

ГЕОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВА И КОДЫ КУЛЬТУР АЗИИ И АФРИКИ

UDC 32

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LANGUAGE AND FOOD SAFETY: THE “ZOMBIE MEAT” SCANDAL

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Food safety scandals that threaten the health and wellbeing of Chinese consumers have been discussed intensively in the past few years, such as milk powder scandal that resulted in children's deaths or recycled oil from garbage used in restaurants. Food issues are therefore receiving growing attention from Chinese media, which represent the main channel to spread and construct a new collective national identity. This preliminary study analyses, over a period of 1 week following the food scandal, a corpus of media contents related to the so-called 40 year-old “zombie meat” incident, a recent food scandal that took place in mainland China during June 2015. In particular, two different Chinese-language websites will be object of analysis, namely: a government-owned website (leading key news website source people.com.cn) and an enterprise-owned media (UGC source sina.com.cn), based on the hypothesis that the two of them should produce different types of textual genres and language register in the report of the same single event. Refs 48. Tables 6.

Keywords: Chinese Media, Food Safety, Zombie Meat.

ТЕМА БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ ПИЩЕВЫХ ПРОДУКТОВ И СКАНДАЛ, СВЯЗАННЫЙ С РАСПРОСТРАНЕНИЕМ «МЯСА-ЗОМБИ» (НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ КИТАЙСКИХ СМИ)

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Представленная статья затрагивает несколько весьма актуальных для современного Китая проблем. Во-первых, — проблема продовольственной безопасности, которая связана с тем, что в последние годы в КНР регулярно возникают скандалы, вызванные появлением в продаже опасных для здоровья продуктов питания. На примере обсуждения одного из таких скандалов в статье исследуются особенности репрезентации болезненных для общества тем в китайских СМИ. В основу статьи положены материалы двух СМИ, относящихся к разным категориям, — это информационный правительственный сайт и популярный китайский сервис микроблогов Weibo. В статье подробно анализируется инцидент, произошедший в 2015 г., — захват властями партии контрабандного замороженного мяса, так называемого «мяса-зомби» возрастом 40 лет, для улучшения товарного вида которого использовались опасные химические вещества.

В статье приведен социолингвистический и текстуальный анализ электронных публикаций, появившихся в течение первой недели после скандала. Предметом специального исследования является то, как китайские традиционные (правительственные) и новые (условно либеральные) СМИ конструируют язык и когнитивные структуры вокруг проблемы продовольственной безопасности. Проводится анализ факта присутствия в электронных публи-

кациях и комментариях следующих пяти фреймов: определение субъектов ответственности, воздействие на человека, экономические последствия, решения и последствия, доверие людей. Каждый фрейм подразделяется на пять подфреймов — пять наиболее существенных вопросов, совокупность которых формирует данную когнитивную структуру.

Результатом исследования являются выводы о том, насколько популярен каждый из фреймов в каждом из двух рассматриваемых СМИ, ответы на какие из 25 вопросов присутствуют в публикациях.

Статья может быть полезна специалистам, интересующимся как проблемами современного китайского общества, так и особенностями репрезентации злободневных тем в СМИ и методами воздействия СМИ на аудиторию. Библиогр. 48 назв. Табл. 6.

Keywords: безопасность пищевых продуктов, «мясо-зомби», китайские СМИ.

1. Introduction

Language use is a socially constituted and historically situated mode of action that is in a dialectical relationship with other processes and aspects of society. The connections between language use and social practices are not always apparent but are often hidden, in particular when language use occurs at a national level and in a cross-cultural context. Needless to say, the transformations of economies, politics, societies, communities and cultures, in recent decades, facilitated by the onset of globalisation and development of information technology, have an important bearing on the way we see the roles of culture, and how we relate and communicate with one another. Indeed, many [1; 2] argues that these information are, to a significant degree, transformations in language and discourse. This is because discourse constitutes core mechanisms through which social practices evolve [3].

Within China, radical changes have occurred in all aspects of life, in politics, economics, education, social structures, values, traditions and identities. In an authoritarian society, these changes are mediated significantly through the power of language, carefully controlled by various sources of authority. Discourse, as a way of speaking and doing things, has become an indispensable instrument for political elites to manage a fluid, increasingly fragmented, but highly dynamic and yet fragile society [4]. People have become, by and large, dependent upon a heavily regulated use of language. And the media is a language carrier for the citizens. The word “*xinxihua*” (信息化, informatization) has become a key-word within the political discourse in China and the web has become not only something to control and monitor, but also a potentially efficient communication tool. Since he became President, Xi Jinping demonstrated his interest in media and public opinion. In a study released early 2014 [5], the University of Hong Kong’s China Media Project found that Xi had appeared in People’s Daily more than any other Chinese leader since Mao. During the first 18 months of his administration, Xi was mentioned by name in the paper 4,725 times, more than double that of his predecessor Hu Jintao [6]. Prof. Qian Gang found that Chinese leader Xi Jinping had a much higher profile in the *People’s Daily*, the flagship newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, than any of his predecessors going back to Mao Zedong and Hua Guofeng. According to an editorial reported by China Daily last February, President Xi, after making an inspection tour of People’s Daily, Xinhua News Agency, and China Central Television, declared that “it is necessary for the media to restore people’s trust in the Party, especially as the economy has entered a new normal and suggestions that it is declining and dragging down the global economy have emerged”. He talked about how to properly guide public opinion, enlightening that good

guidance needs proper forms; sermons only make people tired. Besides, while the media needs to report the positive aspects of the society, it must also cover the negative side, too, so that social progress is possible [7]. In the same month, state regulator SARFT (State Administration of Radio Film and Television) published draft rules that set strict guidelines on what can be published online and who can produce such content [8].

For long, Chinese consumers have been voicing concern over food scandals — from expired food products and gutter oil to poisoned rice. Chinese audiences are very keen on health- and food-related topics perhaps because they have been subjected to serious food safety incidents in recent years.

Moreover, China is the world's top meat consumer, but the mainland has long kept a tight grip over imports, often citing safety worries such as mad cow disease as the main reason behind bans on major producers such as the United States and India. Consequently demand has run ahead of domestic production, creating an opportunity for smugglers.

1.1. The incident

According to the Chinese General Administration of Customs, in June 2015, 21 gangs involved in the smuggling of frozen meat products that posed huge health risks to Chinese consumers were hunted down and the products seized in a crackdown. The crackdown took place in 14 provinces and regions around the Country. The Changsha Administration of Customs in Hunan province broke up two gangs with 20 members suspected of smuggling frozen meat products on June 1st 2015 and seized 800 tons of products worth more than 10 million RMB [9–15]. Some local and international media reports said instead that Chinese authorities had seized 100,000 tons (not 800 tons) of smuggled frozen meat, but they all agreed on the name: some of it was called “zombie meat” since it was up to 40 years old. The products were moved to the mainland via Vietnam, with smugglers hiring residents of border areas to move the products to Chinese border cities and then on to Changsha before the products were transported to several sites around the Country. Importers soaked them in hydrogen peroxide, a banned food additive, to make them look healthy and fresh, and to extend their shelf life. After having confiscated the frozen meat, all the products have been destroyed by officials [16]. The rotten meat included pork's feet and chicken's claws, chicken's wings and other meat products. Packaged chicken's claws are used in several regional Chinese cuisines and often served as a cold dish with a beer, a snack, soup or main dish. They are interchangeably called *feng zhua* (鳳爪, phoenix claws), *ji zhua* (雞爪, chicken claws), and *ji jiao* (雞脚, chicken feet). Usually simmered with soy sauce, Sichuanese peppercorn, clove, garlic, star anise, cinnamon and chili flakes, they enjoy wild popularity in the Country and can be found in supermarket and convenience stores not only around China but also in South-east Asia.

