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Framing Analysis of the China Media Coverage of Foreign Brands Negative Information: Reflection of National Interest and Self-consciousness

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Abstract: Local brand prejudice is a significant and widespread proposition in China. Chinese media play the part of highlighting the local brand quality crisis or activating the local brand bias deliberately or accidentally. This study takes the Chongqing Wal-mart food safety event reported by Chinese media as an example. It makes the text analysis with frame theory on the media frame, subject discourse-power and agenda setting. And it reveals the deficiency of national interest standard and self-consciousness of Chinese media when they reported the negative event of foreign brand. It confirms the framing effect of local brand prejudice formed by Chinese media.

Key words: China media, foreign brand, negative information, media frame, local brand bias

INTRODUCTION

Local brand prejudice is a significant proposition which is widespread and needs further research in today's China (Liu *et al.*, 2013). Although, the report strategy of the mass media is not the leading cause on forming the local brand prejudice, it helps to interpret symbolic meaning with prejudice and it influences the audience.

Opinion on the image or the sign (Xue and Liang, 2009). Thus, some researches analyzed the media priming effect on the food safety in recent years and found that there is obviously negative effect of the food-safety reports. These reports lead to the consumer's psychological panic on the Chinese food industry and darkly clouded views on the whole industry (Juntao *et al.*, 2006). There are two aspects of media's priming effects on the local brand prejudice:

- Chinese media's effect on forming the local brand prejudice is mainly from the plentiful exposures on the product quality crisis of the local brand (such as poison milk powder and tainted steamed buns) and graphic description or negative criticism on the topic of "inferior quality, irresponsibility". The consumer will judge its representative according to the similarity between the description and the prejudice and obviously they are easy to accept these reports' prejudice (Xue and Liang, 2009). This kind of report method makes the audience had a bad impression on the local brand, such as "bad quality, low grade,

low-tech and lack of responsibility and reputation" and affirms and strength the stereotype or prejudice on the local brand. For example, some researches have confirmed that there is significant negative influence on Chinese consumer's national image perceiving and local brand prejudice because of the chemical melamine scandal (Zhang, 2009)

- Foreign brands still have several problems in China, such as bad-quality, responsibility defect, bad-service, false propaganda, exorbitant, counterfeit, ignoring the consumer's right and illegal act. However, Chinese media don't have the discourse power and initiative on reporting the quality problem of foreign brand. Taking HP laptop cockroach scandal, foreign brand collectively breaching of "Three Guarantees" for product quality reported by CCTV "3.15" evening party in 2010 and 2011 for examples, other media did not report these event very well. Thus, the product problems of the foreign brand are revealed without further specifics. On the one hand, this report strategy does not convey the information that the foreign brand also has the weakness of "bad-quality, responsibility defect, fraud and false propaganda" and not all the foreign brand are better. On the other hand, the media strengthens the foreign brand preference continuously. Thus, the Chinese media unintentionally emphasizes the quality crisis of the local brand or play the role on activating the local brand prejudice

The reports of American media are totally different from that of Chinese media. Based on their national interest and healthy and safety, they have been a-twitter with stories about Chinese products' problem (such as Chinese poisoned pet food, tainted toothpaste, lead-painted toys and unqualified aquatic products), actively construct the risk picture of "Made in China", let "Made in China" become the synonym of "dangerous goods" and lead to American mistrust on Chinese manufacturing (Wang *et al.*, 2010). Sanlu milk powder incident in 2008 provided the western media the clue to criticize Chinese administration system. From the national trade, they played up its negative influence and viciously malign Chinese national image and Chinese manufacturing image by the aspect of "Made in China". The New York Time, Wall Street Journal and Financial Times were totally contrary to the fact when they reported Chongqing Wal-mart food safety event in 2011, ignored Chinese laws and consumer right and made the malicious slander on the legal supervisory behavior of Chinese government. Why our rights protection and individual companies' quality problems are exaggerated infinitely and assaulted casually? Maybe it is the reason that American and other western media hold the active discourse power to some extent.

