

# **Wear Masks or not: the News Transmission of Chinese and American media**

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**Abstract:** Media play an initial part in such a special period. During pandemic time, what media do is to carry out health-related reports, including analysis the causes and social impact of virus, which will greatly affect how the public acquire and recognize health information. So what the paper focus on is to compare the differences about the contents media reported about masks between Chinese and American. What's more, I want to explore how media presented their political positions by analyzing the reports from different media.

**Keywords:** *Mask, new transmission, Chinese and American Media*

## **1. Introduction**

In 2020, the epidemic has posed a huge challenge to global public health and safety. One of the biggest challenges is to deal with the highly infectious respiratory tract of the new crown epidemic and the 14-day asymptomatic but transmittable hidden period. One of the main ways to control the rapid spread is calling for the public to wear masks in public places. However, two opposing attitudes towards masks in China and Western cultures resulted in different responses among public and the willingness to cooperation in wearing masks, which directly led to the extent of subsequent spread of the epidemic and the effective of epidemic prevention.

In fact, different cultures have different understandings of masks, and these differences are reflected in many aspects. China suffered from SARS broken out in 2003, so most of the Chinese do hold a strong recognition that masks benefit to the prevention control of the epidemic, for they believe that wearing masks is an effective means to self-protection. However, after the Revolutionary war, the general idea of contemporary society adhere to the faith that freedom is of the greatest importance. What Western cultures believe is that only when someone is sick, he or she needs to wear a mask in order to protect others. Therefore, if you wear a mask, you will be considered sick. For Westerners' prospective, the action of wearing masks is considered as a joke, they will discriminate against people who are wearing masks and even conduct personal and ethnic attacks towards them.

## **2. The difference between Chinese and American about the Reports Related to Masks**

I choose three America media: The Washington Post, The New York Times and Fox news, and one Chinese media, China Daily.

First of all, in terms of the number of posts, the number of reports in China began to rise from January 22. With the in-depth understanding of the epidemic and since governments acted quickly to control the spread of the epidemic, media at that time played a role as the microphone of governments, which was devoting to disseminating official data, clarifying rumors and passing on some necessary healthy knowledge to public. The number of reports associated with masks surged and reached to peak in January, and then gradually began to decrease with time went by.

Compared with Chinese, these three mainstream media in the United States did not report too much about masks in January, and this situation did not change until early March, when the epidemic broke out on a large scale. Unlike Chinese media, there were more and more reports related to masks with time went by. In April and July, the number reached to peak. This trend continued to September and then began to drop. During this period, epidemic still developed rapidly, and the situation was still not optimistic.

When it came to the contents, I found that the reports of mainstream Chinese media always held a

positive attitude towards masks. At the very beginning, what they focused on was to urge everyone to wear masks with the purpose to prevent the spread of asymptomatic infection for 14 days, as well as the shortage of mask materials and donation of masks. And then, the later period mainly focused on how to wear masks directly. And in order to cheer people up, there were also some heartwarming and funny stories about masks in China Daily.

At the very beginning, relevant reports on American mainstream media presented a relatively skeptical attitude, and then it turned to focus on China's shortage of masks and kept claiming that "scientists confirmed that there is no need to wear masks." But then (in the summer of 2020) they gradually changed their points and called for people to wear masks for it was very important in cut off the spread of virus. What's more, they began to reflect on the faults they had made and even launched condemnation of not wearing a mask.

In order to figure out the effects posts had made on public, I collected 10 hot remarks of the reports related to masks in different media. For most of Chinese citizens, they took the mandatory policy of wearing masks for granted, so there were little discussions about whether or not we should obey the regulations. In other words, they never doubted for the reasonableness of media, all they discussed were based in the belief that China Daily was the most reliable source of information. What they cared and reviewed varied with the content of the report, such as where the masks were needed, whether or not the quality of masks were qualified, how to wear masks in order to protect themselves and others and to condemn those who did not cooperate with the policy of wearing masks. There were also some posts about Western cultures, and Chinese citizens universally showed confused, angry and incomprehensible emotions.

On the contrary, American citizens have different attitudes towards wearing masks. In January, experts and the public did not reach a consensus on whether or not wearing masks was effective. Considering of the economic stability, some experts advised that it was better not to snap up masks, "There's been a run of surgical masks in the US because of the corona virus scare. You don't need them, physicians say. "The discussion, even argument, in the 10 top comments, were mainly about whether or not it was necessary to wearing masks: "The question is, are these surgical masks actually doing anything?" The crowd were not given the sufficient information about masks, which led to mass doubts. Even after several months, when the new crown virus has reached to a new stage and masks have been repeatedly confirmed as an effective measure of prevention by scientists, there were still crowds of people who believed that wearing masks was a interference of breathing freedom and what the government had down violated human rights. On July 6th, the hottest comment in post "The resurgence of the corona virus, particularly in the Sun Belt, has left some mayors of hotspot cities frustrated with their governors over their lack of control to require residents to wear masks or stay at home." was still "Masks won't stop the virus." The readers were still arguing about who makes the rules for wearing masks until August.

Then by comparing the frequency of key words, I came to a conclusion that Chinese media focused on information such as "mask", "epidemic", "case", "mask wearing", "diagnosed", "pneumonia", "new crown", "virus", and "prevention and control", while in American media, there were not such words like "prevention and control".

