

# **A Visual Framing Analysis of COVID-19 Pandemic outbreak in India on Washington Post, India Today, and BBC**

**“Global Journalism in news photographs”**

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## **Abstract:**

Covid-19 pandemic has been a focusing point for media outlets especially after the negative economic and social consequences on the world and India especially, after reporting personal stories and disastrous photos about the pandemic as India has been struck hard by the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic daily cases and deaths peaked at more than 400000 cases and 4000 deaths respectively, almost four to five times higher than the peak number of cases and deaths in the first wave.

A review of literature shows that western media’s coverage has highlighted negative themes when covering the issues about the pandemic in India.

Visual framing research is lacking in existing research in comparison to textual analysis.

This study contributes to a general lack of visual framing research in scholarly literature.

In the context of a pandemic, the media’s role becomes even more significant, it can be an important source to identify early outbreaks and it can inform the public about non-pharmaceutical interventions to limit the spread of the disease and its impact as the pandemic swept through India at a pace that has staggered scientists and the authorities raced to contain the deadly virus outbreak.

This study explores the way in which American and Indian media visually represented the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in India. Also, it employs visual framing analysis to interpret and understand the visual frames and messages transmitted through Washington Post and India Today websites. Data were collected from both American and Indian outlets which was further explored through a content analysis.

The two media outlets were chosen because of their availability of multimedia.

The findings of this study will contribute to existing literature and theories regarding the visual portrayals of the pandemic outbreak in India in the global media.

### **Introduction:**

Since the end of the 20th century, the emergence and recurrence of infectious diseases in the world have increased significantly. At present, about 30 new diseases have been found, including the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and avian influenza in November 2003, SARS first broke out in Shunde, Guangdong Province on November 16, 2002. It spreads widely in six months and finally spreads to 32 countries and regions. According to the statistics released by the World Health Organization on August 15, 2003, as of August 7, 2013, there were 8422 cases of SARS in the world. The Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has also spread rapidly to other provinces and neighbor countries since the first case of pneumonia in Wuhan, China. In December 2019, the epidemic was mainly spread by small-scale exposure, and began to spread one month later (Chang Xinghua, et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has received broad public attention and has been subject to media discussion since the beginning of 2020. Previous research has demonstrated that framing could influence perception and behaviors of audience members in the mass media (Yi Kuang, et al., 2021).

Text and visual frames in health-related messages can influence the emotions and perceptions of viewers based on what is emphasized in these two frames, which can determine whether viewers will avoid or heed the message, visual frames can have a persuasive power because of the particular reactions they elicit, which in turn can influence message perceptions and behavior. Researchers have found that visual

frames used in a variety of contexts can elicit strong emotions from viewers, which in turn influences their attitudes and beliefs about particular issues. Some health-related messages that are persuasive in nature warn audiences of a risky behavior, then inform them of behaviors to adopt or change in order to avoid those risks (Witte & Allen, 2000). In the context of depression, those with symptoms who do not seek help are at risk for worsening symptoms; therefore, persuasive health messages warn viewers of this risk and encourage this behavior in order to avoid this risk. These types of messages may include text along with visuals that illustrate and supplement the text, but visuals do more than simply illustrate a concept because they are mentally processed faster than text (Sibley, 2012) and can suggest meanings that go beyond what is conveyed through text. Because health-related messages pertain to people, it is logical that photos of people are used in messages because of their ability to realistically depict individuals that relate to message viewers and their ability to demonstrate behaviors and outcomes (Jannah M. Sontag, 2017).

Media messages are sometimes designed to persuade audiences to change their behavior by changing viewers' perceptions about that particular behavior and its outcomes. Health communication is one area of communication that uses persuasion to influence behavior.

### **Literature review:**

#### **Media Coverage of Pandemic outbreak:**

In December 2019, the reports of patients with viral pneumonia in China surfaced. The origin was related to the Huanan Seafood's whole market. Researchers established that the disease has most likely originated from bats, mutated to infect humans, and transmitted by droplet routes among humans. Since the origin occurred in a wet market, the media criticized the Chinese for consuming live animals like bats, snakes, and dogs. Previously known as "Wuhan virus" and "China coronavirus", it was subsequently called 2019-nCoV, and then finally, on February 11, the World Health Organization (WHO) gave the disease an official name, "Covid-19". In spite of this, renowned world leaders ignorantly kept calling it "Chinese virus" which left concerning effects in international communities, Asian people were stigmatized and called by the name 'Corona' on the streets. Many reported incidents of such racial slurs which exaggerated already

