

ARTICLE

NEWS FRAMINGS OF O GLOBO REGARDING CHINESE SOCIETY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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ABSTRACT – This study aims to explore the news framing of Chinese society during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Brazilian press, focusing on the daily newspaper O Globo. Based on the theory of news framing and the interpretative package analytical method, the investigation systematically analyzed news texts related to Chinese society, published by the newspaper between January 2020 and January 2023, within the pandemic context. The research findings revealed that the 111 analyzed journalistic articles were primarily structured around five frames: “severe pandemic”, “draconian measures”, “victory propaganda”, “Zero-Covid crisis”, and “strict censorship”.

Keywords: News framing. Interpretative package. Chinese society. O Globo. COVID-19 pandemic.

ENQUADRAMENTOS NOTICIOSOS DO JORNAL O GLOBO SOBRE A SOCIEDADE CHINESA DURANTE A PANDEMIA DE COVID-19

RESUMO – O presente estudo visa explorar os enquadramentos noticiosos sobre a sociedade chinesa durante a pandemia de covid-19 na imprensa brasileira, com foco no jornal diário O Globo. Baseando-se na teoria de enquadramento noticioso e no método analítico de pacote interpretativo, a investigação desenvolveu uma análise sistematizada dos textos noticiosos referentes à sociedade chinesa, publicados pelo

jornal entre janeiro de 2020 e janeiro de 2023, no contexto pandêmico. Os resultados da pesquisa revelaram que as 111 matérias jornalísticas analisadas foram estruturadas principalmente em torno de cinco enquadramentos: “pandemia severa”, “medidas draconianas”, “propaganda da vitória”, “crise da ‘Covid zero’” e “censura rigorosa”.

Palavras-chaves: Enquadramento noticioso. Pacote interpretativo. Sociedade chinesa. O Globo. Pandemia de covid-19.

ENCUADRES NOTICIOSOS DEL PERIÓDICO O GLOBO SOBRE LA SOCIEDAD CHINA DURANTE LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19

RESUMEN – El presente estudio tiene como objetivo explorar los encuadres noticiosos sobre la sociedad china durante la pandemia de covid-19 en la prensa brasileña, enfocándose en el periódico diario O Globo. Basándose en la teoría del encuadre noticioso y en el método analítico del paquete interpretativo, la investigación desarrolló un análisis sistemático de los textos noticiosos relativos a la sociedad china, publicados por el periódico entre enero de 2020 y enero de 2023, en el contexto pandémico. Los resultados del estudio revelaron que los 111 artículos periodísticos analizados estaban estructurados principalmente en torno a cinco encuadres: “pandemia severa”, “medidas draconianas”, “propaganda de la victoria”, “crisis del Covid cero” y “censura rigurosa”.

Palabras clave: Encuadre noticioso. Paquete interpretativo. Sociedad china. O Globo. Pandemia de covid-19.

1 Introduction

The economic growth since the 1990s has transformed China into today's second-largest global economy. The country's international influence has expanded significantly in parallel with its global economic expansion (Kastner & Pearson, 2021, p. 19). China's geopolitical impact has already transcended its regional boundaries, radiating on a global scale (Wang et al., 2016). Consequently, China's rise can be considered a key element in shaping a new world order, as the country is not part of the traditional systemic center (Pennaforte et al., 2020).

Since 2009, China has consolidated its position as Brazil's largest trading partner. According to data from the Brazilian government (www.gov.br/pt-br), in 2023, bilateral trade reached a historic high of USD 157 billion, with an unprecedented surplus for Brazil of USD 51 billion. However, despite the favorable economic relationship, ideological differences occasionally cause friction. An example of this was the stance of former Foreign Minister of the

Bolsonaro government, Ernesto Araújo, who asserted that China sought not only trade relations but also the export of its social model, which he described as contrary to Western freedom and democracy (Cruz, 2023, p. 14). Nonetheless, Sino-Brazilian relations generally remain robust. The two nations also cooperate within BRICS, the G-20, the United Nations, and various other international forums.

Socially, however, Brazilians' understanding of Chinese society still lacks depth and comprehensiveness (Gaiotto, 2019; Chen, 2020). It is observed that Brazilian perceptions of China are largely shaped by the media, especially newspapers and television news (Freita, 2014). In this context, the media plays a crucial role in disseminating knowledge about the country and shaping China's image in Brazil. Over time, the Brazilian press has shown a growing interest in China (Yan, 2017).

During the covid-19 pandemic, the Brazilian media closely followed developments in China, reporting on various notable events within Chinese society from its own perspective. China was the first country to detect the outbreak of the new coronavirus and the last to revoke its health policies aimed at eliminating the virus domestically. From the start of the virus spread in Wuhan in December 2019 to the end of 2022, when the Chinese government decided to relax the "zero-covid" policy, the country endured nearly three years of battling this public health crisis. The covid-19 pandemic brought not only biomedical and epidemiological consequences but also social, economic, political, cultural, and historical transformations (Marques et al., 2020, p. 241). Thus, it is impossible to ignore this discursive event when studying journalistic coverage on China. Given the vast cultural and political disparity between Brazil and China, there are still special meanings to investigate about how the Brazilian media covered Chinese society – based on the hypothesis that the Brazilian press approached China differently than the Chinese media did its own country.

