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EXPLORING THE TEMPORAL DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC ONLINE ATTENTION TOWARD THE SOCIALLY-THEMED FILM NO MORE BETS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In the digital age, public attention to cultural products is increasingly reflected in online search behavior, providing a valuable means of examining the diffusion and long-term social influence of media content. Using the Baidu Index, this study investigates the temporal dynamics of public online attention toward the Chinese social-issue film No More Bets. Search data for the keyword "guzhuyizhi" were collected from January 1, 2011, to December 31, 2025, and examined in relation to key temporal nodes, including the film's theatrical and streaming releases, public-security campaigns, and socially significant events. A multi-step analytical strategy combining descriptive time-series analysis, peak detection, event mapping, long-tail analysis, and cross-platform comparison was employed to identify patterns and drivers of attention change. The results reveal a three-stage trajectory of "surge–sustain–resonance." The surge phase in August 2023 was primarily driven by the theatrical release and intensive promotion, while the sustain phase from September to December 2023 was reinforced by streaming availability, platform interaction, and continued user engagement. During the subsequent resonance phase, public attention displayed a pronounced long-tail pattern with periodic peaks corresponding to recurring social agenda nodes, including Chinese People's Police Day, the back-to-school period, and National Constitution Day. Mobile search volume substantially exceeded PC-based search volume, highlighting the importance of mobile and fragmented communication environments in sustaining public attention. These findings suggest that the enduring online vitality of socially themed films depends not only on initial publicity but also on agenda fusion, platform affordances, risk-related collective memory, and alignment with recurring social rhythms. The study demonstrates how a commercially successful film can evolve into a repeatedly activated media event and provides empirical and theoretical insights into the sustained communication of socially consequential cultural products.

Keywords: No More Bets, Baidu index, online attention, temporal dynamics, agenda melding

INTRODUCTION

In Amusing Ourselves to Death, Neil Postman (1985) offers a prescient critique of the transformation of public discourse under the influence of media, arguing that cultural degradation occurs not through coercion but through the subtle dominance of entertainment. His well-known assertion that "what

destroys us is not what we hate, but what we love" highlights the paradoxical power of pleasurable media in reshaping cognition, attention, and public engagement. A comparable line of argument is advanced in The Global Trap, where the concept of "tittytainment" describes a governance logic in which mass entertainment functions as a mechanism for diffusing social tensions and redirecting public attention. Within this framework, media consumption is not merely recreational but also socio-politically consequential, potentially diminishing critical awareness and civic participation. As a central component of the cultural industry, film occupies a dual role: it is both a form of entertainment and a medium for social representation and meaning-making (Hall, 1997). However, when entertainment value becomes overly dominant, the capacity of film to engage with substantive social issues may be significantly weakened.

Against this backdrop, the global film industry, including the rapidly expanding Chinese film market, has increasingly exhibited tendencies toward entertainment-driven production and consumption. Nevertheless, certain films challenge this paradigm by reasserting the social function of cinema. The 2023 Chinese film No More Bets represents a notable case. Based on extensive real-life fraud cases, the film exposes the full industrial chain of cross-border telecommunications fraud. Centered on online gambling as the primary deceptive vehicle, it illustrates how perpetrators exploit gambling addiction which is characterized by compulsive betting, loss-chasing tendencies and impaired control over gambling behaviours (Griffiths, 2005), to manipulate targets, enticing them into continuous bets and irreversible financial losses, and achieved remarkable commercial success, with a box office exceeding 3.8 billion yuan (Zhao, 2023). More importantly, it generated sustained and widespread public discussion that extended far beyond typical entertainment cycles.