According to the South China Morning Post, Customs officials and police denied there had been any recent raids involving meat that old, but said chicken claws dating back to 1967 had been seized in 2013. The Food and Drug Administration statement said meat about four to five years old had been seized this year [17]. Hydrogen peroxide, a colourless liquid often used for disinfection and processing food, that causes vomiting, mouth irritations as well as throat and stomach problems if consumed in unsafe amounts was used to make them white and transform the meat in a “delicatessen” sold both in restaurants and night stalls. The views of opinions and consumers regarding the “zombie

meat” were reflected in both web articles and social media, becoming a very hot topic in 2015.

1.2. *The present study*

As food safety is considered among one of the most urgent issue to address at a national level in China, this paper will focus on the traditional media and new media representation of a specific food safety scandal, as representative example of how the Chinese media address this important topic. It will particularly concentrate on how Chinese traditional and new media platforms construct their language and frames around food safety, with special regards to the ”zombie meat” incident that happened in June 2015.

The present study does not confirm if the content of the news regarding ”zombie meat” was true or not, but only analyses it from a socio-linguistic and textual point of view.

Given the information above, there is reason to believe that the two different Chinese-language websites, namely the government-owned website *People.com.cn* (traditional media), leading key news website source and official website of the *People’s Daily*, and the enterprise-owned media the Sina *Weibo* microblog (UGC source, new media), would produce different types of textual genres and language register in the report of the same event, contributing in part to the framing scholarship particularly concerning food safety issues. In this framework, the paper will start by analyzing the structure and the content of Chinese language Weibo posts and newspaper’s articles. Then it will classify the main frames displayed by the website’s articles (media side) and Weibo posts (audience side). The hypothesis is that genre identification can shed a light on the intended purposes of the online texts and highlight the concrete functions performed by the traditional and new media, therefore further clarifying the peculiarities of the representation of a food safety issue in the Country.

This online materials seem to be relevant as this case had been considered by CFDA (Chinese Food and Drug Administration) as one of the most important Chinese food safety scandal in 2015 and explicated during the ”Media Scientific Explicatory Meeting for 2015 Hot Food Safety Cases” held in Beijing last May¹, affirming therefore that it had an influence over the national public.

2. Literature review

This study aimed to determine and compare how online news media cover the ”zombie meat” incident and how the audience members understand the same issue, using a combination of qualitative analysis and framing theory.

2.1. *Framing theory and News Frames*

Frames, according to Goffman [19], serve as ”principles of organization that govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them”. In media reports, frames can be observed in verbal and visual elements of news. Frames in text ”are manifested

¹ In May 2016 it was held in Beijing the ”Media Scientific Explicatory Meeting for 2015 Hot Food Safety Cases”, see the report [18].

by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments". The goal here is to identify and make explicit common tendencies among the various uses of the terms and to suggest a more precise and universal understanding of them [20, p. 51–58]. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described [20, p. 51–58].

The frames present in the mass media's portrayal of issues and events are called "media frames" [21, p. 103–122]. Scheufele and Tewksbury [22, p. 9–20] explained that framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences. In other words, messages in the media can affect people's different considerations and opinions by emphasizing some aspects of a problem.

In this study, media frames were determined by examining one online news portal coverage of the "zombie meat" incident, namely the website People.com.cn; audience frames were determined by examining people's postings on Weibo. We would like first to examine the extent to which government exercises control over online media. Second, it examined the correlation between media frames and audience frames to better understand how audiences were possibly influenced by media to come to understand a particular food safety incident.

Five generic frames, attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences and morality were examined to be dominant in Semetko and Valkenburg's study [23, p. 93–109] on press and television news frames on European political issues. These generic and other issue-specific frames were used by many other researchers on examining news coverage of political, risk and concrete food safety stories. Luther and Zhou [24, p. 857–872] examined the different frames using by Chinese and U.S. media on the same topic of SARS, analysing responsibility, human interest, conflict and economic consequences frames. Sun and Zhang [25, p. 42–47] analysed the frames of reason/blame, solutions and aftermath to compare the different coverage between two types of print media, China mainland and Taiwan, on the same topic, Sanlu contaminated milk powder incident.

In times of crisis and during periods of great ambiguity, the mass media satisfy the information needs of people. In the case of "zombie meat" incident, the health and wellbeing of people were placed at risk, enhancing people's dependence on the media for information about protective measures and government response, among others.

This study assumed that trust in different information providers can affect the frames they develop about a specific food safety issue based on their exposure to different information sources. Thus, it is hypothesized that different information sources, in this case online news media and a social media, will produce different frames in their coverage of the same topic or issue.

2.2. Mass media and social media in China

As an authoritarian society, China is characterized by a largely top-down pattern of political communication. The official discourse continues to produce 'closed texts' as a

dominant discursive strategy, transmitted through state communication apparatus like the Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily and China Central Television (CCTV). On the other hand, despite the potency of a discursive power facilitated by state-controlled instruments of communications, the political elites no longer monopolize the right to speak in the realm of public communication [26; 27], but have to grapple with challenges posed by a decentralised media industry [28, p. 925–942] and a diverse array of voices.

Today, although all Chinese media outlets in the country are still under government control, news media should not be simply considered as the mouthpiece of the Party, the journalists write news articles considering marketing elements while at the same time under ideological control of CCP [29; 27].

A de-centred, spontaneous, heterogeneous, potentially subversive, but rapidly expanding 'open form' discourse has started to proliferate as bottom-up societal voices. Multifarious, diverse, relaxed and individualistic, the societal 'open form' discourse operates to generate diverse views, interpretations, debates, contestations as well as dissent [4]. More importantly, this bottom-up discourse complicates, problematizes and interrogates official formulations of key sociocultural, economic, and political issues. As a dynamic discursive force in the participation of public affairs it is constantly pushing boundaries [30]. It constitutes the transformative form of discourse reproduction, bringing about possibilities of change, innovation and promise.

There are websites that are owned by joint-stock company even with foreign investments with editorial policies and news-collecting principles that differ in being slightly more liberal than the government-owned websites. Young people grow up in a more relaxed and much wealthier post-reform China and are better educated, better informed and, facilitated by the rapid growth of information and communications technology, more exposed to the wider world. They are attuned to what is happening around them through easy access to new media, rather than to officially-propagated messages of the traditional state channels [31].

2.3. News portal and Weibo microblog

Information technology has moved China closer to a level playing field of communication thus empowering bottom-up societal voices and nowadays, a large number of Chinese people rely on the Internet to get news information.

At the end of 2015, the number of 'netizens' (citizens that sign up onto the Internet) in China reached 688 million (+39.510.000 compared to the previous year), the world's largest. At the same time, mobile internet users grew to 620 million (+63.030.000 compared to 2014) and 90% of netizens used mobile phones to access the Internet.

Furthermore, in 2015, 564 million (564.400.000) users subscribed to a highly diverse range of internet news services, compared to the 518 million (518.940.000) of 2014. As for social media, 530 million (530.010.000) netizens used MicroBlogs in 2015 [32].

The web has proved to be the freest and most-favoured mode of communication for ordinary people.

In this study we examine the news portal People.com.cn. It represents the news websites and other media outlets that are pro-government in their coverage of events or their censorship and news selection principles. Official portal website launched by the People's Daily on January 1, 1997, it offers 16 versions in 17 languages, including Chinese

(simplified and traditional), Tibetan, Korean, English, Japanese, Russian, French, and so on. It publishes news in the form of text, picture, animation, audio and video, BBS, blog, microblog, podcast, talk bar, mobile phone, RSS, and webcast. Empowered by no less than 70 bureaus home and abroad, it publishes news events the moment they take place to global Internet users covering politics, economy, society, and culture².

