

Authenticity Representation of Fact-Checking Short Videos from a Semiotic Perspective: A Case Study of “Mingcha” by The Paper

Li Jiayue¹, Liu Feng²

^{1,2}School of Journalism and Communication, Shanghai University, Shanghai, People’s Republic of China
Email address: panda197@163.com

Abstract—This study takes the “Mingcha” short video series on the Douyin account of The Paper as its research object and examines the symbolic reconfiguration of authenticity representation and entertainment-oriented expression from a semiotic perspective. The findings show that the program constructs a multimodal system of authenticity representation through visual signs such as fixed identifiers, arrow and circle annotations, and highlighted key data, together with standardized subtitles and voice-over narration. At the same time, the tracing of indexical signs and the incorporation of authoritative information strengthen the credibility of authenticity claims. Within a limited scope of entertainment-oriented expression, a relaxed tone, emojis, and localized dynamic annotations enhance informational appeal and dissemination efficiency in specific topics, but they also reshape the pathways through which authenticity is interpreted and entail potential risks.

Keywords— Mingcha; fact-checking; short videos; semiotics; entertainment-oriented expression.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of mobile internet and short video environments, the fragmentation and acceleration of information dissemination have intensified the spread of rumors, thereby making fact-checking an important practice for news organizations in maintaining information credibility. Fact-checking represents an extension of journalistic professionalism under conditions of media transformation^[1]. It originated from the early twentieth century pursuit of objectivity and authority in newspapers and has evolved in the digital era from an internal editorial norm into an independent journalistic genre^[1].

From an epistemological perspective, the realization of news authenticity depends on the mediating role of semiotic systems and can be understood as mediated authenticity^[2]. Different semiotic forms follow differentiated mechanisms of meaning production^[2]. Linguistic and textual signs construct meaning through abstraction and conceptual formation, whereas visual signs rely on similarity to enhance presence and reinforce authenticity claims^[2]. The visual turn in short video journalism has further reshaped both fact presentation and fact-checking pathways. In this context, The Paper launched the “Mingcha” fact-checking program as a representative verification product in 2021, and in 2025 it released the “Mingcha” short video series on the Douyin platform. Through multimodal semiotic resources, the series transforms fact-checking content into an audiovisual form of

expression, shifting the construction of authenticity from a single argumentative mode to an integrated perceptual experience. Accordingly, the “Mingcha” program of The Paper has developed a dual-mode expressive pathway combining textual reporting and short video production.

The concept of “possible truth in journalism” argues that news authenticity is a constructed product of symbolic interaction rather than a simple reflection of objective reality^[3]. On this basis, journalism has incorporated the formal analysis of semiotics^[4]. It has gradually developed a balanced analytical orientation that gives equal weight to content analysis and formal analysis^[4]. This orientation provides analytical frameworks grounded in symbolic approaches such as ideology, narrative, and rhetoric^[4]. Building on this perspective, this study adopts a semiotic approach and focuses on the “Mingcha” short video series to examine how multimodal signs construct authenticity and to reveal the symbolic production mechanism of authenticity in short video fact-checking.

II. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF SEMIOTICS

Semiotics is an interdisciplinary field that studies the generation, transmission, and interpretation of meaning. Its theoretical foundations primarily derive from Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, who defined the nature and scope of signs from different perspectives. Saussure focused on language and argued that a sign consists of the signifier and the signified, emphasizing the arbitrary and social relationship between the two^[5]. Peirce, drawing on pragmatist philosophy and logic, proposed that a sign is constituted by a triadic relation among the representamen, the object, and the interpretant^[6]. He emphasized that the essence of a sign lies in a dynamic process of interpretation, arguing that a sign can only function as a sign when it is interpreted as such^[6]. He further classified signs into icons, indices, and symbols, which correspond respectively to similarity, causal relation, and conventional relation between the sign and its object^[7].

A sign can be understood as a perceptual carrier of meaning that emphasizes the inseparable relationship between meaning and sign^[8]. Any meaning must be expressed through signs, and any sign necessarily carries meaning, while interpretation constitutes the central process through which meaning is actualized^[8]. Accordingly, in this study, a sign

refers to a perceptual carrier that carries meaning and elicits interpretation. It includes both system-based signs grounded in social conventions in Saussurean theory and dynamic signs in Peircean semiotics constituted through the interaction among the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. In the context of video texts, signs are specifically manifested as various elements that transmit information and trigger audience cognition and interpretation, such as images, sounds, written language, and narrative structures.

