

News Framing Analysis of Local Government's Internet Public Opinion Crisis and Media Coverage: A Case Study of the Qingdao Prawn Incident

Xueyu Qu*

School of Art and Media, Qingdao Binhai University, Qingdao 266000, China

*Corresponding author: Xueyu Qu, 1026298337@qq.com

Copyright: © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Utilizing news frame theory, this study analyzed the media coverage of the Qingdao prawn incident. It examined the attribution of responsibility to local government and restaurant owners, along with the framing of the local government's response. Out of 199 analyzed news reports, 28.6% emphasized the local government's responsibility, and 22.6% highlighted the restaurant owners'. In terms of the local government's response frames, negative responses were most prevalent at 21.1%, followed by positive (15.1%) and neutral (12.6%) frames. The data suggests that the media often holds the local government most accountable in public opinion crises, attributing significant blame to restaurant owners. The prevalence of negative framing indicates a bias towards critical coverage. Given the scarcity of neutral reporting, the need for balanced, objective reporting that scrutinizes the root causes and truth of events such as the Qingdao prawn incident is highlighted rather than adhering to superficial or biased narratives.

Keywords: Qingdao prawn incident; Local government; Media coverage; Responsibility attribution; News frame theory

Online publication: June 13, 2025

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem statement

Online public opinion holds a powerful social influence, and with the rapid spread of information on the internet, public incidents can quickly escalate into internet public opinion crises ^[1]. The frequency of government-related crises has increased in the digital age, spreading rapidly via the internet and social networking sites (SNS) ^[2]. As the speed of online information dissemination accelerates, crises involving local governments garner significant public attention. The public's interest in such crises, as seen in the news coverage, further amplifies their effects. This is evident in the comparative study of the Qingdao prawn incident, a representative case of the local

government internet public opinion crisis.

Originating on the Chinese SNS platform Weibo (equivalent to Twitter), the incident negatively affected several local government agencies in Qingdao, such as the Tourism Bureau, the Price Bureau, and the Public Security Bureau. The incident, which occurred in Qingdao, a popular tourist city in China, involved topics of high public interest, such as inflation and the government's role, resulting in substantial social impact. News reports on the Qingdao prawn incident received widespread attention, reflecting its research value. Moreover, it underscored that news coverage of internet public opinion crises directly influences public sentiment and social stability, thereby increasing its societal influence.

Internet public opinion crisis events are typically characterized by their suddenness, destructiveness, staged nature, and persistence, often inciting significant societal attention and discussion. The media's coverage of these events shapes the public's perception, with the press's core mission demanding neutrality and objectivity in news reporting^[3]. However, specific frames can sway news reporting, leading to a lack of objectivity depending on the adopted perspective.

News frames, common in media coverage, can selectively highlight, amplify, or eliminate news content. These frames dictate how journalists craft their articles based on collected data and cited coverage, further shaping the presentation of the news^[4]. The frames allow the public to glean an in-depth understanding of the facts, emphasizing the potent influence of news frames on public perception and understanding.

News frames, underpinned by the responsibility attribution theory, form the background of all media coverage. They represent the methods journalists use to construct reality through the media, influenced by concepts, ideologies, and knowledge^[5]. Thus, an accurate grasp of these news frames is critical when analyzing media coverage of the Qingdao government's internet public opinion crisis events. Such analysis extends to how the media report on the causes and countermeasures of the Qingdao incident from a societal perspective, underscoring the importance of understanding the influence of news frames on responsibility attribution.

1.2. Research objectives

The Qingdao incident first surfaced on Weibo, triggering intense online debates and culminating in a substantial internet public opinion crisis for the local government. As a response, the media released continuous coverage on the incident, with elements such as frequency, topics, news genres, and editorial stances contributing to the news framing. This, in turn, shaped the media's information dissemination and the public's perception and interest in the news.

To examine this incident, the study employed news framing theory as its theoretical framework and analyzed news coverage collected from the "Hydeus" search database between October 5, 2015, and October 31, 2015. Frame analysis was used to scrutinize the responsibility attributed to the local government and restaurant owner, as well as the local government's response, further classified into positive, negative, and neutral coverage.

The aim was to determine whether the media's framing of the Qingdao incident as a public opinion crisis was apt, and to offer insights on how local governments could respond to media coverage during such crises.