### **3. The Political Stands behind American Media**

To be objective, neutral is the core rule of the journalism. However, although almost all news media advertise themselves as non-partisan and exploring the truth without any political prejudice, current media shows a distinct partisan division. The media has become increasingly ideological and has gradually become a tool for party struggle.

I choose three media, the Washington Post, The New York Times and Fox news, which represent most of the voices about American. By analyzing the reports of these three mainstream media, we can come to a conclusion that even such news reports related to the severe epidemic have not been able to shake off the context of party struggle.

What we all know is that the Democratic Party has a more left-handed political philosophy and is more ideologically biased towards liberals. The Republican Party is more right, and ideologically more conservative. In the book *Left Turn: How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Mind*, Tim Groseclose (2011) points out that most of the American media journalists are born with "liberal bias", as they are well-educated and more inclined to liberalism, so Democratic Party is more favored by

them. This bias inevitably affects the political reports of the mainstream media and has fundamentally shaped American politics as well, which lead to a fact that American citizens are more left-handed than they should have been. Professor Grosskross also invented a set of detection systems (Political Quotient), which applies to measure the political tendency of the medias. Among the 20 mainstream media listed, except for Fox News and the Washington Post, the other 18 mainstream media have shown liberalism.

So after analyzing the posts related to masks on these media, I find that Fox news always support the government's claim, while the posts on the Washington Post, The New York Times consist of various positions of epidemic, the criticism of governments, people's attitudes (including the emotion of angry, confusing, scary) towards these disaster and so on, which is more colorful and people enable to know more aspects of epidemic.

#### 4. Discussion

Hofstede (1980) has put forward a conception of Culture Dimensions. He established five dimensions, each of which represents the basic psychological problems of a class of society, including power distance, collectivism and individualism, masculinity and femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term and short-term orientation. When it comes to the culture difference about wearing masks, the explanation of "collectivism and individualism", "power distance", "long-term orientation and short-term orientation" works.

The key point of the question is "collectivism and individualism". Collectivism and individualism refer to the degree of looseness or closeness among individuals among groups, and how to find the right position of their own cultures between these two poles is also a basic problem faced by all societies. Western society is more individualistic, while Eastern culture emphasizes collectivism. Set an example, even at the most severe stage of epidemic, when the mainstream media in the United States recognized the importance of masks and kept pointing out that masks should be taken seriously as vaccines, "Imagine if there's a vaccine that's available today that can reduce your risk of getting coronavirus by five times ... We should treat wearing masks the same way," @DrLeanaWen says as a model shows that over 410,000 Americans could die by January 1." however, the comment which was advocating individualism was the highly praised, "Let everyone decide for themselves. I prefer more Air more than less air." however, in China, the hottest comments about the posts which was calling for people to wear masks all showed supporting attitude to the policy or condemned the unethical behavior of not wearing masks, since Chinese citizens had reached to a consensus that "not wearing masks is a manifestation of social irresponsibility".

Compared with the East, the acceptance of the power distribution is lower in the West. The majority of comments on China Daily hoped that the government would adopt mandatory measures to ensure that everyone wore masks. In the US mainstream media, there were also a few comments which expressed worries on the severe situation and blames on the leadership of the Trump administration. But there were also some comments pointing out that the wearing masks was a kind of public norms that it was businesses' responsibility to persuade customers, not about the governments. On July 11, a report about airlines asked passengers to wear masks triggered a heated discussion. "Delta's CEO says the government should require passengers to wear masks on airplanes, but that he's not optimistic it will happen." And among all of the reviews, the hot comment is "Excuse me? Why does he expect the government to mandate masks — he's the CEO. But probably shouldn't be."

And finally, what the long-term orientation and the short-term orientation refer to how the culture tolerate the delay of meeting their basic needs, such as material, emotional, and social needs. On the posts of Chinese mainstream media, most of the people comprehend the measures governments had taken and were willing to keep wearing masks before the epidemic was over. With the development of epidemic, American people gradually realize wearing masks was not interfere their freedom. On the post of American media which was advocating for wearing masks "In 1918 and 1919, masks also stoked political division. Then, as now, medical authorities urged the wearing of masks to help slow the spread of disease. And then, as now, some people resisted." The hottest review was criticizing American people not wearing masks for the sake of short-term benefits, sacrificing long-term stability. "Can't understand why mask are so political but wearing seat belts are not. Why don't people realize that masks are only temporary."

And when it comes to the political positions behind American media, being exposed to a variety of different political opinions benefit the public to form more reasonable views and a more tolerant

attitude towards dissidents. Studies have shown that in American history, even in the era when partisan journalism was prevailing, the American public were quite active in political participation - as the choice of media increased, people were more likely to be exposed to those news which were consistent with their positions. Political news, to some extent, aroused public's attention to politics and make them enthusiastic participating in politics. However, the current polarization of political parties in the US media has resulted in one-side voice in the mainstream media news reports, which limits the possibility of public to get to know multiple viewpoints. And the mainstream media have also become tools of political struggle for parties, not only fail to enable the public to hear and understand in contact with a variety of information, but also make individuals hostile to media and their supporters which are contrary to their own political positions. Therefore, the polarization of the American people's political positions has intensified.

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