Currently, there is a gap in research regarding the Brazilian media's coverage of Chinese society during the pandemic. There are studies that are limited to analyzing the discursive construction of China by Brazilian newspapers only at the start of the pandemic, or focus on exploring China's image through the lens of the production and dissemination of fake news (Nunes, 2022; Sacramento et al., 2020; Urbano et al., 2020). Until now, no comprehensive studies have investigated the coverage of Chinese society over the three years of the

pandemic. Furthermore, in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches, neither framing theory nor the interpretative package method has been applied in analyzing the coverage of this specific topic. Our article proposes using materials from O Globo as a starting point for an in-depth analysis of the framings and characteristics of coverage related to Chinese society during the pandemic.

2 News framing and interpretative package

O Globo approached Chinese society during the pandemic from a multifaceted perspective, covering a range of topics. Although these topics were interconnected to a certain extent, the points of interest were dispersed. How can these distinct themes be synthesized to analyze the coverage of Chinese society during this specific period? News framing theory provided a theoretical perspective for our analysis.

The notion of framing was initially proposed by Gregory Bateson (1955), who conceived of it as a way in which individuals cognize reality. According to this anthropologist, frames operate as a form of metacommunication, allowing the actors involved in the communicative process to understand what is happening in a given situation from a familiar context. Erving Goffman introduced the concept of framing into the field of sociology. Goffman (1974) asserted that frames are socially constructed interpretative frameworks that allow people to assign meanings and explanations to events and social situations. In the 1980s, the concept of framing began to impact mass communication studies, particularly through the theoretical contributions of Todd Gitlin (1980), Robert Entman (1993), and William Gamson (1992), among other scholars in this field.

Gamson's (1992) definition stood out as the most inspirational for this research. In the article *Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality*, Gamson (1992) argued that news framing has meanings on two levels. The first is the "boundary", which involves determining the scope of news reports, primarily by using selection strategies to choose which facts or attributes to emphasize. The second considers framing as a latent structure, which builds and completes meanings using symbols and the reorganization of news elements according to a particular logic. In sum, the selection of topics to report on and the use of symbols as a means of representation are both framing

practices that function as a “central organizing idea” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3).

The interpretative package approach developed by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) is considered one of the most promising methods among various framing analysis techniques, as it emphasizes the congruence between analytical methods and theories related to discursive construction (Pan, 2006). The concept of the “interpretative package” refers to a system of meanings used in discussing a specific topic within the public sphere (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The authors divide the elements of the “interpretative package” into two parts: framing devices and reasoning devices. Framing devices, which aid in understanding and discussing the topic, include: 1) metaphors; 2) examples or references; 3) slogans or topoi; 4) descriptions or representations; and 5) visual images. Reasoning devices, which provide reasoning for the issue or general position, encompass: 6) origins or causes; 7) consequences or possible effects; and 8) appeals to principles.

The interpretative package analysis follows a general logic involving two steps: induction and deduction. First, during the induction phase, a systematic reading of news texts is conducted to induce frames. Then, in the deduction phase, framing and reasoning devices are used to analyze and interpret the frames. Thus, by exploring journalistic rhetoric and narrative, it is possible to reveal the mechanisms of framing construction (Gamson, 1988).

3 Framings on China and the covid-19 pandemic

To elucidate the framings associated with China in media coverage, we reviewed literature addressing Chinese representation in the mainstream media across various countries. In the media outlets of countries such as the United States, Germany, France, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, and Brazil, three primary news framings prevail: the ideological frame (Cheng, 2021; Huang, 2021; Yan, 2017), the national interest frame (Xu, 2022; Yan, 2017), and the cultural values frame (Liu, 2021; Xu, 2022; Yan, 2017). These studies reveal the persistence of Orientalism as a discursive basis in Brazilian media (Nunes, 2022; Urbano et al., 2020). In terms of content, these approaches create a dual image of China, oscillating between positive representations – such as an economic power and a responsible global actor (Huang, 2021; He, 2020; Yan, 2017; Wu, 2014) – and negative

depictions associated with authoritarianism, lack of democracy, and environmental degradation (He, 2020; Li & Liu, 2021; Yan, 2017).

Concerning pandemic framings, although there is limited academic production on the topic, a comparison can be made between Chinese and Brazilian media framings. Botelho, Oliveira, and Gomes (2020, p. 10) examined the narratives of the Brazilian television news program *Jornal Nacional*, identifying eight interpretative packages: “coronavirus and statistics in Brazil”, “treatment possibilities, vaccines, and testing”, “controversies involving Bolsonaro and his administration”, “coronavirus and social isolation measures”, “covid-19 and international coverage”, “media self-referentiality”, “covid-19 and humanization stories” and “covid-19 and economic impacts”. Wang (2022, p. 18), investigating the framings in the Chinese magazine *China Newsweek*, outlined four interpretative packages: “knowledge dissemination”, “epidemic progress”, “epidemic impact” and “scientific research achievements”. The divergences in framing reveal differing focal points: while Brazilian media emphasize issues and crises, Chinese media prioritize promoting outcomes and achievements.

4 Data collection in O Globo

To establish the empirical study's corpus, we utilized *O Globo*, a national daily newspaper in Brazil, which has been one of the country's most widely read publications. According to figures audited by the Instituto Verificador de Comunicação (<https://ivcbrasil.org.br/>), *O Globo* led the ranking in total circulation (digital and print) among Brazilian media outlets in 2021 and 2022, with 373.138 subscribers in 2021 and 371.384 in 2022. The newspaper ranked second in this category in 2020 and 2023, with total circulation figures of 341.738 and 400.693, respectively. Moreover, between 2020 and 2023, *O Globo* was the only Brazilian and South American media outlet with the advantage of having an accredited correspondent on the Chinese continent¹.

