

# An Exploration of Chinese Netizens' Perception of Symbolic Violence in Medical Cosmetology in the Chinese Video Media Bilibili

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**Abstract.** China's medical cosmetology industry has developed rapidly in recent years, and the Internet, especially social media platforms such as Bilibili, has become an important channel for the public to obtain information. However, the objectivity and fairness of medical cosmetology video content on the platform are questionable, affecting public perception. This paper delves into the phenomenon of symbolic violence within Bilibili's medical cosmetology video content, examining how certain narratives and representations can subtly reinforce societal norms and biases, ultimately impacting viewers' attitudes and beliefs. Through a combination of data mining and content analysis techniques, we uncover the characteristics of video dissemination on the platform, including the prevalence of specific uploaders who dominate the discourse with their views and experiences. This unequal distribution of discourse power can lead to a skewed representation of the medical cosmetology field, with some voices being amplified while others are marginalized. The public is concerned about the risks of medical cosmetics, but successful cases are also recognized. The study emphasizes the importance of enhancing public rationality, promoting healthy media communication, and promoting the healthy development of the industry.

## 1 Introduction

The development of China's medical cosmetology industry started late, and it was not until 2002 that the Measures for the Administration of Medical Cosmetology Services made a clear definition of medical cosmetology: medical cosmetology refers to the use of surgery, medication, medical devices, and other traumatic or invasive medical technology to repair and remodeling of human appearance and the shape of various parts of the body [1]. The medical cosmetology industry has been growing rapidly globally in recent years and has become a highly scrutinized and controversial field. According to the "China Medical Beauty Industry 2024 Annual Insight Report" jointly released by the China Association of Plastic Surgery and Aesthetics, Deloitte China, and other authoritative organizations, the growth rate of China's medical cosmetology market will reach 10% in 2024, and the growth rate is expected to remain between 10% and 15% in the next four years. Data from the research

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report shows that China's non-surgical light medical aesthetic market reached 120.7 billion yuan in 2022, and is expected to increase to 146.1 billion yuan in 2023.

With the rapid development of the Internet, social media platforms such as Weibo, TikTok, and Bilibili have become an integral part of people's daily lives. These platforms not only provide rich information content, but also accurately promote information to users through the algorithmic recommendation mechanism, making information dissemination more efficient and widespread. As a result, video content on social media can quickly attract the attention of a large number of the public and become an important window reflecting the phenomenon of public perception.

As the public's interest in the medical cosmetology industry grows, so does the media's coverage of the industry. However, it is debatable whether these reports are objective and fair. This paper cites the concept of "symbolic violence" proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. This concept refers to the indirect influence on social reality through words, organizations, symbols, and discourses that change or influence people's perception of the world and their behavior. This violence does not manifest itself directly in physical or economic coercion, but rather through cultural and ideological penetration [2]. Symbolic violence phenomena such as discourse imbalance and aesthetic awareness implications have a profound impact on public consciousness and behavior. Therefore, an in-depth study of media coverage of the medical cosmetology industry and its impact is particularly important.

Among China's internet products, Bilibili is the only one among China's internet platforms that has maintained high growth for 15 consecutive years. There are about 20 million users in full attendance every month, and 75% of the full members registered in 2018 are still active on Bilibili this year.

Meanwhile, Bilibili has a large number of medical cosmetology-related videos, which cover a wide range of aspects from the introduction of basic knowledge, and demonstration of surgical procedures to the sharing of post-operative results. In addition, Bilibili's unique bullet screen culture allows users to comment and interact with the videos while watching them, and this instant feedback mechanism provides valuable data for studying public attitudes and perceptions of video content. Therefore, this paper chooses relevant videos from Bilibili, a mass media platform in China, as research objects to explore the extent of public awareness of symbolic violence in the medical cosmetology industry.

## **2 Literature review**

The first is a study of Chinese society's perception of medical cosmetology. Cao Junwei et al. analyzed the public's attitudes and perceptions of the medical cosmetology industry as well as its perceived risks, and used social network analysis of keywords related to medical cosmetology in Baidu, WeChat official accounts, and Weibo to show that medical institutions and technologies influence consumers' perceptions of medical cosmetology and that the depth of public perception is insufficient [3]; Qiu Jinzhou et al. surveyed university students in Guangzhou by questionnaire, analyzed their attitudes towards medical cosmetology, demand, and influencing factors, and found that the market penetration rate of medical cosmetology is low but the future demand is growing, female university students are more inclined to public hospitals, and those who have had previous experience have a high willingness to re-consume [4]. Amy Brown et al. found that women were more likely than men to consider cosmetic surgery and that low self-attractiveness scores increased the willingness to undergo cosmetic surgery, whereas indirect experiences of cosmetic surgery (e.g., experiences with friends and family) had an effect only on women, and media exposure did not have a significant effect on both sexes, suggesting that future research should assess the influencing factors and postoperative satisfaction for different cosmetic surgery projects separately [5].

Krystyne Bana et al. used data analytics to collect relevant posts and likes on Instagram to get that clinical content (non-patient photos) was more popular and attracted the most interactions from physicians and followers than patient and lifestyle content on Instagram [6].

