

Review Article

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Reconstructing Public Governance in a “Multimedia Landscape”: Policy Agenda Construction in the Short Video Era

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The communication ecology of short videos and their emotional mobilization are reshaping public policy agenda setting and challenging traditional governance models. Existing studies tend to focus on either media technology or governance theory, rarely integrating both to explain how digital platforms alter power structures and mobilization mechanisms. This study examines the “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” controversy, combining media ecology and governance theories, and employs functional roles and content framing to analyze the construction of public issues. Findings show that: (1) agenda formation has shifted from official-driven processes to a grassroots-triggered paradigm, reflecting a shift from static status power to dynamic functional power; (2) emotional mobilization presents a paradox: content that most effectively sparks public interaction is not direct emotional appeals, but seemingly objective news/event frames that provide space for representing multiple social contradictions. By treating platform technology and emotional environment as endogenous to governance, this study offers a perspective on the evolution of opinion leaders, complex emotional mobilization, and collaborative governance in the digital era.

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Received: August 30, 2025; **Accepted:** September 03, 2025; **Published:** September 14, 2025**Keywords:** Short Videos, Multimedia Landscape, Opinion Leaders, Emotional Mobilization, Public Policy Agenda**Introduction**

As of last year, China had over one billion short video users, with an average daily usage of 156 minutes per person, ranking first among all Internet applications (China Online Audio-Visual Development Research Report, 2025). This shift marks the transition of the online public opinion ecosystem from a “text-and-image-dominated” period (2014–2018) to a “video explosion” period (2018–present). Changes in social media have fostered new patterns of interaction and reshaped the formation, expression, and emotional mobilization capacity of online opinion leaders. Short video platforms exhibit low entry barriers and strong interactivity. These characteristics have fostered the rise of grassroots opinion leaders with millions of followers, who now exert substantial influence on public discourse. This rise challenges the traditional governance structure and poses new demands for information management, online public opinion regulation, and social governance.

Within this multimedia ecology, a key question arises: how is public policy agenda-setting being transformed, and what new features characterize the associated power dynamics and mobilization mechanisms? This study examines how short video platforms reshape the structure of opinion leaders, creating new interactions between grassroots actors and traditional authorities, while platform interactions amplify emotional factors, transforming them into drivers of agenda setting. The study further investigates how governments can foster effective multi-actor collaboration within this emerging agenda ecosystem. The controversy over

“Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” serves as a case study. By integrating media ecology and public governance theories, the study constructs an analytical framework centered on functional roles and content framing, treating short video platforms as a critical variable influencing governance. Insights from the case reveal the intrinsic logic of agenda construction in the short video era, thereby providing both theoretical and practical guidance for enhancing collaborative governance between governments and citizens.

Part 1: The Short Video Era: Public Policy Agenda Challenges In “Multimedia Landscape”

The public discussion space in the short video era represents a “multimedia landscape,” characterized by the coexistence of audiovisual symbols, textual comments, and interactive features. Media ecology emphasizes that no medium functions as a neutral conduit; each shapes perception, interaction, and social structures [1]. Short video platforms exemplify such transformative media. Their fragmented dissemination, algorithmic recommendations, and emotionally charged content create a new online media ecology, posing challenges to traditional public governance and revealing the limits of existing theoretical frameworks [2].

Agenda-Setting Actors and Power Struggles: From Failed Identity Labels to Dynamic Contestations of Power

The low threshold and decentralized nature of short video platforms have profoundly reshaped the ecology of opinion leaders [3–4]. A growing number of grassroots figures have gained remarkable agenda-setting capacity in public debates. Despite these developments, existing studies have yet to account for the governance challenges posed by such rapid media transformations.

Existing literature on opinion leader evolution largely adheres to a platform-based chronology, categorizing developments into the BBS, Weibo, and post-Weibo stages. This broad “post-Weibo” category, however, fails to capture the governance challenges arising from drastic media shifts.

Accordingly, the study distinguishes between the “text-image period” (2014–2018) and the “short video explosion” period (2018–present). During the former period, WeChat and long-form Weibo posts dominated public discourse. Opinion leaders primarily relied on professional content production, which facilitated rational public deliberation regarding social issues. The latter period features platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou, and Bilibili, which have reshaped communication patterns toward fragmented, audiovisual formats. In this context, opinion leaders often build influence through cross-platform collaboration and coordinated dissemination of content across short video platforms. Their composition has become increasingly diverse, including experts, influencers, and independent media creators.

Traditional frameworks for measuring influence developed primarily within the text-image ecology, are increasingly inadequate. Static indicators, including follower counts, have been shown to fail in accurately reflecting actors’ influence in specific policy debates. Moreover, the binary distinction between “elite” and “grassroots” has blurred: grassroots actors often move toward elitization or commercialization once they achieve visibility, while top-tier leaders struggle with content “standardization” and “concentric-layering” effects. These dynamics reveal a methodological dilemma: if static identity labels (official vs. grassroots) and legacy metrics from the text-image era can no longer capture real power relations, research must adopt a new framework that goes beyond identity categories and traces the dynamic functions of actors in the audiovisual environment.

Agenda Content and Emotional Mobilization: The Complexity of Rationality and Affect

In the “multimedia” environment, the combination of sound, visual imagery, and immersive storytelling in short videos amplifies emotions more strongly than traditional text or images, increasing the role of emotions in public debates. Visual expression communicates not only information but also meaning through cinematographic techniques and background music. These techniques often displace rational discussion. Studies in emotional governance [5], provide evidence that emotions can both advance and hinder policy agendas [6]. However, existing studies do not fully account for the dynamics of short video platforms. The effects of emotional tone in the public sphere are context-dependent. Early interventions by government authorities are critical. Positive reinforcement helps sustain constructive sentiment, whereas negative reinforcement may accelerate its spread [7]. Mobilization of emotions is not linear; in an anxious atmosphere, even neutral or rational videos can spark unexpectedly strong responses. Emotions also interact with power relations and social functions. Some scholars argue that emotions in public communication carry moral and social functions. These emotional dynamics manifest in the interplay between rationality and irrationality, positive and negative sentiment, and public interest and state authority.

Most studies focus on broad emotional categories and fail to address mechanisms unique to short video platforms. Multimodal narratives shape these mechanisms. On these platforms, algorithms further amplify polarized content, thereby influencing the development of public issues. In light of these dynamics, this study investigates how emotions are activated and guided by

distinct discursive strategies—factual reporting, rational argument, and emotional storytelling. Even narratives that appear objective can, under specific conditions, serve as influential triggers of collective emotion.

Agenda Mechanisms and Algorithmic Intervention: The Algorithmic Black Box and Emotional Polarization

The core dilemma of agenda mechanisms lies in conceptualizing the role of platform algorithms. In the construction of online ecosystems, short video platforms influence user emotions through the strategic interaction of content creation and regulatory mechanisms. The recommendation mechanisms of these platforms influence which content users encounter, potentially intensifying the formation of “information cocoons”. This convergence of content, driven by traffic logic, not only limits the diversity of opinions on platforms but also deepens group antagonism and emotional polarization.

