

Evolving Neologisms and Ephemeral Discourse: WeChat Index Analysis of 2021's Chinese Internet Buzzwords

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the evolving neologism, ephemeral discourse, and socio-cultural significance of 10 Chinese internet buzzwords in 2021, which are 双减 (shuāng jiǎn), 躺平 (tǎng píng), 元宇宙 (yuán yǔzhòu), YYDS, 社交牛逼症 (shèjiāo niú bī zhèng), 绝绝子 (jué jué zi), 跌妈不认 (diē mā bù rèn), 破防 (pò fang), 鸡娃 (jīwá), and Emo. Employing a quantitative and qualitative approach, we collected those buzzwords from news articles and analyzed their usage trends using the WeChat Index from 2021 to 2024. This study revealed the creative word formation processes and semantic properties of these neologisms among the Chinese netspeak. The WeChat Index data showed that 7 out of the 10 buzzwords experienced a decline in popularity after two years, while three buzzwords maintained an upward trend. Using the concept of ephemeral discourse and critical discourse analysis, we explored how these buzzwords addressed key social, cultural, and political issues, such as education reform, social pressures faced by youth, and the impact of technology on society. The buzzwords popularity trends were influenced by factors such as the natural lifecycle of neologisms, shifting public priorities, and societal attitudes.

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1. Introduction

Neologisms are newly coined words or phrases that reflect the evolving nature of language (Koltsova, 2017; Pavel; 2017; Marimón Llorca, C., and Sánchez Manzanares, C, 2022). They play a crucial role in language change by filling gaps to describe new phenomena, reflecting societal developments, and accommodating technological advancements (Felicity, 2016). Neologisms are evident in various fields like literature, medicine, psychology, and everyday communication, showcasing language's adaptability and growth (Menghan, et al. 2021). The formation of neologisms involves different processes, including affixation and blending. Studies often utilize computational frameworks to examine the emergence and decline of newly coined words originating from online activities in the social media. Neologisms represent vibrant linguistic instruments and play a substantial role in the ongoing transformation of language.

Studying neologisms in internet discourse is vital for understanding language innovation, cultural dynamics, and communication trends due to their prevalence and impact on language evolution. The internet serves as a rich source for the creation and dissemination of semantic neologisms, expanding the expressive means of languages (Oleksandr, 2022). Detecting and normalizing neologisms in social media content is essential for natural language understanding, especially in informal genres like user-generated content (Zalmout, et al., 2019). Neologisms in digital media can function as linguistic tools reflecting ideological constructs, highlighting the importance of analyzing their formation and implications (Sally, 2021).

The history and development of Chinese internet language or netspeak have evolved significantly over the years. Chen, et.al (2022) provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution and current state of Chinese netspeak research. The research reviewed spans from 1994 focused on the novelty of netspeak and its potential impacts on the Chinese language, reflecting initial curiosity and uncertainty. Therefore, Chinese netspeak

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research has transitioned to exploring its social, cultural, and psychological implications. With the rise of social media in China such as Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, Bilibili, etc., Chinese internet language has become a new variant adapted to the internet age, attracting extensive attention and research (Xuan Hu and Yongjun Liu, 2022).

The distinctive features of Chinese internet language, particularly noted for its creativity and adaptability, include the use of homophones, such as 666, pronounced as *liū liū liū*, deriving from the sound which is somewhat similar to the word *溜* (*liū*) means "awesome" or "well done." This number sequence is used to compliment someone's skill or to comment on impressive actions, meaning smooth or skilled. The widespread use of abbreviations is also the distinctive features of Chinese internet language, often arise from the need to type less, communicate more quickly, and navigate censorship, such as TMD, refers to *他妈的* (*tā mā de*), literally translated "his mother's" or "damn it," to express frustration or anger and XSWL, refers to *笑死我了* (*xiào sǐ wǒ le*) means to "laughing to death" or LOL in English. Furthermore, innovative character combinations involve playful and creative uses of Chinese characters reflecting the dynamic nature of online communication, such as *辣眼睛* (*là yǎn jīng*) literary "spicy eyes," to describe seeing something so absurd or ugly that it's like eyes are burning; *给力* (*gěi li*) literary "to give power," is used to describe something impressive or energizing and to express approval or commendation; *吃瓜群众* (*chī guā qún zhòng*), literally "melon-eating crowd," refers to bystanders who are there just to see what happens.

