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RECEIVED 22 September 2025

REVISED 26 November 2025

ACCEPTED 09 January 2026

PUBLISHED 10 March 2026

CITATION

Xu X, Mahamed M and Sha'ri SN (2026) Media discourse construction of rural revitalization strategy: thematic patterns and sentiment orientation in People's Daily and CCTV News on Douyin.

Front. Commun. 11:1710629.
doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2026.1710629

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Media discourse construction of rural revitalization strategy: thematic patterns and sentiment orientation in People's Daily and CCTV News on Douyin

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This study examines how Chinese state media organizations adjust their communication strategies on short video platforms when reporting on national policy initiatives. Focusing on the rural revitalization strategy, we analyze how two well-known traditional media outlets, People's Daily and CCTV News, shape digital discourse on Douyin. We extract topic patterns and sentiment orientations from 445 rural revitalization videos using a computational approach combining Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling and StructBERT sentiment analysis. The results reveal different digital communication strategies: People's Daily is dominated by positive emotions on all topics, while CCTV News adopts a more differentiated sentiment design, especially when dealing with poverty alleviation and rural livelihood issues. These results show how institutional identity influences digital storytelling strategies. The party newspaper (People's Daily) focuses on ideological reinforcement, while the State Television Station (CCTV) strikes a balance between promoting political content and emotional resonance. This study contributes to the understanding of how traditional news organizations can exploit opportunities on specific platforms while maintaining their institutional role in the digital environment.

KEYWORDS

BERT sentiment analysis, digital media discourse, framing theory, LDA model, rural revitalization

Introduction

Rural areas have historically served as the foundation for urban development, providing essential resources such as population, land, and capital accumulation (Fan et al., 2024). However, under the strong influence of modern industrial and urban cultures, rural culture was once perceived as “backward” and became a target for transformation (Pratama and Kartika, 2025). In recent years, the value of rural China has been rediscovered, and scholars argue that without the revitalization of rural areas, it's impossible to accelerate the modernization of agriculture and rural development in China (Wu, 2025).

Despite the acceleration of urbanization and industrialization at the cost of sacrificing agricultural land, rural areas remain irreplaceable for national food security and economic stability. Their importance extends not only to economic contributions, but also to cultural preservation and social cohesion (Zhang and Huang, 2025). The shift of rural social life toward

modernization brings profound transformations, particularly in the field of communication (Pandey and Pathak, 2025).

As economic pressures intensify, an increasing number of regions recognize that urbanization must be supported by sufficient rural resources to maintain sustainable national economic growth (Xia et al., 2024). However, the representation of rural areas in mainstream media and their exposure on new media platforms still needs further research. Urban-focused media coverage may exacerbate the digital and social exclusion of rural communities and exacerbate existing inequalities (Salemink, 2022; Wu and Liu, 2025). Since the National People's Congress proposed the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy in 2018, mainstream media have played an important role in disseminating the rural revitalization strategy. The government uses mainstream media to influence public opinion, manage public emotions, and promote problem solving in times of crisis (Long, 2024). The increasing participation of government agencies in social media highlights this development in the field of communications. As of 2024, over 2,240 government accounts have been established in the fields of tourism, public security, Communist Youth League, judiciary, publishing, and culture (Wan, 2024). Despite this, few studies have examined how top state media leverage short-form video to communicate policy. In particular, we lack comparative analyses of how different state outlets frame the same policy on platforms like Douyin.

The three most prominent mainstream media are People's Daily, China Central Television (CCTV News), and Xinhua News Agency (Huang, 2023). However, the news positioning of Xinhua News Agency is slightly different from the other two. Reuters and Xinhua News Agency, as exclusive news sources, both have their unique ideological perspectives in their reporting (Jiang, 2024). The academic community generally positions Xinhua News Agency as the country's "news reporting agency" and the main body of external communication, playing an important role in international issues, external communication, and the construction of external discourse (Jiang, 2018). The People's Daily and central media such as CCTV are managed by the Central Propaganda Department system and belong to the core of the central discourse system. They have direct political functions and institutional resources in guiding domestic agendas and transmitting values (Zhao and Zhang, 2024). So, People's Daily and CCTV News have their outstanding role in building a framework for promoting rural revitalization.

With the rapid growth of Chinese internet users and the expanding influence of TikTok (Douyin), adapting to new media platforms has become an essential strategy for traditional mainstream media to maintain relevance and enhance communication effectiveness. As of December 2024, the number of online audio-visual users in China has reached 1.091 billion, a year-on-year increase of 1.6%. Meanwhile, the number of short video users in China has reached 1.04 billion, with a usage rate of 93.8% (China Net-Audio and Video Industry Association, 2025). In light of this digital shift, it is essential to comprehend how rural revitalization is disseminated through mainstream media frameworks.

A critical gap exists in understanding how institutional identity shapes media framing within state-controlled systems. While framing research extensively examines Western democratic contexts, less is known about how different state media outlets operating within the same political system and covering identical policies produce differentiated narratives. Official and non-official media accounts that disseminate the rural revitalization strategy independently produce videos, with weak content relevance and a lack of overall planning, the top-level design

urgently needs to be optimized (Deng and Zheng, 2025). The number of reports on rural revitalization by traditional mainstream media on TikTok (Douyin) is far less than that of private or commercial accounts (Zhu, 2023). Specifically, do institutional differences (party newspaper vs. state broadcaster) generate distinct framing strategies on short-video platforms? This question is particularly important because rural revitalization represents a centrally mandated policy, yet how mainstream media outlets communicate it through platform-specific affordances remains understudied. Understanding these variations illuminates both the constraints and flexibility within state media systems. Although this study has analyzed the topic content using narrative techniques among mainstream media at all levels, exploring the distribution of topics within the communication framework among mainstream media on short video platforms remains a problem (Li, 2025).

Literature review

Rural revitalization and media representation

The wealth and poverty of a country are primarily determined by historical geography, institutional culture, and other factors influencing urban and rural development (Smith, 1985). After the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy plan advocated by the government in 2018, the establishment of a domestic circular economic structure in China has been promoted, reducing the impact of economic sanctions and continuous downward economic pressure (Cai et al., 2024). Rural areas have become rare areas for development, especially in enhancing rural human capital and promoting urban-rural education equity.

The revitalization of rural areas has become a strategic focus in China's national development frame. As a long-term, dynamic, and complex policy initiative, rural revitalization must evolve in tandem with shifting socio-economic conditions and the changing demands of the times (Xiong, 2022). This has placed increasing importance on the role of media (particularly digital platforms) in disseminating rural development narratives, shaping public perception, and facilitating policy understanding (Sanusi et al., 2025). However, some studies have only focused on the construction of a framework for rural image communication, without paying attention to the overall theme framework (Zhao, 2024).

There is a gap that there is little systematic work on how Chinese traditional news media frame rural revitalization on emerging short-video platforms. This study collected all the samples related to rural revitalization from two media from the beginning of TikTok (Douyin) to the beginning of this study, and tried to explore how mainstream media constructed a thematic and emotional framework for the theme of rural revitalization. And there are few studies that combine thematic and emotional frameworks to study the dissemination of rural revitalization on short video platforms (Zhang, 2022).

Short video platforms and rural communication

Since 2013, short videos have gradually emerged in China with the emergence of applications such as Miaopai and Kuaishou (Yu, 2025). TikTok (known as Douyin in China) was created in 2016. Since 2017,

has grown rapidly and has become a popular short video social platform (Uhumwango, 2024). The number of social media users has increased worldwide from 2.7 billion in 2017 to 5.2 billion in 2023, a number projected to approach six billion in 2028 (Galanis et al., 2021).

Due to the need to balance the release of government information such as policy interpretation, important announcements, and official activities, it is not possible to focus on the theme of “rural revitalization,” and the thematic framework among mainstream media needs to be evaluated (Deng and Zheng, 2025). This leaves another gap that is about how institutional sources (especially party and state media) tailor their messaging on short-video apps for policy outreach.

