Research Article

Multimodal Analysis of the Public Opinion Response Discourse on Government New Media

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In the era of "Internet +," government new media plays an indispensable role in guiding positive public opinion. Despite the implementation of China's Double Reduction policy, some local governments' responses to public opinion still need improvement. This study aimed to investigate the characteristics and patterns of the verbal and visual modes in public opinion response discourse on government new media and provide suggestions for these platforms to handle public events more effectively.

Methodology: This study was conducted using multimodal analysis of 68 microblogs responding to the Double Reduction policy from the official Weibo of People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV News. Based on the systemic functional grammar and visual grammar, this research explored the verbal mode in terms of ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions and the visual mode in terms of the representational, interactive and compositional meanings of government new media discourse.

Results: The findings indicated that verbal response from government new media mainly consisted of heading, hashtags and texts, and the visual includes images and videos. The visual mode was in line with the verbal mode to respond to public concerns at issue. The information conveyed was strengthened by the application of images or complemented by the images.

Conclusion: This study contributes to establishing the image of government authority. By capturing the potential meaning of verbal and visual modes, this study also provides some suggestions for improving the discourse quality of government new media when responding to public events.

1. Introduction

Government social media is the account registered by the public power department on the media platforms or the platform developed and constructed by itself (Zeng & Zhang, 2022). It has developed from the initial political websites to new media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and Weibo. With the development of digital technology, communications realized by single language media are gradually replaced by complex media composed of language, image and sound (Zhang, 2018). The content of government new media is not limited to language but includes images, audio and videos among other semiotic modes. Unlike traditional media where the audience is passive receivers of the published contents, new media shortens the time of information exchange and enabled mutual communications.

"Double Reduction" policy, released in July 2021, refers to easing the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education (General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2021). The reducing of homework and extracurricular tutoring means that students can have more time to engage in physical

exercise, experience labor life, and cultivate hobbies, which is conducive to students' comprehensive development and their physical and mental health (Zhou & Qi, 2022). However, the actual implementation of the "Double-Reduction" policy has sparked heated public discussions in China due to the numerous problems this policy has brought about, such as covert training, unemployment of off-campus training institution staff, difficulties for parents in getting refunds from off-campus training institutions (Xue & Zhang, 2024) and parental education anxiety (Zhu & Luo, 2023).

In the era of digital communication, the role of government new media in shaping public opinion and disseminating information has become increasingly prominent (Chen, 2021). Some scholars reckoned that the local governments' neglect of public opinion is an important cause of the various problems that arose in the implementation process of the "Double Reduction" policy (Liu, 2022; Xue et al., 2022). As suggested by Diao and Xue (2024), local governments have not placed sufficient emphasis on the significance of public opinion in their efforts to implement this policy when considering the policy objectives and outcomes of local governance. Therefore, to facilitate the effective implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy, it is essential for local governments to accurately convey policy information and actively address public concerns. With the rapid development of information technology, the emergence of government new media, such as government WeChat and government Weibo, has significantly reduced the communication gap between the government and the public, expanded the channels for policy information communication, serving as a vital bridge between public opinion and government response (Hou, 2012; Song et al., 2024). At present, some discourse strategies to respond to public opinion of "Double Reduction" have problems and still need to be improved. How to expand the influence of government new media to enhance the communication effect to further promote the effective implementation of this policy is worthy of in-depth research and discussion.

Due to local governments' neglect the importance of responding to public opinion, the implementation of "Double Reduction" policy has raised numerous questions and concerns among the public, necessitating a nuanced analysis of the public opinion response discourse of government new media. Since multimodal discourse analysis emphasizes the complete communicative forms of discourse produced within communication, the analysis of multiple semiotic modes is necessary to explore how various semiotic resources are integrated to construct meaning and enhance communication effect. Through a multimodal analysis, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of this policy and provide insights for local governments to enhance their public opinion response strategies.

1.1 Definition of multimodality

Multimodality has been defined in a number of ways by linguists in related field of inquiry. For example, Li (2003) defined multimodality as "the compound discourse with images, charts, etc. in addition to the text, or any text with meaning realized by more than one semiotic code" (p. 1). Likewise, Baldry and Thibault (2006) reckoned that multimodality means that "different symbolic resource systems are co-deployed and co-contextualized in diversified ways during the construction of a text-specific meaning" (p. 21). In terms of multimodal discourse, Zhang (2009) defined multimodal discourse as the phenomenon of using multiple senses to communicate through, for example, language, images, sounds, and other various means and various symbolic resources. Moreover, multimodal discourse analysis, according to Dai (2013), deals with the multiple modes of communication symbols, the relationship between them, the overall meaning they constitute, and their characteristics and functions. It focuses on the design, production, and distribution of multimodal resources in social situations and the recombination of various modes with the process of social practice. From the above definitions, it can be concluded that multimodality is not limited to the study of the traditional language-based mode. However, it takes both verbal and non-verbal modes, into account. Meanwhile, multimodal discourse analysis emphasizes the meaning displayed by each mode and the relations between different communicative modes, which can help comprehend the meaning of specific discourses.