The second is related research on symbolic violence. Cheng et al. found that medical cosmetology information posted by aesthetic bloggers on social media significantly and negatively influenced young women's risk perceptions, which were exacerbated by risk fear and appearance anxiety as mediators [7]; Liu Chuanhong et al. commented that the medical cosmetology market has exploded due to the "face value economy", but the accompanying chaotic phenomena such as "face anxiety" and "medical beauty loans" are frequent, and medical cosmetology advertisements have been criticized for constructing deformed aesthetics, creating illusions and conveying false values. Medical cosmetics advertisements have been accused of constructing abnormal aesthetics, creating illusions, and conveying wrong values, and it is urgent to strengthen the governance to promote the healthy development of the industry [8]. Based on Freud's theory of cultural repression, Wrochna P. discusses whether the cosmetic industry, in the context of the commercialization of the human body, has been effective in solving the psychosocial problems associated with beauty or whether it has exacerbated people's "misery", whether beauty has become a commodity in the medical cosmetology market, and the dangers of this trend and the meaning of "beauty" for well-being [9]. Nainan Wen et al. studied and analyzed YouTube videos about plastic surgery and found a large number of plastic surgery videos, most of which were posted by plastic surgeons who actively use social media to promote their practice. The videos mostly emphasized the benefits of plastic surgery, talked less about the risks, and used experts and high sensory stimulation value strategies to attract viewers' attention, suggesting that viewers' perceptions of plastic surgery were influenced by these positive portrayals and marketing strategies [10].

As can be seen, there is a certain amount of research on the public's perception of and attitude toward medical cosmetology in China, however, these studies are still insufficient in analyzing and exploring the content of medical cosmetology videos and their texts in depth. Most of the existing studies tend to use questionnaires to directly understand the public's concerns about medical cosmetology but rarely focus on analyzing the specific content of the video medium. Research on symbolic violence in the medical cosmetology industry in the mass media is still insufficient both in China and abroad, and most of it focuses on exploring how medical cosmetology information in the media can mislead people and thus bias them against the risks of medical cosmetology procedures. This paper attempts to analyze the public's awareness of the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the medical cosmetology industry on mass media platforms and the extent to which the public is aware of this phenomenon.

### 3 Methodology

The data of this study comes from 3506 video information crawled from Bilibili, corresponding to 2078 tags. It includes video links, plays, likes, video duration, title, uploaders, and release time. These data are cleaned and preprocessed to remove irrelevant columns and convert play counts and likes to numeric types. Then the data is filtered according to the keywords in the video title (e.g., "medical aesthetics", "cosmetology", "plastic surgery", "microdermabrasion", "cosmetic", "plastic surgery", "microdermabrasion", "facial", etc.) in the video titles, a total of 1,953 videos related to medical cosmetology were filtered. And 26,253 comments corresponding to these videos were collected.

## 4 Results

Through statistics on the identity characteristics of publishers, it is found that more than 75% of video publishers do not have the exclusive identity authentication of the B station platform, and among the remaining 25% of publishers containing identity authentication, only 1% have official organization authentication identities, and 24% are personal identity authentication, while personal identity authentication focusing on the field of medical and beauty and fashion accounted for only 17% of the identity authentication, and the rest of the video publishers, although they have personal authentication, the authentication field is not related to the direction of medical cosmetology, but still publish medical cosmetology videos.

In the analysis of video titles and keyword frequencies, it was found that some videos promote specific standards of beauty. For example, some videos implied that only certain physical features were standards of “beauty”. The word frequency analysis revealed that among the high-frequency words, such as “aesthetic” (3,601 times), “standard” (2,804 times), “whitening” (2,352 times), “face slimming” (2,410 times), ‘cosmetic surgery template’ (1,798 times), and so on.

Finally, in order to understand the general public's attitude towards the medical cosmetology industry, the video titles, as well as the comments (both primary and secondary comments), were sentiment analyzed. Through the Text Blob library, sentiment scores were calculated for each title by categorizing them into positive, negative, and neutral sentiment types. The results show that video titles about medical cosmetology have a high proportion of negative sentiment (52.68%), while in contrast to negative sentiment, positive sentiment is relatively less (27.80%), and neutral sentiment occupies a moderate proportion (19.52%), which shows that some of the video content is more objective and neutral.

## 5 Discussion

In an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the mass media in the medical cosmetology industry, its distinctive features are observed in several dimensions, mainly including the uneven distribution of discourse power and the potential guidance of the public's aesthetic perception. This chapter aims to analyze these phenomena in detail and to explore the extent of public awareness of such symbolic violence.