Framing theory and rural revitalization

This study is grounded in framing theory, focusing specifically on how thematic and emotional frames are employed by People’s Daily and CCTV News, these two mainstream media outlets construct the rural revitalization framing within China’s state-controlled media ecosystem. Framing analysis, as a theoretical concept, can become a new conceptual framework by combining different research perspectives (D’angelo, 2010). Especially for those studies based on framing theory and discourse analysis, how to construct political communication by emphasizing emotionality and thematic frameworks, where media narratives play a role in shaping public opinion and institutional trust (Ramírez-Salina et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study mainly combines the thematic framework and emotional framing theory to study the theme mode and emotional orientation of rural revitalization in TikTok (Douyin). In practice, thematic frames would highlight policy issues (e.g., development, poverty relief) and contextualize them in broader social trends, whereas emotional frames would foreground particular sentiments (such as pride, hope, or empathy) to shape audience reaction (Nabi, 2003). Many researchers use framing theory to analyze media systems during different issues such as war, elections, large-scale protests, and social movements (Shabbir et al., 2024). Emotions themselves can act as frames by privileging certain information (e.g., focusing on human suffering vs. success) and guiding interpretation (Lively, 2024). These two framing theories help explain how, in this unique socio-political context, People’s Daily and CCTV News navigate centrally directed framing while exercising limited autonomy to shape their own communication frames and emotional expressions.

By leveraging TikTok (Douyin) to strengthen a steadfast leadership image and influencing relevant thematic news, in order to achieve promotional goals (Indainanto et al., 2025). The influence of the leadership of the CPC and its own political position have brought about tremendous communication effects (Wang, 2025). As a major development strategy in China, rural revitalization may be affected, so this study further explores the influence of leaders on the theme framework of rural revitalization beyond the thematic and emotional frameworks.

While titles are short, they represent the primary framing devices on Douyin. In short-video environments, editors compress issue emphasis, emotional tone, and interpretive cues directly into the title, which functions as a highly intentional, institutionally controlled text (Chen et al., 2024). For state media, title wording reflects official agenda priorities and framing strategies more transparently than the visual component, which mainly provides supporting imagery.

Although including full transcripts could yield more granular framing insights, titles are sufficient for capturing the explicit editorial framing intentions. This study focuses on institutional framing strategies rather than micro-level narrative details, making title analysis appropriate and theoretically justified.

Due to the political connotations inherent in the organizational identities of both People’s Daily and CCTV News (People’s Daily is a party newspaper, while CCTV News is China Central Television), there will be uniqueness in reporting news. Social media has become a vital tool for political leaders to communicate politically and shape a strong leadership image (Uali et al., 2023). While titles are short, they represent the primary framing devices on Douyin. In short-video environments, editors compress issue emphasis, emotional tone, and interpretive cues directly into the title, which functions as a highly intentional, institutionally controlled text.

Challenges in digital media communication

Mainstream media active on Douyin face some common problems in their short video strategies. These include high content homogeneity (characterized by repetitive themes, slogans, and imagery across different video), limited narrative forms, and insufficient audience engagement (Peng, 2023). While these platforms offer opportunities for rapid dissemination and wide coverage, their short format poses challenges to the meaningful and differentiated communication of complex political content.

Institutional identity and media framing: theoretical foundations

Media organizations are not neutral conduits of information but institutional actors whose structural positions shape content production (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). Schudson’s seminal work identifies three organizational properties that influence news construction: ownership structures, production routines, and embedded cultural assumptions (Schudson, 1989). Within state-controlled media systems, institutional identity becomes particularly consequential. As Kuang and Wei (2018) demonstrate in their comparative analysis of Chinese party newspapers and commercial outlets, institutional positioning directly correlates with frame selection, emotional tone, and emphasis hierarchies.

The distinction between “party newspapers” and “state broadcasters” is analytically significant in China’s media ecology. Party newspapers operate as direct instruments of Party communication, prioritizing ideological reinforcement and policy legitimation (Zhao and Zhang, 2024). State broadcasters, while equally subject to state control, maintain a journalistic mandate requiring broader audience appeal and credibility maintenance (An et al., 2020). This institutional tension—between ideological function and journalistic credibility—produces observable framing differences even when covering identical policies.

This analysis extends framing theory by hypothesizing that institutional identity generates predictable variation in three dimensions: (1) thematic emphasis (what aspects of policy are highlighted), (2) emotional tone (how issues are affectively presented), and (3) legitimation strategies (how state capacity and leadership are positioned). This theoretical framework allows us to move beyond

simple content description toward understanding how institutional constraints and opportunities shape digital communication strategies.

Computational approaches in media analysis

The combination of LDA model and BERT sentiment analysis has practical significance in different countries and regions. Sentiment analysis has significant potential in informing public policy, especially in the context of poverty alleviation (Indriyanti et al., 2025). Using historical market data and related news headlines as source data and integrating topic identification and sentiment analysis techniques, researchers have constructed novel frameworks for predicting agricultural futures prices (Wang and Liu, 2025). This study employs a two-stage analytical design that bridges computational text analysis with interpretive frame identification. These computational methods do not directly “detect frames” (as frames are interpretive constructs, not statistically observable entities). Rather, they systematically reveal textual patterns that serve as the material basis for framing.

LDA topic clusters are examined to identify which aspects of rural revitalization are emphasized, how they are conceptually organized, and what is systematically excluded, revealing thematic framing strategies. Sentiment distributions across topics are analyzed to determine whether issues are presented as achievements to celebrate, problems requiring attention, or neutral developments, revealing emotional framing strategies.

Analysis of English text corpus using LDA topic modeling and Bertopic performance evaluation shows that Bertopic demonstrated stronger performance against LDA (HimaBindu et al., 2024). We selected LDA for three specific reasons: (1) interpretability—LDA’s probabilistic framework explicitly models term-topic relationships, enabling transparent manual validation by communication experts; (2) consistency with prior rural communication research—maintaining methodological continuity with existing framing studies on agricultural policy (Wang and Liu, 2025); (3) computational efficiency for our specific task—with a final sample size of 445 videos and Chinese language titles averaging 12–15 tokens, LDA provides sufficient granularity. However, we acknowledge this represents a conservative methodological choice and recommend future research employ BERTopic for comparative validation.

StructBERT was selected over general-purpose BERT implementations because: (1) it was pre-trained on Chinese language corpora specifically (Wang et al., 2019), addressing domain-specific linguistic patterns in media titles; (2) structural pre-training captures syntactic and semantic relationships crucial for interpreting policy-laden Chinese slogans and metaphorical language; (3) prior validation on government microblogs (Du et al., 2023) demonstrates reliability for state media discourse. Sentiment analysis was applied at the topic level rather than individual document level, enabling analysis of how each identified theme is affectively framed across the corpus.”

Research questions and theoretical framework

This study aims to investigate how China’s central mainstream media, People’s Daily and CCTV News, construct and emotionally

frame the discourse of rural revitalization on the short-video platform Douyin. Base on thematic and emotional framing theories, the research focuses on three core questions.

Based on our review of literature and theoretical framework, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the primary thematic patterns in rural revitalization discourse constructed by People’s Daily and CCTV News on Douyin?

RQ2: How do sentiment orientations differ across thematic categories between the two media outlets?

RQ3: How do institutional identities influence the framing and sentiment orientation of rural revitalization narratives on short-video platforms?

