

The Comparison of Different Approaches of Chinese and American Media to Report on Freestyle Skiing Star Gu Ailing

Baicheng Ning

School of the Arts and Media University of New South Wales, High St, Kensington NSW 2052, Australia

Abstract. This paper studies the media coverage of China's Gu Ailing during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and analyzes the media coverage of sports events and related issues from Chinese media (People's Daily) and American media (USA Today) using framing theory. Through qualitative analysis, this study found that the media from the two countries had the same framework and pattern when reporting the events within the sports games, that is, the praise of Gu Ailing's talent and success. Besides sports, however, they constructed different frames. Chinese media focused on Gu's role in promoting China's ice and snow industry and even domestic sports politics, and the US media paid particular attention to Gu's mixed-race identity and nationality. The outcome shows that, there are similarities and differences in the use of the framework by the news media. The similarities are influenced by the news objective, while the differences reflect their different backgrounds.

Keywords: Gu Ailing; 2022 Winter Olympics; People's Daily; USA Today; Framing.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

At the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, Gu Ailing (also known as Eileen Gu), the rising star in Chinese freestyle skiing, was the target of media coverage. The 18-year-old athlete, born in September 2003, has won two gold medals and a silver medal at the Winter Olympics. For the media, Gu has many labels besides excellent grades: "mixed-race American who grew up in the United States", "excellent education - Stamford Bridge University", "strong strength and mentality", "good family background", etc. In reality, Gu's appearance has brought great influence to the public and given the media a lot of news value to report. Due to the complexity of her identity and her outstanding performance, the Chinese and American media's coverage of her from different angles and contents has resulted in a relatively large difference. This study will make a comparative analysis of different media content under the framing theory.

1.2. Problem Statement

The study aims to delve into the differences in Chinese and American media coverage of sports stars, as well as the cultural, social, and political factors behind these differences. This not only contributes to the academic community's understanding of media communication and cultural influence, but also provides valuable insights into the cross-cultural exchanges involved in international sporting events.

Sports stars play an indispensable role in modern society, not only as a representative of sports, but also as an important part of social culture, even sports stars must form and manage a positive public image of themselves through the media [1]. Their influence has gone beyond the field of sports, and has spread to politics, economics, and other levels, becoming a comprehensive social phenomenon. Sport is by its nature connected to issues of identity, community and nation and sport can play an important role in the strategies carried out by actors in contexts characterized by conflict and divisions [2]. International sports events are no longer just a stage for sports competition, but also national strength and international relations will be expressed through sports. Second, media outlets from different backgrounds can report on the same sports star or the same event in very different ways. This multi-faceted presentation allows the audience to fully perceive the facts from multiple

perspectives, confirming the selective expression of the media in the process of information transmission.[3] Media outlets in different cultural, political, and economic contexts are often influenced by their own values and interests when presenting sports news, resulting in different interpretations of the same event. Certainly, this phenomenon can also be interpreted in depth through frame theory. The choice of media topics, reporting language, and visual presentation can all influence public perception and thus have a profound impact on public opinion.[4]

1.3. Research Objective

The central focus is a comparative examination of Chinese and American media reporting frameworks concerning international sporting events, with a specific emphasis on unraveling the political significance of these events. By scrutinizing the underlying cultural values, principles, and narrative strategies employed by media outlets in both countries, I aim to shed light on the distinct approaches each nation takes in portraying sports, athletes, and related stories. Integral to this investigation is the verification of the applicability of framing theory in sports reporting, scrutinizing how media narratives are constructed and examining the theory's adaptability across diverse cultural contexts. Through these interconnected inquiries, the dissertation seeks to contribute a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between media, culture, and politics in the realm of international sports coverage.

1.4. Research Questions

RQ1: What is the amount of coverage on Gu Ailing by the Chinese and American newspapers?

RQ2: What is the frame of coverage on Gu Ailing by the Chinese and American newspaper?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This article focuses on the Chinese and American media's treatment of Chinese ski star Gu Ailing during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. What is the difference between the reports and how they influence the audience through the content of the reports. The article integrates qualitative research strategy to investigate framing theory applied in the media representation of Gu Ailing in Chinese and American newspapers. Qualitative methods, such as content and textual analysis, will be employed to scrutinize linguistic nuances, visual elements, and narrative structures within the selected news articles [5]. These qualitative insights aim to unveil the depth and intricacies of media frames.

