Critical Discourse Analysis of Public Opinion Reversal- Taking the Public Opinion of Mixue During the 315 as an Example

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Abstract. During CCTV's 315 Gala, Hubei Economic TV exposed Mixue's Yichang store for using overnight-lemon, sparking heated online debates and revealing an obvious contrast between media narratives and public opinion. This paper analyzes the public opinion reversal phenomenon in the "Mixue 315 incident" from the three dimensions of text, discourse practice and social practice, aiming to explore how the official media, KOLs and netizens use discourse strategies to compete for discourse power, and the power relations it reflected. The study finds that the three parties have different discourse strategies. In the process of public opinion reversal, the bottom-up mass discourse carries out anti-discipline against the media through the identity of emotional community and the intertextuality of life experience, and is effectively activated and amplified through the spread of social media platforms, forming a strong grassroots public opinion force. The study ultimately reveals that this public opinion reversal profoundly reflects the structural transformation of discourse power in the digital era, where power relations are shifting from centralized, unidirectional control to decentralized, multi-faceted dynamic competition.

Keywords: public opinion reversal, critical discourse analysis, emotional labor, consumer narrative

1. Introduction

1.1. Public opinion reversal

In today's society, where the media is widely available, food safety issues often elicit public criticism. Regarding the incident where Mixue was exposed for using expired ingredients during the consumer rights day event on March 15, 2025, public opinion showed a tendency to support her.

News reversal includes factual reversal and public opinion reversal. When the facts of the news change, public opinion will also change. This phenomenon is called public opinion reversal. Currently, research on this phenomenon has been described from multiple aspects. Qian Yijiao believes that public opinion reversal is related to the transition from the era of mass communication to the post-truth era. Its essence is the change in the public opinion field driven by public participation [1]. Han Yunrong believes that the essence of public opinion reversal lies in the

emotional entanglements and ideological differences among potential stakeholders. It is not about the debate over the truth [2]. Personally, the author thinks that with the public's wider engagement in the public discourse, public opinion reversal is not only a change in facts. It is also a dynamic process of power struggle among numerous stakeholders. Factual news may remain unchanged. Changes in power dynamics and discourse competition may also lead to public opinion reversal.

The current research mainly explores the phenomenon of public opinion reversal from five aspects: time factors, participating groups, formation methods, social influence, and management methods. The study shows that media agenda setting and netizen agenda setting jointly drive the reversal of public opinion [3]. The doubts of netizens are the key factor in public opinion reaching its peak. Events related to public emotions and interests are more likely to trigger such reactions [4,5]. The reversal of public opinion often undergoes an emotional cycle. Netizens reassign meaning to events through discourse practices such as tags and moral judgments. In the all-media environment, emotional tags and moral stories reinforce group differentiation. They cause the rapid transformation of public opinion between extreme viewpoints [6,7]. However, existing research mainly focuses on describing the phenomenon and its formation methods. There is a gap between the discourse at the micro level and the social power structure at the macro level [8]. This gap provides an important space for critical discourse analysis. Its three-dimensional framework helps reveal the hidden power struggles and ideological mechanisms behind the reversal of public opinion [8]. This deficiency provides space for critical discourse analysis. Its three-dimensional framework helps reveal the power struggles and ideological operation mechanisms in the reversal of public opinion.

Critical discourse analysis aims to reveal the interrelationships among language, social power, and ideology. Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework breaks down discourse into three levels: text, discourse practice, and social practice. It focuses on a critical understanding. It links the micro-level linguistic features with the macro-level social reality. This theoretical framework provides an important tool for understanding the power dynamics among different participants in the reversal of public opinion.

The research based on CDA integrates quantitative and qualitative methods. Building a corpus enables the capture of dynamic discourse features [9]. Text analysis focuses on dynamic contrasts. By observing and the proportion of verb processes as well as the stage differences in reported verb types, it can detect changes in stance [9]. The multi-agent comparison method has become a key tool for demonstrating the different discourse strategies of the government, the media, and the public in news reversals [10,11].