Ubiquitous local brand prejudice in China highlights the necessary to rethink Chinese media's reports. Thus, this study takes the Chongqing Wal-mart food safety event reported by Chinese media for example, make the text analysis on the media frame and subject discourse-power, reveals the standard consciousness, problems and source of Chinese media when they reported the negative event of foreign brand and shows the way for mass media to control the audience's attention and for the countermeasure to restrain the local brand prejudice.

THEORY BASIS AND RESEARCH METHODS

Frame theory: Frame theory is the important basic of medium content analysis (Xue and Liang, 2009). Scheufele (1999) divided the frame into media frame and individual frame. Media frame is the central idea to organize the news material or the narrative approach to represent the news. It provides the meaning for the unprocessed fact and shows the story conflict and the event essence (Entman, 1991). Media frame is the decisive factor for people to catch some information, to understand and remember the information, to evaluate this world and to take the frame as their behavior reference. Media frame is the influence factor for people to find the problem, to explain it, to do the moral judgment and to propose the solution (D'Angelo, 2002). The core of the frame is the highlights.

It magnifies some information and ignores other aspects, catches and maintains the audience's attention and makes the predictable judgment on the audience's cognition. Frame analysis is the study on the highlights and dismissed information (Entman, 1991). The audience's construct on the reality, rather than be influenced by their inherent cognitive frame passively, is an interaction process between the text and the audience which means the audience constructs the meaning in the rich pseudo-environment.

Frame encoding scheme: Based on the frame theory by Entman (1993) and the basic flow of "find the problem, explain the reason, make the moral judgment and solve the problem", this thesis does the sample encoding on the report of Wal-mart event. The encoding scheme is as follow:

- **Frame encoding of finding the problem:** It divides the news into nine questions by analyzing the news headlines and gives every type of question an encoding number
- **Frame encoding of explaining the reason:** It divides the news into fifteen reasons by analyzing the news features in the headlines, introductions and ends and gives every type of reason an encoding number
- **Frame encoding of making the moral judgment:** It has three trends on evaluating the Wal-mart event according to the reports' sentimental color, including the positive evaluation (those comments that go beyond the fact, ease and even absolve the responsibility for the Wal-mart), the negative evaluation (those comments and questions that respect the fact and criticize the illegal act of Wal-mart) and neutral evolution (those important facts and evidences on revealing the food safety of Wal-mart). And it gives every trend an encoding number
- **Frame encoding of solving the problem:** It divides the news into sixteen solutions and it gives every type an encoding number. As the coders, two authors encode separately. If the reliability is 0.865 by Holsti's formula:

$$\frac{2M}{N1+N2}$$

it shows the reliability is high

Sample selecting and data collecting: Complete collection of the domestic media reports on the Wal-Mart quality event is an important basis for the follow-up study.

Taking into account the print media (mainly newspapers) basically has the electronic network; it can search through the network to ensure the data's integrity. At the same time, the network media reports have the clear label on its origin. The report of TV news is usually presented in the newspapers, internet and other media. Due to the timeliness, the magazine seldom reports the news events. Therefore, this paper is feasible and can ensure data integrity to collect the reprint of the electronic version of the newspaper and online media through the search engines. Thus, by collecting through soso, baidu and the search engines of the related media, this study holds the domestic media reports on Wal-Mart food safety crisis since September 2011. Search results show that there are a total of 196 reports between September 6 and November 6, 2011 by November 12, 2011. Among them, there are 75 print media reports, 21 network reports and 100 network media reprint article.

THE MEDIA FRAME ANALYSIS ON CHINA'S MEDIA COVERAGE TO WAL-MART FOOD SAFETY EVENT

Frame analysis on the media coverage content: Frame analysis on finding the problem: what is the problem of Wal-mart?

