"Virus Maker" or "Anti-epidemic Pioneer"?
China's Image in BBC'S COVID-19 Coverage

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Abstract. BBC, as the most influential mainstream media in the UK and the world, has been paying close attention to the COVID-19 response in relevant countries since the outbreak. Through text analysis, this paper analyzes the characteristics of BBC162's reports on the epidemic in China from different aspects such as topic setting, keywords and rhetorical methods, and summarizes the image of China in the reports. It is found that BBC's reports on the epidemic in China generally reflect the situation of the epidemic in China objectively, but some reports still have implicit bias of creating fear, negative reports on positive issues and overgeneralization. In terms of the reporting stage, the NATIONAL image of China in THE BBC's COVID-19 reports roughly experienced three processes: from "virus manufacturer" to "pioneer in fighting COVID-19", and then to "interpreter and practitioner of the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind". Therefore, this paper also reflects on the impact of ideological differences and institutional cultural differences on the reporting principles of journalism professionalism.

Keywords: BBC · COVID-19 coverage · China's image · International communication

1 Introduction

With the rise of the network society, the media era is accelerating, and news media increasingly play a key role in conveying information related to major public emergencies to citizens. At a time of uncertainty and extreme fear caused by COVID-19, news organizations have an even greater responsibility to tell their audiences the truth behind their stories. As the first country to detect the Novel Coronavirus, China's actions have been closely watched by the world's media. Through western media's description and reports of the COVID-19 epidemic in China, we can have a comprehensive understanding of China's image in western media.

Scholars have done a relatively rich amount of research on the overall analysis of western media coverage of COVID-19. Among them, there are many achievements worth learning about whether there is emotional bias in the report. Researchers on the part of the typical western news reports the front page to read, by analyzing the news number, text type, the type of information sources, characters, the use of color, including photos, in the press parameters such as the location of the page, find relevant media is getting the audience will be coronavirus information play a decisive role,

perception and decision making, It is found that reports with certain emotional tendencies or even bias will be produced [1]. Along this line of thinking, Ittefaq have made it more clear that there is a tendency of discrimination and open racism in the media's social description of Novel Coronavirus [2]. Using social representation Theory (SRT) and qualitative subject analysis (QTA), the authors study representative reports on novel Coronavirus in leading Chinese, US and UK newspapers and find that the public may be directed to untrustworthy sources of information. Similarly, In his analysis of western media reports on the epidemic, Professor Zhang Jianzhong concluded that fear and panic are the main characteristics of their reports. He respectively from the United States, the Wall Street journal, the French piccard messenger newspaper, western countries such as the British economist representative in various media, selected several typical inaccurate, misleading reports were analyzed, and points out the west to China and Chinese communities, there is a certain discrimination and prejudice. However, due to the limited research objects and the lack of certain representativeness, it is inevitable that the research object is partial and not convincing enough [3].

Similar to Zhang Jianzhong's research, some scholars used the method of frame analysis to analyze the reports on China's news epidemic in the American media from the four rhetorical techniques of naming, shaming, taming and blaming, and found that most of the reports were biased [4]. Similarly, Sun found that some media, especially tabloid media, mostly adopted conspiracy, racist and Sinophobic positions from the key themes, viewpoints and perspectives used in the Australian media's China-related reports [5]. In general, the Australian media's reporting of novel Coronavirus outbreaks in China reflects more on their own fears, anxieties and their political, ideological and cultural stances than on the true situation of how the Chinese people are responding to novel Coronavirus outbreaks. From the perspective of the British media, however, the opposite conclusion was drawn. Zhang and Shaw examined how THE BBC, The Guardian and the Daily Mail reported the COVID-19 in China through sentiment analysis and thematic analysis [6]. Through sentiment analysis, they found that the majority of BBC readers have a more balanced or neutral view of China than the Guardian and The Daily Mail. Through thematic analysis, relatively affluent and educated readers of "quality" news (in this case, the Guardian and the BBC) can get a truer and more objective account of the outbreak and China's handling of it. By contrast, readers with lower levels of education and income (in this case, the daily Mail tabloid) reported less about politics. However, the BBC was found to be under more political control on the topic of "criticising China amid the pandemic", and was mostly silent on the topic of "praising China's response". So, as a media organization with global influence, is BBC's coverage of China under the epidemic objective and fair?