The current research, from the perspective of "discourse analysis", has discovered the key patterns underlying the reversal of public opinion. The reversal of public opinion begins when the conflict in the discourse is resolved and restructured. Different participants introduce new factual narratives through cross-textual means. These narratives challenge the original discourse. Subsequently, public opinion begins to change [12]. This reversal process is accompanied by changes in power. The government regains control of the discourse through timely responses and information dissemination. The media establishes consensus bridges through balanced news reporting. The herd behavior of the public and the collective identity effect may change the speed of the reversal of public opinion [10].

1.2. Emotional labor and consumer narrative theory

Reviewing the existing theories, the theories on emotional labor and consumer narratives can provide useful supplements in the study of public opinion reversals. Liu Fangru pointed out the steps

of emotion collection, control, and application in the field of public opinion [13]. The discourse related to labor can also be regarded as a bottom-up activity. Netizens with specific tendencies actively carry out such activities. This makes the study of mass discourse important. This discourse can be regarded as a type of consumer narrative. The public actively utilizes symbolic resources to construct their identities [14]. Yang Zhihao et al. indicated that the authenticity of the story greatly enhances the sense of identification. It achieves this by reducing psychological distance. This is particularly evident when the audience actively explores [15]. This is actually the process of constructing and identifying emotional symbols [16]. Netizens' emotional labor can be regarded as a practice of constructing their ideal selves. The collective reversal of public opinion may mean that a specific group jointly protects its core values.

1.3. Research questions

The research on the reversal of public opinion provides useful references for this study. However, there are still three key limitations. Most studies focus on the path and reasons for the reversal, but rarely explore the internal argumentation strategies. Few studies have investigated how grassroots narratives began and spread during the period of public opinion reversal. The role of power relations has been widely recognized, but the specific changes in power and the ideological basis behind these discourses remain unclear. To fill these gaps, this study aims to deeply explore the core operational mode of this discourse field. The author conducted a critical discourse analysis of the "Mixue 315" public opinion reversal event. The author wants to answer three basic questions:

1.In this incident, what discourse strategies did the official media, KOLs, and netizens respectively employ to construct the facts and compete for the right to speak?

2. Under the circumstances where public opinion has reversed, how did the bottom-up statements of the public begin and spread widely?

3. In the current social environment of China, what kind of power changes does this unique public discourse feature reflect?

The author did a systematic analysis taking the Mixue Event as an example. This research offers a new theoretical angle for digital-age public opinion evolution. It gives key insights to relevant institutions for effective risk communication, opinion guidance and brand management.

2. Research design

2.1. Analysis framework

This study used a "description-explanation-criticism" logical framework. It took Fairclough's three-dimensional model and combined emotional labor and consumer narrative theories. It showed complex interactions in Mixue's incident. The research method is in Figure 1.
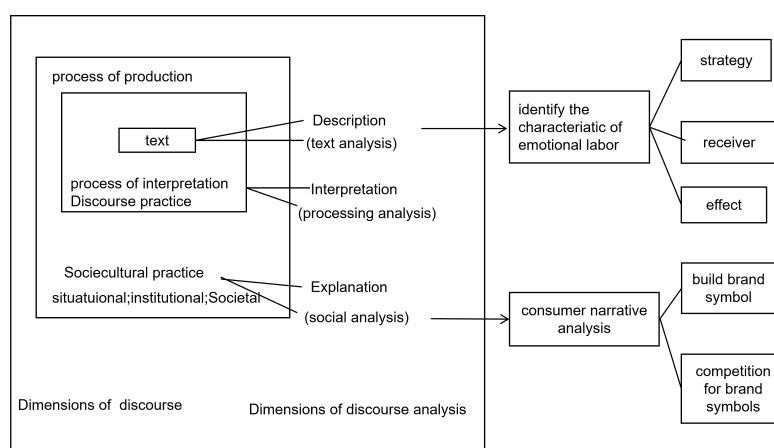
Figure 1. Analysis flowchart

