



# Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage and Self-Construction of Sports Athletes

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**Abstract.** As a very important part of sports reporting, the presentation and shaping of athletes' media image has attracted much attention from all walks of life. After reviewing the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, the official reports on the construction of Gu Ailing's media image and the personal image created by Gu Ailing herself on the Douyin platform can be found that the two perspectives complement each other. The image created by the media is mainly based on Gu Ailing's professional achievements, combined with her special cultural background, making it a symbol of Chinese skiing genius growing up in the cross-cultural context, and the superficial meaning represented by "Gu Ailing" is constantly amplified. Gu Ailing's self-construction is biased in favor of daily life, constantly concrete description of the actual life, adding specific details to the magnified part of the media image of "Gu Ailing", so that it continues to deepen and form a more perfect expression.

**Keywords:** media image; Gu Ailing; report; media reproduction

## 1 Introduction

Although the 24th Winter Olympic Games closed on February 20, 2022, the ice and snow boom set off by the Winter Olympics in China has not stopped. According to iiMedia Research data, the market size of China's ice and snow sports industry will exceed 70 billion yuan in 2022. Based on the support of national policies, the market size of China's ice and snow sports is expanding. Moreover, the Winter Olympics also brought fire to many ice and snow athletes. Among them, Gu Ailing, who won 2 gold medals in the women's freestyle ski jumping platform and the women's freestyle skiing U-shaped course, and 1 silver medal in the freestyle ski slope obstacle skills, has received much attention as a sports star born in the Beijing Winter Olympics. In a certain sense, she has become a representative figure of the "post-00s" sports athletes.

At present, there are relatively few comparative analyses of the mainstream media image of sports stars and the image of self-constructed media, and the research involving Gu Ailing is almost non-existent. A large number of relevant studies can be obtained by searching the keywords "sports athletes", "media image", and "report analysis". The research priorities can be roughly classified into two categories. The

first type of sports star mainstream media image research is based on the analysis of related reports of sports stars. Such reports as Bi Weina and Ma Yuefei (2021) [1] have strengthened the physiological characteristics and femininity of female athletes, and meet the needs of Internet users for athletes' visualization outside of events. Xu Pingting (2021) [2] proposed that the mainstream media strategy for shaping the media image of sports stars has three distinct characteristics: prominent intrinsic characteristics, strengthened negative reports, entertaining and commercial. Marie Hardin, Susan Lynn, and Kristie Walsdorf (2005) [3] analyzed photographic images from *Women's Sports Illustrated*, *Women's Sports and Fitness*, and *Real Sports* to measure gender differences. The second category is to study the self-construction rules and reasons of sports stars from their media image construction behaviors. Gu Liping (2022) [4] proposed that the media image construction of stars should be based on the inner heart of stars. Chen Teng (2018) [5] analyzed the spread of cross-border entertainment of contemporary Chinese sports stars from the perspective of intertextuality.

Based on the comparative analysis of the self-construction of Gu Ailing's media image and the construction of mainstream media, this paper extracts the characteristics of Gu Ailing's Douyin account from 58 short videos published in Douyin. Different from the media image research of other sports stars that focus on the commercial value of the stars themselves or their role in the overall image construction of the country, This paper will pay more attention to the social value of Gu Ailing's own media image and its shaping process of media image. Combined with 300 official reports on Gu Ailing from the 'CCTV' web side, discussing the different focus of media image from different angles, as well as the purpose, formation strategy and effect behind it.

## **2 Content analysis of official media construction and self-construction**

### **2.1 The content logic of official reports**

As written in the CCTV report: "The tragic grandeur of the great athletes' desperate bets is almost absent in Gu (Ailing)[6]." The special feature of Gu Ailing's image lies in "diversity", but due to the limitations of the subject matter, text expression, genre, etc., the presentation of Gu Ailing's image is often fragmented and superficial. These superficial reports only present an obvious result, "gold medal" and "genius", as if they are preset character parameters, while Gu Ailing's element as a "person" is missing.

In terms of content, the official report will focus more on her performance in the competition, from pre-match inspection to post-match mood, and reproduce the special details in her schedule through the reporter's description. Although these words use first-person techniques to express How Gu Ailing felt when she was injured during training, such as "It feels great... Very excited to declare to the world that the injury is not difficult for me.[7]" Or to reflect her love of the motherland and

the feelings of being a Chinese, such as "on the way to realize the dream, the family has always been a strong backing... I have always been Chinese[7]". However, due to the release of the media platform, when the audience receives these text messages, they will think that the modified content is an 'illusion' rather than what the real reporter said, and these efforts to restore are even more ambiguous due to the intervention of third parties. The seemingly objective report has become the halo of Gu Ailing's "genius" title, making her true face more and more blurred.

