

A Comparative Study on Reporting Frames of Chinese and UK COVID-19 Reports

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Abstract: Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019, the development of the pandemic has touched the hearts of people all over the world. COVID-19 related reports not only help people keep abreast of the progress of public health emergencies, but also convey the image of the government in the process of epidemic prevention and having the duty to guide the direction of public opinion. Therefore, the reporting of COVID-19 is of great significance to the public. Based on rational criticism, this paper hopes to provide some references for optimizing the reports from China, by comparing media reports of COVID-19 in China and the UK.

Keywords: Reporting Frames; China and UK; COVID-19

Introduction

We live on the same earth, and the changes of the epidemic cannot be limited national boundaries. Therefore, once the outbreak of the virus crisis, it will be a disaster for the whole world. No one can solve the environmental problem alone, all countries must work together to meet the challenge. On 11 Mar 2020, WHO designated the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic. Based on this, by comparing the Chinese and British public health emergency reported issues in three aspects, reported topics, news tone and visualization, the author wants to provide the reference for narrowing the gap with European news industry and improving the ability of Chinese news industry to report and publicize public health emergencies.

1. Literature Review

Owen Goffman (1974) introduced frame theory into the study of mass communication. Later scholars have done a lot of research on the application of frame theory in the field of news broadcasting. As for journalistic, Entman (1993) further develops the concept of framing. The news frame plays the role of “railings” in the field of news and ensures the general seriousness of news.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, researches on COVID-19 mainly focusing on medical aspects. Feng (2020) compared the changes of news reports on SARS and COVID-19 in People’s Daily from four aspects: source, topic, title and quotation. As an important branch in the field of communication, health communication has grown rapidly in academic achievements over the past few decades, and the research topics have become increasingly rich. Internationally, “health” is the fifth most popular research topic in the past 80 years. In the early stages of the epidemic, China managed to contain it while most countries failed.

People’s Daily and The Times are selected as target media. Due to the large number of reports on COVID-19 in China and the UK, the time span of material collection in this paper is set as six months after the first confirmed case was found in both two countries. The time range is, People’s Daily from Dec 8, 2019 to May 8, 2020, and The Times from Jan 31, 2020 to June 31, 2020. This paper adopts Wang Shifan’s (1989) theoretical research method to broaden the category of framework

analysis to some extent, by comparing reporting topics, news tone and visualization, to make it more suitable for the reporting and analysis of COVID-19.

2. Reporting Topics

This paper analyzes the topics of People's Daily and The Times on the topics of COVID-19 from the five perspectives of government image, international perspective, humanistic care, economic construction and control measures.

People's Daily's reports of COVID-19 focus on the establishment of the government's image. The report "Resolutely contain the spread of the Epidemic" on Jan 23, 2020 pointed the measures taken by Information Office of the State Council to contain the spread of the epidemic at the press conference. The report titled "The first batch of patients admitted to Leishenshan Hospital in Wuhan" on Feb 9, 2020 introduced the hospital's operation system. Humanistic care is another major focus of People's Daily, which pays a great attention to front-line doctors and paramedics, accounting. The report " 'Little Sister' Grows into a 'Female Soldier' -- The Strength of Youth" on May 5, 2020, set up an image of a young person, who is called Lee Yingxian bravely shouldering responsibilities in the epidemic, aimed at publicizing advanced figures and deeds to increase people's determination and confidence in an early victory over the epidemic. In terms of international perspective, People's Daily reporting cooperation between China and other countries on the epidemic actively.

In the early days of the outbreak, The Times published three stories about Prime Minister Johnson, claiming that the coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced for decades. On Mar 12, Boris Johnson's government announced that the UK's response to COVID-19 had reached a protracted phase and that the authorities had come up with a "herd immunity" strategy to tackle the disease. In terms of human care, The Times focuses on a broader class level, such as confirmed cases and deaths in different regions. In terms of economic construction, the income brought by the development of the epidemic to the insurance industry has attracted the attention of The Times. On Mar 16, 2020, "Banks cat to save the world economy from the pandemic" pointed out that The UK is playing the role of banks to cope with the economic impact of the pandemic.

Both People's Daily and The Times focus most of their reports on humanistic care. The former is in line with China's "people-oriented" news concept, while the latter is according with the concept of "herd immunity" proposed by the British government.

3. The Tone of News

News tone is an implicit expression of news tendency. Here, we divide the news tone into three parts: positive report, negative report and neutral report.