During the data collection phase, we used “China and Chinese” as search terms for exploring the period from January 1, 2020, to January 31, 2023. The search was conducted through the newspaper's digitized archive (<https://oglobo.globo.com/acervo/>). Excluding materials with minimal relevance to China, the initial result registered 758 articles associated with the country. These articles covered China in various dimensions, including political, diplomatic,

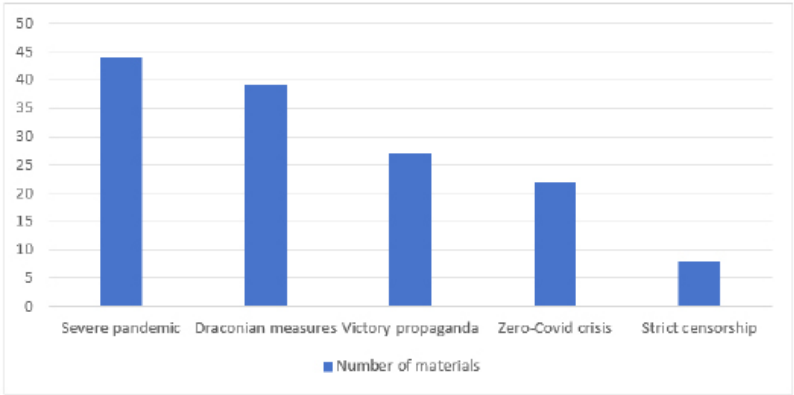
economic, social, and technological aspects, addressing topics that ranged from the pandemic to 5G, geopolitics, and the Xinjiang situation. In this context, a more specific selection was required to focus solely on articles related to Chinese society under the impact of covid-19. This refinement process ultimately resulted in a corpus of 111 articles.

5 News framings of O Globo during the pandemic period

Through analyzing the corpus, it is possible to outline, from a macro perspective, the pandemic's trajectory in China over approximately three years. Initially, the new coronavirus outbreak was detected in Wuhan at the end of 2019 and early 2020, spreading rapidly throughout the city and various regions of China. The local government implemented lockdowns and mobility restrictions to contain the virus. Under central government coordination, a national mobilization succeeded in controlling the spread, culminating in the gradual restoration of social order and a declaration of victory over the calamity in the second half of 2020. However, as time passed, new variants of the virus emerged, including Delta and Omicron, which posed new challenges to pandemic control, leading to intermittent outbreaks across the country. Nonetheless, the Chinese government persisted in a "zero-covid" policy, supported by extensive testing, tracking, isolation, and vaccination. Although this policy helped preserve lives for over a year, the prolonged lockdown and its resulting issues generated significant public discontent, that manifested in protests in late 2022. In response, the Chinese government eventually abandoned this strategy and adopted an approach to coexist with the virus.

Based on the primary themes apparent in the titles and text of each article in the corpus, we identified, from a macrostructural perspective, five high-level frames that refer to the overarching direction of the news texts (Zang, 1999). These five frames are: "severe pandemic", "draconian measures", "victory propaganda", "zero-covid crisis" and "strict censorship". It is worth noting that, due to content overlapping, a single article might involve one or more frames. As shown in graph 1, the number of articles associated with each frame is indicated in the corpus.

Graph 1
Number of materials






The numbers are, respectively, 44, 39, 27, 22 and 8. The “severe pandemic” frame is the most relevant, due to the constancy of the situation, and the “strict censorship” frame is the least expressive. However, in turn, the last one demonstrated the newspaper’s own view of the events.

5.1 Severe pandemic

The “severe pandemic” frame emerged primarily during the early phase of the epidemic in 2020 and resurfaced with the rise of the Delta and Omicron variants in 2022. This frame intensified significantly in late 2022 and early 2023 following the relaxation of restrictive measures. It narrates the challenges China faced due to the pandemic’s severity, as summarized in the following table.

Table 1
“Severe pandemic” frame

Frame	Severe pandemic
Metaphor	<div>1. Epidemic epicenter; 2. Wave of infections; 3. Explosion of cases; 4. Ghost town under quarantine; 5. A scourge spreading across the planet; 6. Emergence of new variants as a “bucket of cold water” on hopes of eradicating the virus.</div>
Example	<div>1. Death toll from new virus surpassing SARS in China; 2. The new pathogen exceeding MERS in victims; 3. In April 2022, Shanghai experiencing the worst covid-19 outbreak since the pandemic’s onset in December 2019; 4. At the end of 2022 and early 2023, China recording nearly 60.000 covid deaths in a single month.</div>
Slogan	<div>1. Unprecedented challenge; 2. Grave situation; 3. Severe and imminent public health threat.</div>
Representation	<div>1. Brazilians requested government assistance to leave China, prompting Brazil to dispatch planes to repatriate its citizens from Wuhan; 2. Multinational corporations limited business travel to China; 3. Lunar New Year events were canceled in Beijing; 4. Hospitals were overcrowded, necessitating an increase in bed capacity; 5. Hong Kong ran out of available coffins.</div>
Framing devices	<div><div>1.</div></div> <div><div>2.</div></div> <div><div>3. <small>Lotação. Enfermeira chinesa trata paciente com Covid em hospital de Tianjin</small></div></div>

Reasoning devices	Cause	1. Unknown virus; 2. Initial delay in prevention and control; 3. Highly contagious variants like Delta and Omicron; 4. Low vaccination rates, especially among the elderly.
	Effect	1. Fear among Chinese spreading faster than the virus; 2. Record deaths and underreporting of confirmed cases; 3. Chinese economy contracting by 6.8% in the first quarter of 2020 – the steepest decline since 1992 – and the country later abandoning its annual growth target; 4. Chinese government adopting draconian measures to combat the virus.
	Appeal to principle	1. Markets with high human-animal interaction in unsanitary conditions should not exist, especially given the advancements in epidemiology; 2. Brazil should begin prioritizing public health.

