Research on Chinese Energy News' Agenda Setting under the Background of Carbon Peaking and Carbon Neutrality --Based on the "Carbon Peaking and Carbon Neutrality" Report of People's Daily

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Abstract: In the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the national leaders pointed out: "We should promote carbon peaking and carbon neutrality actively and steadily based on Chinese energy resource endowment, insist on establishing the system before innovating it. We need implement the carbon peaking action in a planned and step-by-step manner, further promote the energy revolution, improve the efficiency of using coal, speed up the planning and construction of a new energy system, and actively participate in the global governance of climate change." Under the background of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality, energy issues have a more profound impact on China's social development and national economy. The general public's grasp and awareness of energy-related scientific expertise is relatively weak, so it is urgent for energy news reports to reasonably arrange agenda setting and achieve better communication effects. In terms of guiding public opinion, the People's Daily has a high political position and strong theoretical ability. Its agenda setting revolves around the central work of the party and major themes of national construction, and it has strong communication, guidance, influence and credibility. Therefore, this paper takes the "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" report of People's Daily as the research object, studies the agenda setting of China's energy news and puts forward relevant innovative suggestions.
Keywords: carbon peak, carbon neutrality, energy news, agenda setting, People's Daily

1 Introduction

In recent years, the global greenhouse effect has been intensifying, and the problem of climate change is still severe. Energy conservation and carbon reduction have become an important issue concerned by all countries. As an important participant in global climate governance, China made a promise at the 75th United Nations General Assembly in September 2020 to try to achieve the peak of carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, that is, "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" [1]. In the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the national leaders pointed out: We should promote carbon peaking and carbon neutrality actively and steadily based on Chinese energy resource endowment, insist

on establishing the system before innovating it. We need implement the carbon peaking action in a planned and step-by-step manner, further promote the energy revolution, improve the efficiency of using of coal, speed up the planning and construction of a new energy system, and actively participate in the global governance of climate change." This paragraph is the latest strategic deployment of the central government to achieve peak carbon and carbon neutrality in China, showing that China is more determined and more confident in this target. The "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality target" is a strategic decision made by the Party Central Committee after careful consideration, which is related to the great rejuvenation and sustainable development of the Chinese nation.

However, the general public's grasp and awareness of energy-related scientific and professional knowledge is relatively weak. How can the media realize the public's deep understanding of energy issues and take practical actions to promote the realization of the dual carbon goals? How does the People's Daily, the newspaper with the largest circulation and the highest rank in China, set its agenda for energy news reports? This paper researches it.

2 Literature review

2.1 Literature review on reports about energy news of People's Daily

The research object selected in this thesis is People's Daily, the newspaper with the largest circulation and the highest rank in China. It takes propagating the principles and policies of the party and the government and reporting major national events as its mission, becoming the most authoritative newspaper in China and winning praise from many readers. Through decades of development, People's Daily has witnessed the current situation, changes and growth of China's politics and economy in various historical periods, and is also an "encyclopedia" for the general public to understand the state of the nation, as well as a witness to the construction of China's livelihood and the life of its citizens..

From the earliest 12th edition to today's 24th edition, People's Daily has been continuously revised to meet the needs of readers. People's Daily is published in more than 100 countries and regions in the world, and its branches are all over the world, and it has more than 30 editorial newspapers and periodicals. In recent years, in order to better disseminate news, get feedback from readers, and enhance the vitality of the newspaper, People's Daily has also added new media platforms, such as official WeChat, Weibo, official account, client, and People.com.cn.

In terms of public opinion orientation, focusing on major themes such as the central work of the Party and national construction, People's Daily has a high political position, strong theoretical ability, and its agenda setting is highly communicative, instructive, influential and credible. Therefore, People's Daily is a good model for research on energy news agenda setting.

2.2 Literature review on agenda-setting theory

The core point of view of agenda setting theory is that news reports and information

transmission activities of the media can give different degrees of salience to various issues, thus affecting the audience's judgment of the surrounding world and the dissemination of information [2].

