

# *The Use of Tiktok by German Teenagers—Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis of Süddeutsche Zeitung Reports*

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on "German teenagers' use of Tiktok" (hereinafter "Tiktok") and "German teenagers' use of Youtube" (hereinafter "Youtube") as themes, based on a self-constructed corpus of Süddeutsche Zeitung reports from December 2018 to November 2023. The article adopts the method of critical discourse analysis, comparing the obtained data in terms of word frequency and index line analysis, and analysing the similarities and differences in the attitudinal tendencies presented by the Süddeutsche Zeitung when reporting on the two topics. The critical discourse analysis was carried out using a dialectical-relational approach, with a four-stage approach to constructing the analytical framework: Stage 1, the symbolic perspective when observing social defects; Stage 2, the obstacles to solving social defects; Stage 3, the necessity of exploring the defects in the process of social functioning; and Stage 4, the methods of solving the defects. The study found that the Süddeutsche Zeitung showed some differences in word frequency and index line comparisons when reporting on the two topics of "German teenagers using ShakeMe" and "German teenagers using tubes", and that this difference was partly related to the Chinese ShakeMe platform's foreign propaganda image and the media's political stance. This difference is partly related to the foreign propaganda image of the Chinese Shakeology platform and the Subscribe to DeepL Pro to edit this document. Visit [www.DeepL.com/pro](http://www.DeepL.com/pro) for more information. 2 political position of the media. The Süddeutsche Zeitung used a more negative tone when reporting on "German teenagers' use of ShakeEn", focusing on the problems and threats of teenagers' use of ShakeEn and ignoring the favourable effects of ShakeEn on teenagers; on the contrary, when reporting on "German teenagers' use of tubing", the media used a more negative tone when reporting on "German teenagers' use of tubing". On the contrary, when reporting on "German teenagers' use of tubing", more positive examples are reported and a positive tone is used. This study aims to shed light on the construction of China's foreign propaganda image and the development of the Internet. It is worth noting that the size of the corpus also affects the credibility of the conclusions, and the scope of this study's selfconstructed corpus is limited.

## 1. Background of the study

With the historic convergence of the information revolution and the unprecedented changes in the world, network information technology has become more or less relevant to everyone's production and life. The creation and promotion of various social entertainment platforms, as one of the most representative features of the information revolution era, has not only caused many unprecedented impacts on the process of social development, but also profoundly changed the global landscape. The American video website "Oil Tube", founded in 2005, and the Chinese short-video social platform "Jieyin", launched in 2017, are both social video platforms that have attracted a large number of users around the world, even though the time of their creation and the countries in which they have been developed are different. In 2023, 70.9 million people, or 81.5 per cent of the German population, used Youtube [1], while ShakeYin has 20.65 million users over the age of 3 eighteen in Germany, or about 29.7 per cent of the total German population.[1] . This shows that both social video platforms, Tube and Shake it, have a wide range of users in Germany. Since the launch of the two platforms, the number of teenagers using them has exploded due to their unique features of fun, interactivity and embeddedness, which cater to the needs of teenage users.

It is worth noting that the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, when reporting on the two topics of "German teenagers using Shake it" and "German teenagers using tubes", to a certain extent showed different attitudes. As one of the important forms of ideological expression, the use of vocabulary and collocation of news media reports reflects international relations to a certain extent, and has a certain impact on the overall image of the country. Therefore, analysing the discourse comparison of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*'s reports on "German teenagers using Jitterbug" and "German teenagers using tubing" is of some significance to the construction of China's foreign propaganda image.

In critical discourse analysis, discourse is viewed as a social practice that constructs social reality, closely linking discourse and power, reflecting power relations and ideology in discourse.[2] Relevant scholars use analytical techniques from literary works in non-literary discourse analysis, highlighting more prominently the interconnection between non-literary discourse and social reality. [3] Therefore, the discourse analysis of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*'s report on teenagers' use of jitterbugs and tubes on the one hand helps the researcher to understand the characteristics of the report's discourse, so as to explore the deeper content hidden under the discourse when the media reported on the topic, and on the other hand, it also enables the public to have a certain degree of awareness of the way the German mainstream media shaped the report on the topic.