Source: O Globo

The new coronavirus was initially detected in Wuhan, quickly leading to a wave of infections and an explosion of confirmed cases, turning the city into the epidemic's epicenter. The rhetoric used by the newspaper directly reflected the severity of the situation. The newspaper exemplified the gravity by referencing the SARS² and MERS³ epidemics, whose death toll was successively surpassed by the new virus. Regarding catchphrases, O Globo characterized the epidemic as an "unprecedented challenge" for Chinese society, referring to descriptions such as President Xi Jinping's term "grave situation" and a British authority's label of the crisis as a "severe and imminent public health threat".⁴ The newspaper conveyed this framing through reports from 2020, which indirectly depicted the epidemic's impact, including 1) Brazilians requesting government assistance to leave China, leading Brazil to dispatch planes to repatriate them from Wuhan⁵; 2) multinational corporations imposing travel restrictions to China⁶; and 3) the cancellation of Lunar New Year events in Beijing⁷.

Although stringent measures contained the epidemic in China initially, the emergence of variants led to recurring outbreaks in various regions, particularly in 2022, when O Globo reported on Shanghai's "worst outbreak since December 2019"⁸ and the uncontrolled situation in Hong Kong, where a shortage of coffins was noted⁹. From December 2022 to January 2023, due to the drastic shift in Chinese health policies, O Globo cited government-reported figures indicating 60.000 deaths in one month¹⁰, underscoring the severe impact of covid-19 in the country. Visually, images of deserted streets¹¹, patients urgently transferred to isolation hospitals¹², and overcrowded hospitals¹³ symbolized Chinese society's struggle with




the pandemic.

Regarding reasoning devices, the newspaper pointed out that Chinese society was severely impacted by the pandemic due to both objective factors, such as the emergence of an unknown virus and subsequently highly contagious variants, and human factors, including the government's delayed action at the outset, insufficient vaccination, especially among the elderly, and abrupt policy changes. As reported by O Globo, the effects of the outbreak were multifaceted, encompassing widespread infections and fatalities, stringent measures implemented by Chinese authorities, and a tremendous impact on China's economy. Within this frame, editorials in the newspaper advocated, for instance, for the closure of unsanitary live animal markets¹⁴ and for the Brazilian government to proactively protect public health against the new virus¹⁵.

5.2 Draconian measures

Before the revocation of the “zero-covid” policy at the end of 2022, the “draconian measures” frame was coordinated with the “severe pandemic” frame, explained by a cause-and-effect relationship. This frame emphasized the strict health measures implemented by the Chinese government amid the pandemic, as shown in the following table.

Table 2
“Draconian measures” frame

Frame	Draconian measures
Metaphor	1. China's decisive battle against covid-19; 2. A people's war against the covid-19 demon; 3. Shanghai appearslike a war-torn city, albeit without weapons; 4. Freedom resembling a lottery prize depending on the luck of avoiding someone who tested positive; 5. The campaign against the coronavirus described it as a long-distance race.
Example	1. 76-day lockdown in Wuhan; 2. China closing its borders to foreigners; 3. Chinese immigration services halting the issuance of passports and other travel documents; 4. China punishing local officials for rising cases; 5. Lockdowns in Shenzhen and Shanghai.
Slogan	1. War on the virus; 2. Draconian containment strategy; 3. Everything under control; 4. Zero tolerance; 5. “Zero-covid”.
Framing devices	1. Endless testing, strict isolation of cases, exhaustive tracking, and quarantine; 2. China as the last country to maintain a “zero-covid” policy; 3. Only two local transmissions were enough for the Chinese capital to resume strict vigilance, including mass testing in the affected area, temperature checks, and visitor restrictions; 4. By defining pandemic control as a war, the government treated those deviating from orders as enemies of the state; 5. A state of alert becoming a way of life; 6. While the external feeling was that the worst was over, the climate in China remained akin to a wartime scenario; 7. The actions of local authorities became extreme, even separating infected parents from their children, including infants.
Image	<div><div></div><div></div></div> <div></div>

Reasoning devices	Cause	<div>1. China's choice was simple: prioritize health above all because one of the Communist Party's core values is social order;</div> <div>2. For Chinese authorities, this was a lesser risk compared to relaxing and living under the threat of a massive outbreak;</div> <div>3. Three main reasons were cited for dismissing an opening: the high risk of new virus variants, unequal healthcare systems across regions, and the vulnerability of the largely unvaccinated elderly population;</div> <div>4. The authoritarian nature of the Chinese system allowed for restrictions that would be impossible in democracies;</div> <div>5. Mobilization was also driven by collective spirit and volunteer work.</div>
	Effect	<div>1. By October 2020, daily coronavirus infections had dramatically decreased in China, and much of the country appeared to have recovered from the worst;</div> <div>2. 2021 became the year China achieved its highest economic growth in the past decade;</div> <div>3. By April 2022, the country preserved its healthcare system and saved lives, going nearly a year without recording a single covid-related death;</div> <div>4. Many endured disastrous economic and social conditions during isolation;</div> <div>5. In May 2022, data showed that this unyielding battle was harming Chinese growth, international investments, and spurring rare public expressions of discontent.</div>
	Appeal to principle	<div>1. If health was a priority for most governments at the time, it was worth examining the measures implemented without dismissing them just because they were applied by an authoritarian regime;</div> <div>2. China should prioritize vaccinating its population;</div> <div>3. China needed to find a balance to exit "zero-covid".</div>