Based on this, this paper attempts to analyze 162 China-related news reports of BBC news website, a mainstream media in the UK, during the outbreak of COVID-19. By text analysis, the characteristics of BBC reports under the outbreak are analyzed from different aspects such as topic setting, keywords and rhetorical methods, and the image of China in the reports is summarized. And to explore whether there is a certain "implicit bias" in BBC's coverage of the coronavirus outbreak in China.

2 BBC'S Coverage of China During the Covid-19 Pandemic

From the perspective of the topic setting of the reports, the author conducts a mood analysis on the data of these 162 reports, aiming to determine whether news reports tend to be positive, neutral or negative. The study found that only 10% of the reports were positive, mainly about China's successful efforts and outstanding contributions to contain the epidemic. The number of negative reports reached 22%, including deliberately emphasizing the Chinese factor in the tracing of the virus, questioning and blaming China, from questioning China's initial concealment of COVID-19 and its response measures, cracking down on doctors with different opinions, to the negative impact on the global economy. Relatively neutral reports accounted for 68%, mainly involving China's coordination with the WHO, holding a silent ceremony for the dead, and comparing China's data with other countries.

As we all know, China has taken the most comprehensive, prompt, rigorous and thorough response to COVID-19 in the world, buying valuable time for all countries [7]. However, nearly a quarter of BBC's reports questioned or even discredited China's efforts and achievements, which is a typical way of negative coverage of positive issues. For example, he cited "high-tech epidemic prevention and monitoring technologies" such as "Wuhan lockdown", "Xi 'an lockdown", "centralized quarantine", wechat health code and other "high-tech epidemic prevention and monitoring technologies", "community grid management mechanism" and "national mobilization" as the "evidence" supporting what he called "China's top-down mandatory intervention measures" and "absolutism". The BBC by way of agenda-setting, China during the period of disease resistance taken by the efforts and achievements, converted to challenge China's excuse for epidemic prevention policies and measures, and further developed a limit civil liberty, ignoring the citizen privacy is extremely low, to the society and the information of press freedom, highly controlled power authoritarian image of the Chinese government. What is more serious is that THE BBC made a series of "impugning China theories" such as "China virus", "conspiracy theory of the origin of the virus" and "COVID-19 data is not true" as the main contents of the agenda, and further guided the public opinion direction of "Wuhan created the virus and China covered up the epidemic", thus causing serious damage to China's national image (Figs. 1 and 2).

From the key words of relevant texts, fear is one of its prominent features. Inspired by the news model proposed by Dijk, the headlines in news reports and the leads after the headlines play a leading role in expressing the main topics in the news structure [8]. In other words, the title is the most prominent feature of news discourse. At the same time, Dijk believes that it is more important that the title provides a preferred reading mode for the audience [8]. Again, the Dor expresses further affirmation of this. He likens headlines to "relevance optimizers" because they are designed to further optimize the relevance of news content for the audience [9]. Therefore, in news reports, headlines play a very important role in the process of ideological reproduction of the audience.