Existing research often underestimates or even overlooks the extent of algorithmic intervention in processes of multi-actor collaboration. Platforms can implicitly set agendas by distributing visibility through algorithms, while the opacity of content moderation rules may silence marginal voices [8-9]. Although some studies have begun to focus on mechanisms such as “playful governance” or algorithmic optimization, most research has not yet treated platforms and their algorithms as actors with their own interests and strategies, capable of exerting profound impact on collaborative governance processes [10-11].

Part 2: Media Ecology: An Explanatory Framework for Public Policy Agenda Setting in the Short Video Era

To address the dilemmas discussed above, this study integrates media ecology and public governance theories to construct a more explanatory analytical framework. The core of this framework is to treat the media ecology of short videos as a key variable in the reconstruction of public governance, rather than as a neutral channel of information. The dynamic explanatory model (Figure 1) integrates four core elements. Within this model, media ecology serves as the macro-level context for agenda setting, while opinion leaders, emotional mobilization, and collaborative governance between government and citizens interact within this context

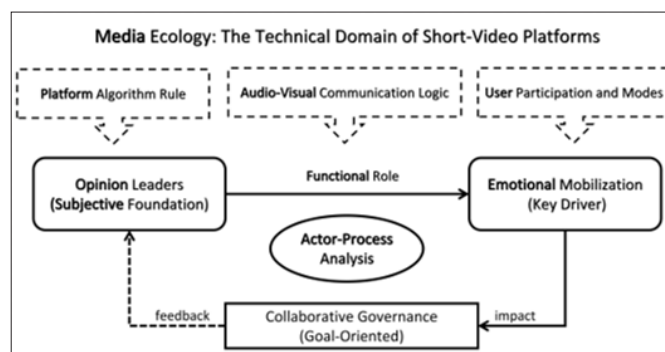


Figure 1: An Interpretive Framework of Public Policy Agenda-Setting in the Short-Video Era (Created by the author)

Macro-Level Field: Media Ecology in Agenda Construction

As a new media ecology, short video platforms with their fragmented, highly interactive, and decentralized features reshape how diverse actors construct public issues. Agenda-setting models dominated by mainstream media face increasing challenges, as diverse actors actively co-construct public issues. The analytical framework treats media ecology as a macro-level background variable. It defines the underlying logic and basic rules of agenda

construction and also reveals the technological constraints of governance within short video platforms.

Meso-Level Interaction: Dynamic Relations among Core Elements

The central contribution of this framework is to analyze the dynamic interaction of three key elements.

The Transformation of Opinion Leaders: From “Identity” to “Functional Roles.”

Opinion leaders play a critical role in shaping the public policy agenda. However, to address the earlier problem of “identity label invalidity,” this study redefines the concept by shifting from identity-based recognition to functional roles. Rather than asking “who the opinion leader is,” the framework examines the specific roles that different actors play in particular issues. This transformation enables the analysis of power struggles shaping the agenda-setting process.

Emotional Mobilization Mechanisms: Nonlinear Dynamics

In the new media ecology, grassroots actors often rely on emotional storytelling to transform public sentiment into strong momentum for agenda diffusion [12-13]. Emotional storytelling on short video platforms is not only a communication phenomenon but also a political tool that can influence governance outcomes. Evidence indicates that short videos disseminated via dialect narratives on livelihood-related issues are shared more extensively than expert commentaries. The evolution of online opinion often stems from competition between positive and negative emotions [14]. Importantly, research demonstrates that emotional mobilization on short video platforms influences governmental responses to policy issues. Therefore, this framework treats emotional mobilization as a core driving force of agenda construction. To address the dilemma of “nonlinear emotional effects,” the empirical part of this study introduces the concept of content framing to test how different discursive strategies activate and guide public emotions and to uncover the complex, nonlinear outcomes of mobilization.

Collaborative Governance between Government and Citizens: The Ultimate Goal

Effective governance in the short video era requires governments to actively intervene and integrate public issues emerging in the online sphere into policy agendas promptly by establishing mechanisms for interaction among diverse actors. Collaborative governance has gained wide recognition as an effective model for addressing complex public problems. Its practical pathways include operating government social media accounts, engaging in strategic cooperation with traditional opinion leaders, and providing timely and transparent policy responses. Within this framework, scholars conceptualize governance as the ultimate goal. This study aims to examine how a new model of governance can emerge initiated at the grassroots level, responded to by officials, and ultimately transformed into collective action.

Part 3: “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools”: An Empirical Analysis of Public Policy Agenda Setting in the Short Video Era

Case Selection and Data Sources

This study uses the “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” incident, which erupted in September 2023, as an empirical case. The event began when parents in several regions, including Ganzhou in Jiangxi Province, raised concerns about the safety and nutritional value of pre-packaged school lunches. The issue quickly gained attention on short-video platforms, generating substantial public pressure.

On September 22, the Ministry of Education explicitly expressed a cautious stance toward the policy, elevating a local dispute into a nationwide public issue. Figure 2 presents the complete timeline of the event. This process from grassroots questioning to official response clearly illustrates the structural transformation of public agenda setting in the era of short videos. This study selects this case because it involves a complex interplay among multiple actors, including the government, enterprises, and parents, making it well suited for examining how short-video platforms reshape the mechanisms of public issue generation and diffusion.

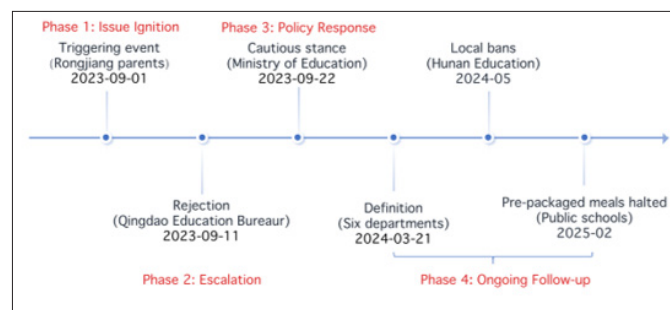


Figure 2: Pre-Packaged Meals in School: Academic Timeline (Created by the Author)

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses. Data were systematically collected from the Douyin platform between September 5, 2023, and February 14, 2025, using six keywords related to the controversy over “pre-packaged meals in schools.” Sampling took place in two stages: (1) High-impact video pre-screening (N = 109): 109 videos with more than 1,000 likes, along with 5,431 comments, formed the basic sample. The dataset covers video metadata (title, tags, posting time), publisher information (nickname, follower count, profile description), and interaction metrics (likes, shares, comments). (2) Purposeful sampling (N = 60): Guided by a “functional role” coding framework, researchers purposefully selected 60 videos representing four actor types—official agenda setters, expert endorsers, grassroots agenda challengers, and commercial information providers. These videos then underwent in-depth analysis to examine how different functional roles use multimodal media symbols to construct narratives and elicit emotional responses from audiences.