To ensure conceptual clarity, the key terms used in each question are defined as follows:

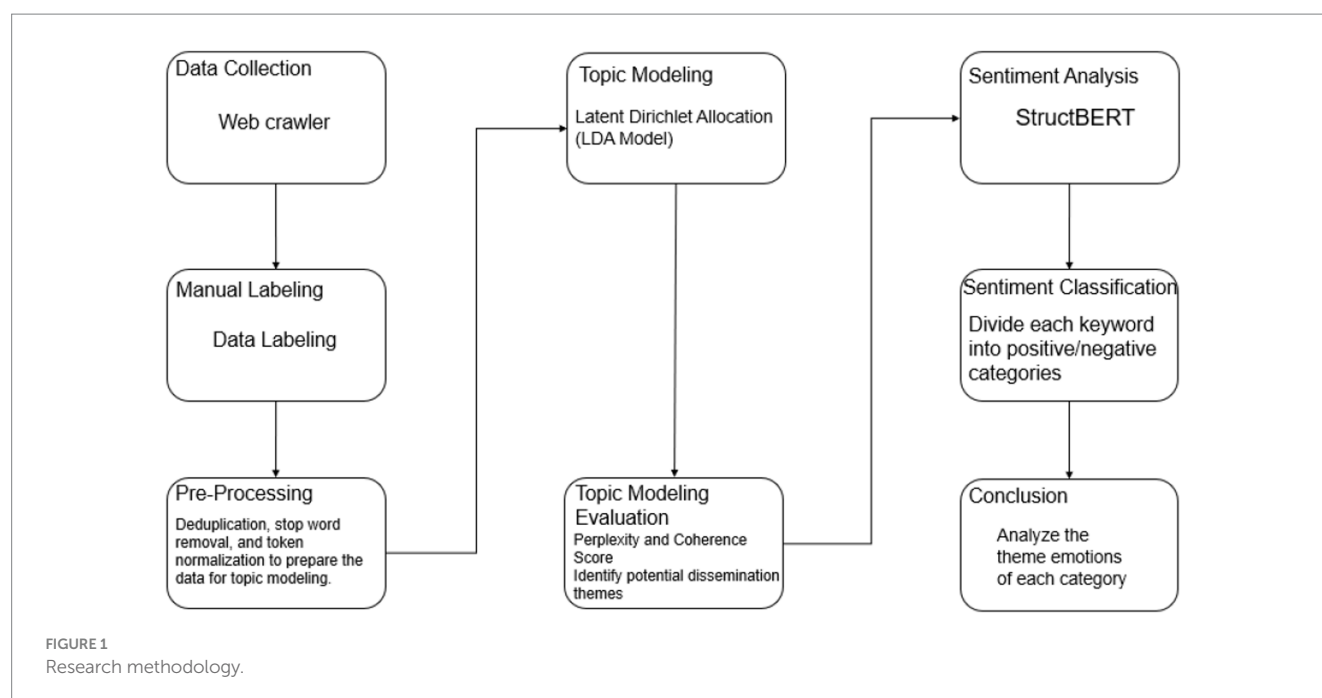
- (i) Lemke describes thematic patterns as “patterns of connections among the meanings of words in a particular field” that recur across texts and give the discourse conceptual coherence (Wu and Lin, 2022). Primary thematic patterns refer to the dominant topics and semantic structures identified through Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) modeling of video titles. These patterns reveal how each media outlet prioritizes and organizes its discourse around rural revitalization, including specific focuses such as industrial development, poverty alleviation, or cultural heritage.
- (ii) In classic opinion-mining surveys, sentiment orientation (also called semantic orientation) is the label that tells us whether the attitude expressed is favourable, unfavourable or neutral (Cardie, 2014). These orientations are derived from sentiment analysis techniques and allow for a comparative assessment of sentiment orientation across thematic categories and between the two media institutions.
- (iii) Institutional identities denote the role-specific characteristics, normative orientations and communicative functions that stem from a media outlet’s position inside a wider political-media system. Schudson argues that news organisations possess institutional properties—ownership, routines and cultural assumptions—that shape how they construct reality (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017).

Method

This research adopts a mixed method combining theme modeling and emotion analysis to explore the theme construction and emotion orientation of China’s mainstream media rural revitalization discourse on the short video platform TikTok (Douyin). The focus of the analysis is on two central state media: People’s Daily and CCTV News.

Data collection and preprocessing

Figure 1 shows the research process and related analysis steps of this study. In the first stage, collected data from all videos (2018–2024) released by People’s Daily and CCTV News on the TikTok (Douyin) platform through web crawlers (Divominer tool).



A total of 13,304 samples were obtained, with 7,840 from CCTV and 5,464 from People's Daily. Through the keyword list of articles on rural revitalization on China National Knowledge Infrastructure, the videos were then manually categorized using the labels, and examples of videos on rural revitalization were selected and preprocessed. All titles were collected within a specified time period and filtered based on relevant keywords, such as "rural revitalization, farmer, village." Standard preprocessing techniques such as deduplication, stop word removal, and token normalization were used to prepare the data for topic modeling. The final effective sample size obtained is People's Daily-213 and CCTV News-232.

The second stage involves using LDA models for data processing. Using the built-in LDA model of the DIVOMINER platform. The capabilities of DiVoMiner enable researchers to efficiently research sentiment and semantic network analyses (Law et al., 2025). After data input, the number of topic categories within the research corpus was determined by evaluating the Perplexity and Coherence curves, that can ensure interpretability and semantic validity. Then, these themes are interpreted as potential communication themes within a broader framework of rural revitalization narratives. Perplexity was initially employed to ascertain the optimal number of topics following the introduction of the LDA topic model. The optimal number of topics is the one with the lowest perplexity among a variety of topics (Li et al., 2022). It is important to conduct perplexity and coherence tests to decide on the appropriate number of topics (Yusof and Saeed, 2024).

In the third stage, sentiment analysis will be conducted using StructBERT (iic/nlp_structbert_sentiment-classification_chinese-base), rather than applying sentiment classification at the document level, the study focuses on evaluating the emotional tone of each identified topic by classifying the corresponding keywords or associated texts into positive or negative categories. For user type, BERT performs best on the Government Affairs Microblog, whereas LDA-BERT performs best on the We Media Microblog (Du et al., 2023). The StructBERT with structural pre-training gives surprisingly good empirical results on a variety of downstream tasks, including pushing the state-of-the-art on