2.2. Data Collection

In this object, data collection will focus on media coverage of Gu Ailing in People's Daily and The USA Today within a two-month timeframe before and after the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Using specific keyword related to Gu Ailing will be used to retrieve relevant articles, ensuring non-repetition of content. This period will be examined: January 4, 2022, to March 20, 2022, which includes one month before the opening of the Olympic Games, during the Olympic Games, and one month after the closing of the Olympic Games. It was the most intense period of media coverage, which provided insight into Gu's performance during the tournament and how her achievements and experiences were covered by the Chinese and American media. A limited time frame helps to ensure that the data and analysis of my research are current. Because the focus of public and media attention will change. [6]

For timeliness and representativeness, first, I made sure that the sample covered the above time frame to reflect the media attention at the time. Second, I would choose the People's Daily and the USA Today which are representative of the mainstream media in both countries, respectively, for authoritative reporting and more valuable analysis.

2.3. Coding Procedure

Coding procedures are an important part of the cognitive process, with inductive coding playing a key role. Inductive coding involves simplifying the processing and understanding of information by integrating large amounts of information into more generalized concepts or principles. In the process of inductive coding, one facilitates the efficient processing and storage of information by recognizing commonalities and patterns among information and abstracting specific situations into broader laws or concepts. This type of coding makes it easier to understand complex information and to apply the knowledge gained when needed [7].

2.3.1. Coding Procedure for RQ1

RQ1 is “What is the amount of coverage on Gu Ailing by the Chinese and American newspapers?” This study extracted all the relevant news in the selected period of time by searching for the keyword “Gu Ailing” on the websites of the selected Chinese and American media outlets. In addition, the news was categorized as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of coverage

Classification	Definitions
Straight news	Briefly report on upcoming and as well as occurring news events and opinions from the public or celebrities, including the what, where, when, who why and how these elements.
Feature news	News feature is an expressive and important genre in the news genre, with description as the main technique, “reproducing” news events, news characters, “a moment” of the image of the report, will be characterized by real people and real things “amplification” and “reproduction” in front of the reader.
Editorial	Various editorials exist, including ‘explainers’ that provide insight into complex issues, ‘critiques’ that evaluate policies or decisions, and ‘persuasive pieces’ that seek to sway readers toward a specific stance. As a powerful communication tool, editorials significantly impact societal discourse.
Opinion	A view of the events from the news media and the journalists themselves, which, through an in-depth analysis of the events and the task, yields a valuable spiritual core that helps the public to understand the events and spreads a specific idea or ideology to them.
Picture	Photojournalism has the advantages that textual reports cannot replace, graphic, vivid image, at a glance, and at the same time provide readers with short and concise textual reports.

2.3.2. Coding Procedure for RQ2

RQ2 is “What is the frame of coverage on Gu Ailing by the Chinese and American newspaper?” In order to generalize all the selected news and analyze their respective framing through content differences and orientation, they were categorized according to Table 2.

Table 2. Different frames and the definitions

Frames	Definitions
Expectations on Gu Ailing	Before the start of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, the expectations of Gu Ailing and the public, including the goals for himself and his team. After the start of the Winter Olympics, the expectations for the upcoming individual events and what they expect to achieve.
Gu Ailing's competition performance	The news will include a direct broadcast of Gu Ailing's state of play and achievements in the competition, including her post-competition remarks, photos of the competition, and awards from her country or organization. (Awards in the Beijing Winter Olympics only; awards in other events are considered to be outside the competition)
Gu Ailing's stories behind	In an interview after the race, Ailing expressed her training and life situation, her personal aspirations that are not related to the race, her own appeal to the society and the ski industry, and the spirit she spreads.
Gu Ailing's identity	These reports will strictly include the notion that Gu Ailing is Chinese-American or American-born Chinese or of mixed Chinese-American descent, and show her playing for the Chinese team in the Beijing Winter Olympics as a result of choice.
Gu Ailing's international influence	The news will include stories about China or the U.S. chasing the competition in the medal standings, the notion that Gu Ailing's playing for China has cost the U.S. a talented player, and so on. Generally with comments about Gu Ailing's choice to play for China
Gu Ailing's impacts on China	Gu Ailing's choice to fight for China has contributed greatly to the success of Chinese sports at the Beijing Winter Olympics, and Chinese political parties, governments and organizations will spread her spirit as a national icon and call on the public to learn from her.
Gu Ailing's influences on skiing industry	Valley Ailing's achievements are sensational, and her success has led to the development of the snow and ice industry, including the ski brand, ski peripheral merchandise, and the ski tourism industry.

