

# POWER, BLAME, AND RESILIENCE: CONSTRUCTING CRISIS DISCOURSE AND MEDIA FRAMING OF LEADERSHIP IN THE U.S. AND CHINA DURING COVID-19

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## Abstract

*This research examined how political leadership of the United States and China discursively claims and disputes responsibility, resources, and resilience in their communication during the COVID-19 crisis, particularly concerning the media framing. The purpose was to analyze how leadership discourses were mediated through media and how it supported normative valorizations of power dynamics and ideological disputes in both countries. A qualitative research design was adopted and headlines from different Media houses were analyzed using Fairclough's 3D model of discourse analysis. The news headlines analyzed were from Xinhua News Agency and People's Daily (China) and Fox News and The New York Times from United States. The headlines of the news which were publicly published between 2020 and 2021 formed the data source for the study. The study findings revealed that the U.S. media and leadership discourse constructed the pandemic as an act of agency by an external 'adversary', China's leadership constructed the pandemic as an act that called for unity, scientific collaboration and global solidarity and one that it as a responsible for addressing openly and proactively. These narratives were actively supported by media in both China, where state-controlled media would support government success as highlighted above, and in the USA where the discourse was highly polarized. The work enriches knowledge about the ways political leaders communicate in crises and what these ways mean for international attitudes and international relations. This underpins the questions about critical media literacy and the nature of discourse and power and their role in creating the international system.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, leadership rhetoric, media framing, discourse analysis, power dynamics, U.S.-China relations, Fairclough's 3D model, geopolitical conflicts, public health communication.

## INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019 has influenced the overall wellbeing of humanity, economy and societal systems making it a crisis of the 21st century. In addition to the epidemiological aspects, the pandemic has been a discursive event which depended on political narrative and media. Bartlett and Ghoshal (2020) argue that political leaders of countries such as the USA and China, the two leading economies globally, have employed rhetoric to make an elaboration within the COVID-19 crisis and set out the perception within citizens and the international community on the crisis as well as the role of each country in managing the crisis. As the way through which much information gets filtered, mediated has been central to either reinforcing or questioning such narratives to other global and domestic audiences (Iyengar, 1991; van Dijk, 2006).



As in the United States, the discourse associated with leadership in the pandemic reflected not only the pandemic management strategy, but also the party-ideological agenda. In the USA, for instance, former President Trump Donald Trump often referred to Covid using had specific phrases such as 'China virus' (In this case Davis, 2020). As such, it not only helped to build the pandemic as an exterior threat but also tried to turn the focus to the external causes of failures in managing the crisis at home. On the other hand, Chinese Presidents notably President Xi Jinping spoke more about survival, unity and global collaboration rather than the source of the virus in China (Grady, 2020). These opposing discourses sum up the manner in which leadership narratives define and translate national priorities and international standing in the midst of a crisis.

An important leadership factor is that media has played a vital role in the presentation and challenge of these leadership narratives. In the United States partisan differences in media coverage reinforced polarization in the public perceptions of the pandemic. At the same time, the Chinese state-sponsored outlets were actively spreading governmental message and responding to the negative foreign opinion. Comparing the leadership rhetoric with media framing is important in understanding how crises such as COVID-19 are constructed socially by discourse, it is therefore urges an assessment of these dynamics.

Critically Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used for this study to observe the political rhetoric surrounding COVID-19 crisis in the United States and China by assessment of how they were mediated and constructed through media. Hence, through the analyses of political rhetoric and media discourse this research has tried to provide an understanding to the role of discourse in influencing the perception and response to global crises.

### **Significance Of The Study**

This is important as this research seeks to locate and analyze how resultant political discourse and media representations inform consumer responses to a rising tide of global crises today, something evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. In identifying the leaders' discourses of the two countries and media as the mediators of the two discourses, the research demonstrates how power, ideology and communication converged in the construction of crises. Knowledge of such dynamics is crucial in debiasing the ways in which political and media) institutions shape perceptions, trust, and behavior during emergencies. The study enhances the discourse of CDA literature by providing epistemological concerns about leadership, media and crisis management, as well as power dynamics in international relations. Furthermore, the study responds to the larger questions on how discursive practices become either a means of building or tearing international collaboration and social cohesiveness whenever there is a pandemic. These insights may meliorate research in language, media, and politics for academicians in linguistics, media studies and political science as well as for policymakers, journalists and communicators involved in crisis communication in pursuit of openness and honesty.

### **Problem Statement**

Pandemic has not only been a disease outbreak; it has raised major political/social issues and has been a major political event with leaders and media constructing it in ways that have bearing on policy reactions. In the United States, political discourse was marked by blame attribution and polarization, in China, state discourses revolved around endurance and global cooperation. The media hereby assumed a critical meditating role and reinforced these outcry narratives as it relayed ideological predispositions of the audience. Although an ever expanding literature exists on the pandemic, there is still a lack of scholarly work on how both the official discourse delivered by the U.S. and Chinese leaders, and the media framing have constructed the COVID-19 crisis. This absence of the analysis of interconnections between political talk, media representation, and crisis-scripting presents a major issue for deconstructing power relations and political ideologies in pandemic politics. It is important that this issue be addressed in order to analyze the critical issue of language

and media that underpins many global crises in terms of communication and management strategies applicable to future crises.

### Research Questions

- 1) How do the political leaders of the United States and China construct narratives of responsibility, resilience, and blame in their public rhetoric during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) What role does the media play in framing and disseminating the leadership rhetoric of the United States and China regarding the COVID-19 crisis, and how do these frames differ across ideological and geopolitical contexts?
- 3) How do the discourses of U.S. and Chinese leaders, mediated by the media, reflect and reinforce power dynamics and ideological conflicts in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID 19 has realized the interconnectivity of the globe and brought out the responsibility that developed countries have in handling Crises. As main authoritative and resourceful actors every developed country is supposed to respond to the existing international responsibility for crisis solving taking into consideration the interests and needs of the world community (Kickbusch et al., 2020). The two countries which were badly affected by the virus had different approaches to the management of the problem based on their political and governance systems. The reaction of the United States itself was blamed for the inconsistency of measures in the internal American context and the absence of effective world coordination in the initial period, while China acted as an active world actor that provided medical supplies, actively spoke in support of international cooperation (Huang & Sun, 2021). These reactions around the COVID-19 crisis demonstrate how media and political language are inclusive by the U.S. deploying the terms like 'China virus' to deflect the blame on China and China deploying state media to portray its response as obliging (Davis, 2020, Grady, 2020). These narratives not only set frames to determine the responsibilities of developed countries and path to cope with the international issues but also shaped the dominating narratives concerning the international public and relations. This led to the conflict of interest between the nation and the world evident when the COVID-19 kicked off and the ethical mandate of the developed countries to do what is right for the globe against their parochial interest as they managed and distributed the vaccines (Kickbusch et al., 2020). Although this paper concerns itself with issues of power relations and discursive strategies during periods of global crises to structure the global narrative and visibility of actions by countries of the developed world.

### FAIRCLOUGH'S THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL

The research opts for Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the dominant instrument of analysis. Norman Fairclough's critical discourse framework combines textual interpretation, discursive practice and social practice as a way of analyzing the socio-political relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995). Their method is especially useful for examining the relationship between political discourse and media narratives because their approach allows decoding how discourses constitute social realities and ideologies, enforce power relations, and function.

### Dimensions Of The Framework

#### *Textual Analysis*

This dimension relates to actual language features and concerns of text language content including density, noun phrase enhancement, rhetorical expressions and imagery. In this research, textual analysis will also look at the discursive strategies used by political leaders (such as Trump referring to covid-19 as "China virus") and how media institutions portray and discuss these narratives. In this case, the linguistic choices are influential in deciphering how meaning is both created and communicated (Fairclough 1995 p71).

### ***Discursive Practice***

Text consumption is the final aspect of this dimension that looks at the generation, circulation and consumption of texts. In that case, this research focuses on the communication process with regard to leadership rhetoric sent by the media and received by the audience. This level is particularly important for defining media as an intermediary and a transmitter of political messages (van Dijk, 2006).

### ***Social Practice***

This dimension seeks to establish the socio-political and culture background against which operates these discourses. For this work, it will analyze how the rhetoric and media framing produce and regulate power relations, international politics and public opinions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study will also respond to how blame and responsibility are constituted in the U.S - China geopolitical contestation.