2. Literature review

2.1. Qingdao shrimp incident

On October 5, 2015, a netizen posted on Weibo about being overcharged at a street restaurant, sparking a heated online controversy known as the Qingdao incident. The user complained that a single plate of ordinary shrimp cost 38 yuan (approximately 6 USD), and a dish cost 1,500 yuan (around 236 USD). This post was shared over 6,000

times, attracting considerable attention from the media and other netizens. Numerous news outlets reported on the Qingdao Incident, leading to a rapid spread of public opinion related to the incident.

In response, the Qingdao Price Bureau's official Weibo account announced that the restaurant in question had been dealt with according to relevant regulations and laws. Three days following the incident, the Qingdao City Propaganda Department announced plans to impose an administrative penalty of 90,000 yuan (around 14,173 USD) on the restaurant.

2.2. Internet public opinion crisis and media coverage

2.2.1. Study on media coverage of local government's internet public opinion crisis incidents

Western academia often categorizes research on media coverage of local government's internet public opinion crises as part of the broader study of crisis incident news coverage. Given the rising frequency of these incidents, several theories have been formulated and studied extensively overseas. These include Steven Fink's "Stepwise Separation Theory", Thomas Birkland's "Agenda-setting Theory", and Grunig's "Excellence Theory", all of which contribute to the understanding of crisis communication.

Moreover, American scholar Robert Heath expanded the realm of crisis management theory. Drawing on corporate crisis management experiences, Heath proposed the 4R model of crisis management encompassing Readiness, Response, Reduction, and Recovery ^[6].

Crisis reporting, the media coverage of crisis events, holds high news value due to its social significance, often commanding considerable public attention ^[7]. Active and accurate media engagement creates a conducive atmosphere for crisis resolution, enabling relevant government departments to devise practical solutions to social issues. Additionally, by summarizing the issues and lessons learned during crisis events, crisis reporting provides valuable feedback for future management, making it an essential task for Chinese media today.

Given the inherent news value of crisis events and the media's societal responsibilities, crisis reporting remains a vital component of news coverage. Importantly, the accuracy of reporting often proves crucial to crisis resolution, given the influence of news media.

In the past, Chinese media tended to downplay or even contradict crisis reporting. However, as Chinese society has developed, so too has the media's approach to crisis reporting. Notably, since 2000, the quality of crisis reporting has seen consistent improvement, with the media assuming a proactive role in the crisis management process ^[8].

2.2.2. News framing theory

In news production, the concept of framing guides how journalists shape news events. It's a tool for simplifying the complexities of society and packaging a vast amount of information into news stories, aligned with general concepts and examples ^[9, 11].

The concept of "framing" first emerged in the field of psychology. Scholar Thesen, in his 1955 paper "On Comedy and Phantasy", posited that "frames" are psychological constructs guiding human perception. People usually focus on the information within the frame, showing interest in related details, while disregarding the information outside of it. As such, to assist in understanding, the information within a frame should be presented suitably, considering that "frames" influence people's perceptions by controlling the scope of information ^[10].

Sociologist Erving Goffman was instrumental in introducing the concept of "framing" into sociological studies in 1959 with his book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life." Goffman posited that the various

features of objects present in social life are organized within a unified frame. This not only aids readers in integrating their prior experiences but also offers researchers a directional guide ^[12].

In his 1974 book “Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience”, Goffman defined frames as tools used by individuals to perceive societal objects, serving as criteria for the perception and judgment of these objects. Frames represent experiences manifested through linguistic symbols, used to create a fundamental structure for processing and interpreting the external world. Goffman’s “frame” is, thus, an individual’s subjective interpretation or cognitive structure through which the public perceives and assesses events. This demonstrates that the objective truth of society can be transmuted into individuals’ subjective perceptions.

Following Goffman, scholars like Gitlin adopted the frame theory for media research, thereby facilitating its rapid spread into the field of media studies. Building on Goffman’s theoretical foundation of frames, Gitlin highlighted the role and significance of frames within the media realm as mechanisms for classifying information and structuring news, thereby influencing the public ^[13].

Research on news frames has been heavily influenced by Erving Goffman’s frame analysis. The concept of “frame” as outlined by Goffman forms the crux of news frames. While scholars may have differing viewpoints on news frames, there is a shared understanding of their meaning. Generally speaking, news frames are the objective and realistic processes that structure the transition and delivery of social events in public communication ^[14].