Agenda setting theory was first proposed by McCombs and Shaw after investigating the influence of media reports on voters during the 1968 US presidential election. It is believed that there is a close relationship between important matters, and thus it is concluded that the overall agenda setting of the media will affect the agenda setting of the public itself [3]. In 1997, McCombs and Shaw put forward the "attribute agenda setting" theory in a paper on Spanish elections, that is, the mass media can not only tell the public "what to think", but also successfully tell the public "how to think", and take it as the second level of agenda-setting theory [4]. In the new century, with the introduction and development of the Internet, Guo Lei, McCombs and others once again made new breakthroughs in agenda setting. In 2011, they proposed the theory of "Internet Agenda Setting", discussing whether the influence of the public is not a single issue or attribute, but a cognitive network composed of a series of issues; the news media not only tell us "what to think" or "how to think", but also determine how we connect different pieces of information to construct a cognition and judgment of social reality.

2.3 Raising questions

Under the background of dual carbon, energy issues have a profound impact on China's social development and national economy. In the era of media convergence, with the rapid development of digital technology and information technology, new media represented by the Internet has gradually reshaped the new media ecology and communication pattern. New forms of network communication media such as Weibo, WeChat public platforms, mobile live streaming, etc. have provided new opportunities for the dissemination of energy knowledge. The author observes that the general public's grasp and awareness of energy-related scientific expertise is relatively weak. So, how can the media realize the public's deep understanding of energy issues and take concrete actions to promote the realization of the dual carbon goals? How does the People's Daily, the newspaper with the largest circulation and the highest rank in China, set its agenda for energy news reports? This paper will research it.

3 Method

This article adopts the method of content analysis. Communication scientist Berelson defines content analysis as: "Content analysis is a research technique for objectively, systematically and quantitatively describing a communication content with clear characteristics." The content analysis is conducted through quantitative statistics and analysis of a large number of representative samples, from data to regular statistics and summaries, and layers of reasoning, so as to minimize the shortcomings of pure quantitative analysis, with a strong systematic and objective. In this paper, we analyze the agenda setting of "carbon peak, carbon neutrality" reports in People's Daily from October 2020 to January 2023 by analyzing the number of reports, sources of reports, and

pages of reports..

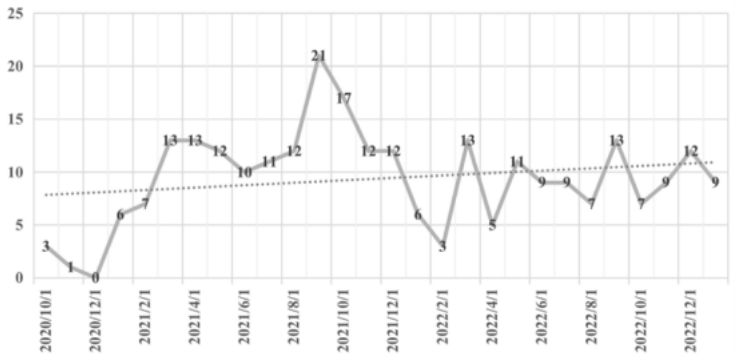
This article takes the reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" of People's Daily from October 2020 to January 2023 as the research object, and searches for the topic "carbon" in the "People's Daily Database", and the search option is "title + keyword". A total of 287 search results were obtained. Among the 287 results, government work reports, news reports, and literary works that only mentioned "carbon" but did not focus on "carbon" were removed through manual screening, and finally 263 reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" were counted in line with the research position.

4 Discussion and analysis

4.1 National policies, important news, etc. affect the number of reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in March

From the perspective of agenda-setting theory, “the agenda-setting function of the media is to increase the importance of issues in the public’s mind through repeated news reports.” The media guide readers to browse and read with high frequency and large quantity. As an influential and authoritative media in my country, People's Daily continues to report on important issues in this period in China, which shows that People's Daily has strengthened its function of setting agendas. It can be seen from Figure 1 that from October 2020 to January 2023, the number of reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in the People's Daily first rose sharply, then leveled off, then rose sharply, then fell sharply, and finally fluctuated upward, showing an overall phase and fast-changing characteristic. At the same time, we can see that March of each year presents a peak in the number of reports. In response to this phenomenon, the author analyzed Figure 1 and concluded that national policies, important news, and important meetings were important factors that affected the peak of the number of reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in March.

Figure 1 Reports about “Carbon Peaking and Carbon Neutrality” in the People‘s Daily from 2020.10 to 2023.01



People's Daily built this agenda by continuing to report on the important issue of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in this period in China. In terms of policy, 2021 is the first year of the 14th Five-Year Plan. The 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China and the Vision for 2035 were published on page 001 of the People's Daily on March 13, 2021. The Outline of Goals mentions "anchoring efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 and adopting more powerful policies and measures".