This example is common among past sports talents, from 'Liu Xiang' to 'Sun Yang'. Under the reinforcement of a large number of official reports, the "human" side of these star athletes has been compressed, and the "genius" side has been continuously magnified. People can have defects, but genius is obviously irrelevant to defects. High standard labels mean that "disappointing" is not allowed, because the broken halo also means losing the value of appreciation. Once the media image appears negative evaluation and cannot be established on the mainstream platform, athletes who have no personal channels to create another media image cannot reconstruct their own media image after losing the audience's love. The result is that once negative news appears, whether true or false, star athletes no longer have the value of the Internet. The mainstream media's attention and construction on these athletes will also collapse, and all the past glory will be lost.

## 2.2 Context setting of official reports : "Happiness"

In *Media Representation and Global Imagination*, Shani Ogard (2012) [8] analyzed how the media brought audiences into situations unrelated to their daily lives through images, text narratives and sounds, and establish "intimate relationships" between them. In the repeated description of Gu Ailing's winning title and interviews with Gu Ailing's relatives, the scenes that continue to show are "a talented girl who grew up under the care of a traditional Chinese family", "a happy love and high-energy emotional interaction under Chinese-style family affection", and the context behind it can be condensed into "happiness" and "bright and brilliant life". These extended meanings behind the shallow text description have a subtle influence on the audience. Even if there is no real description of how Gu Ailing interacts with her relatives, the atmosphere of "happiness" has been emphasized.

Through a large number of reports on Gu Ailing in the official media, the audience linked "Ski Genius Gu Ailing" with "the success of education" and "the importance of family management". The audience's understanding of the self and the world has undergone a fundamental change, This "successful family" is almost impossible to abandon by everyone in Chinese society. Therefore, even if they do not think of the success of Gu Ailing at the beginning or are not interested in sports events, they will be attracted by the "Gu Ailing Frenzy" in the future, trying to explore the reasons for her "success" through the clues in these reports.

Based on the construction of Gu's media image in official reports, it is difficult for a single talent label to break the circle in the previous unpopular skiing events. However, the construction logic of "the birth of genius" has a strong universality in the Chinese society where "expecting sons to become dragons" and "expecting

daughters to become phoenixes" are in the bones, and the communication power has increased sharply.

### 2.3 Content analysis of Gu Ailing's Douyin video screen

Gu Ailing's trembling account is different from the official media, supplementing the background records with more details, turning "personality" into "real". Almost every video in the "running," location and time switching once and again to strengthen the audience's thinking, even if such a video is not released every day, see the relevant content released by Gu Ailing, such as muscles, sportswear, etc., the audience can automatically supplement the 'she has a high-intensity training every day, ten years like a day' such cognition, and at the same time associate it with many virtues, such as "persistence" and "hard work". Moreover, although these qualities do not seem to be considered outstanding advantages in professional athletes, because released on the Douyin platform, distributed in short video content with pan-entertainment as the main body, it has become a clear stream.

The same is true of fashion. In fact, all professional athletes who have won the Olympic gold medals have excellent fashion resources. However, Gu Ailing's release of her unique view on fashion on Douyin has become her new feature, and it has also enhanced her fashion label — "good taste". Gu Ailing not only publishes the content of brand requirements, but also integrates her own dress style and the pursuit of beauty into every video of her. From the opening and trying on videos of Olympic clothing to the different collocations when tasting food, her understanding of fashion has become her own personality characteristics, which is in line with the breath of her own life, and has become a more real "beauty". Similar to the extension of sports, "good taste" is often interpreted in people's minds as positive related factors such as "good self-cultivation," "good family education," and "good family background," thus forming a repeated cycle and emphasis of positive images.

### 2.4 The lens language, publishing logic and significance of Gu Ailing's Douyin video

Its lens design is very simple, with no special or difficult editing and mirror operation, and the "average people feeling" enhances the closeness of the account. In addition, many of Gu's videos are obviously shot by her mobile phone. The finished products are generally the combination of self-shooting and other shots, The fragmented pictures are combined in the form of a theme, such as "food", "sports" and "fashion". There are also some extremely short videos, which contain only a single shot, mostly from the perspective of Gu Ailing's mother.