existing prejudices among people. This happened in SARS 2003 in Toronto which caused the xenophobic reaction, and similarly, was repeated with the coronavirus pandemic. It had a significant impact (Ayesha Anwar, et al., 2020). During global pandemics, such as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), crisis communication is indispensable in dispelling fears, uncertainty, and unifying individuals worldwide in a collective fight against health threats. Inadequate crisis communication can bring dire personal and economic consequences. Mounting research shows that seemingly endless newsfeeds related to COVID-19 infection and death rates could considerably increase the risk of mental health problems. Unfortunately, media reports that include infodemics regarding the influence of COVID-19 on mental health may be a source of the adverse psychological effects on individuals. Owing partially to insufficient crisis communication practices, media and news organizations across the globe have played minimal roles in battling COVID-19 infodemics. Common refrains include raging QAnon conspiracies, a false and misleading “Chinese virus” narrative, and the use of disinfectants to “cure” COVID-19. With the potential to deteriorate mental health, infodemics fueled by a kaleidoscopic range of misinformation can be dangerous. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of research on how to improve crisis communication across media and news organization channels. This paper identifies ways that legacy media reports on COVID-19 and how social media-based infodemics can result in mental health concerns. media and news organizations can adopt to mitigate the negative influences of COVID-19 related news on mental health. Emphasizing the need for global media entities to forge a fact-based, person-centered, and collaborative response to COVID-19 reporting (Zhaohui Su, et al., 2021).

Individuals use media coverage as a cognitive shortcut, or heuristic, to make sense of complex risks, including infectious disease pandemics. The public “co-constructs” what they see, read, and hear from the media with information from personal experience to understand an issue. Also, two types of media framing exist: journalistic and reader. Journalistic framing describes familiar features and conventions in text that make it easy for the reader to take away the intended message of the producer (in this case the media outlet). Reader framing leaves the meaning and message up to the audience’s interpretation, including

how a reader formulates their own meaning based on their own personal experiences and values (Theresa Vellek, 2016).

While mis- and disinformation about health topics is neither new nor unique to the coronavirus pandemic, misinformation concerning COVID-19 has attracted a great deal of attention. Much of the initial research has focused on the types, origins, and spread (Brennen et al., 2020) as well as possible effects of false information and conspiracies around the coronavirus and the pandemic (Freeman et al., 2020). Academic, industry, and journalistic accounts have examined the propagation of COVID-19 disinformation by state actors (Swan, 2020), the prevalence of COVID-19 conspiracy theories (Freeman et al., 2020; Uscinski et al., 2020), the spread of misinformation on social media on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Hollowood and Mostrous, 2020), as well as interventions to counteract misinformation on social media (Pennycook et al., 2020) (J. Scott Brennen<sup>1</sup>, et al., 2020).

With the threat of a new infectious disease, media reporting reveals broader anxieties about the inability of technology and biomedicine to contain epidemics and about the ecological and economic threats of globalization (Washer, 2004). These recurrent worries resurface with each subsequent epidemic, allowing researchers to draw broader conclusions about media coverage of international health crises.

**This study fills a gap in research, as framing scholarship lacks studies on visual elements as related to framing. In this analysis of framing studies in mass media scholarship, text or textual elements were more often studied in framing scholarship than visuals.**

### **Theoretical Framework:**

#### **Visual framing:**

The concept of framing can be theorized and analyzed at both the macro- and micro-levels. On one hand, micro-level framing is relevant to how each individual cognitively processes a mass-mediated message. On the other hand, macro-level framing directly relates to how journalists construct and interpret the reality for their audiences (Scheufele, 1999).

The idea of framing first appeared in Goffman's seminal work in 1974, which postulated that the context and organization of messages

affect audiences' subsequent thoughts and actions about those messages (Goffman, E, 1974).

Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) and Entman (2003) explain framing as a process by which journalists present certain issues in the news with selected images and words to emphasize or promote a certain interpretation. Specifically, Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) note that the primary effects of framing include “cognitive responses that reveal audience issue interpretation,” and not attitude changes. These insights demonstrate that visual framing may have a great impact on the public's perception of natural disasters and government response to times of domestic or global crisis. Moreover, framing differs from agenda-setting theory in terms of their effects; agenda-setting occurs when exposure to news raises the accessibility of, or attention to an issue, whereas framing occurs when exposure makes certain elements (such as an image) applicable to an issue (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Thus, through visual framing, certain pictures or visuals can become linked to issues in society, such as natural disasters. The examination of photographs in this study may reveal how different visual elements online become connected to nations being covered and nations providing coverage. (Rosellen Downey et al., 2012).

### **Visual framing analysis is becoming a prominent form of visual analysis.**

Coleman (2010) defines visual framing as a form of framing analysis. She draws on Entman's (1993) well-known definition of framing to define visual framing as the “selection of one view, scene, or angle when making the image, cropping, editing or selecting it” (Coleman, 2010) that “selects some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” Importantly, visual material often occurs along with text. While the frames communicated in text and visuals do not always align, Coleman concludes that nonetheless, “it is never enough to study framing in one mode of communication and not the other” (Coleman, 2010). Instead, we must adopt a multimodal framing approach that acknowledges and investigates how text and visuals align, conflict, and/or are intertwined (J. Scott Brennen, Felix

M. Simon, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, 2020).

Visuals may not be as explicit and as accurate as text in being able to explain propositions such as cause-and-effect relationships, an attribute that may pose a challenge in the identification of frames because claims are less likely to be perceived in visual depictions of reality that stand alone (without text). Photographers and editors, however, may well feel they are creating a specific visual syntax through the editorial choices they make. Viewers mostly make sense of images with the help of contextual or other cues and might be less conscious of being presented with pre-selected information that omits certain visual cues (Lulu Rodriguez, Daniela V Dimitrova, 2011).