3. Findings

3.1. Comparison of the Amount of Media Coverage of Gu Ailing in China and the United States During the Beijing Winter Olympic Games

People's Daily and USA Today reported about Chinese freestyle skiing star Gu Ailing before and after the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics as well as during the Beijing Winter Olympics. This paper therefore analyzes the coverage of Gu by the two media organizations from China and the United States, respectively, in terms of the number and type of coverage.

3.1.1. Numbers of Coverage

From January 4, 2022 to March 20, 2022, People's Daily and USA Today posted 146 and 80 news stories related to Gu Ailing on their websites, respectively, for a total of 226 stories. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the total number of stories by the two newspapers over the same time period, with People's Daily's stories accounting for 64.60% of the total number of stories selected, and USA Today's stories accounting for 35.40%. Therefore, People's Daily had approximately twice as many stories on Gu as USA Today had on Gu. This shows that People's Daily devoted more space and resources to Gu.

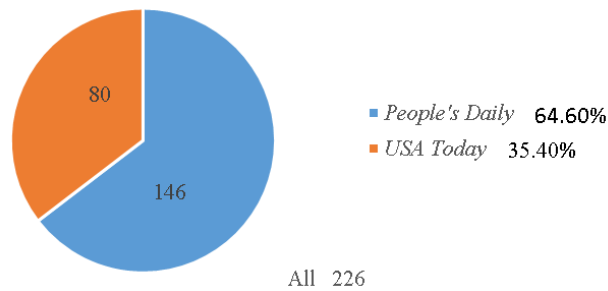


Figure 1. Comparison of the total number of stories covered by the two newspapers during the Beijing Winter Olympics period

3.1.2. Types of Coverage

Figure 2 shows the total number and percentage of stories by category among all the reports examined, and Table 3 shows the number of stories by category published by both Chinese and American media. Among these reports, 160 pieces of objective reports on straight news and picture accounted for 70.80% of the total number of reports, 45 pieces of in-depth portrayal of skiing star Gu Ailing's features accounted for 19.91%, and 28 pieces of opinionated reports, including editorials and opinions, accounted for 9.29%. Such a tendency reflects that in similar sports reports, media organizations should make sure that objective reports should take the main place, supplemented by the portrayal of key news events or personalities, and not to express their own opinions on sports events or sports stars too much.

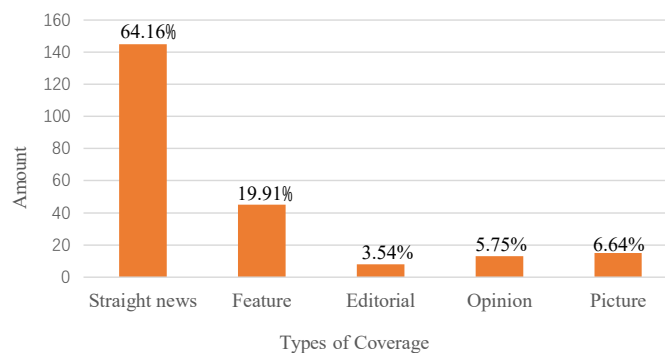


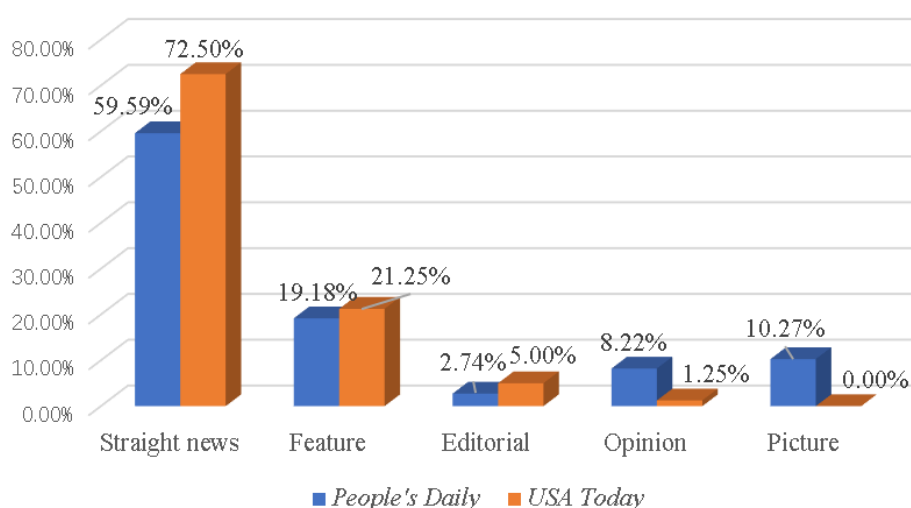
Figure 2. Total amount of every news type and the percentage

