

A Case Study of the WeChat Official Account China Youth Daily

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of new media, rhetorical strategies serve as the core means for news headlines to balance information delivery and communication effects. The rhetorical choices of mainstream official media integrate professional norms with communication value. Taking news headlines published on the WeChat official account *China Youth Daily* as research samples, this study adopts a combination of quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis to sort out the distribution characteristics of various rhetorical devices, and analyze the expressive functions and applicable scenarios of different figures of speech. The research finds that the sampled headlines feature restrained use of rhetoric, hierarchical functions of core rhetorical devices, and differentiated adaptation across news themes, forming a rhetorical system that balances information efficiency, media credibility and communication traffic. This research can provide references for the application of rhetoric in news headlines on new media platforms run by mainstream media outlets.

Keywords: news headlines, rhetoric, new media

1. Introduction

Wu Liquan [1] clearly states in *Modern Chinese Rhetoric*: "Rhetoric refers to the conscious and positive linguistic activity in which a communicator (speaker or writer) adjusts language to fit the theme and context for the sake of achieving specific communicative goals and securing the optimal expressive effects possible."

Rhetoric is a conscious linguistic activity where communicators optimize language in accordance with themes and contexts to realize specific communicative objectives and pursue the best expressive outcomes. In *An Introduction to Rhetoric*, Chen Wangdao [2] puts forward the core principle of rhetoric: "adaptation to themes and contexts". Essentially, rhetoric is the strategic deployment of linguistic resources to boost expressive effects. Within the field of journalism and communication, rhetoric is not merely a tool for linguistic refinement, but also a vital instrument for efficient information transmission and building communication influence. Appropriate rhetorical use can enrich the information density of news, narrow the psychological distance between media and audiences, and shape the communication style and brand image of media organizations.

News headlines are often known as the "eyes" of news, undertaking dual functions: summarizing core news content and attracting audiences to read full articles. Rhetoric is widely adopted in news

headlines, especially in the new media era. "The quality of news headlines directly determines click rates and reading volumes, and also affects media communication power and influence" [3]. For this reason, rhetorical strategies have become central to headline creation for all types of media. Existing studies demonstrate that rhetorical application in new media news headlines is practical and diversified, with media outlets of different orientations forming distinctive rhetorical styles. The rhetorical decisions made by mainstream official media carry typical research value, as such media must abide by professional standards of journalistic objectivity and solemnity while accommodating the traffic logic of new media communication.

Domestic existing research falls into two major branches. The first branch focuses on the ontology of news headline rhetoric, sorting out types of rhetorical devices and their expressive functions in traditional print media headlines and summarizing rhetorical rules of journalistic language. The second branch explores headline rhetoric under the new media context, analyzing headline characteristics on WeChat official accounts, short video platforms and discussing how traffic logic shapes rhetorical strategies. Most prior studies agree that in the new media environment, the rhetorical functions of news headlines extend from information summarization to traffic attraction. Nevertheless, detailed research targeting mainstream official media, particularly youth-oriented mainstream media, remains insufficient. Empirical analysis is still needed to examine how such media balance rhetorical selection between journalistic professionalism and communication traffic.

This study selects news headlines from the WeChat official account *China Youth Daily* as research objects. Using equidistant random sampling, 200 news headlines posted between July 2025 and May 2026 are extracted as analysis samples, covering reporting fields including politics, society, people's livelihood, commentary and more. Centering on rhetorical application in news headlines, this study carries out core research as follows: first, it counts the frequency and distribution features of all rhetorical devices in sample headlines to clarify the overall application landscape; second, it categorizes and analyzes the expressive functions and practical value of each rhetorical device.