This phenomenon raises an important research question: how can a commercially successful film transcend its conventional role as an entertainment product and evolve into a dynamic focal point of public discourse? Unlike conventional blockbusters driven primarily by spectacle, No More Bets engages directly with pressing social concerns, particularly those related to fraud prevention, public security, and transnational crime governance. In doing so, it aligns closely with broader policy agendas in China and resonates with global normative frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2018), especially Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Specifically, the film contributes to public awareness of issues central to SDG 16 (Ebbesson & Hey, 2022), including the reduction of violence and exploitation (Target 16.1), the promotion of the rule of law and equal access to justice (Target 16.3), and the fight against corruption and organized crime (Target 16.5). By translating abstract policy concerns into accessible and emotionally engaging narratives, the film demonstrates how cultural products can function as informal instruments of public education and social governance.

In the digital era, however, the influence of films is no longer confined to theatrical performance or critical reviews. Instead, public attention increasingly accumulates and evolves within online environments, where search behavior serves as a real-time proxy for collective interest and perception. Tools such as Google Trends have been widely used to track public attention across domains including public health, economics, and media studies (Ginsberg et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2023). In China, the Baidu Index provides a comparable and context-specific measure, capturing large-scale patterns of online search behavior and enabling fine-grained analysis of public attention dynamics (Liu et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023).

Compared with traditional indicators such as box office revenue or film reviews, search engine data offer a unique advantage in tracing the temporal evolution and long-tail effects of audience engagement. Prior studies have demonstrated the applicability of Baidu Index in film research, including analyses of cross-cultural dissemination patterns of films such as Bad Genius and Teacher's Diary (Tan et al., 2025a; Tan et al., 2025b). These studies highlight how audience attention is not static but closely linked to temporal contexts, social events, and recurring "social clocks" (e.g., examination periods or public commemorations).

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Building on this emerging line of research, it is important to recognize that the diffusion trajectory of socially themed films is often embedded within broader socio-political processes, including national governance priorities, public risk perception, and policy communication cycles. In this sense, fluctuations in online attention are not merely media effects but reflections of deeper interactions between cultural production and public agendas, particularly within the context of evolving global governance dynamics (Chen & Zhang, 2025). Because the film is grounded in real-world threats of transnational cyber fraud, it does not merely communicate cognitive information but acts as a catalyst for collective fear and anxiety. Through interpersonal interactions and digital media diffusion, this negative affect undergoes a process of emotional contagion across society, subsequently driving heightened online information-seeking and public discourse. Therefore, to systematically capture these shifts, this study investigates the temporal dynamics of public online attention toward No More Bets using Baidu Index data. By integrating data mining techniques with a socio-cultural interpretive framework, the study seeks to uncover both the structural patterns and underlying psychological drivers of attention shifts.

The research is guided by the following questions:

What temporal patterns characterize the evolution of public online attention to the film?

Which key events or time nodes significantly influence fluctuations in attention?

What does this attention trajectory reveal about the interaction between socially themed films and public agendas?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural products mediate social issues in the digital age and provides empirical insights for both media communication strategies and policy-oriented public engagement

Literature review

Attention Economy and the Transformation of Media Logic

The concept of the attention economy provides a foundational lens for understanding media consumption in the digital age. Originally proposed by Herbert A. Simon, who argued that “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention,” the theory conceptualizes human attention as a scarce resource in information-rich environments (Simon, 1971). Subsequent studies have further elaborated that digital platforms compete intensively for user attention, shaping both content production and distribution mechanisms (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Wu, 2017). Recent research highlights that the attention economy is not merely an economic model but also a socio-cognitive system in which visibility, novelty, and emotional salience determine information diffusion (Crawford, 2016; Vosoughi, 2018). For example, studies on online collective behavior demonstrate that attention exhibits bursty, uneven, and temporally clustered patterns, often driven by external events and internal platform dynamics. Moreover, algorithm-driven media ecosystems amplify these dynamics by prioritizing content that maximizes engagement, thereby reinforcing feedback loops of attention allocation (Zuboff, 2019; Hendricks & Mehlsen, 2022).

In this context, media content is increasingly shaped by its ability to capture and sustain attention. As noted in contemporary scholarship, the competition for attention leads to a prioritization of emotionally stimulating and easily consumable content, often at the expense of depth and critical reflection. This transformation has significant implications for cultural production, particularly in the film industry.