“Visuals” or “images” can be examined or evaluated for the frames they convey. Visuals, like text, can operate as framing devices insofar as they make use of various rhetorical tools—metaphors, depictions, symbols—that purport to capture the essence of an issue or event graphically. Through the application of these devices, salient idea becomes easier to understand and easier to remember than other ideas (Entman, 1991).

Visuals offer a number of different condensing symbols that suggest the core frame of the issue (Gamson, Stuart, 1992).

### **Visual framing: building reality with images.**

Researchers have demonstrated on numerous occasions that the media report on events and actors in a specific way that is selecting, emphasizing and giving precedence to certain attributes, which suggests that the content of the news is not free from ideological influence. Along these lines, Entman (1993) defines framing as the ‘selection and emphasis of certain aspects of a perceived reality’. This means that the media actively establish the frames of reference that the audience uses to interpret and discuss public events. But this does not occur only in text, frequently images are used to frame more efficiently, given that the iconic, symbolic and expressive weight of images is much greater than any written text, especially photographs. Messaris and Abraham (2001) believe that when there is a confrontation between a photograph and text, the image usually wins, since it usually seems nearer the truth. Given the iconic nature of photography, spectators tend to ignore the

possibility that the photograph can also be an artificial construction that emphasizes certain elements over others, by using multiple formal and rhetorical resources, such as the framing of the photograph, its selection, cropping, staging or digital retouching, all of which imbue the image with a symbolic and ideological character (Amores, J. J., et al., 2019).

The use of visual images has significant potential for the framing effort. Messaris and Abraham (2001) argue that the special qualities of visuals (i.e., indexicality, iconicity and syntactic implicitness) make the use of images particularly effective for 'framing and articulating ideological messages.' A similar point is made by Hansen (2011), who notes that immediacy, circulability, and ambiguity of visual images turn them into powerful tools for social construction of security issues.

These arguments are supported by Schwalbe and Dougherty (2015), who in their study on the use of images for framing the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war point out that not only visuals processed quicker than texts, but they also produce an immediate emotional response. Similarly, Parry (2010) in her study of visual framing of the 2003 Iraq war argues that visual frames have a higher degree of memorability, which makes their impact higher as compared with verbal ones (Makhortykh, M. & Sydorova, M., 2017).

Visual framing, through the use of metaphors, depictions, or symbols, involves the use of visuals to define problems and their causes, evaluate them from a moral standpoint, or provide solutions (Entman, 1993), or any combination of these, in order to capture the essence of an issue or event graphically (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). While some researchers testing visual frames define visual framing as message themes (Borah & Bulla, 2006; Patridge, 2005). Others have described visual frames as ideological positions held by the visuals used in the messages, where the visuals serve as ideological representations (Griffin, 2004; Pieterse, 1992; Rodriquez & Dimitrova, 2011). Rodriquez & Dimitrova's (2011) review of visual framing studies, identifies, and defines four different types of visual frames: denotative, stylistic-semiotic, connotative, and ideological representations. Denotative refers to the way in which visuals are framed to represent a particular theme, or area of focus, when covering an issue or event. Stylistic-semiotic refers to how photographic techniques, such as point-of-view, camera angle, proximity, color, shading, focal point, and detail, convey differ-

ent meanings. Connotative frames refer to using visuals as symbols to convey meanings commonly understood within cultural or social contexts or to represent abstract concepts (Jannah M. Sontag, 2017).

This type of visual framing fits into Rodriquez and Dimitrova's (2011) ideological and connotative representation categories of visual frames, as the depictions of models are used to make certain social ideas (i.e. about a specific health behavior) salient and represent abstract concepts (i.e. outcomes of an implied health behavior).

Because visuals are so effective and can be more powerful than text, the way in which they are framed makes a difference in emotional reactions or perceptions of the behaviors portrayed in those messages; these perceptions, in turn, influence whether viewers, will behaviorally heed the messages.

### **The Importance of Visual Frames:**

Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) and Entman (2003) explain framing as a process by which journalists present certain issues in the news with selected images and words to emphasize or promote a certain interpretation. Specifically, Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) note that the primary effects of framing include "cognitive responses that reveal audience issue interpretation," and not attitude changes. These insights demonstrate that visual framing may have a great impact on the public's perception of disasters and government response to times of domestic or global crisis. Framing occurs when exposure makes certain elements (such as an image) applicable to an issue (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Thus, through visual framing, certain pictures or visuals can become linked to issues in society (Rosellen Downey, Erika Johnson, and Bailey Brewer, 2012).

