

Perceptions and Attitudes of Chinese Youth Toward Late Marriage

--Text Mining Based on Sina Weibo Content

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Abstract: As a physical carrier of human thoughts and values, social media plays a crucial role in the change of contemporary youth's concept of marriage. Given the trend of late marriage among Chinese youth, this study explores the perceptions and attitudes of Chinese youth toward late marriage based on the text mining of the topic of "late marriage" on Sina Weibo. This study finds that the shift in the youth group's perception of marriage has begun to develop toward the aspect of spiritual needs, and that the youth group still generally has a positive attitude toward late marriage. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the perception and attitude of today's youth groups towards late marriage in order to guide them to form a correct view of marriage.

Keywords: social media, late marriage, Chinese youth, text mining

1. Introduction

According to statistics from the Civil Affairs Bureau of China, marriage registrations in 2022 were 7.636 million [1]. A record low for the number of marriages since the Ministry of Civil Affairs published the data in 1986, and a new low point for the number of marriages in the country over the past 35 years. Concurrently, since the 1990s, late marriage has been prominent in China [2]. The lowering of the marriage rate and the rise in the age of marriage has often indirectly led to social problems such as lower fertility rates and an aging population. As a result, all sectors of society have begun to pay attention to late marriage [3].

Young people are at the age of marriage, and others easily influence their views on marriage, and their views on marriage show strong plasticity. As an important channel for people to obtain information in contemporary society, the topic setting and guidance of the media will play an essential role in the public's outlook on life and value orientation. In postmodern culture, the content of the press is not a "mirror reproduction" of the social reality; on the contrary, society is a reflection of the media. Under the trend of increasing Internet users and the digital transformation of society, social media has penetrated every aspect of people's lives and has a subtle influence on people's values[4]. The current social media are deconstructing and reconstructing the concept of marriage of contemporary youth, significantly affecting their willingness to marry.

Therefore, it is of great practical significance to explore the perception and attitude of Chinese

unmarried young people towards late marriage from the social media perspective, analyze the media influencing factors of Chinese young people's late marriage, and put forward effective education and guidance strategies to promote the physical and mental health of young people and to guide them to form a correct outlook on marriage and love.

2. Research Design

2.1. Research Sample

As one of the most important sources of information for Chinese netizens, the web has become one of the most used social media in people's daily life. China's largest Weibo platform--Sina Weibo (from now on referred to as Weibo), has nearly 600 million users and has a relatively high degree of data openness and rich expression of ideas and opinions [5]. Therefore, this study utilizes the Sina Weibo platform to study the topic of "late marriage" using text-mining research methods.

This study selects the Weibo topic of "late marriage" as the research object, and the topic has formed as high as 17.53 million readers and 42,000 discussions so far, which provides sufficient data support for the study.

This study used web crawler technology to randomly obtain the daily text on Sina Weibo between June 10, 2023, and July 10, 2023, with "late marriage" as the topic tag, and clean the data by firstly deduplicating all data samples and deleting special symbols and other formatting content; secondly deleting meaningless numbers or vacant values and other insubstantial content; and thirdly, checking and cleaning the data as a whole. Number strings or empty values and other flimsy content; third, the data is checked and cleaned as a whole, and finally obtained, a total of 585 influential Weibo texts, including the time of issuance, content, comments and likes, which make up the basic unit of the data research conducted in this study [6].

2.2. Research Method

In terms of research method, this study uses a combination of text mining and qualitative analysis methods to analyze the content of Weibo texts, presenting the themes of late marriage and the tendency of emotional attitudes in the Weibo posted by users and exploring in depth the viewpoints and stances presented behind different perspectives. The specific research lines are as follows: firstly, to analyze the word frequency of the Weibo text, giving the theme characteristics of the late marriage Weibo topic in which young people participate in the discussion; secondly, to analyze the sentiment analysis of the captured web text, presenting the distribution characteristics of the sentiment of young people participating in the debate of the late marriage Weibo topic [7]. Finally, based on the content of specific Weibo, the views and positions behind the different perspectives of the participating youth are analyzed.