Beyond being the official website of the People's Daily, the nationally circulated newspaper known for being the mouthpiece of the CCP and whose editorials and commentaries represent the viewpoints of the Chinese leadership, People.com.cn is also a news-based online information interchange platform collecting news from many mainstream news outlets in China.

There are news portal websites, however, that are relatively more liberal in their orientation and news-collecting principles. Among them is one of the largest portals in China, sina.com.cn, one of the main products of Sina Group which is an online media company serving China and the global Chinese communities³. The Sina microblogging site popularly known as Weibo was founded in 2009 by the Sina Group and has rapidly evolved to be the Chinese version of Twitter. Although also owned by Sina, it is independent from other products of Sina. Weibo and the portal have different online access, service, and market positioning. Entertainment, life, and happiness are the main themes for Weibo users, while the portal forwards all types of news for the general public.

Now Sina Weibo is the largest microblogging server in China, with more than 222 million monthly active users (MAU) worldwide, up 33% over the same period the previous year. Daily active users (DAU) was up even faster, reaching 100 million around the world⁴, they all issue postings, pictures, and source links accessible through webpages and mobile phones. Among the several types of social media now present in China, Weibo has been regarded as not only Chinese version of Twitter, but also a hybrid of Twitter and Facebook [34]. According to the 37th statistical report of Chinese Internet development by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in January 2016, 77% of Chinese netizens are using Weibo. On Weibo, registered users communicate, interact and share the moments of their lives. They can also follow and excavate other people's lives and interested topics and celebrities open up their lives to attract more followers. Even Chinese independent political candidates also use Weibo as an effective tool to frame their political messages. Weibo also works as a news and information source for the traditional media [35]. People talk and comment freely and equally on Weibo, which makes it be a good tool and channel to spread news [36]. Like Twitter, it is often the first place for news to break, and it hosts discussions about breaking news. Sina Weibo allows users to comment on any microblog entry, as they would on a normal blog post. This change was key to the exponential growth of microblogging in China, as it fit with Chinese habits of 'piling in' on a discussion: it's been exciting and empowering for Chinese microbloggers to see their posts attract hundreds or thousands of comments, giving them the feeling that what they have written is being passed on, is influencing the community and may actually change things. Those posting comments are able to trade insults or cheer for their favourite microbloggers. And so a space for discussion has emerged [36].

² Translated by the author from the People.com.cn website.

³ Translated by the author from the Sina.com.cn website.

⁴ Data of Q3 2015. See the Weibo report [33].

2.4. Media coverage of food safety issues in China

The Food Safety Law of People's Republic of China was adopted at the 7th Session of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China on February 28th 2009, and came into force as of June 1st, 2009. On April 24, 2015, the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress revised the 2009 Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China (Food Safety Law). The revised law came into effect on October 1st, 2015. The revisions to the Food Safety Law are wide-ranging, imposing stricter controls and supervision on food production and management. A review of food safety practices in China is essential to ensure compliance with the new law, limiting potential exposure to regulatory enforcement and subsequent loss in profits.

On December 9th, 2015, the China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA) published draft amendments to the Implementing Regulations of the Food Safety Law (Implementing Regulations) for public consultation. The draft Implementing Regulations has provided insights into how the administration intends to implement and enforce the new Food Safety Law, which contains 10 chapters with 154 articles, adding 50 new articles to the old law as well as other revisions. In spite of the implementations and efforts from the government regarding food safety legislation in China, food safety issues are still getting a growing attention from Chinese media and many scholars have investigated media coverage about food safety issues.

Based on the literature review discussed above, this study examines the extent to which the articles about the “zombie meat” incident will exhibit the following frames: (1) attribution of responsibility, (2) human impact, (3) economic consequences, (4) solutions and aftermath (5) public confidence. The first four frames were generated based on previous literature pertaining to risk-, health- or food safety-related topics. The last frame was developed according to the factual basis and specific features of the “zombie meat” incident. These frames are discussed in detail as follows:

- (1) *Attribution of responsibility*: this frame analyses who should be blamed and is responsible for the “zombie meat” food scandal.
- (2) *Human impact*: this frame talks about the impacts toward human being from the scandal; the testimonies of people affected by it and that dealt with it directly.
- (3) *Economic consequences*: this frame deals with the economic impact that this incident had on economy, local and national.
- (4) *Solutions and aftermath*: this frame explains what are the solutions suggested or taken, by the organizations and individuals involved in the case, to solve the issue.
- (5) *Public confidence*: this frame discusses the impact of this scandal on normal life and the increased level of anxiety experienced by the population towards meat products after the scandal occurred.

2.5. Hypothesis and Research Questions

It is hypothesized that different information sources, in this case online news media and social media, will produce different frames in their coverage of the same topic or issue. This, in turn, will result in varying media and audience frames shaped by storylines or

the valence of reports from an official news website and a private website, newsgathering principles and degrees of freedom to express views.

Prompted by the theoretical and methodological problems in this particular context, the present study is going to discover how ideology is reflected via the media discourses in relation to the food safety scandal of “zombie meat”. Thus, the following general questions can be raised:

1. What frames were present on media reports of People.com.cn when talking about the 2015 “zombie meat” scandal (media frames)?
2. What frames were present on the Weibo social media platform (audience frames)?
3. Is there any difference between news papers and new media, in terms of frame coverage for the studied food scandal?

To answer all the three research questions about which frames were present in the media, the audience side and the differences among them, a combination of content analysis and qualitative research was applied.

3. Method

3.1. Research methodology

As research methodology, a combination of two methods was adopted for the present study — content analysis and frame analysis, the strengths of each method compensating for the weaknesses of the other.

1. Content analysis

For the case study that we’ve selected, we looked at Chinese national newspaper and one of the most representative Chinese new media platform that covered the research issue within a defined period of time. From this, we can give the overall picture of the frequency of reporting and, in such terms, compare the newspaper and the social media outcomes. This approach may not answer all the research questions, but it justifies the samples and informs the reader on which samples should be analysed in greater depth.

2. Frame analysis

Frame analysis shows how the media (selected newspaper) and audience (Weibo posts) define and construct the issues by identifying and scrutinising key words within concrete texts. In this study, frame analysis is targeted based on the results obtained from the content analysis; they are used in conjunction to identify the frames in the texts.

3.2. Data collection and time period

We undertook a research on June 4th 2016 on the Chinese search engine Baidu, on the Chinese new media platform Sina Weibo and on the Chinese official website of *People.com.cn*, using the same key-word “zombie meat” (in Chinese *jiangshirou* 僵尸肉), with the following results.

On Baidu homepage more than 5 million results occurred (in detail 5,250,000); on Baidu news column *xinwen* 新闻 12,500 articles came up; on Baidu news column, adding a “news topic” tag *xinwenbiaoti* 新闻标题, we got 16,200 articles and on Baidu *tieba*

贴吧⁵ 646 posts occurred. The research on Baidu was used only as a starting reference tool, to understand how much material would be present on the web when talking about the studied issue, but was not considered in our research, since we decided to focus only on the two platforms of Sina Weibo and People.com.cn, considered as representative of a Chinese new media platform and a Chinese official traditional media platform. For Sina Weibo (weibo.com), the results linked to the zombie meat scandal were in total 958: except for one single result dated June 17th 2015, they started from June 23rd 2015, at 12:08, with a post from 21th Century Economic News that was forwarded 386 times, had 99 likes and 160 comments. On the official web site People.com.cn, during the first research phase, we considered both the results coming from the whole text (*xinwen quanwen* 新闻全文) and the results from the news tags (*xinwen biaoti* 新闻标题). While for the whole text we obtained 643 articles (in about 13 seconds), for the news tag we obtained 368 articles (in about 21 seconds). We then decided to focus for the present research on the “news tag” results only, since it was more correlated to the general aim of the present study.