Data Analysis Strategy: Coding and Quantification

Data analysis employed a mixed approach, integrating qualitative and textual analyses. At the qualitative level, the study coded both the identities and the content of video publishers. The media ecology of short videos reveals the limitations of the traditional concept of opinion leaders, which rests on static identity labels. To address this limitation, the study established a two-dimensional coding framework, integrating “functional roles” and “content frames,” to investigate the actors and mechanisms underlying agenda construction. The functional role dimension classified actors into four mutually exclusive categories (Table 1), based on the central intention of the video content, platform verification, and account profile. The content frame dimension identified the primary forms, narrative logic, and communication strategies of the video content (Table 2). To ensure coding reliability, two coders independently examined 20% of the sample (22 videos). Inter-coder reliability tests produced a Kappa coefficient of 0.85 ($p < 0.01$) for functional roles and 0.83 ($p < 0.01$) for content frames. The coders resolved disagreements through consultation with a third party. A sample of the final coding appears in Table 3.

Table 1: Classification Criteria for Publishers’ “Functional Role”

Functional Role	Definition	Identification Criteria
Official Agenda Setter	Official media, government agencies, or their certified accounts. Their videos aim to publish authoritative information, convey official positions, and guide public opinion, thereby setting the public agenda.	- Clearly labeled as “official account,” “news media center,” “integrated media center,” “radio and TV station,” or “government agency”; - Content includes policy updates, official responses, or neutral event reports (e.g., “Education Bureau Response,” “Ministry of Education Statement”).
Expert Authority Endorser	Individuals with clear professional backgrounds or credentials (e.g., scholars, doctors, nutritionists, lawyers), providing expertise, data analysis, or industry insights to legitimize specific viewpoints.	- Profile mentions professional qualifications such as “Professor, PhD, Physician, Nutritionist, Lawyer, Economist”; - Content focuses on scientific analysis, data reasoning, or industry insights (e.g., “Analysis of Pre-packaged Meal Nutrition,” “Legal Risk Interpretation”).
Grassroots Agenda Challenger	Ordinary citizens or non-professional opinion leaders with moderate follower counts, whose videos are based on personal experience, emotional responses, or questioning of existing information, challenging official or mainstream narratives and proposing new issues or perspectives.	- Profile shows personal introduction (e.g., “mother, farmer, ordinary parent, independent KOL”), moderate follower count; - Content is based on personal experience, emotional expression, or critique of mainstream narratives (e.g., “Opposing Pre-packaged Meals in Schools,” “Parental Concerns”).
Commercial/Corporate Publisher	Video publishers with explicit commercial purposes, or whose profile and video content are directly related to business promotion or product sales. Public issue-related videos often leverage trending topics to promote their brand or services.	- Profile indicates business identity (e.g., “Founder, Chairman, Company Official Account, Supply Chain, Procurement Platform”); - Content mentions own business (e.g., “Cold Chain Logistics,” “School Cafeteria Procurement Platform”) or uses trending topics to promote brand.

Table 2: Classification Criteria for Publishers’ “Content Frame”

Content Frame	Definition and Identification Criteria
News/Event Frame	Reports events, policy updates, or official responses in a neutral and objective manner, aiming to provide factual information. Common forms include news broadcasts, footage editing, or journalist interviews.
Scientific/Rational Frame	Video content relies on facts, data, scientific research, national standards, or laws and regulations as the main evidence, aiming to persuade the audience through logical and rational analysis.
Emotional/Value Frame	Video content tells individual stories and uses emotionally charged audiovisual language, focusing on potential risks of an issue, with the aim of evoking audience empathy and prompting action.

Table 3: Examples of Publisher Types and Content Coding

Publisher Name	Follower Count	Profile Description	Core Video Content	Functional Role	Content Frame
China National Radio Online	26948000	“Telling China’s story, spreading China’s voice” (certified official media)	“How should we view pre-packaged meals entering schools?” (neutral event inquiry)	Official Agenda Setter	News/Event Frame
Han Xiuyun Talks Economy	12625000	“Professor, Department of Economics, Tsinghua University; CCTV Finance Commentator”	“Pre-packaged meals in schools should focus on children’s health, citing Japanese case analysis” (professional analysis + data reasoning)	Expert Authority Endorser	Scientific/Rational Frame

Silver Hair Orange Sister	396000	“Rural orange farmer, personal profile”	“Opposing pre-packaged meals in schools, parents should not relax” (emotional expression + questioning)	Grassroots Agenda Challenger	Emotional/Value Frame
Geng Sister’s Happy Cottage	5219000	“Hua Shun Intelligent, focused on internet, promoting school cafeteria procurement platform”	“Hua Shun Sunshine Procurement Platform empowers campus food safety” (promoting own business)	Commercial/ Corporate Publisher	Emotional/Value Frame

Building on the qualitative coding, the study further analyzed interaction data, including likes, shares, and comments. For the 5,431 comments collected, the analysis focused on three aspects:(1) Sentiment Analysis: Each comment was evaluated with SPSSAU to determine its sentiment polarity (positive, negative, or neutral). The analysis enabled an assessment of the overall emotional tone of public opinion as well as the variation in emotional intensity across different types of videos. (2) Quantitative Statistics and Correlation Analysis: Interaction data for different types of videos were subjected to cross-tabulation and statistical tests to examine the specific effects of various content frames on public opinion mobilization.

Empirical Analysis and Findings

The “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” incident illustrates how short video discourse serves as a driving force behind public issues. Based on a dataset of 109 videos, a purposive sample of 60 videos and 5,431 comments, this study examines the case from three perspectives.

Agenda Inversion: The Shift from “Identity Power” to “Functional Power”

The generation of the “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” issue clearly illustrates an inversion of traditional agenda-setting power. As shown in the timeline (Figure 1), grassroots actors, such as directly involved parents, initially triggered the public issue from the bottom up, while government authorities responded reactively. This process reflects a shift in the source of power from static identities to situational functional power. The study quantifies influence along two dimensions. Researchers use follower count to measure potential influence, thereby indicating the extent to which content creators exert influence relative to their identity and institutional affiliation. Actual influence is measured by the number of likes, reflecting the resonance of video content on a specific issue. By comparing the top twenty video creators ranked by followers and likes (see Tables 4 and 5), the analysis reveals that agenda-setting authority no longer rests with a single actor. Instead, four functional roles interact in a complex and dynamic structure, illustrating the fundamental transformation of power in the era of short video platforms.

The “identity power” of official media is gradually weakening. In terms of potential influence, official and institutional accounts continue to hold an advantage due to their credibility and large follower base only three non-official accounts appear among the top twenty by follower count. However, when considering actual influence, a different picture emerges: ten non-official accounts rank among the top twenty by likes, contrasting sharply with the dominance of official accounts in follower rankings.