As Figure 1 shows, this framework combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Consumer Narrative Theory and Emotional Labor Theory. It systematically examines the power struggles and identity construction in public opinion events. The analysis employs a three-dimensional approach,the "Text-Textual-Practice". It describes textual features such as vocabulary and verbality. It explains the processes of production, dissemination, and acquisition. It particularly focuses on emotional labor strategies and consumers' competitive narratives about brand symbols. At the social-cultural practice level, it explains how discourse is restricted by specific power relations and ideologies. It also explains how discourse reconstitutes these relations and ideologies. This framework links micro-level language choices with macro-level social significance. It provides a comprehensive perspective for uncovering the hidden forces behind the reversal of public opinion.

2.2. Research methods and procedures

This study employed a critical discourse analysis method based on qualitative research. It conducted an in-depth analysis of the "Mixue 315 Incident" through a case study approach. The research examined the discourse strategies used by the media, KOLs, and netizens in this public opinion event. Additionally, it explored the hidden power changes behind these strategies.

Mixue is a beverage brand that has numerous stores in China and has successfully entered the mid-to-low-end market, with a large number of consumers. These consumers come from different social strata. This makes the related events have the characteristics of public issues. During the "315 Consumer Rights Day", public and media attention to products and companies reached its peak throughout the year. This public event can maximize the participation of various discourse subjects. They provided rich materials for the research.

The text dimension analysis is completed by analyzing vocabulary selection and verbal analysis. It will compare the core vocabulary in mainstream media reports with the vocabulary in netizens' comments. It will analyze sentence structures. It will identify which characters in the text have been influenced by the text content. Based on this, this article focuses on identifying the main expressions of emotional labor constructed by these three discourse subjects. Discourse practice analysis shows how discourse is generated and disseminated through intertextuality and recontextualization. Social practice analysis includes ideological analysis and power relationship analysis. It focuses on using the consumer narrative theory to explain how the public participates in the narrative competition of brand symbolic meanings. Critical interpretation has been adopted. It reveals the process by which

public emotions and narrative labor are controlled by capital. It shows the hidden belief system behind the discourse. It also analyzes the changes in discourse power.

2.3. Data sources

This study collected relevant data from Weibo and Zhihu platforms. Based on the development cycle of public opinion, a systematic and balanced sampling method was adopted. The event timeline was divided into the following stages: March 14th to 16th (the outbreak stage), March 17th to 18th (the strategic stage), March 19th to 20th (the balance stage), and March 21st to 25th (the event follow-up stage). The data set included official media reports, netizen comments, and statements from key opinion leaders. After screening, 454 texts were confirmed. The total word count is 23,568 words. This stage division ensures that the sample has temporal representativeness and balance. The focus of the analysis is on the overall discourse characteristics. It does not emphasize strict stage comparisons.

3. Research analysis and findings

3.1. Text dimension analysis: script recognition of emotional narration

3.1.1. Word choice strategy and transitivity

The lexical expressions used by language users reflect their consciousness to some extent. Transitivity, as one of the primary manifestations of language's "empirical function" [17], enables the categorization of real-world observations and actions into distinct processes involving various participants. These processes conceal the power dynamics and ideologies embedded in discourse. This paper will focus on analyzing material processes, psychological processes, and relational processes.