### ***Framing Theory***

Framing theory deals with how the media arrange information that is generally being presented to them to understand some event or issue. According to Entman (1993), framing is the selection of some aspects of a given news story and the construction of the audience's perception of it. The idea is based on the assumption that instead of informing, media helps to shape reality by presenting some aspects of a topic as more important than others, something is seen from Angle A and something else is seen from Angle B. Goffman, (1974) advanced framing as a cognitive framework, in which segments of knowledge pattern the understanding of several phenomena. To make a better sense of framing in relation to media coverage, Norman Fairclough's (1995) Three Dimensional Model of discourse analysis would be useful. Fairclough's model breaks down media discourse into three interconnected dimensions: Data which was analyzed in this paper is referred to as textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. This framework is useful in analyzing the dynamics of framing at various levels of media processing and using.

According to Fairclough, analyzing text ties a textual aspect to a social one in the studying of discourse, political slogans, media coverage, and world relations (Fairclough, 1995). This framework is specifically valuable to analyze the power relations and ideologies within discourse Toedtee (2006), this framework can be used to brilliantly show how discursive leadership builds on the EU media narrative to shift the public responsibility and blame during the COVID-19 pandemic. A popular method of constructing media and politics, it applies to the study of leadership and media in the relation between the U.S. and China (Hart et al., 2020). As such, the framework of moving between text, discourse, and social context is in tune with the study's objective to analyze how leadership discourse and portrayals of the Covid-19 crisis within media socialize and reinforce the crisis script.

### ***The Role of Discourse in Crisis Construction***

Deep down, pandemics are not just events occurring in reality but complex formations of social reality devised in language and discourse, as discussed by CDA. Fairclough (1995) posited a two-fold definition of discourse as both as a text of-and-for society and an activity through which transfer of social practices occur and the discursive processes involved in crises bear relations of power. Van Dijk (2006), assuming the discourse analysis, also claims that language regulates the attitudes and behaviours of the public during emergencies. It was fear not unarticulated prejudice and the leadership talk, media depiction and the language employed by politics during the pandemic replicated ideologies, politics and cultures informing the public. Alyeksyeyeva, Papadopoulou, and Chronaki (2020) in a similar way demonstrated how language including the one applied by the Australian PM helped to spur collaboration while at the same time fear. Like deregulation of language, Trump's dysphemism like 'China virus' militarized language to displace responsibility, cement divisions and cast China in a negative light (Olimat, 2020; Tuncer & Şahin, 2021). Media escalation

and fake news, on the other hand, exacerbated panic and mistrust the role of CDA made more apparent the dynamics of text as pervaded by power relations (Mutua & Oloo, 2020; Radibratović, 2021). Fesmire (2021) contrast COVID-19 and past epidemics in the media, established that crises are culturally framed for politics and culture. How are language and media especially dominant and used for knowledge building and management with particular attention to their implicit assumption of power in the light of contrasting discourses of the USA and China Where Trump's 'othering' language was opposed to the uniting and leading rhetoric of China during infection period is indicative of how global political and ideological power relations during a pandemic shaped the construction of pandemic knowledge.

### ***Media Framing and Crisis Narratives***

The aim of this work is to investigate how crisis, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic, is built in the media and what effects it has on the perception and policy-making of the audience. Based on Iyengar's media framing perspective, media decides whether crises are systemic issues or unique events depending on the way the crisis is presented to the public. According to Hart, Chinn, and Soroka (2020), partisanship exacerbated polarization in the conversation about COVID-19 in media outlets in the United States as people explained the pandemic as a health issue or an ideological construct. On the other hand, Chinese state owned media acted in a systematic manner to support the political narrative of power and togetherness (Huang Sun, 2021). The analysis presented in the study demonstrates that the role of media is to mediate crisis discourses as cultural artefacts that inevitably carry political and ideological implications. It outlines how the USA and China presented COVID-19 with the Chinese media portraying the pandemic as an advantage for global health diplomacy those portraying China as efficient and authoritative (Wang, 2021; Jinshuang & Rong, 2021). At the same time, U.S. media imposed Trump as the leader producing a discourse of enemies outside and inside the nation (Altheide, 2020). This work also looks at how the pandemic turned into a geo-political fight where China emerged as a leader of trends while America was experiencing politics internal splits and external challenging of its leadership in the globe (Lukacovic, 2020; Chang, 2021). It was not just a virus that needed control as evident by media representations but it showed a discursive battle in which both countries sought to use the pandemic to gain petty political and geopolitical advantage over each other.

### ***Leadership Rhetoric and Blame Construction***

This paper aims at understanding how different political leaders employ language to address crisis situations as influenced by the prevailing political systems they belong to or represent. Donald Trump, for instance, used exteriorizing language during COVID-19 by calling the virus the China virus so as to export blame for failures domestically (Davis, 2020). Xi Jinping in his speech has painted China more as a trustworthy partner and open door policy during crises (Grady, 2020). The two given examples show how political leaders predictable self-present rhetorical strategies in framing a crisis to reassert authority and ideology. The paper also examines how the two nations of different political systems disseminated different messages in the media during the pandemic. Chinese media focused on collaboration and unity at the international level, while American media according to Zhang et al. (2021) and Ahmed (2021) stirred up anti-government sentiments and performed the work of polarizing American society. Yang and Chen (2021) documented that China's discourse was to assert both an external nationalism and internal superpowers at the same time to promote foreign prestige. The current research shows how media and political discourse regulate narratives and opinions, and how the US creates the ideological hostility and China conceals the nationalism with globalism, not only in disseminating the pandemic information but also in other domestic and international angles.

### ***The Interplay between Media and Leadership Narratives***

This study explores media as the mediators of political leadership in crises, evident on how media helps or challenges leadership discourses, thus shaping population trust and resulting behavior to crises. It shows the bifurcated coverage of COVID 19 in USA where conservative media followed



Trump's narrative while liberal media vilified him for his response to the pandemic (Hart et al., 2020). On the other hand, China's state-owned media regurgitated government marketing demonstrating nationalism and downplaying global condemnation (Huang & Sun, 2021). This poses the media agenda setting role as a central factor by revealing how power, ideology and media framing impact on the mass public regarding issues of governmental efficiency and international leadership. Harb and Serhan (2020) as well as Al-Razaq Mohammad and Abid (2021) slammed Trump for deploying the pandemic as a nationalist and anti-China platform, Kuwaiti Chung et al. (2021) and Zhao (2021) examined how media perpetuated COVID-19 as a geopolitical war in which China diplomacy threatens the US' hegemony. Milutinović (2021) and Awawdeh (2021) go further into discussing how transitional regimes and Trump took advantage of the crisis discourse to advance on power, while Zhang (2021) still focused on the criticism of western media coverage of China's handling of the pandemic. Expanding from Fatima's (2020) study, the paper also elucidates the role played by journalistic framing in constructing the lines of ideological cleavage, referent to The New York Times coverage of COVID-19.

### ***A Comparative Analysis of Leadership Discourse and Media Representation***

This paper therefore discusses how leadership discourse and media representation used the COVID-19 pandemic narrative to advance domestic agendas as well as geopolitical interests of the USA and China. It draws attention to the different leadership styles, for example, solidarity-oriented discourse adopted in New Zealand, as distinct from the Trump-led America's blame culture, discussed by Hafner and Sun (2021). However, using the Weibo social media platform, Huang and Panyaatisin found that state-controlled Chinese media outlets portrayed the country as strong and cooperation-oriented in preventing the virus. Sun (2021) and Verma (2020) continue with examples of how both Australian and international media painted China with a negative brush and how, on diplomatic front, China has been trying to rebrand itself internationally as outlined by Gauttam EtAl (2020). The paper also builds on this notion by employing Al-Salman and Haider's (2021) categorization of positive and negative images in Western and Chinese media as a powerful remembered image, which stems from geopolitical antagonisms. It combines language used by political leaders to build unity as identified by Sultan and Rapi (2020) with Al-Mwzaiji's (2021) breakdown of blaming the 'foreigner' in crises together with De Rosa and Mannarini (2020) on media created fear. Finally, the paper concludes that the US blame narrative and China as the global leader's concept during the pandemic was a way of perpetuating power relations and ideological partitions around the world.

