Cuteness is Power: A Correlational Study of Influencer's Narration on Chinese Social Media Platform

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Abstract. Cuteness is the practice of portraying oneself or others in a cute manner. In Chinese, cute often refers to 'Meng' a phenomenon originated from celebrity fandom culture. Nevertheless, the cuteness narration also adopts by influencers on social media platform, which to gain more attentions from the fans. However, comparing with other kinds of narrative, for instance, a news article agenda, how cuteness portrayals attract individual users' attention? Given the exciting literature, scholars provide detailed definitions and formation of cuteness culture, however, a paucity focus on the correlational relationship, or causal effects between cuteness narrations and public attentions. This article aims to explore the relationship between social media users' narrations (independent variable) and public attentions (dependent variable), which the author argues that there is a potential correlation between the two.

Keywords: Cuteness, Media narratives, Influencer, Chinese social media platform.

1   Introduction

Cuteness is the practice of portraying oneself or others in a cute manner. In Chinese, cute often refers to 'Meng' a phenomenon originated from celebrity fandom culture. Wong analyzed the adoption of fandom governance communication strategy and cuteness narrative by Chinese state social media accounts as rallying strategy during the pandemic crisis[1], which they argued was a new development in the Chinese state's long history of uniting citizens through the management of emotions [1]. Nevertheless, the cuteness narration also adopts by influencers on social media platform, which to gain more attentions from the fans. However, comparing with other kinds of narrative, for instance, a news article agenda, how cuteness portrayals attract individual users' attention? This particular perspective leads to the article's research question: how did the social media users adopt the narrative of cuteness to gain more attentions, specifically, likes, views and comments?

Given the exciting literature, scholars provide detailed definitions and formation of cuteness culture, however, a paucity focus on the correlational relationship, or causal effects between cuteness narrations and public attentions. This article aims to explore

the relationship between social media users' narrations (independent variable) and public attentions (dependent variable), which the author argues that there is a potential correlation between the two. Providing insights to reveals the public opinion mechanism for communication scholarship. By observing the articles, images, and other communication tactics of social media users' accounts on a popular Chinese social media platform, Weibo. The author finds that cuteness narratives were applied to attract attentions and guide the opinion. Therefore, this study will adopt a quantitative research design, employing several natural language processing techniques, and ultimately examine the correlation coefficient between media narratives and public attentions. The following sections will first explain the concept of fandom, which provides insights to understand the specific cute culture in China.

2   Fandom: From Parasocial to Parakin Relation

The concepts of parakin and parasocial relationships, as elucidated by Yan and Yang [2], offer a valuable perspective for understanding Chinese fandom. In the field of fan studies, fans are those who possess a profound fascination with media stars, actors, and television series. The phenomenon of fans supposedly 'interacting' with celebrities in the television era has been thoroughly examined in the field of entertainment studies, referred to as parasocial interaction. Nevertheless, a novel interaction paradigm called the parakin has been identified in Chinese social media. Unlike fans in parasocial connections, fans in parakin relationships have a significant impact on their idols. Parakin relationships refer to the imagined kinship between fans and idols, where followers exercise a visible level of influence over their idols [2]. In addition, social media has facilitated the collective adoration of celebrities by labeling them as family members, such as moms, sisters, brothers, and the like[2]. Parakin is based on the principles of Chinese filial piety and the concept of 'loving closeness'. According to Guo, love can serve as a universal means of communication that can be utilized to promote and reinforce people's loyalty to the government[3].