According to this idea, the author made a statistical analysis of the typical keywords in the headlines and leads of 162 BBC reports on COVID-19 in China during the epidemic period. The results showed that a total of 28 reports directly used "Chinese coronavirus", "Chinese virus", "Wuhan pneumonia", "Chinese mysterious virus" and "virus from Wuhan" in their titles and leads. In all, 13 reports used "fear," "Wuhan is crying for help,"
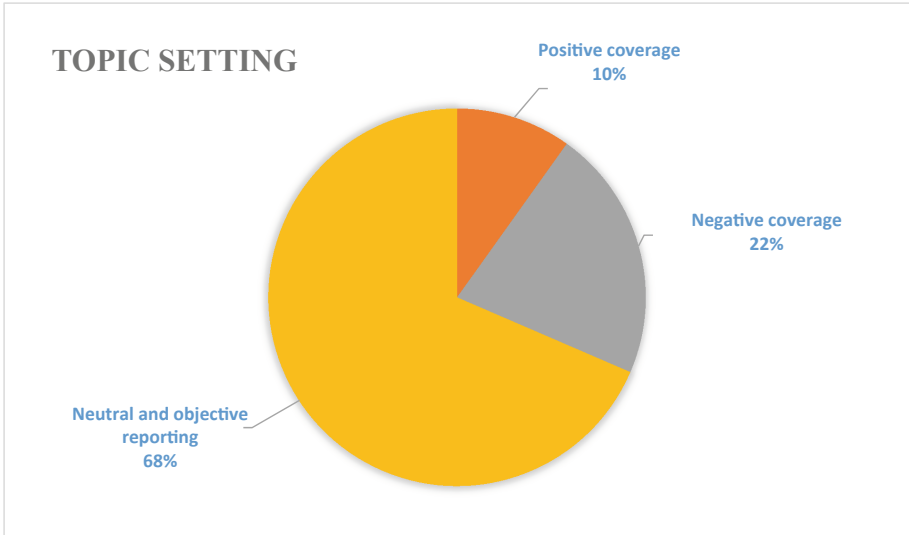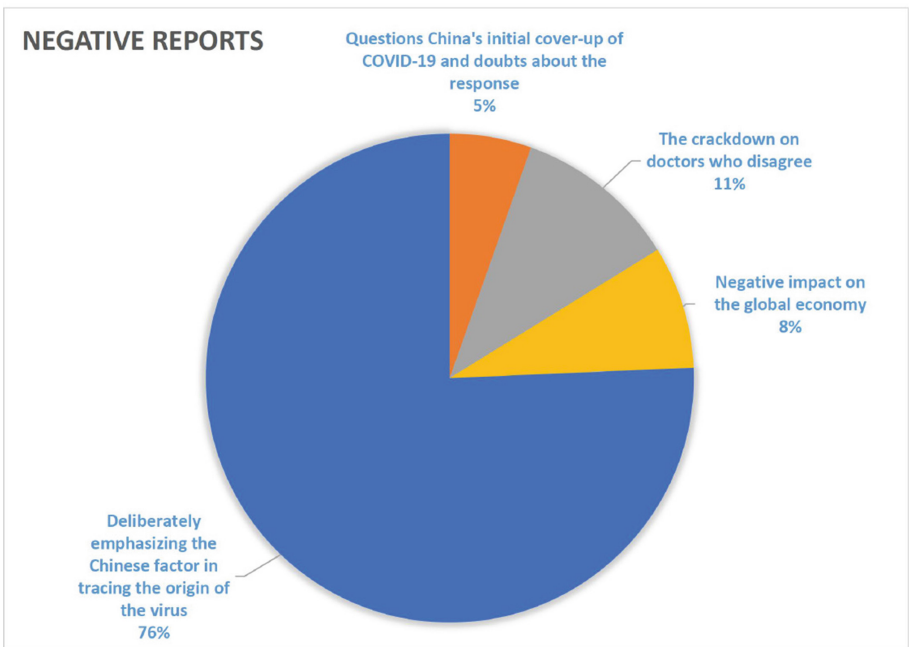
Fig. 1. Topic Setting

