

“Apparently, we can’t trust China”- The Representation of China in COVID-related News Videos on YouTube

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Introduction

- This paper investigates how selected dominant US news media, namely, CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News, portray China in COVID-related news videos on YouTube.
- The analysis shows noticeable differences in the representational strategies adopted by different networks; it also shows the similarity that China is commonly represented as being responsible for the COVID pandemic.
- I argue that these news discourse on social media work to maintain the power relation between US and China, and critical media literacy is important for viewers in understanding these news discourse.

Background

- International journalism shows a strong character of “otherness” (Hall, 1997)
 - Western ethnocentrism
 - Racism
 - Political and ideological bias
- “China threat” discourse is prevalent in US news media(Yang & Liu, 2021)
 - The representation of China is often associated with political/ideological threat; military threat; economic threat
 - Economic threat and human rights-related issues have been dominant themes in recent years.

Method

- Data collection
 - News videos were collected from YouTube by using the search word combinations of “xxx (name of channel) + China + COVID” (e.g., CNN China COVID)
 - Search results were sorted by view counts to prioritize the most viewed videos
 - Select videos that were only directly related to COVID and China (e.g., “Trump thinks it’s not racist to call COVID Chinese virus” was not selected)
- Data analysis
 - Three-dimensional modal (text, discourse, and social practices) (Fairclough, 1995)
 - Multimodal discourse analysis (Kress, 2012)

Summary of Data

Channel	Number of videos	Average views	Highest views	Average comments	Highest comments	Average Length
MSNBC	12	159,956	524,045	825	3,373	5:41
CNN	17	1,092,540	4,654,801	6,889	23,837	6:59
Fox News	21	1,265,022	2,876,227	8,639	28,069	7:11

Results

- Different video title (headline) strategies**
 - Provocative and negative tone of Fox News, and the highlighted voice of Tucker Carlson

Tucker: America is being sold to China	FoxNews
Hong Kong scientist claiming China 'covered up' coronavirus data speaks out	FoxNews
Coronavirus whistleblower speaks out about possible COVID origin on 'Tucker'	FoxNews
Tucker: Why did they lie to us for so long	FoxNews
Chinese virologist accuses Beijing of hiding details on coronavirus	FoxNews
Tucker: Why would America's media take China's side amid coronavirus pandemic?	FoxNews
Tucker: What is the actual death rate of COVID-19?	FoxNews

- Factual and neutral tone of MSNBC & CNN

China Still Concerned With Coronavirus Hot Spots Morning Joe MSNBC	MSNBC
How A Country Serious About Coronavirus Does Testing And Quarantine Rachel Maddow MSNBC	MSNBC
The Fight Is Not Over In China,' Says Reporter About Virus Morning Joe MSNBC	MSNBC
Chris Hayes On Right-Wing's 'Escape From The Lab' Theory Of Coronavirus Origin All In MSNBC	MSNBC
China Begins Easing Coronavirus Restrictions Morning Joe MSNBC	MSNBC
See where officials believe the coronavirus started	CNN
Coronavirus whistleblower doctor is online hero in China	CNN
Wuhan coronavirus kills doctor who warned of outbreak	CNN
CNN reporter returns to Wuhan after 3 months. See what it looks like now	CNN
Trump criticizes China for their coronavirus response. Here's what we know	CNN
US investigates possibility Covid-19 originated in Chinese lab	CNN
CNN's Berman reads Fauci's emails. Watch his response	CNN
CNN journalists living and working under coronavirus quarantine	CNN

- The Tale of Two Whistleblowers**

CNN—Dr. Li Wenliang



Fox News – Dr. Li-Meng Yan



Recognized by the Chinese official and online community	Associated with overseas Chinese dissidents
News materials – <ul style="list-style-type: none">• videos, pictures taken by CNN in China;• audio and text interviews of Li;• CNN correspondent in China	News materials – <ul style="list-style-type: none">• live interview with Yan;• images from other sources;• Fox news commentators
Portrayal of China – China is responsible for COVID (indirectly) as local officials silenced whistleblowers, missing opportunities for quick actions	Portrayal of China – China is responsible for COVID (directly) as the government knew the seriousness (transmissibility) but delayed the sharing of information

- The Grain of Salt**

The assumed untrustworthiness of China in MSNBC and CNN's reports

Examples of framing language

- ❖ “Obviously, as we said a million times on this show, **there is not a grain of salt big number to take big enough that come out of China**. When they reported a couple of days ago, no new death, **I don't think anyone actually believed that**. But you can look at the impacts of their action” (MSNBC News Anchor)
- ❖ In a report about the investigation of the possibility of lab leak theory, the reporter summarized a series of reports and said “whether it was intentional or due to lack of testing, for some, **China's reported number of coronavirus cases and deaths does not add up**” (CNN correspondent)

Conclusions

- The three channels use different reporting strategies to portray China as
 - Untrustworthy – silencing voices; providing misleading information and delayed data
 - Responsible for pandemic
 - ❖ Indirectly – silencing whistleblowers; mismanagement
 - ❖ Directly – provide misleading information and delayed data
 - ❖ Directly and intentionally – manufacturing the virus and creating COVID
- Implications
 - Power relation – “them” (China) as wrongdoer vs “us” (USA) as victim
 - Media representation – not neutral; ideological assumptions
 - Intercultural communication – knowledge of diverse sources; open attitudes; critical literacy

References

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