2. Analysis of rhetorical use in headlines

2.1. Statistical distribution of rhetoric

To fully observe and analyze rhetorical use in sample headlines, this paper first sorts out prior research on rhetorical classification and ultimately adopts the categorization proposed by Liang Zhining [4]. Based on this classification standard, the author marks and counts each of the 200 sample headlines one by one. This study presents rhetorical application characteristics from two dimensions: the distribution of rhetorical quantity per single headline, and the type distribution of different rhetorical devices. Detailed statistical results are shown below.

Table 1. Distribution of rhetorical devices per single headline

Serial Number	Number of Rhetorical Devices Used	Headline Count	Proportion	Example
1	One rhetorical device only	146	73.00%	Iran: Fatah Alizadeh killed (Quotation)

Table 1. (continued)

2	Two rhetorical devices	50	25.00%	Major price cut of lipid-lowering injections covered by medical insurance sparks public concern! Doctors: Stay calm... (Quotation, Shortening)
3	Three rhetorical devices	4	2%	Night Thoughts "My prefrontal cortex went on strike": Why do young people rush to self-diagnose this "viral mental condition"? (Quotation, Rhetorical Question, Personification)

Table 2. Frequency distribution of different rhetorical devices

Serial Number	Rhetorical Device	Occurrence Count	Proportion	Example
1	Shortening	89	34.00%	Taiwan authorities plan to block Xiaohongshu under the pretext of "information security"
2	Rhetorical Question	65	25.00%	Will subway passengers in Changsha be required to show 3C certification for power banks? Official response released!
3	Quotation	62	24.00%	Foreign Ministry: Chinese citizens are reminded to avoid travelling to Japan recently
4	Contrast	22	8.50%	The youngest post-80s! Universities release intensive policy documents
5	Metonymy	9	3.50%	Woman who flashed official credentials detained by public security authorities
6	Simile & Metaphor	3	1.20%	Iran fires cluster warhead missiles, scattering shrapnel like pouring rain
7	Personification	3	1.20%	Night Thoughts "My prefrontal cortex went on strike": Why do young people rush to self-diagnose this "viral mental condition"?
8	Antithesis	2	0.80%	Understand youth, embrace the future
9	Parody	2	0.80%	Just one cent? Zootopia turns into "Zoocrime City" due to rampant illegal filming, urgent reminder...
10	Pun	1	0.40%	Wonderful Beijing, Ideal Life Poly Time Li opens in Beijing, creating a brand-new lifestyle social hub in northern Beijing
11	Parallelism	0	0.00%	N/A
12	Anadiplosis	0	0.00%	N/A
13	Synaesthesia	0	0.00%	N/A
14	Hyperbole	0	0.00%	N/A

2.2. Categorized analysis of rhetorical devices

2.2.1. Shortening

"Shortening refers to condensing multi-syllable words into concise linguistic units with compact meanings to achieve harmonious phonology and concise expression" [4]. Shortening streamlines language without altering semantic meanings and boosts information transmission efficiency. When

applied to news headlines, it fits two practical demands. First, "WeChat pushes content to mobile phones and tablet computers with limited screen space, which restricts headline length" [5]. Second, mobile reading follows a fragmented pattern, and condensed headlines accelerate audiences' information absorption.

Take sample headlines as examples. In the reminder issued by consumer associations: Ten typical online shopping complaint cases exposed, "consumer association" is shortened to its universal abbreviated form "consumer association", cutting word count without hindering comprehension. Another headline reads Taiwan authorities plan to block Xiaohongshu under the pretext of "information security", where "information security" is shortened to "infosec", consistent with standard expressions for cross-strait news reporting. Overall, all shortened forms adopted in samples are widely recognized general abbreviations. Such practice realizes concise wording while eliminating comprehension barriers caused by obscure shorthand, reflecting the rigor of official mainstream media.

