

## Research Article

# Investigating the Supply and Demand Bias between Media and Audience in the Information Technology Era: Evidence from Data Analysis of Chinese Outreach

Guoping Yang 

*School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu University of Technology, Changzhou, Jiangsu 213001, China*

Correspondence should be addressed to Guoping Yang; [guopingyang@stu.wzu.edu.cn](mailto:guopingyang@stu.wzu.edu.cn)

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As an integral part of discourse system, external publicity frequently functions as a useful tool of information release and also an indispensable part effective communication. The existing studies on external publicity concentrate more on the information release of bilateral side, namely, on the side of information issuer, than on the side of information receiver, not to say, the perspective of the supply and demand deviation between media and audience. Based on the questionnaire and in-depth interviews, this paper has investigated the deviations between the information supply of Chinese Media and the information demand of the foreign residents in China, as well as the deviations of the information channels between Chinese Media and foreign residents in China. It is revealed that the factors of age, nationality, occupation, and the length of stay in China have exerted a significant influence on the preference of information needs and also the mode of their access to the information issued by Chinese media. Despite the fact that the current Chinese external publicity could meet the general needs of foreign residents, the awareness of targeted supply of information should be continuously improved. The influence of Chinese media on foreign residents is still limited, even though they undertake the responsibility of information dissemination in China and function as a bridge between China and western world. For this reason, there is still much room for the improvement in the scope of communication concept, communication methods, the media topics, as well as the effect of external publicity.

## 1. Introduction

With the deepening of China's reforms and opening up under globalization, the exchange between China and foreign countries has become increasingly active. In particular, attracted by the Belt and Road strategy of China in recent years, a large number of foreigners take great interest in the development of China and choose to work, study, or travel in different cities of China, which provide a good opportunity to bridge the gap and enhance the overall exchange between China and the outside world. Therefore, the Chinese media has undergone a big pressure of improving the capacity of international communication in the world and presenting a true, multidimensional, and comprehensive picture of China to foreigners. [1–5].

The paper revolves around the coordination of supply and demand in the international communication of Chinese

media based on the case study of Jiangsu province of China, a southeast province with highly developed economy and active exchange, highlighting on the deviation of supply and demand of external publicity in Jiangsu media [6–8], especially the gap in the content and channels of communication issued by Chinese media and interested by foreign residents in China, so as to match the core content and channels of foreign propaganda reports precisely, improving the effectiveness of Jiangsu's external publicity as well as serving as a reference for other provinces in China [6–13].

## 2. Introduction to Chinese External Publicity

External publicity is frequently employed as a good means by different countries or organizations to enhance the mutual understanding or reduce the bilateral misunderstanding of different culture from ancient times, thus building a

constructive image ultimately. In comparison, the rapid development of the western media industry has provided great convenience for its external publicity, and a dominating number of western countries, such as America, Britain, France, Germany, have made many exploration on the skills of external publicity in kinds of media or even in the election campaigns of all kinds. Therefore, the theoretical and practical achievements of external publicity attract more attention in academic circle [14–16].

The origin of China's national external publicity dates back to the Spring and Autumn Periods and the Warring states Period, when the vassal states tries to persuade each other to form the alliance to fight against others. However, the external publicity of China in modern sense started in the mid-1980s, and its real development and prosperity benefited from the great opportunity of national overseas image building and foreign propaganda development during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Since 2015, encouraged by the needs of improving international communication and constructing the international rights of speech, how to present China story and voice to the world in the new era have become one core topic in linguistics and communication, which have made China's external publicity flourish in recent years. [17–21].

From the perspective of research themes, most of the existing external publicity research focuses on national image construction, "international communication," "cross-cultural communication," and "soft power construction" as the entry point. The research focuses on "one belt and one road," "communication strategy," "new media," "language translation," and "globalization" in national external publicity reports and emphasizes the limitations of existing external publicity reports and their response strategies. The above research topics are either covered in the scope of communication science, which illustrates the strategy of China's external publicity in the context of globalization, and the path and strategy of Chinese culture dissemination in external publicity reports, or in the scope of linguistics, which explores the problems in the construction of rights of speech, with the aim of building a complete Chinese foreign communication discourse system.