1.2. Research on public opinion response discourse on government new media

Since government new media plays a significant role in guiding social opinion, some studies put forward different views on how government new media can correctly address and guide social opinion. As observed by Zhang (2020), untimely and inappropriate crisis response to public health emergencies can easily result in negative online public opinion, which might lead to the information plague squeezing the space for authoritative information dissemination. Hence, she drew on the public opinion response discourse of the People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV News, extracting three discursive responses to public opinion from political new media. Besides, based on Lakoff's (2006) Framing Theory, Zhang and Zhang (2020) analyzed the discourse characteristics of different government microblogs in responding to emergencies and concluded three discourse strategies for government new media, which are making good use of the combined framing approach to optimize the discourse structure; utilizing of the multi-modal framing approach to enhance the discourse effect; and adopting the transferred framing approach to maintain discourse harmony. Likewise, Shang (2020) uncovered the significance of public opinion response of government new media in the context of public emergencies, analyzed the difficulties in handling public opinion of government new media, and also put forward relevant measures for government new media to respond to public opinion. On how to close the distance between government new media and netizens, Wang (2021)

analyzed the problems faced by the government new media and provided several strategies for political new media, which are clear role positioning, publishing quality content, multi-channel publicity and promotion, cultivating integrated media talent, and creating a linkage matrix.

1.3. Research on multimodal analysis of government new media discourse

With the development of digital technology, communications realized by single language media are gradually replaced by complex media composed of language, image and sound (Zhang, 2018). Nowadays, the evolution of social media platforms provides governments across the world with the potential to achieve objectives of improved information, service provision, citizen engagement, and legitimacy and respond to increasing expectations from citizens as experienced social media users (Medaglia & Zhu, 2017). Therefore, the discourse of government new media has aroused scholars' attention. For instance, Li (2016) argued that discourse analysis based on functional linguistics can provide a systematic and subtle description and interpretation of the discourse concerned in new media research, and help to promote the cognition of new media research at the discourse level. At the same time, the development of emerging fields such as public opinion analysis also provides useful enlightenment for discourse analysis.

Some studies focus on discourse analysis of government new media and examine the characteristics of its text and image modes. Through studying the multimodal discourse of political new media, Zhou and Wang (2016) conclude the features of language and images in government new media, with images characterized by labeling function, portraitization and low information value and language serving the function of anchoring and complementing the meaning of the image. In addition, Wang and Zhou (2019) further investigated the three expression modes of the language application of governmental new media from the perspective of pragmatic research. Results show that the expression modes of government new media are interdependent and interrelated, in which relations of division and collaboration, hierarchical function change and discourse markers etc. can be identified. Based on Halliday's three meta-theories of systemic functional grammar and Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, Ma and Ma (2017) conducted a multimodal discourse analysis of a microblog posted by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, exploring how each mode constructs meaning and the relationship between the verbal and non-verbal modes in the multimodal government microblog from a linguistic perspective. In a similar vein, drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, Wang (2019) investigated the meanings of representation, interaction and composition in image discourse of political new media and argued that pragmatic effects of the government new media photo discourse can be revealed through pragmatic analysis. In addition, by focusing on the characteristics of its language application during the G20

Hangzhou Summit, Yu (2019) concluded four major features and identifies the problems and shortcomings of the discourse to provide inspiration for the future use of government new media in hosting large-scale international events. It is found that both the WeChat and Weibo accounts of "Hangzhou Publishing" gave full play to the advantages of multimodal discourse, and through the comprehensive use of texts, charts, images, audios, videos and other elements, they promoted the G20 Hangzhou Summit in an all-round way, and have achieved remarkable communication effects. Moreover, based on Pauwels' (2012) multimodal framework for analyzing websites as cultural expressions, Liu et al. (2023) compared how Hainan's homepage and Hawaii's homepage construct identities and multimodally portray the islands as tourist destinations. Results show that the Chinese homepage promotes the provincial government's identity as a traditional administration and information hub by extensively using impersonal semiotic resources with limited interactivity. In contrast, the English homepage creates an identity as a thoughtful caretaker and attentive administrator who provides practical resources to meet the needs of foreign guests.

As mentioned above, though some studies combine public opinion and government new media, most of them only focus on providing strategies for improving the ability of government new media to guide social opinion. In addition, researchers also use multimodality to study the language and image characteristics of government new media, or explore its meaning-making process. Nowadays, major public events like the implementation of "Double Reduction" policy, which has aroused great public concern since its implementation, can cause negative public opinion online. Since political new media plays an essential role in guiding public opinion, its response discourse should also merit our attention. However, as we can see from previous studies, few of them are concerned about the discourse of public opinion responses and the multimodality of this distinctive response discourse has been neglected. As a result, this study is aimed to investigate the public opinion response discourse of political new media from a multimodal perspective.