Fig. 2. Negative reports

"panic," or other similar phrases. For example, ina news report on the situation in Wuhan, China, the headline "China Coronavirus: Road Blocks and Ghost Towns" directly refers
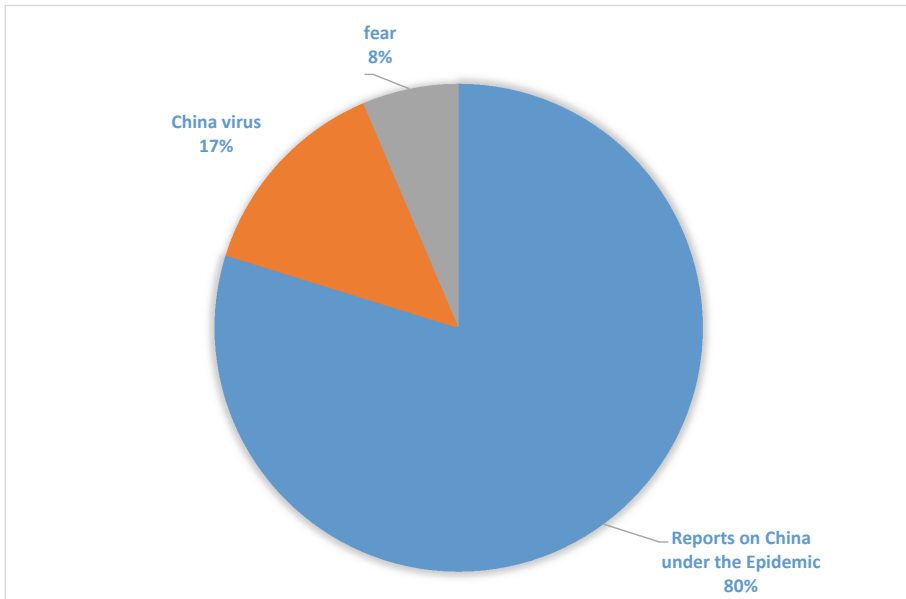
Fig. 3. Reports on China under the Epidemic

to Wuhan as a "ghost town". "COVID-19: Hong Kong's Hospitals overwhelmed spike in cases" describes the threat to The healthcare system in Hong Kong, China. It can be seen that in BBC's related reports, nearly 25% of the headlines and leads directly bring people the feeling of fear. The spread of such news reports, while amplifying public anxiety, not only caused the situation of "information epidemic", but also reduced the credibility and influence of information released by authoritative news organizations to some extent (Fig. 3).

From the perspective of rhetoric, news reports in order to win more readers' attention, adopting exaggerated rhetoric has meant that inaccurate, and the BBC in epidemic reports about China, there were 10 report there are obvious prejudice, more or less use only can support the author view of information, so as to achieve biased coverage effect, Some are even seriously distorted and inaccurate. For example, the unified leadership of the Communist Party is exaggerated as "the obedience of the Chinese people to the Communist Party is a kind of naked obsession and blind obedience" [10]. Described 2021 as an "exceptionally painful year" for China's fight against pneumonia [11]. However, "According to AFP, as of Thursday, China's Ministry of Commerce told reporters that residents in Xi 'an could have adequate access to basic supplies." Obviously, the author did not respect the objective facts and made exaggerated descriptions, which damaged the authenticity of the report.

Of course, the vast majority of the reports are more dispassionate than the 10 that say, "The 1000-bed hospital could be ready in six days," The side shows the speed of "China" [12]. "China provides help to the rest of the world within its capacity", showing "China's image as a responsible major country". "China adopts joint prevention and

control measures to dynamically control the response mechanism of health incidents", which reflects the effective epidemic prevention policy of the government [13].

To sum up, we find that BBC's reports on the epidemic in China generally reflect the epidemic situation in China objectively. However, there are still some reports with fear, negative reports on positive issues, and implicit bias of overgeneralization. This part of the content is easy to produce adverse effects and damage China's national image.

3 Analysis of China's Image in BBC Reports

National image is the spiritual outlook and public opinion reflected by a sovereign state on the world stage and in the international environment. Mass media plays a very important role of "reflection" in the propagation and shaping of national image [14]. It can be said that what kind of "Image of China" the Western media projects will create a corresponding "Image of China" for most western news audiences.

3.1 In the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Outbreak—Information Suppression, Virus-Producing Countries Led by Power Politics

Since the outbreak first began in Wuhan, China, reports of outbreaks in China have made much of this point. Accusing China of concealing the development of the initial outbreak, it also sharply criticised the terms of its visit to the WHO head defends coronavirus role in China [15]. According to multiple reports on China's investigative actions against WHO, the proposed provisions limit the freedom of WHO teams to travel and investigate and collect evidence for health reasons [15]. More pages spoke of Dr. Li Wenliang being accused of "making false comments" that "seriously disturbed social order," and of senior staff at the hospital "severely suppressing COVID-19 warnings for medical staff, which forced them to be exposed to a large number of cases of the virus without protection." [16]. And relate these to China's political system, "people's fascination with the communist Party's hold on power has reached a level of shock". It further creates an image of China that suppressed relevant information and concealed facts under the leadership of power politics in the early stage of the outbreak.

