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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **A Framing Analysis of Chinese and Western Media Coverage of Anti-Internet Enterprise Monopoly in China**

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**| ABSTRACT**

Since the implementation of the Internet anti-monopoly law, different media in different countries have reported it from different angles. In recent years, both Chinese media and Western media have had different reports and opinions due to their stance, culture and perspective. The objective of the study is to compare the differences and commonalities between Chinese and Western media coverage of anti-internet enterprise monopoly in China based on frame theory. This paper classifies the types of coverage in Chinese and Western media into Human Interest Frame, Economic Consequences Frame and Conflict Frame based on frame theory. The aim of this study is to investigate the differences between Chinese and Western media reporting. The results of the study revealed that the differences are drawn from; differences in media systems and differences in news production.

**| KEYWORDS**

Anti-internet enterprise monopoly, China, frame theory.

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### **1. Introduction**

In October 2019, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee proposed to strengthen and improve anti-monopoly enforcement and improve the review system. One year after, China's General Administration of Market Regulation (GAMR) issued the *Anti-monopoly Guidelines on the Platform Economy (Draft for Public Comments)* for wide public consultation. In January 2021, the Political and Legal Work Conference of the CPC Central Committee proposed to strengthen anti-monopoly and anti-unfair competition enforcement and justice (Government of China, 2018). With the Chinese government's anti-monopoly crackdown on Internet companies, numerous Chinese and foreign media outlets scramble to cover the topic, generating widespread public opinion.

In this paper, we use WiseSearch, China's leading news database, to collect Chinese domestic news and Lexis Nexis to coverage of foreign media concerning the sequence of Chinese anti-Internet Enterprise Monopoly policies and put summarize them as three framings.

### **2. Research Methods and Theories**

In this paper, we use two fundamental theories, with the framing theory of Gasmon underlying the whole paper and the Five news frames category by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as a sorting method.

#### **2.1 Framing Analysis: Connecting Text and Power**

Gamson (1989) and others define "framing" as the inner structure of media texts and the core ideas of how news material is

organized, through which news stories suggest how audiences should understand news events; he also identifies three determinants that influence the framing of stories: cultural empathy, sponsorship and media practices. Similarly, Reese suggests framing as an “abridging model” that connects the content of stories with more macro issues such as politics and social power (Reese, 2007); Carragee and Toef criticise some framing studies for neglecting power and for criticise some framing studies for ignoring power and call on scholars to pay more attention to social movements and the influence of social and political power on framing (Carragee & Toef, 2004).

In practical terms, this study will use the “media package” proposed by Gamson et al. as an analytical tool. The reason for this is that it not only provides “framing devices” on how frames are presented, including metaphors, historical examples, buzzwords, depictions and typical images. “Historical examples” are actual events that have been frequently used to reflect the subject of the story; “buzzwords” are summary language about the subject of a story, such as the title of an article, a summary statement or a slogan; “descriptions” are metaphors or examples of the single value of the event, or some interesting modifier. This article focuses on the analysis of linguistic texts and therefore discards the “typical images” from the “framing tools” and adopts mainly “historical examples”, “buzzwords,” and “depictions” as analytical tools.

## **2.2 Five News Frames Category by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000)**

Five news frames were identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000): conflict, human interest, attribution of blame, morality, and economic consequences. The conflict frame emphasizes the conflict between individuals, groups, institutions or countries. The human interest picture is an event, problem, or issues a human face, a personal narrative, or an emotional perspective. The responsibility frame describes a situation or issue in a way that assigns blame for its development or resolution to either the government or a specific person or organization. The morality frame analyses a situation or problem in light of moral guidelines or religious doctrine. The third frame, economic consequences, describes an occurrence, a problem, or an issue in terms of the economic effects it will have on a certain person, group, institution, area, or nation. Based on an examination of national print and television news, the study discovered that the attribution of culpability frame was the most frequently employed, followed by the conflict and economic effects frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This paper applies this theory and finds, after combining it with reading a large number of literature materials, that the framework of domestic and foreign reports on China's anti-monopoly policy generally belongs to Human Interest Frame, Economic Consequences Frame and Conflict Frame.

## **3. Analysis by Category: Human Interest Frame, Economic Consequences Frame and Conflict Frame**

As shown in the table, we categorized new coverage concerning Chinese anti-internet enterprise monopoly policies into three categories, with high frequency words, historical examples and buzz words of each kind.