This study conducted an in-depth analysis of the public opinion response corpus of the political new media platform, selected from People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV News. It intended to explore the revelation of three metafunctional meanings of the text mode and image mode in public opinion responses from political new media and to find out the relations among different modes in meaning-constructing. In so doing, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

(1) What are the components of each mode of the public opinion response discourse on political new media?

(2) How is the textual modality constructed and how is the visual modality constructed in the public opinion response discourse of government new media?

(3) What synergistic relationships exist among these modalities, how do these relationships enhance communication effects and realize communicative meanings?

2. Methodology

2.1. Corpus

To analyze the response discourse on government new media, the author collected a total of 68 posts responding to the "Double Reduction" policy from three political new media official accounts, namely, People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, and CCTV News on Sina Weibo, one of China's biggest social media platforms. The three official accounts were selected due to their far-reaching influence on Weibo, each gaining over 100 million followers. Besides, since the implementation of "Double Reduction" policy, the three central media have paid close attention to its implementation, and actively responded to public concerns about this policy. Among all the posts, People's Daily connected with experts to give their views and strategies on "how to break Chinese parents' anxiety over their children's education" in the form of live streaming. CCTV News also posted a microblog saying "Life is not immersing oneself in exercises", which received more than 20 thousand likes, and "CCTV anchor is on the wall today", which received over 5.5 thousand likes. Xinhua News Agency released a post entitled "Authoritative express: Family Education Promotion Law has been adopted", which gained more than 21 thousand likes. Concerning the Family Education Promotion Law, the three government Weibo accounts posted relevant information in different ways. The law is enacted under the "Double Reduction" policy and clearly states the role parents should play in children's education. Considering these posts' high relevance and popularity, the author chose 12 posts which consist of texts, images and short videos downloaded from Weibo as the database for further analysis.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 SFL-based multimodal discourse analysis

As the most common way to convey information in news reporting, text plays a vital role in effective news delivery. According to Halliday (1985), whether spoken or written language, has ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions simultaneously. Ideational function is the most basic function and social attribute of language, which can reflect things and processes existing in the subjective and objective world. Interpersonal metafunction, often called speech function, reflects the interactive relationship between the speaker and the receiver, the speaker's attitude when speaking and the speaker's view of the real world in language. It is often reflected by the mood of imperative, interrogative and indicative. The textual function is related to "building up the discourse sequences and organizing the discursive flow and creating cohesion and continuity" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Therefore, textual metafunction is the premise of the ideational function that construes experience and the interpersonal function that enacts interpersonal relationships. Text is a relatively complete unit of expressing ideas in practical use. The textual function is embodied by thematic structure, information structure and cohesive means. The starting point for our message is commonly referred to as the Theme. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) believed that the thematic structure carries the line of meaning and is expressed in sentences' linear order.

2.2.2. Multimodal discourse analysis based on the visual grammar

The multimodal discourse analysis is based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar, and it is believed that with the development of technology and the popularity of multimedia technology, traditional symbolic resources such as pictures, sounds, and colors, which used to be considered to be in a paralinguistic position, are gradually playing an indispensable role in the construction of meaning. Therefore, the multimodal analysis should not only consider the three meta-functions of language, but also pay attention to the role of symbolic resources such as images and colors in the construction of meaning (Wei, 2009). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggested that, just as language has three major functions, image mode, corresponding to the metafunctions of language, also has three meanings which are representational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings, and they also emphasized the importance of visual communication in public communication, which provides theoretical guidance for analyzing visual modality in multimodal resources.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) contended that any symbolic mode can represent the objective things and their relations with the external world. The meaning that semiotic resources refer to is representational meaning, which can be divided into narrative representation and conceptual representation marked by the existence of a vector. Corresponding to the interpersonal function in systemic functional grammar is the interactive meaning, which focuses on social relations between participants and the evaluation orientations that participants adopt towards each other and to the represented world of the image. The interactive meaning is achieved by four major systems: contact, social distance, perspective and modality. The compositional meaning refers to the way how the image integrates its representational meaning and interactive meaning to form a meaningful whole. Information value, salience and framing are three dimensions of the compositional meaning. Therefore, visual grammar can be used to analyze the visual modality in government new media discourse.

2.3 Procedure

The author gathered a total of 68 posts from July 2021 to March 2024 under the keyword "Double Reduction" from the official accounts of People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV News on Weibo, with all the texts and images and videos being manually collected. These posts contained information about the current situation of policy implementation, and provide adequate responses to Chinese parents' anxiety over their children's education brought about by the policy.