Film as Social Text in the Attention Economy

Within the attention economy, film occupies a dual position as both a commercial product and a cultural artifact (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Traditional film studies have emphasized cinema’s role in representing social realities, shaping collective memory, and constructing ideological narratives (Bazin, 2004; Erll, 2010; Comolli & Narboni,1971). More recent research extends this

perspective by examining how films function within digitally mediated attention systems. Socially themed films have been recognized as important vehicles for public communication and social reflection. They often address issues such as inequality, crime, health, and governance, thereby contributing to public discourse beyond entertainment. However, their impact is contingent upon their ability to attract and sustain attention in highly competitive media environments.

Empirical studies suggest that most films experience rapid attention decay after their release, consistent with the general lifecycle of media products. Yet, certain films exhibit prolonged attention cycles, indicating the presence of additional reinforcing mechanisms such as social relevance, emotional resonance, and policy alignment. Research using large-scale digital traces (e.g., Wikipedia activity, search trends) has shown that audience engagement with films can extend far beyond theatrical release, forming long-tail patterns of interest. This perspective positions films not merely as static texts but as dynamic nodes within evolving attention networks, whose influence depends on their interaction with broader social contexts.

Digital Trace Data and the Measurement of Public Attention

The rise of digital platforms has enabled the large-scale collection of behavioral data, providing new methodological opportunities for studying public attention. Among these, search engine data have become a widely used proxy for collective interest and information-seeking behavior.

One of the most influential studies in this domain is by Jeremy Ginsberg et al. (2009), which demonstrated that search query data can effectively track influenza outbreaks in real time. This study established the validity of search behavior as an indicator of public attention and has inspired a wide range of applications across disciplines, including economics, marketing, and communication studies.

Subsequent research has shown that search data can capture not only immediate reactions but also longer-term attention dynamics, including cycles of decline and resurgence. For example, studies using Google Trends indicate that search volume reflects both external stimuli (e.g., news events, policy changes) and internal cognitive processes (e.g., curiosity, risk perception).

In the Chinese context, the Baidu Index serves as a comparable tool, offering high-resolution data on public search behavior. Its large user base and localized relevance make it particularly suitable for analyzing public attention in China. Empirical studies have validated its application in fields such as financial markets, public health, and tourism forecasting, demonstrating its robustness as a behavioral indicator (Jiang et al., 2025).

Temporal Dynamics of Collective Attention

A growing body of research emphasizes that public attention is inherently dynamic and follows identifiable temporal patterns. Studies in computational social science have revealed that attention typically evolves through stages, including rapid growth, peak intensity, and gradual decline (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2019). For instance, large-scale analyses of online content show that collective attention often exhibits bursts and decay patterns, with short-lived peaks triggered by external events and longer-term trends shaped by structural factors. Similarly, cross-platform studies demonstrate that attention dynamics follow regularities that can be modeled using diffusion processes, suggesting the existence of underlying universal mechanisms governing information spread.

Importantly, attention is not solely driven by media exposure but is also influenced by social timing and contextual relevance. The concept of the “social clock” highlights how attention aligns with recurring temporal nodes such as holidays, policy campaigns, or culturally significant events (Candia et al., 2018). These temporal structures create opportunities for the reactivation of attention, contributing to long-tail effects (Anderson, 2006). However, while existing studies have identified general patterns of attention dynamics, they often lack contextual interpretation, particularly in relation to socially significant media content.

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Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on media attention and digital trace data, several critical gaps remain.

