

# A Study of *The New York Times*' Reporting Tendencies on the COVID-19 in China in 2021

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**Abstract.** Since 2021, as countries around the world continue to understand the novel coronavirus, tracing the source of the novel coronavirus, developing vaccines, and improving epidemic prevention policies have become the top priority, as well as an important means to curb the continuous spread of the novel coronavirus. However, with the continuous coverage of COVID-19, *The New York Times* and other English-language media tried to attach a political attribute to a global plague by shifting the topic and distorting the facts, which is also an important reason for this paper to study the bias of *The New York Times* in its coverage of China's COVID-19 in 2021. Based on *The New York Times*' news coverage of COVID-19 in China in 2021, this paper highlights the bias of New York Times from four aspects: the origin of COVID-19, the effectiveness of China-made vaccines, China's epidemic prevention policies, and China's COVID-19 data. This paper adopts the text analysis method to summarize the reporting tendency of *The New York Times* by selecting the news reports that are in line with the time and subject scope, analyzing the core of their reporting content and internal context meaning. Finally, this paper concludes that when it comes to the COVID-19 epidemic in China, *The New York Times* tends to bring most of the news events into the political framework by misleading the interviewees, avoiding the important points, and ignoring the reasons for questioning, and distorting China's international image.

**Keywords:** New York Times, Tendencies, Covid-19.

## 1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, the COVID-19 epidemic has experienced several rounds of transmission and rebound worldwide. As of 9:52 p.m. Beijing time on December 31, 2021, a total of 286,632,241 COVID-19 cases and 5,439,554 deaths were confirmed worldwide. And in 2021, mutated novel coronaviruses became the most aggressive "killers". covid-19 mutant virus "delta", discovered in India in May 2021, is thousands of times more virulent than the original strain and has higher transmissibility, pathogenicity, and immune evasion capabilities. It was quickly introduced into Europe, bringing a fourth wave of outbreaks to Europe in mid to late June before spreading rapidly around the world. on November 26, another coronavirus variant, b.1.1.529, was classified as "a variant requiring attention" and named "Omicron". Compared to delta, Omicron is more transmissible, but has a shorter duration of symptoms in patients and is more amenable to recovery.

The outbreak prevention and control policies in 2021 also differed from country to country. After the fourth wave of epidemic in Europe in the middle and late June 2021, the United Kingdom has abolished most of the control policies, while Italy has more strict control. China, on the other hand, located in Asia, has consistently adhered to the epidemic prevention policy of "dynamic zero elimination" and "normalization" since the outbreak of the epidemic. As of 24:00 Beijing time on December 31, 2021, China had 2886 confirmed cases (including 15 severe cases), 94792 cured and discharged cases, 4636 deaths, 102314 confirmed cases and 1 suspected case. The historical number of confirmed covid-19 cases is 1.08 million and the actual cumulative number of deaths is 5174. In terms of relative growth rates of value added in major industries in China in 2021, the information

transmission, software and information technology service industries performed significantly faster than other industries, while the accommodation and catering industries were significantly more affected by the COVID-19 than other industries.

Founded in 1851, *The New York Times*, sometimes referred to as "The Times," is based in New York City, USA. Since 1896, *The New York Times* has kept the Times reportage principle: "Makes every effort really, not fears dauntlessly, without bias and without favor, does not divide the parties and groups, the region or any special benefit." In the 21st century, in response to the impact of the Internet on the traditional media industry, *The New York Times* has embarked on a digital transformation, maintaining profitability by launching online subscriptions and other business methods. In the field of digital platform, on the one hand, it adheres to the concept of subscription first, subverts the old print-centered concept of traditional newspapers by upgrading the website and introducing new technologies, and then tries to integrate text, audio, video, animation, digital elevation model (DEM), satellite linkage model, etc. to combine into a new and more intuitive way of presenting news, thereby achieving the purpose of reducing the number of unsubscribes, enhancing user stickiness and optimizing user experience. On the other hand, it has been vigorously exerting the advantages of paper media and cultivating quality news content. By 2015, *The New York Times'* digital revenue exceeded \$400 million and digital subscriptions exceeded 1 million, achieving in just five years what the print edition had achieved in nearly a century. To date, *The New York Times* has won 130 Pulitzer Prizes in a variety of categories, including international reporting, national reporting and critical writing, ranking it among the world's top newspapers. 2021 saw \$2.048 billion in revenue, up 16.71% year-over-year, and \$220 million in net income, up 119.74% year-over-year. According to the 2022 Global Digital Subscription Snapshot report, *The New York Times* topped the global newspaper media with 8,328,000 paid subscribers as of the second quarter of 2022. There is no doubt that *The New York Times'* digital transformation process has been a success and has profound implications for newspapers and the entire traditional media sector.