The mechanisms of Chinese netspeak, facilitated by the development of media technologies, highlight the creation of Chinese buzzwords. Chinese buzzwords, as a collective creation by Chinese netizens, symbolizes social changes and embodies an essential part of the current Chinese culture. These buzzwords are not only a reflection of Chinese netizens' concerns about reality but also a means to build social identity within online and offline communities. Chinese internet buzzwords, often arising from popular culture or current events, are highly context-dependent and short-lived, perfectly exemplifying the nature of ephemeral discourse. Ephemeral discourse refers to the discussion and analysis of short-lived cultural phenomena, such as social media content, digital literature, performed music, exhibited film. Chinese internet buzzwords have the characteristics of temporary nature and short lifespan (Viires, P and Laak, M 2021; Ringel, S., and Davidson, R., 2022).

Chinese internet buzzwords, have become a powerful lens to examine the current social and cultural trends, served as a reflection of the collective consciousness of Chinese netizens in China. For instance, the buzzword "躺平" (*tǎng píng*), which literally translates to "lying flat," emerged in 2021 as a response to the intense pressure and competition faced by young people in Chinese society. This term sums up the desire to opt out of the rat race and live a more relaxed, low-pressure lifestyle. Similarly, the phrase "内卷" (*nèijiù*) or "involution," gained popularity in 2020, referring to the phenomenon of fierce competition, such as the education system or job market. This buzzword highlights the growing concerns about social problems and the challenges faced by younger generations. Chinese buzzwords act as a bridge between official public opinion and private-public discourse (Guo, 2022). The emergence of these buzzwords in social media represents a dynamic change in language, often driven by social events, which underscores their significance as both a discourse fact and a cultural phenomenon in China (Jing, 2021).

The research of buzzwords draws upon the concept of "language ideology", which refers to the beliefs, values, and attitudes that individuals and societies hold about language and its use (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). Language ideologies are not neutral; they often reflect and reinforce power relations, social hierarchies, and cultural norms within a given society (Irvine and Gal, 2000). Some key aspects of language ideology include: standardization, the belief that there is a "correct" or "proper" form of language, often associated with the language variety used by dominant social groups (Milroy & Milroy, 1999); language and identity, the ways in which language is used to construct and express individual and group identities, such as ethnicity, gender, and social class (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004); language and power, the role of language in maintaining or challenging social inequalities and power structures (Fairclough, 1989). The language ideologies framework has been employed by Gao (2004) and La (2019) to analyze how Chinese buzzwords reflect and shape language ideologies.

The network society theory (Castells, 1996), provides an essential viewpoint for understanding the role of buzzwords in the broader context of globalization and the increasing interconnected of social, economic, and political systems. This theory has been applied to the study of Chinese buzzwords, such as Zou Yushan and Ni Rong (2022) and Xiaorong (2023). By drawing upon these theoretical frameworks, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Chinese buzzwords and their significance in the rapidly evolving digital communication. Revealing insights into digital communication and cultural identity, the study of Chinese buzzwords is crucial. It's challenges linguistic theories on neologisms, semantic shift, and sociolinguistics. Therefore, based on the background aforementioned, the objective of this research is to conduct an analysis of Chinese buzzwords that emerged between in 2021 using the WeChat Index, with the aim of understanding their evolving neologism, life span of the buzzwords, the phenomena of ephemeral discourse and the social implications.