From the media frame analysis on finding the problem (Table 1), China's media coverage to Wal-Mart food safety events are mainly concentrated in the following five areas: there is 87.3% on the part of selling seconds at best quality prices on the organic pork; there is 30.5% on the part of false propaganda; there is 29.5% on the part of selling the substandard foodstuff; and 24.2% on the part of false content of food labels. All problems are caused by the lack of economic driven and business ethics of Wal-Mart. But the covers in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and the British Financial Times (Minxin, 2009; Qinqin *et al.*, 2011; Xiaoyu, 2011) are only showing the administrative penalty and criminal punishment on Wal-Mart by selling false organic pork. They call this event "labeling dispute" and take the false organic pork

Table 1: Frame analysis on finding the problem in Chinese reports

Main problems	No.	%
Selling the worse organic pork	83	87.3
Advertising falsely	29	30.5
Selling the substandard food	28	29.5
Selling the expired food	28	29.5
Having the false contents in the food label	23	24.2
Repackaging and selling the expired dry-cured duck	12	12.6
Having other problems	14	14.9
Selling the product that has not production date	6	6.3
Changing the production date	6	6.3

Other problems contain having the bad environment in food section, selling the dirty dried bean curd, having the quality problem in massage chair, having not enough strength on compensating the consumers

as "mislabeling pork" with some understatement. The western media ignore the illegal behavior, such as selling substandard food products and expired food, changing production date. It shows that there is big difference between the domestic media and western media in the media frame of finding the problem.

Frame analysis on explaining the reason: Why are these problems in Wal-mart?

From the media frame analysis on explaining the reasons (Table 2), China's media coverage to Wal-Mart food safety events are mainly concentrated in the following twelve aspects: there is 36.8% on the part of disregarding the consumers' benefit and health; there is 28.4%, on the part of ignoring Chinese law; there is 27.4%, on the part of Wal-Mart weak supervision; and 25.3%, on the part of economically motivated. Nevertheless, there is 30.6% on the part of absolve the responsibility for Wal-Mart, such as "Chinese government weak supervision, low illegal cost"; the similar problem in other supermarket, "Chinese suppliers' mistake", "over-taxed", "bad relationship with the government" and "other reasons". This kind of reports passes the responsibility, or transfers the problem on the local brand. They never forget to remind the audience focus on the universality of the local brand problem. It implies that Wal-Mart event is an accidental or a small problem. It does not only absolve the responsibility for Wal-Mart, but also play the role in activating the local brand bias unintentionally.

On this food safety event, the New York Times (Minxin, 2009) defines Chongqing as "a city in southwest China with extreme nationalism prejudice" and points out the severe punishment on Wal-Mart is the performance of the rising of Chinese "economic nationalism". This report totally disregards that the behavior of Wal-Mart is

Table 2: Frame analysis on explaining the reasons in Chinese reports

Main reasons	No.	%
Ignoring the consumers' interest and health	35	36.8
Ignoring Chinese law	27	28.4
Having weak supervision of Wal-Mart	26	27.4
Driving by the economic interest	24	25.3
Having weak supervision, low illegal cost of Chinese government	16	16.8
Lacking of business morality or social responsibility	8	8.4
Other reasons	9	9.5
Having similar problem in other supermarket	5	5.3
Having the attention of Chongqing government	3	3.2
Having the problem on Chinese supplier	1	1.1
Being over-taxed	1	1.1
Being disharmony with the government	2	2.1

Other reasons contain being difficult for consumers to present evidence; being monopolistic of the supermarkets; being mishandle on the public relations crisis; lacking in the crisis management; being untimely to communicate with business sector; Chinese food safety environment; super-national treatment; forming the monopoly; foreign media think Wal-Mart receive the political pressure

long-time, deliberate and illegal. Wall Street Journal (Qinqin *et al.*, 2011) reported this event on the topic of “authoritarian China”, “capricious regulator”, “China bully Wal-Mart”, “Wal-Mart prostrate itself under the beating” and “Wal-Mart in China is facing with the legal and political obstacles and risk”. Wall Street Journal continued to blame Chinese deteriorating investment environment and discriminating foreign capital enterprise behavior, such as government procurement rules, independent innovation policy, lifting intellectual property and providing illegal subsidies. The report of Financial Times (Xiaoyu, 2011) was “It is the worst regulatory environment for Wal-Mart and many other foreign-owned enterprises in China”. That was a general food illegal event, but the western media regarded it as “Chinese government’s crackdown, conspiracy and political revenge” and they never reflect on the illegal act and show the apologies on the damage of consumer benefit.

