

# On “Zibo Fever” from the View of Coding and Decoding Theory

Xuanqiao Zhang

School of Liaoning University journalism and communication, Shenyang 110031, China.

---

**Abstract:** In March, the 2023 of a local barbecue in Zibo went viral on social media, reviving the local tourism industry and opening new opportunities for the city of Zibo, the "Hospitable Shandong" culture closely associated with Zibo barbecue has also attracted intense attention from netizens. With the help of Houle's coding and decoding theory, this paper takes the Zibo craze as the research object, explores the concrete application of the coding and decoding theory in practice, and deeply understands Houle's media culture communication theory.

**Keywords:** Encoding; Decoding; Zibo Fever

---

## Introduction

In March, 2023 with the "Small cakes, oven plus dipping sauce" barbecue soul of the "Three-piece set", Zibo barbecue in the Internet quickly out of the circle, "Into Zizhen Barbecue" has become the most fashionable "Internet celebrity event". According to travel China, Zibo's hotel bookings rose 800% over the same period of 2019, with travel orders up more than 2,000% over the same period of 2019, tickets for a high-speed train from Zibo to Zibo sold out within a minute on the first day of the May Day holiday.

For Zibo, barbecue is not a special advantage, but Zibo has been able to take advantage of the opportunity to take part in the city's economic test with a small barbecue, using the temperature of the fireworks and the tension of new media, it has become a "Internet red city" that has quickly entered the field of vision of the people of the whole country, and has placed the wings for the transformation and development of the old industrial cities to take off. Behind Zibo's drive is more about the city's commitment to its development philosophy, its innovation in the way it promotes it, and its commitment to urban governance than the food itself.

## 1. Explanation of Houle coding and decoding theory

Houle systematically proposed the theory of encoding and decoding in "Coding and decoding in television discussion"(1973), in which any information needs to be "Encoded" before it enters the field of mass communication. Encoding refers to the process of the communicator transforming the information into a symbol or code that is convenient for the media to deliver or for the audience to accept. In the mass communication, this process is represented by the activities of collecting, editing and producing the content of communication. Decoding refers to the receiver to receive the symbol to interpret and understand, read the meaning of the activities.

According to Houle, the content of communication must be processed by code, which is both the basic material for constructing text and the necessary rules for decoding it. Based on the understanding of the code and the coding subject as the code processor, this paper will focus on the "Zibo Fever" in the coding process of the coding strategy of the main coding, multi-decoding of the audience and coding of the meaning of the carrier-that is, the code-to be analyzed.

## 2. "Zibo Fever" in the coding strategy

### 2.1 Multi-agent common coding

"Zibo Fever" is not only a process from individual self-propaganda to content output, but also a process of continuous processing and construction of the main body of communication. In the construction of this event, not only thanks to the strong action of the Zibo government behind it, but also thanks to various forces such as the media, as a decoder and also in the secondary coding of the countless netizens to join.

In the spreading process of Zibo Barbecue, the coding body has changed from a single source radiation to a ubiquitous multi-level coding body. More initiative is given to the coders and content consumers, not only can they receive a greater volume of information

than ever before, but they can also actively participate in the dissemination process. It is precisely because these different subjects play the role of different coders, through their supplement, expansion and adaptation, the cross-media narrative of Zibo barbecue presents a multi-subject trend and different characteristics.

## **2.2 Use short video narratives**

The popularity of barbecue in Zibo can not be separated from the spread of short videos. People watch online to promote offline consumption and promote the re-dissemination of online information. Relying on media technology, cloud watching allows people to interact with the video content with the possibility of re-interaction, deepening the local brand image of travel and culture, "Barbecue + City" IP to create a huge environmental advantage.

Creating short video works is the process of coding symbols, relying on individual imagination and internalized code system, shaping a unique symbol as a whole, presenting readers or viewers with their own unique spiritual or physical worlds has helped Zibo to shorten the process of symbol formation and to achieve a rapid rise in popularity at lower publicity costs.

## **2.3 Cross-media coding layout**

Zibo BBQ first caught the attention of young people on platforms such as Weibo, Douyin and bilibili, with a younger social media audience. These social media platforms are primarily used by a younger, more active group, and spread more easily and more quickly. After Zibo's barbecue gained popularity, mainstream media platforms with a wider audience and more specialized content, such as CCTV News, also participated in the coding and content production of the barbecue.

In such a cross-media narrative system, we can find that Zibo barbecue-related content is usually distributed on different media platforms, on the one hand, it is all-pervading with the eyes and attention of the general public, on the other hand, the narrative content on each media platform also complements each other, cooperates with each other, co-creates, thus can compose the multi-angle, multi-level more complete story. The resultant force formed by different media is often invincible, forming an unstoppable trend, "Zibo Heat" accelerated warming.