III. THE SEMIOTIC CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHENTICITY IN “MINGCHA” SHORT VIDEO BY THE

(1) *Visual Symbolic Visualization of Authenticity*

The “Mingcha” short video series by The Paper transforms the complex and often tedious fact-checking process into visualized factual representations that can be quickly viewed and understood through visual presentation and symbolic marking. At the overall visual level, the series maintains a highly consistent stylistic system. A fixed “Mingcha” logo consistently appears in the upper-left corner of the frame, and each video concludes with a black background combined with the program logo, accompanied by a voice-over stating that “Mingcha videos are updated irregularly.” The repeated use of stable visual symbols forms a coherent identification system of the program, enabling audiences to establish expectations regarding content type and professional authority at the very beginning of viewing. In this way, an initial confirmation of authenticity is constructed at the level of signification.

In the presentation of specific video content, comparison and magnification annotations are widely used to construct the authenticity of evidentiary claims. For AI-generated false videos, the “Mingcha” short video series repeatedly employs red circles, arrows, and frames to draw audience attention to key elements, such as abnormal details in hand movements or inconsistencies between frames. These anomalous features are further highlighted through zoomed-in visual presentation. This practice directly embeds the criteria for judging truthfulness within the visual frame, so that the evaluation of authenticity no longer relies primarily on audiences’ media literacy or specialized knowledge, but is instead rendered as an intuitively perceptible process guided by salient visual cues.

Some videos further strengthen the construction of authenticity through multi-frame simultaneous presentation. For instance, in a video depicting a foreign professor’s apparent anger over students using artificial intelligence to complete assignments, the series juxtaposes a screenshot of an anomalous tie within a split-screen format. This is accompanied by clear textual labels indicating “before” and “after” for comparison. In this way, the evidentiary basis for identifying the video as artificially generated is fully and clearly presented at the visual level.

The editing rhythm in most short videos maintains a moderate pace, allowing sufficient time for audiences to observe details. This restrained editing style itself functions as a semiotic marker of authenticity, suggesting that the content is grounded in evidentiary judgment rather than emotional stimulation.

(2) *Labelled Expression of Truth Evaluation in Linguistic Signs*

Linguistic signs in the “Mingcha” short video series by The Paper perform the function of defining and categorizing authenticity. All video scripts in the series consistently begin with the prefix “Mingcha,” forming a highly unified linguistic marker that attributes a clear program identity to judgments of authenticity at the verbal level. In addition, the content of the videos generally follows a stable communicative sequence that first presents widely circulated claims, then provides verification and explanation, and finally delivers a concluding judgment. This consistent linguistic structure renders the evaluation of authenticity a reproducible logical process.

In terms of linguistic expression, the “Mingcha” short video series frequently employs evaluative lexical items as linguistic signs to qualitatively assess information. For example, in a video debunking the claim that “one in every six people in Osaka is Chinese,” the subtitles include expressions such as “this is indeed somewhat exaggerated” and “do not be misled by clickbait headlines.” These colloquial evaluative statements explicitly convey a stance and delineate the boundary between factual accuracy and inaccuracy.

Meanwhile, the “Mingcha” short video series also enhances the credibility of factual evidence through a combination of data presentation and explicit conclusions. In the same video debunking the claim that “one in every six people in Osaka is Chinese,” the visual content directly displays official statistical data and calculation procedures, while subtitles simultaneously present specific percentage figures. In this way, an abstract process of data reasoning is transformed into a form of linguistic sign that can be directly read and interpreted. In videos such as “Has Poland officially declared war on Russia and sent troops into Ukraine?” and “Has a floating flying shoe appeared at an overseas exhibition?,” when artificial intelligence detection results are mentioned, the series presents specific probabilistic values of verification outcomes within the visual frame, thereby allowing authenticity judgments to be confirmed not only through verbal description but also through objective quantitative language. Overall, the “Mingcha” short video series by The Paper transforms truth verification into a rule-governed semiotic process through stable linguistic structures and clearly labeled expressions.