From the perspective of research types, the theoretical and applied studies on external publicity are both available in existing studies, and the research findings corroborate each other. Theoretical research focuses are closely related with the current national guiding ideology of external publicity, external publicity strategy, the structure and function of external publicity, and the path of external publicity, and other macro topics, aiming to clarify and build an external publicity with Chinese characteristics and adapted to Chinese culture. The applied research focuses on new domestic phenomena, especially from the perspective of microcase studies to explore the core issues of "One Belt, One Road" cultural communication, national image construction, overseas communication of culture and products, and the shift of communication strategy of political and cultural news reporting.

From the perspective of research characteristics, the existing foreign communication research breaks through the

traditional path of independent development of a single discipline, and the trend of integrating the research perspectives of communication and linguistics becomes more and more obvious. The research process focuses on both the interpretation of national macropolicies or strategies and the analysis of communication patterns, and also closely follows the influence of microfactors such as translation, discourse system construction, and cultural interpretation on the construction of communication messages at the language level.

In short, the existing foreign propaganda research mostly starts from the source like information introduction and focuses on the introduction of domestic highlights, which not only is effective but also has obvious limitations. On the one hand, the sensitivity to changes of times in the communication environment is not strong. The existing external publicity relied heavily on the traditional media with newspapers and TV as the theme, and it is difficult to adapt to the characteristics of the times when everyone is a participant in information dissemination in the era of network information and self-media. Narrow information dissemination channels lead to significant discounting of information effects. On the other hand, the perspective experience of audience is insufficient. The existing external publicity focused on promoting domestic highlights from the perspective of the communicator with the help of its own traditional media, ignoring the audience's information needs and audience media habits, resulting in a mismatch between supply and demand of foreign propaganda information and channels, thus violating the basic principle that foreign communication is about results.

### 3. Research Questions and Methodology

In order to clarify the deviation between media and target audience under the influence of modern times as well as the individuality of reader, a questionnaire and follow-up interview are conducted in this research. The following two questions are examined thoroughly:

- (i) Does China's existing external publicity information meet the needs of foreign audiences? Alternatively, what kind of stories do we need to tell to foreign audiences? In specific, what kind of information is of interest to foreign audiences and what kind of information is provided by China's external publicity information?
- (ii) Does China's existing outreach channel meet the needs of foreign audiences? Alternatively, where do we tell the stories so that foreign audiences can hear them? In specific, what channels are foreign audiences used to get information about China, and what are our main channels to disseminate China's external publicity information?

The questionnaire employed in this research contains 12 subquestions, and 100 foreign residents living in Jiangsu province, China completed the questionnaire carefully either online or offline (50 paper and 50 online). The subjects varied in age, geography, the length of stay in China, and

occupation, and therefore, were somewhat representative. In response to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, the researcher also conducted in-depth interviews with some foreign residents in order to conduct in-depth follow-up on individual questions and make suggestions to China's existing external publicity in terms of communication channels and content, thus enhancing the overall research validity.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Findings

Since the 1920s, a variety of models reflecting different views and research methods have emerged in Western communication research, but it is generally accepted that the "5Ws" model of classical communication proposed by Lasswell (1948) is a powerful generalization which has greatly promoted the study of mass communication and opened a new era in communication research. According to the "5W" model, the information dissemination process consists of five links and elements, that is, communicator, communication content, communication channel, communication object, and communication effect. Therefore, if the communicator and the communication object are constant, we must focus on the communication content and the communication channel in order to optimize the communication effect. For this reason, the whole research on the deviation of China external publicity are mainly conduct from the demand of information content and its source channel.

*4.1. Analysis on the Demand of Information Content of Foreign Audiences.* The core of external publicity is to match target audience's demand of information content with the media's supply of information content, therefore, the key to successful communication lies in the effective and appropriate supply of information to meet the needs of target audience. The information provided by good communicators is often equal to or more than what audience need, while the failed communication often results in audience not capturing all or part of the information they need, and eventually forcing audience to seek relevant missing information from other channels.

*4.1.1. Analysis on the Focus of Interest of Foreign Audiences.* With 40 years of reform and opening up, China has developed rapidly, and its political, economic, cultural, social, and ecological civilization achievements have attracted strong attention from the outside world. Thus, the external publicity should concentrate more on the interest of foreign audience instead of a general introduction to the development of China in the past 40 years. The data show that 71% of the subjects have a strong or very strong interest in the ongoing story of China (see Figure 1), especially the long history and cultural heritage of China (31.29%), the progress of China's social undertakings (21.88%), and the achievements of economic enterprise development (22.91%).