3. Data analysis

3.1. Characterization of topics for discussion

To further understand the main issues discussed by young people under the topic of "late marriage," this study utilized the ROST software to analyze the word frequency of the acquired Weibo text, and the final analysis results retained the top 20 high-frequency keywords, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: High-frequency word keywords in “late marriage” topic (top 20)

Words	Word Frequency (times)	Percentage
late marriage	730	25.87%
get married	323	11.45%
literature	238	8.43%
marriage	237	8.40%
emotion	223	7.90%
bachelordom	135	4.78%
music	105	3.72%
healing	105	3.72%
older	82	2.91%
youth	71	2.52%
age	70	2.48%
sing	69	2.45%
happiness	63	2.23%
girl	53	1.88%
love	51	1.81%
passion	48	1.70%
unmarried	48	1.70%
constellation	46	1.63%
early marriage	44	1.56%
mate	41	1.45%
child	40	1.42%

As shown in the table, the most frequent word is "late marriage," and other related words include "marriage," "literature," "emotion," "bachelordom," and so on. Words like "literature," "healing," and so on show that contemporary youth's attitude towards marriage has changed from a mandatory option of accomplishing "traditional tasks" to an optional one of satisfying spiritual needs. Young people's expectations of marriage have become more related to literature, music, and healing than the mundane. Today's younger generation has a greater responsibility for forming their own values and prize individuality to a greater extent than any preceding generation [8, 9]. Over time, the diversification of information access methods has facilitated increased contact with diverse cultures, allowing young adults greater freedom to develop more varied value systems than the previous generation [6].

It is worth mentioning that in the word cloud statistics, in Figure 1, we can see that the word "girl" appears more frequently, which indicates that females are the majority of the young people who are more explicitly interested in marrying later. Most of the Weibo text captured this time is also from female publishers. Women have also become the main force and even opinion leaders in today's discussion of late marriage on the Internet, reflecting the discursive shift in the right of mass media discourse.



Figure 1: Word frequency analysis of the topic "late marriage"

With the transformation of social reality and the prevalence of "gender constructivism" [9], feminism has gradually moved to the center of the social stage under the improvement of women's economic status, access to ideological education, and the development of civil rights struggle, and the status of women's discourse has been elevated to an unprecedented level, which is reflected in the discourse shift in the mass media. The rate of women's speech has also been elevated unprecedentedly, which is sufficiently reflected in the discursive change of the mass media.

3.2. Characteristics of the distribution of youth emotions

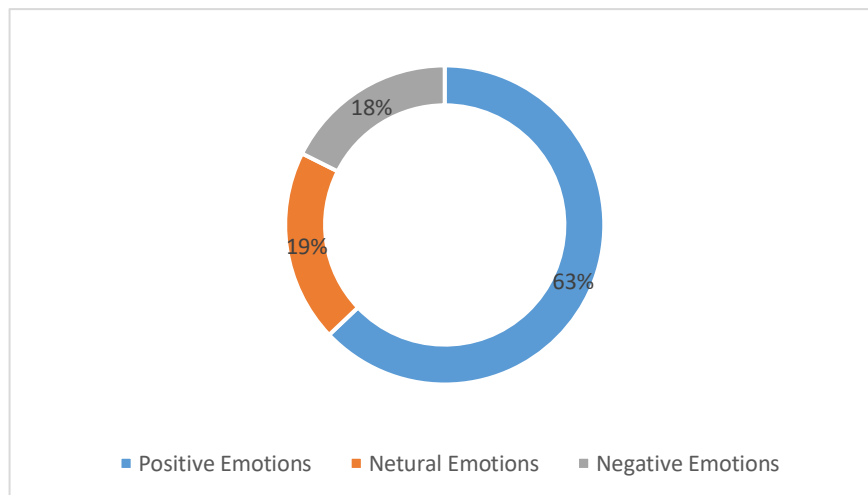


Figure 2: Sentiment distribution

By analyzing the sentiment of all Weibo texts, we can see from Figure 2 that 63% of young people hold positive emotions, 18% have negative feelings, and 18% remain neutral in the discussion of "late marriage."