There are three main categorizations of definitions for news frames:

- (1) Frames have been considered as a tool for selective screening. Gitlin viewed frames as consistent models for cognition, interpretation, and expression, with journalists constructing news through a process of selection, emphasis, and exclusion ^[15]. Thus, the styles of reporting in news coverage can be viewed as news frames constructed by the media. News frames can be seen as determining the content and manner of media coverage.
- (2) Emphasis has been placed on the effects of news frames. Entman viewed frame theory as the process of building frames, which involves selection and focus. By choosing and emphasizing certain aspects of an event, it facilitates the definition, interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment of particular issues ^[16]. Entman’s definition of news frames can be interpreted as how journalists influence public perception by selecting information and emphasizing certain aspects of news events.
- (3) Frames have been seen as a process of creating positive meaning. Gamson, in particular, saw the frame as the central idea of news coverage, attributing meaning to news events ^[17].

The frame analysis of news reporting is a critical theory in communication studies. Frames are structures that shape the general perception, explanation, and representation of objects. Through the process of symbol transformation and adjustment, frames select and construct specific meanings and representations that reflect certain core meanings and ideologies, as well as specific sociocultural values ^[18].

In conclusion, the theory of frames has evolved through the realms of psychology, sociology, and communication studies. It has broadened its research domain from individual cognitive processes to group studies. Building on Erving Goffman’s frame theory, the concept of news frames emerged as an extension of communication studies. Today, news frames significantly influence journalists, the public, and society as a whole.

2.3. The frame of responsibility

The theory of responsibility framing stems from psychology and is employed to elucidate and analyze the causal relationships in human behavior resulting from environmental influences and their effects. It is also referred to as

“attribution theory”, as it interprets, manages, and predicts behavior through the lens of responsibility. In essence, it can be viewed as a theory that modifies and governs human behavior by altering individuals’ self-concept and self-awareness. Communication scholar Iyengar integrated the theory of responsibility attribution with frame analysis and introduced the concept of “frame of responsibility”, suggesting that news media defines the causes and solutions of specific social issues through three frames: “episodic/thematic frames”, “causal/reactive frames”, and “individual/social responsibility frames”^[19].

Iyengar proposes that in certain news reports, although the causes or solutions of news events are not explicitly stated, they indirectly present or provoke judgments on “who caused the event” and “who should bear responsibility” by constructing episodic or thematic news frames. The “episodic frame” distills complex social issues into individual problems, while the “thematic frame” treats social issues as macro-level social phenomena, discussing the in-depth causes and solutions of the news. From the viewpoint of responsibility attribution, Iyengar analyzed the framing strategies of news coverage and the effects of communication, introducing the “causal/reactive frame” that analyzes the causes of the event from two perspectives: “cause” and “response.” News media tend to focus on the questions of “causes of the problem” and “responsibility for the event” when reporting social issues. Hence, the ultimate goal of news coverage on social issues can be perceived as discussing the causes of the event and solutions to the problem^[20].

Iyengar further argues that news media frames the responsibility for social events in terms of individual responsibility and social responsibility. The frame of individual responsibility emphasizes that the event reported in the news is a result of accidental or individual actions, underscoring the responsibility of individuals or a small group of people in the emergence or resolution of the issue. In contrast, the frame of social responsibility focuses on the underlying causes that make the event a matter of social concern and seeks macro-level solutions.

2.4. Research problem

For this study, news coverage of the Qingdao prawn incident from October 5, 2015, to October 31, 2015, was gathered using the “Hydeus Search” database. This database incorporates news reports from the incident’s onset to the period when its influence began to wane. The investigation period represented a concentrated period of the internet public opinion crisis of the local government in relation to the Qingdao prawn incident. The news coverage during this time was deemed valuable for research based on the agenda-setting theory of news framing. Hence, a detailed analysis was conducted for this investigation period.

The Qingdao prawn incident serves as a representative case of an internet public opinion crisis involving a local government. This study utilized the attribution theory and news framing theory as foundations for a content analysis intended to extract the themes and alterations in stance in the news coverage of the Qingdao prawn incident from October 5 to October 31, 2015.