## 2. Literature Review

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019, it has spread from Wuhan, China, to the whole world in a very short period of time. Under such a globalized event, most people, regardless of their class and status, receive information about COVID-19 from the news media, except for first-line research and medical staff. However, whether the news media can be absolutely objective in conveying information to the recipient of a certain event has become an important variable that cannot be ignored by the public and the nation in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the importance, the scholar Lu Xu and Weizhao Du in 2020 based on the Beijing three news media in the health class tendentiousness of news reports related research, based on the conclusion of scholars can be found that the news media cannot guarantee its reports an event when absolutely fair and objective, especially based on the social context environment [1], It is difficult to avoid subjective reports when reporting medical news. Plus coincided with a COVID-19, in the event of an outbreak of the international political situation is changeable state, which China temporarily as the new outbreak provenance, and behind and the west about the new epidemic treatment policy into a different direction, so this paper thinks the foreign news media for degree of orientation and characteristics of China's COVID-19 outbreaks reported has relative theoretical significance and practical significance.

And appeared after the foreign affairs from country to country, the two news media for the same event will position split because of various reasons, under the contradiction, about this part of the related research is not scarce, for example, on June 15, 2020 after the border conflicts between China and India, have scholars according to the incident in India, English media as the sampling object, This paper conducts propensity analysis to understand the narrative framework of Indian English media through quantitative analysis, and then publishes the objective conclusion that Indian English media put the cart before the horse and maliciously demean China's national image [2].

After stating and showing the necessity of studying foreign media, another focus of this paper is the influence and authority of *The New York Times* at home and abroad. In addition to the digital data shown in the Introduction section, there are also many related researches on *The New York Times* in recent years. In particular, as the first country to report COVID-19, China was deliberately criticized by *The New York Times* for nominalization. Scholar Yueling Pan pointed out in her paper that nominalization is the most important means in grammatical metaphor [3], and *The New York Times* carried out unfair reports on the epidemic in China through this method. Moreover, Yueling Pan also made a horizontal comparison between *The New York Times* and the Guardian through LDA model analysis and outlined the focus of western mainstream media reports.

Not only that, by focusing on *The New York Times* published the news itself, after the outbreak of a COVID-19 in China, the Chinese government has taken appropriate line blockade and silent, but *The New York Times* has ignored other negative effects brought by the disease and will report focuses on the blockade of the economic downturn and supply chain disruptions in the world above, The world's slowdown can be traced back to China. In the case of the mass death of stowaways in the UK in 2019, scholars Yu Hu and Wanli Zhuang analyzed the dual framework in western media's international news reports, reflecting the lack of "political correctness" and "self-censorship" in the western media industry [4].

The above studies and theories are helpful to have a macro understanding of the reporting tendency of *The New York Times* and western media. However, there are still some gaps in the research described above, such as a slight lag in timeliness and insufficient in-depth longitudinal analysis of *The New York Times*. The purpose of this paper is to explore the reporting bias and characteristics of *The New York Times* on the COVID-19 epidemic in China, outline the narrative framework of *The New York Times* on this event, and reveal the bias, subjectivity and politics of the Western media in reporting the news.

### 3. Methodology

This paper aims at *The New York Times* in 2021 in the United States against China on the basis of the outbreak of the COVID-19 news reports, to explore *The New York Times* news reports on China's covid-19 outbreak has what kind of characteristic and accept the reports information under the characteristics of readers whether perception of China's COVID-19 outbreak has positive correlation view changes. Since the basic data of this paper is written news reports, and the main purpose of exploration is to present the reporting tendency, this paper will adopt qualitative analysis and content analysis. That is, by setting keywords that can be used to present the *The New York Times* news reports tendency in LIWC-22 text analysis software in advance, and then deriving the results of the proportion of each keyword in the collected texts, the news reports tendency can be quantified to a statistical degree.

Since this paper was written in August 2021 has a more complete timeline and data timeliness compared with the incompleteness and uncertainty of 2022. At the same time, Omicron, the sub virus with the most widespread transmission capacity of COVID-19, was reported for the first time in South Africa on November 9, 2021, and the virus rapidly spread globally. The topic of COVID-19, which has been dormant for a period of time, is quickly aroused. Under the influence of three main reasons: time integrity, data timeliness and topic popularity, 2021 will become the limited range of news reporting time in this paper.