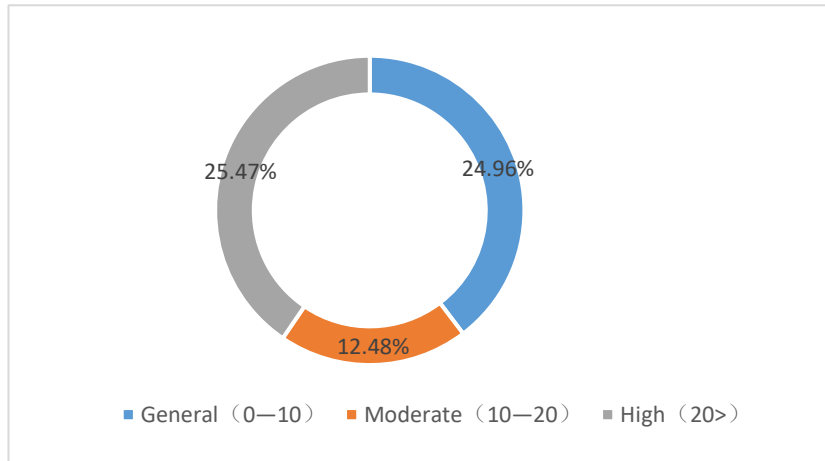


Figure 3: Positive mood segmentation statistics results

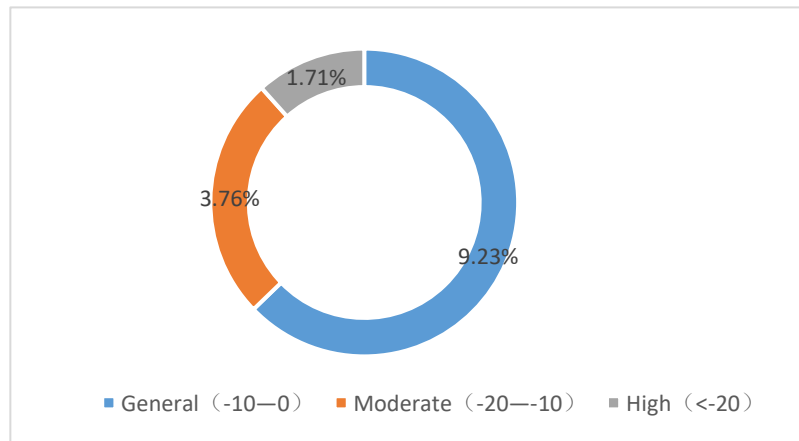


Figure 4: Segmented statistical results of negative emotions

Figures 3 and 4 show the segmented statistical results of positive and negative emotions, respectively, according to which it can be seen that more young people hold highly positive emotions. At the same time, those with negative emotions are also more peaceful, and most have only general negative emotions. It can be seen that the youth groups participating in the discussion of "late marriage" are generally more positive and have a calmer state of mind, and can correctly view the issue of late marriage and calmly face the choice of late marriage.

With the progress of society and the proliferation of discourse, people's ideology has become more enlightened and tolerant, and the public's perception and attitude towards late marriages are constantly being reshaped, while society has become more and more tolerant of late-marriage groups.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Disenchantment of Marriage

One of the reasons for the high level of discussion of "late marriage" as a topic among contemporary youth groups in social media is the "disenchantment of marriage" caused by the media's coverage and dramatization of marriage. Social media provides a platform for people to defend their rights and voice their opinions, and gender relations have gradually become a hot topic in the current society. To attract attention, all kinds of media competing to report on gender-related news. There are

numerous adverse reports on sexual assault, domestic violence, extramarital affairs, divorce, and post-divorce property disputes. The adverse news reports presented by social media can produce a "wake-up call effect" to arouse the youth's awareness of the crisis and tension in their marriages [10]. This scattered and unsystematic marriage information forms irrational opinions about marriage, aggravating the unfavorable attitude towards marriage and even resulting in a 'fear of marriage' [11]. In this state, the negative news reports on marriage in social media and the media rendering of post-marriage anxiety make the youth groups have certain "psychological barriers" in the face of marriage, and the expectation value for wedding also declines without realizing that they have entered the late marriage age.