In order to explore the discursive features and

communicative effects of the response discourse on government new media, this study employed a multimodal approach to analyze the linguistic and visual semiotic resources based on the three language metafunctions from the perspective of systemic functional grammar and the visual grammar. The analytical procedures can be divided into three steps. Firstly, the author will describe the composition of the public opinion response discourse on government new media. Then, each mode adopted in political new media will be investigated to sum up the regular patterns of the embodiment of the three metafunctions of the text mode and the three meanings of visual modes within the corpus. Finally, the relationships between different modes will be analyzed to discuss the communicative effects of these posts in terms of responding to public concerns.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The composition of public opinion response discourse on government new media

The rapid development of technology has predetermined the multimodal nature of the discourse of political new media, and prompted it to constantly adapt to new symbols and new rules, to enrich its modal forms, to maintain its status in the new era of mass media, and to realize its due interactive effectiveness. Besides, government Weibo is instantaneous and serves as a window for communicating public sentiment (Wang & Zhou, 2019). In response to public concerns about this policy, the discourse from three central media is centered on three aspects, which are direct response to the Chinese parents' anxiety over their children's education caused by this policy by providing suggestions, the response to the improvement of children's growth quality, and the promulgation of Family Education Promotion Law. Regarding the specific posts of the three facets, government new media applied verbal and visual modes to enhance communicative effects. The following part will provide a detailed analysis of the application of modes in these posts and how they are combined to construct meaning.

3.1.1. Verbal mode

The discourse entity of political new media has its unique and complete structure. Specifically, it can be divided into heading, hashtags and text. These three parts are related to each other. Although each of them bears different functions, they together contribute to a well-organized and communicative-efficient discourse of government new media (Wang et al. 2020).

Generally, the heading is positioned at the top of the text. In the case of information on government new media like Weibo, every post released by political new media, regardless of its length and importance, is bound to have a precise topic. The timeliness and authoritativeness of the new media requires that the information must be delivered in real-time. Therefore, the headline is always placed in the most prominent and primary position in the release of

information. On Weibo, the headlines of the three major central media are often marked with "[]", which makes them easily noticed by readers, as can be seen in Figure 1.
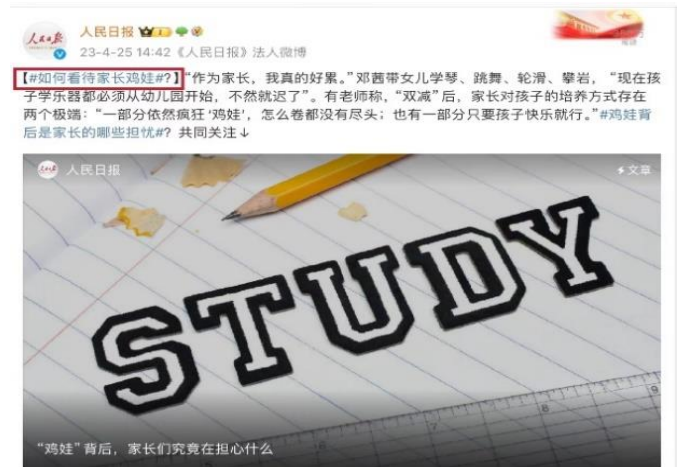

Figure 1.
People's Daily's Post on the 'Over-competitive Parenting' Phenomenon

Additionally, on the platform of Weibo, hashtags play an indispensable role in disseminating vital information, as seen in Figures 1 and 2. Blue hashtags are applied quite often by the three central media to demonstrate critical information, which is no exception as to the information disclosed concerning the "Double Reduction" policy. In Figure 2, the heading, with a blue hashtag included in it, points out the most essential information, which means, in 2022, the Ministry of Education continued to fight the critical battle of the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy. Another hashtag points out the information source of this post and the two hashtags are typically used to attract the audience's attention. In doing so, the audience can easily access the main points of this post, which dramatically increases the efficiency of information delivery.
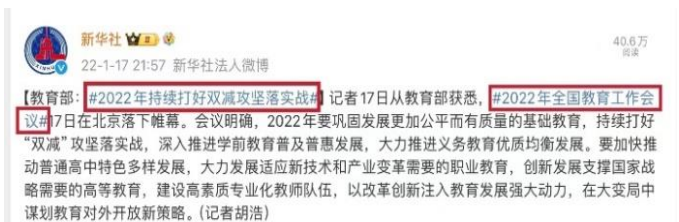

Figure 2.
Advancing Quality Education and the "Double Reduction" Initiative: China's 2022 Educational Priorities

