

## Analysis of the Stereotype Formation Mechanism of Square Dance Damas in the We Media Era

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**Abstract.** In the era of We Media, Square Dance Damas have been always constantly recognized as a negative image in many media reports. How is this negative stereotype Square Dance Damas constructed? This study, taking Square Dance Damas violently occupying the basketball court news as an example, combined with the agenda melding theory, analyzed what kind of impact of new frame generated by a flat discourse system in the We Media era may have on media value perception, and further discussed the Formation Mechanism of the Stereotype of Square Dance Damas in the We Media era.

### Introduction

In recent years, various reports on Chinese Damas (elder female citizens) emerge in an endless stream. Especially when it comes to Square Dance Damas, it seems to repeatedly appear in the teeth of the storm of public attention, and caused a lot of controversies. The features of hot news over Chinese damas are classified and summarized by some media, dancing enthusiasm; selfishness and weak public awareness come at the top of the list [1]. In various media coverages, Square Dance Damas are described as savage and unreasonable, blindly impulse and even be lack of basic social common sense [2]. As a symbolic being, Square Dance Damas are labeled with multiple negative remarks. However, how was this kind of stereotype of Square Dance Damas formed anyway? Is there any connection between this stereotype's formation mechanism and We Media?

### A Retrospect into the Event

In 2017 June, a video clip over elder square dancers fighting with young basketball boys over the right to use the basketball field in Loyang Wangcheng Park went viral in the Internet, and swiftly become the center of public attention. In this event, it was not just the Square Dance Damas that got into the fight with those basketball boys, but there were many male senior citizens too. However, in the subsequent coverages, most media organizations chose to only use Square Dance Damas, and even the review published by Xinhua News Agency pinned their spearhead at those damas [3].

### The Concept of We Media and Stereotype

American IT column writer Dan Gillmor has written in his book published in 2004 July, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, that the blog stands for New Media 3.0. In his idea, 1.0 refers to traditional media or old media, while 2.0 refers to what has been recognized by mass public as new media, and 3.0 refers to We Media such as blogs [4]. In general, SNS or Apps such as WeChat, Weibo, Blogs, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram could be classified as We Media. One of the most significant features of We Media is that the users can be the viewer of media content as well as the generator (Users Generate Content, UGC). And due to the great user base of We Media, and its easy, flexible and all-time accessibility, the content of We Media has an unimaginable volume and updates promptly.

The concept of stereotype was firstly introduced by American journalist Walter Lippman in his

book *Public Opinion* published in 1922. Stereotype is used to explain people's misunderstanding and prejudice of the world, and their incorrect, irrational and stubborn attitude [5]. When media constructs an unreal world, wrong or prejudiced stereotypes are generated as well.

## Two Paths to Build Up the Stereotype of Square Dance Dama

### Digital Refugee and the Flat Discourse System in We Media Space

#### *Square Dance Damas— Digital Refugees of We Media Era*

Digital Refugee is a concept that refers to those who, in digital era, have limited access to new media technology or less capacity to use it due to personal social or economic status. Accordingly, along with this concept there are also concepts like Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants.

Apparently compared to most of the Internet users, Square Dance Damas are no doubt the digital refugees of the digital era. This can be proven by a rather simple example – we often see critics over these damas via Weibo or many other We Media channels, but we rarely seem to see them defending themselves in this public sphere. And it is the weak position that those digital refugees are in that caused the polarized opinion in the public sphere of We Media, which leads to a flat discourse system.

#### *The Flat Discourse System of We Media Public Sphere*

Discourse Power, simply put, can be concluded as the right of speech. In French philosopher Michel Foucault's opinion, discourse means some certain rule to which a social community could comply with to communicate its meaning in society, thus ensure its social status and recognition by other communities [6]. Therefore, discourse power can be regarded as a product of power, between which lies a profound relationship. With the rise of We Media, monopoly of the government and elites on the pattern of discourse power is broken, which leads to a brand new, civilian-based pattern of discourse power. However, this so-called civilian-based is nothing but just a comparative concept.

According to the 40<sup>th</sup> China Statistical Report on Internet Development released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), by 2017 June, Chinese Internet users are mostly aged from 10 years old to 39 years old, which makes up around 72.1% of the total user base, as shown in Fig. 1. And this majority of internet users take absolute domain in terms of the use of Internet or other new media tools, which empowers them with the ability to create an overwhelmingly mainstream idea against other communities in the online public sphere.