Corpus linguistics reveals features within language systems and language use by analysing the frequency or probability of occurrence of each research object. Among other things, the high frequency of occurrence of research objects shows the core elements of language use, thus demonstrating the forms, meanings and functions that are most frequently used in the communication process.[4] According to Tang Liping, "the strength of corpus linguistics lies in its ability to quantify the cumulative effects of meaning, which is a basic premise that attracts critical discourse analysis into dialogue with it" . [5] Combining the research methods of critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics, the intrinsic meaning of discourse can be explored by analysing the aspects of word frequency, indexical lines and collocations in the text through intuitive data, and observing the relevant lexical patterns and grammatical structures. [6].

This study takes the self-constructed corpus as the original text source, and takes "German teenagers' use of jittery voice" and "German teenagers' use of tubing" as the themes, extracts the reports of related themes from *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and explores the attitudinal tendency and the reasons for the differences in the media reports in terms of indexing rows and word frequencies, so as to inspire the construction of China's foreign propaganda image.

## 2. Research design

Jitterbug and Youtube are both popular among teenagers as video platforms with wide influence, large audiences and high socialisation, and the use of these two platforms by teenagers has been frequently mentioned in the media. In this paper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, a representative German mainstream media, was selected as the data source to build the original database, which was used as the basis to set up the news frame.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* was chosen as the original data source for the database constructed for this study for two main reasons. Firstly, the newspaper was chosen for this study as the communication medium of the mainstream media in Germany. Max Weber, a German social scientist, strongly advocated the sociological examination of newspapers in the course of sociological research and clearly stated that the material for the study was the newspapers themselves. [7] Second, relevant reports from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* were selected for corpus construction. The relevant reports in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* were selected for corpus construction. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, founded in 1945, is the most widely circulated national daily newspaper in Germany and belongs to the "mass media", which has a large circulation, is widely read and has a large audience in Germany. In addition to this, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is a serious media outlet with a strong commitment to journalistic professionalism and reliable sources. It is considered one of the top newspapers in the field of journalism in Germany and has consistently ranked among the top two in both elite newspaper elections. [8] *Süddeutsche Zeitung* also holds a large advantage in terms of ease of access to data and openness of data. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* has a well-established electronic newspaper library, and news from all sections of the newspaper over the years can be searched on its website. In addition to all sections of news published in the printed newspaper, the website also contains commentators' reports and analyses on a wide range of topics unique to its online edition. Therefore, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* was chosen for this study as a representative of the German mainstream media for the collection of primary data and the construction of the corpus.

In this study, we select the reports of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from December 2018 to 10 November 2023 on "German teenagers use Shakeology" and "German teenagers use tubing" for a comparative study, and construct a news frame on the relevant topics through four steps: collecting samples, secondary screening, extracting information and analysing information, and constructing a self-constructed corpus on the basis of the corpus. Through four steps of collecting samples, secondary screening, extracting information, and analysing information, we constructed a news frame of the relevant topics and built a corpus on this basis.

## 3. Comparative analysis

### 3.1 Word frequency analysis

Using numbers to describe the frequency and pattern of occurrence of each research object in different contexts, and analysing the reasons for the different frequency of occurrence is known as word frequency statistics. [9] When using corpus searching, word frequency statistics is one of the most common methods. By counting the frequency of the subject words and other high-frequency words, we can clarify the media's attitudes and perceptions when reporting on the relevant topics. In addition to analysing the frequency of the subject words "German teenagers use Shake it off" and "German teenagers use tubes", the study also analyses and compares the two topics according to the classification of the articles in the self-constructed corpus and explores the reasons for this.

### 3.1.1 Word frequency analysis of the classification "school education"

"The use of tubing by young people in Germany" is categorised in "School education" according to its effects on young people, including "positive effects" and "negative effects". Firstly, in the "School Education" section, it is categorised according to its effects on young people. Firstly, in the category of "school education", the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that the negative effects of "German teenagers using Jitterbug" tend to be the use of violence, cyberbullying, bullying, etc.; the negative effects of "German teenagers using tubing" are more likely to be the use of violence, cyberbullying, and bullying. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reports that the negative effects of "German teenagers using Shakeology" tend to use violence, cyberbullying and bullying, while the negative effects of "German teenagers using Tube" are more likely to use high-frequency words such as grade. From this, it can be seen that *Süddeutsche Zeitung* believes that Shakeology causes cyber violence to teenagers, and its negative effects have been mentioned many times; while tubing is more of a factor that causes teenagers' academic performance to decline, and there are also some neurologists who have researched on the effects of teenagers' excessive use of social networks on the brain and nerves. Secondly, in terms of the positive impact of "German teenagers using Jitterbug" and "German teenagers using tubing", tubing has a greater impact on teenagers than Jitterbug. Whether it's museums, tubing books or sex education, the educational videos posted on tubing have a positive effect on all aspects of youth development. By analysing the above data, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* concludes that the negative impact of Shakeology on German teenagers is significantly greater than the extent of the negative impact of tubing on German teenagers.