Source: O Globo

Given the severity of the crisis, China's central government led local authorities to adopt a series of extremely strict health policies, waging an intensive battle against the virus. In this context, the newspaper frequently reproduced metaphors popularized within Chinese society to highlight the rigor of the adopted measures. These metaphors included comparing the pandemic to a battle, portraying Shanghai under strict control as a weaponless war zone¹⁶, or likening freedom during this time to a lottery prize¹⁷. In constructing this frame, the newspaper referenced imposed quarantines in cities like Wuhan, Shenzhen, and Shanghai, each with populations exceeding ten million, and other measures demonstrating the intensity of the implemented policies: from prohibiting foreigners from entering China and preventing Chinese citizens from leaving, to sanctioning government officials deemed negligent in disease prevention and control¹⁸. The frame's most prominent slogans were "war on the virus" and "zero-covid" or "zero tolerance". In addition to explicitly stating that China was the last country to uphold a "Zero-Covid" policy, O

Globo also alluded to the strictness of these measures in an indirect manner. These included mentions of heightened vigilance triggered by a minimal number of confirmed cases¹⁹, the equation of disobedience with national betrayal²⁰, and the compulsory separation of parents and children during isolation periods²¹. The images associated with this frame primarily consisted of large-scale testing²² and cities under quarantine in China²³. Additionally, the image of a Brazilian model confined to her residence in Shanghai during lockdown²⁴ may have elicited empathy among Brazilian readers regarding this frame.

In terms of reasoning devices, O Globo analyzed the underlying reasons for China's strict measures. Several factors were argued as motivations for such policies. First, the Communist Party of China (CPC) values social order highly, leading it to favor strict measures over more open policies due to the perceived lower risk associated with control²⁵. Second, regional disparities in China's healthcare system were considered relevant²⁶. Furthermore, the authoritarian regime itself facilitated implementing control measures over the population²⁷, and the CCP treated pandemic control as a criterion for evaluating cadre performance, resulting in nationwide vigilance²⁸.



The newspaper acknowledged the positive effects of China's measures, including rapid containment of the pandemic²⁹, lives saved, and economic support³⁰. However, it also noted that during lockdowns, some citizens faced subsistence challenges, and excessive measures led to economic setbacks and public dissatisfaction³¹.

In terms of appeals to principles, O Globo presented two distinct viewpoints. On the one hand, early in the pandemic, there was an appeal to learn from China's rapid containment measures³². On the other hand, in later editorials, amid the ongoing pandemic, the newspaper advocated for increased vaccination and a balance between control and normalization³³ to prevent the world from paying an excessive price for China's extreme strategy³⁴.

5.3 Victory propaganda

The "victory propaganda" frame, referring to the use of pandemic containment success as Chinese propaganda, emerged after the rapid control of the first epidemiological wave in Wuhan and across China in 2020. The following table illustrates the interpretative package for this frame.

Table 3
“Victory propaganda” frame

Frame	Victory propaganda
Metaphor	1. Wuhan becoming a monument to victory; 2. Shanghai as a showcase of China's success in fighting the pandemic.
Example	1. China began sending expert authorities to other nations after seeing a significant drop in cases within its territory; 2. The celebration of victory over the pandemic reached epic proportions in a 70.000-square-meter exhibit on the outskirts of Wuhan.
Slogan	1. Success of China's action against the pandemic; 2. Government trophy in the fight against the virus; 3. Regime superiority.
Representation	1. President Xi's government sought to capitalize on its success in pandemic control, transforming it into a soft power tool by offering technical and financial aid to various countries; 2. Public health became a diplomatic priority to demonstrate to the world the superiority of the Chinese system in virus containment; 3. The successful virus containment became a source of patriotism among the Chinese and a means to project China internationally as a model of efficiency in competition with the West.
Framing devices	
Image	<div><div></div><div></div></div> <div><div>1.</div><div>2.</div></div>
Cause	1. Success was a source of national pride; 2. China aimed to reshape the unfavorable image from the crisis's initial stages; 3. China intended to project itself internationally as a model of efficiency in competition with the West; 4. The country sought to demonstrate the superiority of the Chinese system in virus containment.
Reasoning devices	
Effect	1. Created a trap where any retreat would mean political defeat; 2. Fear arose that the victory celebration might come at the cost of concealing the true extent of the damages.
Appeal to principle	1. Avoid the victory trap; 2. China should portray the real pandemic situation.

Source: O Globo

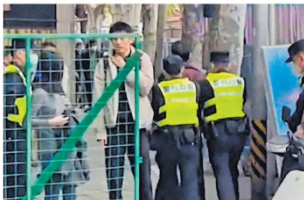

In this context, the newspaper highlighted that cities like Wuhan and Shanghai served as symbols and showcases of China's success in combating the epidemic³⁵. The government's propaganda was evident in the deployment of medical teams, the provision of protective materials, the exportation of vaccines to needy countries, and the establishment of exhibitions showcasing the epidemic fight. The slogans of this frame echoed the propaganda China promoted to highlight its pandemic victory and the superiority of its regime. The newspaper revealed that China's propaganda apparatus praised the "zero-covid" strategy as proof of the superiority of the CPC leadership and President Xi, turning it into a soft power instrument³⁶. Visually, images published by the newspaper included the exportation of protective equipment to other countries³⁷ and the portrayal of the Chinese president as commander in the victory exhibition³⁸.

