disseminated, hygiene protection knowledge is popularized, and timely notifications regarding vaccination are delivered. This enhances the efficiency of group and organizational communication. Through the familiar circles of users within the grids, trust is established between the recipients and senders of information during the process of health communication, laying the foundation for interactive health communication.

This also facilitates the explosive spread of the influence of health communication, constructing a localized path for "network plus grid" health communication.

6. Conclusion

In the past, healthcare was primarily focused on doctors and medical institutions, emphasizing the supremacy of scientific and objective medical knowledge. As a result, people sought medical attention from doctors when they fell ill. However, the current concept of health places communities and individuals as the main agents of healthcare, emphasizing the humanistic and cultural aspects of medical outcomes. Communities and individuals must actively participate in the sustainable management of health (Chen, 2003). Numerous empirical studies have shown that effective community communication and the creation of a supportive environment can foster a sense of belonging among residents, thereby enhancing their ability to cope with the environment and their confidence in facing new challenges in life (Yan & Zheng, 2008). For the Daying Street community, whether it is the strategic expression of health knowledge through public signage, the emergency response of the community loudspeaker during public health incidents, or the integrated operation of online group building grids and comprehensive governance grids, they understand the significance of health from a collective and community perspective. Structural factors and the central role of culture are further emphasized in this process, highlighting the agency of community residents.

The health communication system in Daying Street is a diverse and multi-dimensional network of information dissemination. The integration of new and traditional media, the interweaving of formal and informal communication channels, and the intertwining of organizational communication, group communication, mass communication, and interpersonal communication have created a new landscape of health communication in the community, incorporating both "top-down" and "bottom-up" communication models. This has formed the "internal expression" of health communication within the community. Here, the "voice" of the community replaces health information as the core of health communication, and the establishment of intelligent

platforms allows community members to establish collective discourse through dialogue, discussion, and public expression of communication strategies (De Souza, 2009). The concept of "people-centered" and "audience-centric" health, to some extent, is more conducive to exploring an adaptive path of health communication and better understanding how new rural communities, amid the construction of socialist new rural areas and urbanization, use symbolic signs to achieve health communication goals. It helps us better interpret the potential of space in the daily activities of Daying Street residents and the connection between their active selection of health information. In the community, the use of these media and the application of symbols also help us understand whether and how individual discourse and grassroots discourse participate in health mobilization. This highlights the significance of everyday life and micro-level practices in health mobilization, emphasizes the role of the community in health promotion, and encourages reflection on the relationship between media integration and public space in the community.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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