According to Hertog and McLeod (2001), frames derive power from their symbolic significance as they use recognizable myths and metaphors in the narratives. They also carry "excess meaning" as they activate some related ideas or thoughts, and they have an accepted shared meaning within a culture as they resonate with its members. Images are powerful framing tools because they are less intrusive than words and as such require less cognitive load. Therefore, peripheral rather than central processing may be activated, and audiences may be more likely to accept the visual frame without question. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that when there is conflict between textual and

visual framing, visual frames often win (Ferguson, 2001). This may be due not only to the fact that visuals such as photographs seem closer to reality, but also because they have the power to create stronger emotional and immediate cues. After all, historically, seeing preceded the use of language. Because of their high attraction value, images seen on a page, website, or screen often give the first impression of a story, and they are readily remembered (Rogers

and Thorson, 2000). Visuals are good framing devices because, according to Wischmann (1987), they are “capable of not only obscuring issues but [also] of overwhelming facts” (Lulu Rodriguez, Daniela V Dimitrova, 2011).

Visual frames can have a persuasive power because of the particular reactions they elicit, which in turn can influence message perceptions and behavior. Researchers have found that visual frames used in a variety of contexts can elicit strong emotions from viewers, which in turn influences their attitudes and beliefs about particular issues.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions:**

**H1:** The study suggested a significant difference between the three media visual coverage in terms of displaying people’s emotions.

**H2:** The study suggested a significant difference between Washington Post, India Today, and BBC in terms of adopting different visual frames. Among the four frames investigated in this study, several frames clearly differentiated between Washington Post, India Today, and BBC.

**Based on this discussion, the following research questions were asked:**

**RQ1:** At the stylistic level, what camera shot position did Washington Post, India Today, and BBC use in their visual coverage of the Covid-19 outbreak in India?

**RQ2:** At the denotative level, what were the dominant visual patterns of the Covid-19 outbreak in India in the three media’s visual coverage?

**RQ3:** At the denotative level, how did Washington Post, India Today, and BBC visually cover the facial expressions of Indian people after Covid-19 outbreak?

**RQ4:** At the denotative level, what news actors were presented in the

three media's visual coverage?

**RQ5:** At the connotative level, what were the dominant frames used by Washington Post, India Today, and BBC in their visual coverage of the Covid-19 outbreak in India?

### **Method:**

Quantitative visual content analysis was used in this study to examine picture

contents and dominant frames in the visual news coverage of the Covid-19 outbreak in India in Washington Post, India Today, and BBC.

Researchers described quantitative content analysis as a 'systematic, replicable and statistical method in which to describe the communication,' draw inferences about its meaning. Also, the central idea of Qualitative Content Analysis is to start from the methodological basis of Quantitative Content Analysis but to conceptualize the process of assigning categories to text passages as a qualitative-interpretive act, following content-analytical rules. In this respect, the Qualitative Content Analysis is a mixed methods approach: assignment of categories to text as qualitative step, working through many text passages and analysis of frequencies of categories as quantitative step (Mayring, Philipp, 2014).

In this study, the unit of analysis was **the news photographs** of the Covid-19 outbreak in India published on Washington Post, India Today, and BBC.

### **Rationale for sampling:**

Three news media outlets: Washington Post, India Today, and BBC, were investigated in this study.

The three news sources have their online publications of textual and visual news stories, the comparison between their online visual coverage is feasible.

For selecting visual news images from the three media outlets, the search engine on three official media websites was used.

BBC Online, formerly known as BBCi, is the BBC's online service. It is a large network of websites including such high-profile sites as BBC News and Sport, the on-demand video and radio services co-branded BBC iPlayer, the children's sites CBBC and CBeebies, and learning services such as Bitesize.

The Washington Post Company is a diversified media organization whose principal operations include newspaper and magazine publishing, broadcasting and cable television systems. The company also produces electronic information services, provides test preparation, education and career services, and offers online information covering federal and state legislative and regulatory activity.

Washingtonpost.com is a one-stop news, information and entertainment resource that helps users make sense of Washington, the web and the world. The site offers something for everyone interested in what is happening in Washington. Washingtonpost.com is published by the Washington Post Company's news media subsidiary, Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive.

The Group boasts a portfolio that includes The Most Renowned, Respected & Sought-after media vehicles that are leaders in their respective genres.

The India Today Group commenced its journey with the launch of a single magazine in 1975. Over the last 42 years, the group has grown to be one of India's most diversified media conglomerates with interests in hugely scalable businesses that encompasses of 21 magazines, 4 TV channels, 1 newspaper, multiple websites and mobile sites and applications across all leading platforms such as iPhone, iPad, Android, Windows. The India Today Group has also extended its business interests to e-commerce, books, retail, education and music.

This study examined photographs published from 1 April 2021 to the end of May 2021. Washington Post yielded 100 news photographs, India Today online website yielded 60 news photographs, and BBC yielded 55 news photographs. To document the selected news images, the screenshot of each news image was utilized. The screenshot also captured the closed caption under each news image. In total, all 215 retrieved news photographs were analyzed and coded.