First, existing research predominantly focuses on entertainment-driven or cross-cultural films, while relatively little attention has been paid to socially themed films that address public risk, governance, and collective security issues. This limitation is particularly significant because such films operate under fundamentally different communication logics: rather than merely attracting attention, they engage with risk awareness, moral evaluation, and policy relevance, thereby reshaping the nature and persistence of public attention. Second, from a methodological perspective, although tools such as the Baidu Index have been increasingly applied in media and communication studies, most existing studies rely on descriptive or short-term analyses, focusing primarily on peak attention during release periods. There remains a lack of systematic temporal modeling that captures the full lifecycle of public attention, including post-release fluctuations, long-tail effects, and event-driven reactivation. Third, and more importantly, there is a lack of theoretical integration in explaining how and why public attention evolves over time. Prior studies often treat search behavior as a straightforward indicator of popularity, without sufficiently theorizing the interplay between media content, risk perception, and public agenda dynamics. As a result, the underlying mechanisms linking digital attention patterns to broader socio-cultural processes remain underexplored. Taken together, these limitations point to a critical blind spot in the literature: the absence of an integrated analytical framework for understanding the temporal dynamics of public attention to socially consequential media content in digitally mediated environments.

To address this gap, the present study examines the case of No More Bets, a film that uniquely combines commercial success with strong social relevance. By leveraging high-resolution search data and integrating perspectives from attention economy, agenda-setting, and risk perception theories, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive account of how socially themed films sustain and reshape public attention over time. This study further responds to the growing need for computational approaches in media research by integrating large-scale behavioral data with theoretically grounded analysis.

METHOD

This study adopts a computational social science approach by leveraging large-scale search behavior data to examine the temporal dynamics of public attention. The primary data source is the Baidu Index, which provides aggregated search volume data based on user queries from China's largest search engine. Baidu Index has been widely used as a proxy for public attention due to its extensive user base and high penetration rate in the Chinese internet ecosystem. It captures the frequency of keyword searches over time, enabling researchers to analyze collective information-seeking behavior and its fluctuations (Zhang et al., 2017). The dataset used in this study spans from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2025, covering both pre-release and post-release periods of the film No More Bets. All data were retrieved on January 6, 2026, ensuring consistency in data extraction. All data were retrieved using consistent query settings to ensure reproducibility.

This study adopts a multi-step analytical strategy. First, descriptive time-series analysis is conducted to examine the evolution of public attention. Second, peak detection is applied to identify significant spikes in search volume, using a statistical threshold. Third, event mapping is performed by linking peaks with real-world events, including film release, media exposure, and policy campaigns. Fourth, the long-tail effect is quantified by measuring post-peak decay rates and sustained baseline attention. Finally, comparative analysis is conducted across personal computer (PC) and mobile platforms, with statistical tests applied to assess differences.

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RESULTS

We found that following the release of No More Bets, search interest in the idiom surged abruptly, then gradually subsided and eventually stabilized with minor fluctuations (Figure 1). Before the film's release, the daily average of its associated search index remained generally below 50,000, reflecting limited public attention. Following the nationwide theatrical release of the film on August 8, 2023, public search interest exhibited a sharp and rapid increase, peaking within days of the release. This pattern is highly consistent with the intensive social discourse aroused by the film's premiere. After the peak period, the search index did not return to its pre-release baseline but transitioned into a prolonged long-tail phase, characterized by periodic fluctuations in public attention (Figure 2). Personal computers and mobile platforms showed similar fluctuation trends, yet the search volume on mobile devices was far higher than on PCs, suggesting that the public prefers mobile devices for online information seeking (Figures 3 and 4). Notably, the search behavior for this term showed regular, abrupt peaks on multiple specific dates. These peaks were closely related to activities associated with the film's themes, such as organized anti-fraud campaigns, rule-of-law education, and safety awareness initiatives.