	Frame	Human Interest Frame	Economic Consequences Frame	Conflict Frame
<b>The framework tool</b>	<b>High frequency words:</b>	Users, micro and small businesses, market barriers, Entrepreneurs, Sino-US competition, malicious competition, Copyright	Internet layoffs, Tencent, Jingdong, antimonopoly, capital power, Internet majors, Chinese Communist Party, state-owned enterprises	Hegemony, government supervision, tech-giant
	<b>Historical examples:</b>	The "gatekeeper" system proposed by the European Digital Marketplace Act has obvious antitrust features. A series of antitrust investigations in the United States against giants such as Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google. Tencent Music  Previously monopolized the market, and users were hindered from listening to songs. Internet head enterprises require software developers to choose one of two and charge high fees.	Alibaba monopoly and Douyu  ban on the merger of Tencent's Tiger  Group case,	Chinese government's \$18.2 billion fine against Alibaba, Australia passed a law forcing Google and Facebook pay publishers for access to news, the UK is in the process of setting up its own tech regulator to regulate the industry, and Russia is imposing restrictions on information on Twitter
	<b>Buzzword:</b>	Freedom to listen to songs, Innovation vitality	Data east and count west, 996, burning money	Platform hegemony, information cocoon, techgiant influence

	<p><b>Description:</b></p> <p>"Tencent Music and NetEase Cloud Music have given up their exclusive copyright licenses. This means that the situation of 'having to switch back and forth between multiple music apps if you want to listen to a few songs', which has been complained about by netizens and music fans for years, is finally gone."</p> <p>"Only by decisively strengthening anti-monopoly can China's digital economy catch up with the United States."</p> <p>"Entrepreneur Li Yi Yi often regrets that he did not start his own business a few years earlier. The company he founded, recently developed software, was forced to 'choose one or the other' by the platform, not only requiring him to provide a high amount of security deposit but also to 'dictate' the product."</p>	<p>"For now, the structural adjustment of the Internet industry will indeed create a big impact on many industries and business formats."</p> <p>"In the past, the consumer internet sector produced many high paying jobs with the addition of capital, and after the bubble burst, a mean reversion occurred". In the long run, this is beneficial for the healthy development of the internet".</p> <p>"The party is using the antimonopoly crackdown as an excuse to increase its influence on private enterprises, especially in the internet sector."</p>	<p>"While governments have been battling tech companies for years to seek supremacy, recent actions have pushed the industry to a turning point that could reshape the workings of the global internet and change the flow of digital material."</p> <p>"In a sense, the expansion of platform capital has evolved to the stage of 'platform capitalism'. Internet companies are not ordinary companies but the deep-seated infrastructure of social development. While the Internet has profoundly changed global social life, it has also deeply impacted the political and economic systems of many countries."</p>
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\*Data collection and statistics by authors.

### 3.1 Application of Human Interest Frame

The Human Interest frame refers to news reports that emphasize how certain individuals and groups are affected by the issue or problem (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Xinhua news agency released a report entitled Internet antitrust: not only about the freedom to listen to songs but also about fair competition in the market (China Discipline Inspection and Supervision News, 2021). The piece highlights the benefits of anti-monopoly policies for users. Xinhua cites the example of the music software sector, where in the past, music apps such as Tencent or Netease obliged users to purchase a membership to listen to a particular singer's songs or to pay for a single song because the company owned the exclusive rights, which according to Xinhua was originally intended to protect creators but has turned into a tool for some platforms to build up market barriers.

By telling individual case stories and quoting netizens' comments, such reports convey the message that the mass public is the beneficiary of the policy, cause the public to reflect on and resent the monopoly of Internet companies, and make them identify with the necessity of curbing the monopoly of Internet companies, thus establishing the public opinion base of the anti-monopoly policy and thus maintaining the legitimacy of it.

A NetEase News report states that Chinese Internet companies can truly compete with U.S. Internet companies and close the gap by strengthening anti-monopoly and reactivating industry innovation and competition (People's Think Tank, 2022). Media reports as such elaborate that Chinese companies will become more competitive because of anti-monopoly. As developed countries in Europe and the United States are pioneers in anti-monopoly, coupled with the fact that Sino-US competition is at a white-hot stage in 2022, the share prices of Tencent and Alibaba fell after the introduction of China's antimonopoly policy, which put the spotlight on the Internet industry between China and the US. Such reports are meant to give the public a long-term perspective and persuade them that Chinese companies will be the beneficiaries of the anti-monopoly policy.

People's Daily News describes the story of a software entrepreneur, Li Yi Yi, depicting how he "...often regrets that he did not start his own business years earlier. The company he founded had just recently developed a piece of software and was forced to choose between the two by the platform, which not only required him to provide a high security deposit but also proposed many changes to the product. "By describing the plight of micro and small businesses as well as individuals in the Internet sector being squeezed by Internet giants, similar news reports actually illustrate to readers that anti-monopoly policies benefit micro and small businesses.

### **3.2 Application of Economic Consequences Frame**

Economic Consequences Framework: this framework focuses on the economic benefits and cost losses arising from the activities of individuals, groups or organizations (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). And as soon as the news of China's Internet anti-monopoly was released, both Chinese and foreign media held their own attitudes towards economic consequences.

