

Viewing the evolution of media ecology from buzzwords of the year - Based on an analysis of the top 10 buzzwords of 2015-2020

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Abstract

Buzzwords show different social styles and cultural forms in different periods, which reflect the development of the era accurately and clearly. By analysing the sources and themes of the top ten buzzwords between 2015-2020, as well as the changes in their communication modes and content during the period, the evolution of media can be explored. From the perspective of modes of communication, the main sources of buzzwords have changed from opinion leaders to the public, and the routes of transmission have shifted from a single path to a topological scene. From the perspective of communication content, the change of buzzwords reflects the innovation of discourse, the change of attitudes, the change of concepts and the remodeling of emotions in the period. These changes reflect the evolution of media ecology in the era of intelligent media, including the transformation of communication processes, communication discourse and participants.

Key words: Buzzwords; Communication mode; Communication content; Media ecology

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of topic selection and research status

After Reform and Opening Up (a policy of China's economic construction from 1978), buzzwords gradually entered public life in China, indicating ideological emancipation and cultural freedom. Buzzwords convey the social features and cultural forms of different periods, and accurately and clearly map the development of the times and in the 21st century, many scholars have turned their attention to buzzwords to explore social phenomena.

Among the existing research, most has selected representative buzzwords within a certain era and made diachronic observations based on a macro perspective. From the perspective of linguistics and semiotics, some scholars have discussed the reasons for the widespread dissemination of buzzwords based on the etymology and structure of buzzwords and other linguistic features. Focusing on the symbolic features of contemporary buzzwords, Huang Biyun analysed their creation mechanisms, composition methods and dissemination effects as language signs, and put forward the view that the dissemination of catchphrases relies on their abnormal internal tension.^① Other scholars have paid more attention to the value of the meaning of the word itself and the value of the discourse system represented by the buzzwords, and use the catchphrase as the way in to explore the dissemination and innovation of the discourse system. Xu Leiyue believes that buzzwords are visual texts in the image age, that mainstream media buzzwords and social media buzzwords are the representation of national discourse and popular discourse, and that the positive interactions between the two promote cultural innovation.^② Hei Xiaohui and Yin Jie believe that popular words are a stable discourse system, which challenges the national discourse system and should create multiple modes of dialogue to realise the innovation of the discourse system.^③

^① Huang Biyun. Research on the Transmission Mechanism of Internet Popular Words[D]. Jinan University, 2011.

^② Xu Leiyue . Analysis of Contemporary Buzzwords from the Perspective of Discourse Theory (2010-2018) [D]. Zhengzhou University, 2019.

^③ Hei Xiaohui, Yin Jie. The construction, dissemination and innovation of China's discourse system from the perspective of current buzzwords: Based on the investigation of annual buzzwords from 2012 to 2016 [J]. Research on Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theory, 2017(01):90- 95+108.

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have turned their attention to the social mentality and youth mentality behind the spread of buzzwords. In *"The Social Mentality Behind the Yearly Buzzwords"*, Huang Chuxin analysed in detail the multiple dimensions and multiple subjects corresponding to the top ten buzzwords in 2019, and summed up the diverse social attitudes conveyed by these buzzwords.^① In another study, through their research on buzzwords over the past five years, Li Jidong and Wu Qian put forward the view that the change of buzzwords represents the change of the identity of youth groups.^② Wang Jiapeng found that the social mentality of young people is changing from political ridicule to life ridicule, a trend that corresponds to the evolution of buzzwords.^③

With the sudden rise of some highly penetrating buzzwords on the Internet, some scholars have begun to conduct case study research on these buzzwords from a micro perspective. For example, Shu Jing took “柠檬精” (sour grapes) as the research object, discussing the dissemination characteristics, group interaction performance and influence of today's youth's self-deprecating culture on social media.^④ In another piece of research, from the perspective of youth subculture, Wei Xiaoyang analysed the reasons for the popularity of the “打工人” (migrant workers) buzzword, which led to a reflection on the value of subcultural communication.^⑤

Generally, although current research on buzzwords covers many disciplines, it is relatively fragmented and no systematic research has been undertaken to date. Focusing on the research on buzzwords from the perspective of journalism and communication, most discussions still remain as descriptions of the changes in the communication mechanisms of buzzwords, or aim to explore the social and psychological motives of the changes in buzzwords, but rarely does research in these fields consider the media ecology in the era of intelligent media. Moreover, there are many detailed case studies

^① Huang Chuxin. The social mentality behind the annual buzzwords [J]. People's Forum, 2020(01):116-118.

^② Li Jidong, Wu Qian. Youth Identity and Discourse Practice of Internet Buzzwords in the Past Five Years [J]. Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China), 2020,42(08):39-43.