Through this analysis, the study identified how the framing of the Qingdao prawn incident news coverage was constructed, how it evolved over time, and the issues and influencing factors embedded within the framing. This deepened understanding allows for a more nuanced grasp of the way news frames shape and are shaped by public opinion, thereby influencing the narrative and potentially the resolution of crises.

Based on the data selected and analyzed in this study, the study has defined the following research questions:

Research question 1:

What is the volume of articles that adopt the local government accountability frame?

Research question 1-1:

In the early phase of coverage, how many articles adopt the local government accountability frame?

Research question 1-2:

In the mid-phase of coverage, how many articles adopt the local government accountability frame?

Research question 1-3:

In the late phase of coverage, how many articles adopt the local government accountability frame?

Research question 2:

What is the volume of articles that adopt the store owner accountability frame?

Research question 2-1:

In the early phase of coverage, how many articles adopt the store owner accountability frame?

Research question 2-2:

In the mid-phase of coverage, how many articles adopt the store owner accountability frame?

Research question 2-3:

In the late phase of coverage, how many articles adopt the store owner accountability frame?

Research question 3:

What is the volume of articles that adopt the local government response frame?

Research question 3-1:

How many articles convey a positive representation of the local government's response?

Research question 3-2:

How many articles convey a negative representation of the local government's response?

Research question 3-3: How many articles provide a neutral portrayal of the local government's response?

These questions aim to quantify and understand the framing of the Qingdao prawn incident by analyzing the attribution of responsibility and response in news media coverage across different phases of the event.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research methodology: Content analysis method

Content analysis is a systematic and objective research method that involves statistically classifying existing communication content, minimizing subjective intervention based on data statistics to enhance the accuracy and objectivity of research^[21]. Berelson defined content analysis as an objective, systematic, and quantitative research method for communication content^[22]. Kerlinger identified content analysis as a systematic and objective method for measuring variables and analyzing communication content^[23]. The advantages of content analysis include the ability to use a wide range of samples without excessive subjectivity, as well as a comprehensive analysis method that emphasizes qualitative analysis in addition to quantitative analysis during the analysis process, which can enhance the accuracy and validity of content analysis.

Hence, content analysis was chosen as the primary method for this study, with news coverage of the Qingdao prawn incident serving as the sample for a systematic and quantitative content analysis. This approach was intended to discern patterns in the framing structure of news coverage of the Qingdao prawn incident.

3.2. Analysis subject and period

The focus of this study is news coverage of the Qingdao prawn incident. For a comprehensive and reliable sample, the "Hydeus Search Database" was utilized to gather news articles related to the incident.

The chosen research period spans from October 5th, 2015, to October 31st, 2015. The selection of news topics is generally based on their potential for impact, utility in regulation, and promotability. Preference is given to topics that can generate positive effects, unique topics, and fresh topics not yet covered by others. The selected research period considers the value of meaning transmission and practicality. The period from October 5th to October 31st, 2015, marks the onset of the Qingdao prawn incident and its gradual fade from influence. This period likely has the most concentrated and plentiful news coverage related to the incident, making it an optimal research period. To visually analyze the quantity and status of research samples according to the research period, the 27-day period from October 5th to October 31st, 2015, was divided into three nine-day segments: early, middle, and late.

In this study, the sample selection criteria were based on the keyword “Qingdao Prawn” in the news headlines. News reports collected from the data search database from October 5th, 2015, to October 31st, 2015, were selected as the analysis samples. Videos and photos were excluded from the analysis samples due to the difficulties in analyzing their topics and information sources. Consequently, a total of 199 articles were gathered from October 5th to October 31st, 2015. This study also confined the scope of analysis within the news articles included in the data search database for the specified period, excluding news reports from other platforms.

3.3. Analysis unit

Based on established theoretical perspectives and the research goals and questions of this study, the units of analysis were constructed around the following frames, determined by the article titles: the frame attributing responsibility to the local government, the frame attributing responsibility to the restaurant owner, and the frame centered on the local government’s response, which was further divided into positive, negative, and neutral frames.