It is worth noting that the majorities (82.35%) of foreigners who are really interested in the changes and development of China have been in China for three years or more, and the majorities (82.35%) have a strong desire to get

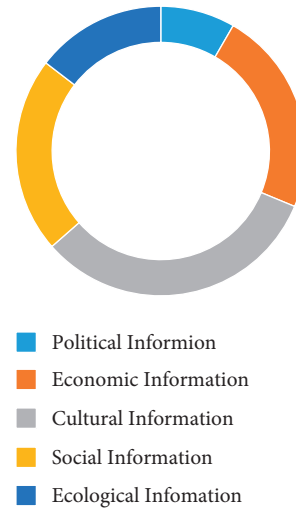


FIGURE 1: Focus of interest of foreign residents.

in touch with China. Their excellent Chinese language skills (64.28% of them think their Chinese language skills can meet the general communication or in-depth communication) provide them with better convenience to understand Jiangsu and integrate into the development of Jiangsu society.

*4.1.2. Analysis on the Information Satisfaction of Foreign Audiences.* The external publicity reports are targeted at foreign audiences. Therefore, successful external publicity reports should meet the needs of foreign audiences. Statistics show that the existing foreign propaganda can basically meet the information needs of the majority (89.34%) of foreigners in Jiangsu, especially those who have not been in China for a long time or know little about Jiangsu (see Figure 2). However, it is important to note that the data show that the information satisfaction of expatriates is highly correlated with the length of their stay in China. Foreign residents who have been in Jiangsu for more than three years are significantly less satisfied with information than those who have been in China for a shorter period of time (less than three years). Although the proportion of each group, which agrees to the alternative "not enough information," is the same, the approval rate for "fair information" is less than half of that for those who have been in China for less than three years (Figure 3). In-depth interviews revealed that, although the existing foreign affairs reports seem to be able to meet the needs of the audience, there is still much room for deeper understanding and satisfaction. The interest of foreign residents are scattered in the field of "History," "Religion," "Political Situation/Information," "Traditional Culture," "Transportation," "TV programs in English or Hindi," "Business," "Marketing," "Taobao," "Local Information," "Employment," "Freedom of Expression," "Travel," "Job Opportunities," and "Networking," and so on.

*4.1.3. Analysis of Information Boosting Sources for Foreign Audiences.* In modern society, it is the duty of official media to occupy the position of public opinion and adhere to the release

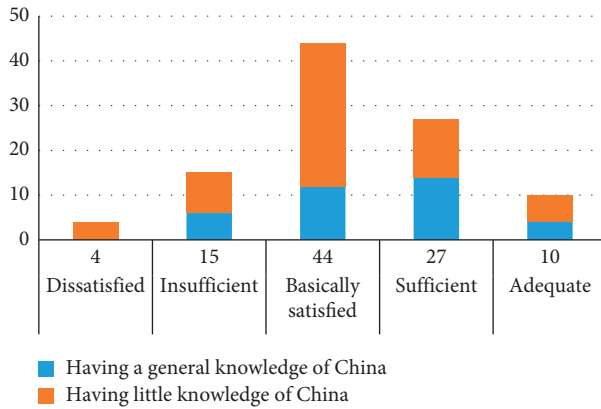


FIGURE 2: Information satisfaction of foreign audiences.

of information. The information gap, demand asymmetry, or the official media's failure to speak will often lead to the audience being misled by wrong information and eventually lead to the misjudgment of information or ideas of both sides of communication. Clarifying the channels for foreign audiences to get the missing or needed information when the information is missing or the information supply does not match the demand, and realizing the targeted supply, is undoubtedly useful for reducing misunderstanding, strengthening communication, and improving understanding.

More and more foreign residents have become genuinely interested in the changes and achievements of China (Jiangsu). They are willing to spend more time and effort to learn more about China, to discover Jiangsu, and to explore the stories that are happening in Jiangsu, China. Just under 7% of expatriates would voluntarily opt out of that information need when it is missing. As an important platform for information technology, the abundance of online information, because of its convenience, timeliness, and richness, is often effective in filling the information needs gaps of audiences and bridging the gap between information supply and demand. Nearly one-third of expatriates would choose to turn to the Internet, and nearly 9.2% would choose to go to the library to find information.