With the development of information technology nowadays, the public have entered the "picture reading era". Most audiences are reading the information on government new media, to a large extent, only getting information from images and headlines, rather than reading the text carefully. Therefore, in the current new media language environment, media workers have to condense the information in limited space on Weibo due to the word count limit and the text only serves as an explanation or a supplement to the headline. Therefore, heading and hashtags play an important role in disseminating information and attracting
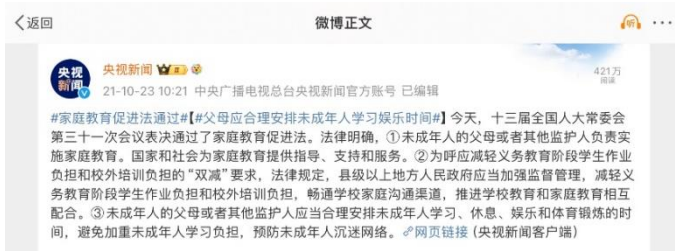
Figure 3.
Family Education Promotion Law Adopted: Balancing Learning and Leisure for Minors

viewers' attention on political new media like government Weibo.

Another component of the verbal mode is the main body of the post, which covers the key information content. This part of information interprets the content of government affairs information or news release, and further explains and expounds the heading. While the function of the heading is to stimulate and attract reading, the text describes the content released by the government new media, providing more details. Readers obtain much relevant information by reading the main body. A screenshot (Figure 3) demonstrated a piece of news entitled "Parents should reasonably arrange minors' learning and entertainment time" released by CCTV News. The body part of the news gave a specific explanation to the headline and explained the explicit provisions of the Family Education Promotion Law in three points. Although the words are limited in this text, it is still an indispensable part of the verbal mode of political new media. In addition, in Figures 3 and 4, although the text volume of the information is small, the hyper link provides hypertext for readers, which includes more specific and rich content and is convenient for readers to continue to read in depth to obtain more information. In so doing, the government new media enhance communication efficiency in limited cyber space. Text accounts for a large proportion and plays a key role in the whole new media verbal mode of government new media. Therefore, the text on government new media should deserve

Figure 4.
Ministry of Education to Crack Down on Unauthorized Tutoring Practices

our attention and be appropriately employed in the public opinion response discourse of government new media.

3.1.2. Visual mode

Image is a general term for various graphics and pictures, a highly similar and vivid description or portrait of an objective object. Image symbols are second only to texts in the multimodal discourse of government affairs and must attract the attention of government agencies, the subjects of multimodal discourse expression in government affairs. Among the collected 68 microblogs, except microblogs containing videos, the rest contains different types of images, such as comics, character images, and pictures containing only text. Different images are suitable for different types of information release, such as notification, warning and other information release, realizing a variety of communication effects. The extensive use of images shows that government new media pays great attention to the selection of images. With images that are more intuitive to read, it also enables users to click on the image to read some of the textual content under the image hyperlink, as in Figure 5.

Figure 5.
Reviewing the "Double Reduction" Policy: Ministry of Education's Initiative

The video modality is also a frequently selected channel for the dissemination of information on new media platforms. Compared to images, video content incorporates elements such as text, images and sound. Short videos, with their brevity and concise content, are favored by viewers in today's fast-paced society. The analysis of the fonts of the short videos reveals that the font, color and position of the illustrative subtitles affect the expression of the video content. Through observation, it is found that the fonts of the explanatory subtitles are more prominent and will be highlighted in bold, and the colors are mainly used in high brightness, such as yellow and white. As shown in Figures 6 and 7, which are images taken from the "news broadcast from CCTV anchors", the captions are in white and yellow respectively, and the font also varies in the two pictures. The font in yellow puts an emphasis on the information the producer tries to convey, which is children have more possibilities. In addition, the subtitles are located at the

Figure 6.
CCTV News: Life Isn't Just About Rote Learning or Cramming for Exams

bottom with concise content. They are displayed vertically without affecting the users' experience.

Verbal response from government new media mainly consists of heading, hashtags and texts, and the visual includes images and videos. With the visualization of online language, images, videos, and other paralinguistic elements are taking on a more significant role in new media social interactions, thus endowing new media discourse with strong multimodality and hypertextuality (Feng & Wang, 2017). In addressing the public concerns regarding the "Double Reduction" policy, government new media has effectively combined the verbal and visual modalities to enhance the communicative effect of the media (Yu & Xu, 2021).

Figure 7.
Expanding Opportunities: CCTV News on the "Double Reduction" Policy's Impact on Education

3.2. Multimodal discourse analysis of public opinion responses from government new media based on systemic functional grammar

3.2.1. Ideational metafunction

As demonstrated in the previous section, the textual modality of language in government Weibo discourse is mainly the body part. This study analyzed linguistic modality according to the three metafunctions proposed by Halliday (1985), namely ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning, and collected the screenshots from the three major government Weibo accounts responding to the "Double Reduction" policy.