(3) *Indexical Signs as Markers of Source Authority and Tracing in Authenticity Construction*

Indexical signs in the “Mingcha” short video series by The Paper are used to convey the authority of information sources and the process of source tracing, thereby enhancing the evidential grounding of authenticity claims. In nearly all cases where circulated online content is presented, the videos include on-screen labels such as “footage sourced from the internet” or “video obtained from online sources.” These indexical markers delineate the status of information sources and signal at the outset that the authenticity of the content has not yet been verified, thereby providing a semiotic precondition for subsequent fact-checking.

During the fact-checking process, the “Mingcha” short video series continuously incorporates authoritative

information sources to establish the evidential grounding of authenticity claims. In the video addressing the claim that “China’s Type 055 destroyer exploded during the rehearsal for the September 3 military parade,” the series successively cites video materials from Xinhua News Agency, republished footage from the Guangming Daily, and visual materials produced by China Central Television, while explicitly labeling the sources of these materials within the visual frame. These media identifiers themselves function as highly symbolized indicators of authority. Audiences are not required to further verify their authenticity, as trust is transferred at the level of signification. In videos such as “Did 417 Russian soldiers surrender collectively to Ukrainian forces under the leadership of a battalion commander?” and “Footage of Thai airstrikes on a Cambodian cybercrime center exposed,” when presenting international military-related information, the series similarly displays screenshots from People’s Daily Online and official statements, thereby compressing complex source-tracing processes into visually recognizable authoritative signs.

The “Mingcha” short video series also constructs a reverse indexical mechanism of authenticity by presenting information about the original publishers of circulated content. In the videos “Has a foreign professor lost his temper after students used artificial intelligence to complete assignments?” and “Has a floating flying shoe appeared at an overseas exhibition?,” which are examined as AI-generated content, the series directly displays homepage screenshots of the accounts that first released the misleading videos. It further points out that these creators’ production orientations are closely associated with artificial intelligence-generated content, thereby supporting the claim that the circulated videos are highly likely to be AI-generated. In this way, the origin of misinformation is itself semiotized, and indexical signs are employed to disclose authenticity through the marking of source genealogy.

Overall, the “Mingcha” short video series by The Paper constructs a multilayered semiotic system of authenticity through the coordinated operation of visual signs, linguistic signs, and indexical signs. This system enables audiences to directly perceive the fact-checking process and thereby facilitates the formation of trust at the level of signification.

IV. SYMBOLIC RECONFIGURATION AND MEANING SHIFT IN AN ENTERTAINMENT-ORIENTED CONTEXT

(1) Semiotic Features of Entertainment-Oriented Expression in Fact-Checking Short Videos

In the “Mingcha” short video series by The Paper, entertainment-oriented expression does not function as the dominant mode of fact-checking discourse. Instead, it is selectively embedded in a limited number of videos. At the overall level, most videos maintain a restrained tone in narration, vocal delivery, editing rhythm, and visual presentation, thereby sustaining the serious epistemic register of journalistic fact-checking. Only under specific thematic conditions and information formats are lightly entertainment-oriented semiotic elements introduced. For instance, in the video “Has a goat been tied to the roof of an Indian aircraft?”

Once again, it is AI!,” which investigates an obviously implausible claim about a goat tied to the roof of an aircraft, the series adopts a relatively relaxed male voice-over style due to the non-serious nature of the topic, which is unrelated to war or military affairs. In addition, emojis and laughter sound effects are intermittently inserted into certain visual segments. The use of such entertainment-oriented signs corresponds to the non-serious nature of the information topic itself. By adjusting vocal tone and visual rhythm, the video reduces the cognitive and interpretive threshold for audiences. By contrast, videos involving war, military affairs, or public security issues generally maintain a more serious semiotic style, without the use of explicitly entertainment-oriented elements.

It can thus be observed that the entertainment-oriented expression in The Paper’s “Mingcha” short videos is not a generalized trend, but rather a strategic choice grounded in the attributes of specific topics and the form of information. Such a choice reflects the adaptation of fact-checking content to the expressive conventions of short-video platforms; however, it does not fundamentally disrupt its underlying semiotic structure, which remains centered on authenticity.