As for the time slot to analyse, since both web articles and Weibo posts started to appear on the web on June 23rd, we decided to start our research from that date and to select the contents appeared both on Weibo and *People.com.cn* during the first 8 days since the news first appeared online. Therefore, the selected time was June 23rd – June 30th 2015.

An English language research was also conducted on the Chinese official newspaper China Daily, that produced a total of 7 results, coming from the USA (2 articles), Chinese (4 articles) and African (1) editions of China Daily. Since they first appeared on July 1st and the last one on July 17th (after the selected research period) and they were in English, they were excluded from the research and considered only as supporting material for English translations.

3.3. Data analysis, coding and translation

For the analysed web contents, only Chinese versions were available. Therefore, in order to analyse in depth the Chinese articles and Weibo posts, an English version was created. To do so, we used two translators⁶ that worked independently from each other and translated from Chinese to English all the selected *Weibo* posts and *People.com.cn* articles' contents. Both are fluent in Chinese and English. The few differences between the back-translation and the original wording of the web articles/Weibo posts were discussed until there was agreement that the Chinese version had the same meaning as the English version and viceversa. To determine frames, the coders used the Semetko and Valkenburg's study [23], following Wang's research on framing food safety in China [37]. All the five frames were examined through their visibility in the analysed texts by five questions⁷ and the total 25 answers were coded as “yes” (1) or “no” (0) for each unit of analysis and the number of positive or negative answers deciphered the visibility of the frames in the texts.

⁵ Baidu Tieba (Chinese: 百度贴吧; literally: “Baidu Paste Bar”) is the largest Chinese communication platform provided by the Chinese search engine company, Baidu. It is an online community bound tightly with internet search services, that functions by having users search or create a bar (Forum) by typing a keyword, and if the bar has not been created before, it is then created upon the search.

⁶ Namely the writer of the present research and assistant Wang Xilu (worked both as coders and translators).

⁷ All the questions are expressed in appendix A.

4. Results

4.1. Results of content analysis

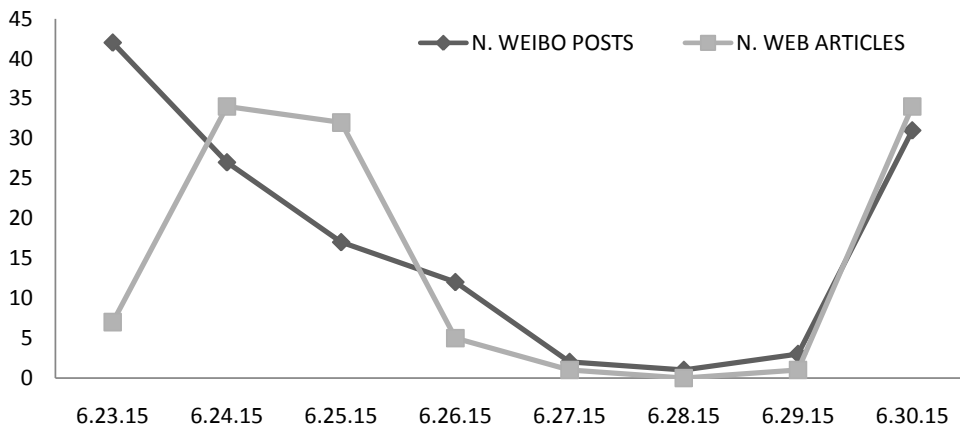
We can give the overall picture of the frequency of reporting and, in such terms, compare newspapers and social media outcomes. This approach may not answer all the research questions, but it justifies the samples and informs the reader on which samples should be analysed in greater depth.

Initial distribution

We used during our research the key word “zombie meat (*Jiangshirou* 僵尸肉)” both for web articles and social media posts’ titles. The total number of web articles was 114. After the first selection, they were further filtered erasing the articles that were repeated and the TV news services, resulting in a total of 33 original articles. The maximum peak of web articles published online happened during the days June 24th and June 29th (on both days we registered 34 articles).

The total number of Weibo posts collected during the selected time slot was 135 units (47 web pages), with a peak of 42 posts on the first selected day (June 23rd). Weibo posts and web articles’ distribution is shown in detail in Tab. 1, below.

Tab. 1. Weibo post and People.com.cn articles’ distribution



Frequency of reporting

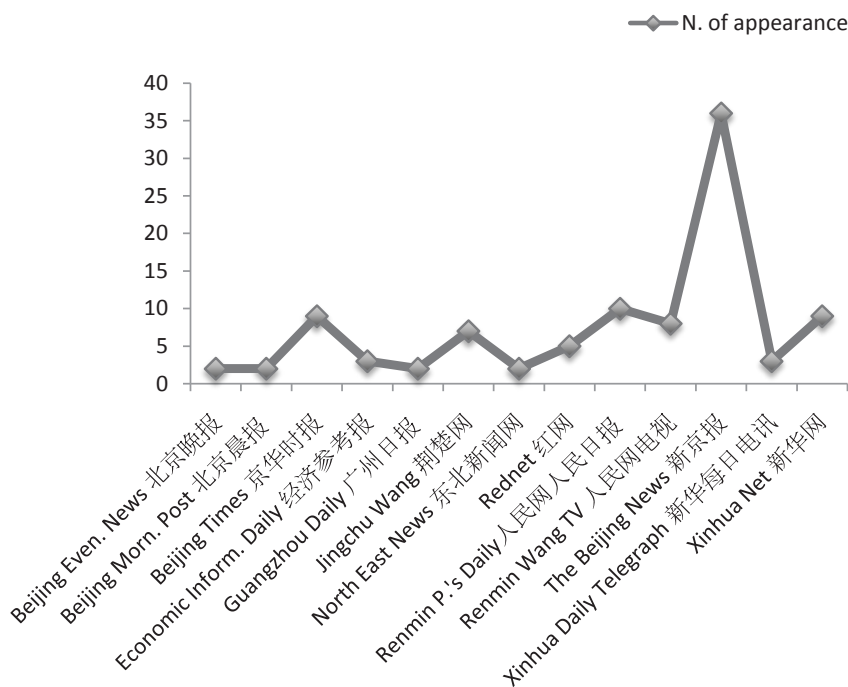
As for the frequency of reporting the same news, the most repeated (more than twice) web articles (considering the text only, since the title was often changed) appeared to be in total 6: one article dated June 30th (repeated 32 times, article ID:82) written on The Beijing News (*Xin Jingbao* 新京报) written by the journalists Li Dong and Yang Jie, finance section; the first one (repeated 14 times, article ID:1), article of Changsha Xinhua agency (*Xinhua wang* 新华网), wrote by journalist Li Dan, published online on June 23rd, legal section; one article dated June 25th (repeated 10 times, article ID:42) published on the People’s Daily (*Renmin Ribao* 人民日报) by journalist Lv Xiaoxun, opinion section; one article dated June 24th (repeated 6 times, article ID:11), written by journalist Wang Shichuan for

the Beijing Times (*Jinghua shibao* 京华时报), politics section; one article dated June 24th (repeated 4 times, article ID:14), written by journalist Xi Po for The Beijing News (*Xin Jingbao* 新京报), politics section; two articles dated June 24th (repeated 3 times, article ID:19, ID:24), respectively from the Economic Information Daily (*Jingji Cankao Bao* 经济参考报), by journalist Chen Wei, finance section, and from Xinhua Daily Telegraph (*Xinhua meiri dianxun* 新华每日电讯) by journalist Shu Shengxiang.

As for the Weibo posts, there was no repetition: we noticed that on the 140 character-based platform some words were repeated, but not entire posts, so we treated each of them independently.

From the below Tab.2, it is possible to see the provenience of the articles and the original news sources. The most popular media outlet during the zombie meat food scandal was The Beijing News (36 times), followed by People's Daily (10 times) and Beijing Times and Xinhua Net (both 9 times).