Table 3 and Figure 3 show the difference in the type of coverage between the two newspapers. Although the total number of stories in USA Today was less than that in People's Daily, it accounted for a larger proportion of straight news, which included a lot of newscasts about the Beijing Winter Olympics, of which Gu was only a part. However, the proportion of features in both Chinese and American media is similar, reflecting the similarity in the importance they attach to Gu.

Compared to USA Today, People's Daily is more subjective and guides the viewers, providing them with a number of viewpoints to understand the news figure while spreading the image of Gu Ailing, however, USA Today's approach will make the viewers more spontaneous and generate more perspectives to understand the story. In terms of the type of photojournalism, both People's Daily and USA Today took photographs of Gu Ailing's performance on the field, but USA Today incorporated these photographs more into their features rather than forming a strictly photojournalistic story. The similarities between the two media outlets were that they used the three types of reporting - objective reporting, feature reporting, and opinion reporting - in similar patterns, using them a lot, a little, and very little, respectively.

Table 3. Distribution of news categories in the two Chinese and American newspapers (amount)

		Types of Coverage					
		Straight News	Feature	Editorial	Opinion	Picture	Total
Newspapers	People's Daily	87	28	4	12	15	146
	USA Today	58	17	4	1	0	80
	Total	145	45	8	13	15	226

**Figure 3.** The proportion of each type of report in total coverages respectively

3.2. What are the Main Framing Strategies Used by the Chinese and American Media in Their Coverage of Gu Ailing

Different media will strategically report on the same news subject to highlight the characteristics of one aspect. In order to meet the needs of their audience and ideology, media from different backgrounds often focus on different parts of the same news event or produce different perspectives. In the same story, multiple frames may be presented. In this study, according to the different contents reported by each piece of news, the examined news was divided into the following 7 frames. expectations on Gu Ailing, Gu Ailing's competition performance, Gu Ailing's stories behind, Gu Ailing's identity, Gu Ailing's international influence, Gu Ailing's impacts on China (politics and education) and Gu Ailing's influences on skiing industry (China and worldwide).

3.2.1. Overview of Chinese and American Media Frame

Table 4 and Figure 4 show how many reports of People's Daily and USA Today correspond to the number and proportion of different frames. It is obvious that for such a sports star, a lot of news broadcasts are placed on the first two aspects of the game, including the player's personal expectations for the event, the mentality of the upcoming game, the level of competition shown in the game and the final honorary results. Of course, the demeanor displayed during the game and the attitude towards the opponent will also be the focus of the coverage. The content is divided into the first three frames, with 58, 90 and 49 news references (duplicates), which are the three most frequently used frames.

Table 4. The amount of each frame is in the coverage respectively

		Different frames						
		Expectations on Gu Ailing	Gu Ailing's competition performance	Gu Ailing's stories behind	Gu Ailing's identity	Gu Ailing's international influence	Gu Ailing's impacts on China	Gu Ailing's influences on skiing industry
Newspapers	People's Daily	38	55	32	3	1	36	32
	USA Today	20	43	17	24	15	3	2
	Total	58	98	49	27	16	39	34