In terms of reasoning devices, O Globo observed that, in addition to fostering a sense of national pride, the motives behind such propaganda were primarily political. These included the intent to reverse the country's negative image during the initial phase of the epidemic³⁹, project China internationally as an efficient model in contrast to the West⁴⁰, and demonstrate the superiority of the Chinese system in virus containment. However, this approach of using victory in the epidemic fight as a propaganda focal point could produce adverse effects, such as the "victory trap"⁴¹, in which any backtrack in this strategy would be seen as a political defeat⁴². Additionally, there were concerns that the victory narrative might overshadow the true extent of the pandemic's damages⁴³. Within this framework, there was a moral appeal to avoid the victory trap and to accurately convey China's epidemiological situation.

5.4 Crisis of "zero-covid" policy

The "zero-covid crisis" frame addressed the controversies surrounding the zero-covid policy. It emerged after the spread of the Omicron variant in 2022, which compelled the Chinese government to implement rigorous and prolonged prevention and control measures. These measures led to widespread societal discontent. The following table presents an analysis of this frame.

Table 4
“Zero-covid crisis” frame

Frame	Zero-covid crisis
Metaphor	1. Unyielding battle; 2. A soccer coach who only knows how to defend.
Example	1. Videos on Chinese social media showed people in protective suits clashing with residents of a neighborhood shouting, “Send supplies”. Numerous complaints surfaced on Weibo, China’s Twitter equivalent; 2. Worker protests at Foxconn in Zhengzhou; 3. Migrant workers protesting in Guangzhou after being confined for over three weeks, demanding food; 4. The largest protest occurred on Saturday in Shanghai, where 500 to 1.000 people, mostly young, gathered at a street intersection with candles and banners in memory of the tragedy victims; 5. Protests on the Tsinghua University campus in Beijing, where students were barred from leaving due to pandemic restrictions.
Slogan	1. We don’t want PCR tests, we want freedom; 2. Urumqi; 3. Rule of law and freedom of expression.
Framing devices	1. People banging pots and shouting from windows became routine in Shanghai’s recent weeks; 2. During protests, anger was expressed with shouts of “Urumqi”, the city where the tragedy occurred; 3. Many demonstrators held blank sheets of paper above their heads; 4. Protesters lighting candles, singing the national anthem, and chanting “We don’t want PCR tests, we want freedom”.
Image	<div></div> <div>1. 2.</div>
Cause	1. Logistical and communication failures by authorities; 2. Food and medicine shortages during quarantine; 3. Endless cycles of testing; 4. General fatigue and questioning of how long the strategy could continue.
Effect	1. Affected President Xi’s popularity; 2. Chinese government announced a drastic relaxation of covid restrictions.
Appeal to principle	1. Unvaccinated population, and reassess the health policy; 2. Moderation in response to protests.

Source: O Globo



The newspaper metaphorically compared China's zero-covid control to an unyielding battle, and in this context, columnist and correspondent Marcelo Ninio adopted a critical tone, likening this relentless approach to a soccer coach who only knows how to defend⁴⁴. Under this frame, the newspaper reported a series of events illustrating the controversy around this extreme policy, highlighting worker protests at the Foxconn factory in Zhengzhou, migrant protests in Guangzhou, a large-scale protest in Shanghai in memory of the Urumqi fire victims, and student protests at Tsinghua University⁴⁵⁴⁶. Slogans from various demonstrations were cited, such as "We don't want PCR tests, we want freedom" and "rule of law and freedom of expression"⁴⁷. Additionally, O Globo represented societal discontent with excessive measures and freedom restrictions through the banging of pots and shouting during lockdowns in Shanghai⁴⁸, as well as the display of blank sheets of paper as a form of protest⁴⁹. Related images depicted the public's resistance against control agents⁵⁰ and police detaining protesters⁵¹, reflecting the tense atmosphere within Chinese society.

O Globo identified several key causes for social discontent with the zero-covid policy starting in 2022. These included insufficient food and medicine provisions during quarantine, poor communication between the government and the public, relentless nucleic acid tests, widespread fatigue with the restrictive measures, and uncertainty about the policy's duration. The analysis suggested that dissatisfaction with zero-covid could affect public support for Xi's government⁵². Additionally, protests in various regions prompted an abrupt shift in health policy, leading the government to relax restrictions. Within this frame, analyzed texts from O Globo called for a reassessment of the zero-covid policy in China. The newspaper also cited a moral appeal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for Chinese authorities to exercise restraint when handling protesters⁵³.

5.5 Strict censorship

Unlike the previously mentioned frames, which emerged at different stages of the health crisis, the "strict censorship" frame remained constant throughout the pandemic coverage on China. This frame emphasized the rigid control widely present in Chinese society, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 5
“Strict censorship” frame

Frame	Strict censorship
Metaphor	1. Siege on the media; 2. Official censorship wall; 3. Opacity of information as the fog of war; 4. Any openings to expose inconvenient facts were quickly closed; 5. Blank sheets of paper.
Example	1. Li Jingliang was interrogated and forced to sign a statement labeling his warning about the new virus as an unfounded rumor. Many who questioned government actions had their WeChat accounts (China's version of WhatsApp) suspended; 2. In early April 2022, the independent portal Caixin revealed that several patients at a senior hospital in Shanghai had died after not receiving proper treatment due to the caregiving staff being removed for quarantine. The report only stayed online for an hour before being removed; 3. Posts on drug shortages and price manipulation during lockdowns were also removed, according to the censorship monitor GreatFire.org.
Slogan	1. Censorship; 2. Lack of transparency.
Representation	1. A journalist willing to take risks might cover the war in Ukraine on the ground, but not the quarantine in Shanghai; 2. Isolation led to a game of cat and mouse between censors and social media users striving to keep evidence of hardships circulating online; 3. There was no mention in state media of the wave of protests against the zero-covid policy.
Image	1.  2. 
Cause	1. In China, the press is predominantly state-controlled and operates under censorship; 2. Censorship aims to avoid tarnishing the country's image.
Effect	1. The country was criticized for lack of transparency by the World Health Organization (WHO); 2. Protests demanded freedom of expression.
Appeal to principle	1. China should report the true pandemic situation; 2. The people's voice needs to be heard.