2.2.2. Rhetorical question

"Also known as interrogative rhetoric or Q&A rhetoric, rhetorical questions refer to intentional questioning to draw audience attention or strengthen emotional resonance. They are 'unnecessary questions' with answers unstated or self-supplied by writers, divided into prompting questions that foreshadow text content and provocative questions that highlight core ideas. News headlines mostly adopt standalone questioning without immediate answers, whose resolutions lie within full articles. This device emphasizes key information, triggers reflection and arouses reading curiosity" [4]. Among all rhetorical devices for news headlines, rhetorical questions stand out as a core method to boost communication traffic. By raising controversial, suspenseful or cognitively contradictory questions, media break audiences' psychological expectations, arouse curiosity and raise article click rates. Sample headlines such as Will impoverished teen recipients appear "non-needy"? Milk tea brand releases statement and Will subway passengers in Changsha be required to show 3C certification for power banks? Official response released! adopt the "question + official reply" structure. The opening question builds suspense, while the subsequent hint promises answers within texts, motivating audiences to click and read.

It is worth noting that rhetorical questions are a common breeding ground for "clickbait" in recent years. To chase traffic, some commercial self-media outlets adopt exaggerated, out-of-context or misleading rhetorical questions, "whose full articles often bear little or no relevance to headline content" [6]. This creates a sharp contrast between sensational headlines and empty texts, severely eroding audience trust and disrupting the new media content ecosystem. Judging from research samples, all rhetorical question headlines from *China Youth Daily* are rooted in authentic news facts, with each query corresponding to verified official replies and factual explanations. Even so, excessive dramatic suspense risks weakening news solemnity and sliding toward clickbait journalism. Journalists must firmly uphold the boundary of journalistic authenticity.

2.2.3. Quotation

Chen Wangdao [7] defines quotation as "embedding excerpts from prior idioms, allusions or statements" in texts, including official remarks, interviewee comments, authoritative conclusions, proverbs and famous quotes, to strengthen text persuasiveness and richness. For news headlines, quotation aligns closely with journalistic professionalism. On one hand, direct quotation of statements from official institutions or news participants embodies journalistic objectivity and

authenticity, complying with the core journalistic principle of "letting facts speak for themselves". On the other hand, presenting core remarks upfront quickly delivers central news information, enabling audiences to grasp key viewpoints at first glance. Sample headlines including Identity and voice stolen! Kenneth Fok: This is extremely disturbing and Foreign Ministry: Chinese citizens are reminded to avoid travelling to Japan recently both fall into the category of quoted statements. The former directly cites statements from parties concerned, highlighting core news conflicts and personal attitudes and enhancing the sense of scene and human touch of news. The latter reproduces official announcements, reinforcing news authority and warning value.

2.2.4. Contrast

Figures of speech that use contrast fall into two kinds: reflective contrast and parallel contrast [4]. This writing skill lets things with opposite or related features set each other off. Its main point is to show clear primary and secondary relationships when different ideas support one another. Using contrast as a writing tool usually brings two main effects. First, it makes readers feel a clear difference between related ideas. Second, it makes the whole writing carry stronger feelings and power. When writers make news headlines, they often use contrast. Sharp opposite ideas can make a news story stand out easily. Common small daily events become much more interesting this way. Meanwhile, the most important news points get shown clearly, so people can catch the key message right away. We can look at the headline "Even Warren Buffett got scammed?" as a simple example. This headline puts two pieces of information side by side. One part is the public view of Buffett, who everyone sees as a great expert in investment. The other part is the real event that he was cheated by others. When these two ideas appear together, the news story becomes far more dramatic. It also makes more people want to talk about this event online and in daily life.

2.2.5. Metonymy

Metonymy is also called the replacement rhetorical device [4]. It does not directly use the original noun of a certain thing. Instead, it uses the names of items that have close connections with this thing to take its place. This rhetorical skill can shorten long word groups, and make sentences more lively and easier for readers to understand.