In terms of important news, the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China will release the Statistical Bulletin on the National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China in the previous year on the last day of February every year. In the Statistical Bulletin of the People's Republic of China on National Economic and Social Development in 2020 issued by the National Bureau of Statistics on February 28, 2021, it was mentioned that "carbon dioxide emissions per ten thousand yuan of GDP decreased by 1.0%." In February 2022 The Statistical Bulletin of the People's Republic of China on National Economic and Social Development in 2021 issued by the National Bureau of Statistics on the 28th mentioned that "carbon dioxide emissions per ten thousand yuan of GDP decreased by 3.8%".

At the same time, the "Two Sessions" are also held in March every year. The government work report is the most important document of the two sessions every year, and its content is also of great significance to the research of this paper. The Government Work Report by Li Keqiang excerpted by People's Daily on March 6, 2021 mentioned: "Do a solid job in carbon peaking and carbon neutralization. Formulate an action plan for carbon emissions peaking before 2030. "In the Government Work Report Made by Li Keqiang excerpted by People's Daily on March 6, 2022, it was mentioned: "Promote the carbon neutralization work and carbon peaking in an orderly manner. Implement the carbon peak action plan."

4.2 The prescribed action prompted the peak of reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in September

From the trend line in Figure 1, it can be seen that the number of reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in the People's Daily shows an upward trend of volatility in general. From this, it can be concluded that newspapers increase the public's exposure to energy news by increasing energy news reports rate and improve their awareness of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" information. At the same time, the media uses people's understanding of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" information and attention to environmental issues to guide the focus of readers' attention. As can be seen from Figure 1, the number of reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" also peaks in September every year. The author conducted research on the phenomenon of concentrated reporting in September every year and found that in September every year, the Central Propaganda Department would release "prescribed actions" in advance according to the tasks issued by the leaders' speeches, and the newspapers would arrange reporter stations in various places to conduct interviews. Local propaganda departments will also get the news in advance and arrange the corresponding interview process.

At the 75th United Nations General Assembly held in September 2020, national leaders made the commitment of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" for the first time. As the official

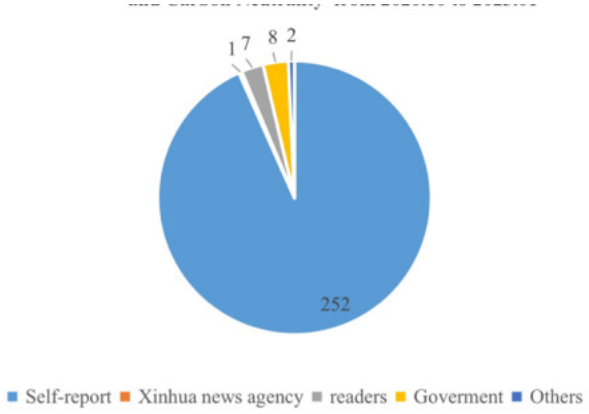
newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, People's Daily has the responsibility of reporting and propagating the political position of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality". At the same time, as people's understanding of the concept of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" continues to deepen, reports on "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in the People's Daily began to increase.

In September 2021, Li Keqiang attended the opening ceremony of the 2021 Taiyuan Energy Low-Carbon Development Forum and delivered a keynote speech, clearly stating that the Chinese government attaches great importance to high-quality energy development and addressing climate change, which once again increased the popularity of this topic. It can be clearly seen in Figure 1 that the data in September 2021 reached a peak of 21 articles.

In February 2022, the People's Daily reported that many of the contents involved the Beijing Winter Olympics. During this period, almost all people in the country were paying attention to this grand event. Therefore, the author infers the data trough and current political hot-spots presented in Figure 1 in February 2022. The Winter Olympics are highly relevant.

4.3 Highly credible information sources help convey the attributes of issues

Figure 2 The Source of People's Daily Reports about Carbon Peaking and Carbon Neutrality" from 2020.10 to 2023.01



People's Daily's news sources are authoritative and extensive, with high persuasiveness and credibility, which to a certain extent improves the dissemination effect of energy news. It can be seen from Chart 2 that, as the "No. 1 newspaper in China", more than 90% of the reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in the People's Daily are self-collected reports, which fully demonstrates the abundant resources, organization and talent network behind it as the central party newspaper.