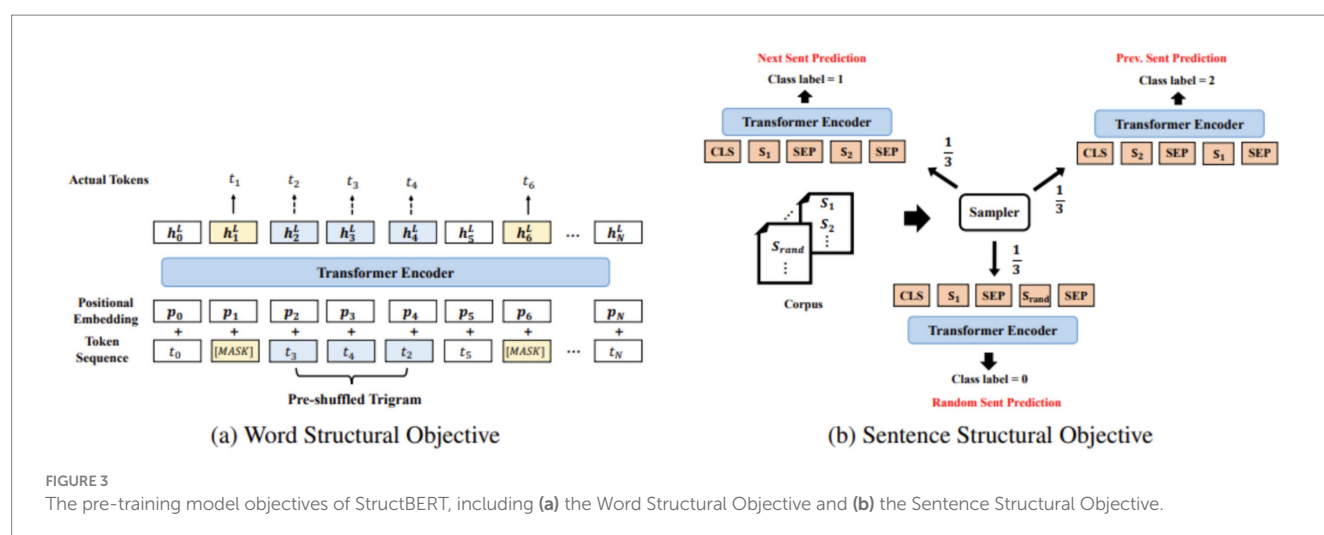
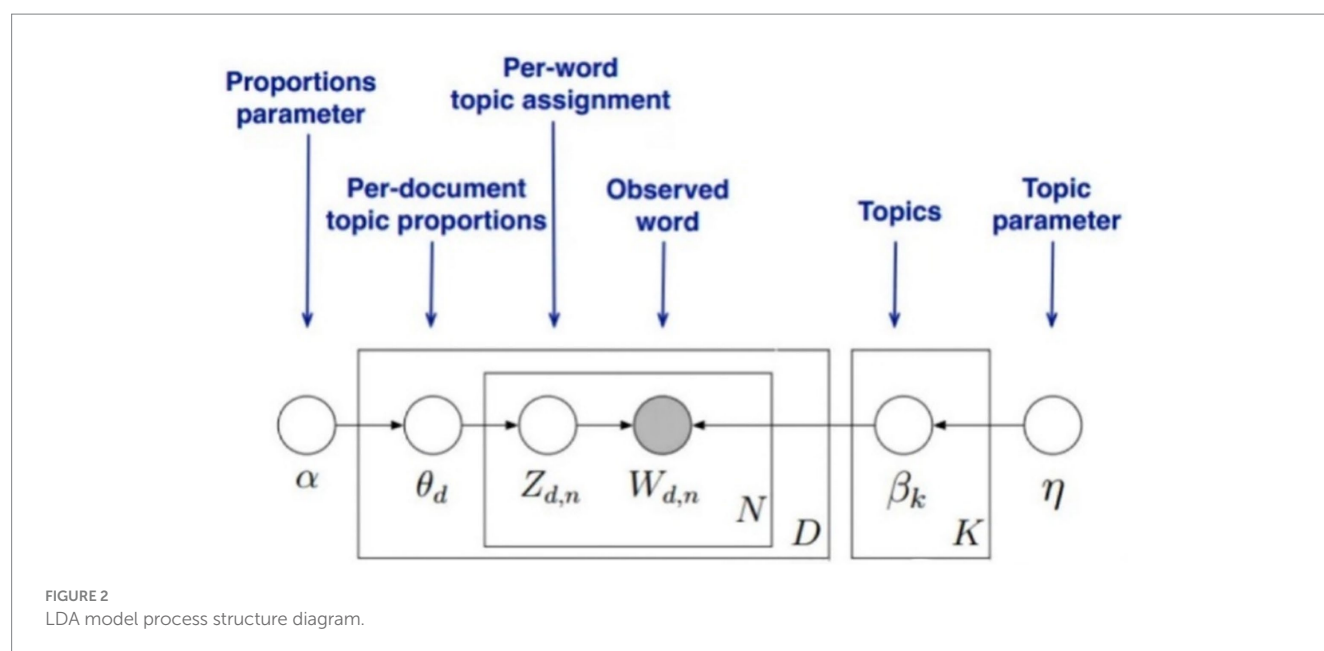
the GLUE benchmark to 89.0 (Wang et al., 2019). This enables a nuanced understanding of how different theme are emotionally constructed and presented by mainstream media.

To ensure the validity of the data. Two PhD-level researchers independently assessed the relevance of each topic's text to rural revitalization and examined the consistency of rural revitalization-related keywords within each topic. Cohen's kappa values for the topic categories of People's Daily and CCTV News are 75 and 63%, respectively, meeting the standards for content analysis. Based on the keywords selected from the 36 sections of the Rural Revitalization Strategy Plan (2018–2022) released by the government and the keywords analyzed in previous literature as a lexicon, the data is filtered. Specifically, this study investigated whether the title of each TikTok (Douyin) video was related to the theme of regional revitalization. After this review, the topics were categorized and described accordingly.

One researcher started the classification; the other checked and validated the groupings. When the first researcher wasn't sure about the classification, the two worked through conversation to decide on the best groupings. The researchers gave maximizing thematic coherence inside each group top priority when arranging the subjects, so reducing overlap among several groups. At last, they developed succinct summaries for every topic cluster and the consistency reaches above 95, so capturing the common thematic elements among the grouped subjects.

Topic modeling with LDA

The latent Dirichlet distribution (LDA) is used to reveal the underlying topic structure in a corpus. To determine the optimal number of topics, the model is trained and evaluated using perplexity and coherence scores. This research tested different topic numbers ($k = 2$ to 15) and selected the model with the lowest perplexity and highest consistency as the final analysis object. Figure 2 shows the LDA model process structure diagram.



The LDA preprocessing pipeline consisted of six main steps: (1) removing URLs, (2) lemmatization and part-of-speech filtering, (3) named entity recognition, (4) trigram and bigram detection and concatenation, (5) stop word filtering, and (6) frequency-based filtering (Barna and Knap, 2023).

After determining the optimal number of topics, extract the most important keywords from each topic and manually classify them by two communication experts and Cohen's k was used to ensure the reliability of the data. This ensures that each topic receives meaningful explanations and is assigned to relevant topic categories.

Sentiment analysis using StructBERT

Use the StructBERT model pre-trained on a Chinese corpus to assess the sentiment orientation of video titles. StructBERT captures context and semantic nuances, which is particularly important when analyzing short, often metaphorical or slogan-like media titles.

StructBERT, an NLP pre-training model proposed by Alibaba Damo Institute, is a mature language model for Chinese language sentiment analysis (shown as Figure 3). The model gives surprisingly good empirical results on a variety of downstream tasks, outperforming many published models (Wang et al., 2019). Each title was classified into one of three sentiment categories: positive, negative, or neutral. The model's predictions were validated by a manual review of a random sample, ensuring high reliability of the sentiment classification (Liang and Chen, 2024).

Overall, this study first applies the LDA module within the DiVoMiner platform to extract latent topics from news headlines, and subsequently integrates an open-source Struct-BERT model (which can be run via Python and the Hugging Face platform) to perform sentiment analysis. Topic modeling is used to reveal the structure of media frameworks and is a paradigm of combining thematic framing with computational models. By using LDA (and BERTopic) to analyze the thematic structure of news media, in order to reveal how media constructs war narratives through

specific themes (Verbytska, 2024). By implementing standardized data preprocessing procedures—such as tokenization, noise reduction, and unified encoding—along with multiple LDA runs and clustering strategies to identify stable topic structures (We ran the LDA model multiple times to verify stable topics.), the method enhances reproducibility. The open accessibility and platform compatibility of Struct-BERT further ensure the replicability and scalability of the overall methodological framework.

Findings

Thematic patterns in People's Daily

In order to determine the optimal number of themes for the content of People's Daily, this research conducted perplexity and coherence analysis, as shown in Figures 4, 5. The perplexity analysis (Figure 4) shows that when the number of topics is set to 5, the perplexity significantly decreases, indicating that the model fitting has been improved. This finding is corroborated by the coherence analysis (Figure 5), which shows a peak at five topics, suggesting stronger semantic coherence.

By manually evaluating the optimal number of topics, the study separately examined $K = 4$ and $K = 6$ to ensure the accuracy of the selected K value and to assess whether the resulting topic categories could be clearly distinguished and interpreted. The results show that when $K = 4$ or $K = 6$, the keywords associated with “Rural ecological construction and development” and “Rural development and rural revitalization” were merged, making the two topics difficult to differentiate. In contrast, when $K = 5$, this overlap was reduced, and the topics could be clearly separated and interpreted. Based on this computational evidence, we determined that five is the optimal number of thematic categories for People's Daily content on rural revitalization.