Interpersonal communication is still the mainstream channel for foreign residents in information seeking, and it is the main factor influencing foreign residents' choice and judgment. If foreign residents cannot get the information they need, nearly 50% of respondents will consult their Chinese friends in China, or their foreign friends who have been in China for a relatively long time, or their teachers or classmates. It is worth noting that similar experiences often make foreigners in a foreign country hug and support each other. Among Chinese friends, foreign friends and teachers, most foreign residents prefer to ask their foreign friends who have lived in China for many years, followed by their Chinese friends and teachers.

**4.2. Analysis on Information Channels of Foreign Audiences.** Communication channels are not only the carriers of communication contents but also the channels for audiences

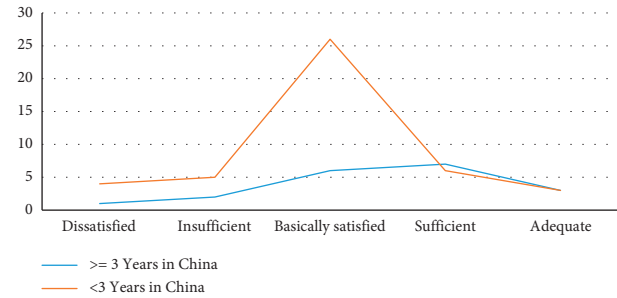


FIGURE 3: The difference of information satisfaction of foreign audiences.

to get information. The degree of development of communication channels directly affects the speed, scope, and efficiency of information dissemination. As the main body of institutional operation, the communication channels are inevitably influenced by the ideology of their own operating system, ownership relationship, and political and cultural background. The position of the operating organization also inevitably affects the choice of communication content, the direction of the audience, and the tendency of the content. Therefore, the channels through which foreigners get information can considerably influence the quality of information they get, and the tendency of the information influences their judgment of China (Jiangsu) and the increase or decrease of their perception of China to a large extent.

**4.2.1. Analysis on Foreign Audiences' Preference of Media Language.** The language employed in external publicity determines their influence among audiences, while the reading preference of foreign residents and their language ability determine their language choice for retrieving information. Data show that the lack of Chinese language ability results in foreign residents' inability to thoroughly understand the recent great changes that is happening in China. A total of 56% of foreign residents prefer English reports to get information about China (Jiangsu), about 30% choose their native language, and only 14% choose Chinese (see Figure 4).

In addition, due to the language capacity of Chinese agencies in charge of external publicity and the diversity of foreign audiences' nationality backgrounds, domestic agencies involved in external publicity do not have the capacity to cater to foreign reporting in various languages. The language service targeted at Central Asian and African regional countries such as Pashto (Afghanistan), Tajik (Tajikistan), Armenian (Armenia), Uzbek (Uzbekistan), Belarusian (Belarusian), Malay (Brunei, Malaysia), and Rwandan (Rwanda) is far from meeting the demands of the whole society.

In general, China (Jiangsu)'s external publicity reports are dominated by English, which cannot satisfy the demand of current international exchanges. With the development of the "One Belt, One Road" national strategy and the further consolidation of China-Africa economic and trade ties,

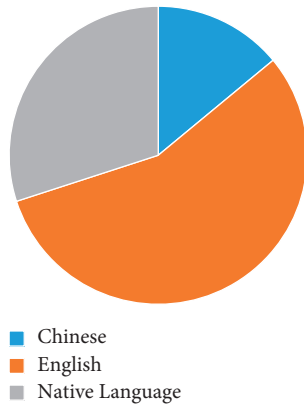


FIGURE 4: Language preference of foreign residents.

China (Jiangsu) is gradually consolidating the political and economic ties with traditional European and American powers, and meanwhile, strengthening ties with Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Most of the Central Asian countries, which were part of the former Soviet Union, are influenced by their historical origins and Russian geopolitics, and most of them are bilingual speakers, including their native language and Russian, while African countries, despite their many ethnic groups and diverse languages, are influenced by the colonialism of the last century, with English or French as their official language. In this sense, while maintaining the traditional “storytelling in English,” China’s external publicity should vigorously expand the ability of “telling stories in Russian and French.”