The following screenshot is a post on the People's Daily official Weibo entitled "How to break Chinese parents' anxiety over their children's education under "Double Reduction". As demonstrated in Figure 8, the People's Daily invited two experts to discuss and share their opinions on the policy. The text concludes three main points of dealing with Chinese parents' anxiety over their children's education, which are: ① parents should rationalize their expectations of their children, helping them to find themselves, discover themselves, and achieve themselves; ② pre-school is the most critical time for the formation of children's cognitive style, behavioral habits, and personality traits, so it is important to accompany them to grow better; ③ children need time and space to grow after they enter school, filling all of this time cannot contribute to their growth in a real sense.

The ideational function is mainly embodied by the transitivity process, which includes six processes, namely the material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process. These clauses mainly consist of the material process and relational process. The message sent from this release is that

Figure 8.
Addressing Parental Anxiety after 'Double Reduction': Insights from China's Two Sessions

Figure 9.
Rethinking Education: "Double Reduction" Policy Aims to Enhance Children's Growth Quality

Figure 10.
Family Education as a Compulsory Course: The Role of Parents in 'Double Reduction' Policy

parents should lower their expectations. The domination of the material process reflected from phrases such as "help children discover themselves" and "accompany kids" can impress the viewers that what parents should do is to help their children find themselves and give kids space and time to grow instead of pushing children to succeed. In addition, these kinds of "doing" are closely related to the topic, which highlights parents' role in their children's development as is mentioned above.

The verbal response on government new media is characterized by the material process in terms of ideational function. As is demonstrated in Figure 8, government new media actively responds to the issue of how parents can overcome the anxiety about their children's education under the "Double Reduction" policy through providing experts' opinions, aiming to guide public opinion. Similarly, Li (2003) also found that mainstream media like Xinhua News Agency focused on using opinion expressions that indicate their own stance and attitude to influence the audience's thoughts and provide value guidance to the audience through their short video news content.

3.2.2. Interpersonal metafunction

Two indispensable sides that are closely related to the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy are parents and children. This policy aims to reduce students' burden to improve education quality. However, it is greeted with parents' doubt, and some parents become even more anxious. Therefore, government new media attempted to persuade parents from another perspective: the nature of education is to improve children's growth quality. As shown in Figure 9, this post demonstrates the opinion of a deputy to the National People's Congress about the "Double Reduction".

The deputy mentioned that letting each child develop according to his or her own strengths is the original mission of educators, and it should be the rational consensus of society and parents. "Double reduction" is to integrate educational resources inside and outside the school, reconstruct the education ecology, return to the essence of education, and improve the quality of children's growth. These statements also demonstrate that parents should pay attention to children's potentials and that educators and parents should reach a consensus on children's

personalized development. All these clauses embody the interpersonal metafunction, which helps leave a deep impression on the audience that "Double Reduction" policy is conducive to children's all-round development and parents should emphasize students' overall development instead of only focusing on their academic performances.

When the government new media offers crucial information such as the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy, the promulgation of the Family Education Promotion Law and the release of the results of the "Double Reduction" work, declarative clauses were often used. For example, a microblog entitled "Parenting is also a compulsory course" from the People's Daily, as shown in Figure 10, features the new law. It is characterized by declarative clauses and imperative clauses, which highlight the authority of the information on the government new media platform. This corresponds to the pragmatic expression mode of government new media: a normative and serious discourse style that adapts to formal authoritative release (Wang & Zhou, 2019). It aims to inform the audience of the relevant policies. As seen in Figure 11,

Figure 11.
Family Education Promotion Law Adopted: Empowering Parents and Reducing Academic Burdens

"the 31st session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress voted to adopt the law on the promotion of family education on October 23rd. The law stipulates that parents or other guardians of minors are responsible for implementing family education. The state and society provide guidance, support and services for family education." These texts actively build the interpersonal relationship between the government and readers, which is the expression of interpersonal function.

From the perspective of interpersonal function, declarative clauses and imperative clauses are mainly employed for significant information release related to the implementation of policies such as the promulgation of Family Education Promotion Law. The interpersonal function of the language in government new media reflects the interactive characteristics of new media (Qin & Li, 2018). By communicating with the audience through plain and natural textual discourse and multimodal means, it has closed the distance with the audience, demonstrating a strong sense of being people-friendly (Yu, 2019).

3.3.3 Textual metafunction

According to the Family Education Promotion Law, "Double Reduction" is clearly incorporated into this law. Regarding the release of information on the Family Education Promotion Law, the three central media employed different headings and hashtags. The titles and hashtags are demonstrated as follows.