Metonymy has two main uses in news headlines. For one thing, it can cut down the length of information. It uses representative symbols to stand for complicated events or ideas, so news headlines become shorter and clearer. For another, it makes use of the knowledge readers already have in their minds, so people can grasp the headline meaning without spending much time thinking. We can take the headline Brothers in revolution: Chinese and Vietnamese youth carry forward revolutionary bonds as an example. The phrase "revolutionary bonds" here is metonymy. It stands for the common revolutionary past, old traditions and friendly connections shared by China and Vietnam. This writing method turns abstract friendship formed through history into easy-to-feel symbols, and creates short sentences that leave a deep impression on readers.

2.2.6. Simile & metaphor

"Simile and metaphor, collectively referred to as figurative comparison, consist of three core elements: tenor, vehicle and similarity. Based on shared traits between two entities, writers describe the intrinsic features of tenors through separate vehicles. They are categorized into similes, metaphors and metonymic metaphors according to whether each element appears explicitly" [4].

Figurative comparison converts abstract concepts into concrete images, simplifies obscure theories, and renders headlines accessible, vivid and readable.

In news headlines, similes and metaphors mainly lower comprehension barriers for specialized content and strengthen visual imagery and readability. Especially for professional fields such as politics, science and military affairs, daily-life metaphors translate niche professional concepts into perceptible images for general audiences. The sample headline Iran fires cluster warhead missiles, scattering shrapnel like pouring rain is a typical simile. It compares the dense scattering of warhead fragments after detonation to rainfall, allowing audiences to visualize the scene effortlessly and drastically reducing comprehension difficulty.

2.2.7. Personification

Zheng Yuanhan [8] points out: "Personification falls into two subcategories: animization and dehumanization. Animization endows inanimate objects with human titles, behaviors, facial expressions, dispositions or emotions; dehumanization depicts humans or objects as other creatures by assigning animal or alien traits to them." Personification concretizes abstract concepts, enlivens headline language and conveys distinct emotional attitudes.

Within new media news headlines, personification is mostly applied to columns and topics targeting young audiences. Humanized wording consistent with internet discourse enlivens headlines and strikes emotional chords with young readers. The sample headline Night Thoughts | "My prefrontal cortex went on strike": Why do young people rush to self-diagnose this "viral mental condition"? personifies the prefrontal cortex by assigning the uniquely human action "go on strike", vividly depicting states of irrationality and impulsive decision-making. Aligned with young internet users' linguistic norms, this rhetoric easily triggers emotional resonance among youth audiences.

2.2.8. Antithesis

Antithesis can also be named parallel couplets or balanced writing skills [4]. It is made up of two word groups that have the same number of words and matching sentence structures. This rhetorical way can sum up ideas briefly and express full meanings completely. Antithesis has two good points at the same time: neat outer forms and short clear meanings. When it is used in news headlines, it brings smooth reading sounds and tight logical relations. Most news headlines use soft matching antithesis without strict rules for word tones. The two separate sentence parts explain real facts from two sides that can complete each other.

When writers create news headlines, antithesis helps pack key ideas into tidy sentence forms. It also makes the writing carry deeper thoughts and looks more well-organized. We can use the headline Understand youth, embrace the future as an example. This sentence fully fits the rules of antithesis, with equal word numbers and matching structures. In terms of meaning, it shows a step-by-step logical flow: knowing young people well can help society seize future development chances. The short and rhythmic words are simple for people to remember, and hold deep thought value. It clearly shows how important youth topics are for the present times.

2.2.9. Parody

Parody is also referred to as the copying rhetorical skill [4]. When people need to express certain ideas, they will change some word parts or single words of widely known phrases and sentences to make new expressions. It copies old language forms on purpose so as to bring readers a fresh and

unusual reading feeling. People split parody into two main types by different copying ways: one is replacing certain words, and the other is adding or cutting word parts. Most news headlines choose the word-replacing type of parody. This way can wake up readers' stored memory and let them connect related ideas easily, so the headlines show new and special writing effects.