Both at home and abroad, China presents a positive and responsible international image. The report titled "If Wuhan wins, Hubei Wins, Hubei Wins, the whole country wins" on Feb 12, 2020 highly praised the medical workers and rescue officers and soldiers who insisted on their front-line posts, and strengthened people's determination to defeat the epidemic. In terms of institutional policies, the Chinese government has actively introduced a series of COVID-19 control measures reduce the risk of infection. In terms of medical measures, China has actively developed novel corona-virus vaccines, distributed anti-epidemic materials to friendly countries, and extended sympathy and assistance to those countries affected by COVID-19. People's Daily has carried positive publicity and reports on advanced individuals like Lee Yingxian and other advanced collectives, showing touching stories of the fight against the epidemic to all sectors of society, and instilling confidence in the whole society's fight against the epidemic. The attitude of People's Daily is positive. It aims to help people build confidence in responding positively to the epidemic. We should also recognize that only by pointing out the problems can we solve them better.

The positive tone of The Times is dominant and accounts for most of the reports. But the author notice that there is a report titled "Doctor dies after picking up inflection from patient" on Mar 21, 2020, which mainly tells about the high risk of infection among doctors at the front line of the epidemic. It tells people that the epidemic is no joke and let readers have their own thinking.

People's Daily and The Times have mostly positive reports. In the face of such a major public health event as COVID-19,

the two schools have been adhering to a high degree of humanistic care every day, reducing society's excessive tension over the epidemic.

4. Visual Presentation of News

Visualization was first proposed in the computer field in 1987. It is the use of calculator graphics and image processing technology, data into images on the screen display, and interactive processing of the technology. The concept of visualization is introduced into the field of journalism, and a more concise and digital presentation of large amounts of data. Visualization makes the originally complicated and boring news clear, increases the liveliness of the news, and stimulates readers' interest in reading. It can also help audiences understand news more effectively in the professional political news, the investigation of emergencies and the in-depth analysis of some social events.

The visualized presentation effect of People's Daily in the epidemic report is relatively unitary. The connection between visualized and news is closely displayed on related pictures, and the visualized means are single. In the report of Feb 7, 2020, "Work Extra Shifts", attach the working photo of workers rushing to make masks and protective suits at a medical materials company's workshop in Hai'an, Jiangsu province. In order to fight the epidemic, the workers in key positions work tirelessly.

The Times has attached great importance to the visual presentation of news in epidemic reports. In an article titled "Modern mask" on 22 Feb 2020, the subject of the report was a young woman wearing a mask matching her festive dress, adding a touch of festive spirit to the pandemic era. In this way, pictures are usually more persuasive than words. On May 11, 2020, the report "See friends and family in 'flexible' lock-down" using the form of relationship chart to call on the public for quarantine. There are three parts of staying alert, Control the virus and Save Live are organically connected in eye-catching green and yellow as a warning. In subsequent reports of the outbreak, The Times also introduced data maps to make it easier to see where the epidemic was concentrated.

Both media focus on the use of pictures to enrich the content of the news, which reflect that pictures are easier and easier to obtain. It can help people to understand news intuitively, enhancing people's empathy ability. The Times makes more use of the advantages of news visualization and skillfully applies its simplicity to news reports. Data maps directly show the worst-hit areas of the epidemic in front of readers, which is more intuitive and easier to understand than reading text.

5. Conclusion

By comparing the reports on COVID-19 in China and the UK, the author puts forward the following suggestions for optimizing the news reporting of public health emergencies in China.

Firstly, we should return to the report itself when reporting news events, constantly exploring the internal meaning, to stimulate the public's thinking and attention to news events. In real life, the lack of previous news tracking not only wastes many hard-earned news leads, but also causes the public to gradually lose trust in news. The public wants to see not only the reports of hot news, but also the in-depth understanding of the essence of the event.

Secondly, the news media should strive for various reliable sources of information, because authenticity and objectivity are the key to news reporting. Journalists who collect news clues should establish friendly relations with news subjects, obtaining information from multiple angles. In news reports, we should never listen to a single source of information, because the parties at the center of the news will exert their subjective initiative, which is unfair.

Thirdly, we should strengthen our ability to respond to news reports of emergencies. The release of information to the public must be timely, accurately and comprehensively, when a public health emergency breaks out, to reduce social anxiety and tension. The government should establish and improve the emergency reporting mechanism for public health emergencies and encourage the training of compound talents.

Finally, journalists need to be more sensitive to news. Journalists lack relevant knowledge in a certain field, will make the news report lack professional terminology expression, so that the content of the report is simple and single. This requires journalists to strengthen their professional quality and broaden their knowledge.

There is a long way ahead for us to explore. We should record the times with sound, convey our thoughts with news, and hear China's voice on the world stage. Head above the sky, defending ordinary sense in practice, to establish rational, and find faith.

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