^③ Wang Jiapeng. From political ridicule to life ridicule: From the perspective of online buzzwords in the past ten years, the social mentality changes of Chinese youth [J]. China Youth Studies, 2019(02):80-86+79.

^④ Shu Jing. Analysis of the interactive communication of self-deprecating culture among young people in social media — Taking "Lemon Essence" as an example [J]. New Media Research, 2020,6(11):13-14+71.

^⑤ Wei Xiaoyang. Inclusion and Resistance: An Interpretation of the "Dagong Worker" Stem from the Perspective of Youth Subculture Dissemination [J]. Audiovisual, 2021(03):158-159.

on a single buzzword, but few diachronic studies. In the few diachronic studies that do exist, most of the time periods selected are relatively early. They focus on topics that have been trending over the past few years, excluding the latest buzzwords.

1.2 Research objects and research methods

Looking at the academic studies that have taken buzzwords as research objects in recent years, two obvious points of controversy can be found. First, there is no universally agreed definition for the word "buzzwords", and scholars have different opinions on the concept of buzzwords. Therefore, in the concentrated period of annual buzzwords releases every year, multiple versions of the top ten annual buzzwords selected by different institutions emerge. Among them, the most influential are the "Top Ten Buzzwords of Chinese Media" published by the National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Print Media Center and the "Top Ten Buzzwords of the Year" published by the editorial department of the YaoWen-JiaoZi Magazine. Due to the high degree of professionalism and strong political and economic colours of the "Top Ten buzzwords in the Chinese media", to select buzzwords that can represent social life in China as much as possible, the author first determined that the main research object will be the "Top Ten Buzzwords of the Year" published by the YaoWen-JiaoZi Magazine.

Since 2009, the YaoWen-JiaoZi Magazine has selected the most popular buzzwords of the previous year at the beginning of each year, extensively collected words frequently used in the past year, and invited experts and scholars in the field of applied linguistics to select and comment on these words. The selection takes the values of the time, the value of language and the value of society as the main criteria, and the buzzwords selected should not only meet the "characteristics of the language of news media and social communication", but also have a certain expressive effect and at the same time be popular. Under this standard, improvised words with homonyms, words that imply vulgar and indecent meanings, or words that are only popular on the Internet are not included.

The annual selection of the top ten buzzwords by the YaoWen-JiaoZi Magazine has gained great influence in China and the magazine has become one of the most

authoritative buzzword selection agencies. However, its "Top 10 Buzzwords of 2014" released in early 2015 caused huge controversy. 2014 was an important year for the substantial growth of mobile phone users in China and 4G technology was officially launched in the same year. The convenience of mobile smartphones promoted the widespread dissemination and high-frequency use of words spontaneously created by users on the Internet. Popular words in that year such as “男默女泪” (male keep silent and female tears) and “逼格” (Posh) were all born in the online environment. However, these words were not selected in the “Top 10 Buzzwords of 2014” as they are ungrammatical or vulgar, thus did not meet the selection criteria. The selection of buzzwords overemphasises positivity and ignores the diversity of popular culture. After the controversy, in early 2016, the magazine began to collect popular words from society when it selected the "Top Ten Buzzwords in 2015".

Buzzwords represent the common focus of people from all walks of life. Those who participate in the selection of buzzwords have shifted from the internal group to the general public, which further reflects participatory culture's respect for individual values. Selection criteria involving extensive public participation can better reflect and express public opinion and has a strong degree of reliability and validity. Considering that 2016 was the first year that included the selection of buzzwords from society, the author of this paper takes 2016 as a time node and selects the "Top Ten Buzzwords in 2015-2020" (Figure 1) as the research sample. This paper mainly adopts a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis to analyse the changes in the content and methods of popular words in the six years and the evolution of the media ecology reflected in these words.