Though, there is a wealth of research available on media framing as well as leadership rhetoric especially and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic little systematic analysis has been done yet on constructing the crisis narratives through the combined angle of political rhetoric and media framing especially in comparative perspective. This is important given what the U.S and China, two of world's leading economic powers, did or did not do in response to the virus. Through the use of CDA, this research therefore seek to fill this research gap by shedding light on how language and media construct crises and influence public perceptions in the two most potent world powers. Although there is extensive literature on media and politics in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, there are data deficits in comparative analysis of leadership discourse in relation to the media and public perception in constructing global narratives. Though prior research has looked at the process of Americanization (Ahmed, 2021) and Operation, China's nationalism globalization mix (Yang & Chen, 2021), fewer have considered how these narratives are shaping International Relations and depictions of Trust in institutions such as the WHO. Moreover, research commonly distinguishes between media framing and political debate and does not take into consideration their mutual relations. Zhang et al. (2021) compare The U.S and China regarding coverage of social responsibility, but little is done on the possibilities of cultural and geopolitical influences of these coverage. In doing so, this study redresses these two deficiencies by exploring the USA and Chinese discursive stances, comparing the leadership rhetoric and media framing of the two states, comparing the construction of dual pandemic narratives, and considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global order.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This research adopts a quantitative research approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the discourses of political leaders in the United States and China in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak and media's mediated function in these processes. CDA is best suited for interpreting how language builds up social discourses, relations of power, and value systems (Fairclough, 1995). As such, the study aims at revealing how crisis events are socially constructed and negotiated at the micro level of discursive practices heading from leaders and media.

### Data Collection

The data for this study comprises of News headlines from major media houses in both countries were used to establish how leadership rhetoric was communicated and packaged. In the U.S., data was obtained from conservative and liberal sources in the form of Fox News and New York Times correspondingly. For the Chinese context, state-controlled media Xinhua and People's Daily were examined. By choosing these headlines, a broad sample is guaranteed to quantify and analyze the relationship between leadership language and media coverage during the pandemic.

### Data Analysis Technique

This work adopts a three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework that has been developed by Fairclough (1995) and the process involves textual analysis. The fourth level concerns the textual elements in terms of its language bank, the metaphorical and rhetorical wording. For example, the study compares Trump's reference to the illness as the "China virus" and Xi's focus on the concepts of "solidarity" and "resilience." Discursive practice level is concerned with the creation, circulation and reception of the texts. The study also takes into account the political backgrounds of the dissemination of these narratives and media bias of the media houses. At the social practice level, we have to contemplate about how the mentioned discourses are connected with the power, blaming and international stance during the pandemic situation. In other words, the identification of the patterns of blame construction, ideological framing and the negotiation for power and responsibility in the texts is the goal of the analysis.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis section looks at the media construction and framing of leadership rhetoric from the United States and China during the COVID-19 pandemic more closely. Applying Fairclough's three dimensional analysis, the study explores the relationship between textual, discursive and social practices as to discover the ideological and geopolitical contextualization of these narratives. It aims at identifying how the forms of political leaders' speech with regard to responsibility, resilience and blame and how they are constructed by media framing as distinct the discursive manifestation of power dynamics and ideological battles. In this section, I synthesize selected articles and headlines to consider media as a mediator where its activity is exposed as either reinforcing or contesting leadership discursive claims within specific sociopolitical settings. Such a multiple approach offers important understanding of the logic of building up the peripheral segment of discursive citizenship in the context of a world crisis.


**Table 1**

*Fox News Headlines Analysis*

Headline	Textual Analysis	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
Trump Declares National Emergency	Uses strong declarative language to project authority and urgency.	Disseminated widely to project federal government's control.	Reflects power dynamics and

Over Coronavirus Pandemic			emergency response framing.
President Trump Announces Travel Ban from Europe Amid COVID-19 Outbreak	Frames travel ban as a protective measure, emphasizing external threat.	Reported as a preemptive policy action.	Shifts blame externally, emphasizing national security.
Trump Signs \$2 Trillion Coronavirus Relief Bill into Law	Focuses on economic relief with quantitative emphasis.	Distributed across media to highlight relief efforts.	Positions economic relief as central to government's response.
Trump Suggests Injecting Disinfectant to Treat COVID-19, Alarming Experts	Controversial metaphorical suggestion of 'disinfectant,' raising alarm.	Amplified by critics and supporters for political narratives.	Illustrates leadership's miscommunication.
President Trump Halts Funding to WHO, Citing COVID-19 Response	Halting funding implies strong criticism of WHO's performance.	Framed as a critique of international organizations.	Reflects distrust in international institutions.
Trump Claims 'Total Authority' Over States in Reopening Economy	Highlights authority with potential federal vs state power dynamics.	Debated across partisan media lines.	Exemplifies federal-state tensions in crisis management.
Trump Announces Guidelines for 'Opening Up America Again'	Optimistic tone promoting economic recovery.	Promoted as an economic recovery step.	Encourages economic activity, balancing health concerns.
President Trump Wears Mask in Public for First Time During Pandemic	Symbolic gesture of compliance with public health norms.	Widely shared to showcase compliance with health measures.	Symbolizes shifting tone towards pandemic compliance.
Trump Pushes for Schools to Reopen Amid Rising COVID-19 Cases	Pushes a divisive narrative on reopening, targeting schools.	Polarized media responses reflect ideological divides.	Exposes conflicting priorities in reopening debates.
Trump Administration Orders Hospitals to Bypass CDC in Reporting Data	Redirects data flow away from CDC, signaling distrust.	Critics framed it as undermining institutional integrity.	Demonstrates institutional mistrust during a crisis.
Trump Announces Plan to Distribute 150 Million Rapid COVID-19 Tests	Announces distribution plan, showcasing action and preparedness.	Covered to reflect proactive crisis management.	Emphasizes government's action-oriented approach.
President Trump Tests Positive for Coronavirus	Reveals vulnerability, creating empathy and concern.	Focused on leadership's health, stirring public debates.	Creates public empathy while raising concerns.
Trump Leaves Walter Reed Hospital, Says 'Don't Be Afraid of COVID'	Downplays severity, aiming to reassure public.	Critiqued for undermining public safety.	Reflects leadership's risk communication strategy.






Trump Claims COVID-19 Vaccine Will Be Available Before Election Day	Claims vaccine availability as a marker of progress.	Highlighted in discussions on vaccine readiness.	Positions vaccine as a critical milestone.
President Trump Signs Executive Order to Lower Drug Prices Amid Pandemic	Focuses on healthcare reforms, emphasizing affordability.	Praised for affordability measures in partisan outlets.	Shows policy focus on economic and health intersections.
Trump Administration Secures 100 Million Doses of Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine	Announces securing vaccines, projecting control over health measures.	Showcased as a healthcare achievement.	Reflects leadership's focus on vaccine diplomacy.
Trump Threatens to Cut Federal Funding to Schools That Don't Reopen	Coercive tone targeting non-compliant schools.	Polarized responses based on ideological lines.	Highlights federal pressure on local governance.
President Trump Announces Operation Warp Speed to Accelerate Vaccine Dev.	Accelerates vaccine production, showing urgency and innovation.	Promoted as a government achievement.	Projects urgency and innovation in crisis response.
Trump Signs Executive Order to Use Defense Production Act for Meat Plants	Highlights meat supply chain, addressing economic concerns.	Praised for addressing economic disruption.	Focuses on economic stabilization during pandemic.
Trump Administration to Withdraw from WHO Amid Pandemic	Criticizes WHO, implying organizational inefficiency.	Framed as anti-internationalist stance.	Critiques global health governance.
President Trump Extends Social Distancing Guidelines Through April	Extends guidelines, balancing caution and public reassurance.	Reported to highlight ongoing crisis efforts.	Balances caution with ongoing crisis rhetoric.
Trump Suggests COVID-19 Will 'Disappear' Without Vaccine	Downplays threat, promoting optimism.	Critiqued for overly optimistic messaging.	Promotes optimism while underestimating risks.
Trump Administration Announces Plan to Distribute 100 Million N95 Masks	Announces protective gear plan, emphasizing supply chain control.	Emphasized logistical capacity.	Shows preparedness and supply chain focus.
President Trump Signs Executive Orders for COVID-19 Economic Relief	Uses executive orders to show leadership amid gridlock.	Framed as a leadership response to gridlock.	Highlights decisive leadership in crisis.
Trump Claims U.S. Has 'Prevailed' in COVID-19 Testing	Boasts success in testing, framing pandemic response positively.	Promoted as a success story by supportive media.	Reflects governmental framing of pandemic achievements.