The results demonstrate that on short video platforms, traditional identity-based authority, defined by an actor’s official status, does not automatically confer agenda-setting power. Agenda-setting power depends on whether the actor’s message resonates with the audience. At the same time, the “functional power” of grassroots actors is increasingly prominent. Five grassroots agenda challengers who were not among the top twenty in follower count achieved high positions in the like rankings, with four accounts, including Silver-haired Orange Sister, ranking within the top seven due to the persuasive and engaging nature of their content. These results demonstrate that influence in the short video ecosystem is no longer shaped solely by follower size; grassroots opinion leaders can mobilize audiences successfully through emotional resonance on specific issues. This differentiation of power directly leads to an inversion of agenda-setting roles. The initial drivers of the “Pre-packaged Meals” incident were these grassroots challengers, who, as “participants” or “empathetic narrators,” leveraged personal life stories and emotional engagement to elevate a local event to a nationwide public policy issue. Official media, in contrast, primarily assumed the role of “responders” and “managers,” shifting their focus from informing to clarifying and responding. Their delayed and reactive stance positioned them in opposition to public sentiment from the outset, reducing the effectiveness of official opinion management and setting the tone of discourse as a target for public negative emotions. This context provides a critical background for interpreting the heightened negativity observed in official comment sections in subsequent analysis.

Grassroots actors initiated the agenda, and official responses influenced the public discourse. The subsequent involvement of expert authorities and commercial actors further altered the power dynamics. The rankings of economist Han Xiuyun in both lists illustrate the enduring persuasive power of expert endorsers—they lend legitimacy to specific viewpoints by providing professional knowledge and rational analysis. In contrast, commercial or corporate actors, such as Aaron A (Pre-packaged Meal King), participate not out of public concern but to leverage the issue for brand promotion or monetization. The engagement of these actors reflects the penetration of platform economic logic into the public opinion space. By attaching themselves to trending topics, they convert the attention generated by public issues into commercial value, contributing to the commodification of discourse. The analysis reveals that the influence structure of short video public opinion is not a simple binary interaction between government and citizens, but a polycentric, hybrid field shaped by the interplay of official authority, grassroots affective responses, expert knowledge, and commercial logic. It also highlights the complex entanglement of political, social, knowledge-based, and commercial forces in the digital public sphere of short videos.

Table 4: Top 20 Publishers by Follower Count in the “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” Incident

Rank	Publisher Name	Follower Count	Functional Role
1	Changjiang Yun News	40035000	Official Agenda Setter
2	CCTV Kuai Kan	38168000	Official Agenda Setter
3	China News Service	36902000	Official Agenda Setter
4	Qilu Evening News – Guoran Video	31552000	Official Agenda Setter
5	Zhengshi'er	27850000	Official Agenda Setter
6	China National Radio Online	26948000	Official Agenda Setter
7	Vista Kan Tianxia	25865000	Official Agenda Setter
8	Zonglan News	24724000	Official Agenda Setter
9	Guo + Community	21003000	Official Agenda Setter
10	Phoenix WEEKLY	14176000	Official Agenda Setter
11	Guancha.cn	14043000	Official Agenda Setter
12	Han Xiuyun Talks Economy	12625000	Expert Authority Endorser
13	Yicai Global (First Financial)	10596000	Official Agenda Setter
14	Jin Shipin Changtian News	10468000	Official Agenda Setter
15	Zui Jiangyin Commentary Department	9583000	Official Agenda Setter
16	Xinhua News Agency Kuai Kan	8777000	Official Agenda Setter
17	Wu Wei	6956000	Commercial/Corporate Publisher
18	Geng Sister's Happy Cottage	5217000	Commercial/Corporate Publisher
19	Gaodu News	5173000	Official Agenda Setter
20	BRTV News	4912000	Official Agenda Setter

Table 5: Top 20 Publishers by Likes in the “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” Incident

Rank	Publisher Name	Like Count	Follower Count	Functional Role
1	Yue Niu News	743000	4365000	Official Agenda Setter
2	China National Radio Online	382000	26948000	Official Agenda Setter
3	A Luo'en A (Pre-packaged Meal King)	322000	71000	Commercial/Corporate Publisher
4	Silver Hair Orange Sister	295000	396000	Grassroots Agenda Challenger
5	Da Mei Sister	254000	79000	Grassroots Agenda Challenger
6	Recording Small Snail	238000	19000	Grassroots Agenda Challenger
7	Nuan Nuan Food Time Shop	232000	23000	Grassroots Agenda Challenger
8	Geng Sister's Happy Cottage	227000	5217000	Commercial/Corporate Publisher
9	Ai Cixi	181000	201000	Official Agenda Setter
10	China News Jingwei	160000	3760000	Official Agenda Setter
11	Deathbell Chris	160000	1340000	Commercial/Corporate Publisher
12	Da Wan News	154000	4893000	Official Agenda Setter
13	Guancha.cn	151000	14043000	Official Agenda Setter
14	Secretary Lu	143000	27000	Grassroots Agenda Challenger
15	Guancha.cn	140000	14043000	Official Agenda Setter
16	Changjiang Yun News	135000	40035000	Official Agenda Setter
17	Wu Wei	120000	6956000	Commercial/Corporate Publisher
18	Han Xiuyun Talks Economy	116000	12625000	Expert Authority Endorser
19	Weishi Lanxi	114000	784000	Official Agenda Setter
20	CCTV Kuai Kan	101000	38168000	Official Agenda Setter

Differentiation of Discourse Strategies: Coupling of Roles and Frames

Emotional factors, as key drivers of public opinion, exhibit significant variation in production and guidance mechanisms depending on the functional roles of actors. To examine this mechanism, the study conducted content coding of 60 purposively sampled videos. The results show that actors with different functional roles employ highly differentiated rhetorical strategies and narrative frames. This divergence in discourse practices directly shapes the distinct paths through which actors construct power within the public opinion

space. Table 6 presents the preference distribution between the four functional roles and three content frames in detail. The research team further conducted a cross-tabulation analysis of functional roles and content frame selection. Chi-square tests indicated a highly significant association between the two variables ($\chi^2 = 34.599$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that actors with different functional roles exhibit a high degree of specialization in their choice of discourse strategies. It is precisely this specialization that collectively forms the communication ecology of the issue under study.

Table 6: Proportion of Functional Roles Across Content Frames

Content Frame Functional Role	News/Event Frame	Scientific/Rational Frame	Emotional/Value Frame	Proportion
Official Agenda Setter	11	6	2	31.67%
Expert Authority Endorser	0	3	4	11.66%
Grassroots Agenda Challenger	1	3	21	41.67%
Commercial/Corporate Publisher	0	2	7	15%
summary	12	14	34	60

Official agenda setters demonstrate a notably composite discourse strategy, yet their core advantage lies in their monopoly over the “news/event frame.” Such content (N = 11) is almost exclusively produced by official media, confirming that state media primarily exerts influence through control over information release and agenda-setting authority. Their involvement in the “scientific/rational frame” (N = 6) and “emotional/value frame” (N = 2) reflects strategic adaptations to the platform ecosystem. In stark contrast, grassroots agenda challengers exhibit a strong preference for emotional narratives. Among the 25 videos they produced, 88% (N = 22) employed the “emotional/value frame,” while content featuring objective factual reporting was absent. These findings indicate that in the short video ecosystem, grassroots actors exert influence not through traditional informational authority but through emotional mobilization, leveraging personalized narratives and intense emotional expression to elicit public resonance and facilitate participation in agenda-setting. Situated between these extremes, expert endorsers adopt a dual strategy that balances rationality and emotion. They employ the “scientific/rational frame” (N = 3) to reinforce cognitive authority while also extensively using the “emotional/value frame” (N = 4) to enhance content dissemination. This compromise strategy enables knowledge experts to seek public influence within the constraints of platform-mediated communication. Commercial or corporate content producers, in contrast, demonstrate a relatively instrumental rationality. They strategically avoid news content with the strongest public attribute, focusing instead on the “emotional/value frame” (N = 7). This approach maximizes the emotional potential of public issues to drive audience engagement and commercial conversion.