3.4. Operational definition of frames

3.4.1. Frame of local government accountability

The frame of local government accountability refers to news articles that predominantly assert the responsibility for the prawn incident lies with the Qingdao local government. For instance, if the title of an article includes phrases like “Government agencies feign ignorance”, “Prompt resolution from government departments expected”, or “Qingdao prawn is priced at \$5.89 per person, each prawn billed as \$5.89 at checkout”, indicating that the accountability for the incident is attributed to the local government, the article is categorized under the frame of local government accountability.

3.4.2. Frame of restaurant owner accountability

The frame of restaurant owner accountability pertains to news articles that predominantly assign the responsibility for the prawn incident to the restaurant owners. For instance, if the title of an article includes phrases like “\$5.89 for one prawn, is this even real?”, “Restaurant owner accused of food pricing fraud”, or “Condemnation of restaurant owner’s unlawful actions relating to the incident”, indicating that the accountability for the incident is attributed to the restaurant owners, the article is categorized under the frame of restaurant owner accountability.

3.4.3. Frames of local government’s response

Frames of local government’s response are subdivided into positive coverage, negative coverage, and neutral coverage. Positive response frame refers to news articles that present the Qingdao municipal government’s

response to the prawn incident in a favorable light. For example, if the title of an article includes phrases like “New administrative measures in response to the prawn incident”, “Actions that the government should take in response to the prawn incident”, or “Reform of the work system in relevant departments following the prawn incident”, indicating a positive response from the local government towards the prawn incident, the article is categorized under the positive response frame. Negative response frame refers to news articles that present the Qingdao municipal government’s response to the prawn incident in an unfavorable light. For example, if the title of an article includes phrases like “Government departments need to immediately resolve the prawn incident”, “prawn incident highlights the insufficient response from relevant government departments”, or “Internet public opinion crisis for the government due to the prawn incident”, indicating a negative response from the local government towards the prawn incident, the article is categorized under the negative response frame. Neutral response frame refers to news articles that neither positively nor negatively present the Qingdao municipal government’s response to the prawn incident. For example, if the title of an article includes phrases like “How should the government prevent incidents like the prawn incident?” “Evaluation of each department’s response to the prawn incident”, or “Measures taken by the local government in response to the internet public opinion crisis caused by the prawn incident”, indicating a neutral stance towards the local government’s response to the prawn incident, the article is categorized under the neutral response frame.

3.5. Reliability measurement

In order to ascertain the dependability of the content analysis, this study underwent an inter-coder reliability verification process. A batch of twenty article titles, constituting about 10% of the total articles analyzed, was chosen as the focus for an initial analysis conducted by the researcher and another graduate student. This preliminary analysis was based on the operational definitions of the key frames. The inter-coder agreement tied to the analysis was determined to be 85%. This result underscores the established reliability of conducting content analysis in a consistent manner, using the news article title data employed in this study.

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of research question 1

Research question 1 addresses the analysis of the frame attributing blame to the local government in the context of the Qingdao Incident. As depicted in **Table 1**, out of the total 199 news reports concerning the Qingdao Incident, 57 reports, which equate to 28.6% of the total, framed the blame on the local government. This shows that a notable percentage of the news articles ascribed the responsibility for the Qingdao Incident to the local government or pertinent governmental departments. This suggests a prominent frame that assigns blame to the local government.

Table 1. The frame of blame attribution to the local government

Category	Local government responsibility frame	Total
Quantity (count)	57	199
Percentage (%)	28.6	100.0

The analysis of the frame attributing responsibility to the local government was subsequently carried out

by time period. As illustrated in **Table 2**, following the occurrence of the Qingdao prawn incident, it attracted considerable attention as a prominent issue across various media outlets in China. From October 5, 2015, to October 31, 2015, a total of 57 news reports associated with the local government responsibility frame were identified. Of these, from October 5 to October 13, encompassing the initial period of the research timeline, there were 47 news reports related to the local government responsibility frame, accounting for 82.46% of the total during this period. This suggests that during the early stages of the research timeline, the media concentrated on constructing a frame, attributing responsibility to the local government. It is also noticeable that coverage was densely packed during this initial period, as public and media attention was primarily focused on who was responsible for the Qingdao prawn incident.