### 3.1.2 Frequency analysis of words classified as "family"

Under the category 'family', the subjects expressed varying degrees of concern about the use of Jitterbug and Tube by young people in Germany, and wanted to protect them from harm. By looking at the frequency of the words in question, parents and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* are not only concerned about the use of Tube and Jitterbug by German teenagers, but also discuss the use of other social media programmes (e.g. Instagram<sup>②</sup>) and electronic devices. Media addiction and screen time were among the topics mentioned several times. It is interesting to note the high frequency of media education under the topic "German teenagers' use", which reflects the fact that teenagers are able to gain knowledge through Youtube, and that parents need to understand the use of such social media platforms and electronic devices in order to better understand and protect their children.

## 3.2 Index line analysis

The index line is the core of corpus analysis, which can show the repeated co-occurrence of words, provide information about the meaning tendency of the users of words, and analyse the correlation and associative meaning between them. <sup>[10]</sup> The index line can reveal themes and linguistic patterns that cannot be obtained by analysing high-frequency words or high-strength collocations, thus revealing the deeper meanings implicit in the text. Since the self-constructed corpus selects reports in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* with the themes of "German teenagers use Tiktok" and "German teenagers use Youtube" respectively, the direct analysis of "Tiktok" and "Youtube" will be conducted. The indexical line analyses of the words "Tiktok" and "Youtube" help to explore the attitudinal expressions associated with them.

In the index lines of these "Tiktok"-related searches, there is a preponderance of words with overtly negative connotations. For example, "Some challenges are spread on Tiktok in a discriminatory form", "Especially on highly popular platforms such as Tiktok, attempts are being made to negatively influence children and adolescents", "Protecting children from sexual harassment on Tiktok", and so

on. Shake Shack", "Protecting children from sexual harassment on Shake Shack", and so on. In addition, the government has taken a stance on the negative impact of Shakeology on young people, saying that "the prosecutor's office is investigating the matter after they participated in a dangerous challenge on Shakeology" and that "the authorities hope that Shakeology and tubing will protect minors". Among the reports on the positive impact of Shakeology on young people, the keyword "book Shakeology" appeared more often, such as "Book Shakeology has positively changed the book market, and young people have begun to read a lot again!". This shows that the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* used some clearly negative words when reporting on the topic of "Teenagers using Shakeology in Germany". For example, in the report, it is said that when young people use ShakeMeibo, they are very likely to receive negative information, such as sexual harassment, cyber violence, fraud and bloody violence, etc.; because young people have not yet matured in their viewpoints and do not have enough ability to sift through the information, they are prone to take part in dangerous challenges popular in ShakeMeibo, which puts their lives at risk. At the same time, the government departments' suggestions and actions on ShakeEn have been reported through the media, indicating the importance that the community attaches to the use of ShakeEn by young people.

In contrast to the expression in the index line related to "Tiktok", under the topic "Teenagers using tubes in Germany", the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported more examples of the positive impact of the use of tubes by teenagers. The content mostly reads "Getting a lot of positive feedback, the comments on the tubes are sometimes like paeans of love", "Videos on the tubes during epidemics can be a better way to get the message across", "The tubes are a great medium", "Many children use the tubes to learn the school curriculum", etc. Through these examples, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* points out that young people use the tubes not only to broaden their horizons and improve their abilities, but also to receive friendly comments from others and feel the warmth of interpersonal relationships; and that educators use the tubes to make more young people aware of their study programmes. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* thus often uses these distinctly positive terms when reporting on "German teenagers using tubes". There are also negative reports, but not to any great extent.

### 3.3 Dialectical-Relational Analysis

The corpus linguistic analysis of the text above belongs to the micro-level analysis, and in order to further explore the dialectical relationship between the text, social reality and ideology, to clarify the problems, to explore the essence of the problems in depth, and to carry out the critical discourse analysis at the macro-level, the dialectical-relational analysis method is chosen. Dialectical-relational analysis is a way of critical discourse analysis. According to Fairclough, the dialectical-relational analysis method needs to focus on social conflicts while exploring the discourse to find the ways in which ideology is manifested at the linguistic level, especially the relevant elements that express dominance, indifference, and defiance; moreover, it needs to explain the dialectical relationship between symbols and other social elements.<sup>[11]</sup> Fairclough proposes four stages in the methodological constitution of the dialectical relations of critical discourse analysis. Based on the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*'s different viewpoints on "German teenagers using Jitterbug" and "German teenagers using tubes", the following section will use these four phases as an analytical framework to develop a dialectical-relational perspective on critical discourse analysis. -In the following, we will use these four stages as a framework for analysing critical discourse from a "dialectical" perspective.