(2) Changes in the Cognitive Pathway of Authenticity Under Semiotic Reconfiguration

The incorporation of entertainment-oriented signs has led to a shift in the representation of authenticity in The Paper’s “Mingcha” short videos, which no longer relies solely on the direct articulation of serious authoritative discourse, but instead turns toward a meaning-making process that is more dependent on audience participation. Within this mode, authenticity in “Mingcha” videos is not delivered as a one-time assertion; instead, it is progressively recognized and validated through viewers’ interpretive engagement with multiple semiotic cues, including visual imagery, on-screen captions, and audio narration.

In most “Mingcha” short videos, authenticity is constructed primarily through evidentiary display, data comparison, and source-tracing procedures. For instance, in the verification of artificial intelligence-generated content, the videos enlarge, annotate, and juxtapose anomalous regions, thereby guiding viewers to complete authenticity judgments by following a sequence of semiotic cues during the viewing process. Such a processual mode of representation transforms authenticity from a singular, conclusion-oriented judgment into a cognitively experiential process that can be observed and engaged with, thereby enhancing viewers’ sense of participation in both the fact-checking procedure and its underlying logic.

In the “Mingcha” short videos that incorporate emojis and sound effects, entertainment-oriented signs coexist alongside signs of authenticity. The use of a relaxed tone and visually engaging elements alleviates the psychological burden associated with information processing, thereby increasing viewers’ willingness to remain engaged with the fact-checking process. Within this semiotic context, authenticity is interpreted and affirmed through a relatively light and affectively moderated symbolic environment.

The form of semiotic reconfiguration does not diminish the authenticity of the information; rather, it alters the

pathways through which authenticity is understood and accepted. During the viewing process, viewers make judgments of truthfulness through semiotic cues, while simultaneously forming cognitive impressions of the content within the overall viewing experience. As a result, authenticity and the viewing experience become interwoven at the cognitive level.

(3) Impacts and Potential Risks of the Reconfiguration of Entertainment-Oriented Signs

At the level of communication effects, entertainment-oriented modes of expression contribute to enhanced dissemination performance of fact-checking short videos on social media platforms. The video titled “Was a goat tied to the top of an Indian airplane? It is AI yet again!” generated as many as 56,000 shares. Beyond the inherent absurdity of the topic itself, the use of a light and engaging expressive mode functioned to amplify and accelerate circulation, thereby increasing audiences’ willingness to share and further disseminate the content.

The combination of entertainment-oriented signs and functional signs also enables audiences to quickly grasp core conclusions within a fragmented viewing environment. Prominent annotations and concise language strengthen information retention, thereby making fact-checking outcomes more easily recognizable and recallable. This semiotic configuration contributes to the expansion of the communicative space of fact-checking content on short video platforms, allowing information that was originally oriented toward professional domains to enter broader public communication contexts.

However, at the level of meaning construction, the reconfiguration of entertainment-oriented signs and authenticity-related signs entails certain potential risks. When authenticity is increasingly perceived through intuitive visual cues and the affective experience of viewing, audiences may be more likely to remember binary judgments of truth and falsehood, while relatively neglecting the evidential sources and argumentative processes upon which fact-checking is based, thereby limiting the enhancement of media literacy. Moreover, if entertainment-oriented signs occupy a dominant position in the expressive structure, the authoritative indexicality and evidential logic of authenticity-related signs may be weakened, consequently affecting the professional image of fact-checking as a form of public information service. In this context, fact-checking short videos may gradually be perceived at the cognitive level as a form of content with either knowledge-oriented or entertainment-oriented attributes, rather than as a journalistic practice grounded in evidence and source tracing. This undermines a deeper understanding of authenticity and may also affect the long-term trust foundation in fact-checking outcomes among audiences.

Overall, the entertainment-oriented expression in The Paper’s “Mingcha” short videos represents a limited and strategic semiotic adjustment. The reconfiguration of authenticity-related signs and entertainment-oriented signs responds to the communicative logic of short video platforms while simultaneously imposing higher demands on semiotic

configuration. How to enhance expressive accessibility and dissemination efficiency while ensuring that authenticity-related signs remain in a dominant position, and how to maintain a relative balance between entertainment elements and authoritative representation, thus becomes a key issue that requires sustained attention in the practice of short video-based fact-checking.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

(1) Conclusions

The “Mingcha” short video series produced by The Paper constructs an effective presentation of fact-checking authenticity through the coordinated operation of multimodal signs. At the level of visual signification, the continuous presence of fixed branding elements, the use of red arrows and circular highlights for key annotations, and the emphasis on critical data through visual highlighting collectively constitute a stable and highly recognizable visual semiotic system. In this way, authenticity is transformed into a set of visually perceptible and identifiable cues, enabling audiences to form intuitive judgments regarding information veracity within a relatively short viewing duration.