### **Coding Scheme:**

In this study, six variables in total were coded. These variables were as follows:

Visual news image identification, visual image publication date, camera shot position, facial expressions, the presence of other news actors, and news frames.

The variable of 'news image identification' included three categories:

Washington Post, India Today, and BBC.

This variable indicated from which news outlet the visual images were retrieved. The variable 'publication date' represented each publication date of news images on their websites.

These two variables are about basic information of analyzed visual news images.

Camera shot position in this study included the following categories: close-up (featuring details of subjects or objects), medium shots (featuring the relationship between subjects or objects), long shot (featuring the broad context), dialogue shot (featuring the interaction between different subjects or objects), and this variable indicated the stylistic level of visual framing (stylistic conventions involved in visual representation).

The variable 'visual pattern of citizens' reflected how public are presented in three news outlets' visual coverage. It has four categories: people presented as individuals, a small group of 2-3, a medium group of 4-15, and a large group of 16 or more.

The variable 'citizens' facial expressions measured whether the selected visual news images suggested the emotional reactions of refugees. It includes four categories: not recognizable, positive (happy, grateful), negative (fearful, angry, or desperate), and mixed (both positive and negative facial expressions of people).

One variable represented the denotative levels of visual framing.

The variables 'presence of other news actors' accordingly identified news actors presented in visual news images and the image captions provided details on them.

These variables also represented the denotative levels of visual frames.

Finally, the study included the variable 'dominant frame.' It had five categories: human interest (focused on people and their lives and suffering), lose/gain (focused on the lost lives and the saved lives), law and control (focused on law enforcement), and politics (focused on politicians and celebrities). These categories were developed based on the previous literature.

#### **Validity and Reliability:**

Two trained coders each coded the same 10% of the entire sample

to test intercoder reliability. A total of 22 news pictures from the total 215 were randomly selected to check the levels of agreement between two independent coders in coding different variables. The coding focused on the visual content of the photographs.

The consultation with accompanying captions was also adopted because it

made coding more precise. All coded variables achieved more than 80% agreement. The final results of intercoder reliability were acceptable.

**A review of literature revealed that there are ranges of topics that the studies have performed analyzing visuals through media. Those studies are like the following:**

### **Results:**

As stated above, crosstabs and chi-square tests were used on all of the data. Descriptive statistics were also used to analyze the independent variables defining the sample (related to news outlet).

### **Stylistic level of visual framing:**

The first research question asked how Washington Post, India Today, and BBC used different camera positions in their visual coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in India.

The analysis indicated a significant difference between Washington Post, India Today, and BBC in terms of using different types of camera shots. For Washington Post, among 100 news photographs, 9 (9%) used close-up shots, 27 (27%) were medium shots, 40 (40%) used long shots, 24 (24%) used dialogue shots, by contrast, in 60 of India Today images, 14 (23.3%) used close-up shots, 17 (28.3%) were medium shots, 12 (20%) used long shots, 17 (28.3%) used dialogue shots. For BBC, among 55 news photographs, 3 (5.5%) used close-up shots, 26 (47.3%) were medium shots, 26 (47.3%) used long shots, and no dialogue shots (See Table 1).

Clearly, the most significant difference between the three media's visual representation was about the usage of close-ups, medium shots and long-shot camera positions.

**Table (1)**  
**Camera shot position in the news images**

Camera Shot- Position	Washington Post		India Today		BBC	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Close-up shot	9	9	14	23.3	3	5.5
Medium shot	27	27	17	28.3	26	47.3
Long shot	40	40	12	20	26	47.3
Dialogue	24	24	17	28.3	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

**Denotative level of visual framing:**

To investigate how Indian people were presented in the three media outlets' visual coverage, chi-square tests were run for each pertinent variable. The result illustrated a significant difference between Washington Post, India Today and BBC terms of presenting individuals in their visual coverage. In Washington Post international's visual coverage, a total of 32 (32%) of the photographs featured individual. In addition, 22 (22%) news images featured a small group (2-3). Meanwhile, 26 (26%) news images presented a medium-sized group of people (4-15) and 20 (20%) news photographs portrayed a large group of people (16 or more). In India Today coverage, 6 (10%) featured individuals, and 23 (38.3%) news images described a small group (2-3). In addition, 31 (51.7%) news images presented a medium group (4-15). In BBC coverage, 27 (49.1%) featured individuals, only 4 (7.3%) news images described a small group (2-3). In addition, 24 (43.6%) news images presented a medium group (4-15) (See Table 2).