This is evident through the table of Fox News headlines of the pandemic where the different news headlines depict the framing techniques used in shaping the people's attitude towards the pandemic through political aspect. The linguistic analysis shows that there is a conscious and systematic use of assertive lexis to enforce and claim dominance, order and pressured timidity, as even through the headline 'Trump declares national emergency over coronavirus pandemic,' the use of declare tends to amplify the presidents authoritative decisiveness. This is not to suggest that other cases - such as 'Trump Suggests Injecting Disinfectant to Treat COVID-19, Alarming Experts' - is not potentially arresting in some ways, using the sort of shock-jock rhetoric and metaphors that will incite prima faces and political controversy. The positive and recurrent self-image of Trump regarding his administration's achievements in handling or distributing tests or vaccines contrasts with the negative portrayal of outside agents including blaming China or WHO for the virus or for interferences with a possibly curative substance; or blaming global institutions such as the WHO for mishandling. The discursive practice in these headlines more often than not involves information sharing through partisan outlets, with reports tailored to appeal to conservatives - stories are written with the primary aim of rallying the base around economic recovery or national security while playing down the health risks or deflect (Harb, 2020). For instance, the narrative "Trump Claims COVID-19 Vaccine Will Be Available before Election Day" carries positive undertones of optimism and government performance thus contributing to the acceptance of a successful response.

Table 2

*New York Times Headlines Analysis*

Headline	Textual Analysis	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
Trump Declares National Emergency Over Coronavirus Pandemic	Uses declarative tone to emphasize urgency and action.	Covered as federal government's response to crisis.	Reflects federal authority in emergency declarations.
President Trump Announces Travel Ban from Europe Amid COVID-19 Outbreak	Frames travel ban as proactive, targeting Europe as an external threat.	Framed as a necessary protective measure.	Emphasizes external blame, shaping public threat perceptions.
Trump Signs \$2 Trillion Coronavirus Relief Bill into Law	Focuses on economic response with quantitative measures.	Promoted to highlight government's relief efforts.	Positions government as responsive to economic fallout.
Trump Suggests Injecting Disinfectant to Treat COVID-19, Alarming Experts	Raises concerns through controversial metaphorical language.	Amplified by critics for its controversial implications.	Illustrates leadership's communication gaps.
President Trump Halts Funding to WHO, Citing COVID-19 Response	Critiques WHO, positioning it as ineffective during a global crisis.	Critiqued internationally for funding withdrawal.	Critiques international health governance.
Trump Claims 'Total Authority' Over States in Reopening Economy	Asserts authority with potential overreach implications.	Debated across political and legal frameworks.	Highlights federal-state tensions in authority claims.



Trump Announces Guidelines for 'Opening Up America Again'	Promotes optimism and reopening plans.	Promoted as optimism despite ongoing risks.	Balances reopening pressures with public safety concerns.
President Trump Wears Mask in Public for First Time During Pandemic	Symbolic compliance with public health measures.	Widely covered to signify change in behavior.	Signals leadership's compliance under scrutiny.
Trump Pushes for Schools to Reopen Amid Rising COVID-19 Cases	Pushes divisive narrative focused on reopening schools.	Polarized media discussions reflect ideological divides.	Exposes ideological divides in education policy.
Trump Administration Orders Hospitals to Bypass CDC in Reporting Data	Redirects responsibility away from CDC, creating institutional tension.	Critiqued as undermining institutional integrity.	Creates mistrust in institutional management.
Trump Announces Plan to Distribute 150 Million Rapid COVID-19 Tests	Highlights proactive distribution efforts.	Highlighted as crisis management success.	Promotes logistical preparedness in crisis response.
President Trump Tests Positive for Coronavirus	Reveals vulnerability, evoking empathy.	Covered extensively due to leadership's health implications.	Raises public concerns about leadership vulnerability.
Trump Leaves Walter Reed Hospital, Says 'Don't Be Afraid of COVID'	Attempts to downplay pandemic severity.	Critiqued as underestimating public safety concerns.	Reflects risk minimization strategies in public health.
Trump Claims COVID-19 Vaccine Will Be Available Before Election Day	Links vaccine availability to leadership success.	Promoted as a significant milestone in pandemic management.	Frames vaccine readiness as a measure of success.
President Trump Signs Executive Order to Lower Drug Prices Amid Pandemic	Focuses on healthcare cost reduction during crisis.	Framed as addressing healthcare affordability.	Addresses dual goals of affordability and health.
Trump Says Coronavirus Will 'Disappear' Despite Surge in Cases	Downplays severity, projecting optimism despite evidence.	Criticized for overly optimistic rhetoric.	Downplays risks while projecting optimism.
Trump Administration Announces Withdrawal from WHO Amid Pandemic	Critiques WHO withdrawal as prioritizing national interests.	Covered as a nationalist policy decision.	Prioritizes national over international cooperation.
Trump Suggests Delaying Election, Citing Unfounded Claims of Mail Fraud	Raises election concerns through controversial rhetoric.	Framed as undermining democratic process.	Criticizes leadership for controversial democratic implications.



Trump Administration to Purchase 100 Million Doses of Moderna's Vaccine	Demonstrates proactive vaccine procurement.	Showcased as securing public health needs.	Highlights proactive measures in public health strategy.
Trump Signs Executive Orders for COVID-19 Economic Relief	Uses executive orders to showcase economic leadership.	Promoted as bypassing legislative hurdles.	Reflects executive authority amid legislative gridlock.
Trump Claims U.S. Has 'Prevailed' in COVID-19 Testing Amid Rising Cases	Frames testing efforts as a success story.	Highlighted as a leadership achievement.	Frames testing as a measure of crisis success.
Trump Administration Orders Hospitals to Bypass CDC in Reporting Data	Creates institutional conflict over data reporting.	Framed as avoiding CDC oversight.	Highlights challenges in institutional collaboration.
Trump Pushes for Schools to Reopen Amid Rising COVID-19 Cases	Promotes controversial reopening strategies.	Debated for prioritizing economic over health concerns.	Debates trade-offs between economy and health.
Trump Announces Guidelines for 'Opening Up America Again'	Highlights recovery steps, balancing optimism with caution.	Promoted as economic recovery effort.	Balances caution with economic messaging.
Trump Declares National Emergency Over Coronavirus Pandemic	Positions government action as central to crisis response.	Framed as authoritative and decisive action.	Reinforces centralized government action.

Through the theory of CDA, the textual analysis of New York Times headlines suggests that framing has been employed systematically to portray two sides of President Trump's handling of COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the headline "Trump declares national emergency over coronavirus pandemic" is written in affirmatory style, which accentuates the fact that the government is acting, and this action is relevant and timely, as it addresses the crisis situation. This is less confrontational than they are, for example, the Disinfectant headline "Trump says to inject disinfectants to cure coronavirus, raises many concerns among experts." These shifts in the tenor are useful to build the story of Trump as a surefooted decision maker in the time of crises, but they also highlight the communicative divergence and breakdown in moments of ambiguity. Finally, the discursive practice of these events focuses on the structuring of such occurrences in a way that could either serve to reinforce the public's faith in federal actions - for example, the "Trump Signs \$2 Trillion Coronavirus Relief Bill into Law" headline or to provoke controversy regarding the way in which he has dealt with the WHO funding cuts as well as his commentary of the virus. This is important in the management of understanding as posited by van Dijk (1998) where Trump's administration is depicted as active or protective, actions while negative depictions of external factors such as WHO is cast as being reasonable.


Table 3

## Xinhua News Agency Headlines Analysis

Headline	Textual Analysis	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
President Xi Jinping Calls for Global Cooperation to Combat COVID-19	Emphasizes cooperation and global unity.	Framed as a call for international collaboration.	Promotes global solidarity and shared responsibility.
China Shares COVID-19 Treatment Protocols with International Community	Positions China as a contributor to global health solutions.	Shared as a model for global health practices.	Positions China as a leader in pandemic solutions.
Chinese Health Officials Hold Press Conference on COVID-19 Containment	Focuses on transparency and containment efforts.	Distributed to emphasize China's effective response.	Reflects transparency and proactive governance.
Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Addresses COVID-19 Origin Theories	Addresses and refutes external criticisms of virus origins.	Framed as defensive against external accusations.	Counters narratives criticizing China's role in pandemic origins.
China Donates Medical Supplies to Europe Amid Pandemic	Highlights China's role as a global aid provider.	Highlighted as international goodwill gesture.	Builds China's image as a benevolent global actor.
State Council Briefs Media on Economic Policies During COVID-19	Emphasizes economic stability and government action.	Reported to assure economic confidence domestically.	Demonstrates commitment to domestic and international stability.
Xi Jinping Advocates for Strengthened Global Public Health Governance	Advocates for strengthened international public health systems.	Promoted as a vision for global health leadership.	Advances China's image as a global health advocate.
Chinese CDC Updates on Vaccine Development Progress	Showcases progress and innovation in vaccine development.	Distributed as a reflection of scientific capability.	Showcases leadership in scientific innovation.
China Sends Medical Experts to Assist African Nations	Demonstrates China's support for underdeveloped nations.	Framed as aiding weaker nations during crisis.	Reinforces China's role in aiding global health equity.
Press Briefing: Measures to Support Small Businesses During Pandemic	Focuses on economic relief for domestic businesses.	Focused on government's commitment to businesses.	Demonstrates focus on protecting domestic economic interests.
Xi Jinping Attends G20 Summit, Calls for United Response to COVID-19	Calls for collective global action and solidarity.	Positioned as a leadership step for global unity.	Strengthens China's role in global leadership during crises.