First, as far as uploader types are concerned, authoritatively certified UP owners dominate the discussion of medical cosmetology topics, and their influence far exceeds that of ordinary users. This phenomenon reveals a significant imbalance of discourse within the platform, where the voices of ordinary users are often drowned out, creating a de facto monopoly of information. According to Michel Foucault, “discourse implies the process by which a social group establishes its position in society and is recognized by other groups by transmitting its meaning to the community according to certain stereotypes” [11]. So in this sense, on the one hand, the Internet is not simply an occasion for personal expression, but in digital media platforms, it is also a major issue of whether someone's voice can be heard, how many people can hear it, and as a result, it has a social impact and establishes social status [12]. This imbalance is not only limited to cyberspace but is also an extension of the inequality of the real social structure in the online realm, which exacerbates the polarization of social classes and discontent. Therefore, in order to deal with the imbalance of discourse power in online platforms, online platforms should strengthen supervision and guidance, set up diversified evaluation criteria, and consider the quality of articles, depth of interaction, and originality, as well as introduce policies to support ordinary users, such as providing traffic tilting and content recommendation, in order to promote the diversified and in-depth development of content. For the public, it is necessary to improve media literacy, cultivate critical thinking, choose information rationally advocate constructive expression, and avoid blindly following

the trend and extreme remarks. Platforms should optimize the content ecosystem, encourage originality and diversity, reduce low-quality content, and promote interdisciplinary exchanges to broaden the public's horizons. In addition, the government and social organizations should provide public resource support, pay special attention to vulnerable groups, and provide them with more channels to express their voices, so as to achieve a balanced distribution of social resources, and jointly build a healthy, diversified and inclusive online environment.

Looking further into the content of the videos, the phenomenon of deliberately promoting specific aesthetic standards is found in some of the videos. Commercial logic has gradually infiltrated the construction of women's aesthetic culture, and women's choice of appearance has been shaped by fashion brands and commercial companies, highlighting the characteristics of the "consumption-first" Internet celebrity economy. This continuous exposure undoubtedly shapes the public's aesthetic preferences in an invisible way, which may lead to individuals' dissatisfaction with their own appearance, and then give rise to an over-reliance on medical cosmetology. This phenomenon not only contributes to the homogenization of aesthetic standards but also triggers a series of psychological problems, such as anxiety and depression, posing a potential threat to an individual's daily life and health. The government should strengthen the regulation of medical aesthetic advertisements and establish strict review standards to combat false and misleading advertisements; at the same time, through education and media publicity to enhance public awareness of medical aesthetic advertisements and guide the formation of a healthy aesthetic and consumerism; the medical aesthetic industry needs to strengthen self-regulation and establish norms for the benign development of the industry; and in addition, to improve the legal and regulatory system to ensure that legal remedies are provided for the victims to protect the rights and interests of the consumers comprehensively. In addition, the legal and regulatory system should be improved to ensure the provision of legal remedies for victims and the comprehensive protection of consumers' rights.

At the level of sentiment analysis, the high proportion of negative sentiment in medical cosmetology-related video titles is particularly striking. Multiple factors are at work behind this result: first, the video content frequently mentions surgical risks, failure cases, and post-operative complications, which enhances the public's perception of the negative consequences of medical cosmetology surgery; second, the revelation of false propaganda behaviors in the industry triggers the public's dissatisfaction with the misleading information; and third, the fear of surgical failures and complications spreads widely among the public, which intensifies the worry about medical cosmetology surgeries; Fourth, the lagging and insufficient regulation of the industry has led to the frequent occurrence of unregulated operations and unlicensed practices, further weakening the public's trust in the medical aesthetic industry.

However, positive emotions should not be ignored. The display of successful cases, the introduction of professional physicians, and the positive impact of medical aesthetics on personal image enhancement have, to a certain extent, increased public recognition of and trust in the effects of medical aesthetics. These positive messages help build a more comprehensive and objective image of the medical aesthetic industry.

In addition, neutral emotional content also occupies a considerable proportion, mainly focusing on the discussion of medical aesthetic technology, concerns about the development of the industry, and the interpretation of policies and regulations. These videos provide a window for the public to gain a deeper understanding of the medical aesthetic industry and promote the diversified dissemination of information.

It can be seen that the public's attitude towards the medical cosmetology industry on social media presents a high degree of alertness and critical thinking. They are not only concerned about the risks of surgery and false propaganda but also actively call for strengthening the

regulation of the industry; at the same time, they are open to cases that truly reflect the effects and value of medical aesthetics; and they can maintain the ability to analyze objectively when faced with neutral information. This mature and rational attitude provides a good social foundation for the healthy development of the medical cosmetology industry.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper provides an in-depth examination of the current state of coverage of the medical cosmetology industry on Chinese social media platforms (especially Bilibili) and its impact on public perceptions, focusing on the phenomenon of symbolic violence. Based on 3,506 video messages crawled from B station and its 26,253 comments, the study analyzes the content of medical cosmetology videos, the identity of the publishers, the emotional tendency, and the public's attitude towards the industry. Public attitudes toward the medical cosmetology industry on social media show vigilance and critical thinking, with concerns about risks and false propaganda as well as openness to real cases. This mature and rational attitude provides a good social foundation for the healthy development of the medical cosmetology industry. However, it is still necessary to solve the problems of imbalance of discourse, guidance of aesthetic concepts, and trust in the industry through the efforts of many parties in order to promote the sustainable and healthy development of the medical cosmetology industry.

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