In Stage 1, social deficits are observed from a symbolic perspective, which mainly involves textual provenance, the time when the textual content is referred to, the embedded political position or ideology, the specific social deficits, and how to observe them from a symbolic point of view.<sup>[12]</sup> The texts in the corpus are taken from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*) from December 2018 to 10 November 2023 on the topics of "German Teenagers Using Shakeology" and "German

Teenagers Using Tubes". The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is politically supportive of the Social Democratic-Liberal Democrat (SPD-Liberal Democrat) government, and emphasises coverage of political, economic, business, cultural and sports news from the southern region.<sup>[13]</sup> The report published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* had mentioned that Jitterbug is a Chinese social media software, so the image of China's Jitterbug foreign propaganda will to some extent affect its attitude when reporting. At the same time, it is combined with the social situation, such as the ban on Jitterbit imposed by the United States in 2020. From this, it can be seen that different political stances will also affect their attitudes when reporting. The text within the self-constructed corpus deals with the social flaws of the adverse effects of Jitterbug and tubing on teenagers; and from the level of symbols, it mainly analyses how the media constructs its positional attitudes around the topic.

There are three steps in the analysis of stage two. First, the three major dialectical relationships are analysed based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, and critical discourse analysis proceeds through the three steps of description, interpretation and explanation.<sup>[14]</sup> Fairclough argues that the elements of society together constitute linguistic symbols, while the order and relationships between them influence the composition of discourse, and that symbols are embedded in structure and structure.<sup>[14]</sup> According to Fairclough, the elements of society together constitute linguistic symbols, and at the same time, the order and relationship between the elements of society also affect the composition of the discourse, and symbols are embedded in structures and hierarchies, which are the elements that hinder the processing of social defects<sup>[15]</sup>. And media coverage is not just a simple way of communicating an event to people, but also one of the ways in which the state controls public opinion and constructs ideologies.

Stage 3 is a two-step process to consider whether the social order "needs" the social defect. It analyses whether the defect is inherent in society, i.e. the problems that the use of tubes and jitterbugs by adolescents poses to adolescents, and whether it is possible to address the defect at its social roots. Both of these analyses determine to some extent whether society should shed the defect.

In stage 4, feasible ways to address the social defect are identified. The media reports in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* mostly refer to the negative effects of Shakeology on young people, and very rarely analyse the causes and propose measures or recommendations to address them. However, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*'s report less often mentions the negative impact of tubing on teenagers.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this study, we compared and analysed the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*'s reports on "German teenagers using Jitterbug" and "German teenagers using tubes", using a combination of corpus techniques and critical discourse analysis. A self-constructed corpus was built from the collected reports, the texts in the corpus were analysed in terms of word frequency and indexing lines, and the dialectical-relational analysis method was used to compare the two types of reports, and it was found that *Süddeutsche Zeitung* used more negative tones when reporting on the topic of "German teenagers' use of Jitterbug," focusing on problems that arise in the use of Jitterbug by teenagers. It was found that *Süddeutsche Zeitung* used a more negative tone when reporting on the topic of "German teenagers' use of Shakeology", focusing on the problems and threats of teenagers' use of Shakeology and ignoring the favourable effects of Shakeology on teenagers. The author believes that the reason for this is related to the foreign propaganda image of China's Jitterbug and the political stance of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. This is an inspiration for the construction of China's foreign propaganda image and the development of the Internet.

In addition, the critical discourse analysis based on the corpus can make the research results more objective, reduce the researcher's bias, and improve the accuracy of the results, which is also a new perspective to study the research on social opinion environment and public communication. However,

the size of the corpus affects the credibility of the findings, and the scope of the corpus should be expanded as much as possible in the future.

- ① Refers to the promotion and recommendation of books on the tubing platform."
- ② A social software owned by Meta, which is widely followed by teenagers all over the world.
- ③ A topic hashtag in Jitterbug that has amassed a large number of short video works about book recommendations and reading promotion.

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