Frame analysis on making the moral judgment: What is the Evaluation on Wal-Mart Food Safety Event?

From the media frame analysis on making the moral judgment (Table 3), China's media coverage to Wal-Mart food safety events are mainly concentrated in three aspects: negative, natural and positive. There is 54.8% on the part of respecting the fact that Wal-Mart is illegal and lack of responsibility; there is 33.7%, on the part of revealing the important fact and evidence in the Wal-Mart food safety problem; there is 23.2%, on the part of inconsistent with the fact and absolving the responsibility for Wal-Mart. Meanwhile, the western media also absolve the responsibility for Wal-Mart and accuse china’s government. It shows that the China’s media is lack of national interest standard and self consciousness.

Frame analysis on solving the problem: How to solve the Wal-Mart food safety problem?

From the media frame analysis on solving the problem (Table 4), China’s media directly or indirectly coverage to Wal-Mart food safety events are mainly concentrated in fourteen aspects: there is 48.4% on the part of requiring rectification; there is 47.4%, on the part of requiring

penalty; there is 33.7%, requiring to confiscate the unlawful income; there is 31.6%, requiring to be investigated for criminal responsibility in accordance with law; there is 31.6%, requiring Wal-Mart to strength the product stewardship; and 30.5%, requiring the Business management department to strengthen the supervision and law enforcement (interlink assurance system). The first four solutions are the administrative or the criminal penalties that taken by Chongqing relevant local authorities, the fifth requires finding the solution within the company and the sixth requires finding the solution from the part of government. Generally speaking, the solution frame can be divided into two parts: one is Wal-Mart should strengthening the supervision by themselves, the other is the government should promote supervision and law execution.

Overall, although most Chinese media could report Wal-Mart food safety event in the topic of “health and safe, commercial deceit, illegal and criminal”, the 23.2% reports or comments eased even absolved the responsibility for Wal-Mart. However, based on their national interest and enterprise benefit frame, the western media regarded it as “Chinese government’s crackdown, conspiracy and political revenge” and they never reflect on the illegal act and show the apologies on the damage of consumer benefit. As a result, there is a great difference between Chinese and western media in national interest standard and self consciousness. The pseudo-environment that constructed by China’s media

Table 3: Frame analysis on making the moral judgment in Chinese reports

Moral judgment	No.	%
Negative comments (respecting the fact that Wal-Mart is illegal and lack of responsibility)	52	54.8
Natural comments (revealing the important fact and evidence in the Wal-Mart food safety problem)	32	33.7
Positive comments (inconsistent with the fact and absolving the responsibility for Wal-Mart)	22	23.2

Table 4: Frame analysis on solving the problem in Chinese reports

Solutions	No.	%
Requiring rectification	46	48.4
Requiring penalty	45	47.4
Requiring to confiscate the unlawful income	32	33.7
Requiring Wal-Mart to strength the product stewardship	30	31.6
Requiring to be investigated for criminal responsibility in accordance with law	30	31.6
Requiring the Business management department to strengthen the supervision and law enforcement (interlink assurance system)	29	30.5
Requiring to apologize and compensate to consumers	16	16.8
Other solutions	10	10.5
Requiring to improve the consumers’ responsibility consciousness	6	6.3
Requiring the consumers to report timely when they meet the similar problems (to increase the consumers’ safeguarding rights consciousness)	4	4.2
Requiring the consumers to boycott Wal-Mart in solidarity	1	1.1
Requiring to ease the enterprise’s tax	1	1.1
Requiring the harmonious relationship with government	1	1.1
Requiring to set up the department of the safeguarding rights with the cooperation between enterprise and the Consumers’ Association	1	1.1

Other solutions contain requiring to set up the traceable good supply system; requiring to obey Chinese laws; requiring to make good crisis management; requiring to improve the laws and increase the punishment level

can not make the audience have the cognition of symbols of “unbelievable, falsification and confusion management” and semantic processing of “Wal-Mart is unreliable”. The media’s comment and the explanation have the impact on the audience, so they can not be the anti-stereotype sample for controlling the local brand bias (Kees and Semetko, 2003).