Fandom refers to the bond between fans as a community, while fanship refers to the emotional attachment supporters have towards specific fan objects[3]. Fandom culture is sustained by the emotional engagement and actions of fans, including the consumption, sharing, and creation of content related to a particular work of art. The aforementioned actions contribute to the establishment of fan communities and the reinforcement of community identification. Chinese entertainment enthusiasts exhibit diversity and are not uniform in their preferences and interests. Even within a fan community, supporters can be categorized according to their level of devotion to their idols. Dedicated followers frequently harbor profound admiration for their idols, displaying heightened emotional and temporal commitment, and exerting unwavering support for the idol's merchandise. Regular fans tend to be more emotionally distant and only invest in their idols within the boundaries of their personal limits. "Casual spectators" are even less devoted. They choose to solely purchase things from an idol in order to satisfy their own personal desires. In addition to idol worship, fan community engagement is motivated by followers' social desires for communication and participation. Members of

fan communities not only emotionally invest in their idols, but also form strong inter-personal bonds with one another[3]. The concepts of fandom, parasocial relationships, and parakin relationships offer valuable insights into the dynamics of Internet fandom. In this gamified realm, fans and idols engage in a mutually influential relationship: fans idolize and idealize idols, while idols actively cultivate a cute and endearing image [1].

3   Cute Culture: Definition, Evolution, and Representation

The idea of cuteness has been analyzed by scholars across several fields, with a key focus on determining the "boundary between cuteness as a cultural aesthetic and the biological basis of our emotional reaction to a cute object" [1]. The study of cuteness in scientific research can be traced back to Lorenz, who introduced the concept of the baby schema. This schema includes distinct physical features such as a prominent forehead, big eyes, a small mouth, and chubby cheeks [4]. The broad application of Lorenz's baby schema can be attributed to the evolutionary imperative of caring for infants, which is essential for the survival of the human species. According to Yang, it is hypothesized that the exhibition of cuteness, as observed in human neonates, triggers parental caregiving, compassion, and empathy [5].

Multiple research investigate the impact of cuteness in marketing promotions, re-vealing that cuteness is highly effective in capturing individuals' attention. Prior studies have investigated the emotional and cognitive reactions of customers to cuteness, as well as the resulting behavioral outcomes, based on the care-releasing function of cuteness [6]. When people see something cute, it might make them feel tender and inclined to behave in a helpful and sustainable way, especially if the cute thing is related to them. Furthermore, unintentional exposure to stimuli that are perceived as cute elicits kama muta, an emotional state characterized by a sense of being deeply moved or touched, hence enhancing individuals' inclination to engage in prosocial actions towards non-cute subjects [7]. According to Septianto and Paramita, from a cognitive standpoint, the attractiveness of brand logos leads customers to believe that the brand has a higher potential for growth, which in turn enhances their attitude to-wards the brand, especially among individuals who are feeling optimistic[8]. Moreover, a logo featuring an endearing style boosts customers' inclination to protect the company from harm, leading to reduced repercussions after a brand violation.

Cuteness has gained popularity in popular culture, particularly among Japanese youth, especially teenage females, since the 1960s in the field of cultural studies. As a result, businesses have since adopted it[6]. Individuals or things that appear more adorable or individuals who dress in a more adorable manner are more likely to receive social recognition and rewards in Japan [8]. In the 1990s, the U.S. market had a signif-icant influx of Japanese cartoons, comic books, ideas, and other consumer goods. American adolescents started adopting the fashion trends depicted in Fruits and other comparable Japanese fashion publications. In the present era, marketers from all over the world take advantage of the consumer preference for cuteness by promoting, manufacturing, and selling adorable stationery, soft toys, and cartoon-themed acces-sories [5]. This study expands upon previous genealogical maps of Chinese cultural

models of devotion and affect management by highlighting the concept of meng, an adjective denoting "cuteness" that originated in Chinese online slang and later became widely used. Moe is a loanword originating from the Japanese language. It denotes the feelings of fondness, possessiveness, and protectiveness that fans experience for animated characters or popular culture icons. Meng, is a sort of cuteness culture in East Asia. It is intimately linked to the subculture of Chinese internet fandom and has given rise to compound words that describe the activities of followers and idols. In her groundbreaking work, linguistic anthropologist Teri Silvio theorizes that fans' interest in popular East Asian characters can be understood as a type of "animation."[9] According to Silvio, animation involves projecting human attributes such as life, power, agency, will, personality, and others, outside of oneself and into the sensory environment through acts of production, perception, and interaction. In China, particularly on digital media platforms, two primary strategies are employed: the employment of names and the fun utilization of sound-alike phrases in Chinese internet culture, along with the creation of humorous memes. However, the verb menghua can be seen as the primary method for expressing cuteness or animation. It literally means 'to cutify', which refers to the act of making someone or something cute. The term "maimeng", which translates to "selling cuteness" or "playing cute," refers to the act of presenting oneself as adorable in order to get affection. In summary:

Hypothesis: The adoption of cuteness narrative is positively correlate with an increase in the level of attention from audiences. In other words, the greater number of cuteness narrations, the higher the likelihood of receiving likes, comments, and reposts.
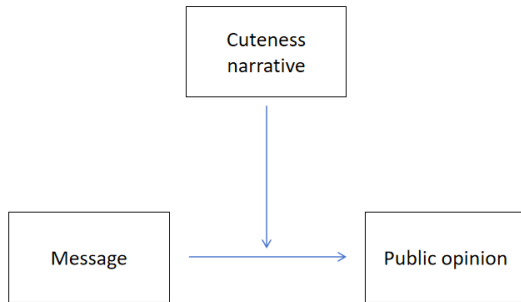

Fig. 1. Proposed cuteness narrative model

Author also proposed a communication model that treat cuteness narrative as the moderator variable to influence the public opinion as shown in figure 1.

4   Methodology

4.1   Data

To best achieve the objectives of this study, the author divides the data into two groups. The first group consisted of data observed from state social media account's articles and other forms of content on Weibo, that is, People's Daily, Yangshi News, and Global

Times. The second set of data collected comprises articles and comments from Weibo users other than People's Daily Yangshi News, and Global Times during the same time period. This sample includes reflections, responses, and actions in correlation with the state media's cuteness narration, in this paper, "A Zhong Gege". In accordance with the conceptual framework presented in this article, the first type of data serve as the independent variable, while the last type of data acts as the dependent variable.

4.2   Analysis and Measurements

The analysis process used a two-stage study design with different measurements. The first stage involves quantification. At this stage, the quantification procedures are different for state media and other users. For the state media's social media accounts, the author calculates the number of articles, and frequency of keywords within a selected time period. For other users, the author calculates the number of public's response in four different categories. These two steps measure how the media employed cuteness narratives, and how the public reacted to them. The final stage is to compute the correlation coefficients and regression equations between media narratives and public reactions for two different communication tactics: cuteness and prejudice. The results reveal the hypothesis of this article.

4.3   Results

Quantification.
The term 'A Zhong' is an animated representation of the Chinese nation, adopting a narrative of cuteness. The first set of data was collect through the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, from Sep to Nov in 2019. As shown in table 1 and figure 2.

Table 1. Quantification results for the state social media accounts in category 'A Zhong'.

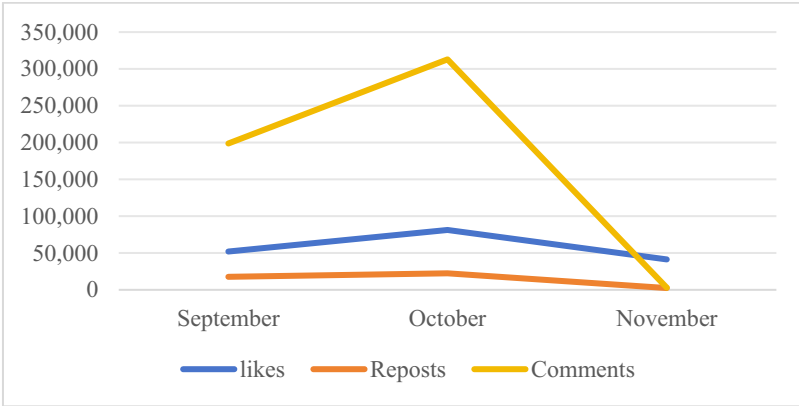| Publish Period	likes	Reposts	Comments
September	52,053	17,698	198,779
October	81,301	22,420	312,933
November	41,301	2,420	2,933

Fig. 2. Quantification results for the state social media accounts in category 'A Zhong'.