The Paradox of Mobilization: The Power Distinction among Facts, Reason, and Stories

As noted earlier, the operational mechanism of emotional mobilization is far more complex than a simple linear logic in which emotional content directly triggers emotional feedback. In the context of an inverted agenda power structure, a central question arises: which discourse strategies are most effective in stimulating public engagement? This study quantitatively examines three primary types of discourse emotionally compelling stories, rigorously logical reasoning, and objectively presented facts which correspond to the emotional/value frame, scientific/rational frame, and news/event frame.

Quantitative Examination of Mobilization Effects: The Paradox of Emotion

The study compared interaction metrics comments, likes, and

shares across videos representing different content frames (see Table 7). As the sample data did not meet the assumption of normality, the Kruskal-Wallis H nonparametric test was employed. Results indicated significant differences in the number of comments among the different frames ($p = 0.00279$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons further revealed that: (1) videos using the news/event frame received significantly more comments than those using the emotional/value frame ($p < 0.01$) and the scientific/rational frame ($p < 0.05$); and (2) there was no significant difference in comment count between the emotional/value frame and the scientific/rational frame. However, in terms of shares, videos employing the emotional/value frame averaged 20,000 shares, significantly higher than the other two frames. These findings underscore the distinctive advantage of emotional/value content in cross-community dissemination.

The core paradox of this study emerges here: in a highly emotionalized public opinion environment, videos that appear most neutral and objective—the news/event frame—elicited more public comments than the emotional/value or scientific/rational frames. This finding contradicts the conventional view that emotional content inherently drives greater engagement. To investigate this puzzle, the study further analyzed video scripts and comment sections to explore the underlying mechanisms behind this phenomenon.

Table 7: Comparison of Interaction Metrics Across Different Content Frames

Content Frame	Number of Videos	Average Likes	Average Comments	Average Shares
News/Event Frame	12	165,000	113,000	11,500
Emotional/Value Frame	34	75,207	16,511	20,446
Scientific/Rational Frame	14	118,418	69,334	8,656

Decoding the Mechanism: Why Do “Fact-Based” Videos Elicit the Most Comments?

The news/event frame generates the largest pool of comments because it often serves as a focal point for multiple social contradictions. A single news report may simultaneously include official statements, parental concerns, corporate responses, and

expert opinions, packaging diverse and sometimes conflicting elements. This presentation of complex social tensions activates audiences with multiple identities and provides points of identification, thereby creating ample space for discussion.

To examine this phenomenon, the study used SPSSAU to calculate sentiment scores and tendencies for the titles and comments of 12 videos employing the news/event frame. Recognizing that irony, wordplay, and implicit expressions in online texts can lead to misclassification, manual semantic correction was applied as follows: (1) for each video, the top 20 comments by likes were selected as a correction sample; (2) team members cross-checked these comments and manually annotated statements that were likely mis-scored by the algorithm (e.g., “Which is healthier, sugar water or bird’s nest?” or “Thanks to the media, thanks to Douyin, thanks to the power of the internet, otherwise who could challenge this?”); (3) researchers reinterpreted the comments according to context, converting them into sentiment expressions recognizable by the sentiment dictionary and subsequently recalculated in SPSSAU. The study also supplemented the analysis by inferring “unsaid” elements in the comments based on context and rhetorical strategies. Table 8 presents the final results, with Table 9 providing examples of the top three liked comments for each video. The findings show that, although manual analysis initially misclassified some comments as neutral or positive due to the presence of words such as “thanks,” reinterpretation revealed them as strongly negative. For example, comments like “Parents would never agree, so they are just talking; in reality, they won’t communicate at all” directly express skepticism toward the official narrative of “multi-party communication.”

Analyzing the video titles and comments reveals a notable discrepancy between the emotional tone of titles and the sentiment

expressed in comment sections. Official media titles in the news/event frame generally adopt neutral or slightly positive phrasing for example, the sentiment score of a title from China National Radio (CNR) was 0.32, while that of a title from CCTV Quick Watch was 0.25. These media outlets attempt to present an objective and rational stance for public discussion. However, the comment space exhibits strongly negative sentiment: the calibrated sentiment scores of the top-liked comments across the 12 videos were almost entirely negative, and the total sentiment score of all comments was also predominantly negative. Together, these results indicate a public discourse space dominated by negative emotions. The observed pattern explains the previously identified “paradox of mobilization.” Fact-based videos, while aiming to act as neutral information carriers, often become outlets for public anxiety and frustration. Audience reactions do not follow the content rationally; instead, viewers use the platform to express concerns and dissatisfaction about pre-packaged meals in schools. Highly liked comments frequently include statements such as “Parents would never agree” and “Pre-packaged meals must be banned from schools,” reflecting stance-taking rather than reasoned debate. Analysis of these interactions shows that discussions framed around news/facts tend to simplify and concretize complex social issues, eventually turning them into sites of emotional confrontation. Compared with this, the scientific/rational frame interacts weakly due to its closed nature, whereas the emotional/value frame, with its focused appeal, easily elicits public resonance and sharing. The news/event frame, by contrast, offers the broadest space for discussion and contention, as its openness and aggregation of contradictions create numerous points of engagement. Despite the hostile tone in comments, it is precisely the convergence of multiple tensions that generates the emotional energy required for strong comment mobilization.