## **2.4 The coding logic is in harmony**

The popularity of Zibo barbecue stems from the popular label "Hospitable Shandong, Warm Zibo"-- which, in turn, serves as the logic that runs through his coded text, in this framework for the overall story service. Whether it's the release of a map of Zibo's barbecue scene, or the subsequent high-speed rail tours in which visitors receive guides and specialties from Zibo's districts and counties, or even videos recording their daily barbecue punch cards, zibo is built around the image of integrity, warmth, simplicity.

In the process of dissemination, as the decoder of the vast number of netizens on the Zibo barbecue these positive symbol recognition and pursuit, inspire them to go together spontaneously, actively new content to derive and create. Therefore, it is certain that if we want to promote the innovation and dissemination of content, we can not do so without the voluntary and positive contribution of the audience to the logical unity of content, or even entirely in line with the original intention of the disseminator, and on this basis for polymerization, enrichment and development.

## **3. The audience of "Zibo Fever" decoding research**

At the beginning of coding, the encoder may try to set the decoding parameters in advance, but it is not guaranteed that the decoding and coding can achieve the intended equivalent effect, this is because the decoded audience has its own dynamic characteristics. Recognizing the dynamic nature of audience decoding, Houle proposed three positions of audience representation in code interpretation: "Dominant position", "Consultative position" and "Antagonistic position".

Applying the decoding theory to the audience feedback decoding formed in the "Zibo Fever" series of reports, we find that the decoding pattern mainly shows the dominant decoding under the recognition proposed by Houle, that is to say, audience decoding is an operation carried out in the coding-dominant code, and it is a clear communication of the information content of the coding code, which realizes the high equivalence between the encoding and decoding paths.

After fully recognizing the intention of the coders, the individual actively participates in the link of production, supplements and expands the content, and actively enriches the content by using science and technology, the content creation and flow operation of "Zibo Fever" have both played a positive role in promoting and guiding. After collecting and analyzing the comments about Zibo

BBQ on social media platforms, it was found that the audience-oriented decoding mainly shows the following aspects.

### **3.1 Food identity**

There is no denying that "Pop" is indeed called metaphysics, but behind it there is a basic logic-that is, People's recognition of beauty. While barbecues are all over Zibo, they have a strong local flavour and go out of their way to differentiate. Different from Northeast BBQ, Xinjiang BBQ and Yunnan BBQ, the soul of Zibo BBQ "Shish + pancake + shallot" is its core. Coupled with the unique ritual of "One table, one batch, one burrito" in the external image, Zibo barbecue gives a strong visual impact, creating a very strong sense of ceremony and scene, at the same time, the marinade is the characteristic of Zibo Barbecue, home marinade recipe is different, even a small barbecue, can let a person taste the essence of Lu cuisine.

### **3.2 Cultural identity**

In addition to aesthetics, there are some cultural factors in the audience's identification with Zibo Barbecue. It can be said that because of the Zibo and Shandong hospitality culture, the popularity of Zibo barbecue to achieve the protection of the cultural core. Zibo's fireworks satisfy visitors' imaginations of the city's hospitable atmosphere, and audiences decode the symbols to produce their own meanings, creating the city's unique cultural symbols, produce their own cultural memory of the city.

Barbeque symbols are encoded and decoded from a single function point to a deep connection with the city, thus making people think of Zibo and link to the rich cultural meaning of barbeque. Without the rich history and culture of Zibo, it is difficult to create the "Hot" barbecue in today's China, which is a combination of Chinese traditional culture and the great era.

### **3.3 Emotional empathy**

Unlike other metropolises, which are refined and fast-paced, Zibo's barbeque is unadorned, with a small table and a few stools, with contemporary people's inner pursuit of the "Human fireworks" coincides.

On the surface, is the barbecue fire, but from the media platform bombardment of reporting information, but also to see a kind of true, good and beautiful return and transmission. Zibo, a warm city, stresses that urban management should be combined with the lifestyle, hierarchy and culture of consumption in order to meet the basic needs of the public, a steady stream of people from all over the world come to "Roast" this warm and loving city. This combination has pushed Zibo to the top of its traffic, but it also implies an audience yearning for the pure truth of "Sincerity, simplicity and simplicity."

## **4. Conclusion**

Zibo's barbeque boom could not have been possible without Zibo's hard-core initiatives, strong social media exposure and audience monetisation. The convergence of various forces has created "Zibo + BBQ", a travel product that has a scale effect, attracting netizens from all over the country to pay attention to Zibo and monetize it through "Traffic", it has helped transform Zibo's tourism industry, providing a template for a city with a rich history and culture but little influence. This article hopes to learn from the "Zibo Fever" incident and explore how to tap more "Zibo", from the content of creative experience and ideas can be used for reference to better guide the integration of local culture and tourism development.

## **References**

[1] Chen LD, Lin YF. Inheritance and Innovation: A Stuart Hall study of encode decoder [J]. Research in journalism and communication, 21(08), 2014:99-112.

[2] Procter J. Stuart hall[M]. Routledge, 2004.