The letter from readers is an independent page set up by People's Daily in order to effectively "come from the masses and go to the masses", to fulfill the principle of "three closeness" in news reporting (close to life, close to reality, close to the masses), to narrow the distance with readers, and to understand what the masses think and feel [5]. Since the author did not find the contents

of the letters from readers when searching the topic "carbon" in the People's Daily Database", the author searched the letters from the readers of People's Daily in recent years separately, and counted 7 articles related to energy conservation and emission reduction,such as: Planning Street Trees Requires Brainstorming □Develop and Grow Together with Street Trees and Planting and Managing Roadside Trees Should be Tailored to Local Conditions published in 2022□ Green Office Starts with One Piece of Paper, Strictly Prevent Illegal Occupation of Forest Land, Deforestation Caused by Tea Planting, and Other Issues from Reoccurring and Resolutely Curb Tea Planting and Deforestation published 2021. It can be seen that although the general public's awareness of the professional term "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" needs to be improved, with the development of society and the publicity of the media, the awareness of energy conservation and emission reduction is gradually improving.

In addition, some reports in People's Daily not only convey the latest policies and measures of government departments, but also facilitate direct communication between government departments and the public, such as the National Development and Reform Commission, the State Council Information Office, and the Development Research Center of the State Council. With the support and help of Xinhua News Agency, readers' letters, government departments and other parties, People's Daily has made great contributions to China's reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality". In short, People's Daily has a wide range of news sources, which enhances the persuasiveness of the report and thus strengthens the effect of the agenda.

4.4 Diversified and professional report themes strengthen audience awareness network

"The order of importance or prominence of the "issues" given by the media will affect the perception of the issues published by the public and politicians." People's Daily, in its coverage of the "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" issue, has repeatedly arranged front pages, highlights and features to enhance the intensity of its coverage, drawing the attention of the public and relevant departments, and helping to promote the resolution of the issue. The diversification, specialization, and scientization of the content of reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" also reflect that the media guides the public to understand "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" scientifically and rationally, and guides public opinion with positive and rational reports.

Table 1 2020.10-2023.01 People's Daily "Carbon Peaking and Carbon Neutrality"

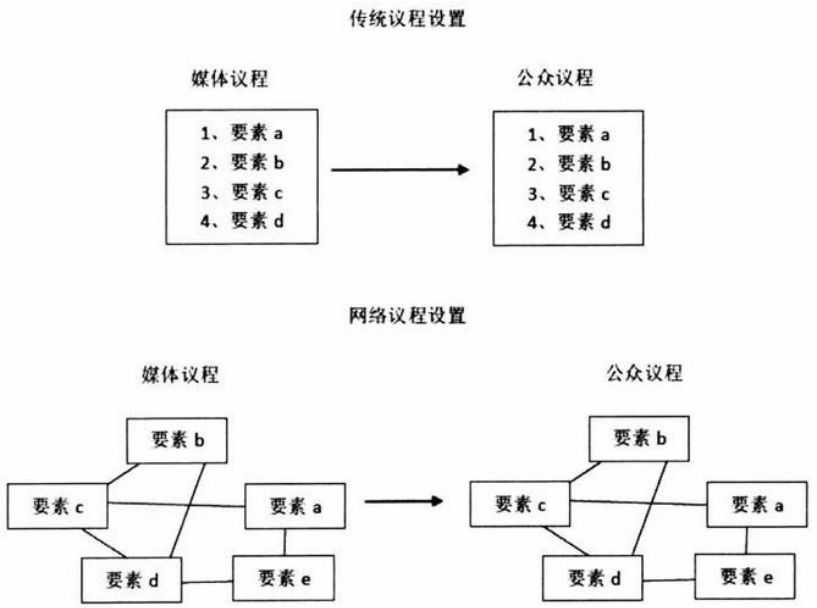
Year	Title	Number of front pages	Number of features
2020	highlights, ecology	1	0
2021	highlights, ecology, international, finance, consumption, green, integrated, economic, social, commentary, science and Technology, special reports, politics, special issues, culture, sports, democracy, economics, theory, documents	19	2
2022	highlights, ecology, international, finance, consumption, green, integrated, economic, social, commentary, science and Technology, special reports, politics, special issues, culture	15	2
2023	highlights, ecology, international, finance, consumption	1	0

It can be seen from Table 1 that from October 2020 to January 2023, the pages occupied by the reports about "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" of People's Daily show the characteristics of diversification. In general, it involves news, ecology, international, finance, consumption, green, comprehensive, economics, society, commentary, science and technology, special reports, politics, special issues, culture, sports, democracy, economics, theory, documents, etc. A total of 20 categories. In addition, in terms of layout, the front page and special topics have been arranged many times to focus on the "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" theme.