Tab. 2. Media outlets, sources of news articles



It is interesting to note how the article dated June 30th written on The Beijing News (*Xin Jingbao* 新京报) written by the journalists Li Dong and Yang Jie appeared to be the most popular during the 8 days following the arise of the zombie meat food scandal. According to The Beijing News' website, The Beijing News (www.bjnews.com.cn) is a "mainstream daily newspaper based in Beijing co-founded by Guangming Daily and Nanfang Daily Group, and supervised by the formers". Approved by General Administration of Press and Publication, the regulatory authority of the Beijing News has been changed since Sep.1st, 2011. The newspaper is now supervised by Propaganda Department of CPC Committee of Beijing City. With its first issue being published on the 11th of November 2003, The Beijing

News is the first Chinese newspaper co-founded by media groups from different regions in China; it is also China's first mainstream newspaper that adapts shareholding system [38]. People's Daily, that appeared to be the second most preferred online article source, is the largest Party newspaper in China founded in 1948. It is a large-scale information interaction platform and it is also one of the largest comprehensive Internet media entities on the Internet. As a leading key news website in China, it upholds the belief "authority and strength originate from the people [39]". With "authority, popularity and credibility" as its tenet, it takes "multiple languages, all media forms, globalization and full coverage" as objectives, and "disseminating China's news and covering world news" as its mission⁸.

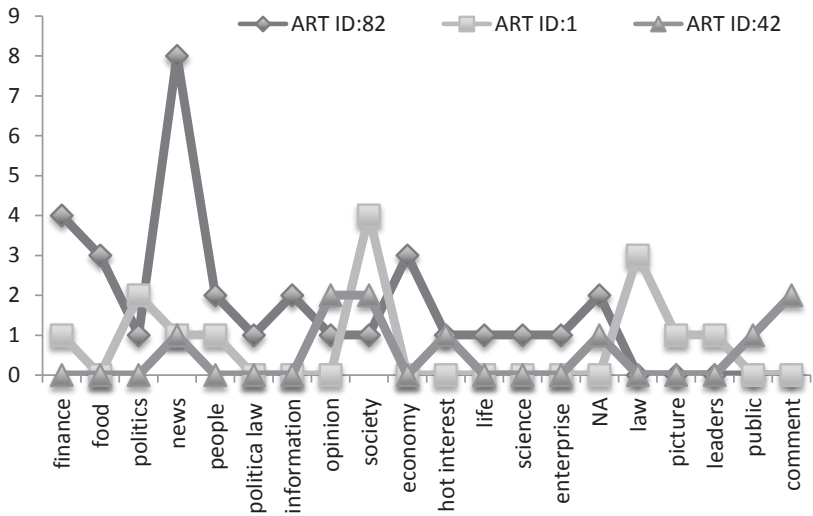
Beijing Times, started in 2001 and part of the People's Daily Group, rated third together with Xinhuanet, which consistent principle is to "persist in giving top priority to national interests, unswervingly uphold correct guidance to public opinion and safeguard the authenticity, authoritativeness and objectivity of news reporting"⁹.

Among all the 135 Weibo posts, 77 of them had an external link to a website news (57,03%). The most popular link was the one reporting the Xinhua Net web article written by journalist Li Dan on June 23rd, that was repeated 19 times, while the others were all different articles which sources were not repeated more than once, therefore they were not inserted in Tab. 2.

News category

Among these six most popular web articles, we looked where the first three (repeated respectively, 32, 14, 10 times during the selected timeslot) were incorporated, within the newspaper columns. The most used columns for the above articles, were, as represented in Tab. 3: news (8 times), finance (4), society (4), law (3), opinion (2) and comment (2) sections. For the Weibo posts, there was no category division.

Tab. 3. Most popular categories for web articles



⁸ See the English website of the newspaper [39].

⁹ See the English website of the newspaper [40].

Looking at the Weibo posts, we considered for the content analysis, different variables. The social media accounts that posted about the zombie meat scandal in the selected period of time, 90 were public V accounts (66,66%) and 41 were private accounts (30,37%) — among them, 27 were private V accounts (20%) while 4 were only normal accounts (10,37%); for 4 accounts it was not possible to identify (2,96%).

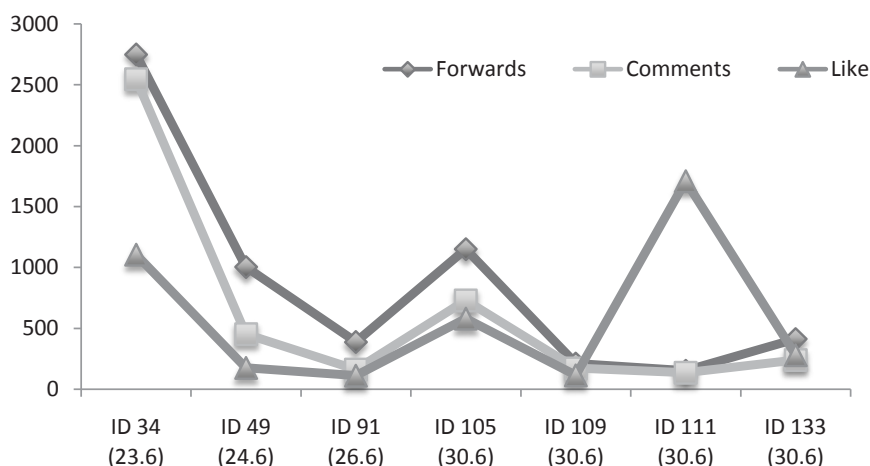
While the usage of the hashtag “#” used to identify messages on a specific topic are very popular on Twitter, in China, for the specific food safety incident analysed, we counted only 35 hashtag (25,92%), a relatively low amount considered the media attention the case gained in June 2015.

Only 13 of the Weibo posts used the “@” to connect their post to other users (9,62%).

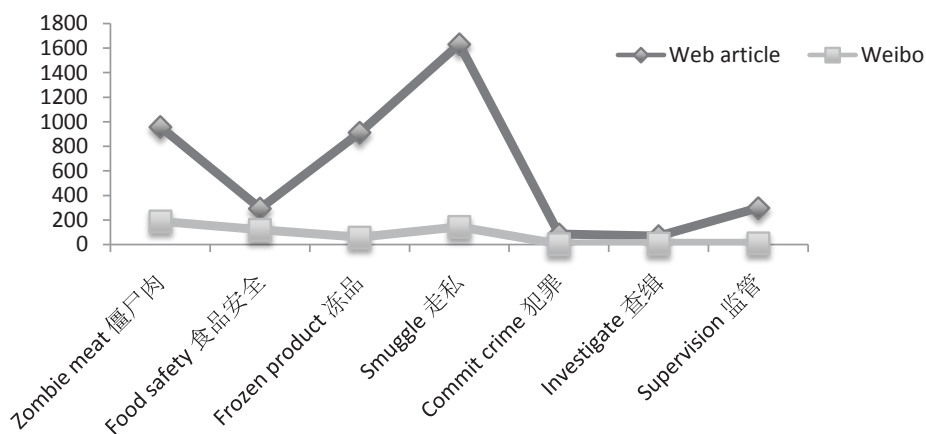
A high amount of image was instead used with Weibo: 111 netizens used images with text (82,22%) while only 24 (17,77%) preferred the usage of text only.

We also looked into the most popular Weibo posts (the ones that had more than 100 forwards, like and comments), distributed in Tab. 4, and briefly individuated some of the major key words, in Tab. 5.