And necessary in order to more efficient and convenient to select text data, this paper qualitative analysis of the news report data source will choose *The New York Times* digital version of the official website, based in New York Times' world section of the website, search "COVID-19" and "China" as keywords, grab a total of 40 news report, After that, three news reports per month were allocated for the first 10 months of 2021 (total 30 reports), and five each for November and December (total 10 reports), when the Omicron outbreak occurred.

After the guarantee to get enough data support, this paper will through summarizing classification of two kinds of "positive" and "negative" keyword, through text analysis software LIWC - 22 to generate two kinds of subordinate dominated all the key words in the report, won *The New York Times* in 2021 against Chinese COVID-19 objective analysis result of epidemic news tendentiousness, and final statement.

#### 4. Result

Based on the text analysis of the 2021 New York Times news report on COVID-19 in China, the fields involved in the report can be divided into four categories: 1. The origin of the novel coronavirus (2019-NCOV), 2. China's epidemic prevention policy and implementation, 3. COVID-19 epidemic data collected by Chinese researchers, 4. Evaluation of vaccines owned by China.

In January 2021, as a WHO team traveled to Wuhan for a four-week investigation to trace the source of COVID-19, *The New York Times* journalist James Gorman published a news titled "A W.H.O. Research on His Trip to China Seeking Origins of the Virus" on February 14 [5], before the results were published, In his report, the journalist James Gorman did not enter into the subject of his news report in time. Instead, he asked the researcher what the difference between his visit to China and his previous visit to China was, and whether he thought there was resistance to the scientific research goal, which was biased towards personal and subjective questions, leading the researcher to make a negative evaluation of China's epidemic prevention policy.

In the news report "A W.H.O. Research on His Trip to China Seeking Origins of the Virus," [5] the researcher said that China was unwilling to hand over raw data to cooperate with the investigation, But the scrupulously objective news media did not state why China was reluctant to hand over raw data, instead portraying a one-sided image of an investigative team stymied in China.

On March 5, 2021, *The New York Times* published a news report entitled "Some Scientists Question W.H.O. Inquiry Into the Coronavirus Pandemic's Origins"[6]. This news report reports on an open letter submitted by a group of French scientists in Paris. The open letter criticized the W.H.O. for releasing a report on the origins of the coronavirus in China, while *The New York Times* picked up the letter to highlight the W.H.O. Tracing the origin of COVID-19 in China is a political part, and the author also cited the opinion of David A. Relman, professor of medicine at Stanford University, who supported the open letter to prove the authority of the open letter, misleading the simple project of tracing the origin of COVID-19 as a political performance. Not only that, but on April 7, 2021, *The New York Times*, in a report titled "With Virus Origins Still Obscure, W.H.O. and Critics Look to Next Steps," [7] repeated its call not to ignore the possibility of a leak at a Chinese Virus lab, Attempts to once again obfuscate the issue of Covid's origin and deepen conspiracy theories, even after the W.H.O. and numerous experts say the possibility of a lab leak are extremely low. Even in the second half of the story, *The New York Times* suggested that Chinese scientists were lying or ignorant about their research on the coronavirus.

*The New York Times* has two main queries about COVID-19 vaccines: First, 1.4 billion people in China still don't have access to the world's most effective COVID-19 vaccines (those that use breakthrough mRNA technologies developed and approved in the West and have been accepted in dozens of countries). Second, the effectiveness of China's domestic vaccines has been questioned. *The New York Times* believes that China's domestic vaccines are not effective and are less effective than those developed in the West. It even believes that Chinese regulators have changed the rules to allow Chinese drug makers to submit trial data late or provide false data. (Sinovac and Sinopharm's vaccines have helped prevent hospitalizations and deaths, but their ability to reduce the spread of variants like Omicron remains questionable.) For example, "They Had the Vaccines and a Plan to Reopen. They Got Cold Feet." shows this phenomenon. [8] This article questioned China's lack of use of advanced vaccines, expressed disbelief that China was so determined to compete with the United States and the West in science and technology, and expressed the view that China was not fully committed to developing a homegrown mRNA vaccine. Multiple reports in *The New York Times*

have suggested that China's lack of mRNA vaccines, coupled with delays in approving effective foreign vaccines, has left holes in Beijing's narrative of victory. This essentially political campaign has now led to China delaying the approval of foreign mRNA vaccines. But China has lagged behind in vaccine development, noting that it is increasingly elusive when China will approve BioNTech.