Based on perplexity and coherence analyses, the optimal number of topics for People's Daily was determined to be five. These five thematic elements align with the five directions established by the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China for the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy: industrial prosperity, ecological livability, rural civilization, effective governance, and prosperous living (Fan et al., 2024).

After two rounds of independent screening and comparison by two trained PhD researchers, for assessing inter-coder reliability for topic classification, Cohen's $k = 0.75$, indicating that the classification process was reliable, the following themes emerged (see Table 1).

1. Rural development and rural revitalization: This dominant frame constructs rural revitalization as a hierarchical policy execution process driven by state directives. Based on keywords, ‘the state advances,’ ‘the state implementations,’ ‘the state plans’ Active verbs consistently position government as the primary actor and emphasize institutional frameworks rather than specific outcomes or life experiences.
2. By foregrounding policy structure over implementation challenges or grassroots experiences, the frame shows that positions rural revitalization as an extension of state capacity and Party leadership; provides officials with a vocabulary for understanding and discussing the initiative; establishes policy compliance as the primary measure of success.
3. Rural ecological construction and development: Based on the keywords “发展” (development) with “生态” (ecology) and “绿色” (green), it aligns with the previous promotional slogan ‘Green mountains and clear waters are as valuable as gold and silver’. In addition, “保护” (protect) and “建设” (construct) reflect a sustainable development plan for the program. Its purpose is to show that the solution is to frame environmental protection as integral to development rather than constraining.

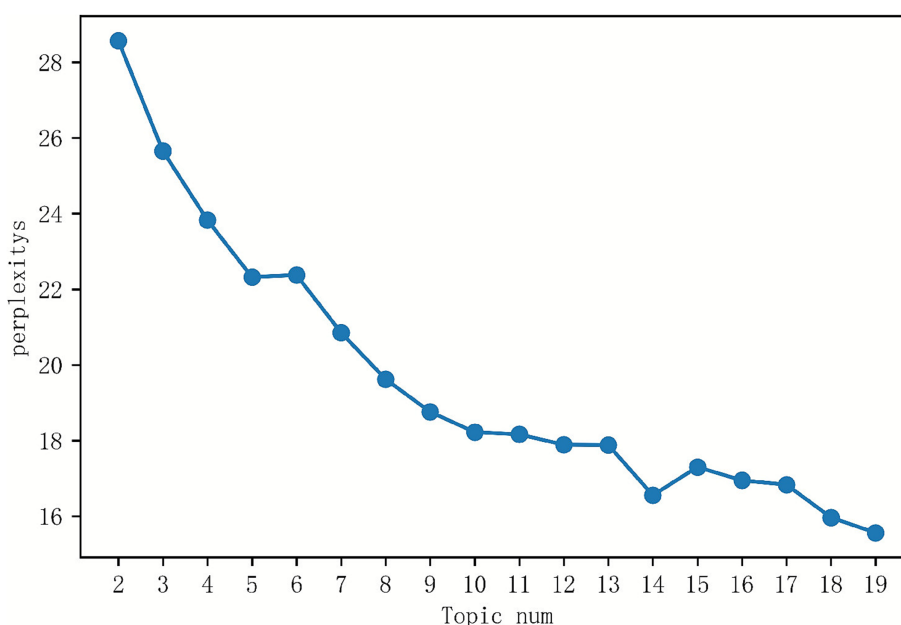


FIGURE 4
Perplexity analysis of People's Daily.

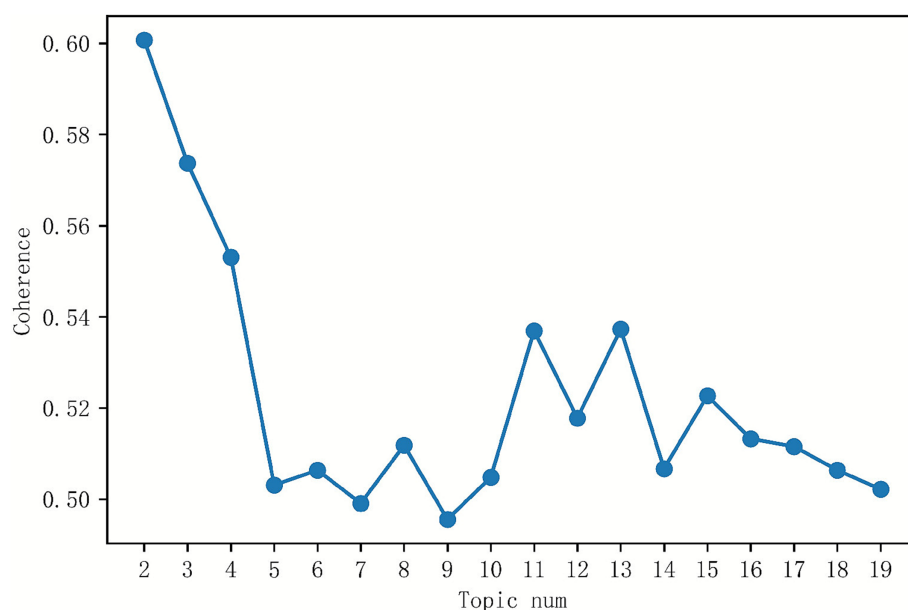


FIGURE 5
Coherence analysis of People's Daily.

TABLE 1 People's Daily—thematic classification.

Themes	Keywords
Rural development and rural revitalization	战略 (strategy), 实施 (implementation), 发展 (development), 政策 (policy), 推进 (advance), 规划 (planning), 措施 (measures), 建设 (construction)
Rural ecological construction and development	生态 (ecology), 环境 (environment), 保护 (protection), 绿色 (green), 建设 (construction), 美丽 (beautiful), 资源 (resources), 发展 (development)
Rural poverty alleviation and livelihood	脱贫 (poverty alleviation), 攻坚 (tackle tough problems), 贫困 (poverty), 收入 (income), 增收 (income increase), 保障 (security), 帮扶 (assistance), 群众 (masses)
Rural community care and social support	关爱 (care/concern), 儿童 (children), 留守 (left-behind), 老人 (elderly), 服务 (services), 志愿 (volunteer), 活动 (activities), 社会 (society)
Rural revitalization and construction	建设 (construction), 乡村 (village/rural), 振兴 (revitalization), 基础设施 (infrastructure), 道路 (roads), 改造 (transformation), 工程 (project), 完善 (improve/perfect)

4. Rural poverty alleviation and livelihood: “攻坚” (literally “attack fortifications”), “收入” (income) and “增收” (income increase). To some extent, it indicates success numerically and materially, making poverty alleviation measurable and demonstrable. And the determination of the Chinese government to eradicate poverty, maintain poverty alleviation as an ongoing concern by focusing on income security and consolidation.
5. Rural community care and social support: “关爱” (care/concern), “志愿” (volunteer) and “留守儿童” (left-behind children). This frame constructs rural social welfare as a community mobilization and moral concern rather than structural policy issue. Because this frame addresses a sensitive consequence of rural–urban migration: family fragmentation and care deficits in villages. This frame can effectively demonstrate the focus on vulnerable groups and provide some attention to the issue of rural population loss caused by urbanization development.

6. Rural revitalization and construction: “道路” (roads), “基础设施” (infrastructure) and “建设” (constructing). This frame constructs revitalization as physical modernization through infrastructure investment, emphasizing visible, material transformation. Due to the fact that rural revitalization can be refined into many policies to assist rural areas, such as land subsidies, rural healthcare, etc., Therefore this framework can allow the audience to intuitively see the government's investment and support for rural areas.

As Figure 6 shows, from the frequency of words, it's evident that People's Daily clearly leans toward a policy-based topic communication framework, emphasizing policy implementation and the actual state of poverty alleviation. Its reporting primarily focuses on the explanation of government policies, the status of policy implementation, and the practical progress and outcomes of poverty alleviation efforts. In short, People's Daily's thematic frames are policy-oriented and procedural, reinforcing official development narratives.