2. Methods

To investigate the evolving neologisms and ephemeral discourse of Chinese internet buzzwords, this research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative linguistic interpretation. The data collection method involved gathering buzzwords from news articles published between January and December 2021. We selected Chinese news outlets which annually publish articles featuring the latest and most popular Chinese internet buzzwords, namely sixthtone.com, thatsmandarin.com, thechinaproject.com, people.cn, newconceptmandarin.com, china.org, and whatsonweibo.com. These news outlets are known for their extensive coverage of Chinese internet culture and language trends, providing a reliable and up-to-date source of data. From those news outlets and articles, we extracted a total of 10 most popular and used Chinese internet buzzwords in 2021, along with their definitions, origins, and examples of their usage in context. Based on the works of (Li, 2023), who have extensively studied the morphological and semantic characteristics of Chinese internet neologisms, this research examining the linguistic features of the collected buzzwords, such as their word formation processes and semantic properties.

In order to capture the emergence, development, growth, lifespan, and short-lived nature of these buzzwords, this study using the WeChat Index. The WeChat Index, a powerful tool provided by the WeChat platform, will be utilized to track the usage of the 10 selected buzzwords. The index provides numerical data on the search volume and frequency of each buzzword from 2021 to 2024. By extracting and analyzing this data, we can observe the emergence, growth, peak, and decline of each buzzword's popularity. In addition, to effectively present the findings, data visualization techniques will be employed. Line graphs will be used to showcase the trend of each buzzword's WeChat Index over the three years period. This visual representation will clearly demonstrate the short lifespan of most buzzwords and highlight any exceptions to this general trend.

In this research, the ephemeral discourse concept and critical discourse analysis used to analyze these 10 Chinese internet buzzwords and explore their role in online communication. Ephemeral discourse refers to the transient and fleeting nature of online communication, characterized by the rapid emergence, circulation, and obsolescence of linguistic forms and meanings (Danet and Herring, 2007; Zappavigna, 2012; Jiang et al., 2021). To capture the ephemeral nature of Chinese internet buzzwords, this research employed a diachronic approach, tracing their emergence, popularity, and decline over the three-year period. This involved examining the frequency and contextual usage of buzzwords across different time points and identifying the factors that contributed to their short-lived prominence, such as specific events, and user engagement. This research also drew upon the concept of Chinese buzzword "life cycle" (Ji et al., 2021) to explore that Chinese buzzwords show a trend of declining and stabilizing at low levels after an explosion in popularity.

Discourse analysis used for the qualitative research method that examines language use in social contexts, focusing on how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and contested through interaction (Gee, 2014; Fairclough, 2010). This analysis was guided by the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which seeks to uncover the power dynamics and ideologies embedded in language use (Fairclough, 2010). Therefore, critical discourse analysis used to conduct a thematic analysis of the buzzwords, identifying the key social, cultural, and political issues they addressed, such as social inequality and national identity.

Throughout this analysis, we maintained a reflexive and iterative approach, constantly comparing our findings with existing literature on Chinese internet language and culture (Chen, 2022). By combining discourse analysis and the concept of ephemeral discourse, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Chinese internet buzzwords from 2021 to 2024, reveal on their linguistic features, socio-cultural significance, and the dynamic processes of language change in the digital age.

3. Results and Discussion

Observations of the 10 most popular Chinese buzzwords in 2021, followed by trend analysis using the WeChat Index from their emergence in 2021 until 2024, revealed that all buzzwords experienced an exponential increase in their index during 2021-2022. From 2022 to 2023, seven of these buzzwords continued to rise in index; however, from 2023 to 2024, the same seven buzzwords showed a drastic decline in index. This indicates that within a period of three years, most Chinese buzzwords are likely to experience a decline in trend. The seven buzzwords that showed a declining trend after two years of popularity among the public include: 双减 (*shuāng jiǎn*), 躺平 (*tǎng píng*), 元宇宙 (*yuán yǔ zhòu*), YYDS, 社交牛逼症 (*shèjiāo niúbī zhèng*), 绝绝子 (*jué jué zi*), and 跌妈不认 (*diē mā bù rèn*), whereas the three buzzwords that continued to rise in trend after two years are: 破防 (*pò fáng*), 鸡娃 (*jīwá*), and Emo.