In addition, it can be seen from the pages listed in the table that the reports on "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" involve multiple topics and cover a wide range of contents. For example, on August 2, 2021, the 18th edition (Finance and Economics) reported the article titled "Developing carbon finance and boosting carbon market" was mainly about "national carbon emission trading market officially launched, in which the financial industry will play an important role". The report on the 14th edition (politics) on August 10, 2022 is titled "Speeding up green and low-carbon technology innovation to help achieve dual-carbon goals", based on "JiuSan Society's central research team went to Jiangsu to carry out key investigations and surveys, as the basis for the dual-carbon strategy. The main content of the 12th edition (ecology) on December 1, 2022 is "Protecting Island Ecology and Helping Green Development", and "Suzhou, Jiangsu carried out ecological restoration of the Taihu Lake Basin, and focused on promoting Taihu ecological island construction" is the main content.

In 2011, Guo Lei, McCombs and others proposed the third layer of the agenda-setting principle—the network agenda-setting theory. Different from the traditional agenda-setting theory in the past, the network agenda-setting theory emphasizes the influence of the news media on the public, including the public's cognition of issues, attributes, or a combination of issues and attributes, which is similar to that of different media. The network structure of the same nodes connected to each other is not distributed in a linear form.

Figure 3. Traditional agenda setting and online agenda setting [6]



The multiple themes reported by People's Daily on "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" confirm the central theory of Internet agenda setting: it is not a single issue or characteristic attribute that affects the public, but a variety of complex topics that constitute a cognitive network. The news media influence the masses not only in terms of "what they think" or "how they think", but more importantly in terms of how they relate disparate pieces of data and information to each other to form their perceptions and judgments of the real world.

5. Conclusion

From the above research, we can find that: People's Daily continues to report on the important issue of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in this period in China, and builds an agenda with a large number of reports. At the same time, People's Daily has a wide range of news sources, which enhances the persuasiveness of the report, thereby strengthening the effect of the agenda. Not only that, People's Daily reports are diverse, professional, and scientific, and form a cognitive network with rich report topics.

Under the background of dual carbon, energy issues are closely related to China's social development, but the public's grasp and awareness of energy-related scientific and professional knowledge is generally relatively weak. At present, with the rapid development of digital technology and information technology, new media represented by the Internet has gradually reshaped the new media ecology and communication pattern, which provides new opportunities for the dissemination of energy knowledge. In order to raise the public's awareness of energy issues and take concrete actions to promote the realization of the dual carbon goals, it is necessary

to rationally arrange the agenda setting of energy news reports and improve the dissemination effect of energy news.

First of all, we must keep up with the theme of the times and raise the height of news [7]. For news reports, the timeliness of news is particularly important, and being able to make news content produce due social effects within an appropriate time limit is the primary factor for news reports to gain dissemination effectiveness [8]. State leaders emphasized that “we must persist in consolidating and strengthening the mainstream ideology and public opinion, promote the main theme, spread positive energy, and inspire the powerful force of the whole society to unite and forge ahead.” [9] And journalists must promote the main theme, follow the footsteps of the times, and spread positive energy in order to make excellent news reports..

Second, we must expand news sources and increase the temperature of news. The "three closeness" principle of news reports is "closer to life, closer to reality, and closer to the masses". It is not only necessary to interpret professional knowledge into content that the audience can understand to improve the communication effect, but also to integrate and display information from multiple sources, and report objectively and comprehensively, so as to truly "come from the masses and go to the masses" [10].

Third, it is necessary to broaden the content of reports and increase the breadth of news. What affects the public is the cognitive network composed of various complex issues. The public can understand the theme of the report more deeply through diversified and comprehensive reports. Aspects of the topic can be reported more objectively and professionally.

In the era of media convergence, information is disseminated in more diverse ways, with a wider scope of dissemination, and with more comprehensive dissemination content. Energy news will eventually become an important position of public opinion. I believe that with the efforts of journalists, energy news will make more contributions to the promotion of my country's "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" strategy.

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