Table 1. Examples of media reports on Mixue Ice City during 3.15

Me dia	1.A staff member hid the remaining lemon and orange slices from that day in the storage cabinet beneath the workbench, preparing them for use the next day.
	2.Reporters have repeatedly observed flies and insects crawling wildly in plastic cup lids at the store, which can be reused the next day after washing.
	3. The staff said frankly, "I dare not drink it again, I am a little afraid."
	4.Law enforcement officers discovered left raw materials in the second-floor warehouse, suspected of non-compliant labeling. They seized the items and immediately launched an investigation into the store.
	5.However, many netizens make excuse for Mixue , saying, 'It wasn't the lemon that had been left overnight—it was just that I arrived late.'
	6.comment topics meida have set: Why do netizens shield Mixue from its scandalous exposure? Media Comment on Mixue: Don't Turn Tolerance into Indulgence Why is Mixue always tolerated Cover up the Mixue is a helpless act of incompetence
	7.This is not a triumph of quality, but a race to the bottom of integrity.
	8. Netizens dismiss the issue of Mixue's overnight fruit products as trivial, given their average price of just a few yuan, while pointing out that there are far more counterfeit and substandard products to be concerned about.

The words chosen in the media blog articles possess both sensory and legal characteristics. Examples 1 and 2 in Table 1 illustrate this point. When reporting on the shop's violations, they use negative emotional verbs such as "hit" and "crazy crawling". These verbs depict the shop's behavior as immoral fraud. They aim to make readers feel disgusted. Example 4 uses legal terms such as "suspected", "seized", and "investigated". These terms make the report more credible. They also position the media on the side of the regulatory agency. They help the media present an objective and serious image. Labels are a typical feature of media discourse. In this public opinion event, the media wrote a series of comments. They used words such as "excuse", "cover up", and "race to the bottom'to categorize netizens". These words classify the netizens' behavior as irrational. The media positioned themselves as a critical voice. They wanted to undermine the rationality of public discourse. This is essentially a struggle for the right to define the event.

What the media described was a process at the material level. These processes included the actions of store staff hiding lemons and the actions of regulatory agencies enforcing the law. It clarified the attribution of responsibility for the violations. It shaped the authoritative image of the regulatory authorities. This made them more credible.

The processes at the psychological level are reflected in Examples 3 and 8. Example 3 describes the fear of the store staff. Example 8 mentions that "netizens dismiss issues as trivial". Such descriptions will make readers doubt the brand. They also point out the cognitive biases of the readers.

Table 2. Example sentences of KOLs' comments on Mixue 315 incident

KOLs	1. 'Haki Media'(a sarcastic nickname for misleading media) is in a mess, with too much Dad-style patronization.
	2.I don't cover up for wrongdoers. I support businesses in resisting media bullying through concrete actions!
	3. Why don't journalists from these media outlets report on the widespread use of substandard sanitary napkins across the country? Are they not even as good as those inferior products?
	4.The media is trying to confuse 'overnight lemons' with 'overnight meals'.
	5.I cut a lemon myself and soak it for at least two days.
	6.Snow King (Mixue's mascot) doesn't mind my poverty, nor do I mind its dirtiness—this is what we call mutual attraction!
	7. In recent years, people have noticed that the credibility of both slogans with blue background and white text and professional reports has been declining. Moreover, distrust is frequently observed in various trending events.
	8．People have common sense and can distinguish between minor mistakes and major errors of principle.
	9.Media professionals may not be directly involved in production, but they must remain connected to the public, otherwise it would be making a fool of themselves...

The words used by opinion leaders carry a strong sense of irony. Example 1 in Table 2 demonstrates this. It uses derogatory terms like "Haki Media" to directly attack the media. The redefined words, such as Example 2 in Table 2, aim to redefine the "cover up" behavior of netizens described in media discourse.

Example 3 introduces other more harmful social events. This includes cases related to sanitary napkins. It helps the public establish a judgment system for social events.

In Example 6, emotionally touching words, such as using the character "Qiong" (which means "poverty" in Chinese), can be regarded as a form of self-deprecation. These words directly reflect the economic conditions and emotional needs of the general public. They position Mixue as the spokesperson for "us". They refer to critical media as "you". This achieves political mobilization of identity recognition.

Examples 7 and 8 illustrate this. KOLs often employ psychological processes. They position the public as the driving force behind their actions. They construct the image of "rational cognition" through concepts such as "notice" and "distinguish". This refutes the criticism of the media.