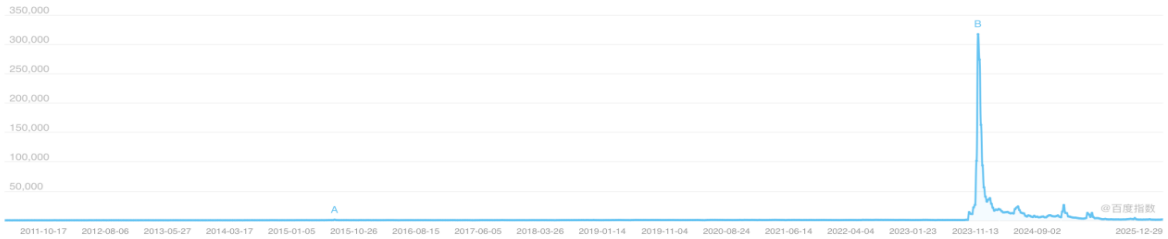


Figure 1. Overall Search Trend of Baidu Index (PC+Mobile) for the film "No More Bets" from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2025

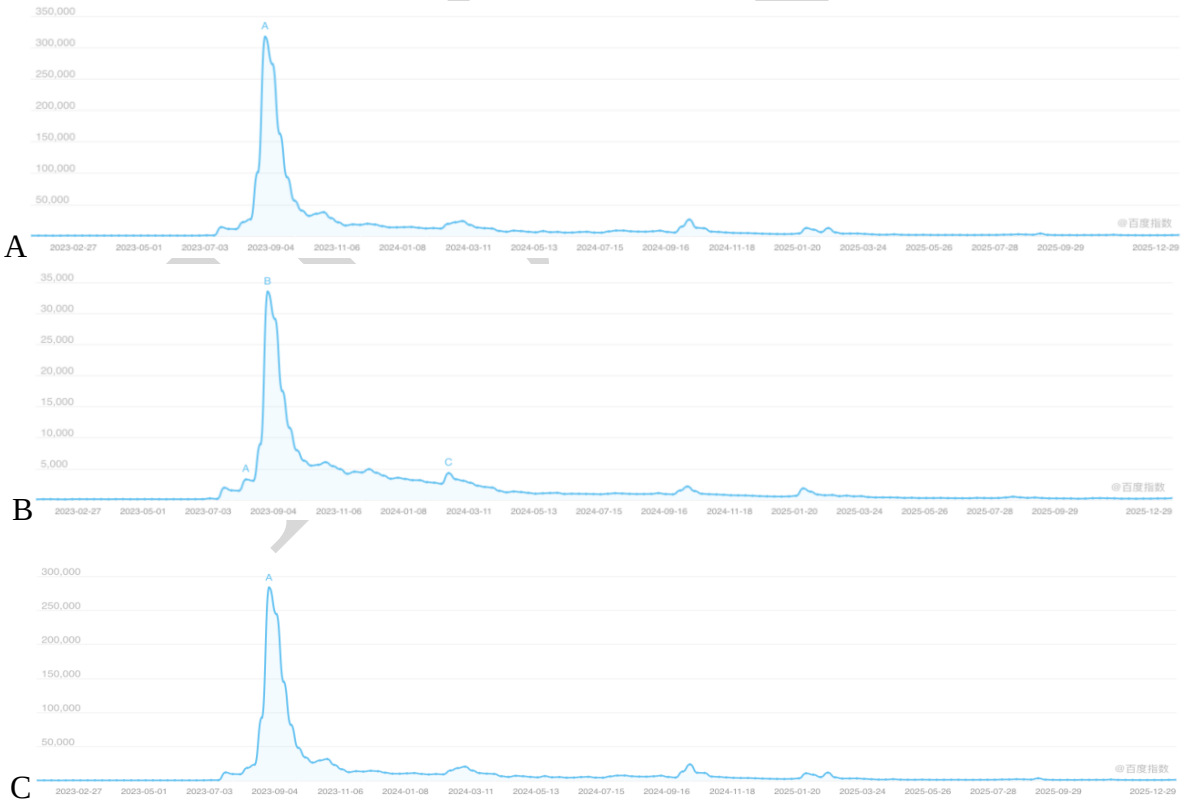


Figure 2. Baidu search volume Index in China during 2023–2025 for the film "No more bets". The average value of search volume. (A) The overall search trend index. (B) Personal computer search index. (C) Mobile wireless search index.