Regarding the public's reactions, the author calculate the number of articles and comments within three months period. Note that again, the data analyzed only includes those mentioned 'A Zhong', shown in figure 3.
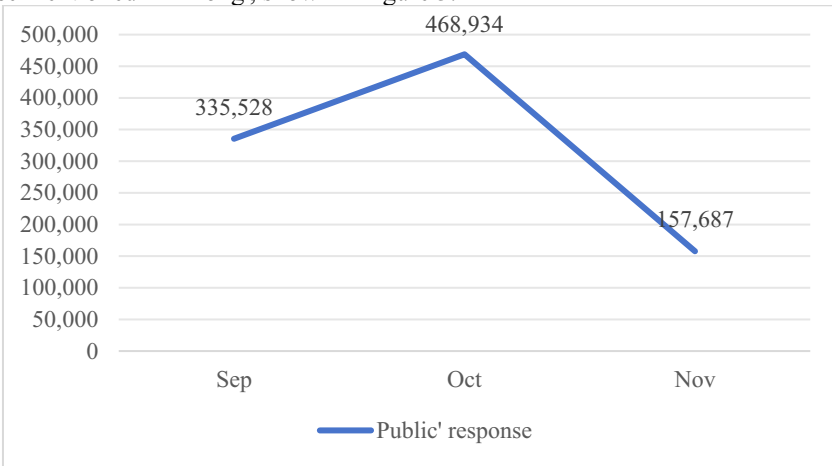

Fig. 3. Quantification results for the public's response in category 'A Zhong'.

Calculation.

In this section, author intends to compute the correlation coefficients and regression equations between media narratives and public reactions/opinions. By achieve this objective, the authors tally the number of reactions from the public to the number of state social media articles posted at selected points in time (mostly by month). Figure 4 demonstrates the correlation coefficient between state social media's frame and public opinion in this category, which is 0.9471. Hypothesis is confirmed.
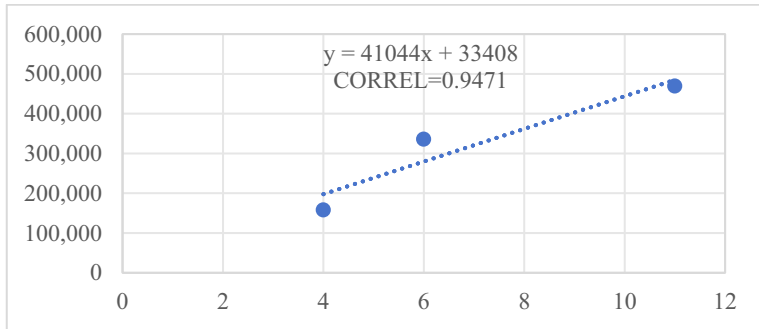
Fig. 4. Correlation coefficient and regression equation in category 'A Zhong'.

5   Conclusion

As scholars celebrated the potential of the social media to promote the various ideas. This study aims to explore the correlation between social media's framing and public's opinion as well as reaction, and examine how the specific portrayals can influence the public response, which may contributes insights for marketing and communication studies. The quantitative figures have theoretical and empirical implications for understanding the impacts of cute culture and communication tactics on social media platform. First, the correlation coefficients and regression equations of the A Zhong category support the hypothesis of this article, and suggest that cuteness is most likely to influence the effect of public opinion. This study reveals that cute nation and idolized hero serve as publicly visible signs of participation in a game-like sequence. The public responds to state social media accounts' actions, and their responses are available for other users and the state to review and incorporate into their own subsequent moves [1].

For future research, the author acknowledges the limitations of using observational data in Chinese communication studies. One typical example is the difficulty in accessing both positive and negative content on social media platforms. Thus, experimental designs and other statistical models, such as 'difference-in-difference', may be an effective method to examine the impact of Chinese communication on digital platform. Furthermore, this article explores the correlation between media framing and public opinion, but it is also worth exploring causal-effect research of this focus.

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