Tab. 4. Most popular Weibo posts



Tab. 5. Some of the major key-words utilized



4.2. Results of frame analysis

The first research question asks what frames are present in the online media coverage of the zombie meat incident. The frames were *attribution of responsibility*, *human impact*, *economic consequences*, *solutions and aftermaths* and *public confidence*. Among the total 25 questions that defined the 5 frames, some of them were omitted, since none of the article answered those questions. They were, respectively:

Frame 2, question 3: Does this story mention that the zombie meat was banned by law because of its adverse impacts on human health?

Frame 3, question 3: Does this story mention the influence of this incident on stock market?

Frame 3, question 4: Does this story mention health care costs incurred by victims and their families, employers, and the government?

Frame 4, question 3: Does this story mention what the sellers (restaurants/supermarkets) did to protect brand credibility?

Frame 4, question 4: Does this story mention compensating the victims for their suffering?

Within the website articles, we used content analysis to determine the most prominent frames, which resulted to be the *solutions and aftermath* frame, while the *economic consequences* was the least visible.

The second research question asks what frames are present in the social media coverage of the zombie meat incident. To determine whether the same frames were also present on the audience side, the same counting was applied: the frame *human impact* was the most prominent one, while the *attribution of responsibility* was the less visible on Weibo posts.

Among the total 25 questions that defined the 5 frames for the Weibo posts, some of them were omitted too, since none of the Weibo posts answered those questions. In common with the online articles, question 3 and 4 of frame 3 and of frame 4 didn't get any answer. Differently from the online articles, also question 5 of frame 3 (mention to the loss of the industry) was not mentioned on Weibo. They were, respectively:

Frame 3, question 3: Does this story mention the influence of this incident on stock market?

Frame 3, question 4: Does this story mention health care costs incurred by victims and their families, employers, and the government?

Frame 3, question 5: Does this story mention the economic losses of the industry or manufactory chain, such as from farmers to retailers?

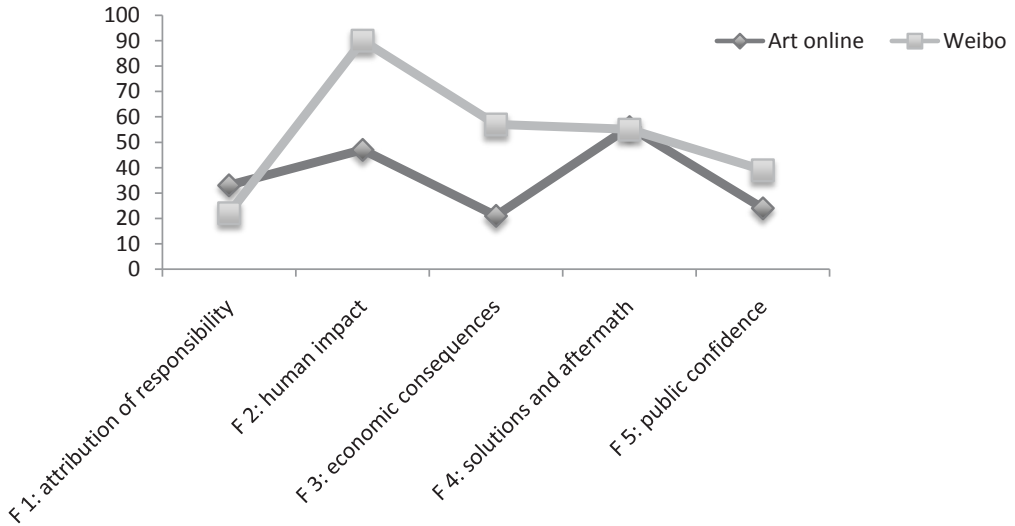
Frame 4, question 3: Does this story mention what the sellers (restaurants/supermarkets) did to protect brand credibility?

Frame 4, question 4: Does this story mention compensating the victims for their suffering?

Frame distributions in online articles and Weibo posts are below represented in Tab. 6.

Finally, the third research question asks if there is any difference among the frames displayed on online articles and on Weibo, and if so, which are the differences. The answer to this questions is discussed in detail in the below chapter.

Tab. 6. Frame distributions in online articles and Weibo posts



5. Discussions and conclusions

This study conducted a content analysis to examine media frames embedded in the online news posted on the website People.com.cn and the social media platform Weibo, regarding the “zombie meat” food scandal that occurred in June 2015, with the final aim to identify how the same food scandal was handled by media and by audience, looking for differences between the presence of frames used by these two groups of people.

Findings revealed that all the five identified frames occurred on the news portal and on Weibo.

5.1. Media Frames

The *solutions* frame was the most visible one among media frames. In detail, all the solutions mentioned in the online articles are expressed in hypothetical form, through the usage of textual forms such as “should/must” (应该 / 必须 / 要 / 更应 / 特别要 / 不仅要 / 更需要 / 更要), future forms expressing willingness (将 / 会), indicating suggestions about what the government and the related departments should do to solve the problem. This proves the high attention that media paid to the “zombie meat” issue, since it is considered affecting the whole health of the population. In the articles many successful cases were mentioned, where the Customs seized, sequestered and destroyed tons of rotten meat; all the involved departments were mentioned too (industry and commerce sectors, public security, immigration inspection department, national and local State and Drug Administration) and some considerations on the implementation of the food safety law and the need to build up a proper traceability system were done.

The most used verbs in this frame leads to expressions such as “enhancing the control”, “coordinate closely”, “build up a new system” (加强 / 配合 / 建立), indicating the need to improve the current situation, with positive textual connotations.

Chinese president Xi Jinping, premier Li Keqiang, vice premiers Zhang Gaoli and Wang Yang were all mentioned in this frame, since they all “made important instructions that would increase the transparency of information and establish the food quality traceability system”, with the clear role of promoting a positive image of the government. This can be considered as a reference to what Premier Li Keqiang said last June 11th when he talked about the needs to innovate procedures and increase efforts to improve the supervision of food production and sales to ensure safety. The Premier gave instructions to a national teleconference on strengthening food safety in Beijing. The government, producers and other parties concerned should all be held responsible for safeguarding food safety, which concerns everyone’s health, the Premier said. A zero tolerance attitude should be adopted toward anything that compromised food safety, the Premier noted and said efforts should be revved up at the grassroots level to ensure strict supervision and law enforcement [41]. And media play an important role in the game. The ability and responsibility of the bodies responsible for the dissemination of information are considered relevant in consolidating the executive’s credibility, especially at times when the administration is confronted with the management of a crisis that jeopardizes the safety of citizens or their vital interests [42]. In the “zombie meat” scandal, few suggestions on how government bodies should publicize more information regarding food safety to boost awareness of the problems appeared in the articles too. Neither compensation for the victims nor what the sellers did to protect their brands appeared in this frame.

The second frame, for visibility, was the *human impact* one. People.com.cn’s articles paid attention to the harm on human health of “zombie meat”, indirectly enlightening the fact that it was prohibited by the Chinese government. The *human impacts* often serves the purpose to touch readers’ hearts. In this frame were included testimonies that were all coming from the officials directly involved in the products’ seize or from experts, including nutritional doctors, who explained to the readers the possible diseases that the rotten meat could bring to people if eaten or the effects of the temperature difference, when freezing and de-freezing the meat repeatedly. This kind of “risk communication” towards the public has been getting an increasingly higher importance for the Chinese government, that, conscious of the need to become a more trustworthy speaker, has been in the recent years focusing on international cooperation with international organization in the field of food safety, with a focus –among others- on risk communication in the food safety field¹⁰. On November 19th the Press Center of China Food and Drug Administration CFDA and the China National Food Industry Association, in cooperation with the School of Journalism and Communication of Peking University, launched a contest¹¹ for young students and researchers in the field of risk communication, aimed to recruit young communicators expert in social media usage, in order to provide support to scientists and industry in the important job of disseminating food safety awareness and knowledge to the public [43].