Table 3. Examples of comments from netizens on Mixue Ice City's 315 incident

Mas sive Neti zens	1.Previously, I observed them cutting lemons, which appeared quite clean. Penalties were imposed only on individual stores with issues.
	2.The ingredients are all visible fresh fruits, but proper storage conditions should be emphasized in the future. I trust Mixue.
	3.Such a talented writer, why not write about sanitary napkins and edible oil ?
	4.It doesn't matter; the cost-performance ratio is excellent.
	5. We hope the headquarters can manage individual incidents to prevent one bad apple from spoiling the whole batch. We will continue supporting Mixue in the future, as they are a conscientious company and always make active donations.
	6. I don't care, I will spoil the Mixue.
	7.What bicycle do you want of 4 yuan? (Ironically, what more could you ask for) I always use up my own lemon juice the next day. For health reasons, I would not drink Mixue anymore.

The language used by ordinary netizens tends to be direct or indirect supportive expressions. Examples 1 and 2 in Table 3 illustrate this. Words such as "individual store" and "real fruits" are used here. They narrow down the scope of the problem and reduce its severity.

Examples 4 and 5 show Mixue's good cost-effectiveness and reliable company image. Words such as "cost-performance ratio" and "conscientious company" are used here.

Netizens often mention other social events. Example 3 is one of them. They express their dissatisfaction through these events. This dissatisfaction is directed at the ineffective supervision by regulatory agencies and the habit of downplaying important issues.

Personal emotions and brand loyalty are clearly visible in their language. Words such as "spoil", "believe", and "don't care" are very common here.

Ordinary netizens usually use expressions based on the concept of belonging. For example, "Mixue is the bright spot of affordable milk tea". This gives the brand positive symbolic characteristics.

3.1.2. Text-based analysis of emotional labor guidance

The media strategy is a top-down approach to emotional management. Example 6 in Table 1 demonstrates this. Media organizations consciously plan different commentary themes. They believe that the public needs to feel and express emotions of condemnation and vigilance. Then, these emotions are presented as actions that rational consumers should take. Other possible public emotions are directly named negatively and belittled. This approach attempts to control the public's emotions. It guides the public to act along a path that conforms to authority and logic.

KOLs engage in a professional and organized management of emotions. They create targeted anger and sarcastic remarks for media organizations. They foster empathetic resonance among consumers and brands. This process transforms the vague dissatisfaction of the public into politically significant collective protest actions. They mention events such as the tampon scandal and the oil tanker dispute. They shift public attention from individual incidents to broader social injustices.

The emotional labor of ordinary netizens in large numbers shows in three key aspects. Consumers actively played down issues. They created emotional reasons to keep buying. Brands treat themselves as people. They put in emotional effort, like loyalty and care. This makes brand-consumer relationships stronger. Internet memes build shared communities. Users swap playful words there. This strengthens their collective identity. This natural emotional labor repairs brand reputation. It also turns purchasing decisions into statements of who they are. Through this process, public tolerance and loyalty turn directly into brand value and consumer loyalty. They act as free support for brands' "affordable and conscientious" image. In the end, brands easily took over the value of this emotional labor.

3.2. Analysis of discourse level

3.2.1. Intertextuality analysis

In 1969, scholar Julia Kristeva said, "All discourse is really just taking in and changing another discourse." A text can be used with other texts. It backs up and builds another text. Different subjects shape their own discourse positions and authority. They do this by citing, rephrasing, putting other texts or discourse resources side by side. In this study, intertextuality mainly refers to the specific strategies of each discourse subject to construct their own position and compete for discourse authority by citing, paraphrasing, and juxtaposing other texts or discourse resources. The following will analyze the intertextuality practices of three types of subjects: media, opinion leaders and the public netizens.