Health Commission Reports Zero New Domestic COVID-19 Cases	Highlights control and success in managing domestic cases.	Shared to showcase pandemic control success.	Projects national success in pandemic management.
Foreign Ministry Responds to International Travel Restrictions	Defends China's policies amid international restrictions.	Framed as a diplomatic response to international policies.	Defends national policies while engaging diplomatically.
China's Efforts in COVID-19 Vaccine Research Yield Positive Results	Presents China's advancements in vaccine research.	Distributed to highlight technological advancements.	Builds technological reputation in global health.
Press Conference on Educational Adjustments Amid Pandemic	Addresses adjustments in educational strategies.	Reported to reflect adaptability in crisis.	Reflects adaptability in managing education during crises.
Xi Jinping Inspects COVID-19 Prevention Work in Beijing	Demonstrates leadership's direct involvement in prevention measures.	Shared to emphasize leadership engagement.	Showcases leadership's direct accountability.
China Enhances Cooperation with WHO on Pandemic Response	Promotes alignment with WHO and international norms.	Aligned with WHO narratives to build credibility.	Aligns national efforts with global health standards.
State Council Announces Economic Stimulus Package	Outlines economic measures to support recovery.	Reported to build confidence in recovery plans.	Highlights commitment to economic recovery.
Chinese Experts Share COVID-19 Experience with Latin America	Shares China's expertise, enhancing global ties.	Distributed to strengthen global partnerships.	Builds soft power through knowledge sharing.
Foreign Ministry Denounces Politicization of Pandemic	Critiques politicization, advocating for science-based discourse.	Framed as countering geopolitical narratives.	Counters narratives of geopolitical tensions.
Press Briefing on Resumption of Industrial Production	Highlights measures to restart economic activity.	Promoted as economic resilience strategy.	Reflects resilience and recovery focus.
China Releases White Paper on Fighting COVID-19	Details China's comprehensive pandemic response strategies.	Positioned as a transparent government effort.	Demonstrates transparency in governance.
Xi Jinping Sends Condolences to Countries Affected by COVID-19	Expresses solidarity with affected nations.	Framed as a gesture of empathy and solidarity.	Builds solidarity with globally affected communities.



China Advocates for Science-Based Approach to Pandemic	Promotes scientific principles in global health strategies.	Aligned with global scientific community standards.	Promotes science over politics in health discourse.
Chinese Authorities Outline Plan for Vaccine Accessibility	Focuses on equitable vaccine distribution plans.	Reported to promote equitable access globally.	Highlights equity and accessibility in vaccine distribution.

Xinhua News Agency headlines showed a daily consistent narrative of China as a world leader in combating COVID- 19, themes of collaboration, openness, and technology adoption. Likewise, the title - ‘President Xi Jinping wants world to give more fight to COVID 19’ is also positive and encourages people to fight against COVID 19. This is further brought by the discursive practice where China is constructed as having a role of nurturing global solidarity in contradiction with what the western media sought to put across as China’s self-serving. This is evident in the headline titled “China Gives Medical Supplies to Europe Amidst COVID-19,” where China is portrayed as a constructive player in the international system especially in dealing with a pandemic disease. This social practice not only defines China as a responsible great power able and willing to help other countries but also strengthens its soft power and its brand image. In the same manner, Chinese CDC Updates on Vaccine Development Progress also speaks about China’s dedication to science as an advancement and a contribution to the global society as an achievement in health science. These strategies put together build a picture of China as both an economic and a healthy powerhouse, ready and able to spearhead the fight against the coronavirus and drive forward global health agendas.

Table 4

*People’s Daily Headlines Analysis*

Headline	Textual Analysis	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
Effective Measures Lead to Decline in COVID-19 Cases in China	Presents successful containment measures as exemplary.	Promoted as a model for effective pandemic response.	Demonstrates the success of China’s governance model.
President Xi Jinping Visits Wuhan to Inspect Epidemic Control Work	Highlights leadership’s direct involvement in crisis management.	Distributed widely to emphasize leadership accountability.	Projects direct accountability of leadership.
Editorial: Unity and Cooperation Are Key to Overcoming Pandemic	Advocates for collective action and cooperation.	Framed as a call for solidarity and global unity.	Promotes the importance of unity in crisis response.
Government Press Conference Highlights Support for Healthcare Workers	Emphasizes support and appreciation for healthcare workers.	Focused on boosting morale among healthcare professionals.	Reinforces the value of frontline workers in societal resilience.
China Encourages International Collaboration on COVID-19 Research	Promotes China’s role in global health research collaboration.	Shared to enhance China’s scientific reputation globally.	Positions China as a key player in global health innovation.

State Council Announces Measures to Stabilize Employment	Focuses on stabilizing employment as an economic priority.	Reported to assure domestic economic stability.	Shows commitment to mitigating economic fallout.
Xi Jinping Stresses Importance of Preparedness in Public Health	Stresses the importance of preventive measures.	Framed as a proactive approach to future crises.	Highlights the foresight in addressing public health challenges.
China Donates Test Kits and Masks to Neighboring Countries	Positions China as a generous aid provider to neighboring nations.	Distributed as evidence of China's goodwill.	Strengthens China's image as a benevolent global actor.
Health Officials Provide Update on Asymptomatic Cases	Provides transparency about domestic COVID-19 challenges.	Highlighted to demonstrate government transparency.	Shows government transparency in managing the crisis.
Foreign Ministry Addresses Accusations Regarding COVID-19 Data Transparency	Defends China's stance on data transparency criticisms.	Framed as defensive against external critiques.	Counters narratives challenging China's pandemic role.
China's Economy Shows Resilience Amid Pandemic Challenges	Highlights economic resilience amid pandemic disruptions.	Distributed to instill confidence in economic recovery.	Demonstrates economic adaptability and resilience.
Press Briefing on Educational Institutions Reopening Plans	Outlines strategic plans for safely reopening schools.	Reported as a strategic educational initiative.	Reflects cautious optimism in educational recovery.
Xi Jinping Emphasizes Role of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Treatment	Promotes the use of traditional medicine in treatment.	Framed as innovative use of cultural practices.	Reinforces cultural integration in healthcare solutions.
China Calls for Lifting Unnecessary Travel Restrictions	Calls for removal of restrictions affecting mobility.	Distributed to advocate for easing travel restrictions.	Promotes mobility as a key to recovery.
Government Provides Guidelines for Public Health Safety Measures	Provides clear safety measures for public health.	Shared to reinforce trust in government safety measures.	Reassures public trust in health protocols.
Chinese Enterprises Resume Operations with Precautionary Measures	Reports cautious yet optimistic resumption of economic activity.	Promoted as evidence of balanced economic decisions.	Balances safety and economic recovery.
Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Refutes Lab Leak Theories	Refutes accusations and promotes scientific approaches.	Framed as addressing geopolitical narratives.	Counters external criticisms with evidence-based responses.



Press Conference Highlights Success in Containing Local Outbreaks	Praises success in local containment efforts.	Highlighted as a national achievement in outbreak control.	Demonstrates national success in pandemic containment.
China Announces National Day Celebrations with COVID-19 Precautions	Focuses on national pride with careful health precautions.	Framed as a mix of patriotism and public health diligence.	Fosters national pride and public safety awareness.
Xi Jinping Participates in Virtual BRICS Summit on Pandemic Response	Emphasizes international cooperation through multilateral platforms.	Promoted as leadership in global pandemic strategy.	Strengthens China's leadership in global collaboration.
Health Commission Reports on Vaccination Progress Nationwide	Reports progress in vaccination campaigns.	Distributed to emphasize vaccination success.	Positions vaccination as a critical milestone.
China Urges Global Solidarity at United Nations Assembly	Calls for global unity and collaboration at a key forum.	Highlighted to call for renewed global solidarity.	Advocates for multilateral cooperation in crisis resolution.
Press Briefing Addresses Concerns Over Imported Cases	Highlights ongoing concerns over imported cases.	Framed as addressing public health vigilance.	Reflects vigilance in pandemic management.
Xi Jinping's New Year Address Highlights COVID-19 Achievements	Reflects on achievements and resilience during pandemic challenges.	Distributed to reflect on government efforts and resilience.	Highlights resilience and strategic crisis management.
China and WHO Experts Begin Joint Research on COVID-19 Origins	Commences cooperative efforts with WHO experts.	Framed as a cooperative initiative with international implications.	Positions China as a cooperative and responsible global leader.