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DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

Using Baidu Index data, this study clearly demonstrates that the online attention received by No More Bets, a phenomenal social-issue film, does not follow the simple pattern of "peaking upon release and then fading into obscurity". Instead, it has undergone an evolutionary process marked by an initial surge, sustained continuity, and eventual deep synchronization with the societal rule-of-law agenda. These findings give rise to multi-level theoretical insights.

The Communication Logic of the Agenda-Setting Turn of Media Events

The dissemination of No More Bets was not confined to short-term hype in the early release period but exhibited a pronounced long-tail effect (Natilli et al., 2022). Multiple attention peaks during its long-tail communication cycle aligned precisely with ritualized temporal nodes of public significance, such as Chinese People's Police Day, the back-to-school season, and National Constitution Day, which served as pivotal catalysts driving the sustained momentum of the film's long-tail popularity. For No More Bets, the associated temporal nodes closely correspond to the core agenda of national governance and public security. The policy backdrop of this agenda orientation can be traced to the promulgation and implementation of the *Anti-Telecom and Network Fraud Law of the People's Republic of China* in 2022, which provided institutional support for the social communication of anti-fraud topics.

Against this context, No More Bets has transcended an ordinary visual text to become a classic media event (Dayan & Katz, 1992). It not only concretizes telecom fraud as a prominent social risk but also, through its extensive social influence, has successfully established itself as an iconic symbol in the communication of anti-fraud discourse. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Mead, Huebner, & Joas, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984), this symbol did not emerge naturally but was endowed with the collective meaning of "anti-fraud warning" through interactive practices among the public, media outlets, and official agendas. As an important symbolic carrier linking individual risk perception to public security governance, it facilitated the transformation of anti-fraud concepts from abstract policy discourse into concrete social consensus.

On ritualized occasions designated by official institutions, including Police Day and National Constitution Day, media and government-affiliated platforms require tangible content to convey abstract ideals of the "rule of law" and "public security". Owing to its high public recognition, No More Bets has naturally been adopted as an optimal narrative vehicle. Driven by the need for social affiliation and agenda alignment (Shaw et al., 1999), the public voluntarily initiates information searches and discussions related to the film, thereby completing the dynamic process of agenda melding. This process enables the film's attention curve to resonate precisely with the agenda calendar of social governance, promoting the deep integration of private concerns and public governance agendas.

Notably, Agenda Melding Theory offers strong explanatory power for the present study. Formally articulated by Shaw, McCombs, Weaver, and Hamm (1999), agenda melding argues that individuals, motivated by social affiliation and group identification, selectively connect with media and interpersonal agendas that help them move toward or away from groups. In this process, media agendas, group agendas, and individual agendas become intertwined. Furthermore, in the social media era, the process of agenda melding has grown more complex and agentic, as users are no longer passive recipients of information but active participants in agenda construction and dissemination (Meraz, 2009).

The Sustained Impact of "Fear Appeal" and Collective Memory in a Risk Society

As presented in the research results, although public attention to the film declined moderately in the post-release period, it did not drop to a trough; instead, it exhibited characteristics of periodic fluctuations. This communication trend precisely testifies to the communicative success of No More Bets, which largely stems from its effective application of "Fear Appeal" theory (Witte, 1992). The Fear Appeal theory posits that evoking audiences' fear through information can prompt them to take