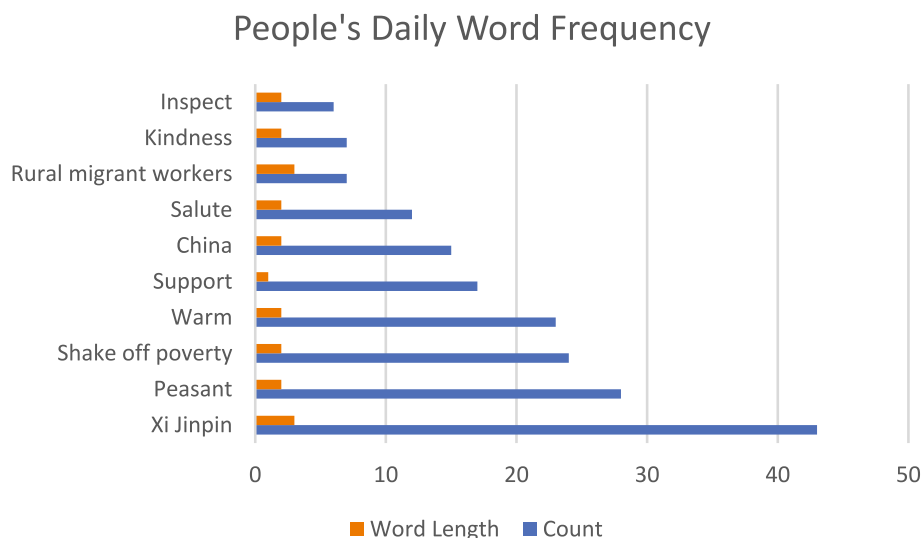


FIGURE 6
Word frequency of People's Daily.

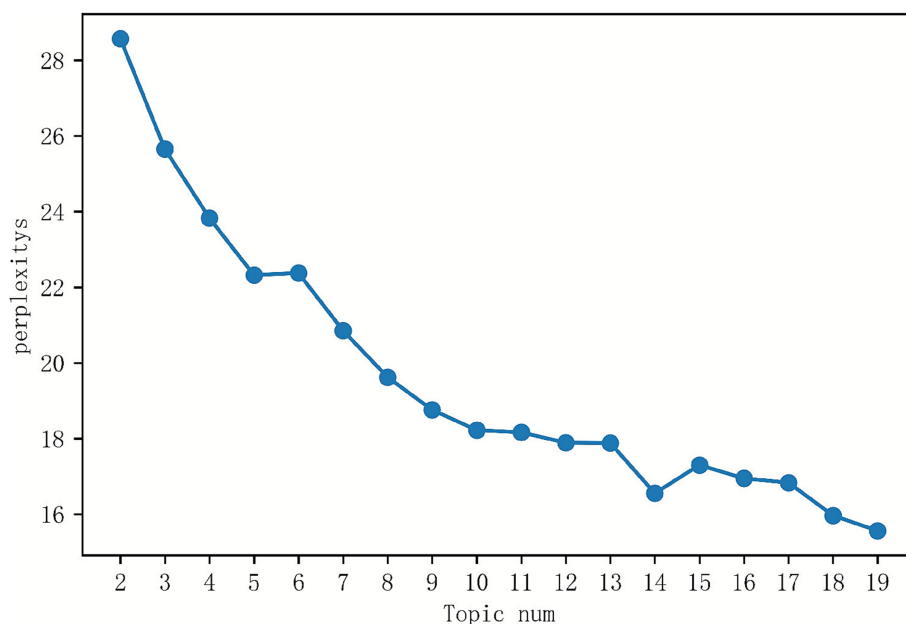


FIGURE 7
Perplexity analysis of CCTV.

Thematic patterns in CCTV News

A similar analysis was also used to determine the optimal number of topics for CCTV News content. As shown in Figures 7, 8, both the perplexity and coherence metrics were investigated. The perplexity analysis (Figure 7) showed an overall downward trend without a clear turning point, while the coherence value (Figure 8) reached its maximum value when the number of topics was set to 5.

Considering these two metrics and consistent with the analysis of People's Daily. Similarly, at K = 4 and 6, there was an overfitting of the theme category keywords, making it difficult to accurately determine

the theme, we concluded that five topic categories are also the best choice for analyzing CCTV News content.

Similar to People's Daily, the optimal number of topics for CCTV News was determined to be five. Cohen's $k = 0.63$. These themes are (see Table 2).

1. Rural development and poverty alleviation work: “脱贫” (escape poverty), “增收” (increase income), “产业” (industry) and “群众” (masses). This frame reflects CCTV's dual mandate: fulfill political requirements (cover poverty alleviation prominently) while maintaining journalistic credibility

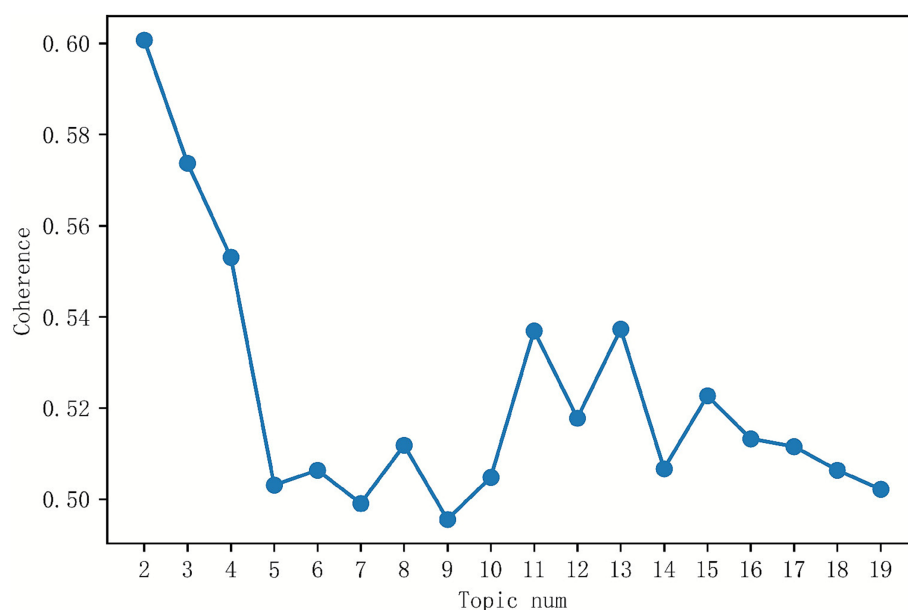


FIGURE 8
Coherence analysis of CCTV.

TABLE 2 CCTV News—thematic classification.

Themes	Keywords
Rural development and poverty alleviation work	脱贫 (poverty alleviation), 攻坚 (tackle tough problems), 帮扶 (assistance), 产业 (industry), 发展 (development), 增收 (income increase), 致富 (become prosperous), 带动 (drive/lead)
Rural life and agricultural development	生活 (life), 农民 (farmers), 乡村 (rural/village), 传统 (traditional), 文化 (culture), 家乡 (hometown), 记忆 (memory), 变化 (change)
Rural development and child development	儿童 (children), 孩子 (kids), 教育 (education), 学校 (school), 成长 (growth), 梦想 (dreams), 未来 (future), 关注 (attention/focus)
Rural Revitalization and Comprehensive Development	振兴 (revitalization), 乡村 (rural/village), 发展 (development), 推进 (advance), 建设 (construction), 产业 (industry), 经济 (economy), 工作 (work)
Poverty alleviation and rural life	生活 (life), 农村 (rural), 农民 (farmers), 收入 (income), 提高 (improve), 幸福 (happiness), 美好 (beautiful/wonderful), 保障 (security)

through human-interest storytelling. By narrating personal stories, it showcases the effectiveness of poverty alleviation work and the results of rural revitalization. This also reflects CCTV's institutional positioning: as a broadcaster seeking broad public appeal, it must make rural revitalization emotionally resonant and relatable, not just politically correct.