Chart 1. The development trend of the 10 most popular buzzwords in China from 2021 to 2024.

These 10 most popular and most used buzzwords in 2021, through Fairclough's CDA framework (2010), demonstrate various word formation patterns. First, compound words (*shuāng jiǎn*, *tǎng píng*, *yuán yǔ zhòu*) which represent complex concepts through semantic compression. Second, hybridized expressions (YYDS, Emo), shows the used of acronym and English influence on Chinese internet language. Third, Metaphorical constructions (*jīwá*, *pò fáng*): Utilize existing words to create new meanings. Fourth, intensifiers (*jué jué zi*, *diē mā bù rèn*) reflect emotional amplification in online communication. Five, social phenomenon descriptors (*shèjiāo niúbī zhèng*) combine colloquial and medical terminology. From discursive practice, these buzzwords emerged and circulated primarily through social media platforms, reflecting education reform context (*shuāng jiǎn*, *jīwá*), social attitude evolution (*tǎng píng*, *pò fáng*, Emo), and digital culture (*yuán yǔ zhòu*, YYDS, *shèjiāo niúbī zhèng*, *jué jué zi*, *diē mā bù rèn*). These buzzwords are primarily generated and circulated via social media platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok (Sun, P., et al 2022). Users, especially youths, create and popularize these terms through memes, videos, and online discussions. The buzzwords are consumed widely across different social groups but resonate strongly with younger demographics to express contemporary experiences. Traditional media and commercial entities sometimes co-opt these terms for marketing, further disseminating them. From social practice, these buzzwords reflect broader sociocultural transformations in Chinese society, which are young Chinese are developing linguistic tools to express resistance, educational pressure remains a significant social issue, and mental health awareness is increasing.

The rise of the buzzword 双减 (*shuāng jiǎn*), which literary means "double reduction", referring to the Double Reduction Policy announced in July 2021. This policy aims to alleviate the burden on students in compulsory education by reducing homework and off-campus training. The implementation of *shuāng jiǎn* in China represents a transformative educational reform aimed at addressing fundamental societal concerns regarding access to and quality of education. This strategic policy intervention seeks to recalibrate the educational landscape by minimizing excessive academic burdens while simultaneously enhancing the equitable distribution of educational resources (Xue, E., & Li, J., 2022). The term *Shuāng jiǎn* is a concise and notable abbreviation, effectively conveying the policy's core message. The widespread adoption of buzzword *Shuāng jiǎn* across various media platforms and in everyday conversations highlights its power in shaping public discourse. *Shuāng jiǎn* has become a focal point for discussions on education reform, parenting, and work-life balance. However, the WeChat index data reveals a declining trend in the popularity of the *Shuāng jiǎn* buzzword over the three years. From a peak of 13,642,892,889 in 2021-2022, the index fell to 10,165,193,999 in 2022-2023 and further decreased to 4,507,728,088 in 2023-2024.

This declining of *Shuāng jiǎn* popularity in public discourse naturally fading. This phenomenon is similar with the typical lifespan of buzzwords, which often experience a drop in popularity after two years. The declining trend may indicate that the public's focus has shifted to other issues or new policy initiatives. As the Double Reduction Policy became integrated into the educational system, its impact on daily life may have become less noticeable. This decline can be attributed to factors such as the natural lifecycle of buzzwords, shifting public priorities, and potential critiques of the policy's effectiveness.