*4.2.2. Analysis on Foreign Audiences’ Preference News Source.* The core purpose of external publicity is to influence the audience deeply and make them implicitly accept and believe and recognize the information reported in kinds of media. Therefore, the initial thing in external publicity is to overcome the Conflict Psychology of foreign audiences in reading, and gradually change from the initial resistance and wariness to enjoy the pleasure brought by the information easily and naturally.

Given the fact that most foreigners have been influenced by the foreign environment for a long time and do not have a correct view and understanding of China, it is not surprising that they have some or even many doubts about the credibility of the information provided in kinds of Chinese news reports. Statistics shows that the news source of preference of foreign residents in China is somewhat overwhelming when they search for information about China. A total of 75% of foreigners say they prefer foreign media other than Chinese media, while only 24% of foreigners say they prefer Chinese media first, and another 1% of respondents choose both Chinese and foreign media (See Figure 5).

It is worth noting that the length of time foreign residents in China, their interest in China as well as their understanding of China are closely related to their preference to media when obtaining information. The more they know about China, the more interested they are in China, and the more proficient their Chinese is, the more willing and able

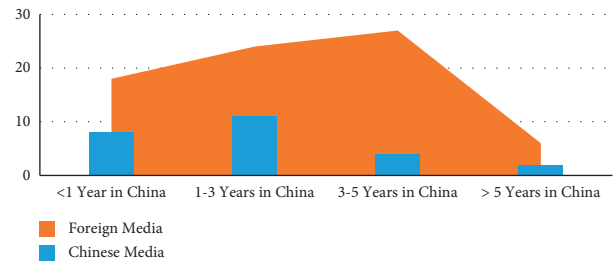


FIGURE 5: Media preference of foreign residents on their length of stay in China.

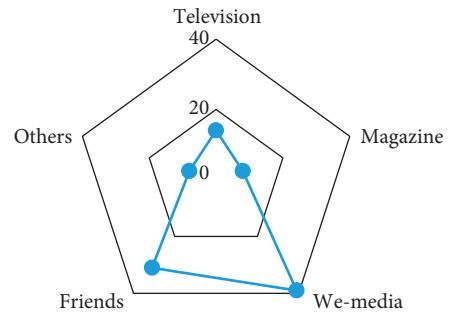


FIGURE 6: Preference of media types.

they are to understand China’s story in a Chinese way directly and deeply. Statistics show that 25.7% of foreign residents are with a strong interest in China, 27% of foreign residents are with a deep understanding of China, and 31% of foreign residents are with a high proficiency of Chinese would choose Chinese media when they are retrieving information. Hence, how to retain the interest of foreigners in reading Chinese media directly is an important issue worthy of further consideration, especially when foreigners’ honeymoon interest in China has waned in the early stage, how to adapt the existing Chinese external publicity reports to foreign residents’ expression habits and their needs in terms of the manner of story presentation is an important issue that cannot be ignored at present.

*4.2.3. Analysis on Foreign Audiences’ Preference of Media Type.* Media types include traditional media, such as newspapers and magazines, which transmit information in a single dimension with the help of single vision, and also three-dimensional media such as TV and Internet, which transmit information in multiple dimensions with the help of multidimensional perception such as vision and hearing. The understanding of the preference differences in media type of foreign audiences can help us achieve “precise information placement” in external publicity reports, thus reducing the waste of foreign propaganda resources.

It is revealed from the data that the role of traditional print media, including newspapers and magazines, are in a declining position (only 8%) in external publicity with the least exposure to foreign residents, followed by TV media (14%), while the most popular media type for foreign residents in the online information era is self-published media with an overall share of 39% (see Figure 6). In addition,

interpersonal communication is still an important channel for foreign residents (31%), further verified with the foregoing conclusion.

The data also demonstrate that with the increasing and deepening integration of foreign residents into China society, the Chinese we-media has gradually gained more popularity among foreign residents. About 31% of the foreign residents admitted that the information they received in the we-media would greatly influence their understanding of China (Jiangsu), while another 6% of the residents considered we-media information as an important reference factor to help them make judgment.

## 5. Research Findings and Implication

The national or regional image is one of the key factors in shaping foreign relations and improving communication ability toward the outside world, thus helping foreign audiences to understand the region or country objectively and truly is the primary task of national external publicity. For this reason, the core of external publicity is to help the cognitive subjects establish an image that is basically consistent or equivalent to the cognitive object, that is, to build a counterpoint cognition and avoid misperceptions. The analysis of information demand and information channels based on data in the previous section fully indicates that there are certain deviations in the information supply of the existing China (Jiangsu) foreign external publicity reports.