Table 8: Sentiment Scores of Titles and Comments under the “News/Factual Frame”

Publisher Name	Title	Title sentiment score	Title sentiment polarity	Total sentiment score of comments
Yue Niu News	Parents oppose use of pre-cooked meals in school canteens: “If children’s health is gone, what’s the point of studying?” School responds: pre-cooked meals removed.	-0.07	Negative	-3.22
CNR News	How should we view pre-cooked meals entering schools, especially primary and secondary schools?	0.32	Positive	-1.79
China News Service	Parents crowd school gates after pre-cooked meals enter campuses; a principal says: “We must never experiment on children.”	-0.03	Negative	-4.12
DaWan News	After pre-cooked meals enter schools, parents crowd the gates. Lawyer: not suitable for students.	0.05	Positive	-0.16
Yangtze Cloud News	Xinhua commentary on pre-cooked meals in schools: the right to know must not be “pre-cooked.”	0.13	Positive	-0.37

Weishi Lanxi	Concerns over pre-cooked meals in Ganzhou schools; local education bureau sends investigation team (Jimu News).	0.28	Positive	-1.88
CCTV News Fast View	Ministry of Education: pre-cooked meals in schools should be approached with great caution, not promoted.	0.25	Positive	-0.91
Health Daily	Concerns of millions of parents: how can food safety be ensured if pre-cooked meals enter schools?	0.57	Positive	-0.49
Gaodu News	Ministry of Education comments on pre-cooked meals in schools.	0.24	Positive	-3.17
Qilu Evening News	Widespread concern over pre-cooked meals in schools; some parents quit jobs to deliver meals.	-0.13	Negative	-1.86
Yangtze Cloud News	Influencer Simba claims children should eat pre-cooked meals, sparking heated discussion.	-0.05	Negative	1.15
Hu Daxia	Ministry of Education responds to “pre-cooked meals in schools” controversy: food safety above all else.	0.28	Positive	-0.13

Table 9: Sentiment Scores and Polarity of Top 3 Liked Comments

Publisher Name	Comment content	Likes	Score	Polarity
Yue Niu News	“Don’t mock those who dare to speak up. The light they fight for may one day shine on you, even if you did nothing.”	3259	0.32	Slightly positive
	“They used to say overnight leftovers shouldn’t be eaten—so let me ask, how many nights old is ‘pre-prepared food’?”	967	-0.02	Slightly Negative
	I just received a notice: boarding students are not even allowed to bring milk to school. [angry][angry][angry] Children are in the stage of growth, yet even milk is banned. [angry][angry][angry] What kind of ridiculous school rule is this?	259	-0.29	Slightly Negative
CNR News	Parents will never agree, so all of this is just talk—there will be no real communication.	2154	-0.12	Slightly Negative
	Disagree, disagree, disagree, disagree.	925	-0.06	Slightly Negative
	Two points revealed: prepared meals must enter schools, and parent committees are considered legitimate.	634	0.25	Slightly positive
China News Service	Why do you think it’s called an “experimental primary school”?	7624	-0.17	Slightly Negative
	It was already hard to convince the elderly at home not to eat overnight food, and now children are eating “month-old food.”	3905	-0.28	Slightly Negative
	Where is the so-called disagreement among the public? All I see is unanimous opposition, not a single parent agreeing.	3789	-0.16	Slightly Negative

DaWan News	A school is only a place for teaching. Why does it get to decide students’ food, clothing, housing, and daily life? This is ridiculous.	20000	-0.18	Slightly Negative
	We were always told vegetables can’t be left overnight, pickled vegetables cause cancer, and now here comes pre-prepared food.	4944	-0.14	Slightly Negative
	I work in a factory cafeteria—forget pre-prepared food, we aren’t even allowed to reuse dishes from lunch for dinner.	3540	-0.13	Slightly Negative
Yangtze Cloud News	Pre-prepared food may be acceptable in society, but absolutely not in schools. Eating it occasionally is one thing, but eating it every single day is completely different.	17022	0.09	Slightly Positive
	Pre-prepared meals must not enter schools! And parents must be allowed to inspect at any time!	16282	-0.06	Slightly Negative
	We won’t eat overnight meals—this is like eating “year-old meals.”	12855	-0.10	Slightly Negative
Weishi Lanxi	My daughter said after eating school meals she couldn’t have a bowel movement for a whole week. Other students either have diarrhea constantly or can’t poop for days. They’re not allowed to eat outside or go home to eat—what are we supposed to do? [cry] [cry]	5644	-0.45	Negative
	This is deadly! Pre-prepared food with all kinds of preservatives has actually entered schools.	3853	-0.21	Slightly Negative
	If schools insist that children must eat pre-prepared meals and won’t let them attend otherwise, I’ll just take my child home. As long as she’s healthy, that’s all that matters!	2692	-0.22	Slightly Negative

Table 10 (Continued): Sentiment Scores and Polarity of Top 3 Liked Comments

Publisher Name	Comment content	Likes	Score	Polarity
CCTV News Fast View	Can someone explain what “pre-prepared food” actually means?	1060	0.06	Slightly Positive
	Important things should be said three times: Pre-prepared meals must be banned from schools. Ban them! Ban them! Ban them!	965	-0.22	Slightly Negative
	“Not advisable to promote”? Then explain why.	847	-0.17	Slightly Negative
Health Daily	Forget safety for now—first explain why it has to be introduced at all??!!	12252	-0.05	Slightly Negative
	Pre-prepared food is a false proposition. What Economic Daily should do is guide the debate on whether such food should even exist, not on how to produce it.	9018	-0.32	Slightly Negative
	What’s going on with Economic Daily?	3970	-0.12	Slightly Negative
Gaodu News	Most takeout meals nowadays are already pre-prepared food.	11000	-0.25	Slightly Negative
	Pre-prepared food is nothing more than a fancy name for leftovers.	6885	-0.04	Slightly Negative

	Can this kind of takeout even be eaten? The sellers themselves won't eat it, but they sell it to others. Such black-hearted shops should be shut down.	1130	-0.30	Slightly Negative
Qilu Evening News	Why give pre-prepared food to children? Do they have no conscience?	3494	-0.41	Negative
	If pre-prepared food really enters schools, I think I would also quit my job to cook for my child. After all, all this hard work is for the next generation—if their health isn't guaranteed, then what's the meaning of my struggle?	2604	-0.09	Slightly Negative
	Back in my school days, in the '90s, there were no such restrictions! Students could eat outside, parents could pack lunches, or if busy just top up a meal card to eat at school. It was all about choice, not compulsion.	1227	-0.36	Slightly Negative
Yangtze Cloud News	My personal suggestion: anyone making false advertisements or lying on public platforms should be held criminally responsible.	1842	-0.43	Negative
	I've been a chef for 21 years. All pre-prepared food is frozen, and most of it comes from abroad.	721	0.19	Slightly Positive
	I believe food should be cooked and eaten immediately—that's when it's most nutritious.	158	0.41	Positive
Hu Daxia	A friend of mine works at a pre-prepared food factory. She told me not to eat it.	156	0.10	Slightly Positive
	It must be banned.	94	-0.04	Slightly Negative
	Pre-prepared meals must absolutely not enter schools. Ban pre-prepared meals.	62	-0.10	Slightly Negative

The Grammar of Mobilization: Multimodal Decoding of Two Core Strategies

Building on the macro-level analysis of mobilization effects across different discourse frames, this section selects typical cases from the emotional/value frame and the news/event frame to examine how videos employ multiple audiovisual elements such as camera shots, music, subtitles, and titles—to generate emotional impact.