2020	<p>人民至上,生命至上 (People first, life first) 逆行者 (Heroes in harm's way) 飒 (handsome) 神兽 (God beast; means wild kids)</p> <p>后浪 (rear waves; means younger generation) 内卷 (involution) 双循环 (dual-cycle development pattern)</p> <p>打工人 (migrant workers) 直播带货 (Live commerce) 凡尔赛文学 (Versailles literature; means humblebrag)</p>
2019	<p>文明互鉴 (mutual learning of civilizations) 区块链 (blockchain) 硬核 (Hardcore) 融梗 (Thaw stem) 柠檬精 (sour grapes)</p> <p>xx千万条,xx第一条 (Roads are countless, safety is foremost) 996 (9am to 9pm, 6 days a week work schedule)</p> <p>我太难了 (I'm getting worn out) 我不要你觉得,我要我觉得 (My way or the highway) 霸凌主义 (bullying)</p>
2018	<p>命运共同体 (community with a shared future) 锦鲤 (kio fish; means lucky dog) 店小二 (humble servant)</p> <p>教科书式 (textbook style) 官宣 (Official Announcement) 确认过眼神 (we can see that from one's eyes)</p> <p>退群 (withdraw form a group) 佛系 (Buddha-like) 巨婴 (giant infant) 杠精 (Contrarian)</p>
2017	<p>不忘初心 (Not forgetting the original intention) 砥砺前行 (Sheer Endeavor) 共享 (share) 有温度 (warm and cozy)</p> <p>流量 (most-streamed) 我可能xx了假的xx (I may have a fake xx) 油腻 (greasy) 尬x (bad at socializing) 怼 (Lash out) 打call (Cheer on)</p>
2016	<p>供给侧 (supply-side structural) 洪荒之力 (prehistoric powers) 工匠精神 (a craftsmanship spirit of striving for the best)</p> <p>吃瓜群众 (melon-eating masses; means spectators) 一言不合就xx (the slightest disagreement leads to xx) 套路 (routine)</p> <p>葛优躺 (Ge You slouch) 友谊的小船说翻就翻 (The friend-ship wrecks easily) 蓝瘦香菇 (Feel sad and want to cry) 小目标 (set a small target)</p>
2015	<p>获得感 (sense of gain) 互联网+ (Internet plus) 颜值 (facial attractiveness) 宝宝 (baby) 创客 (maker) 脑洞大开 (mind-blowing)</p> <p>有钱就是任性 (rich and bitch) 剁手党 (online shopaholic) 网红 (Internet celebrity) 主要看气质 (It mainly depends on temperament)</p>

政治 经济 娱乐 社会
 Politics Economy Entertainment Society

Figure 1: Top 10 Buzzwords in 2015-2020

1.3 Research significance and innovation

The dissemination of buzzwords is a process of natural selection and the self-replication of strong cultural memes by the public.^① The public chooses the content they agree with from a mass of information and actively shares and disseminates this content. On the one hand, the gathering of public opinion makes buzzwords the epitome of the public mentality. In-depth research on the changes of buzzwords involves the diachronic monitoring of public opinion, which can improve the media's ability to control public opinion and avoid the secondary effects of online public opinion as much

^① Lin Gang. The Generation and Function Evolution of the Word Model of "XX People" from the Perspective of the Internet: Talking about the Annual Hot Word "Workers"[J]. Media Observation, 2021(02):62-67.

as possible. On the other hand, the dissemination of buzzwords in the context of technological empowerment relies on social media platforms, and changes in the generation and dissemination mechanisms of buzzwords are a true reflection of current media ecological changes.

From the perspective of research content, as mentioned above, this paper selects the “Top Ten Buzzwords from 2015 to 2020” as the research object. The first and last year here not only take into account the changes in the selection criteria of the top ten buzzwords in the period but also covers the latest buzzwords as much as possible, making up for the lack of recent research on buzzwords in the existing diachronic studies. From the perspective of research methods, this paper uses a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis. Different from interpretive analysis of the pure textual content of buzzwords in most previous studies, this paper counts the frequency changes of buzzwords in various dimensions, and conducts inference description analysis, which alleviates the subjective uncertainty in purely qualitative research.

2. Textual Analysis of buzzwords in 2015-2020

2.1 Provenance Analysis of buzzwords

2.1.1 Mainstream discourse system

Of the 2015-2020 buzzwords, many buzzwords come from the mainstream discourse system and their content covers many themes of social development. From General Secretary Xi Jinping’s speech at important domestic and international conferences, buzzwords such as “不忘初心” (not forgetting the original intention), “命运共同体” (a community of common destiny) and “文明互鉴” (mutual learning of civilizations) have emerged. Words such as “创客” (Maker), “互联网+” (Internet plus) and “工匠精神” (Craftsman’s Spirit) have entered the public’s field of vision through government reports and these words have been frequently used in social life. “店小二” (humble servant) and “教科书式” (textbook style) refer to the work requirements for leading cadres in government service departments, which demonstrate the increase in

the public's recognition of public officials. “供给侧” (Supply side), “双循环” (dual-cycle development pattern) and “区块链” (blockchain) have emerged in the process of jointly building a new pattern of economic development, reflecting the continuous innovation of economic development forms and development models in China today.