The Chinese buzzword 躺平 (*tǎng píng*), which literally translates to "lying flat," emerged in 2021 as a popular expression among the younger generation in China. The emergence *tǎng píng* represents a deliberate social phenomenon where individuals consciously pulling out of societal pressures and conventional expectations. This cultural response manifests as a form of passive resistance against the intense competition and relentless pursuit of success that characterizes contemporary Chinese society (Matthyssen, M., 2024). At the textual level, *tǎng píng* is a simple and evocative phrase that captures the essence of the sentiment. The act of lying down or lying flat symbolizes a rejection of the relentless pursuit of success and a desire for a more balanced and less stressful life. The choice of this particular phrase highlights the younger generation's yearning for a break from the constant pressure to excel in education, career, and social status.

The sharing of memes, personal anecdotes, and discussions related to *tǎng píng* has created a sense of solidarity among young people. Moreover, the emergence of *tǎng píng* reflects the broader social and economic challenges faced by the younger generation in China. The intense competition in education and the job market, coupled with rising living costs has led to a growing sense of frustration. The WeChat index data reveals a declining trend in the popularity of *tǎng píng*, from a high of 6,006,216,747 in 2022-2023, the index fell to 3,383,174,821 in 2023-2024, following an initial index of 1,692,924,732 in 2021-2022. Like many buzzwords, *tǎng píng* may have experienced a natural decline in usage after its initial surge in popularity.

As the novelty of the term wore off and public discourse shifted to other topics, the frequency of its use naturally diminished. This pattern is consistent with the typical lifespan of buzzwords, which often experience a drop in popularity after two years. The decline in the buzzword's *tǎng píng* popularity may also reflect a shift in societal attitudes and discourse. While *tǎng píng* initially resonated with the younger generation's frustrations, it may have faced criticism or backlash from other segments of society. The government's emphasis on hard work and the need for young people to contribute to the nation's development may have also influenced the public perception of the buzzword.

The Chinese buzzword 破防 (*pò fáng*), which translates to "breaking through one's defenses," originated in the online gaming community and has since spread through various levels of social discourse in 2021. This term metaphorically expresses a moment when someone's emotional defenses are overwhelmed, akin to the English expressions "this really got me" or "so many feels." The widespread adoption of *pò fáng* among Chinese youth signifies a notable shift in emotional expression a powerful indicator of emotional vulnerability and authenticity among younger generations. The term's transition from gaming jargon to mainstream social discourse illustrates how digital culture shapes modern emotional communication (Bilibili, 2021, November 29). Interestingly, the

WeChat index data reveals an upward trend in the popularity of *pò fáng*, from 1,261,153,520 in 2021-2022, the index increased to 5,200,059,474 in 2022-2023 and further rose to 6,147,493,341 in 2023-2024. This growth in popularity sets *pò fáng* apart from many other buzzwords that typically experience a decline after two years. Several factors may contribute to the enduring popularity of *pò fáng* is the adaptability have allowed it to be applied to a wide range of emotional experiences, from being moved by a heartwarming story to feeling deeply affected by a social issue. This broad applicability has helped maintain its relevance and resonance with users over time.

元宇宙 (*yuán yǔ zhòu*), which translates to "the metaverse," has gained significant attention since its rise to prominence in 2021. Originating from the 1992 novel Snow Crash and popularized by the movie Ready Player One, the concept of the metaverse gained traction in China when Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, known for his Mandarin proficiency, renamed the parent company to Meta. This move prompted Chinese internet giants like Alibaba and Tencent to follow suit, registering names and logos related to the metaverse. *Yuán yǔ zhòu* has become a focal point for conversations about the future of technology, digital economies, and social interaction. The involvement of major tech companies and the registration of related names and logos have further legitimized the concept and fueled speculation about its potential applications.