Narrative Grammar of the Emotional/Value Frame

The emotional/value frame represents the most frequently used mobilization strategy in this case, and all four functional roles identified in the study employed it at some point. However, variations in emotional expression and mobilization objectives exist across these roles. To investigate this variation, the researchers selected four representative videos—one from each functional role each employing the emotional frame and achieving the highest interaction levels. The analysis focused on four dimensions: specific vocabulary choices, background music, title style, and visual style. Table 10 summarizes the audiovisual rhetorical features identified across these videos.

Table 10: Comparative Narrative Strategies of the “Emotional/Value Frame” across Four Functional Roles

Functional Role	Publisher Name	Title	Visual Style	Specific Vocabulary	Background Music
Expert Authority Endorser	Han Xiuyun Talks Economy	Prepared Dishes, Who Do They Harm?	Lecture-style visuals with the authoritative image of the speaker, bookshelf background to enhance credibility; inserts of official documents, ingredient labels, and comparisons with Japanese school lunches for strong visual contrasts and evidence-based persuasion	“anger,” “public outrage,” “additives,” “preservatives,” “strengthen the nation,” “national foundation,” “selfish interests,” “forced imposition,” “harming the country’s future”	None; narration only
Commercial / Corporate Information Publisher	Aaron A	Guochao Legend 4.0 #GuochaoLegend #ShawarmaLegend #Nailong #PreparedDishes	First-person, hand-held recording in a dormitory setting; dim but authentic visuals create a pseudo-documentary style, resembling a real user’s casual sharing rather than overt advertising	Dialogues include skeptical lines such as “You expect me to eat this?” combined with promotional terms like “legend of prepared dishes,” “national trend rising”	Two-part: light instrumental in the first half, then a rhythmic, upbeat advertising song with positive lyrics
Official Agenda Setter	Ai Cixi	After prepared dishes entered schools, parents could only deliver meals to the gate... some students ate sitting on the ground	Handheld shaky camera; panoramic and medium shots of crowded, chaotic school entrances, showing students and parents eating in rough conditions	“sit on the ground,” “can only,” “concerns”	No added music; only noisy ambient sounds
Grassroots Agenda Challenger	Silver-Haired Sister Orange	Children are the future of the nation, the hope of families. Resist prepared dishes in schools, parents must not relax.	First-person selfie style, shaky camera, filmed at a school gate; conveys parental anxiety and authenticity	“violent harm,” “harming children,” “never compromise,” “a ruined generation,” “frozen leftovers,” “dirty stuff”	None; only natural ambient sounds, reinforcing urgency and realism

Grassroots Agenda Challengers: Authentic Complaints from “Direct Stakeholders”

The video produced by “Silver-Haired Orange Sister” serves as a typical example of the grassroots agenda challenger role. From an auditory perspective, the video completely omits background music while retaining ambient sounds. The first-person, handheld, shaky camera perspective at the school entrance generates a sense of anxiety experienced by an ordinary parent. The video text is filled with extreme negative expressions, such as “full of hostility” and “harming children,” while simultaneously linking the issue to elevated values, for example, the “future of the nation.” The core mechanism of the grassroots–emotional frame narrative thus becomes apparent: the narrator, as a purported eyewitness of the event—whether genuinely a parent or someone dramatizing for attention—transforms personal emotion into a seemingly authentic complaint. Regardless of the narrator’s actual identity, the mobilization objective is consistent: to evoke emotional resonance among parents as direct stakeholders, thereby easily steering public discussion toward emotional confrontation.

Official Agenda Setters: The Dilemma of the “Observer”

The official account “Ai Cixi,” one of the few using the emotional/value frame yet achieving relatively high engagement, employed an indirect emotional mobilization strategy. The video retained ambient sounds to enhance documentary realism and used handheld filming to depict congestion and confusion at the school gate caused by parents delivering meals. The title explicitly highlighted the contradiction “Parents can only deliver meals to the school gate”—while details such as “sitting on the ground” further emphasized the tension. The core intention of the official–emotional frame narrative differs from that of grassroots actors: adopting the stance of a traditional objective observer, the video translates policy disputes into concrete “dilemma scenarios.” Even if the initial aim may have been mere reporting, in the emotionally charged public discourse, this calm presentation of negative facts provided an outlet for long-standing public dissatisfaction. The authoritative source of the report drives public attention and the expression of negative emotions, rather than mitigating the controversy.

Expert Endorsers: Elevating Value as “Critics”

The video by economist Han Xiuyun provides a model showing how traditional expert authorities combine professional knowledge with emotional mobilization in the short-video context. A model for how established expert authorities integrate professional knowledge with emotional mobilization within the short-video context. The video adopts a lecture format, supplemented with visual elements that reinforce expertise, including authoritative imagery, bookshelf backgrounds, and screenshots of official documents. The title, “Pre-packaged meals: Identifying the harmed parties,” maintains the rational tradition of expert discourse while incorporating emotionally charged phrases such as “public outrage,” “self-interest,” “forced purchase,” and “harming the nation’s future” to achieve value-based critique. The sophistication of this strategy lies in Han’s dual role as a rational critic and her skillful use of combined rhetorical devices amplifying perceived risks and elevating the discussion to broader societal values thereby linking a specific food safety issue to overarching national narratives. The ultimate mobilization goal is to generate a widespread sense of public urgency and moral responsibility, fostering a broad-based consensus against the policy concern.

Commercial/Corporate Information Providers: Emotional Mitigation as “Marketers”

The videos produced by “Aroan A” illustrate a commercialized application of the emotional/value frame. These videos employ upbeat, contemporary music combined with a short, narrative reversal “roommate initially rejects pre-packaged meals, then finds them surprisingly appealing”—aiming to generate positive perceptions of pre-packaged meals. Rather than directly engaging with the controversy over “pre-packaged meals in schools”, the content reframes the issue within everyday life contexts, emphasizing young audiences’ emotional experiences and considerations of cost-effectiveness. As one of the few cases conveying positive sentiment, the video text integrates trendy cultural references, such as “Guochao” and “Nailong”, linking them to the product in an attempt to mitigate negative public perceptions of pre-packaged meals. Aroan A, adopting the role of a trend-focused marketer, implements a combined strategy of emotional mitigation and value association. The ultimate mobilization objective is to cultivate favorable audience attitudes in the public discourse space, thereby enhancing market acceptance and enabling the extraction of commercial value.

Summary

Analysis indicates that the emotional/value frame operates through a systematic narrative logic, guiding audience perception by combining emotional resonance with value association. Content creators frequently reduce contentious public issues into a binary “us versus them” structure; in the case of pre-packaged meals in schools, this frames the debate as a conflict between parents and schools. To strengthen moral positioning and collective identity, moral panic contributes to the amplification of potential threats for example, some videos display lists of food additives or suggest that long-term consumption could cause cancer, thereby generating collective concern. Such strategies emphasize public issues regarding children’s health, thereby enhancing the dissemination scale and reach of the messages.