The media demonstrates strong explicit intertextuality in discourse practice, and establishes its discourse authority mainly through two ways. Firstly, it cites official sources, such as directly citing law enforcement details, and binds media reports with government supervision behaviors, thus enhancing the legitimacy and public trust of the reports. Secondly, the media selectively quote the comments of netizens, using words like "excuse" to quote the comments of netizens, and put some public words in the position of being examined and criticized, so as to construct the role of the media as a rational guide and public issue setter.

KOLs' intertextual strategies show strong social critique awareness and intent to mobilize discourse. They place events into broader social issue networks. For example, they link the "overnight lemon" scandal to the "sanitary pad safety incident." This builds a framework of avoiding core issues and focusing on regulatory oversight. It makes the public doubt regulatory justice. They also use cultural symbols and collective memory. One example is comparing Mixue to "Pang Donglai," a well-known conscience enterprise. This gives emotional and moral reasons for consumer support.

Ordinary netizens' intertextual practice grows out of daily life and online subculture. It forms a kind of "bottom-up" mass discourse. Their typical way is using their own life experiences in intertextual ways. For example, they joke that "my family's lemons are left overnight too, and who doesn't have leftovers?" They use common-sense logic to challenge professional norms. This builds a "grassroots standard" to push back against the food safety discourse from authorities or the media. They also add internet slang. Phrases like "What kind of bike do you want?" are used. These handle serious issues in a humorous way. They quickly bring emotional resonance and identity among online communities. This ultimately softens the impact of the media's authoritative narratives.

3.2.2. Recontextualization analysis

Sociologist Bernstein first came up with the idea of recontextualization. It's part of his theory on educational communication. This idea shows how knowledge gets rebuilt through power dynamics and ideological frameworks when it moves across different areas. Later on, linguist Fairclough tweaked this framework for critical discourse analysis. He turned it into a key tool for looking at public discourse practices. This method focuses on how discourses are taken over, changed, and eventually serve new power relations. It also looks at how they help build social positions in different contexts.

In this public opinion event, the media dominated the direction of public opinion through two main means. They extensively cited official investigation reports - Example 4 in Table 1 is a good example - to divert the focus of the event: from an ordinary commercial violation to a public law enforcement issue. They considered the support from netizens to be unreasonable and seemed to require some explanation. They created several discussion topics - Example 6 in Table 1 applies to this - selected netizens' comments and labeled them as "excuses", "tolerance" or "cover-up". This simplified the complex emotions of the public into pure cognitive biases. This approach gained the right to define the meaning of public opinion, and regarded some netizens' supportive behaviors as an embodiment of an unbalanced social mindset.

KOLs systematically bring up more serious social issues. They turn specific brand troubles into criticism of the industry's regulatory system. They frame the public's heavy support for Mixue as a sort of uncooperative pushback against power structures. They redefine the media's "regulatory moves" as plain "bullying." This pulls off a discourse shift—from individual actions to structural reflection. In the end, it swaps out the targets of criticism.

Netizens' talk has made a daily-life-style recontextualization. They mostly use their own life experiences as intertextual materials. They turn food safety worries into cost-performance ratio judgments. This weakens the absolute authority of official stories. They also use internet memes (like Example 7 in Table 3 shows). They turn media's accountability demands into collective humor and emotional connection. They define support for Mixue as defense for their social class identity and lifestyle.

Looking at discourse practice analysis, we can tell clearly the different roles and strategies of the three players in the public opinion field. The media tries to lead public opinion to rational thinking and sticking to principles. They do this using recontextualization, with authoritative intertextuality and issue-focused talk. KOLs use critical intertextuality and structural recontextualization. They lift events to thinking about systemic social problems. They voice public feelings with sound arguments. Netizens use every day intertextuality and resistant recontextualization. They make the big stories from the top easy to understand. They use simple personal experiences and emotional connections to support brands. In the end, they make media criticism useless in public discourse.

3.3. Analysis of the social practice level

The aspect of social practice focuses on integrating into the social and cultural environment. It demonstrates how discourse constructs power relations and ideologies within a specific social context. At the same time, it also explores the mutual influence between discourse and social practice. In this study, ideology refers to a series of beliefs, values, and worldviews. They are deeply embedded in discourse and are often taken for granted by people. These ideologies meet the needs of specific social groups. They make power relations seem normal.