*The New York Times* exposed and criticized China's strict lockdown and the outrageous and unreasonable nature of mass nucleic acid testing. While China's quarantine policies, including strict lockdowns, have prevented millions of people from falling ill, scientists say the result is that people have not built up enough natural immunity to help fight serious infections, making a reliable vaccine more important than any other thing. Pressure is mounting on China to find a new approach. It points out that the Chinese government's propaganda campaign, which claims the virus has destroyed Western countries, has contributed to widespread stigma and fear of infection among the Chinese population, even among the young and healthy. It also silenced voices within China seeking a different response, branding them traitors. Says local governments may err on the side of overreacting to contain the outbreak because of the high political stakes. *The New York Times* warns that this approach is not sustainable: At a time when global opinion is hardening against China, China could find itself increasingly isolated diplomatically and economically. For example, in a report of *The New York Times*: "Why China Is the World's Last 'Zero Covid' Holdout"[9], it vigorously complained about the dissatisfaction brought by the lockdown policy to the Chinese people. That has led to frequent complaints about inadequate medical care or food, soaring youth unemployment, small businesses closing and overseas companies shifting supply chains elsewhere. The article characterized China's pursuit of zero as "single-minded" and "above all other problems," calling the quarantine policy tough and harmful. Says the economic consequences of the zero policy may at some point force China's leaders to rethink their response.

In covering the controversial Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Taiwan, *The New York Times* has tended to politicize the covid-19 epidemic. For years, the Hong Kong and Taiwan issues have been the focus of U.S. attention on China. Although the epidemic outbreaks in Hong Kong and Taiwan are not very serious, they are still one of the main focuses of *The New York Times*' coverage, often using a combination of public health events and politics in their coverage. For example, an article titled "The Hong Kong police, citing the pandemic, block Tiananmen anniversary events." [10] was published on May 27, 2021, reporting that the Hong Kong police, citing the ongoing threat of corona virus, had rejected a request to hold a march and candlelight vigil. The report points the finger at the Hong Kong police by stating that there are relatively few new cases of coronavirus in Hong Kong and that other public events including Art Basel and professional soccer matches have not been banned. While in the case of Taiwan, a report published on June 16, 2021, entitled "Taiwan Wants German Vaccines. China May Be Standing in Its Way." [11], stated that the Taiwanese authorities complained that the mainland's intervention prevented them from purchasing doses of the BioNTech coronavirus vaccine, thus causing a shortage of the vaccine. Although it is stated in the article that the Chinese government considers this accusation "fabricated out of nothing" and that it is willing to give the vaccine to Taiwan. However, the headline of the article is very misleading to readers.

Result 7-New York Times Implicitly Disagrees with Beijing Winter Olympics Epidemic Control Initiative

In its coverage of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, which will be under the grip of the corona virus, *The New York Times* has tended to criticize China's strict epidemic prevention measures for the Winter Olympics. For example, an article titled "Tokyo's Olympic Bubble? Wait Till You See Beijing's." [12] published on August 9, 2021, used the phrase "the authoritarian government" to refer to the Chinese government, which has adopted a zero-tolerance approach to the corona virus, thereby locking down the city and conducting mass medical testing. In addition, the report states that "Most officials on various national Olympic committees appeared to believe that the unprecedented restrictions they had seen in Tokyo would be almost nothing by comparison", lending credibility to the report's point by using the attitude of official sources. However, no specific person was mentioned

in the report, and the word "appear to" was used. Actually, the veracity of this opinion is not yet known.

## 5. Discussion

At the end of 2019, the first patient infected with the novel coronavirus was reported in Wuhan, China. Due to the rapid transmission of the novel coronavirus and the Chinese New Year, which was a major festival in China at that time, there was not enough data for systematic analysis of the novel coronavirus at the same time. Against this backdrop, most international news media reports on the novel coronavirus are one-sided and misleading.