**Table (2) Individual presence in the news images**

Individual presence	Washington Post		India Today		BBC	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Individual	32	32	6	10	27	49.1
Small group (2-3)	22	22	23	38.3	4	7.3
Medium group of (4-5)	26	26	31	51.7	24	43.6
Large group of 16+	20	20	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

For the facial expressions, this study asked how selected news media portrayed Indian people facial expressions in their visual news coverage. The results suggested a significant difference between the three media visual coverage in terms of displaying people emotions,  $p < .001$ . For Washington Post, among 100

images that presented Indian people, 25 (25%) images did not clearly show people facial expressions, whereas no images demonstrated Indian people positive

emotion. On the other hand, 67 (67%) images exhibited peoples' negative

emotions. Meanwhile, in India Today's images that portrayed Indian people, 9 (15%) images did not show Indian peoples' facial expressions, only 4 (6.7%) images displayed peoples' positive emotion, 33 (55%) images showed the peoples' negative emotion, and 14 (23.3%) images showed peoples' mixed emotions.

Also, in BBC's images that portrayed Indian people, no images recognized Indian peoples' facial expressions whether positive or negative. Also, no images displayed peoples' positive emotion, 39 (70.9%) images showed the peoples' negative emotion, and 16 (29.1%) images showed peoples' mixed emotions (See Table 3).

**Table (3)**  
**Emotions presented in the news images**

Emotions presented	Washington Post		India Today		BBC	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Not recognizable</b>	25	25	9	15	0	0
<b>Positive</b>	0	0	4	67	0	0
<b>Negative</b>	67	67	33	55	39	70.9
<b>Mixed</b>	8	8	14	23.3	16	29.1
<b>Total</b>	100	100	60	100	55	100

Aside from portraying Indian Covid-19 outbreak, the three media outlet showed other news actors in their visual coverage. For Washington Post, among 100 images that presented other news actors, there were no images demonstrating a political figure or police units or beneficiaries. Meanwhile, 25 (25%) presented volunteers, 10 (10%) presented health figures, 7 (7%) presented students in schools, 12 (12%) presented corpses, 46 (46%) presented patients. In addition,

India Today international's news coverage included political figures (17; 28.3%), no ordinary people and police units (3; 5%), health figures (11; 18.3%), students (9; 15%), beneficiaries (5; 8.3%), corpses (8; 13.3%), patients (7; 11.7%). By contrast, 55 BBC's news images covered different news actors. These were political figures (4; 7.3%), volunteers (3; 5.5%), health figures (9; 16.4%), ordinary people (17; 13.9%), and corpses (19; 34.5%), patients (3; 5.5%), (See Table 4).

**Table (4)**  
**News actors in the news images**

News actors	Washington Post		India Today		BBC	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Political figures	0	0	17	28.3	4	7.3
Volunteers	25	25	0	0	3	5.5
Police units	0	0	3	5	0	0
Health figures	10	10	11	18.3	9	16.4
Ordinary people	0	0	0	0	17	13.9
Students	7	7	9	15	0	0
Beneficiaries	0	0	5	8.3	0	0
Corpses	12	12	8	13.3	19	34.5
Patients	46	46	7	11.7	3	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

The research question asked what news sources did the three media outlet adopted in covering the Indian Covid-19 outbreak in terms of using news sources investigated in this study. Both news agencies and websites are used as sources of news images covering the Indian Covid-19 outbreak.

For Washington Post, a large amount of its visual coverage used news agencies (55; 55), more than using the images of the website itself (45; 45%), in contrast to both India Today and BBC (See Table 5).

Table (5).  
News sources of the news images

News sources	Washington Post		India Today		BBC	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
News agencies	55	55	17	28.3	22	40
websites	45	45	43	71.7	33	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

**Visual frames:**

The last research question asked what visual frames did the three media outlet adopted in covering the Indian Covid-19 outbreak. The retrieved test statistic indicated a significant difference between Washington Post, India Today, and BBC

in terms of adopting different visual frames. Of the four frames investigated in this study, several frames clearly differentiated between Washington Post, India Today, and BBC. But the most prominent visual frame is the human interest in the three media outlets. For Washington post, a large amount of its visual coverage focused on the frames of 'Human interest' (79; 79%) and 'lose/gain' (21; 21%). For India Today, the most frequently adopted frame was 'human interest' (27; 45%), then Law and control frame (17; 28.3%), then Politics (13; 21.7%) Lose/Gain frame (3; 5%). However, BBC's coverage also largely adopted the frame of 'Human Interest' (29; 52.7%). Meanwhile, the 'Politics' frame (15; 27.3%) was also used in BBC's visual coverage, then, Law and control frame (11; 20%) (see Table 6).

Table (6)  
Visual Framing used in the news images

Dominant frame	Washington Post		India Today		BBC	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Human interest	79	79	27	45	29	52.7
Lose and gain	21	21	3	5	0	0
Law and control	0	0	17	28.3	11	20
Politics	0	0	13	21.7	15	27.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Discussion:**

The findings of this study revealed that Washington Post, India Today, and BBC used different camera shot positions to cover the Indian Covid-19 outbreak. While Washington Post used more long up shots, India Today used more medium and dialogue-shot images to cover different news actors and thus provided viewers with a broader news context.