For instance, such headline as 'True Measures Work Miracles: The Number of COVID-19 Cases Is Falling in China, Setting an Example for Other Countries' is designed to speak about the measures taken by China as effective, thus turning the results of the actions performed in the country into an example for the other countries. This is done through the discursive practice where the government actions are presented as model like and the Chinese public is encouraged to be proud of their nation's good governance. The social practice that is associated with this story supports the idea of China as a successful state where the leadership successfully dealt with the pandemic both on the internal and external front. Furthermore, it is also important to note that leadership engagement is given special attention through the headline of 'President Xi Jinping Visits Wuhan to Inspect Epidemic Control Work,' not only stressing personal responsibility centered on Xi, but also promoting the CCP's preference for strong and centralized top-down control during crisis situations. This fits China's larger political story of accountability in leadership, which puts up the main message to citizens and other nations on holding leaders responsible and is a proactive measure in the ongoing story on constructing pride.


Table 5

## Comparative Analysis of USA and China COVID-19 Response

Aspect	USA (Trump Administration)	China (Xi Administration)
<b>Leadership Rhetoric</b>	Strong nationalistic tone, often attributing blame externally (e.g., 'China virus').	Promoted themes of unity, resilience, and international solidarity.
<b>Media Framing</b>	Highly polarized; conservative media often echoed government rhetoric, while liberal media critiqued it.	State-controlled media emphasized government success and minimized criticism.
<b>Focus Areas</b>	Emphasis on reopening the economy, vaccine development, and political blame-shifting.	Focus on pandemic control, international aid, and scientific collaboration.
<b>Global Cooperation</b>	Minimal focus; often criticized international organizations like WHO.	Positioned as a global leader; emphasized collaboration with WHO and aiding other nations.
<b>Blame Attribution</b>	Frequent external blame, primarily targeting China for the origin of the pandemic.	Defended against blame; refuted accusations about the pandemic's origin.
<b>Transparency</b>	Criticized for inconsistent communication and perceived lack of transparency.	Highlighted transparency through press briefings and sharing of data.
<b>Economic Messaging</b>	Focused on economic relief measures (e.g., stimulus packages) and job recovery.	Emphasized stability and resilience; supported small businesses and employment.
<b>Public Health Strategies</b>	Promoted rapid reopening of the economy with inconsistent adherence to public health guidelines.	Strict lockdowns and preventive measures, with alignment to WHO recommendations.

Examining the headlines in the People's Daily, one gets the impression that China is handling its pandemic response extremely well while ensuring that leaders are held responsible, the people are united and the country is strong. For instance the title of the article "Effective Measures have contributed to a decline in COVID-19 cases in China" is written in a manner that is promoting China as a successful example that other countries should follow in term of containment measures. This is done through the discursive practice where the government actions are presented as model like and the Chinese public is encouraged to be proud of their nation's good governance. The social practice that is associated with this story supports the idea of China as a successful state where the leadership successfully dealt with the pandemic both on the internal and external front. Moreover, the centrality of leadership engagement is boosted by the titled of the news headline such as, "President Xi Jinping visits Wuhan to inspect epidemic control work", not only emphasizing Xi Jinping direct responsibility for the crisis, but also affirming the Chinese Communist Party's proposition of a strong, centralized leadership. This fits China's larger political story of accountability in leadership, which puts up the main message to citizens and other nations on holding leaders responsible and is a proactive measure in the ongoing story on constructing pride.





To the same effect, the People's Daily also reliably constructs China as a responsible and active player on the world stage, which actively participates in global processes and values science. For instance, while some headline examples include "China Urges Global Cooperation on Coronavirus Research," and "Health Commission Shares Results on Vaccination across the Country." As such, the discursive practice of portraying China as a major participant in the global health research places the country as a participant in the global solution as well as an active participant in the fashioning of global health discourse. The social practice of enhancing China's participation in cooperation particularly regarding the COVID 19 undertakings such as 'China and WHO Experts Begin Joint Research on COVID-19 Origins' assist in creating and reinforcing China's positive image as a cooperative and responsible actor, trying to respond to criticisms in relation to its early management of the pandemic. Concurrently, such headlines as "Xi Jinping's New Year Address Highlights COVID-19 Achievements" represent an attempt to party and state emphasize domestic and global power by framing pandemic as a test of a state's and a country's strength. This detailed approach constructs a clear and balanced vision of China as a strong nation in the face of the crisis on the lever of leadership responsibility with the world.

### DISCUSSION

Blaming narratives and who is responsible for the COVID-19 outbreak and how societies cope have been evident during the pandemic in the United States and China; thus, this case can provide an excellent insight into the construction of rhetorical strategies. The responses were made by both countries in the crisis also presented responses which based on their political ideologies, national cultural value system and leadership agendas while the framing of the response exposed the differing leadership styles, media perception and domestic and international agendas.

The relative and early Trump administration's prevailing narrative defence in the United States is characterized by shifting the blame and pseudo-patriotism. Donald trump and his administration labelled the virus as the "China virus" or "Wuhan virus" (Hickman 2020). This language did not only sought to externalize the blame for the pandemic onto another country, but also utilize nationalism and mask the failures of the US in managing the health crisis. The call for a scapegoat that was pinned against China by the American media compounded with a lack of an orderly and cohesive public health response further enshrined the division of the American political system along the Republican and Democrat lines over the efficacy of the administration's response (Parker, 2020).

The responsibility narrative in the U.S.A was less coherent as almost all state governors became the principal drivers of the pandemic response; the federal government under Trump was accused of a lack of a coherent and coordinated response and messaging that dismissed the gravity of the virus's threat. It was also full of politics, where Trump engaged in a policy war with states such as New York and California while blaming them for not managing the issue well. Nevertheless, there were these tensions, and through them, the Trump administration claimed to protect the economy, properly targeting issues of recovery and restarting. Extending notions of resilience, in his public speeches Trump has turned focus on the necessity of the return to normalcy as a primary U.S. objective that entails the restoration of the economy and 'the American' way of life.

Nevertheless, the resilience narrative sharply backfired due to the in the policy implementation along with criticism from the public health officials and political opponents. For instance, Trump's continuous encouragement for people to go to back to their jobs regardless of the dangers involved notwithstanding the Corona virus pandemic or the absence of federal requirements insisting on the use of face masks exhibited a difficulty in accepting responsibility to help contain the calamity (Gosnell, 2020). This caused Americans' reactions to be split, whereas the conservatives aligned with the words freedom and no masks and social distancing, at the same time the liberals and prominent epidemiologists insisted on precautions. This binary played up the lack of coordination that was supposed to have existed and put the onus on the local and state governments, not the federal.

On the other hand, China's approach under President Xi Jinping was cast in terms of recurring with strength, every person's concern, and great power. Some of China's state-controlled outlets portrayed the first cases and subsequent measures to stem the virus's spread as the Chinese government's strength and effectiveness. The government's framing of resilience was structured around the early lockdown in Wuhan and the government's swift return of order, understood as a success narrative in the context of the pandemic. For example, the government promoted the attainment of construction of hospitals and mass testing campaign as a sign of efficiency and effectiveness of the Chinese government in mobilizing for action amid the global challenges (Chen & Holmes, 2020).


As in other cases, the Chinese narrative of responsibility was couched not only domestically but also internationally. Chinese Media presented the opportunity of being the supplier of basic medical supplies and sharing scientific expertise (such as treatment regimen) with nations that need this support. These monies were described as moral imperatives and again positioned China as being on the right side of the pandemic response equation. And so while Chinese rhetoric around resilience was used to mobilize narratives of domestic victory over the pandemic, it was also used to promote China's global narrative as a responsible and responsible global actor in global health governance.

Still, the narrative of blaming was much more reactive when talking about the outside world and its allegations on the source of the virus. Chinese authorities collectively dismissed allegations regarding the lack of openness of the country's first response and negated suggestions that coronavirus stemmed from a Chinese laboratory. The Chinese authorities portrayed these criticisms as the foreign that was set against China and its media tried to discredit the sources outside of China which placed the blame for the outbreak in China. In Fairclough's (1995) words, such framing not only responds to accusations but also sustains legitimate politics domestically and internationally. Hence, though China was the first to accept its national responsibility on the outbreak, it was also fast to shift the global blame for the virus's origin, being portrayed as the innocent victim instead of a perpetrator of a global political animosity.