As China gradually controlled the rate of infection and more research was conducted on the virus, it conducted a core-tracing investigation with the W.H.O. But for *The New York Times* media, it is easier to expose their lack of objectivity. Therefore, *The New York Times* deliberately avoided the focus of COVID-19 tracing in result1 in order to divert public attention, and guided researchers to answer the information the reporter wanted to convey to readers by asking subjective questions

*The New York Times* also ran a misleading report on the source of the coronavirus. On March 5, 2021, it highlighted the suspected leak of the virus laboratory in China in the open letter and quoted the views of medical experts to deepen the trust of this hypothesis. Before *The New York Times* reported on the letter, the investigation team had disclosed to the international media much about the progress of the investigation and the broad Outlines of its likely findings, and also stressed that it was highly unlikely that the virus had leaked from a Chinese laboratory. However, *The New York Times* reprinted objective articles on the main body, but selectively exposed the content for readers, which played a role in guiding readers to misunderstand the source of COVID-19. For such misleading reports of *The New York Times*, the corresponding strong evidence should be disclosed according to different misleading themes of *The New York Times*, so as to reduce the credibility of *The New York Times*, and flexibly use overseas platforms to occupy the dominant power of public opinion

*The New York Times*' coverage of China was unprofessional and focused on headlines that raised doubts about the authenticity and credibility of China's vaccine data and questioned China's distrust of vaccines developed in Europe and the United States. Moreover, the information provided by *The New York Times* was misleading. *The New York Times* is often eager to take conclusions to find arguments, deliberately excluding these important factors other than vaccination, just to highlight the "problems" of China's vaccine, which is obviously instructive. Correct and authentic news reports and commentary articles should add reasonable fact-based speculation and thinking on the basis of adhering to facts, being truthful, comprehensive and detailed, and distinguish individual thoughts from objective facts instead of believing subjective assumptions.

*The New York Times* conducted targeted interviews with individual discontented people in extremely isolated parts of China and found that most Chinese were unhappy with the mass lockdown and cited a single figure as evidence that China's economy was declining throughout the year. It criticized China's refusal to abandon its old methods of lockdowns, mass testing and quarantines. These reports are one-sided and distortion, while for those who don't obey the rules of the reset, punishment from the local authority become more and more severe in China, but also actually inhibit the virus further continue, ensure the follow-up of production and life, these are according to the epidemic situation and social background of China, to determine the state of the union. In fact, *The New York Times*, also have a strong political propaganda color. The belittling of China's epidemic prevention policy is also one-sided. It is unreasonable and groundless to distort, doubt and deny China's epidemic prevention policy. An objective report should be clear about its own attributes, rather than blindly criticizing the starting point and purpose of the policy.

*The New York Times*' unusual focus on the covid-19 outbreaks in Hong Kong and Taiwan and its tendency to place public health events in a political framework when reporting on politically sensitive Chinese territory, is due in large part to the U.S. positioning of China as a "strategic geopolitical and economic competitor. In fact, China's political, military, and technological power has grown steadily

in recent years, its economy has taken off rapidly, its economic dependence on China has become increasingly evident, and a multipolar order has emerged in East Asia. In response, China should actively build a China-led public health narrative discourse system in the international community, enhance its international discourse power, refute the smear campaign against China by Western mainstream media represented by *The New York Times*, and tell the story of China's fight against the epidemic.

The reason why *The New York Times* is implicitly opposed to the epidemic prevention and control policy set by China during the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, accusing it of being too stringent and making a big deal out of such news, is partly to divert domestic conflicts. *The New York Times* is trying to stir up public suspicion that the Beijing Winter Olympics sporting events are treating athletes unfairly on the grounds of epidemic control, even though they have no substantial evidence but still want to achieve the purpose of discrediting China. Chinese government should actively respond in the international public opinion arena and build a responsible image of a great power.

## 6. Conclusion

Reports on novel coronavirus are largely one-sided and misleading due to the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus and the lack of sufficient data for systematic analysis of the novel coronavirus. Relevant strong evidence should be disclosed according to different misleading themes of *The New York Times* to reduce the credibility of *The New York Times*, flexibly use overseas platforms, and occupy the dominant power of public opinion. *The New York Times*'s reporting on China is unprofessional, focusing on headlines that raise questions about the veracity and credibility of Chinese vaccine data and questioning China's distrust of vaccines developed in Europe and the United States. Personal thoughts should be separated from objective facts rather than believing in subjective assumptions. *The New York Times* has been plagued by overgeneralization, a single sample, missing data, and selective reporting. Many reports believe that China's epidemic prevention policy is just a political show, with a strong Chinese political color. These reports are one-sided and distorted. It's important to reconsider the pros and cons, think from multiple angles and dimensions, and never lose the sense of justice. China should actively build a China-led public health narrative discourse system in the international community, strengthen its international discourse, refute the smears on China by the Western mainstream media represented by *The New York Times*, and tell the story of China's fight against the epidemic. *The New York Times* called China's COVID-19 control policies for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics too draconian and extravagant. Chinese government should take an active part in the international public opinion arena and establish the image of a responsible major country.

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