2. Rural life and agricultural development: “生活” (life), “记忆” (memory), “传统” (traditional) and “农民” (farmers). This frame constructs rural areas as sites of authentic cultural experience and identity, marking a difference from People's Daily. By introducing the traditional culture and customs of rural areas, people who have already left rural areas can recall their rural life. So, this frame demonstrates platform-institutional interaction. Douyin's short-video format privileges emotional, visually compelling content.
3. Rural development and child development: “成长” (growth), “梦想” (dreams), “未来” (future) and “关注” (attention/care). This frame constructs rural revitalization as rural real

education and child's dream. Presenting a real educational environment by showcasing the educational environment of left behind children in rural areas and the educational environment created by the government for them. CCTV's frame is more empowerment-oriented because focusing on potential and aspiration rather than living environment, so this reflects CCTV's tendency toward inspirational storytelling.

4. Rural revitalization and progress in poverty alleviation: “产业” (industry), “经济” (economy), and “建设” (construction). It is a very intuitive framework used to describe the economic development and overall effectiveness of rural areas. Like People's Daily, ultimately rural revitalization is the revitalization of the rural economy, and its economic attributes are important regardless of which framework it is placed in While similar to People's Daily framing, this topic appears less dominant in CCTV's overall discourse.
5. Poverty alleviation and rural life: “幸福” (happiness), “温暖” (Warm) and 农村 (rural area). Similar to the second

framework, both have a rural life. However, based on the poverty alleviation framework, the main manifestation is to improve the quality of life, demonstrating the improvement in the quality of life in rural areas after the promotion of rural revitalization policies. However, CCTV makes this connection through lived experience rather than political slogans—humanizing official discourse.

Figure 9 indicates that CCTV News emphasizes emotional themes, highlighting images of farmers, poverty alleviation successes, and nostalgia for rural life. The difference in emphasis between CCTV News and People's Daily is notable. While People's Daily focuses on policy and developmental aspects of rural areas, CCTV News places a greater emphasis on showcasing the warmth and human side of rural life.

As shown in Figures 6, 9, Xi Jinping emerges as the single most frequently occurring proper noun across both media outlets' coverage of rural revitalization, surpassing other political actors and policy-related terms by a wide margin, typically associated with ceremonial or on-site inspection narratives. Both media repeatedly feature leader visits to villages or statements by central leaders. That depict rural development as a top-down initiative guided by the country's top leadership.

Sentiment analysis results

Among the five selected topics, People's Daily showed the most positive sentiment (shown as Table 3). No negative sentiment was found in the titles, and four of the five topics had a sentiment score of 1.0. These included topics such as "Rural Revitalization and Rural Construction," "Rural Development and Rural Revitalization," and "Rural Care and Social Support."

Only the sentiment value of the topic "Rural Poverty Alleviation and People's Livelihood Security" (0.739) was significantly lower, indicating that the topic tone was problem-oriented. This shows that even in a highly controlled media space, issues regarding social inequality and grassroots challenges receive limited but noteworthy attention. Meanwhile, the association between state leader and positive sentiment was particularly strong in People's Daily, suggesting a deliberate convergence of thematic and emotional appeals.

As Table 4 shows, the topic sentiment patterns of CCTV News are more diverse than those of People's Daily. The values range from 0.756 to 0.92, and all topics include some negative sentiment. It is worth noting that the topic of "Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation" has the lowest sentiment score (0.756), which indicates that editors tend to emphasize the difficulties and complexities of poverty alleviation.

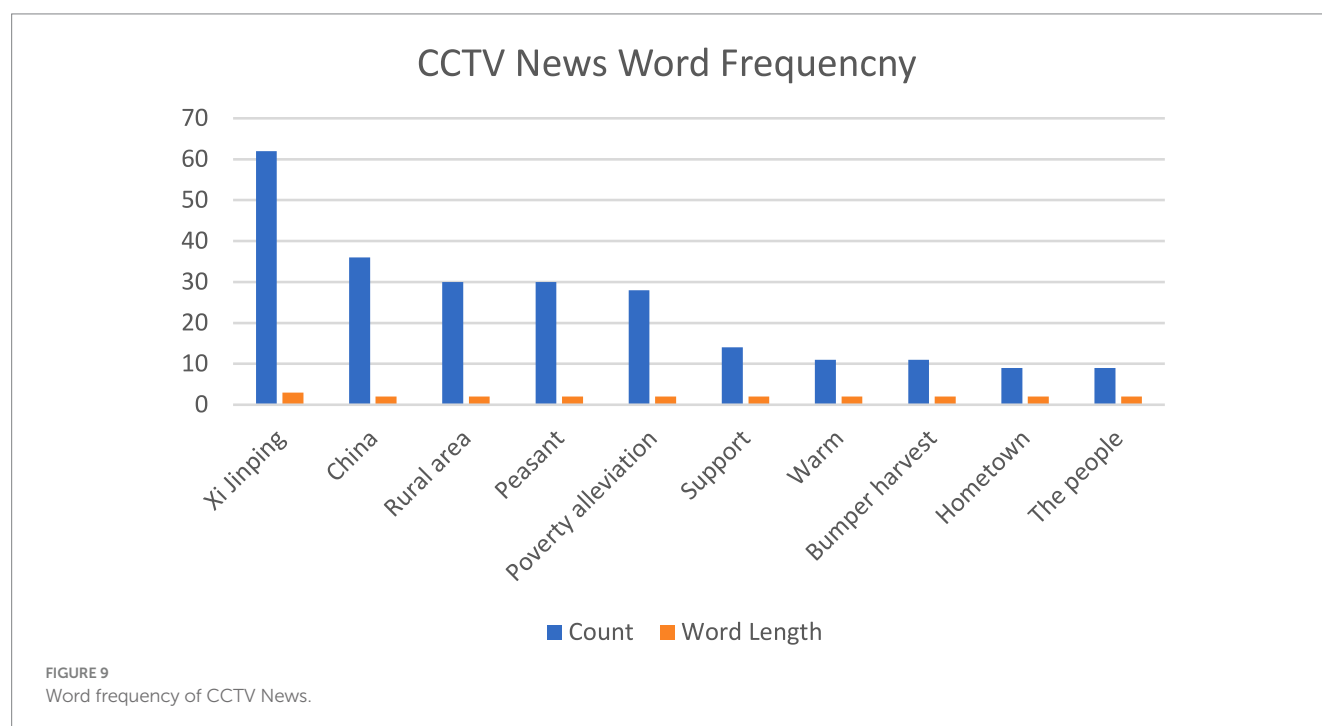


TABLE 3 People's Daily—thematic sentiment analysis.

People' Daily-max_topic	Positive	Negative	Thematic sentiment analysis
Rural development and rural revitalization	19	0	1
Rural ecological construction and development	16	1	0.882353
Rural poverty alleviation and livelihood issues	20	3	0.73913
Caring for rural communities and social assistance	25	0	1
Rural revitalization and rural construction	13	0	1

TABLE 4 CCTV News—thematic sentiment analysis.

CCTV News-max_topic	Positive	Negative	Thematic sentiment analysis
Rural development and poverty alleviation work	36	5	0.756098
Rural life and agricultural development	27	3	0.8
Rural development and child growth	24	2	0.846154
Rural revitalization and progress in poverty alleviation work	24	1	0.92
Poverty alleviation and rural living	24	2	0.846154

Although topics such as “Rural Development and Children’s Growth” (0.846) and “Rural Revitalization and Poverty Reduction Progress” (0.92) express a lot of optimism, the inclusion of a more balanced sentiment tone indicates a more descriptive or narrative thematic framing strategy.

Discussion and conclusions

This study examines how China’s two major state media, People’s Daily and CCTV News, initiate and promote discussions on rural revitalization on the TikTok (Douyin) platform. By combining topic modeling (LDA) with sentiment analysis (StructBERT), we find that there are significant differences in the topic distribution and sentiment orientation of the content.