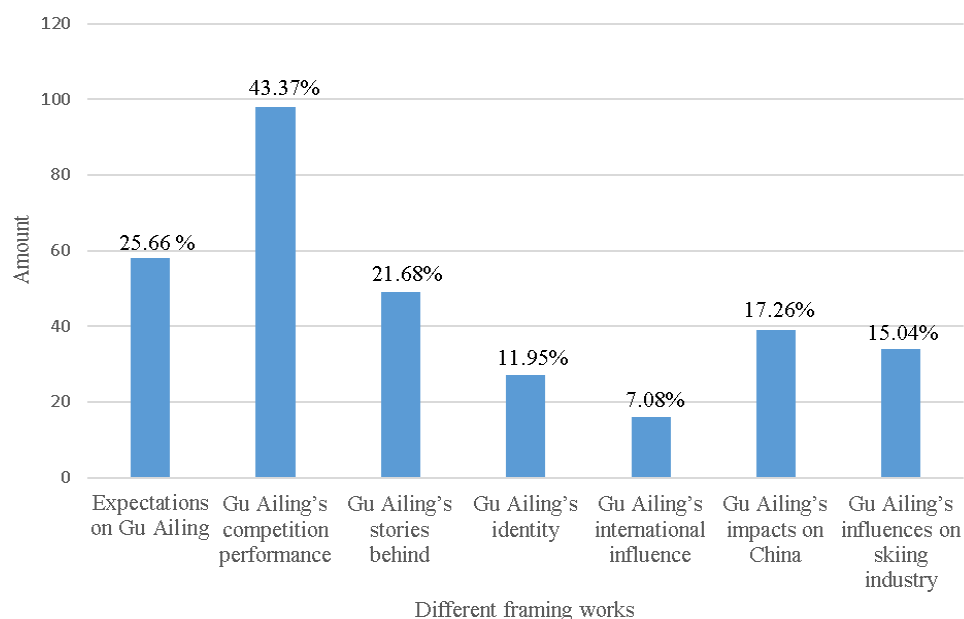


Figure 4. The percentage of each frame is in the coverage both

3.2.2. Comparison of Chinese and American Media Frame

Figure 5 shows that when People's Daily and USA Today reported Gu Ailing, they put the same and different emphasis on the seven frames. According to the data in Table4 and Figure 5, both media focus on Gu Ailing's Gu Ailing's competition performance, but obviously USA Today pays more attention to it, and more than half (53.75%) of their reports mention it. For People's Daily, the three frames they focus on most are Gu Ailing's competition performance, Gu Ailing's pre-match expectations and Gu Ailing's impacts on China (in politics and education). For USA Today, they are more focused on Gu Ailing's competition performance, Gu Ailing's identity and Gu Ailing's pre-game expectations.