Examining the narratives constructed in both the United States and China during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights what political leaders do in terms of using rhetoric to meet the state interests and political agendas. Trump's American narrative was about blaming someone or something else, attributing responsibility by fragment, and political divide, while Xi's Chinese narrative was about togetherness, strength, and partnership both within the society or country and with others in the global society. The contrasting show how national media and political reaction maintain political power relations, where the US response focused on individualism, liberty, and hallmark economic revival, while the China response prioritized collectivism, bureaucratic governance, and global stewardship.

Thus, using the tools of the public discourse political leaders of both countries built up and reinforced the themes of responsibility, resilience and blame. To understand the extent of influence of the discourse in the construction of the pandemic as a conflict of national pride and political authority, the use of discourse analysis is relevant because it allowed for the investigation of how the public comprehends global crises and the government's management of them.

The media is very central in setting the perception on behalf of the public through passing leadership narratives most especially during crises. In context of COVID-19, the media in both USA and China spread and disseminated the leadership narratives of their respective Governments. However, the manner in which these narratives were packaged for presentation to the general population arose from substantially different ideological, political, and geopolitical backgrounds. Due to the pluralistic and rather polarized context, that the American media is situated in, the representations of the crisis and the national responses given by the media of those two countries are very unlike - the Chinese media operates mainly under the authoritarian government.



During COVID-19 in the United States, media constructs were predominant in the leadership discourse by the Trump administration. The rhetoric could be characterized as blame-sensitive, nationalist and economic. For instance, former President Trump once again disregarded the virus and passed all responsibility to China by calling the virus the “China virus” or the “Wuhan virus (Hickman, 2020). This blame attribution was couched in the pretext of not blaming the administrations slow response to the pandemic, but also complimenting a pro-nationalistic protectionism agenda. Labelling China as the source of the virus acted as a unifying political narrative among Trump supporters who repeated the president’s narrative.

However, the left-leaning media, including democratic-leaning newspapers like the New York Times and source like CNN were critical about Trump’s approach to the virus outbreak by pointing out things like confusing signals, lack of clarity, and not following health protocols. These outlets painted Trump as irresponsibly reckless handling the tragedy and this greatly heightened the polarization of American public discourse. , Entman (1993) rightly observes that the media fulfils the role of defining issues and allocating blame, and in the case of America, the media is responsible for influencing the relative importance of Trump in intensifying the pandemic. The media’s portrayal of Trump’s economic messaging also varied: whereas conservatives focused on the need to resume the economy’s operations and get the country back to work, liberals accused the latter of promoting the premature reopening of the economy without regard to the cost in human lives.

As such, the ideological factors in the United States influenced the Media’s construction of the blame and responsibility for the crisis, which also rendered the crisis explicitly political. The conservative media endorsed Trump’s discursive strategy and prescriptive economy, which meant appeal to economic nationalism; the liberal media meanwhile sidelining the leadership magnified the pandemic as a public health issue and the call for government intervention.

Comparatively, the extent to which the media functioned as the frame through which leadership rhetoric played in China was diametrically opposite. Mainstream Chinese media plays a key role as it was used during COVID-19 by CCP to promote its actions as immediate and efficient. While giving details of the situation, Chinese media outlets always put emphasis on Xi Jinping as the leader of the country and people of China striving together under the leadership of the CCP. For instance, the lockdown of Wuhan, and the construction of new hospitals were highlighted by the official media as China’s effectiveness if not efficiency in the conduct of the pandemic. Specifically, the leadership narrative highlighted the government’s role and abstemiousness as the primary organizational scripts of the nation’s COVID response (Chen & Holmes, 2020).

Furthermore, the Chinese media had called more attention to the international cooperation perspective while regarding China’s actions as part of the global fight against the virus. The giving of medical supplies, together with the global health research in which the country played an active role, were constructed as evidence of China as a world leader and caregiver. China-based media depicted the country as a responsible and cooperative participant of the global struggle against the coronavirus, which was depicted entirely differently in the Western media. Chinese stations sometimes denied foreign claims that the authorities failed to manage the virus’s dissemination during the early stages and stressed the openness of the Chinese initiative in sharing information on the disease with the WHO and other countries (Wang, 2020). This defensive tone was intended to categorically respond to outside criticism, downplaying the Chinese leadership as being victimized, and thus constrained in their presence on the international stage.

While media externalizations in the United States were clearly divided between those critical and supportive of government actions, Chinese media presented one coherent voice supporting their government’s efforts. Main procedures of preventive health including mass test, strict stringent lock down including the city of Wuhan were introduced as efficient strategies in dealing with the virus. Thus, speaking about the framing of resilience by the Chinese media, it was not only of national

character but also claimed global, as China was portrayed as the leader of the progressive movement that cooperatively is leading global pandemic response.

The contrasting ways in which the two events have received treatment by the media are distinguished by ideological and geopolitical factors. Globally, in the USA particularly, the media is very much divided into so many channels, contaminated with partisan ideologies and political agenda. Fox News and similar stations backed up rhetorical of the Trump administration while MSNBC and similar stations covered the pandemic as the leadership failure and the public health threat that worsened because of the political polarization. This resulted in the construction of opposing patterns of accountability attributing blame both to China as well as the Trump Administration. Therefore, the U.S media became the political arena wherein controlling the narrative of the pandemic depended on political affiliation as well as the political division.

On the other hand, the Chinese media worked under the authoritarian regime and its single aim was to present the success of state in managing the crisis situation. The discursive construction of responsibility and resilience in China was mainly top-down since the state powerful media outlets narrative constructed political legitimacy at home and abroad. It also provided this top-down narrative which in a coherent and consistent way focused on governmental rationality, leadership, and the collective ability to stand strong in examining the collective in the face of threats. Some responsibility was shifted onto external actors especially now that criticisms on the virus source took root, the government is portraying itself as a target of geopolitical.

In the two countries under study, the US and China, media was instrumental in shaping and reporting the leadership rhetoric during the COVID-19 crisis despite the difference in the type of frames used across the political left and right and across national boundaries. Despite the fact that the global media was rather involved in providing information about the crisis, the media from the USA, mainly focused on the partisan approach, tried to present the crisis through the lens of blame and political confrontation which disrupted the coherence of response. On the other hand, the Chinese state-controlled media portrayed the government as relevant, strong and responsible, presented efficiency and order and promoted a collective image of China. Such differences in media framing clearly show how issues of political systems and geopolitical interest play a central role in shaping how leadership rhetoric is package and presented to the people.

In this article, the discourses of US and Chinese leaders during COVID-19 as surrounded by media systems of US and China difference and conflict. These discourses do not merely reproduce the geopolitical as well as domestic scripts of each nation, but also contribute to the reproduction of narratives framing each nation's response to the crisis. In the US, as partisan divisions and ideological disputes intensified through media sounds bites, they played into the framing and politicization of the pandemic, blame attribution process. On the other hand, Chinese leadership rhetoric consistent with state propaganda and disseminated through state-controlled media provided the Chinese leadership as a unified voice anchored on the CCP and the ideology of governance, crisis management, and global leadership. As revealed through the CDA I have discussed above, such discourses managed to further entrench the power relations in the context of ideological antagonism between the US and China.

Discourse on Covid 19 in the United States based on the current president trump and information shared through media outlets was couched in terms on nationalism blame shifting and ideological polarization. The Trump's and his administration's narrative for handling the problem was couched in externalization where the virus was referred to as the 'China virus' or 'Wuhan virus' which served to neatly shift the blame to China. Pandemic that was foreign to the U.S and portrayed as something beyond their control was employed to mask domestic misdeed. Trump used very nationalistic discourses which conservative media loved, and used them to garner support for how his administration responded to the crisis. As Fairclough's 3D model (1992) suggests, discourses reflect and reinforce social practices: in this case, the U.S. discourse of blame led to a continuation

of a US responsibility to fix problems at home by projecting blame onto China, its strategic competitor.

This discourse of blame was also cast within the framework of American exceptionalism, an idea that has become almost a platonic form of American political thinking. The US media, especially Fox News, to repeat the president's speech and supported the idea of defeating the pandemic as an enemy and the necessity of opening the economy regardless of the consequences. Arguing that in many countries the fight against the coronavirus has led to the loss of millions of jobs, the Trump administration and many other political leaders used the language of 'booting the economy' and 'restarting job creation' as the national agenda against the virus. Nevertheless, the liberal media, which included CNN and The New York Times, brought in an understanding of COVID-19 as a leadership failure, Trump's shifting statements, preparations absence, and political consequences of underestimating the virus. This ideological battle coupled with media coverage enabled the pandemic to be deliberately political to the extent that differences in using majoritarian conservative and liberalist ideologies resulted not only in how citizens of the country conceptualized the virus but also in how political structures within the United States of America reproduced power relations.