The images that used close-up camera shots disclosed vivid details of portrayed subjects (See Figure 1). As Jenni and Loewenstein (1997) argued, the vividness of portrayed subjects enhanced by close-up shots results in viewers' perceived familiarity with subjects and also generates a great empathic response from viewers. With that said, images with close-up portrayals of public created an identifiable victim effect that can lead viewers to think more about the crisis and urge them to take actions. The close portrayal of the victims of corona and the families of them is also a choice to humanize sufferers.

Those shots are used to link a distant suffering to viewers' normal life. In doing so, Washington Post acted as an agent of symbolic power by presenting distant suffering as a cause of emotion, reflection, and action for media audiences.

In addition, the three different types of filming techniques: medium, long and dialogue were also proportionally presented in three media outlets' visual coverage of the Indian Covid-19 outbreak. Accordingly, a medium shot was adopted to feature either an individual patient or a small group of people suffering. On the opposite side, a long-shot portrayal was mostly used to show a large group of bodies or people in crowded areas in a broad story context (See Figure 2,3). It seems that long-shot images entail an interest in a broader context rather than actuality, as opposed to offering the sense of close proximity to a scene of suffering (Chouliaraki, 2006). These long shots are less likely to solicit viewers' emotional response than close-ups and medium shots. Besides, tracking-shot images recorded the victims of corona virus whom are cremated on the banks of the rivers in India or the people who cremate the bodies of the Covid victims (see Figure 4,5). Various filming techniques in visual presentations established different types of pictorial conventions and contributed to the visual reality construction of the distant suffering.

One focus of this study was to examine how Washington Post, India

Today, and BBC portrayed Indian Covid-19 outbreak in their visual coverage. In their visual images, Indian were presented as individuals, families, medium groups, and mass crowds. Most news images that featured individuals or family members clearly depicted the subjects' facial expressions (see Figure 6,7,8). These images humanized people by presenting their emotional reactions toward a situation. On the contrary, the medium group of people or mass crowd in the news images did not show Indians' recognizable facial expressions (See Figure 19).

Compared to India Today, Washington Post, and BBC featured significantly more images of patients and their families, images of corpses (dead bodies). In this way, previous media outlet coverage humanized those sufferers.

Another difference between the three media outlets' visual coverage was that India Today had fewer images of political figures like prime minister Narendra Modi, also police units. In those images, different subjects (or objects) were portrayed. In contrast, in Washington Post's and BBC's visual coverage, the images without public presence mostly depicted the pictures of dead bodies (see Figure 10).

In addition to the publics' presence, this study also focused on how the three media outlet described publics' facial expressions. The news expressed feelings such as sadness, desperation, and fear. In other words, people are particularly sympathetic when they see victims' negative facial expressions. In this dialectic, it is reasonable to say that Washington Post's and BBC's visual coverage is more effective to generate viewers' sympathy and thus emotionally engages viewers in the distant suffering. Their visual coverage, therefore, undergirds a cosmopolitan viewpoint through symbolic recognition (facial expression) of distant and vulnerable "others." Also, both news outlets captions provided viewers with comprehensive information about the pictures of the Indian Covid-19 outbreaks.

Aside from public, the three media outlets demonstrated other news actors

in their news coverage as well. Specifically, India Today's visual coverage had a

large presence of police units. The police units in the news images were like police units detaining men who flouted the Covid-19 virus

safety protocols. Moreover, pictures of violators facing arrest or fines after the lockdowns have been imposed by policemen.

Also, the visual representation in BBC featured humanitarian aid workers that were saving victims of Covid-19 virus and pictured hospitals battling to treat patients as there were a loss of 1600 doctors at least.

India Today's visual coverage highlighted Indian news actors and downplayed the international counterparts.

The visual coverage was also not very different in Washington Post, India Today, and BBC, the use of news frames on covering the outbreak of Covid-19 in India. The dominant frame used in the three-news media's visual coverage was the 'human interest' frame. This seems logical because the outbreak of Covid-19 in India is an urgent ongoing global issue and the humanitarian aspect of the event simply cannot be ignored.

The 'loss/gain' frame, another frame used, described the lost and saved lives

of public and was largely present in Washington Post's visual coverage more than the two other media outlets.

Although the three media outlets emphasized human interest aspects, the proportion of the 'law and control' frame in India Today then BBC was much higher than in Washington Post.

This indicated that Washington Post's coverage heavily focused on the confrontation between police units and people. This visual frame highlighted the law enforcement agents and dehumanized people by presenting them as 'flouting the Covid-19 safety protocols and as violators' (See Figure 11).

The adoption of the 'loss/gain' frame was significantly used in Washington Post more than India Today and BBC. This could partly be explained by the fact that those frames suggested that in addition to the focus on human sufferings, the way that India dealt with Covid-19 outbreak and how other countries were shocked with how the Indian government dealt with Covid-19 virus.