Text analysis on the media discourse-power: Capture and control on the discourse right is an important tool for stakeholders to influence the audience cognition. The deep reason why different media show the pretty difference on the same events in finding problem, explaining the reason, making the moral judgment and solving the problem is that the media is the voice of different stakeholders. Making the text analysis on the origin of the reports on Wal-Mart event, it finds that the discourse right subjects are journalist, industrial and commercial administration, Wal-Mart management, government officials, consumers, authorities or experts, police, Wal-Mart employees, insiders and so on (Table 5). The top three that hold the discourse right are journalist, industrial and commercial administration and Wal-Mart management, followed by 54.7, 31.6 and 17.9%. There is only 5.3% from the consumers which means consumers in the weak position of capturing the media discourse right. Among these subjects of right, Wal-Mart management, insiders, government officials, authorities or experts, journalist, foreign media, Wal-Mart employees and consumers, in this order, are what to absolve the responsibility for Wal-Mart. There are 21.2% reports quote all of the above stakeholders’ word or the journalists’ comments (except the slander and attack from the foreign media) to excuse or absolve the responsibility for Wal-Mart. Obviously, these media discourse have been controlled and the reasons are various, such as “the media lack of national interest standard and self-consciousness”, “ignorance on Wal-Mart’s discourse right control”, “the media and journalists pursue their own economic interests”, “catering to the audience’s requirement” and “their own local prejudice”.

Text analysis on the media agenda-setting: Sometimes, the media prefer to catch and maintain the audience’s attention by overstating partial information and ignoring other aspects (D’Angelo, 2002). Thus, the audience is influenced by the media essentially. It is necessary to make the text analysis on the Wal-Mart event on the basis of above frame analysis and to find out how the quality safe information is highlighted. The media subjects can be divided in to five types: 12.5% or 12 reports belong to problem showing-type coverage and are reproduced 13 times; 35.4% or 34 reports are government treatment-type coverage and are reproduced 38 times; 22.9% or 22 reports are media criticism-type coverage, are reproduced 21 times; 19.8% or 19 reports are Wal-Mart response-type coverage, are reproduced 19 times; 9.4% or 9 reports are to exculpate or to pressure the government-type coverage and are reproduced 10 times. Overall, the most heavily reported involve government treatment-type coverage which is related to the government’s attention and industrial and commercial or the police’s punishments. Just as well the problem showing-type coverage and Wal-Mart response-type coverage are. Nevertheless, the most important measure for Wal-Mart to apologize, change the manager and pay compensation is the high attention of the government and punish according to law.

From the media result, it should be definite that problem showing-type reflects the fact of Wal-Mart problem and government treatment-type coverage reflexes the government attention and regulation and also set up the responsible image of the government. Only 22.9% coverage leads audience understands on Wal-Mart event in correct direction. Such as “Wal-Mart has deal with more than 500 consumer claims (0.5% of the total)”, “Wal-Mart in self-checking finds results are much more serious than expect”, “there is no rule on production date in Wal-Mart and the origin of preserved egg is exposed fraud”, “Foreign media misrepresent Wal-Mart event and report Wal-Mart suffer from political pressure” and “Foreign media cover that Wal-Mart is punished in China and China always like making a fuss”. These reports are