Table 2. Number of news reports on local government responsibility frame by time period

Time period	Initial (10.05–10.13)	Midterm (10.14–10.22)	Post-term (10.23–10.31)	Total
Number of news reports	47	7	3	57
Percentage (%)	82.46	12.28	5.26	100

Moving on to the middle period of the research timeline, from October 14 to October 22, only 7 news reports relating to the local government responsibility frame were found, accounting for 12.28% of the total for this period. This represents a significant drop compared to the initial period and can be interpreted to mean that media criticism towards local governments markedly decreased during this middle phase of the research timeline.

Finally, for the latter period of the research timeline, from October 23 to October 31, only 3 news reports related to the local government responsibility frame were found, accounting for 5.26% of the total for this period. This shows a continued decline from the middle period and indicates that media criticism towards local governments ceased during the latter part of the research timeline.

4.2. Analysis of research question 2

Research question 2 centers on the framing of the restaurant owners' accountability in relation to the Qingdao prawn incident, implying articles that underscore the responsibility of the restaurant owners. As demonstrated in **Table 3** below, from a total of 199 articles, there were 45 articles, which constitute 22.6% of the total, that framed the responsibility on the restaurant owners for the incident.

Table 3. Framing of restaurant owners' responsibility

Category	Framing of restaurant owners' responsibility	Total
Quantity (count)	45	199
Percentage (%)	22.6	100.0

Continuing with the analysis of the frame attributing responsibility to restaurant owners, as indicated in **Table 4**, a total of 45 news articles were published that framed the restaurant owners' responsibility during the period from October 5, 2015, to October 31, 2015, the 27 days following the Qingdao prawn incident. Of these, during the initial period of the research window from October 5 to October 13, there were 42 news articles, making up the majority, or 93.3%, of articles for the entire research period. This signifies that most news reports framing the

restaurant owners' responsibility were concentrated in the initial period, implicating the restaurant owners directly as the immediate cause of the Qingdao prawn incident.

Table 4. Number of news articles on restaurant owners' responsibility by reporting period

Time Period	Initial (10.05–10.13)	Midterm (10.14–10.22)	Post-term (10.23–10.31)	Total
Number of News Reports	42	3	0	45
Percentage (%)	93.3	6.7	0	100

From October 14 to October 22, which falls within the middle part of the research period, there were only 3 news articles focusing on the restaurant owners' responsibility, accounting for a mere 6.7% of the entire research period, demonstrating a significant drop compared to the initial period.

From October 23 to October 31, encompassing the latter portion of the research period, there were no news articles emphasizing the restaurant owners' responsibility. This suggests that the media's focus on framing the restaurant owners' responsibility dwindled after the initial period, as the restaurant owners were merely superficially implicated as the immediate cause of the Qingdao prawn incident. Instead, the media's attention shifted towards framing the responsibility of the local governments and their response to the incident during the middle and later parts of the research period.

4.3. Analysis of research question 3

Research question 3 seeks to explore the volume of news articles associated with the local government's response frame to the Qingdao prawn incident. This is further dissected into three specific sub-questions, namely Research questions 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3, which are designated as the positive, negative, and neutral local government response frames, respectively. These distinct frames will be examined to provide a comprehensive overview of the various perspectives and sentiments expressed in the media coverage regarding the local government's response to the incident.

4.3.1. The analysis for research question 3-1

Research question 3-1 relates to the positive local government response frames, specifically spotlighting those articles which cast the actions and responses of the Qingdao municipal government to the prawn incident in a positive light. As displayed in **Table 5**, out of a total of 199 collected articles, 30 articles, accounting for 15.1% of the total, were classified as having a positive frame regarding the response and measures taken by the Qingdao municipal government.

Table 5. Positive frame on Qingdao municipal government's response and measures

Category	Positive framing of Qingdao municipal government's response and measures	Total
Quantity(count)	30	199
Percentage (%)	15.1	100.0

Following the analysis of the positive framing of local government responses, results revealed a total of 30 news reports with a positive frame towards the local government's response during the period from October 5, 2015, to October 31, 2015. This time frame encapsulates 27 days after the initial occurrence of the Qingdao prawn

incident, as depicted in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Number of positive local government response frames in news reports by reporting period

Time period	Initial (10.05–10.13)	Midterm (10.14–10.22)	Post-term (10.23–10.31)	Total
Number of news reports	20	3	7	30
Percentage (%)	66.7	10	23.3	100

During the initial phase of the research period, from October 5 to October 13, there were 20 news reports about the positive response of the local government, comprising the majority share of 66.7% of the total during the entire research period. This suggests that the media were largely focused on building a positive portrayal of the local government's response during the initial aftermath of the Qingdao prawn incident, as the local government was actively involved in resolving the crisis and minimizing its negative impact. Therefore, the construction of a positive framing of the local government's response was particularly concentrated during the early phase of the research period.