Source: O Globo

O Globo adopted this frame, metaphorically comparing official censorship to a wall or media siege⁵⁴, while the opacity of pandemic-related information was likened to the fog of war⁵⁵. Notably, the use of blank sheets of paper during protests also served as a significant metaphor for the conditions faced by a society unable to express itself. Within this frame, the newspaper highlighted incidents such as Li Jingliang being forced to sign a statement dismissing his warning about the new virus as an unfounded rumor⁵⁶, the blocking of accounts for critical netizens, and the removal of a negative quarantine report from the Caixin website⁵⁷. “Censorship” and “lack of transparency” emerged as keywords. In terms of representation, the greater possibility of covering the war in Ukraine compared to the pandemic in Shanghai⁵⁸ was used sarcastically to illustrate the severity of censorship in China. Photos of protesters holding blank sheets⁵⁹ visually embodied this news frame.

In the analytical framework, O Globo identified that China’s lack of transparency stemmed from its predominantly state-controlled press operating under strict censorship⁶¹. Moreover, to protect the country’s image, China rarely discloses unfavorable news. The consequences of this situation became visible through the WHO’s criticisms of China’s transparency and in public demonstrations where citizens demanded freedom of expression⁶². This frame was founded on two central principles: the need for accurate and transparent pandemic coverage and the imperative that the people’s voice be heard.

6 Conclusion

O Globo closely monitored Chinese society from 2020 to 2023, observing the pandemic’s progression in the country and reporting nearly all significant milestones during this period. While the newspaper conveyed negative content about the Asian giant, it also acknowledged China’s efforts and positive outcomes in combating the pandemic. Through the extensive use of symbolic devices, O Globo applied metaphors, examples, slogans, representations, and images to construct narrative frames, resulting in comprehensive and specific framings. In this study, we discussed the following frames: “severe pandemic”, “draconian measures”, “victory propaganda”, “zero-covid crisis” and “strict censorship”. These frames are interrelated and, to some extent, causally linked. Over time, the first four frames emerged

successively, with the “draconian measures” frame, as a consequence, almost coinciding with the “severe pandemic” frame. The “strict censorship” frame, in contrast, remained consistent throughout the analyzed period. The “victory propaganda” and “strict censorship” frames reflected the perspective of the “other” and the values of democracy and freedom in the Brazilian media, sharply contrasting with the Chinese press, which is predominantly state-run and operates under official censorship, thus favoring praise over criticism.

Finally, studying Brazilian media coverage of China is essential for understanding China’s image in Brazil, given that the media is a vital source of information about China for the Brazilian public. However, due to the complexity of the national image topic, further research is required for a more comprehensive exploration of this issue. The limitation of this study lies in its focus solely on journalistic content analysis. Future research should therefore include audience reception analysis, which would offer deeper insights into the impact of these articles on Brazilian readers’ views of China, aiming to thoroughly study the images of China in Brazil from a journalistic perspective.

NOTES

- 1 This is correspondent Marcelo Ninio, who started working for O Globo in China in October 2020. See: Ninio, M. (2020, October 14). De Pequim, Marcelo Ninio estreia coluna no Globo. O Globo, p. 31.
- 2 O Globo. (2020, February 4). Mortes por novo vírus superam as da Sar na China. O Globo, p. 23.
- 3 Grillo, M. (2020, February 10). Repatriados: Grupo chega da China a base aérea para quarentena contra coronavírus. O Globo, p. 25.
- 4 O Globo. (2020, February 11). China tenta retomar a normalidade: País volta de feriado prolongado com ruas ainda vazias e recorde de mortos. O Globo, p. 23.
- 5 Souza, A. de, Gullino, D., & Macedo, I. (2020, February 6). Voos para Wuhan: Aviões partem para buscar brasileiros. O Globo, p. 30.

- 6 O Globo. (2020, January 29). Multinacionais restringem viagens de negócio à China. O Globo, p. 22.
- 7 O Globo. (2020, January 26). Presidente chinês diz que epidemia “está acelerando”. O Globo, p. 32.
- 8 O Globo. (2022, April 6). Xangai estende quarentena por covid a 26 milhões. O Globo, p. 20.
- 9 O Globo. (2022, March 17). Surto da Ômicron faz China aumentar número de leitos. O Globo, p. 18.
- 10 O Globo. (2023, January 15). China registra quase 60 mil mortes por covid em um mês. O Globo, p. 23.
- 11 O Globo. (2020, January 28). OMS aumenta alerta contra epidemia: País preparam retirada de cidadãos das zonas de risco de contágio. O Globo, p. 21.
- 12 Garcia, R. (2020, March 4). Ciência em conflito: Pesquisadores questionam informações da China sobre a epidemia do novo coronavírus. O Globo, p. 36.
- 13 O Globo. (2022, December 29). Na China, médicos trabalham infectados por demanda de covid. O Globo, p. 18.
- 14 Rónai, C. (2020, January 30). Mercado de horrores. O Globo, p. 6.
- 15 Veja 15.
- 16 Figueiredo, J. (2022, April 27). Xangai parece uma cidade em guerra, mas sem armas. O Globo, p. 20.
- 17 Ninio, M. (2022, May 7). Quando a quarentena bate à porta em Pequim. O Globo, p. 22.
- 18 O Globo. (2021, August 5). China pune funcionários locais por um aumento de casos de covid. O Globo, p. 20.
- 19 Ninio, M. (2020, December 22). Novos casos após 133 dias mudam vida em Pequim. O Globo, p. 26.
- 20 Ninio, M. (2022, May 19). China: surto de covid leva a questionamentos da ação oficial. O Globo, p. 18.