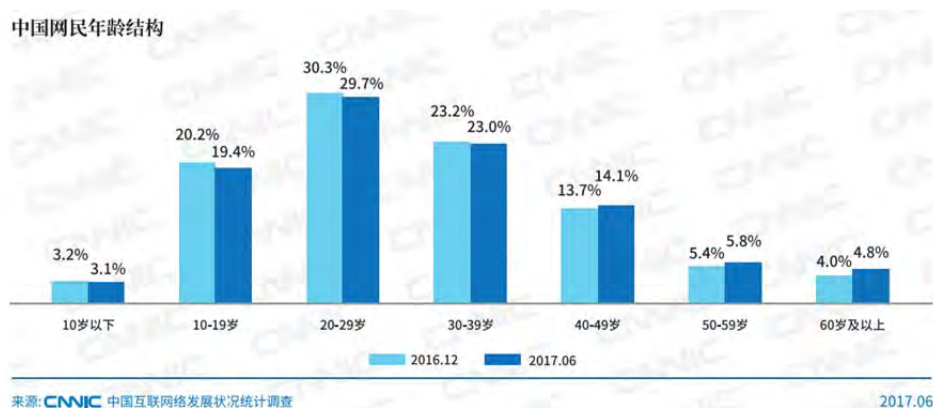


Fig. 1, The age structure of Chinese Internet users

However, according to survey, those who participate in square dance are mostly female, especially senior female citizens, around 79.8% of who are aged over 40 years old, and most of them have not received any higher education as 86.2% of them only had an education level of high school and below [8]. Therefore, faced with the monopoly of the online new elites on the discourse

power, Square Dance Damas almost lost the right to voice for themselves and possess no stand in the public opinion field of We Media.

According to Kenneth Burke, communication enhances identification and with the enhancement of identification, so will the shared meaning increase thus leads to a mutual understanding, which is like a trend of an upward spiral [9]. When We Media space is filled with prejudiced critics over the Square Dance Damas, their silence disables a prompt and effective communication, and further hinders the acquisition of identification and understanding of other discourse communities.

## **Narrative Frame of We Media and Value Perception of Mass Media from the View of Agenda Melding**

### ***The Agenda Melding of Mass Media and We Media***

Agenda Melding is a concept firstly brought out by McCombs and D. Shaw in their book *Individuals, Groups, and Agenda Melding: A Theory of Social Dissonance*. In this theory, agenda melding consists of 6 phases: searching for community, searching for the agenda of community, searching for guidance, searching for guidance over communication media, initial and advanced phase of mass media's agenda melding [11].

This hypothesis shows that in We Media era, people are able to set individual and communities' agenda via new media, and further influence media's agenda setting, then the public's agenda setting [11]. Examples are countless, such as some famous Chinese news like Tsingdao shrimps, Liangchen Ye and more. All these news or topics were originally agendas set by We Media users then followed up by mass media. In short conclusion, We Media users have been playing an important role of agenda setting for mass media.

Back to the Square Dance Damas violently occupying the basketball court news, it was actually made known to many Internet users by Weibo videos, and then covered by mass media. When We Media set this agenda for mass media, profound impact was generated too. And this mechanism foreshadowed the formation of Square Dance Damas' stereotype.

### ***The Narrative Frame of We Media Influences Mass Media's Value Perception***

News frame is, during the production of news text, a way of thinking through which journalist make subjective judgement of the importance of a news event's elements, and select what they need to encode to present to the audience. In a word, it is the news manufacturer's subjective perspective. News frame determines the production of news text, and participate in its construction of reality.

In the news of Square Dance Damas violently occupying the basketball court, the source is as a matter of fact Weibo, a We Media platform too, and its narrative frame would also leave certain impact on media's news frame as well. As concluded by a scholar, normal people has never been more desired by media like now, however, their words are never loyally, with respect and accurately copied by media either [12].

In conclusion, in the process of agenda melding of mass media and We Media, when following up agenda set by We Media users, mass media are subject to the impact of its narrative frame, and even engraft this frame to its own news frame, which leads to a misplaced value perception.

## **Summary**

Through the above analysis and discussion, the formation mechanism of Square Dance Damas' Stereotype can be illustrated as Fig. 2.

On the one hand, Square Dance Damas are digital refugees in We Media space that have less hold of discourse power compared to other digital natives and digital immigrants, which leads to a polarized discourse system in the We Media sphere that mostly lashes out on those damas. On the other hand, mass media take in the narrative frame of We Media during the agenda melding process, thus adopt a biased and misplaced value perception of Square Dance Damas,

In the process of agenda melding of We Media and mass media, social reality and discourse expression are constantly being constructed and reconstructed; whereas the flat yet irrational

discourse system of the online public sphere further accelerated this Pseudo-environment. All of that results in the stereotype of Square Dance Damas as low-quality, disturbing and unreasonable.

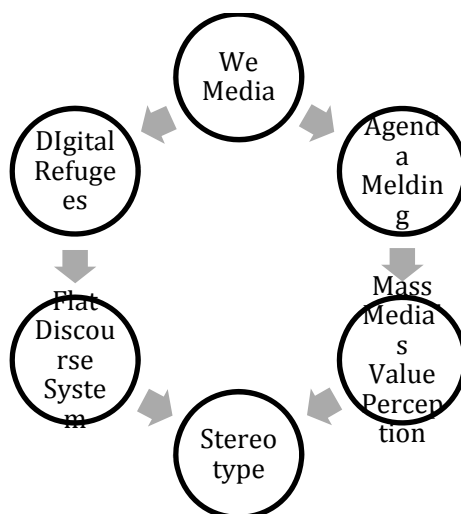


Fig. 2, Stereotype Formation Mechanism of Square Dance Damas

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