(1)【@全体家长！#做父母也是一门必修课程#】——人民日报

(2)【#权威快报# #家庭教育促进法表决通过#】——新华社

(3)#家进庭教育促法通过#【#父母应合理安排未成年人学习娱乐时间#】——央视新闻

Translation：

(1) [@All parents! #parenting is also a compulsory course#] from People's Daily

(2) [#Authoritative Express# #the Family Education Promotion Law is adopted by vote] from Xinhua News Agency

(3) #The Family Education Promotion Law is adopted# [#Parents should reasonably arrange the minors' study and entertainment time#] from CCTV News

Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) believed that the thematic structure is expressed in the linear order of sentences. The theme is usually placed in the front position of a sentence, mainly at the beginning of the sentence, except for the rheme part. It can be concluded that the choice of placing all parents at the beginning of the sentence in the first clause indicates that it emphasizes that the law first informs all parents, giving priority to the interpersonal function of the expression of intention. In the second clause, Xinhua News Agency places the authoritative express at the beginning of the sentence, aiming to highlight the authenticity of the information and to inform the public that the information is authoritative, which gives priority to the

conceptual function. In the third clause, the Family Education Promotion Law is placed at the beginning of the sentence, which is the theme, emphasizing the prominence of the law. The title forms another clause, and parents serve as the theme of this clause, also highlighting their position as the main relevant party of the law, and conveying that parents should bear the responsibility to arrange their children's study and recreation time appropriately.

As can be seen in the examples above, three central media all released informative posts concerning the Family Education Promotion Law, each focusing on a special aspect by employing different themes in the headlines. Similar to a study conducted by Qin and Li (2018), the content of the title can reflect the expressor's awareness of the importance of the information being published. In this study, government Weibo, as the information disseminator, reflects the authoritative and public characteristics of government new media information discourse (Ma & Xia, 2003) by emphasizing the source of information release and interaction with the audience.

3.3. Multimodal discourse analysis based on the visual grammar

3.3.1. Representational meaning

Representational meaning is a description of the objective world that reflects the relationships between the various participants and can be categorized into narrative and conceptual representation based on the presence or absence of vectors in the image. Figure 8 demonstrated the three represented participants, a hostess and two invited experts. This image mode reproduced the participants and their relationship with the audience. In Figure 8, the two experts directly gaze at the audience with a smiling facial expression. The yellow caption of this picture explains the topic of this live streaming, which is associated with the heated social opinion, that is the Chinese parents' anxiety over their children's education caused by the "Double Reduction". The two represented participants gaze at the camera to realize a reactional process, which means that the two experts are the Reactor and the camera is the Phenomenon. As characters in the image, the two guests constitute only one vector in the image. Their gaze is looking at the photographer's lens, which belongs to the narrative image. The hostess' gaze at the screen in front of her forms a vector.

From this screenshot, it can be shown that when faced with the topic about how to solve the issue of Chinese parents' anxiety over their children's education, the political new media wanted to convey positive information to parents through building a close connection with the audience. Besides, through the particular form of live broadcast, parents can directly "face" the experts through watching this video, where the distance between the audience and the speakers diminishes. Therefore, the People's Daily endeavored to assure parents of children's all-round development after the implementation of the policy. When the readers look at the image, it is as if he or

she makes eye contact with the participants of that image, and the reader's gaze realizes a complete communicative process from issuing to being received by the target (i.e., the represented participants) in the image.

3.3.2. Interactive meaning

Interactive meaning refers to the relationship between the producer of an image, the thing represented by the image and the viewer of the image, and is realized through four main elements: contact, social distance, perspective and modality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). For example, the significance of the interaction in Figure 8 lies in the fact that the participants in these images make direct eye contact with the reader, achieving a certain level of interactive effectiveness. The two experts are shown their heads and shoulders, which indicates the personal distance where they seem to have a conversation with the viewers face to face. This intimate relation effectively appeals to the audience and stirs their emotions. Besides, their sincere facial expression seems to demand trust from the viewers with a close relationship and make them believe that "Double Reduction" is conducive to students' all-round development in the long term and parents should be less anxious towards children's schooling.

Similarly, Xinhua News Agency especially released a post on Liu's opinion on the "Double Reduction" policy, reporting her views on the implementation of the "Double Reduction" as a response to the public opinion, aiming to assure audience that the educators will endeavor to help improve the quality of children's growth. Taken from a frontal angle with a medium shot, Figure 9 also embodies the interactive meaning, which points out that "any semiotic mode has to be able to project the relations between the producer of a sign and the receiver or producer of that sign" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 42). This picture indicates involvement between viewers and the represented participant. In the vertical dimension, the image adopts an eye-level perspective, which shows that the viewers, and the represented participant in the image are in an equal relationship.

Government new media responded to the public concerns about the "Double Reduction" policy through the application of visual modalities such as images, short videos, and live broadcasts, aiming to close the distance with the public. As observed by Xu and Feng (2020), the use of visual images and the multimodality of genres have increased the vividness of Weibo posts, creating a sense of closeness akin to social interactions among friends, thereby reducing the social distance with the public and establishing personal connections (Li & Yuan, 2023).