- 21 Veja 16.
- 22 O Globo. (2022, March 28). Xangai fará confinamento em duas fases contra covid. O Globo, p. 22.
- 23 Ninio, M. (2022, April 26). Chineses temem que quarentenas se espalhem. O Globo, p. 22.
- 24 Veja 16.
- 25 Ninio, M. (2021, November 30). Para a China, a prova de que política de “covid zero” compensa. O Globo, p. 20.
- 26 Veja 17.
- 27 Ninio, M. (2022, November 20). China muda política de “covid zero” para manter controle sob controle. O Globo, p. 24.
- 28 Ninio, M. (2022, April 8). A batalha decisiva da China contra a covid-19. O Globo, p. 18.
- 29 O Globo. (2020, October 13). Cidade chinesa testará 9,4 milhões de pessoas em 5 dias. O Globo, p. 20.
- 30 Martim, G. (2020, October 20). PIB da China cresce 4,9% no terceiro trimestre. O Globo, p. 30.
- 31 O Globo. (2022, May 5). Covid-19: Pequim fecha 15% do metrô e 158 rotas de ônibus. O Globo, p. 18.
- 32 Ninio, M. (2020, October 20). País já vive a realidade pós-covid. O Globo, p. 30.
- 33 Ninio, M. (2022, August 30). O mal-estar chinês. O Globo, p. 22.
- 34 O Globo. (2022, April 28). Mundo pagará caro pela insistência chinesa na estratégia “Covid zero”. O Globo, p. 2.
- 35 Ninio, M. (2022, April 8). A batalha decisiva da China contra a covid-19. O Globo, p. 18.
- 36 AFP. (2022, December 25). Mídia oficial chinesa esconde gravidade de surto de covid. O Globo, p. 20.
- 37 Duchíade, A. (2020, March 20). Cortina de fumaça diplomática

pode custar vidas. O Globo, p. 30.

- 38 Ninio, M. (2020, November 29). Entre a propaganda da vitória e a rebeldia da cena Rock. O Globo, p. 58.
- 39 Veja 25.
- 40 Ninio, M. (2022, April 8). A batalha decisiva da China contra a covid-19. O Globo, p. 18.
- 41 Ninio, M. (2021, August 27). Após domar surto de Delta, China questiona “covid zero”. O Globo, p. 32.
- 42 Ninio, M. (2022, November 20). China muda política de “covid zero” para manter controle sob controle. O Globo, p. 24.
- 43 O Globo. (2020, April 18). China revê números: Recontagem em Wuhan eleva em quase 40% mortes de covid-19 no país. O Globo, p. 13.
- 44 Ninio, M. (2022, November 29). Protestos tentam furar a retranca chinesa. O Globo, p. 18.
- 45 New York Times. (2022, November 25). Um teste para Xi: Em desafio a líder, protestos contra política de “covid zero” se espalham pela China. O Globo, p. 21.
- 46 O Globo. (2022, November 30). China reforça segurança e busca reduzir desagrado com “covid zero”. O Globo, p. 33.
- 47 O Globo. (2022, November 28). Cansaço da “covid zero”: atos antiquarentena se espalham na China após incêndio mortal. O Globo, p. 22.
- 48 Ninio, M. (2022, April 26). Chineses temem que quarentenas se espalhem. O Globo, p. 22.
- 49 Veja 47.
- 50 Ninio, M. (2022, April 16). Xangai, a versão pandêmica da “névoa da guerra”. O Globo, p. 16.
- 51 O Globo. (2022, November 29). Morde e sopra chinês: Governo aumenta policiamento onde houve atos, e algumas cidades suavizam medidas anti-covid. O Globo, p. 17.

- 52 New York Times. (2022, November 25). Um teste para Xi: Em desafio a líder, protestos contra política de “covid zero” se espalham pela China. O Globo, p. 21.
- 53 O Globo. (2022, November 29). Morde e sopra chinês: Governo aumenta policiamento onde houve atos, e algumas cidades suavizam medidas anti-covid. O Globo, p. 17.
- 54 Ninio, M. (2020, April 18). A revista chinesa que furou o cerco à mídia. O Globo, p. 16.
- 55 O Globo. (2022, November 29). Morde e sopra chinês: Governo aumenta policiamento onde houve atos, e algumas cidades suavizam medidas anti-covid. O Globo, p. 17.
- 56 O Globo. (2020, February 7). Morre o descobridor do novo vírus. O Globo, p. 31.
- 57 See 50.
- 58 See 50.
- 59 See 44.
- 60 See 47.
- 61 See 50.
- 62 O Globo. (2023, January 26). Mortes e casos graves de covid caem 70% na China. O Globo, p. 17.

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