3.3.1. Ideology

When it comes to media discourse, Van Dijk said: "The media isn't a neutral, common-sense or rational coordinator of social events. It helps rebuild pre-set ideologies instead." The media frames netizens' emotional support as an irrational cover-up and indulgence. This lets the media keep its hegemonic position as a professional judge. This ideology boils down complex social feelings to a cognitive bias that needs fixing. It ignores the structural social contradictions behind those feelings.

The remarks of the opinion leaders are filled with distrust towards the powerful class. They regard these powerful individuals as conspirators. This is a crucial populist ideology - separating the people from authority. They introduce theoretical frameworks such as "value sequence" and "emotional value". They attempt to make public emotions seem reasonable and act as enlighteners. Their ideology holds that public behavior is a rational response to structural oppression. However, this also requires intellectuals like them to reveal the underlying logic.

In a time of slower income growth and higher living costs, online sayings like "What kind of bicycle for 4 yuan?" and "Even my family eats leftovers" show a way of thinking that values economic practicality and daily convenience over abstract principles. Netizens see Mixue as a brand for regular folks. They view media criticism as authorities butting into their daily lives. This has built a strong anti-elitist populist mindset. Sticking up for a brand turns into defending their own lifestyle and social identity. It expresses deep dissatisfaction with elite narratives.

3.3.2. Power reconstruction under the consumer narrative

Schembri's consumer narrative theory says brands are symbolic resources for consumers to build their self-identity. The heart of this incident is the fight to decide which identity narrative finally ties to the symbol "Mixue". Netizens and KOLs mobilize and organize emotional labor via consumer narratives. They want to take the event's definition, interpretation and moral high ground. This reinforces or challenges the current social power dynamics. Power relations analysis looks at dominance, subordination, resistance and negotiation shown in discourse. Check out Figure 2—it shows the relationships between different subjects in Mixue's 315 incident.
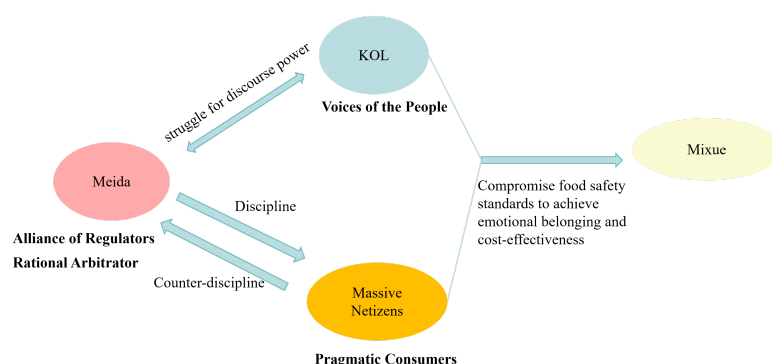

Figure 2. The relationship of the various subjects in the 315 incident of Mixue

The media has the power to set the agenda, define right and wrong, and guide public opinion. Through discourse practice, it constructs a dual identity. As we have seen in text and discourse analysis, the media links its statements to institutions and power. It uses legal terms and cites official materials in a cross-textual manner. This enables it to position itself as an ally of regulatory agencies. This provides solid support for its second identity - as a rational arbitrator. Examples 5 and

6 in Table 1 illustrate this. The media labels netizens' comments as "excuses" or "cover-up behavior". It describes public support as an irrational indulgence that needs to be corrected. Thus, the media occupies the moral high ground in its discourse. It restrains netizens. It attempts to shape qualified modern consumers through the power of discourse. The media does have some advantages. However, its objective and calm speaking style makes it weak in explaining complex public emotions. This puts it at a disadvantage in the competition to seize the discourse authority from opinion leaders.