recommended actions to avoid threats, but its effectiveness depends on "Threat Appraisal" (perceived severity and perceived susceptibility) and "Efficacy Appraisal" (perceived response efficacy and self-efficacy). When successful, audiences enter the "Danger Control Process" and adopt protective behaviors; when unsuccessful, they enter the "Fear Control Process" and exhibit defensive responses such as denial or avoidance (Witte, 1992). This model has been widely applied and validated in health communication, risk communication, and social marketing (Popova, 2012). With a highly realistic and even exaggerated approach, the film presents the plight of fraud victims and the cruelty of criminal groups, greatly evoking audiences' perceived susceptibility and perceived severity of the consequences. Building upon the Fear Appeal framework, the profound impact of No More Bets can be further understood through the lens of emotional contagion within a risk society. As the film vividly portrays the ruthless industrial chain of real-life cyber fraud, it triggers not individual-level caution alone, but a generalized sense of collective fear and anxiety. In hyper-connected digital ecosystems, negative emotions, particularly anxiety regarding personal safety and financial security, spread rapidly among social networks through viral text, video snippets, and online sharing. This macro-level emotional contagion transforms abstract social risks into an urgent psychological pressure, prompting the public to turn to search engines (such as Baidu) as an immediate coping mechanism to seek risk validation, information relief, and communal reassurance. Consequently, emotional contagion serves as a powerful psychological engine that drives the sharp surges and periodic resurgences of online attention observed during the film's lifecycle. Specifically, the film achieves this by portraying the victims' profound experiences of helplessness, the dangerous allure of high financial returns, and intricate processes of cognitive manipulation. In digital environments, public psychological responses to these manipulation methods—such as the devastating cycle of gambling addiction—manifest as intense online reflection, moral debates, and peer warnings. Furthermore, the intense public interest and viral discussions surrounding the film on social media powerfully stimulate individuals' motivation to watch and discuss it through the psychological mechanism of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). As a cultural phenomenon embedded in digital social networks, the mounting peer chatter creates a compelling social pressure; individuals are driven to consume the film and participate in related online searches not only out of risk awareness, but also to avoid social isolation and maintain shared conversational currency within their peer groups.

This "risk anxiety" triggered by the film does not completely dissipate with the end of viewing; instead, it crystallizes into a form of "collective risk memory" in the digital age (Beck, 1992). Whenever new major fraud cases are exposed, or during periods such as the back-to-school season (when risk perception among students and parents increases), the public's subconscious risk memory is triggered, prompting them to search for No More Bets as a familiar cultural text to seek confirmation of the risk situation, deepen their understanding of the risk's nature, or engage in effective risk communication. This endows the film's attention with responsive potential to real-world risk events during the long-tail phase. Although no major new cases emerged during this study's observation period, the underlying mechanism remains theoretically valid and empirically plausible.

Mobile and Fragmented Communication and the Continuous Reproduction of Meaning

The absolute dominance of mobile-based search (CNNIC, 2026) has established the typical context for public attention behaviors toward the film No More Bets—fragmentation, instant triggering, and socially-oriented engagement. In this ecosystem, bullet comments (Wang et al., 2020) and short video remixes, as forms of "participatory culture" practice (Jenkins, 2006), continuously "reproduce" and "recontextualize" the film text. For example, during Police Day, public security accounts extract film clips for legal education, or education bloggers edit fraud scenes as warnings during the back-to-school season. These fragmented contents continuously suture the film into new social dialogues, thereby guiding users to return to search engines for further information seeking (Tan et al., 2024). This not only maintains the baseline popularity of the keyword but also establishes a communication closed loop of "social platform triggering → search behavior response → data peak presentation," providing a sustained dynamic mechanism for the periodic fluctuations of attention during the long-tail phase.

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Supplementary Cultural Interpretation: Title Translation and Public Recognition

The Chinese title of the film, Guzhuyizhi, is directly derived from a traditional Chinese idiom. This linguistic choice serves as a critical catalyst for reducing the cognitive barrier for domestic audiences, thereby facilitating instant audience resonance and a rapid surge in search engine traffic post-release. Aligning with Lawrence Venuti's (1995) theory of domestication, the film's English title No More Bets strategically prioritizes cultural transparency to directly communicate the core anti-fraud narrative. This deliberate translation strategy not only facilitates cross-cultural comprehensibility but also reinforces the film's rapid establishment of symbolic relevance and sustained online circulation. Intriguingly, however, this linguistic optimization did not disrupt the fundamental temporal dynamics of public attention, which remains primarily driven by episodic social agendas. As Venuti (1995) contends, domestication achieves communicative efficacy primarily by aligning textual choices with the target audience's cultural schemata; yet such linguistic resonance operates at the level of symbolic accessibility rather than agenda-setting power, explaining why it could enhance reception without fundamentally reshaping the rhythm of public attention.