2.1.2 Public figures

High-profile social figures are also important contributors to buzzwords. “主要看气质” (It mainly depends on temperament) refers to netizens' evaluations of public figures, and it have become popular due to the resonance of many netizens. “官宣” (Official Announcement) was originally a phrase for celebrities announcing good news on public platforms, and from that various media used "official announcement" to emphasise authority when releasing news. “洪荒之力” (Prehistoric Powers) and “小目标” (set a small target) were all used by public figures on variety shows or in interviews, and the relevant video clips of these shows and interviews caused a frenzy on the Internet. These words then became popular. In addition, “怼” (Lash Out) and “996” (9am to 9pm, 6 days a week work schedule) also gained widespread attention because public figures discussed them.

2.1.3 Popular literary and artistic works

Popular literary and artistic works, including films, songs, books and comics, have become a breeding ground for buzzwords. For example, “道路千万条，安全第一条” (Roads are countless, safety is foremost) was spread due to the popularity of the Chinese sci-fi movie *"The Wandering Earth"* during the Spring Festival in 2019. In addition, “友谊的小船说翻就翻” (The friend-ship wrecks easily) is the concept settings of comic author when he is creating comics, which became popular in 2016 due to the prevalence of comic works. Although words such as “佛系” (Buddha-like) and “杠精” (Contrarian) are general descriptions of social phenomena, their popularity ultimately relies on literary and artistic works created with these words as the theme. Finally, the term “融梗” (Thaw stem) is a new word used by netizens in China when discussing whether a popular film and television work involves plagiarism.

2.1.4 Content produced by individual users

The inadvertent popularity of content produced by individual Internet users has also led to the emergence of a number of Internet buzzwords. For example, “确认过眼神” (we can see that from one's eyes) and “我太难了” (I'm getting worn out) are all from videos posted by individual users on the Internet. The exaggerated emotional expressions in these videos are highly infectious and resonate with the public. “凡尔赛文学” (Versailles Literature; means humblebrag) have attracted a lot of attention and imitation in a short period of time, constantly expanding the forms and content in the derivative creations of users, forming a popular trend.

2.1.5 Acceptance of foreign language vocabulary

The generation of buzzwords is also related to foreign languages, with new connotations extended in their use. For example, “硬核” (Hardcore) and “内卷” (Involution) are both translated from English words. “硬核” (Hardcore) originally referred to rap music with a strong sense of rhythm and power, and was later extended to mean powerful, becoming a buzzword used when expressing praise. “内卷” (Involution) originally referred to the phenomenon that the social model will stagnate after a certain stage of development. After being extended to irrational internal competition, it has led to a discussion of the phenomenon of involution among university students. “霸凌” (bullying) is transliterated from the English "bullying" and it describes the oppression and bullying of another person. However, it now specifically refers to the pressure and interference of the United States in the affairs of other countries when dealing with international affairs. The popular word “打 call” (Cheer on), which is composed of Chinese and English words, originally referred to a concert audience following the rhythm of music and interacting with performers, and it has now come to express support or approval. With the expansion of its scope of application, the word used in a variety of situations where a sense of identity can be expressed.

2.1.6 Innovation in Chinese vocabulary

The generation of certain buzzwords stems from innovation in the Chinese language, mainly manifested in innovation in semantics and word formation. For example, “套路” (Original meaning: well-versed method; Extended meaning: routine), “油腻” (Original meaning: greasy food; Extended meaning: greasy man) and “流量” (Original meaning: traffic or flow; Extended meaning: most-streamed) have meanings themselves, but they have been given new semantics in the Internet age. Popular terms such as “颜值” (facial attractiveness) and “柠檬精” (sour grapes) are composed of multiple nouns and their short word formation can clearly convey relatively complex information, so they have been quickly accepted and used by the public.

2.2 Thematic Analysis of buzzwords

Social life can be divided into different fields such as politics, economy, culture, society and ecology and as a mapping of social life, buzzwords are closely related to the fields above. In this section, the author first considers the criteria that separate the five fields when dividing buzzwords. Since buzzwords are a representation of popular culture, their content are closely related to culture. Most of the top ten buzzwords over the past six years can be attributed to the theme of culture. Therefore, this paper selects economy, politics, entertainment, and society as the main dimensions to classify the buzzwords from 2015-2020. The political category includes national policies and governance concepts. The economic category includes national economic policies and social and economic phenomena. The social category refers to topics that discuss or reflect certain social phenomenon. Finally, buzzwords for entertainment or ridicule are classified as entertainment. For buzzwords that contain two themes at the same time, this paper takes the more propensity indicator as its subject. According to the above, the topic distribution map of the top ten buzzwords from 2015-2020 is shown in Figure 2 below.