At the level of social practice, the popularity of *yuán yǔ zhòu* reflects a growing fascination with virtual reality and the potential for immersive digital experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift towards digital communication and remote work, making the idea of a shared virtual space more appealing. However, the WeChat index data reveals a decreasing trend in the popularity of *yuán yǔ zhòu* over the past three years. From a high of 6,147,493,341 in 2023-2024, the index fell to 5,200,059,474 in 2022-2023 and further decreased to 1,261,153,520 in 2021-2022. This decline in popularity aligns with the typical lifespan of many buzzwords, which often experience a drop after two years of initial excitement. The decreasing trend of *yuán yǔ zhòu*. First, the initial hype surrounding the metaverse concept may have gradually faded and practical implementations remained limited. The lack of tangible progress or mainstream adoption of metaverse technologies could have dampened public enthusiasm.

Similar to the English term "G.O.A.T." (Greatest of All Time), YYDS, an acronym for the pinyin phrase 永远滴神 (*yǒng yuǎn dī shén*), originated from an e-sports culture. This buzzword has gained significant popularity since its emergence in 2021 then widely adopted to describe someone or something that is exceptional and awe-inspiring which reflects the growing influence of e-sports and the changing dynamics of online expression in contemporary Chinese society. YYDS is a catchy representation of the phrase "forever god" or "eternal god." The use of the term "god" or *shén* (神) in this context emphasizes the supreme level of skill, talent, or excellence attributed to the person or thing being praised (Chen, Y., 2022).

YYDS has transcended its original e-sports context and is now used to express admiration and respect for individuals or entities in various fields, reflects a shift in the way admiration and respect are expressed online, with a focus on brevity, humor, and shared understanding. However, the WeChat index data reveals a decreasing trend in the popularity of "YYDS" over the past three years. From a peak of 19,425,312,271 in 2022-2023, the index fell to 13,931,695,157 in 2023-2024, following an initial index of 649,158,476 in 2021-2022. The important factor may contribute to the decreasing trend of YYDS is the overuse of the term. As the term became more widely adopted, its original sense of exclusivity may lead to a decrease in usage.

The evolution of online language and the emergence of new buzzwords may have diverted attention, internet users constantly seek fresh and innovative ways to express themselves. Newer terms and phrases may have captured the public's interest, leading to a decline in the popularity of older buzzwords. As new games, players, and trends emerge, the term's association with specific individuals or contexts may have become less significant, contributing to its declining popularity.

The emergence of Chinese buzzword 社交牛逼症 (*shèjiāo niúbī zhèng*) translates to "social awesomeness syndrome," reflects the growing anxieties surrounding social interaction in contemporary Chinese society. The emergence of the term *shèjiāo niúbī zhèng* captures a growing psychological phenomenon characterized by heightened social interaction anxiety, particularly prevalent among students, due to the convergence of multiple

stressors, including academic performance expectations, family obligations, and career preparation demands. The situation has been further complicated by the implementation of covid pandemic-related social distancing protocols, which may exacerbate existing social anxiety tendencies (Lin, H. et al 2023). This buzzword popularity also coincides with the increasing emphasis on individualism and self-expression. *Shèjiāo niúbī zhèng* embodies a carefree attitude, encouraging individuals to be confident and assertive in social settings without being overly concerned about others' opinions. The use of the word *症* (*zhèng*) "syndrome" in this context is a playful exaggeration, suggesting that the confidence and social skills displayed by these individuals are so remarkable that they can be likened to a medical condition.

Ideologically, *shèjiāo niúbī zhèng* can be seen as reinforcing certain values extroversion and social dominance, potentially marginalizing introverted individuals or those who prefer smaller social circles. Additionally, the term's association with "awesomeness" suggests a competitive element to social interaction, aligning with the broader societal emphasis on achievement. The declining trend of *shèjiāo niúbī zhèng* since its peak in 2022-2023. The WeChat index data reveals, from a peak of 16,271,091,538 in 2022-2023, the index fell to 7,828,062,180 in 2023-2024, following an initial index of 754,214,638 in 2021-2022, matches with the typical lifespan of buzzwords. As society continues to negotiate the boundaries of acceptable social behavior and self-expression, the term's significance may have shifted or become less pronounced.