People’s Daily exhibited a stronger alignment with official narratives, presenting overwhelmingly positive sentiment across topics, which reflects its function as a direct voice of state ideology. As the official newspaper of the Party Central Committee, People’s Daily focuses more on policy promotion and achievement display, so its emotional inclination is more singular and positive. In China’s case, the rural revitalization narrative is closely tied to Xi’s legitimacy as a leader (Yuan and Guangfu, 2020). On the basis of innovative communication forms, the People’s Daily TikTok (Douyin) account still focuses on highlighting the political significance of short video news (Yi, 2021).

In contrast, CCTV News demonstrated greater sentiment diversity, incorporating moderate negative tones when addressing complex social issues like poverty alleviation and rural livelihoods. As a national television media outlet, CCTV News emphasizes everyday life in the countryside, so emotional expression is relatively diverse. The user profile of CCTV News demonstrates its approachability and high user stickiness in the dissemination direction of news related to people’s livelihoods (An et al., 2020). People’s Daily’s overwhelmingly positive tone then aligns with reinforcing Xi’s success narrative, whereas CCTV’s inclusion of some critical sentiment on poverty mirrors Xi’s stated focus on ‘targeted poverty alleviation’ and acknowledges difficulties.

In this perspective, portraying leaders (like Xi Jinping) as central figures serves to legitimize policies. Thus, the frequent mentions of Xi function as intentional framing, reinforcing the rural revitalization narrative. People’s Daily predominantly constructs a policy-oriented leadership narrative, emphasizing the top-down guidance and strategic vision of the central government in advancing rural revitalization. In contrast, CCTV News adopts a performative leadership narrative, focusing on local implementation stories and human-centered narratives that visualize the leadership’s effectiveness and responsiveness. Research has found that the portrayal of the image of new farmers in the Farmers’ Daily is at the macro level of issues, which are in line with

national policies, adhere to the party spirit principles of the media, and are related to keywords such as leaders (Wang, 2023).

Institutional identity shapes not only the thematic emphasis but also the narrative style of reporting. Leader centered discourse was often combined with a positive emotional tone. Thus, the frequent mention of Xi would be interpreted as intentional framing: media may use his image to unify and legitimize the rural revitalization narrative. It is especially potent in People’s Daily, where almost all leader-related content had positive sentiment. This institutional difference creates a natural experiment: both outlets must communicate the same policy on the same platform, yet their organizational identities may produce different framing strategies—revealing how institutional positioning shapes platform adaptation.

The comparison between the two media outlets reveals their different communication strategies: People’s Daily favors ideological affirmation, while CCTV News combines political affirmation with limited critical reflection. While both contribute to shaping the long-term narrative of rural revitalization, CCTV News allows for greater emotional heterogeneity, potentially increasing audience trust and identification. Meanwhile, Thematic frames highlight trends or public-policy contexts, whereas “episodic” (or “narrative”) frames highlight particular cases (Benjamin, 2007).

This study extends framing theory in two ways. First, in the context of China’s state media on Douyin we identify leadership portrayal as an analytically distinct frame: leader centered narratives operate alongside thematic and affective frames to legitimize policy. Second, we show that institutional identity systematically shapes frame selection, a party newspaper privileges policy or legitimacy frames while state television combines policy with human interest framing to sustain credibility.

Regarding methodology, the paper demonstrates a replicable mixed-methods pipeline that links large-scale computational pattern detection (LDA and StructBERT) with targeted interpretive framing analysis. Therefore, enabling robust “patterns to interpretive frames” analysis for short-form social media content.

From the launch of People’s Daily and CCTV News TikTok (Douyin) accounts in 2018 to mid-2024, fewer than 300 videos on rural revitalization were published. The topic’s strong political nature and relatively low public attention resulted in limited audience engagement (e.g., likes and comments), leading to fewer postings and less developed frames. Meanwhile, the rise of rural users and the increasing influence of specialized rural accounts, such as ‘Zhubo Shuo Sannong’ and ‘China San Nong Fabu’, have further shaped the discourse, often drawing more attention than comprehensive media. For mainstream outlets, however, the political mandate requires continuous coverage. In this context, leaders’ rural inspections and policy seminars become effective framing resources, simultaneously

fulfilling political objectives and sustaining the communication framework for rural revitalization.

In summary, this study shows that China's two leading state media shape the rural revitalization narrative on TikTok (Douyin) through distinct but complementary framing strategies. Thematic frames in People's Daily reinforce state authority and policy legitimacy. Emotional frames in CCTV News increase relatability and narrative depth. Leadership-centered frames legitimize policy through visibility and symbolic authority. Both outlets prominently feature that is Xi Jinping's image and rhetoric are central tools for legitimizing the rural revitalization policy on social media.

Limitations

Despite the contributions of this study, there are some limitations that need to be considered. First, the study focuses on national mainstream media, especially People's Daily and CCTV News on TikTok (Douyin). Although these sources play a vital role in shaping public discourse, they do not fully reflect the diversity of rural revitalization narratives because they do not include perspectives from local media, independent content creators, and public discourse.

Second, the study uses LDA topic modeling and BERT sentiment analysis as the main methodologies. Although these techniques can effectively identify topic patterns and sentiment orientations, they rely on pre-trained models and model biases and may not fully capture the nuanced rhetorical strategies and implicit meanings of media discourse.

Third, this study is grounded in framing theory, focusing specifically on how thematic and emotional frames are employed by various mainstream media outlets to construct the rural revitalization narrative within China's state-controlled media ecosystem. This reflects a unique sociopolitical context in which media actors operate under centrally coordinated narratives. Its conclusions might not apply directly to other nations with distinct media systems due to China's particular media environment.

While this research observe leadership prominence, cannot make definitive claims about how this element differs between outlets or how it interacts with thematic and emotional framing. This represents a limitation of the current study and an important direction for future research.

Lastly, rather than audience reaction, this study concentrates on media coverage and only including video titles. This indicates that it does not look at how the general population views or interacts with the TikTok (Douyin) story about rural revitalization, and the inability to further explore microscopic or more accurate frameworks.

5.1 Suggestions for further research

To better understand the complexity of the digital framing process, future research could draw on more diverse media sources. Local media, independent content producers, and user-generated content may fall into this category. Combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative techniques such as discourse analysis or expert interviews can better understand the strategic design and contextual interpretation of rural revitalization narratives.

Comparative research in different political and media environments can further deepen the theoretical understanding of

the digital framework theme process in different sociopolitical contexts. In addition, incorporating audience analysis (including engagement metrics, user comments, or sentiment tracking in surveys) and by collecting more sample information (including likes, comments, video content, subtitles, etc.) can investigate how media narratives influence public opinion and political discussions. Future research should quantify leadership mention frequencies and contexts; examine co-occurrence patterns (e.g., do leadership mentions cluster with certain topics or sentiments) and investigate whether institutional differences extend to leadership framing strategies. If such analysis were to reveal systematic differences, this would support our broader argument about institutional identity shaping multi-dimensional framing strategies.

Future studies might also explore how rural revitalization narratives evolve over time, especially in response to policy adjustments or changing economic conditions. A longitudinal approach could reveal patterns of consistency or change in media framing and emotional tone. From the perspective of media coverage of the same topic from different positions, it may be analyzed that, in addition to the hierarchical communication structure of mainstream media, different framework publishers may focus on different points, more or less adding or reducing elements in the same event to conform to their expected framework.

This study verified the existence of differences in emotional expression among different media on the same platform and topic, providing valuable reference for future researchers in setting long-term frame on new media platforms.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human data in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was not required, for either participation in the study or for the publication of potentially/indirectly identifying information, in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The social media data was accessed and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/national regulations.

Author contributions

XX: Writing – original draft. MM: Writing – review & editing. SS'r: Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declared that financial support was not received for this work and/or its publication.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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