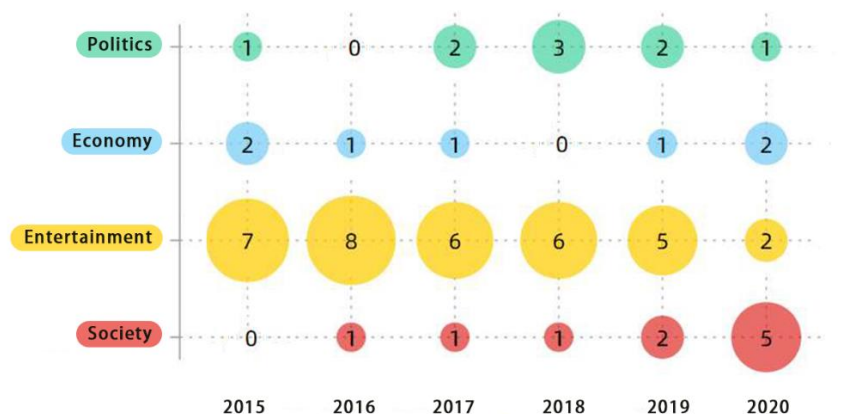


Figure 2: Distribution of the top ten buzzwords in 2015-2020

As shown in Figure 2, the top ten buzzwords from the past six years cover all areas of social life. From top to bottom (y axes), the topic distribution of buzzwords in each year is unbalanced. Among the buzzwords on the list, entertainment and social categories account for the vast majority, while political and economic buzzwords account for relatively few. From left to right (x axes), although the number of entertainment-themed buzzwords shows a decreasing trend year-on-year, they were been dominant from 2015 to 2019, and only surpassed by social buzzwords in 2020. Over the past six years, the number of political and economic buzzwords on the list has remained stable without significant changes.

3. Changes of the communication modes of buzzwords between 2015-2020

3.1 Source change: From opinion leaders to multiple subjects

3.1.1 Opinion leader leadership

Early buzzwords are mostly related to the mainstream discourse system and high-profile social public figures, and can be divided into two categories according to the specific differences of the source subjects of the buzzwords. The first category of buzzwords are mostly national policy and government terms, with themes closely related to China's political economy. Certain words, such as “命运共同体”

(community with a shared future) and “文明互鉴” (mutual learning among civilizations), were originally part of the mainstream social discourse system and were usually used in important national conferences and the discourse of mainstream media. In recent years, with the increasing attention of the public to the political circumstances of the country, these words have also been actively recognised by ordinary people and gradually become buzzwords. The second category of buzzwords mostly come from the mouths of public figures such as celebrities and are closely related to entertainment. Due to the high degree of popularity of public figures, topics related to these figures can attract a lot of public attention in a short period of time. For example, the word “小目标” (set a small target) became popular because Wang Jianlin, Chairman of Wanda Group, proposed to make 100 million yuan as a small target when he talked about how to become the richest man in the world. In addition, the word “官宣” (official announcement) was used by two celebrities to announce their marriage, which led the trend of official announcements becoming a buzzword. Driven by this celebrity effect, the public actively participate in discussions or imitations of these buzzwords, which brings new popularity to these words.

3.1.2 Multiple subject participation

With the active participation of Internet users, the content produced by individuals has gradually become the main source of buzzwords each year. The participation of multiple subjects is mainly reflected in the following three aspects. First, some buzzwords on the list are directly derived from works published by individual Internet users on the Internet, which have gradually become popular through the spontaneous interpretations of the public. Taking the 2016 buzzword “蓝瘦，香菇” (Feel sad and want to cry) as an example, the word comes from a short video that exploded in popularity in that year. In the video, "Feel sad, I want to cry" said with a strong Guangxi accent sounds very similar to "Blue Thin, Shiitake" and this highly figurative homophony was loved by young people across China. Second, the imitative use of multiple subjects promotes the popularisation of words in niche cultures. In 2020, for

example, some netizens used the sociological term “内卷” (involution) to express their thoughts on the intense competitive pressure on university students, which led to "involution" being used to talk about various contexts with irrational internal competition, and it has now become widespread in society. The buzzword “凡尔赛文学” (Versailles Literature), which was a buzzword in 2020, was originally used to describe the negative show-off tone of a Weibo user when publishing micro-content. Netizens mocked this behaviour by imitating the blogger's tone of praise, triggering the emergence of the term "Versailles Literature". Third, the public participates in derivative creations with buzzwords as the theme, setting off new fashion trends. Words such as “我太难了” (I'm getting worn out) did not receive a lot of attention the first time they entered the public eye, but attracted some Internet users to spontaneously create comics and emoticons related to these words. With the popularity of these related derivative works, such terms have begun to be frequently used by the public, and their popularity has continued to rise.