In the middle phase of the research period, spanning from October 14 to October 22, there were only 3 news reports about the positive response of the local government, making up only 10% of the total. This indicates that as the Qingdao prawn incident began to lose its immediate relevance and government responses grew less frequent, the positive framing of the local government's response started to appear less frequently, resulting in the lowest number of news reports in this category across the entire research period.

Towards the latter phase of the research period, from October 23 to October 31, there were 7 news reports about the positive response of the local government, accounting for 23.3% of the total. Given that the Qingdao prawn incident was an online public opinion crisis involving the local government and that the effects of the incident still lingered during the latter stage, the Qingdao municipal government continued its efforts to alleviate the negative impact. Consequently, the media continued to report on the positive responses from the local government.

4.3.2. The analysis of research question 3-2

Following the investigation of negative local government response frames, the author can glean that 42 out of the total 199 articles possessed a negative tone concerning the reactions and measures undertaken by the Qingdao Municipal Government in response to the Qingdao prawn incident, as illustrated in **Table 7**. These articles, making up 21.1% of the total, essentially portrayed the local government's response in a negative light. This conveys that a significant proportion of the media coverage during the incident was critical of the government's handling of the situation.

Table 7. Negative frames on Qingdao Municipal Government's response and measures

Category	Negative frames on Qingdao Municipal Government's response and measures	Total
Quantity (count)	42	199
Percentage (%)	21.1	100.0

Table 8 highlights the temporal analysis of negative frames attributed to the local government's response after the Qingdao incident, from October 5, 2015, to October 31, 2015. A total of 42 news reports portrayed the local government's response in a negative light. Of these, a substantial 38 reports, representing an overwhelming 90.5% of the coverage, were published from October 5 to October 13, the early stage of the research period. This was a period when

the Qingdao municipal government was primarily focused on crisis management and damage control. However, media reports perceived and highlighted issues with the government's approach, creating a contrasting narrative. As a result, the media emphasized negative frames around the local government's response during this early phase.

Table 8. Number of news reports on the negative framing of local government response by reporting period

Time period	Initial (10.05–10.13)	Midterm (10.14–10.22)	Post-term (10.23–10.31)	Total
Number of news reports	38	4	0	42
Percentage (%)	90.5	9.5	0	100

In the middle stage of the research period, from October 14 to October 22, the number of reports with negative frames fell sharply to just 4, representing 9.5% of the total coverage. Interestingly, in the later stage of the research period, from October 23 to October 31, there were no reports with negative frames around the local government's response. This absence of negative media portrayal coincides with the resolution phase of the Qingdao incident, marking a shift in media reporting towards a more balanced and objective tone.

4.3.3. The analysis of research question 3-3

The focus of research question 3-3 is on the neutral framing of the local government's response, specifically those articles that neither positively nor negatively critique the actions and measures undertaken by the Qingdao municipal government in the aftermath of the Qingdao incident. As depicted in **Table 9**, out of a comprehensive collection of 199 articles, a total of 25 articles (12.6%) were categorized as embodying a neutral stance towards the government's response.

Table 9. Neutral framing of Qingdao Municipal government's response and measures

Category	Neutral framing of Qingdao Municipal Government's response and measures	Total
Quantity (count)	25	199
Percentage (%)	12.6	100.0

Table 10 presents the analysis of neutral framing of local government responses. This analysis spans 27 days from October 5, 2015, to October 31, 2015, within which a total of 25 news articles framed the local government's response to the Qingdao incident neutrally. During the early research period, which ranges from October 5 to 13, 14 articles presented a neutral frame, which comprises the highest percentage (56%) throughout the entire research period. This suggests that the Qingdao municipal government endeavored to convey unbiased information to the public through various statements, striving for a neutral framing of their response during the early stages of the incident.