The release logic of Gu Ailing's Douyin account is also very free, and there is no specific format or theme. Such a way of publishing, unlike the general star or athlete account, the operating authority of the account will be considered to be in the hands of staff. Netizens are willing to believe that the real person behind the account of 'Frog Princess Gu Ailing' is Gu Ailing herself. Gu Ailing's Douyin account is very casual from the camera group to the way of publishing the content, which is in line

with Gu Ailing's image, so it becomes part of her personal charm and forms the highlight of her self-construction.

Through Gu Ailing's Douyin content, the audience understands the behind-the-scenes life of sports athletes, their life is not just staying in the sports arena. At the same time, Gu Ailing's female identity also makes the past neglect of gender with female athletes to be seen by the public, once thought that female athletes need to abandon the gender characteristics, the hair cut short, sans make-up and so on the old concept is remodeling, and Gu Ailing, who draws eyeliner, loves fashion, and loves physics, tells the audience bluntly but efficiently that what kind of girl can be an excellent athlete.

### **3 The relationship between official construction and self-construction**

The mainstream media's portrayal of Gu Ailing's media image focuses mainly on the aspect of "hard sports genius", and label words such as "champion" and "the first person in the history of Chinese athletes" are constantly used in her reports, making Gu Ailing's media image prominent among many Olympic athletes. In addition, the mainstream media focuses on Gu Ailing's Chinese attributes and cross-cultural colors, with descriptions such as "Beijing Big Girl" and "The World Sees Chinese Beauty", and at the same time, it also associates her competition results with "dream realization" and "love", etc., and depicts Gu Ailing as a new example of youth idols.

In the Internet image constructed by Gu Ailing's Douyin account, there are two key points that are obviously different from the construction of mainstream media, on the one hand, from the display of various advertising films, she fully shows her appearance and body beauty, and shows her enthusiasm for fashion; On the other hand, from her own released video clips of life, the trivial content about jogging in the city and tasting food in various places appears frequently, as if it is deliberately weakening the more abstract images of "genius" and "champion" and placing herself in the context of "eighteen-year-old ordinary girl".

The genius ski girl in the official report and the ordinary girl who loves to eat and play built by Gu Ailing have recorded the overall image of Gu Ailing from a more comprehensive perspective, and the differentiated keywords have not produced contradictory conclusions, but collided with a wonderful spark, constituting a unique female image between maturity and youth. In the official report, only one athlete wearing a ski suit can be seen, the only thing that can show different colors is the face exposed after taking off the equipment, but in Gu Ailing's Douyin, she never skimps on showing her body full of strength, unlike the "female naked body = sexy" cognition that generally exists on the Internet, all the comments of Gu Ailing's netizens with body display videos pay more attention to "how to practice?" "Too handsome", the image of talented athletes constructed in official reports pre-positioned her position in the minds of netizens in the social networking of the Internet. Therefore, the judgment of her seems to jump out of the judgment of gender.

## 4 Conclusions

From the definition of mainstream media to Gu Ailing's own label, this paper makes a comparative study of her media image in mainstream media reports and her self-construction on Douyin platform. On the one hand, it is full of curiosity about why, what and how to construct it, On the other hand, we can also learn how the media image of the young generation of sports stars in the new media environment seeks a delicate balance between "constructed by others" and "constructed by themselves". By analyzing how the media and athletes themselves can equally shape an independent, professional and meaningful media images of athletes through good cooperation in the new media era, this paper hopes to provide some reference for optimizing the design and reproduction strategies of athletes' images by mainstream media and athletes' self-media from all aspects and angles, and further consider the social significance and value of the media image of sports stars.

In the process of media reproduction, the communicator obtains benefits and rights through the visibility of the media, and the audience can form a connection with distant people or events through the new form of "distant media contact" (Chen Minjing, 2014).[9] The image constructed by Gu Ailing in the official report and on Douyin will have a profound impact on the audience it faces, and in summary, the image presentation of the two angles is a multi-dimensional display of Gu Ailing, showing complementary and mutually reinforcing features. Through the multi-faceted presentation of official reports and Douyin, her media image breaks the audience's obvious stereotype of sports, from the admirable "champion" to the real and close "person", from the desperate "professional athlete" to the "new era youth" who insists because of love, opening up the audience's acceptance pattern and redefining the social value dimension of sports stars.

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