We can take this headline as an example: Just one cent? Zootopia turns into "Zoocrime City" due to rampant illegal filming, urgent reminder.... This headline copies the famous work name Zootopia and swaps one central word to make the new phrase "Zoocrime City". This new phrase clearly points out where the illegal shooting takes place. Besides, it uses a relaxed way to laugh at the common problem of taking videos without permission. The headline mixes fun expressions with hidden critical meanings at the same time.

2.2.10. Pun

"Puns utilize phonetic or semantic features within specific contexts to enable one word to refer to two separate matters, bearing both superficial and underlying dual meanings. They are classified into homophonic puns and semantic puns" [4]. The two layers of meaning carry a primary-secondary hierarchy: superficial connotations play secondary roles while hidden underlying meanings serve as core messages. Puns render headlines witty, implicit, entertaining and infectious.

In news headlines, puns are mostly reserved for commercial, cultural tourism and brand news to strengthen memorability and fit the logic of commercial communication. The sample headline Wonderful Beijing, Ideal Life | Poly Time Li opens in Beijing, creating a brand-new lifestyle social hub in northern Beijing adopts homophonic puns. The phrase "Wonderful Beijing" sounds identical to "Splendid", simultaneously highlighting Beijing's regional attribute; "Ideal Life" homophones "Time Li", referencing the project name "Time Li". The dual-meaning phrasing closely ties into the project brand and local characteristics while conveying positive life values, featuring delicate wording and strong memory retention.

2.2.11. Analysis of zero-frequency rhetorical devices

Four rhetorical devices — parallelism, anadiplosis, synaesthesia and hyperbole — record zero application frequency in this statistical research. This result is not accidental, but a direct reflection of journalistic attributes and rhetorical principles governing mainstream media. First, hyperbole violates the core journalistic standard of authenticity. Hyperbole amplifies or minimizes object characteristics to strengthen expressive effects and carries strong subjective bias. If adopted in news headlines, it risks distorting facts and misleading audiences, so official mainstream media strictly avoid this device to uphold objectivity and authenticity. Second, synaesthesia and anadiplosis are highly literary figures of speech, mostly reserved for prose, poetry and other literary styles. Their expressive logic clashes with the core function of news headlines: efficient information delivery, leaving extremely limited applicable scenarios in practically oriented journalistic headlines. Third, parallelism requires three or more syntactically similar clauses, occupying excessive headline word count and conflicting with mobile platform length limits and fragmented reading habits, resulting in rare use within WeChat official account news headlines. The existence of zero-frequency rhetorical devices further proves the restrained and practical nature of rhetorical selection by mainstream media. All rhetorical devices serve the core objectives of information transmission and public opinion guidance, rather than prioritizing literary expression.

3. Research findings and discussion

Combining statistical data from two tables and categorized rhetorical analysis, four core characteristics of rhetorical application in news headlines published on the *China Youth Daily* WeChat official account are summarized as follows:

First, rhetoric is applied in an overall restrained manner, preserving the fundamental tone of journalistic objectivity. In terms of rhetorical quantity per headline, 73% of all headlines adopt only one single rhetorical device, while headlines stacking two or more devices account for a minimal proportion with little rhetorical overloading. From the perspective of rhetorical categories, highly subjective and literary devices such as hyperbole and synaesthesia see zero use, while similes, metaphors and personification are only deployed sparingly. This characteristic demonstrates that as an official mainstream media outlet, *China Youth Daily* prioritizes journalistic authenticity and objectivity. Rhetoric merely acts as an auxiliary tool for information delivery instead of a dedicated tactic to chase traffic, preventing excessive rhetorical embellishment from diluting the informative nature of news.

Second, core rhetorical devices feature clear functional divisions, forming a three-tier system centered on "information efficiency – media credibility – communication traffic". Shortening, rhetorical questions and quotation together account for over 80% of all rhetorical uses and constitute core headline rhetoric. Each device corresponds to three core demands of new media headlines: shortening caters to fragmented mobile reading and headline length limits to realize efficient information transmission; quotation aligns with journalistic professionalism to construct media credibility; rhetorical questions fit new media traffic logic to expand communication reach and click volume. The integration of the three devices builds a complete rhetorical system balancing mainstream media professionalism and WeChat platform communication rules.