Conclusions

This study systematically examines and interprets the dynamic online attention toward the social-issue film No More Bets in Chinese cyberspace through a temporal analysis of Baidu Index data. The public's online engagement with the film follows a three-stage pattern: "release-induced surge—streaming-driven continuation—long-tail resonance". Among these, the phenomenon of "resonance" during the long-tail phase is particularly pivotal, indicating that the film's influence has become deeply embedded in the cyclical rhythms of the social agenda. The core mechanism underpinning this resonance is agenda melding. At officially designated nodes for legal education and public security promotion，such as Police Day, National Constitution Day, and the back-to-school safety awareness period, No More Bets, as a highly symbolic cultural text, is collectively appropriated by media outlets, government platforms, and the public to articulate and deliberate on public issues. This process generates regular pulse-like peaks in the film's search volume. The film's dissemination and impact are highly contingent upon the mobile and fragmented social media ecosystem, where meaning is continuously reproduced through secondary creative practices. Its narrative strategy, grounded in Fear Appeal and the macro-level emotional contagion of real-world threats, successfully converts societal-level collective fear and anxiety into a lasting collective risk memory regarding cyber fraud. This emotional and cognitive mechanism drives subsequent information-seeking behavior, enabling the film to be repeatedly activated when relevant social issues emerge. For the planning and sustained dissemination of social-issue films, emphasis should not be placed solely on box office performance during the release window but should also strategically plan their alignment with relevant social agenda nodes. By actively participating in the construction of public discourse, their social benefits and cultural vitality can be maximized. The social responsibility (Guo, 2024) and cultural mission (Song, Su, & Tang, 2018) of film posit that cinema should serve as a force for social progress, rather than merely a commercial product (Carlos, 2022). Concurrently, there is an urgent need for the academic community to strengthen interdisciplinary research into such film and television texts that exert significant social influence, thereby bridging the gap between public practice and scholarly theory (Dwivedi et al., 2024). While Baidu Index provides a valuable proxy for public attention, several limitations should be acknowledged. First and foremost, the research relies exclusively on Baidu search data without incorporating data from other search engines, which may introduce bias into the holistic portrayal of attention dynamics. In addition, search data only reflects public interest rather than actual behavior, meaning it may not fully capture offline engagement; algorithmic opacity of search engines may also affect the transparency of data generation, further limiting the reliability of the data employed. Additionally, the study focuses solely on the temporal trends of public attention and lacks an in-depth analysis of the spatial distribution of search audiences—subsequent research could leverage the "user demographic profiling" function of Baidu Index to address this gap. Additionally, with the advancement of generative artificial intelligence technologies, the public's methods of information acquisition may undergo significant transformation, making it crucial to

continuously examine the methodological value of search behavior in socio-cultural research. Finally, the analysis is restricted to the Chinese internet context, which may hinder the generalizability of the research findings to other regions or contexts. Nevertheless, given that Baidu holds approximately 70-75% of China's search engine market share (Stat Counter Global Stats, 2022) and Baidu App had 648 million monthly active users in December 2022 (Baidu, Inc., 2023), the data can still be regarded as a reliable reflection of the online interest patterns of a substantial proportion of Chinese netizens (Long et al., 2022).

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Ethics and Conflict of Interest
The authors of the study acted in accordance with ethical rules in all processes of the research. The authors declare unequivocally that there are no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the study's design, execution, or reporting.

Author Contribution
Qinyi TAN and Yin WU contributed equally to this study. Qinyi TAN: Conceptualization, Data curation, Writing – review & editing. Yin WU: Investigation, Validation, Writing – original draft. Luyan TENG: Methodology, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability
The data supporting this study are publicly available from Baidu Index (https://index.baidu.com). The specific search parameters are provided in the Methods section. The raw aggregated data can be reproduced by any researcher following the same procedure.

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