The propagation of 鸡娃 (*jīwá*), which translates to "chicken baby," has become increasingly popular among middle-class Chinese parents in megacities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and many other big cities, who are obsessively competing to provide the best education and opportunities for their children (Li, R., 2021). The use of "chicken" in this context is metaphorical, drawing upon the association of chicken blood with heightened energy and courage and refers to mustering the courage to withstand the intense competitive pressures of schooling in China. The social implications of this buzzword reflect the growing anxieties and aspirations of Chinese parents in the face of a highly competitive educational system.

Parents share their experiences, strategies, and concerns related to *jīwá*, creating a discursive space where the competitive nature of child-rearing is both normalized and critiqued. Interestingly, the WeChat index data reveals an increasing trend in the popularity of *jīwá* over the past three years. From 1,713,842,696 in 2021-2022 and 1,804,799,524 in 2022-2023, the index surged to 6,717,646,397 in 2023-2024. This sustained growth in popularity sets *jīwá* apart from many other buzzwords that typically experience a decline after two years. The important factors may contribute to the enduring popularity of *jīwá* are the intense competition and pressure in China's education system shows no signs of declining. As society grapples with the consequences of excessive academic pressure on children and explores alternative approaches to education, 鸡娃 remains a relevant and provocative point of reference.

The Chinese buzzword 绝绝子 (*jué jué zi*), which used to express a strong sense of admiration, awe, or disbelief towards someone or something. Interestingly, the word can also be employed to convey the idea that something is unbelievably awful, depending on the context. The term has been employed in a variety of contexts, from praising a skilled person to expressing shock. The flexibility of the term's meaning, depending on the context, has contributed to its popularity and adaptability. Users engage with the term through likes, comments, and shares, creating a participatory culture around its use. From the WeChat index data, the trend of buzzword *jué jué zi* experience decreasing trend in the popularity over the past three years, from a peak of 178,696,557 in 2021-2022, 50,687,303 in 2022-2023 and further decreased to 21,018,231 in 2023-2024. Like many buzzwords, the overuse and saturation of the term may have led to a gradual loss of its novelty and impact, correspond with the typical lifespan of other buzzwords. As the buzzword became more widely adopted and mainstream, its original freshness and distinctiveness may have plummet, leading to a decrease in usage.

The term 跌妈不认 (*diē mā bù rèn*), which literally translates to "falling so much that even one's mother doesn't recognize them," means a self-effacing expression used by Chinese investors to describe the experience of suffering substantial losses in investment funds and securities, to the point where they become unrecognizable to their own mothers. The buzzword went viral during a period when China's stock and mutual fund market experienced a significant downturn. At social implications, this buzzword reflects the growing anxieties and

challenges faced by Chinese investors in an increasingly volatile financial landscape. The collocation of these characters creates a vivid and humorous image, adds an emotional and familial dimension to the term, emphasizing the personal and social consequences of financial instability.

The rapid growth of China's economy and the increasing participation of individuals in the stock and mutual fund market have brought both opportunities and risks. *Diē mā bú rèn* captures the psychological and social impact of financial volatility on individual investors, highlighting the need for greater awareness and understanding of the complexities of financial markets. However, the WeChat index data reveals a decreasing trend in the popularity of *diē mā bú rèn* over the past three years. From a peak of 2,127,422 in 2022-2023, the index fell sharply to 538,402 in 2023-2024, following an initial index of 1,504,743 in 2021-2022. As language continues to evolve and new expressions gain popularity, this "mainstream" buzzword may lose their appeal and be replaced by newer, more relevant terms.