### **Conclusion:**

This study empirically analyzed the urgent visual news coverage of the Covid-19 outbreak in India in Washington Post, India Today, and BBC as a global issue. Through the analysis of the stylistic as well as

the denotative level of visual frames, this study linked the findings of framing analysis to the connotative meaning of visual framing.

The study also discussed the visual frames of three news sources in the lens of ideological attachment.

Reporting on a cross-border crisis, the visual coverage of the CNN International demonstrated the evidence of global journalism through its humanized storytelling of distant suffering. CNN International's coverage also presented a plethora of news actors. Moreover, Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) visual framing model was empirically applied to this study.

The study made several rhetorical arguments about the evidence of global journalism based on the visual framing analysis of the European refugee crisis. While this study assessed only the visual frames from a media content perspective, it would also be relevant to consider how those photographs are perceived by the general public and in what context those pictures can contribute to a more cosmopolitan perspective in the public.

Practice should develop more sophisticated measurements of several key indicators: complex relations and reader engagement in the visual coverage of global issues.

For journalism studies, they need to contribute to the reporting of distant sufferings and humanitarian issues.



**Figure (1): a picture shows disclosed vivid details of portrayed subjects (Washington Post)**

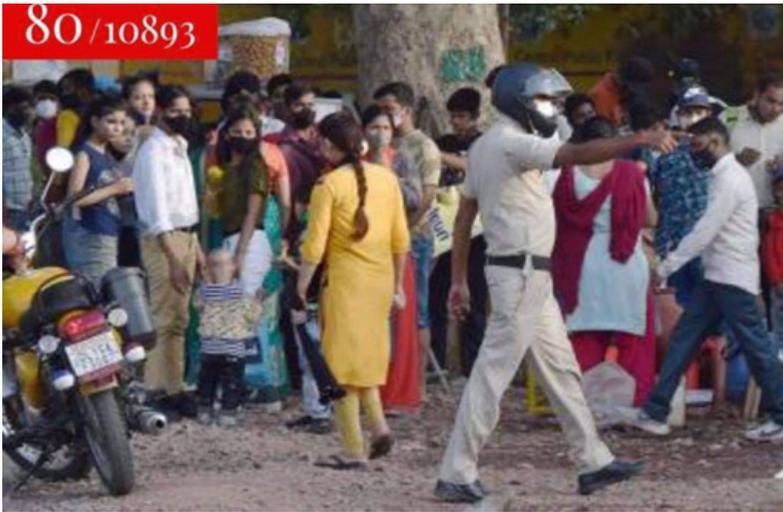


Figure (2): a long-shot portrayal was mostly used to show a large group of bodies or people in crowded areas in a broad story context (India Today)



People crowd a market after further ease in COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, in Patna | PTI Photo

Figure 3: a long-shot portrayal was mostly used to show a large group of bodies or people in crowded areas in a broad story context (India Today)

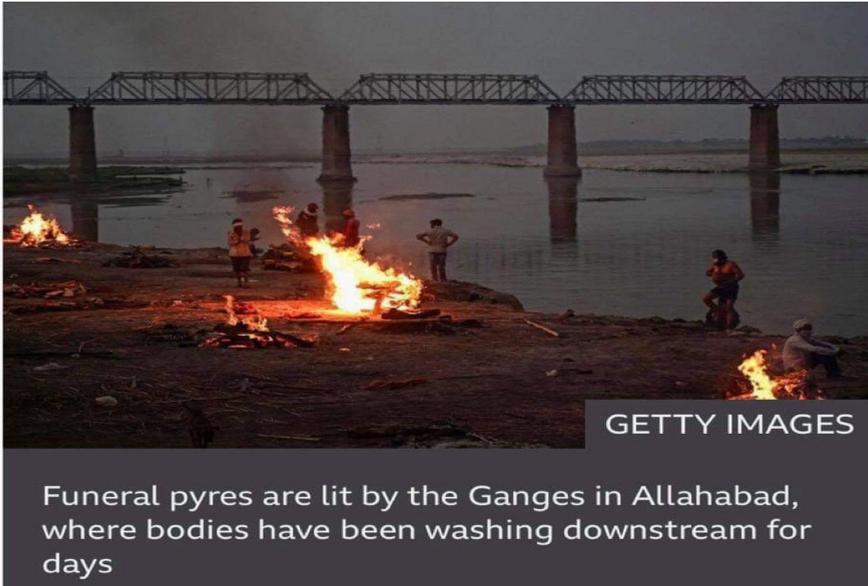


Figure (4): victims of corona virus whom are cremated on the banks of the rivers in India (BBC)



Figure (5): People cremate the bodies of Covid-19 victims in Delhi (BBC)



Figure (6): Mass funerals in Delhi (BBC)





Figure (8): a picture showing the misery and the loss of lives (BBC)



Figure (9): a picture showing a group of people or mass crowd in the news images which did not show Indians' recognizable facial expressions (BBC)



Figure (10): images of corpses (dead bodies) (Washington Post)



Figure (11): picture of the confrontation between police units and people (Washington Post)

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