At the level of linguistic signs, the “Mingcha” short videos establish a relatively standardized expressive structure by clearly differentiating between circulating online content, the fact-checking process, and final conclusions through subtitles and voice-over narration. Meanwhile, the overall tone of the videos remains calm and restrained, thereby mitigating the interference of affective or emotional expression in evaluative judgment. By foregrounding key facts and data, the series further reinforces the rational foundation of authenticity interpretation. Linguistic signs thus not only perform an informational and explanatory function but also may guide the cognitive pathways through which audiences process and interpret factual claims.

Indexical signs also play a crucial supporting role in the construction of authenticity. Through the presentation of original video sources, uploader information, official document screenshots, and content from authoritative media outlets, short videos materialize the fact-checking process into a traceable chain of signs, thereby endowing authenticity with explicit source attribution and institutional authority endorsement. Authenticity is thus no longer confined to a purely conclusory level of articulation, but is progressively disclosed through processes of evidential presentation and source tracing.

Within the communicative context of short video platforms, certain content incorporates relatively light expressive modes, resulting in a limited reconfiguration between authenticity-related signs and entertainment-oriented signs. This semiotic reconfiguration enhances the attractiveness and dissemination efficiency of the content, making fact-checking information more likely to enter public visibility. At the same time, the mode of perceiving authenticity is correspondingly transformed; its interpretation is no longer entirely dependent on authoritative discourse, but becomes intertwined with viewing experience and semiotic rhythm. It can thus be observed that fact-checking in short

videos expands its communicative space under the operation of multimodal signs, while also necessitating continued attention to maintaining a balance between entertainment-oriented expression and authoritative presentation.

(2) *Implications for the Practice of Fact-Checking Short Videos*

The effective dissemination of fact-checking short videos relies on the holistic design of their semiotic system. Stable and unified visual identifiers, together with clearly articulated highlight annotations, contribute to enhancing the recognizability of the format and strengthening the perceptibility of authenticity. Visual signs thus transform complex information into intuitive cues, effectively reducing audiences' cognitive burden in comprehension.

At the level of linguistic expression, fact-checking short videos clearly distinguish between circulating online content and verified conclusions, while presenting factual claims in a relatively restrained tone. This contributes to maintaining the professional authority of fact-checking practice. In addition, the incorporation of visualized data and specific evidential materials further strengthens the persuasiveness and credibility of the information.

Fact-checking short videos should adopt a cautious stance toward the incorporation of entertainment-oriented elements. While moderate adjustments in expressive style may enhance dissemination effectiveness and audience engagement, authenticity-related signs must remain in a central position, so as to avoid entertainment-oriented expression overshadowing the logic of verification or weakening authoritative meaning. The adequate presentation of source-tracing information and authoritative indexical references constitutes a fundamental basis for establishing and maintaining public trust, and represents an indispensable component of short video-based fact-checking practice.

(3) *Reflections*

This study focuses on the "Mingcha" short video series produced by The Paper, whose scope in terms of sample size

and temporal span is relatively limited. In addition, grounded in a semiotic perspective, this analysis does not sufficiently address audiences' actual interpretive processes and psychological responses, which requires further empirical investigation to more precisely elucidate the specific effects of entertainment-oriented signs on authenticity perception.

Future research may expand the sample scale and extend the observation period to conduct longitudinal analyses of fact-checking short videos, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the findings. Moreover, survey methods, interviews, or experimental designs may be incorporated to examine differences in how diverse audience groups interpret authenticity-related signs within entertainment-oriented communicative contexts. Meanwhile, a cross-platform comparative perspective can be introduced to analyze variations in semiotic construction and communicative effects of fact-checking short videos across different media environments, thereby providing more comprehensive theoretical support and practical implications for journalistic institutions in optimizing fact-checking practices.

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