4.2. The Reconstruction of Perceptions

From the high-frequency words "career", "spirituality", "healing" and "literature" in the results of data analysis, it can be seen that the concept of marriage and love of the youth group is being reshaped nowadays. In the traditional view of marriage in the past, "family" and "children" were the main topics of discussion about marriage, but with the continuous improvement of people's living standards and the awakening of self-consciousness, marriage has slowly changed from a "necessity of life" to an optional "spiritual need".

At the same time, the existence of social media makes the process of audience access to information considerably shortened, in the audience accepting the lead at the same time, but also in the subtle influence on the audience's thinking and conceptual remodeling and construction. Emotional connection is indispensable when contemporary youth's view of marriage and social media and the degree of youth's perception of marriage information on social media will have a particular impact on their view of marriage [12].

As the "main force" of social media use, young people obtain Internet information promptly and actively export their personal views. The openness of online topic discussions, the media rendering of post-marriage anxiety, and the construction of media images of independent youth will, to varying degrees, influence the youth's view of marriage and even cause the phenomenon of promoting "non-marriages." [3] At the same time, social media is an essential channel for young people to obtain information, assuming the role of "answering questions and solving puzzles" of young people's emotions. In the process of young people seeking answers from social media, the content of social media will inadvertently deconstruct the existing concept of marriage among young people. For example, the so-called perfect partner and ideal life in social media will, to a certain extent, influence the youth's conception of marriage. Social media influences youth's views on marriage by creating emotional resonance and connection with them.

4.3. The Rise of Feminism

As can be seen from the high-frequency word "women" in the results of the data analysis, women are becoming the center of discussions on gender topics. In recent years, feminism has gradually penetrated the production of media content and shaped the development of the media market under its enormous potential for media consumption. Feminism, in a broader sense, is the realization of equality between men and women in the world, i.e., the advocacy of women's rights based on the political, social, and economic equality of men and women. As the increasingly dominant party in marriage, as well as the main force of social media use and online topic discussion, the female group dramatically influences the trend of marriage choices of the youth group. In feminist media practices, the construction of the image of the independent woman, the demonstration of female opinion leaders, and the rise of the "new female power" have, to a certain extent, influenced young women's views on marriage, with young women unknowingly accepting late marriage, and late marriage becoming the

norm [3].

5. Conclusion

In the new media era, where social media and life are closely connected, various online trends deeply influence people's thoughts. At the same time, the cross-pollination of Chinese and foreign values continues to influence the importance of Chinese youth [13]. Early marriages need not be emulated, and late marriages are not anomalies. Everyone's views on marriage and love are different, and these are influenced by family background, upbringing, and personal preference. However, there are positive and negative views on marriage. Positive opinions on marriage can give people positive and correct guidance, while negative views on marriage can lead to wrong behaviors, thus affecting marriage happiness [14].

To gain hits and pursue their economic interests, some media nowadays often violate the moral bottom line and promote wrong values. In this regard, on the one hand, social media, as the leader of public opinion, should also be the disseminator of people's spiritual morality; the relevant departments should strengthen the supervision of the media environment, the social media should publicize the correct and positive view of marriage, promote the "truth, goodness and beauty" in marriage, and increase the positive publicity of the marriage issue. On the other hand, young people should also improve their media literacy and recognize the right and wrong in media information. Media literacy refers to the audience's ability to access the media, understand and evaluate media content, and create and participate in media activities. They should realize what is "media reality" and what is "real reality" and consciously resist incorrect values to make the right choice of marriage.

This study had the following limitations. First, the study's sample size was not large enough, limiting the accuracy of the findings to some extent. Second, because lack of proficiency in using research tools limits the thorough analysis of research findings. Third, this study was conducted only on Chinese youth, and the results cannot be applied to other countries contexts. Future research should expand the diversity of research subjects.

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