The leadership narrative in China which has been influenced by President Xi Jinping and disseminated through state owned media emphasized on such discourses as cohesion, recovery and effectiveness of the government. As a result, the Chinese Communist Party reinterpreted COVID-19 as a contingency that the party could manage through state-driven cohesiveness and self-policed conformity. While in the US call for external scapegoats was common in political discourse, the Chinese strategy was based on nationalism and state responsibility for the crisis. Both the print and electronic media in China had relayed Xi Jinping's speeches during his December 2020 visit for the Party's centenary; he pointed out how project management needed to be tightened with a focus on collective coordination and discipline in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. About Wuhan Lockdown, Fast Building of New Hospitals, Contactless Contact Tracing, China demonstrated organizational supremacy to manage crises saying that, only the CCP can govern China without any Interference.

The manner in which these actions were covered by the Chinese media was intentional in order support the CCPs authority. For instance, both Xinhua and Global Times, which are China's official media outlets, have persistently delivered Xi's leadership as the key element for China to contain the spread of the virus. In discourses of resilience, China set itself up not only as a victim of the pandemic but as winners who were charting a way forward for the rest of the world. Chinese media humbled China by highlighting its cooperation with WHO and providing medical aid to other countries, which ascribed China a morally superior global subject (Wang 2020). Thus, the media discourse acted to construct the narrative of China as a global responsible and cooperative state to counter claims, primarily from the USA which accused China of responsibility for spreading the virus.

Also, the Chinese media discourse tried to downplay the responsibility for the emergence of the pandemic and discredit all accusations associated with a leak or improper handling of the virus as politically motivated and part of a mission to contain China's growth as a superpower. Such a discourse of defensiveness is part of the configuration of power relations in China's approach to the pandemic. The Chinese state media adopted a consolidated voice and acted in concert to justify the behavior of the administration and preserve the party's authority. They indicate a top-down model of governance in as much as they depict the media as an auxiliary of state power to diverge the people.

Thus, the media was one of the main objects through which constructed relations of power or ideological clashes in both the United States and China. The various media outlets in the U.S.A have offered the conservatives' as well as liberals' view of the pandemic. As with the assertions of the work of Fairclough (1995), media can be viewed as the channel where ideological struggle is played out, so it helps to support or subvert political power. In the case of the U.S., blame and responsibility of the media have ensured that polarity continued to escalate not only the political



aspects but also the manner in which narrative regarding the pandemic was supported by the specific ideological groups as the given political power structures.

In china, the state controlled media served as means of strengthening the authority of the CCP. The party's recount of suffering and rallying made the authoritarian rule finest, and portrayed the CCP as the rightful government in China and internationally. Chinese media focused the pandemic as a test of strength, which was successfully passed by the Chinese leadership and this inherent exacerbated the CCP's control over politics and political opinions and on the other hand, brought China to the forefront in the management of the pandemic.

In conclusion, discourses of the leaders of the USA and China through the respective media systems are the instruments of constant construction of power and ideological distinctions during the COVID-19 pandemics. In the U.S., the conflict of blame attribution and media culture, political divisions as well as race to claim the essence of American identity contributed to the ideological struggles. By contrast, the Chinese state media put forward the CCP as the force of sustainability and the lodestar for the world, asserting the authoritarian power to be the driving force in the world. This paper demonstrates how CDA unveils how the media serves as a means through which leadership discourse reveals the politics of power and ideological contestations within the sphere of international relations and in period of crisis.

### Findings of the Study

The result of this study supports the hypothesis that leadership discourses of both the US and China during COVID19 pandemic are embedded with their ideological leaning and media played the significant role in operationalizing these ideologies. A polarized media environment in the U.S. enriched nationalist narratives and facilitated blame attribution toward China contributing to the politicization of the outbreak response. Conservative dailies mostly applauded the actions of the Trump administration and downplayed the risks to public health in the name of the economic revival while liberal media commented on the lack of cohesiveness in the approach and the unpreparedness, deepening division in the country and around the world. At the same time, however, China's state controlled media embraced a coherent narrative of national strength, as well as the ECCP's success in managing the outbreak, and Chinese leadership in the management of pandemics. The Chinese government decided to employ discursive strategies to build legitimacy of the party and unity of the country on the background of the pandemic as evidence of the superiority of the China's authoritarian model. The observation made in this paper corresponds to other studies investigating how political leaders manage to appeal to a specific audience's reason through discourse during crisis periods. As research on politicization of COVID-19 has noted, for example, Zhang and O'Donnell (2021) and Gubernskaya et al. (2022), the American top brass sought to portray the virus as a nuisance to national sovereignty, which was similar to the scapegoating by the media about China. This research also supports Entman's (2004) frames theory regarding political polarization in the media with American media bias, and an increasing fracture within the country. That is entirely different from China where the media strategy aligns with what Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued about propaganda-ministry media system where the media serves to mirror the ruling regime's frame of national cohesion and resistance. Further, the results provide backing to what has been stated by Fairclough (1995) that power not only in discourse relations but also constructive power is involved in the continuous construction of power relations. The author of the text under analysis discuss how pandemic discourse was employed in China to support authoritarian governance using the idea developed by Lee & Lee (2021) that China's state organism actively used the crisis to strengthen its power and positive image. Therefore, this study enriches the theoretical knowledge on leadership rhetoric and media framing by drawing attention to how these narratives, when reproduced through state and commercial media, define not only domestic relations of power but also worldwide geopolitical relations.

Indeed, the conclusion drawn from the current study corresponds to the theoretical framework drawn from the Framing Theory and the critical discourse analytical approach as

expounded by Fairclough's 3D model. Entman (1993) opined that from the analytical perspective of framing theory, media has the ability to select certain aspects of reality, define these aspects in certain ways and thereby control the interpretations of these aspects by the public. In this study, American media's binary constructions regarding COVID-19; blame attribution, and external vilification (e.g., China), illustrates Entman's conceptualization of framing as the battle over resources, ideologies. This is also true because, like the USA, China's media framing concentrated on endurance, solidarity, and leadership effectiveness; thus, Herman and Chomsky's (1988) notion of media as the administrative arm of the state applies here. The critique by Fairclough (1995) of the given piece of discourse as a social practice, a discursive practice, and a textual practice can help to shed light on how both U.S. and Chinese leaders' discourse in constructing the national identity and responsibility. Thus, this study posits that as a form of discursive practice, the media constructs a representation of the leadership practice within the practice of power-relations, ideology tensions involving the framing of the public health strategies and the relating of blame. As a result, the work provided a demonstration of how leaders in both countries utilized discursive strategies for constructing their authority and using messaging that serves the purpose of enshrine hegemonic ideologies and power politics that reveal the applicability of Framing Theory and the Fairclough's CDA model of analyzing pandemic rhetoric.

### CONCLUSION

This study analyzed critically the discursive strategies of responsibility, resilience, and blame by the political leaders in the United States and China during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the media representations of those discursive strategies. The analysis revealed a stark contrast between the two countries' rhetorical strategies: the U.S. resorted to blame assigning, and nationalist narratives, which primarily directed at China, whereas China stressed multilateralism, cohesion, and agency and posed as a responsible Great Power. These two different discourses not only described but also prescribed in so far as that they represented and maintained the Geopolitical structural confrontation and the ideological polarization. The study revealed media as influential in defining the perception by narrowing down the actions and choices of the political leadership in line with the Framing Theory and Framing Theory of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. The U.S. media, already suffering from ideological division, followed the cue of the government, and China's state-controlled media made efforts to justify the government's actions. These media framings contributed to exercising power relations between these countries also shaping the limbs of the public domain and thus perpetuating political discursive hegemony in line with nationalist political agendas of these countries. In conclusion, the study brings into focus how effective discourse constructs political subjectivity and world images, especially how leadership and the media, in response to fluctuations in global governance wield rhetorical instruments to assert authority, control crisis and conduct diplomacy in the age of uncertainty. Although both collections of headlines may initially be seen as related to crisis management, both are actually deliberately constructed to form national and international political visions of identity, power, and politics of the respective countries contained within.

Possible future studies could look at leadership discourse and media coverage effects over time on public opinion of national response measures in the context of crisis such as the current pandemic. Future comparative research could further explore how specific political systems influence the discourses such as democracies or authoritarian regimes during global health crisis besides COVID-19 but including climate change crises, conflicts and so on. Further studies could also explore whether other media or social networking sites, and/or citizen journalism contribute to perpetuating or subverting the kinds of messages given out by state-oriented or conventional media organizations.

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