Table 5: Subject and the attribution of responsibility of media discourse-power

Subject of discourse-power	Representing the fact and revealing the problem		Absolving the responsibility for Wal-Mart	
	No.	%	No.	%
Journalist	52	54.7	2	2.1
Consumer	5	5.3	1	1.1
Industrial and commercial administration	30	31.6		
Public security department	3	3.2		
Government official	14	14.7	3	3.2
Wal-Mart employee	3	3.2	1	1.1
Wal-Mart management	17	17.9	6	6.3
Authorities or experts	4	4.2	3	3.2
Insiders	1	1.1	4	4.2
Foreign media			2	2.1

the model for Chinese media, but their reprint rate is very low. Wal-Mart response-type coverage sets up the responsible image and receives compassion and forgiveness. However, consumers don't realize that it is much hard to get the compensation. Exculpate or to pressure the government-type coverage, such as "Organic poker event makes 10 Wal-Mart stores closed or loss of 45 million", attempt to find the excuse for the mistake of Wal-Mart. Is the loss of Wal-Mart much important than the health of Chinese consumers? Some reports pressure Chongqing government, such as "the relation between Wal-Mart and Chongqing is worse" and "Chongqing: why do you keep a stern face for Wal-Mart?" Some reports explain for Wal-Mart, such as "Wal-Mart learn quickly from it mistake" and "performance pressure let Wal-Mart make mistake" 29.2% Wal-Mart response-type and Exculpate or to pressure the government-type coverage reflect the weak national interest standard and self-consciousness of China's media.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis takes the Chongqing Wal-Mart food safety event reported by Chinese media for example, make the text analysis on the media frame and subject discourse-power and find the fact that although Chinese media report this event according to the frame of "healthy and safety, commercial deceit and delinquency", 23.2% reports or comments reduce even absolve the responsibility for Wal-mart. Further analysis on the media agenda-setting finds that there are five agenda-settings in Chinese media 12.5% reports are presenting the questions, 35.4% are the processing patterns by the government, 22.9% are the comments, 19.8% are reporting the countermeasure of Wal-mart and 9.4% reports are absolving the responsibility or pressuring the government. In comparison with the United States and other western media which report this event with untruth, slander and attack by the topic of "Chinese government's crackdown and political revenge", the reflection of national interest and self-consciousness of Chinese media are obviously weak.

The theoretical innovation of this paper is to reveal the deficiency of national interest standard and self-consciousness of Chinese media and explain why Chinese media play the part of highlighting the local brand quality crisis or activating the local brand bias deliberately or accidentally. Recently, Chinese researches have made on the priming effect of Chinese media on the local brand food safety crisis and find that the food

safety reports do have the negative influence on Chinese consumers' national image perception (Wang *et al.*, 2010). Meanwhile, a few researches explore the media frame of American report on Chinese product problem and risk constructing strategy. But less research discusses the media frame of Chinese report on foreign brand negative event and standard consciousness study. This study takes Chongqing Wal-Mart food safety event for example, makes the text analysis and comparison on the media frame, standard consciousness and media subject of Chinese media and provides following conclusion: Facing the local brand bias and culture inferiority, Chinese media should not only take "supervision by public opinions, the truth of the matter and the right to know" as a kind of responsibility, but also actively construct the media theory and self-consciousness on the basis of setting up the national interest frame, cultivating Chinese culture confidence and ethnocentrism and controlling the local brand bias. It will play an important role in promoting the development and prosperity of socialist culture and accelerating to transform the way of economy development.

This study takes Chongqing Wal-Mart food safety event for example, makes the text analysis and comparison on the media frame, agenda setting, subject discourse power and media agenda, reveals some reasons of local brand bias to some extent and analyzes and explores the problem and disparity of Chinese media on national interest standard and self-consciousness. The standard consciousness and the influence on the audience's local brand bias recognition of Chinese media from following aspects: first is to compare Chinese media's reports on Chongqing Wal-Mart event with the reports on the foreign brand quality problem in CCTV 3.15 and to explore the different media frame in the situation whether there is the government's intervention. Second is to explore the difference, problem and origin of Chinese and foreign reports by comparing their media frame when they report Chinese product problem. The last is to study the influence of mass media on the audience's local/foreign brand preference when the media report the local/foreign brand quality crisis alternatively.

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