3.1.3 From opinion leaders to multiple subjects

Compared with ordinary people, public figures have a higher level of influence and stronger discourse dominance in the process of information flow. Most paths of dissemination of early buzzwords took opinion leaders as the central node, and the information received by the public was the "buzzwords" themselves that had been published but were not yet popular. After coming into contact with these "buzzwords", the audience chooses to disseminate information spontaneously that is consistent with their existing attitudes or consistent with their emotional needs. In this process, although the audience makes active choices, their initiative is often limited to selective contact and selective memory, and their behaviours are dominated by receiving and sharing information. Rarely do individual users spontaneously participate in the secondary creation of buzzwords.

With the rise of network media, single-line communication behaviours based on sharing can no longer meet the needs of the public. In the new media era, everyone is a productive consumer and uses the Internet as a medium of content production to

actively express their attitudes or opinions. Platform-based media and social networks give users a great deal of space for participation, and individuals shift from recipients of information to producers of content. In this context, the main source of buzzwords has gradually gone from opinion leaders who dominate discourse to user-generated content. The formation of buzzwords is also the process of network users constructing information networks with self-centred nodes. In this process, Internet users select information that is highly consistent with their own cognitive attitudes from a large amount of information. This identity-based information is more likely to resonate with social groups in the process of dissemination and has a relatively close empathy interaction effect. Although the formation of buzzwords is inevitably affected by subjects at higher discourse levels, the words still strongly reflect the cognitive attitudes of multiple subjects towards the same topic.

3.2 Channel upgrade: From a single path to a topology scenario

In geometry, topology is defined as an abstract structure that uses points and lines to represent geometric connections. In this regard, the Internet connects terminals, people, content, services, and so on, in a network, in which individual network users play the role of individual nodes. These individual nodes are not only the centre of communication but also units of social connection. They directly or indirectly form the connection relationships through social media^①, forming the topological scene in the Internet era. In this topological scene, the dissemination of buzzwords breaks from social media platforms such as online forums into mainstream media and official media reports. The way the public uses buzzwords is no longer limited to repetitive sentences but visual narratives relying on symbols such as pictures and videos provide infinite possibilities for the dissemination of buzzwords.

The upgrade of popular channels of communication is first reflected in the change in the application scope of buzzwords. Buzzwords themselves have high penetration and rich semantic connotations. They were mainly used and disseminated on social

^① Peng Lan. Research on new media users [M]. Renmin University of China Press: Journalism and Communication Library, 202 005.397 .

media in the early days but with the increase of their popularity and social recognition, they have gradually been incorporated into the language system of mainstream media. In 2019, the popularity of a sci-fi film caused the audience to discuss hardcore sci-fi in Chinese films and “硬核” (Hardcore) was extended to the appreciation of people or things. From then, The People's Daily used the term “硬核” to describe the Army Air Assault Brigade for the first time and the term has subsequently appeared in mainstream media reports to express affirmation. As can be seen from this example, the application of buzzwords has moved from the general public to the mainstream media. Buzzword is used both as a language of social communication and as a language of the news media, which greatly improves the dissemination and influence of buzzwords.

Another feature of the upgrade of communication channels is the innovation in the form of communication of buzzwords. Rich and colourful media forms are suitable for a variety of media platforms and buzzwords can be seen in topological scenes with users as the central node. Taking the popularity of “打工人” (migrant workers) as an example, this term first appeared on the Bilibili video platform when creators called themselves migrant workers in the videos they posted, which attracted a lot of attention from users of the platform. After the videos moved to Weibo, a social media platform, an entry on the topic of “打工人” (migrant workers) quickly appeared, and Weibo users improvised snippets of quotes and turned them into emoticons. Afterwards, a series of emoji packs for migrant workers set off a wave of dissemination on instant messaging platforms such as WeChat, and workers from all walks of life labeled themselves as “migrant workers”. Due to the specific social identity of the term “workers”, some groups cannot participate in the group carnival of “打工人” (migrant workers) and words such as “上学人” (who must go to school) and “干饭人” (who is addicted to eating) have gradually emerged. From a nickname in a video to imitation and adaptation including text, images, and videos, buzzwords generate new meanings in the process of their dissemination and are updated in real time with the tone of different media platforms. From short video platforms to social networks and instant messaging platforms, buzzwords can even become daily terms of the public used in face-to-face communication, which reflects the vitality of buzzwords in the new media era.

4. Changes in the communication content of buzzwords between 2015-2020

4.1 Discourse innovation: The construction of an official discourse system

The changes in the dissemination of buzzwords between 2015 to 2020 are first reflected in the discourse innovation of the official discourse system. Buzzwords derived from government documents and leaders' speeches closely follow the interests and demands of the public and convey China's political philosophy. In addition, the official discourse system also accommodates some online buzzwords and incorporates them into the discourse system of mainstream media news reports.