3.3.3. The compositional meaning

Compositional meaning studies how representational meaning and interactive meaning work as a whole, which is also a way to express the relationship between participants and viewers of government new media (Yuan & Nai, 2022). This study will analyze it from three aspects: information

value, salience and framing. Information value is achieved by the layout of various elements in images. According to the different placements of the elements, people can estimate the status, role and importance of the represented participants in the image. As shown in Figure 9, a deputy to the National People's Congress is placed in the center of the image, which indicates that she is the focus and what she conveyed at the National People's Congress merits people's attention.

Salience draws the viewer's attention using elements of composition, which can be achieved through color, relative size, perspective and foregrounding or background. The blue background of the image in Figure 9 accentuates the seriousness of the National People's Congress. Xinhua News Agency especially released a post on Liu's opinion on the "Double Reduction" policy, reporting her views on the implementation of the "Double Reduction" as a response to the public opinion. Through Liu' s speech at the National People's Congress, government new media aims to assure parents that the educators will strive to help child develop according to their strengths.

Framing refers to connecting or cutting of the elements by the artificial or natural segmentation lines. The more elements are connected in an image, the more they are shown as forming a single unit of information and as belonging to a unified group. Xinhua News Agency opened a livestream showing its audience the afterschool activities of a school after the implementation of the "Double Reduction". As illustrated in Figure 12, this screenshot displays a scene that a teacher moves the classroom outside the classroom, introducing the fruits and leaves of plants. In terms of framing, the composition of this image is overall coherent, with no extraordinarily enlarged or reduced representation of a particular participant in terms of proportion and no segmentation lines. This image reproduces a vivid classroom scene and the harmonious relationship between the teacher and students.

Figure 12.
Enriching School Life: A Lively Look at After-Class Activities Under the "Double Reduction" Policy

3.4. Synergistic relationship between visual image modality and textual modality

Kress and van Leeuwen (2011) argued that multimodality refers not only to the use of different semiotic modes in constructing a multimodal discourse or event, but also to how these modes are integrated in a particular way, where "each modality does not have the same role, but rather each occupies a different position according to its own range of meaning and the needs of the context" (Zhang, 2023, p. 449). Therefore, it is necessary to find out the relationships among different modes in the discourse of government new media when responding to public opinion on the "Double Reduction" policy.

Both two posts (Figures 10, 11) encompass images explaining the main points of the Family Education Promotion Law, which complements with the texts of verbal mode. For the People's Daily, the detailed information in the illustrations below the text mode contain different background pictures, mainly featuring parents and children, as shown in Figure 10. The verbal mode above these pictures only provides very few information. In this post, the image mode contains more information, and plays a dominant role in attracting viewers' attention by applying different background images according to the content the government new media attempts to convey. However, Xinhua News Agency puts most of the information in the form of verbal mode in the picture (Figure 13).

Figure 13.
Family Education Promotion Law Adopted: Empowering Guardians and Aligning with "Double Reduction" Goals

As shown in Figure 13, the information in this image corresponds to that in the text of Figure 11. Therefore, this picture does not add new information. Instead, it concludes the main points of the text above, which strengthens the information expressed in the main body of the post. Therefore, the multimodal communication of text supplemented by pictures doubles the communication effect, conveys public opinion and realizes the ideological guidance function of government Weibo (Chen & Mao,

2019). In so doing, Xinhua News Agency emphasizes the main points of the new law, which are parents' responsibility of implementing family education, the state's support and parents' role in the implementation of "Double Reduction".

The visual mode worked in concert with the verbal mode to respond to public concerns at issue, which echoes Wei's (2008) findings. She found that within the multimodal text, it is the interaction of text, images, and colors as symbols that created a striking and vivid effect, jointly realizing the political and practical significance. In terms of the response discourse of government Weibo in the present study, it is found that the information conveyed is enhanced by the application of images or complemented by the images. Likewise, Ma and Ma (2017) found that the text serves as an anchor for the image in a government Weibo post, which anchors the information in the image, making the information clearer and more specific. In other words, the intrusion of images into language has a constructive role in the emergence of active multimodal discourse (Xiao, 2017). Through the combination of the verbal and visual, government new media disseminate messages to the recipients more effectively.

4. Conclusion

This study conducted a multimodal discourse analysis of the public opinion responses from the People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV News that are focused on "Double Reduction" policy based on systemic functional grammar and visual grammar. This study complements the application field of multimodal discourse theory through the case analysis and text analysis of public opinion responses from political new media, which contributes to establishing the image of government authority and spreading positive social energy. By capturing the potential meaning of verbal and visual modes, the study can also improve the ability to respond to public opinion via government new media. It should be pointed out that this study mainly explored the features of the image modality and text modality at the content level, other modes, such as audio and typography in the political new media discourse, need to be addressed in a more synthetic way in future studies.

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