3.2 Post-covid-19 Outbreak—The First to Achieve Remarkable Results in the Fight Against COVID-19

With concrete actions, China has proved to the world the feasibility of its epidemic prevention and control measures. Although the report says "the authoritarian state relies on top-down mobilization methods. They can overcome bureaucratic and financial constraints and mobilize all resources." However, some reports still criticized China's "undemocratic epidemic prevention and control measures", but they also praised China's remarkable achievements in fighting the epidemic. For Huoshenshan Hospital, some media marveled at the "Chinese speed": "A temporary public hospital was completed in 10 days". In terms of medical supplies, Wuhan can receive supplies from other hospitals or easily order them from factories, lamenting "the perfection of China's medical security measures". The deployment of disinfection robots, smart helmets, drones with

thermal cameras and advanced facial recognition software shows the positive role that "Chinese technology" can play in the fight against COVID-19 [17]. It can be seen that the reports convey from different aspects the efforts made by the Chinese government and people in the process of organizing the anti-epidemic response and the strong national strength displayed, which to some extent shows that the various anti-epidemic measures implemented by China have achieved relatively ideal results.

3.3 After the Epidemic Is Basically Under Control—An Interpreter and Practitioner of the Idea of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind

After basically bringing the situation under control at home, China began to provide humanitarian assistance to other countries. BBC also mentioned in several reports that Chinese vaccines have played a positive role in epidemic prevention and control in many countries around the world, and acknowledged that China is the world's leading vaccine exporter. The report said China has provided 1.2 billion doses of finished and bulk vaccines to more than 100 countries and international organizations, either through export through commercial partnerships or free donations. At the same time, it Has been reported that Vaccines in China have made more than other countries combined [18]. In addition, some reports focused on China's assistance and medical personnel to Italy, Serbia and other countries that were most in need at that time. China's international assistance with the image of a major country is undoubtedly a vivid interpretation and practice of the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind.

4 Conclusion

To sum up, we found that BBC's reports on the epidemic in China on the whole objectively reflected the situation of the epidemic in China, but some of them had some problems such as unclear citing sources, insufficient empirical evidence, positive issues and negative reports, and overgeneralization. Especially in the early and middle period of the COVID-19 outbreak, when relevant information was still unclear, it further amplified the atmosphere of panic and created a national image of China as a country that suppressed information and produced the virus under the leadership of power politics for western audiences. But as China's epidemic prevention and control has been steadily implemented, the BBC has seen the remarkable progress made by the Chinese government and people in the fight against the virus, as well as the humanitarian assistance provided to other countries. Therefore, relevant reports also follow the reporting principle of journalism professionalism, and depict a positive national image of China from a fairly objective standpoint—a "pioneer in fighting the epidemic" with great power sentiment.

It can be seen from the above that BBC's news coverage of the epidemic in China has generally experienced a process from viewing China as a "virus manufacturer" to a "pioneer in the fight against the epidemic", which generally objectively reflects China's positive efforts in the fight against the epidemic. However, due to the Chinese and western in social system, values and human rights between ideological differences on issues

such as long-term, makes part of the BBC report also shows relatively obvious implicit bias, namely still see China as a superpower authoritarian countries, will China make efforts to fight the new crown outbreak, as for individual freedom and democracy of public opinion is absolutely repression. In fact, each institutional culture has its own characteristics. In journalism, especially in the field of public opinion of international news, judging the institutional culture of other countries with one's own political standpoint will obviously affect the reporting principle of journalism professionalism. Taking this study as an example, we can see that BBC, as a news organization with global public opinion influence, still has a certain implicit bias in its coverage of the epidemic in China, which is undoubtedly not conducive to enhancing communication, dialogue and understanding between the East and the West. Therefore, the author also hopes that the news media of all countries in the world can be more understanding and tolerant, less narrow and biased in their international communication work in the future, and record the historical process of this new era of globalization with real and objective words and lenses.

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