*5.1. Research Findings.* It is a general consensus that the external publicity should meet the needs and preference of foreign audiences, and the information conveyed in the report should be delivered in an appropriate and acceptable way. Only by understanding the Deviation of Supply and Demand between the media and the audience can we improve the effectiveness and efficiency of external publicity. The detailed analysis above clearly indicates that the deviation in the existing external publicity of China (Jiangsu) is in terms of information content and information channels.

First, after 70 years development, China's opening to the outside world is getting higher and higher, and the backgrounds of foreigners in China are diversified in terms of nationality, age, and occupation. The longer those foreigners stay in China, the deeper their understanding of China would be. Their interest in China would also accordingly become stronger and stronger, and so does their language proficiency in Chinese.

Second, China (Jiangsu)'s external publicity can meet the basic needs of foreign audiences, but the information "target supply" capability is insufficient. The existing external publicity concentrates on the supply of political, economic, cultural, and social information in a cramming way, showing the characteristics of "big and coarse" rather than "small and precise," which cannot satisfy the thematic and personalized needs of foreign audiences.

Finally, although traditional media bear the essential responsibility of information dissemination in external publicity, their influence on foreign audiences are limited.

Due to the uneven Chinese language ability, English helps most foreign audiences understand China, however, it cannot meet the needs of most non-English-speaking foreign audiences. Because of their own ideology and prejudice against China, foreign audiences are wary of official external publicity information in spite of their high interest in China. Compared with the multidimensional vitality of three-dimensional media, the traditional print media reports featuring a single vision and a single dimension, although welcomed by the outside world for their authority and credibility, are also criticized for their seriousness, officialness, and timeliness.

*5.2. Research Implications.* As a special form of media communication, external publicity, which are intended to build a good image of the country or government, have attracted much attention because of their official background, and the will of government agencies. It is demonstrated in the study that although the existing external publicity work is somewhat effective, most information are conveyed in a Stormy bombing with little "silent" gentleness. On the other hand, from the level of the effect of communication, the existing external publicity focuses on the release of information in a one-way dominant mode but ignores the interactive characteristics of the two-way cycle of communication process.

*5.2.1. Communication Concept.* External publicity is not simply a cold and simple information release or data report, but should be full of temperature information sharing. The essence of external publicity communication is "interpersonal communication," that is, two-way communication with "people (audience)" as the main target. Effective external publicity reports must start from the cognitive object, analyze the preferences of the cognitive object in terms of information needs, and channel selection, in order to achieve "target-to-target communication."

*5.2.2. Communication Mode.* Information is passed in both directions in kinds of communication activities. However, traditional communication channels are typical of unidirectional communication mode; therefore, the function of sharing and giving feedback have been cut down. Advancing with the pace of the times, we need take more deep thinking on how to make full use of the two-way sharing and interaction in the network era has put forward higher requirements for foreign propaganda in the new era, so as to apply the concept of "interpersonal communication" in today's external publicity.

*5.2.3. Effect Monitoring.* The essence of external publicity should highlight more on the effect of communication in the deep level than on the dissemination of information in the surface level. The former, in comparison, often is dependent on the impact extent of the communication content in the external publicity on the audience's inherent beliefs, opinions, and attitudes. Therefore, holding on to the big names of

network, observing and following up the effect of external publicity from the perspective of big names, using big names or foreign media as a bridge to speak for ourselves is undoubtedly an important channel to monitor the effect of foreign propaganda communication.

## 6. Conclusion

External publicity as a necessary component of government work and international communication plays an important role in shaping the image of the country or region in political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. Traditional external publicity work has made great progress in conveying different information to foreign audiences from the cognitive subject, but in the new era, it also faces the core requirement of switching from the cognitive subject to the cognitive object. In this paper, we focus on foreign audiences and investigate the characteristics of information needs and channel preferences of foreign audiences with different backgrounds through questionnaires and interviews and explore the deviations in information supply and demand between media and audiences in China's external publicity, which has paved the way to further our study in "targeted communication" in external publicity. Due to the size and background of the subjects in the research, the interpretation of the questionnaire and interview is somewhat not comprehensive enough, but they are still very informative and worthy of further discussion in the follow-up study.

## Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are included within the article.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest exist concerning this study.

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