At present, there are "mainstream media public opinion fields" and "folk public opinion fields" in China, and social networks have broken the mainstream media public opinion field's control over social public opinion. Buzzwords are the true reflection of the public's focus and emotional appeal and can be regarded as an important weathervane of social public opinion. On the one hand, it is inevitable for the media to explore a more acceptable way for the general public (In China, mainstream media used to prefer to report news in official words rather than online words), but on the other hand, the widespread use of buzzwords in news reporting by mainstream media is also equivalent to a collection of subcultures that spread far and wide. However, the officialisation and mainstreaming of buzzwords does not mean the passive compromise of the power of folk discourse to the power of official discourse. Indeed, behind the dissemination of buzzwords is still the group identity and public opinion expression of ordinary people.

4.2 Attitude change: From personal opinion output to consensus expression

In cyber utopia, the public has a "free market of opinions" and can freely output opinions or express their wishes on the Internet. Early catchphrases such as “有钱就是

任性” (rich and bitch) and “巨婴” (giant infant) are the evaluative expressions of the public towards social news events. These kinds of buzzwords can be regarded as "word media" and behind them is often popular Internet events, and they imply the public's attitude towards these events or the trends of public opinion.^①

Over the past two years, buzzwords have increasingly reflected the balance between the expression of personal emotions and attitudes and the consensus view of society. The buzzword “996” (9am to 9pm, 6 days a week work schedule) is not only individual dissatisfaction with high-intensity work, but also society's criticism of the system of online work. In addition, the buzzword “内卷” (involution) used by young groups not only expresses the pressure of irrational competition, but also calls for the attention of all sectors of society to the phenomenon of involution. The public's perspective on popular topics has shifted from the self to the group, and their attitude of talking about popular topics has also shifted from the output of individual opinions to a more macro-level consensus expression.

4.3 Conceptual Reform: Joking, Irony and Positive Criticism

Although critical buzzwords have been on the list for the past six years, the social mentality behind these buzzwords has not been static. To be more specific, most of the buzzwords in the early years were strong denials against unreasonable social phenomena - they were the catharsis of the negative energy of the public – but today they are more of a joke and ridicule about life, with a strong positive criticism.

For example, the 2015 buzzword “有钱就是任性” (rich and bitch) is a mockery of the behaviour of using money to do whatever you want, reflecting the public's dissatisfaction with the gap between the rich and the poor in society. The 2017 buzzword “油腻” (greasy man) is far more socially tolerant to men than women, reflecting the public's sarcastic attitude. People hate some middle-aged men who are self-righteous like a backseat driver, The 2018 buzzwords “巨婴” (giant infant) and “杠精” (Contrarian) are both descriptive generalisations of a type of social group,

^① Zhou Mei. The Generation Mechanism and Social Effect Analysis of Ci Media[J]. Media, 2019(06):91-93.

reflecting the public's disgust at these groups. The popularity of the buzzwords mentioned above reflects the long-term resentment and even violence of the public towards certain social phenomenon and the social groups involved in these phenomena.

Compared with the negative attitudes in the early stages, buzzwords after 2019 have been more sarcastic. Even if they still include a critique of social phenomena, this critique is no longer so sharp. For example, “柠檬精” (sour grapes) is used to express envy in a self-deprecating way, and “我太难了” (I'm getting worn out) and “打工人” (migrant workers) are used to ridicule the inevitable pressure of life. For “凡尔赛文学” (Versailles literature), which refers to low-key but show-off behaviour, most people choose to laugh it off and do not reproduce the criticism of “有钱就是任性” (rich and bitch)". From this joking and humorous irony, we can see that the negative and negative colour of buzzwords is gradually weakening, and the public's mentality is becoming more relaxed and peaceful.

4.4 Emotional Reshaping: Cohesion in an Age of Crisis

Buzzwords are a common expression of the public's emotions and annual buzzwords are closely related to the themes of the times. In this regard, the top ten buzzwords in 2020 showed a very different distribution trend from the past. To be more specific, the number of social buzzwords exceeded that of entertainment buzzwords, and buzzwords related to pandemic topics accounted for nearly half of all buzzwords in that year. After experiencing a major public health emergency together, the focus of public attention has shifted from light-hearted entertainment topics to relatively serious social topics. During the pandemic period, the highly uncertain information environment caused some people to panic. In 2020, General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned the guiding principle of “人民至上，生命至上” (People first, life first) in a speech, which was quickly recognised and affirmed by the Chinese people. In addition, words such as “逆行者” (Heroes in harm's way) have been used to describe the battle against the pandemic during the pandemic, while “神兽” (Wild kids) and “直播带货” (Live commerce) are related to the modes of learning and commodity trading that have changed due to the impact of the pandemic on society.