China media released a report entitled: *Internet layoffs on the hot search: capital tide + anti-monopoly, Internet circuit logic changed*. In terms of the use of frameworks for reporting, China has adopted a 'read China's approach to its news coverage, showing through its own position that China's development is not a threat and also showing the economic damage caused by the massive layoffs of Internet monopolies. The subject matter of this reportage is in line with the main Chinese voice, but it does not reflect the macro nature of its coverage. The analysis found that Barron's used the 'economic consequences framework' to highlight the macro impact of the event in its actual reporting, which was very macro in nature. Barron's focuses on framing the economic consequences of China's monopoly on the Internet leader in its actual reporting and presents the idea that the Internet industry will boost China's economy after China adopts an anti-monopoly, arguing that China will continue to reap economic benefits and revealing the situation and potential consequences for the development of Chinese state-owned enterprises.

China can learn from this idea in its reporting, for example, by showing the impact on the Chinese economy and the possible global impact of the monopoly of the Internet's leading companies in China and by showing the advice that China's development can give to the rest of the world. We should also learn to take advantage of the shortcomings of the US media's image as the "world's policeman" and gradually shift the topics to the general public, with scientific and objective. Media can also select the best comments from the audience as "reports" so that the audience can participate in the report.

### **3.3 Application of Conflict Frame**

In the conflict frame, Chinese and foreign media reports on Internet anti-monopoly focus on two core conflicts: platform hegemony and public life, and government and tech-giants.

Firstly, many of the reports mentioned that Internet platform companies have become giants, gradually penetrating all aspects of life and establishing "platform hegemony".

The word "hegemony" appears 134 times in 52 reports from China and abroad.

Internet platforms are a showcase for audio, video and text content, as well as the right to publish information, and they themselves have become the main domain of public opinion. Under the interpretation of established legal provisions, Internet platform companies can violate freedom of expression and eliminate opponents at will.

At the same time, the Internet platform giants have established multiple "technical barriers" such as cloud services, hardware systems, operating systems and application software, which allow them to establish platform hegemony with a few simple operations.

On the other hand, several reports have pointed out that Internet monopolies have exacerbated social divisions. The most obvious problem is the "information cocoon" and "echo chamber effect" brought about by the algorithmic mechanism of the platform, where the psychological tendency of some people to be biased in listening and believing is amplified by the Internet platform. As a result, people with different views tend to be polarised, exacerbating the tearing apart of different opinion groups.

Secondly, the conflict between the government and the technology giants behind the internet platforms has also been the focus of media coverage. The dispute between the two runs through one main thread: influence. The ten largest technology companies, which have become the gatekeepers of the business, finance, entertainment and communications industries, now have a combined market capitalisation of more than US\$10 trillion. Together, they are equivalent to the world's third largest economy in terms of gross domestic product (Kang, 2021).

Among the cases of increased government regulation that emerged from the report was the Chinese government's \$18.2 billion fine against Alibaba, Australia's passing of a law forcing Google and Facebook to pay publishers for access to news, the UK in the process of setting up its own tech regulator to regulate the industry, and Russia imposing restrictions on information on Twitter.

As for tech companies, reports indicate that both Amazon and Facebook have set up their own departments to adjudicate conflicts over speech and oversee their own websites. In the US and EU, these companies have spent a lot of money on lobbying (Chen, 2022).

The New York Times reports that while governments have been battling tech companies for years to seek supremacy, recent actions have pushed the industry to a turning point that could reshape the workings of the global internet and change the flow of digital material.

The application of the conflict frame in these reports is not only intended to catch the reader's eye but also to show concern about the prevalence of monopolies by the Internet's head companies, with implicit support for their increased regulation and implementation of anti-trust policies behind the scenes.

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, this study conducted a framing analysis of Chinese and Western media coverage of anti-Internet enterprise monopoly in China, comparing their differences and commonalities.

The reasons for their differences come from a number of sources. Firstly, the distinctions in the media system cannot be underestimated. The media in mainland China is an important tool for propaganda and ideological work and has to stand firm on its political stance, while the western media is more susceptible to the influence of its own political attributes and the market system. Secondly, in terms of news production, each society is a relatively independent discursive community, and the media in each society domesticates a global media event to maintain continuity with local political institutions, cultural practices and historical narratives. As a result, Chinese and Western media present very different frameworks for reporting.

The main limitation of this study is that although it summarises and analyses the different frames in Chinese and Western media coverage, it neglects the interactions between the different frames. In fact, as the Internet anti-monopoly has been an important international social agenda in recent years, both Chinese and Western media are closely following the developments related to it, and future research could pay more attention to the interaction between different media frames.

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