The Chinese buzzword "Emo" refers to a state of emotional distress or depression following a stressful or unexpected event. Interestingly, the term's origin is not derived from the English word "emotional," but rather from the Chinese phrase "我 哭 个人 momo 地哭" (*wǒ yi gèrén momo de kū*), which translates to "I'm crying secretly, alone." The expression *wǒ emo le* is commonly used to convey the sentiment of feeling "so blue" or deeply saddened. From social implications aspect, this buzzword reflects the growing awareness and expression of mental health issues in contemporary Chinese society. The use of the English word "Emo" in the Chinese context is a form of linguistic borrowing and blending. The term's original meaning in Western culture has been recontextualized to fit the Chinese narrative of emotional distress.

WeChat index data remarkably reveals an increasing trend in the popularity of "Emo" over the past three years. From 3,537,107,753 in 2021-2022, the index rose to 7,719,461,753 in 2022-2023 and further increased to 9,642,244,980 in 2023-2024. This sustained growth in popularity sets "Emo" apart from many other buzzwords that typically experience a decline after two years. Several factors may contribute to the enduring popularity of "Emo." First, the increasing awareness and recognition of mental health issues in Chinese society have maintained the relevance and resonance of the term. As more individuals become comfortable discussing their emotional well-being and seeking support, the use of "Emo" as a shared language continues to grow. Second, the term's ability to capture a common experience and provide a sense of solidarity among those facing emotional challenges has contributed to its staying power. Third, the ongoing discussions and initiatives surrounding mental health in China have kept the term in the public consciousness. Therefore, "Emo" remains a relevant and important part of the discourse.

4. Conclusion

By employing a combination of data collection, calculating the trend using WeChat index analysis, and critical discourse analysis, this study has demonstrated valuable insights into the evolving neologisms and ephemeral discourse surrounding Chinese internet buzzwords in 2021, and the ephemeral discourse or lifespan surrounding 10 buzzwords from 2021 to 2024. The findings of this research underscore the transient nature of Chinese internet buzzwords, with most experiencing a sharp decline in popularity after two years. This trend aligns with the concept of ephemeral discourse, highlighting the rapid emergence, circulation, and obsolescence of linguistic forms in online communication.

This buzzwords observation contributes to our understanding of the lifecycle of internet neologisms and the factors influencing their rise and fall in public discourse. The WeChat Index analysis revealed that seven out of the ten buzzwords studied, namely 双减 (*shuāng jiǎn*), 躺平 (*tǎng píng*), 元宇宙 (*yuán yǔ zhòu*), YYDS, 社交牛逼症 (*shèjiāo niúbī zhèng*), 绝绝子 (*jué jué zi*), and 跌妈不认 (*diē mā bú rèn*), followed this pattern of declining popularity. However, the study also identified three buzzwords, 破防 (*pò fáng*), 鸡娃 (*jīwá*), and Emo, that defied the typical two-year decline, exhibiting a sustained or even increasing popularity over the three-year period. This finding suggests that certain buzzwords may resonate more deeply with the public consciousness. Therefore, the enduring popularity of these terms underscores the need for further research into the factors that contribute to the longevity of certain internet neologisms.

The critical discourse analysis of the buzzwords revealed their significance in reflecting and shaping public opinions on various social, cultural, and political issues in contemporary China. From the intense competition in education (*shuāng jiǎn* and *jīwá*) to the growing resistance towards societal pressures (*tǎng píng*), these buzzwords serve as powerful lenses through which to examine the collective concerns of Chinese netizens. This study highlights how internet buzzwords can serve as barometers of public sentiment. Despite the valuable insights gained from this research, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Future research could expand the scope of analysis, incorporating a larger sample of buzzwords and extending the timeframe to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of online discourse in China. Furthermore, the study relied primarily on the WeChat Index as a measure of buzzword popularity, which, while providing valuable quantitative data, may not fully capture the nuances of online engagement and interaction. In conclusion, this study serves as a call for further research into the world of Chinese internet buzzwords and their role in shaping public opinion and cultural identity.

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