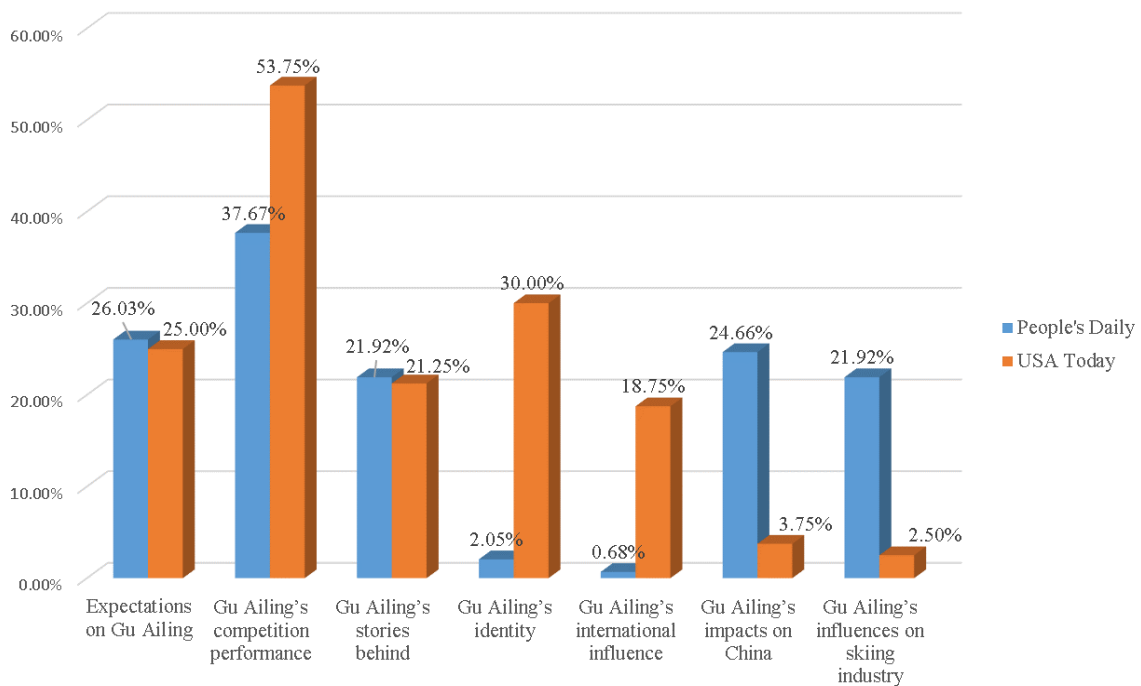


Figure 5. The percentage of each frame in the coverage respectively

For People's Daily and USA Today, the biggest difference between them appears in the next four frames. The first three frames can be summarized as the description of the competition, competition and life of Gu Ailing, a skier, with the purpose of allowing the audience to better understand her, including who she is, her ability, and some basic information. In the People's Daily report, Gu has said that she enjoys Chinese food and festivals, and USA Today has repeatedly mentioned Gu's living and learning environment in the United States, including her educational background. As the basic content, these three aspects are indispensable for the media, because the media needs to let the audience have some basic understanding of the news subject Gu Ailing before they can continue to lead the audience to understand the deeper story behind Gu Ailing and give different opinions according to different positions behind the media.

According to the data in Figure 5, the frame of People's Daily focuses on Gu Ailing's influence on politics and education in China and her drive to the ski industry. This echoes the ideology of China's commitment to building a sports power and the slogan of 300 million people participating in ice and snow sports. USA Today focused on Gu's mixed-race status and her nationality, as well as China's challenge to the United States in the medal table after Gu represented China at the Beijing Winter Olympics. In People's Daily reports, "the call for the public to learn from Gu Ailing" is often accompanied by "300 million people on the ice and snow", especially after the Beijing Olympics, Gu Ailing has been repeatedly mentioned in China's internal political and education conferences. The terms "Chinese-American" and "American-born Chinese" appear much more frequently in the USA Today story than in the People's Daily story, and they both emphasize that Gu's representation of China is a loss for the United States.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that framing is real in the coverage of sports events and sports figures. In the process of framing Chinese and American media, I would like to find both the same point and the common ground of news production. The common point is that they all need to objectively report the newsmakers themselves, and make the audience interested and deeply impressed by the details of the newsmakers. The difference is that when media with different political and ideological backgrounds report controversial news figures, they will inevitably be affected, so that these media will have different emphasis on news events and news figures.

In this study, Gu Ailing's identity and stance for the Chinese national team were discussed by USA Today, while People's Daily paid more attention to Gu Ailing's arrival as a positive spiritual encouragement to Chinese sports and Chinese society, and also helped promote Chinese official slogans and calls. However, neither the Chinese nor the American media wanted to further confront the issue of Gu Ailing's identity, the Chinese media tried to avoid similar topics in their reports, and the American media limited their articles to repeatedly mention Gu Ailing's Chinese-American mixed-race identity and playing for the Chinese team.

The main goal of both parties is to provide viewers with more valuable regular news about the rising star of freestyle skiing. If there is a big difference of opinion between the media of the two sides, maybe it will have a greater impact on the network opinion, and the audience of the two sides will be more willing to be attracted by different framing. But such an approach is bound to undermine the fundamental principle that sport is apolitical, especially in a context such as the Olympics. Invariably, they chose to do their framing and journalism in a more tempered way.

References

- [1] Yoo, E. (2022). Impression management of South Korean sports stars through image-based social media. *Sport in Society*, 25(9), 1734–1755. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2021.1878146>
- [2] Belcastro, F. (2022). Sport, politics and the struggle over “normalization” in post-Oslo Israel and Palestine. *Mediterranean Politics*, 27(5), 644–664. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2020.1845938>
- [3] Liao, D. Y., & Pitts, B. G. (2021). Sports celebrity endorsement and consumer behavior: A review and conceptual framework. *Journal of Sport Management*, 35(1), 16–30. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2019-0266>. (In Chinese)
- [4] Johnson, R. G., Romney, M., Hull, K., & Pegoraro, A. (2022). Shared space: How North American Olympic broadcasters framed gender on Instagram. *Communication & Sport*, 10(1), 6–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479520932896>
- [5] Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE Publications.
- [6] Eastman, S. T. (2017). The personalization of athletes: A content analysis of US Olympic athlete profiles. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 52(5), 554–572. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690216673094>
- [7] Lee, M. (2018). *Global sport, nationalism and national identity construction: The case of naturalized Chinese table tennis players in South Korea* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Loughborough University, School of Sport and Exercise Science.