The narratives crafted by opinion leaders and online communities exemplify a classic bottom-up consumer discourse. As spokespersons for public sentiment and interests, these influencers frequently employ emotionally resonant language and intertextual references to broader social events, directly exposing the real concerns of the masses—specifically, their skepticism toward selective oversight and inadequate regulation. In this process, they also assume the role of enlighteners, striving to provide rational explanations for the public's straightforward support. In the context of consumption decline, netizens have developed a pragmatic consumption mindset. Examples 4 and 7 in Table 3 both emphasize the "Mixue" brand's cost-effectiveness. They redefine the food safety standards by regarding the rationality of prices as the core value. The intertextuality of netizens' daily experiences shows how they transform their consumption behaviors into identity markers. Mixue is portrayed as a flawed but worthy-to-be-protected brand. This elevates their support behavior to the level of defending their social class and living conditions. KOLs and netizens link brand symbols to the representation of a shared conscience and empathetic consumer identity. This narrative, rooted in real-life experiences, creates a strong psychological closeness through extreme material authenticity. It immerses the public completely in their own constructed meaning world. They firmly have emotional ownership of the brand symbols.

In the end, netizens and opinion leaders managed to grab the top emotional and moral take on the symbol. This signals a shift in the digital age. Symbolic meaning creation no longer gets decided one-sidedly by authoritative media. It's moved into a dynamic process of non-stop competition between multiple stakeholders. They use narrative practices to drive this. The way to build up symbolic capital has grown complex and full of conflicts.

During the whole back-and-forth, the brand seems nowhere to be seen. It's actually the real winner of structural power. The public puts a lot of emotional effort into defending their identity. They create stories to build conscience-driven brands. The brand takes all this for almost nothing. What should have chipped away at the brand's symbolic capital? Through the public's spontaneous story-based defense, it became a top-tier ritual of emotional asset growth and identity value boost. The "Mixue" symbol got new strength and meaning. It came from the defiant spirit of grassroots defenders. The public's emotional narrative work finally got polished through capitalization. It turned into an unbreakable market moat for the brand.

4. Conclusion

Using Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis framework, along with emotional labor and consumer narrative theories, this study looks at media reports and online discussions about Mixue's 315 Consumer Rights Day public opinion incident. It uses critical discourse analysis across three dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The research finds out:

Official media, KOLs and netizens use different discourse strategies. Media builds a "regulatory-disciplinary" narrative. It frames public support as "irrational shielding". It uses legal terms and agenda-setting to keep its authority as a rational arbitrator. Opinion leaders use deconstructive and critical frameworks. They fight for the right to interpret by putting issues side by side and raising

theories. This weakens the media's moral high ground. Netizens use emotions and identity. They use strategies like down-to-earth analogies and meme play to build a strong defensive discourse system. This achieves effective grassroots resistance.

This power struggle shows big changes in authority dynamics. The traditional one-way disciplinary way has turned out to be useless. Public discourse has fallen into a cycle of control and resistance. Emotional correctness often overshadows factual truth. The center of discourse power shifts from institutional levels to different grassroots nodes. The main tension comes from the gap between the state's "law-based regulation" governance logic and citizens' "practicality-first" survival logic. The public sees the authorities' sticking to principles as indifference to real-life situations. This creates a cognitive divide that hurts communication. In the end, the public's emotional narratives challenge media authority. But they may unintentionally boost brand symbolic capital. This shows the complexity and contradiction of emotional politics in the digital age.

This study has certain limitations. It only focuses on one key event. Whether the conclusions can be used broadly needs more testing with different public opinion cases. The research mainly does textual analysis of discourse. Specific platform mechanisms behind different discourses aren't discussed in detail. There's no long-term follow-up to confirm long-term social impacts of various actors. Future studies can adopt multi-case comparison. They can explore common patterns in identity construction and power dynamics during public opinion reversals. The analysis should look into how platform algorithms strengthen or restrict narrative abilities of different actors. This helps understand discourse power distribution mechanisms in the digital age better.

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