¹⁰ Last November 2nd — November 3rd it was held in Shanghai the CIFSQ 2016 (China International Food Safety and Quality Conference 2016), During the conference, attended by representatives of CFSA (China National Center for Food Safety Risk Assessment), CFDA (China Food and Drug Administration), EFSA (European Food Safety Authorization) and US FDA (US Food and Drug Administration), Chinese officials discussed with European and American counterparts about international cooperation in the food assesment fields, mentioning also the need to improve cooperation in the risk communication field.

¹¹ The contest is divided into two main themes: “I am so I am safe” (我作为、我安全 wwo zuowei, wo anquan) and “Food safety has you, has me” (食品安全有你有我 shipin anquan, you ni you wo).

Almost same visibility had the *attribution of responsibility* and *economic consequences* frames. As for the first one, the audiences were exposed to a lot of media reporting about this incident and they could receive the solutions and responsibilities information from mass media. Then, after the issue was exposed, people had their own opinions about who should take responsibility, but they only slightly expressed that through a social network. Government and the current Chinese system as a whole, that included all the already mentioned departments (described in an article as an “empty shell”), were considered to be the main responsible for this incident and all the departments were pointed as negligent. One of the recurrent sentences that appeared in this frame was “everyone is involved, no one cares” (谁都参与谁都不管), while in the audience frame it was used only once, an unexpected result. This seems to reveal the presence of a certain measure of independency within the state-run media. Due to the numerous lacks of supervision and the low risks of punishment, the smuggles and some citizens that live on the borders with South Asian countries such as Vietnam could successfully smuggle in the rotten meat, directing it to 2–3 tier cities. First cities such as Beijing and Shanghai were also mentioned in the articles, but always in positive terms, indicating that no rotten meat was arrived in the local markets. It clearly indicates the existing differences among big cities, direct municipalities and suburban areas when it comes to supervision, law enforcement and food safety checks. This local diversity in supervision enforcement expressed by the media was an unexpected result too, since the central government is constantly trying to improve food safety law and its implementation, both on a national and a local level, for example with a strict supervision on standards. As mentioned to prof. Chen Junshi [44] during the last CIFSQ 2016 Conference in Shanghai last November, according to the Food Safety Law, the currently existing 4800 over-lapped and contradicted standards were cleaned-up and integrated into one set of mandatory national food safety standards; at the same time 500 new standards were promulgated¹². The government, the meat industry (negligent) and the smugglers themselves were accused of responsibility: human being without any moral, ready to run after money only. No mention was made to the retailers.

In the economic consequences frame, no mentions were made to the stock market and the health care costs of the incident, but indirect mentions to the reduced sales and the economic national level losses were pointed out, indirectly, mentioning the value and amount of products seized during the attacks in the provinces involved.

Lastly, the *public confidence* was the less visible frame among the selected media articles. Not much mention was made to the consumers’ public confidence.

Due to the always present and constant control operated by the Chinese government on the media, it appears clear to understand that the media could not report views that questioned the central government about a domestic issue of such importance as this food safety scandal — or deliberately would not do it — operating a self-censorship.

The media articles were depicted in Tab. 2 as part of different news columns. They appeared in the news (8 times), finance (4), society (4), law (3), opinion (2) and comment (2) columns. This shows that this “zombie meat” case was primarily considered as news (actuality) issue first, and eventually inked to its financial consequences and to the population, which is, however, incongruent with the frame outcomes of the *economic consequences*, which rated at the fourth place in terms of visibility, out of the five frames.

¹² CIFSQ 2016 (China International Food Safety and Quality Conference 2016), for the complete presentations’ download, see [44].

The greater communication effectiveness and the timeliness of the new medium of information Weibo quickly bring into question the already low credibility of the media State, creating new spaces of dissent, in which serious popular discontent emerges clearly [45]. In our study, the fact that on the first day of the selected time the highest peak of Weibo posts was registered (42 posts) and for People.com.cn the peak was instead reached on June 24th (34 articles) proves that traditional media's response is still slower than new media's one.

When talking about new media in China it is possible to refer to it indicating the phenomenon with the term "micro-propagation" of the new media as the new driving force for the social development of China, in place of traditional communication. Microblogs such as Weibo and WeChat platforms, micro-video and all other forms of micro communicative propagation are drastically changing the media landscape and the Chinese public opinion, leading to an integration of traditional media and new media [46].

With regards to the visibility of frames in the audience's postings on Weibo in our study, the five media frames were also presented, which indicated that in this specific incident the media can still affect the audience, at least at some extent. Under a health-risky situation as the one represented by the "zombie meat" scandal, audience took information mostly from media and were dependent from it when sharing information on their social media online (as represented by the high % of external link present in the Weibo posts).

What it is interesting to note, is that the term "zombie meat" appeared for the first time on the social media platform, and was *then* re-used in the media articles in the following days. Moreover, the slang terms "born after the 70s" (70后) and "born after the 80s" (80后) that clearly refer to the young generations, were taken from the web and repeated in some media articles, even if they found the highest visibility on the audience frames, together with the term "aged meat" (高龄肉). In an environment, such as the Chinese one, where the new regulations aim to contrast online anonymity and to dissuade bloggers from media outcry [45], this clearly indicates a slight reverted tendency of audience frames' influence on media frames, which is quite a new factor in the Chinese web landscape and indicates the growing communication empowerment of Chinese netizens,

Audience appreciated the most the *human impact* frame, which rated first in terms of visibility. Social media are considered [44] the megaphone of Chinese citizens, outraged by the mismanagement of local governments and the widespread corruption among Party officials; they constitute a space for complaint, denounce of social injustices, violations of property and labor rights; a square for nationalistic claims. It is therefore natural that netizens focused mostly on the impact that such a huge scare could have on (their) human life. The adverse impacts of the consumption of "zombie meat" on human health were repetitively discussed, together with the inconvenience brought to the population and victim's pains. Among these, testimonies (or better, comments of officials' testimonies) such as "once opened the wagon, the whole compartment smelled so much to make me vomit" (整整一车厢, 打开门差点吐了) were frequent in this frame, and several times diseases such as SARS (禽流感), aphtha (口蹄疫), crazy cow (疯牛病) and other diseases that endanger human's life were mentioned in the posts. Under the uncertain current situation of food safety in China and due to the many food scandals that occurred in the last years in the Country, from milk powder to "hogwash oil", it is reasonable that the population is

worried about its health and talks about it. The website “Zhichu Chuangwai” (掷出窗外) that literally means “Through it out of the window” realized by the by-then Fudan University student Wu Heng is a brilliant example of the high amount of food scares that occurred in China in the last years and gives us a brief overview of them. Stopped few years ago, this website has been a precious archive of the main food scandals that happened in China between 2004 and 2011 and included thousands of them, with the possibility to search for them using key-words, provinces’ names or items’ names; it was also awarded by the Chinese government and used by Chinese researchers active in the food safety sector as database for research purposes¹³.

In the posts the words “huge disaster (重灾区)” were repeated incessantly in this frame, together with the consistent mention to chemical drugs used, such as the hydrogen peroxide (氧化氢).

The *economic consequences* and the *solution* frames had a similar visibility on Weibo, but on the Weibo posts the content linked to these two frames indicated, respectively, the value of the products seized (value mentioned started from 10.000.000 RMB — 1000万人民币 — up to 3.000.000.000 RMB — 30亿人民币) and the quantity of products found (mentions started from 800 tons — 800吨 — up to 100.000 tons — 10万吨), not mentioning the real economic consequences that this scandal had on the industry, on the stock market nor the health care costs. This could be explained by limited awareness and knowledge of economic factors by the netizens, that in this case simply repeated what different media sources wrote in the previous days.