Looking at the buzzwords between 2015-2020 as a whole, we can find that the social topics involved in the buzzwords are extensive and scattered. Faced with diverse social topics, individuals with different social identities will always choose those that more closely relate to themselves, and there can be differences in cognition and attitude when talking about the same social topic. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the original potential conflict between the individual and the collective was bridged to a certain extent and individual social individuals have largely been assimilated into the social group in which they belong. The common crisis faced by the public during the pandemic has created an opportunity for cohesion and strengthened personal and social identity.

5. Perspective on the evolution of media ecology from the perspective of buzzwords

5.1 Paradigm iteration and process reengineering of communication

The formation of buzzwords relies on the promotion of self-media and the participation of network users, breaking the traditional point-to-surface monopoly of communication centred on opinion leaders. It can be seen that the rise of the decentralised Internet and platform-based social media has subverted the traditional one-way communication pattern of the past. The gatekeeper role in the dual action model is no longer applicable to the era of digital media, and the generalisation of the gatekeeper role in network communication has also had an impact on the media ecology. In this new pattern of communication, it is particularly important for the mainstream media to actively play the leading role.

In addition, the dissemination of buzzwords through various media such as text, pictures, and videos is the embodiment of the fusion of media forms. In the context of media fusion, there is an information production process that processes content according to the characteristics of different terminal media.^① Under this new pattern of

^① Wang Huafeng. On the Influence of Media Convergence on Information Dissemination [J]. Journal of Journalism Research, 2016,7(14):104.

communication, the production of media content needs to integrate and process information, produce news products suitable for different tones, and promote the multi-channel distribution and dissemination of media content.

5.2 The benign interactions between subcultures and mainstream culture

From the self-proclaimed “佛系” (Buddha-like), to the emotional release of “我太难了” (I'm getting worn out), to the self-deconstruction of “打工人” (migrant workers), behind these buzzwords is the free emotional catharsis of young subcultural groups on the Internet when faced with high pressure in society, which is the expression of individual self-consciousness.

The Birmingham School explores the unique style of subculture from the perspectives of "ritual resistance" and "identity" and believes that the core feature of subculture is its strong resistance to disapproved culture. It is true that most of the uproar caused by buzzwords on the Internet is based on the discourse expression of youth groups. These youth groups active in social networking forums face the pressure of social life and create language and memes with emotional expression to retreat and resist this pressure. However, these buzzwords with language memes as their predecessors do not strongly confront mainstream culture and the subcultures in these buzzwords more reflect the characteristics of the group looking for identity.

For the youth, official discourse occupies a relatively large amount of discourse space, and young people retain their expectations in the cycle of self-identity deconstruction and reconstruction. One is the expectation of the same cognition of the social group to which one belongs and the existence of oneself, and another is the expectation that official discourse can recognise youth subcultures. For mainstream media, the new media era is different from the previous public opinion era, where individual users and self-media could speak out on social platforms. Although the mainstream media has a high level of discourse power, if subcultures are ignored, it will be difficult to influence public opinion.

In the buzzwords from 2015 to 2020, we can find that the process of the mainstream media getting closer to popular culture is also the process of mainstream

culture's incorporation of subcultures. When the mainstream media began to use buzzwords in news reports, the resistance of subcultures was further weakened and a friendly and positive interaction with mainstream culture was engendered. The use of buzzwords by mainstream media is a necessary step for mainstream media to explore effective communication with youth groups in the new media era, which is conducive to the aggregation of diverse values.

5.3 Everyone Participates in the Age of Smart Media

Liquid journalism has replaced the previous communication pattern controlled by professional media and individual users who survive in nodes can become more independent gatekeepers. The participatory culture in which individuals actively create media texts and disseminate media content based on their identity has taken social media by storm, forming the situation where everyone participates in the era of digital media.

Participatory culture relies on micro-content produced by individual users, and the emergence of buzzwords represented by “凡尔赛文学” (Versailles literature) is entirely due to the active participation and active dissemination of multiple subject users. In the digital media era, the aggregation efficiency of individual network users directly affects the scope and effect of information dissemination. But at the same time, the production and dissemination of media products are spontaneous, the common identity or the same cognition of a certain thing acts as a strong link to connect different individual users, and the behaviour of active dissemination caused by this is difficult to be affected by professional media restrictions. This requires professional media to play the role of gatekeeper while excavating individual value and build a relatively open field of information production and a positive new pattern of communication.

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