Identity-based cues further extend the frame’s influence, converting passive viewers into active participants through phrases like “our generation of parents must stand up.” Videos often follow a three-stage emotional narrative—establishing a positive state, crisis emergence, and heroic resistance—with audiovisual techniques such as close-ups, slow-motion, and heavy background music intensifying perceived conflict. Additionally, technical facts undergo frequent reframing to generate emotional impact; for instance, the one-year shelf life of pre-packaged meals receives representation as “eating zombie meat.” In terms of solutions, most videos (87%) avoid concrete alternatives and instead emphasize extreme positions, such as “a complete ban is necessary.” While this narrative system effectively consolidates mobilization, it can also drive public discussion toward polarization and exacerbate social tensions.

Narrative Grammar of the News/Event Frame

In contrast to the emotional/value frame, the news/event frame in this case exhibits a strong source monopoly. Among the twelve core samples, eleven were published official media, with only one originating from a grassroots account. This disproportion itself highlights the intrinsic linkage between the news/event frame and traditional authority. Given the lack of representativeness of the lone grassroots case, the analysis focuses on two typical examples published by official media (Table 11).

Table 11: Comparative Analysis of Narrative Strategies in “News/Fact Frames”

Role Type	Publisher Name	Title	Specific Words	Background Music	Title Style	Visual Style
Official Agenda Setter	Yue Niu News	School cafeteria uses pre-packaged meals, parents protest: “Children’s health is already gone, why even study?” School announcement: All pre-packaged meals removed	“health is already gone,” “why even study,” “angry rebuttal”	Serious, slightly urgent	Combines emotional quotes with official announcement, using quotation marks to highlight strong viewpoints	Handheld live footage, chat screenshots, and official documents combined to create a sense of realism and conflict
Official Agenda Setter	China National Radio Online	How should we view pre-packaged meals entering schools, especially primary and secondary schools? #Pre-packagedMeals	No notable specific words; neutral and professional terms such as “Consumer Rights Protection Committee” and “adequate communication” are used	Neutral, calm, consistent with news interview program	The question in the video title introduces the topic objectively and encourages reflection	Clear, stable visuals; professional studio and remote interview settings; visual style is calm and objective

Main Practice One: Local Media’s Conflict-Oriented Strategy

As a typical “conflict-driven” news outlet, Yue Niu News received 743,000 likes. Its video title quoted a parent’s extreme remark, “Children’s health is already gone, why even study?” alongside the outcome “All pre-packaged meals removed,” which heightened the sense of drama. The visuals combined live footage, chat screenshots, and official documents to show the complete process of “parents protesting, forcing the school to act.” Serious, urgent background music emphasized the conflict, with the video’s primary purpose being to reproduce the event and attract public attention.

Central Media’s Rational Guidance Strategy

China National Radio Online led in video comments with 462,000, exemplifying the central media’s “rational-guidance” approach. Its title posed a neutral question: “How should we view pre-packaged meals entering schools, especially primary and secondary schools?” The video relied on professional studio footage and expert interviews, paired with neutral background music and formal narration. Its core function was to organize public discussion, guiding an emotional topic toward a more rational deliberation.

Summary

Comparing the 12 core samples, the study finds that the “news/event frame” follows a multimodal narrative grammar balancing objectivity and authority. Creators combine handheld footage, official documents, and chat screenshots to convey factual authenticity, while authority markers, including media logos, close-ups of official reports, and standard studio settings, establish credibility. Auditory strategies vary by scenario: serious or urgent strings accompany conflict reporting, whereas neutral piano music supports policy discussions. Original interview audio is often retained and supplemented with professional narration. Titles reflect three strategies: “conflict-enhancing” titles reproducing emotional statements (60%), “issue-guiding” titles employing questions (30%), and “alerting” titles adopting generalized terms (less common). Recurring elements feature stable camera work, neutral sound, multiple sources, and structured information. Behind this grammar lies a game of authority construction—the central media use it to maintain and reproduce institutional authority. At the same time, it allows the frame to accommodate multiple contradictions by juxtaposing conflicting perspectives in a shared space, providing broad discussion opportunities, multiple points for critique, and ultimately triggering intense public engagement.

Part 4: Implications for Public Policy Agenda Setting in the Short Video Era

The “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” incident unfolds through three key stages: it begins with emotional appeals from grassroots parents, which media and online platforms subsequently amplify, and finally enters the official agenda, prompting government policy adjustments. This trajectory highlights a potential governance pattern in the digital era and provides insights into how public issues evolve through interactions among multiple stakeholders.

Implication 1: Rethinking the Governance Role of Government and Official Media

The governance role of government and official media is increasingly shifting from traditional agenda setters to more responsive “agenda perceivers.” The “Pre-packaged Meals in Schools” incident illustrates this transformation: rather than acting solely as agenda setters, authorities actively monitor and address emerging public concerns. When the capacity to ignite public

opinion moves to grassroots actors, reliance on the conventional “official website release—media report” pathway can result in delayed responses and diminish the explanatory power of official discourse. Moreover, without timely policy support, official media often shoulder public expectations and emotional pressures alone, and their objective reporting may be interpreted as indifferent by some, thereby exacerbating emotional polarization. Therefore, innovation in governance requires the restructuring of operational mechanisms. The government should move from a behind-the-scenes manager to an active participant, collaborating with official media and platforms to establish a sensitive monitoring and rapid response system. Such intervention should shift from a unidirectional conclusion to constructive guidance, promoting rational public discussion of policy issues.

Implication 2: Balancing Platform Logic and Governance Logic in Official Communication

Official communication strategies must balance platform dissemination logic with governance objectives. The analysis demonstrates differing approaches among media. Local outlets, including Yue Niu News, draw attention by emphasizing conflict and victimization, which can potentially intensify social polarization. In contrast, central media, including China National Radio Online, mitigate emotional fluctuations through expert dialogue and policy interpretation, maintaining stability but limiting engagement. Effective communication adapts dynamically to the evolution of public discourse. Early in a public concern, authorities can moderately highlight points of contention and diverse perspectives to capture attention and establish a fair arbitration image. As the matter escalates, the timely introduction of authoritative sources and policy explanations provides reliable information, thereby reducing emotional polarization. A strategy of “introducing conflict first, then consolidating with authority” addresses both informational and emotional needs while enhancing the legitimacy and persuasiveness of the official stance.

Implication 3: Recognizing the Legitimacy of Public Emotion in Governance

Governments must acknowledge the legitimacy of public emotion, treating collective sentiment as a valuable signal for policy adjustment rather than mere noise. The short video public sphere is a multi-centered space shaped by official authority and grassroots emotions. Governance in the digital era increasingly reflects the coordination of multiple actors rather than a single authority-driven model. Officials must maintain institutional leadership while also acting as coordinators and facilitators in the generation and dissemination of public issues. Formal institutional recognition of grassroots actors’ contributions enhances openness and responsiveness in the public agenda. Recognizing the legitimacy of emotion does not imply indiscriminately accepting all narratives. Governments and platforms must remain vigilant, particularly against emotionally charged narratives created with ulterior motives. A central challenge for future governance is to manage responses to genuine public sentiment while safeguarding against manipulation, thereby ensuring a careful and resilient approach.

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