Among the 7 Weibo posts that attracted more than 100 forwards, comments and likes, five of them were public V accounts while only two were private. The Weibo post that attracted the highest number of like (ID111, 1709 likes) was written by the private user Sha Yi 沙溢: together with a personal exclamation (“What is the difference with eating rubbish? Lack of moral!” 这和吃垃圾有区别吗！缺德啊), it only included a link to the web news portal “Wang Yi” 网易新闻 that discussed the low cost of maintaining frozen meat (17 RMB per ton). As mentioned above, the economic aspects of the scandal attracted attention only when mentioning this aspect and the value and quantity of the product seized, but no direct mention to stock market, meat industry losses or national wide economic losses.

The Weibo post that received the highest amount of comments and forwards (2546 comments, 2749 forwards) was written on June 23rd (first day of the scandal) and came from a private user too (ID34). Among the possible reasons why this post, that mentioned in the text the Xinhuanet article already mentioned by other users, gained the highest interest from the web, could be related to the fact that it used the hashtag Weibo explosion (微博爆料) and the high fan’s number of the author, called “Happy张江” (7431878 fans¹⁴).

Public confidence and *attribution of responsibility* frames were not very visible on Weibo and differences with media side for these frames are discussed below. Worthy to notice that in the *public confidence* frame on audience side the blame on government is very seldom mentioned, and when it happens, it usually uses interrogative forms such as “whose fault is it?” (谁之过?) or “who is ultimately responsible for the safety of our tongue?” (谁最终为我们舌尖上的安全负责?). This could be explained in two ways:

¹³ See the website [47].

¹⁴ Data available on August 15th 2016.

first, the majority of Weibo accounts analysed in the study were public V accounts, so governmental-related (more than 66% of the total Weibo posts). The web is an important resource to use in order to “get back the microphone of internet” [45, p. 19], therefore, the political usage of a more positive, simple, friendly discourse through official Weibo accounts appear necessary in order to supple public opinion. Secondly, it could be related to the Chinese government’s tight since 2015 on social media. According to the Cyber Administration of China¹⁵, the 2015 regulations required users who post comments online, or in chat rooms and blogs, to register using their real name and agree to abide by a code of conduct. That code includes pledges that users will not criticize the Communist Party, make racist remarks nor post pornography. The new rules also sought to stop the use of code words or other expressions often employed by Chinese web users to refer to controversial people or events. For example, the disgraced Chinese politician Bo Xilai was often referred to as BXL. It is understandable that the Weibo private users were very carefully when mentioning government.

5.3. Differences and correlations between media and audience frames

The government now allocates to social media a task traditionally reserved to investigative journalism: to collect feedbacks and even critics of the government’s policies [45]. At the same time, the government seems to adopt an ambivalent attitude towards the social networks: on the one hand it exerts an increasingly tight control on users and on network operators; on the other hand it grants to social media a complaint function for people’s discontent, aimed at overseeing public opinion, listen to the people and gather feedback — even negative — within a disciplined space [45]; the outcomes of our study are in line with the above sentence.

The third research question asks if there is any difference among the media and audience frames, and if so, which are the differences. Both in media than in audience cases the first four frames displayed a higher visibility for the frames’ first questions, respectively: blame to the government (frame 1), adverse impact on human health (frame 2), reduced sale volumes (frame 3), solutions from the government (frame 4), while for the fifth frame *public confidence* we noted an inversion of interest among media and audience. In regards to the fifth frame, while the articles mentioned the erosion of the credibility of the government, the Weibo posts pointed more attention to the erosion of the Countries involved: even if most of the times reference to foreign Countries was suggested with comments such as “labels were written in foreign languages” (包装上全是外文文字), in the Weibo posts USA and Vietnam were mentioned as possible countries of origin for the frozen products, since frozen food is often considered to be a strategic food stock for these Countries (多来源于国外的过期“战备肉”). This could be explained as the government (media) sensibility to mention foreign Countries when talking about a food safety scandal that could affect international affairs and politics, while in the case of private netizens, the government allocates to the people the above mentioned “complaint function”.

Still, in the *public confidence* frame, both media and audience mentioned the same brand: Hong Xing refrigerator warehouse (红星冷库) in Hunan Changsha, considering it to be the “entrance gate” for all this rotten meat, before it reached 2–3 ties cities around China.

¹⁵ See [48].

As for the *economic consequences* frame, the reduced sales and the economic national level losses were mentioned the highest amount of times in both media and audience cases, always indirectly: mentions to the value of the products seized and the amount of products. Also the low cost of keeping frozen meat was mentioned, mostly in Weibo posts.

The stock market and the health care costs weren't mentioned neither in the media nor in the audience frames, demonstrating that none of them pay a great attention to these aspects, when it comes to a food safety issue.

In both media and audience sides, all the five predefined frames were present that revealed first it was applicable to examine framing theory in new media, Internet-based news websites. And second, the results suggested the feasibility of using postings on social media to measure audience frames in the era when audiences have multiple information sources.

One of the main aim of governments — on a global level — in publicizing information to the public is indeed the promotion of trust in governmental institutions. In the Chinese case, the existence of *public confidence* frame, even if it didn't come out as the most popular one in the study, still revealed that when such a health risky incident happened, the public easily lose their confidence toward current Chinese food safety conditions, government and even mass media, that are mainly considered to be the “voice of the Party”. Within this contest, it seems that the Chinese government, coherently with the international discourse on this matter, has still room for improvement.

5.4. Limitations of the present study

This study shows evident limitations. First, it did only partially take into account the lack of freedom and government's control over Chinese media that of course affects the results using framing analysis. Methodologically, we didn't use statistical analysis but used instead a combination of content and qualitative analysis to identify, analyse and discuss frames. Additionally, the 25 questions generated for the 5 frames might not have covered entirely and comprehensively the frames. In detail, the *economic frame* resulted to be the less used, that could be explained as not attractive content for media and audiences, or linked to the fact that the incident didn't have any real economic consequences. The same applies for the *solutions frame* that did not display any response on the sellers' actions nor the compensations for the population. For future studies, statistical analysis could be used in combination with qualitative analysis; furthermore, diverse questions should be developed to identify better the media and audience frames.

APPENDIX A — Frames and sub frames

Frame 1: attribution of responsibility

1. Does the story mention the wrongdoings of meat industry?
2. Does the story suggest that meat-processing industry should be responsible for the incident?
3. Does this story blame that the governmental organizations are responsible for this incident?

4. Does this story blame retailers for knowingly selling expired meat to the public?
5. Does this story suggest that other individuals and entities should be responsible?

Frame 2: human impact

1. Does this story have a statement that eating expired meat will bring adverse impact on human health?
2. Does this story introduce the symptoms, diseases and disorders caused by eating this expired meat?
3. Does this story mention that the zombie meat was banned by law because of its adverse impacts on human health?
4. Does this story mention the victims' pain and suffering?
5. Does this story mention the inconveniences brought to regular consumers?

Frame 3: economic consequences

1. Does this story mention the reduced sales of the products concerned in general?
2. Does this story mention any country-level economic losses, such as reduced meat imports?
3. Does this story mention the influence of this incident on stock market?
4. Does this story mention health care costs incurred by victims and their families, employers, and the government?
5. Does this story mention the economic losses of the industry or manufactory chain, such as from farmers to retailers?

Frame 4: solutions and aftermath

1. Does this story mention any actions to handle the product concerned in market?
2. Does this story mention solutions from governmental organizations?
3. Does this story mention what the sellers (restaurants/supermarkets) did to protect brand credibility?
4. Does this story mention compensating the victims for their suffering?
5. Does this story mention punishing those who violated the law?

Frame 5: public confidence

1. Does this story mention people's reluctance to use or eat the product concerned?
2. Does this story mention increased levels of anxiety and worry over the general food safety situation?
3. Does this story mention erosion of the reputation of some brands?
4. Does this story mention erosion of the reputation of the countries involved?
5. Does this story mention erosion of the credibility of government?

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