Third, rhetorical questions accommodate communication demands yet carry latent boundary risks amid mainstream media's traffic transformation. Ranking second with a 25% proportion, rhetorical questions reflect mainstream media's proactive mastery of new media communication techniques to expand content circulation via suspense setting. Meanwhile, rhetorical questions remain a high-risk category for clickbait journalism. Even though all sample rhetorical questions are backed by verified factual evidence, traffic assessment pressure creates risks of over-amplifying suspense and downplaying objective facts. Balancing communication effects and journalistic authenticity stands as the core boundary mainstream media must maintain when deploying rhetorical questions.

Fourth, rhetorical styles match media positioning and target audience traits, adopting an overall tone dominated by rigorous wording with moderate innovative expressions. Targeting youth as core audiences, *China Youth Daily* moderately integrates youth-friendly rhetoric such as personification and parody in commentary and social issue articles to narrow psychological distance with young readers. Nevertheless, plain, objective wording remains the mainstream, with formalized devices including antithesis and puns only deployed in specific scenarios, consistently maintaining the solemn positioning of official media. This rhetorical strategy avoids both over-entertainment and rigid, stilted communication, representing a typical transformation path for mainstream media adapting to new media platforms.

Fifth, rhetorical selection features obvious differentiation across news themes, with distinct rhetorical strategies matching different reporting fields. Sample data reveals that political and policy news headlines mainly rely on shortening and quotation to prioritize information authority and delivery efficiency, rarely deploying highly subjective rhetorical devices. Social livelihood and hot event headlines frequently adopt rhetorical questions to arouse public attention through suspense.

Commentary and youth-focused articles moderately use antithesis and personification to strengthen ideological depth and emotional resonance. Commercial and cultural tourism news sparingly deploy puns and parody to boost reading interest and memorability. Such theme-matched rhetorical strategies simultaneously guarantee communication outcomes for diverse content and safeguard the overall solemn positioning of the media outlet.

4. Conclusion

Taking 200 news headlines from the *China Youth Daily* WeChat official account as research samples, this paper systematically analyzes distribution characteristics and expressive functions of rhetorical devices applied in headlines. From the core theoretical perspective of rhetoric studies, the rhetorical strategies adopted by *China Youth Daily* headlines embody the practice of Chen Wangdao's [2] theory of "adapting rhetoric to themes and contexts" within the new media context. In terms of thematic objectives, rhetoric serves the core mission of mainstream public opinion guidance; in terms of contextual adaptation, rhetoric fits communication rules of WeChat official accounts and linguistic norms of youth audiences. Overall, headline rhetoric adopted by new media platforms run by mainstream official media presents general features of practical priority, restrained deployment and balanced pursuit of traffic and credibility. Shortening and quotation guarantee information efficiency and journalistic professionalism, rhetorical questions accommodate new media communication demands, and a small volume of literary rhetorical devices optimize reading experience, realizing the integration of traditional journalistic norms and new media communication laws.

The application of rhetoric in news headlines essentially reflects media integration between communicative appeal and journalistic professionalism. For mainstream media outlets, the ultimate goal of rhetorical use is to disseminate mainstream viewpoints and satisfy audience demands, rather than solely pursuing traffic metrics. In the future, as the new media ecosystem continues to evolve, rhetorical strategies for news headlines will keep iterating. Even so, adhering to journalistic authenticity and respecting audiences' right to know will remain the unbreakable core standard for all rhetorical application. Follow-up research may expand sample scope and conduct comparative analysis on rhetorical differences among media outlets of varying administrative levels and market orientations, presenting a more comprehensive panorama of rhetorical ecology in new media news headlines.

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