Table 10. Number of news reports on neutral framing of local government responses by reporting period

Time period	Initial (10.05–10.13)	Midterm (10.14–10.22)	Post-term (10.23–10.31)	Total
Number of news reports	14	5	6	25
Percentage (%)	56	20	24	100

The research period's mid-term and late-term, spanning from October 14 to 22, and October 23 to 31, saw 5 and 6 news reports, respectively, that neutrally framed the local government's response. These accounted for 20% and 24% of the total research period. The steady reporting of neutral frames during these periods implies a sustained media interest in the incident, focusing on providing a balanced view of the local government's response even as the incident reached its conclusion.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary

The media's coverage of the Qingdao incident spanned a total of 199 articles. The majority of these attributed the incident's responsibility to the local government's response, with corruption within local government agencies often being cited as a contributing factor. There were 57 articles (28.6%) that framed the local government as bearing the brunt of the responsibility. Meanwhile, restaurant owners were deemed the secondary parties to blame for the incident in 45 articles, representing 22.6% of the total news coverage.

In examining the local government's response, the media produced a total of 97 articles. Of these, 30 (15.1%) presented a positive framing of the government's actions, while 42 articles (21.1%) cast the local government's response in a negative light. The remaining 25 articles (12.6%) offered a neutral perspective on the government's response. In terms of the volume of news coverage, negative portrayals of the local government's response were most prevalent, followed by positive and neutral representations, respectively.

An evaluation of the research results based on the time period categories established for this study offers the following insights:

For coverage attributing responsibility to the local government, 47 articles were produced in the early stage (82.46% of the total), seven in the middle stage (12.28%), and three in the late stage (5.26%).

Coverage blaming restaurant owners featured 42 articles in the early stage (93.3% of the total), three in the middle stage (6.7%), and none in the late stage.

For positive portrayals of the local government's response, there were 20 articles in the early stage (66.7%), three in the middle stage (10%), and seven in the late stage (23.3%).

For negative portrayals of the local government's response, 38 articles emerged in the early stage (90.5%), four in the middle stage (9.5%), and none in the late stage.

Neutral coverage of the local government's response featured 14 articles in the early stage (56%), five in the middle stage (20%), and six in the late stage (24%).

5.2. Discussion

The cornerstone of journalistic reporting is the principle of truthfulness, necessitating the commitment to both accuracy and objectivity in news dissemination. The lifeblood of news lies in its truthfulness, which aims to authentically reflect the factual essence of events based on tangible evidence. As such, news reporting must first verify the precision of its elements, while ensuring a comprehensive and objective unveiling of reference and background materials. Additionally, the principle of truthfulness in news reporting dictates that stories and patterns inherent in events be conveyed in a comprehensive and professional manner, to truly expose the kernel of truth^[24].

A comparative analysis through literature research, between the concept of internet public opinion crisis and the Qingdao prawn incident, designates the latter as a typical internet public opinion crisis precipitated by

governmental actions. The adverse repercussions of the Qingdao prawn incident have detrimentally impacted both the credibility of the Qingdao government and the city's image. According to existing literature, internet public opinion crises are characterized by emotional and biased tendencies, prone to straying from rational thought, negating reality, and succumbing to malicious commentary, which can dominate public opinion.

Precise media reporting of such internet crisis incidents holds considerable significance, as it aids in fostering a positive environment for crisis resolution, stimulates problem-solving by governmental agencies, and integrates feedback and lessons learned during the crisis resolution process. Moreover, accurately informing the public about the truth of the crisis can aid in enhancing public understanding of the situation, which in turn can contribute to the resolution of the crisis.

In the case of the Qingdao prawn incident, news coverage across diverse media platforms has markedly influenced people's attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors towards the event, primarily serving as a principal source of information. Therefore, news reporting on the Qingdao prawn incident ought to deliver a comprehensive and objective account of facts, circumstances, and perspectives, avoiding the concealment of realities or biased reporting.

Examining the framing of news coverage during the "Qingdao Prawn" incident from October 5, 2015, to October 31, 2015, which resulted in a significant internet public opinion crisis, it is evident that the most attention was directed towards the local government's response. The coverage of this aspect allowed the public to gain a comprehensive understanding of the government's measures.

Within this context, 30 articles (15.1%) framed the government's response positively, while 42 articles (21.1%) did so negatively. Neutral coverage amounted to 25 articles (12.6%). Thus, the government's response was most commonly framed negatively.

Coverage attributing responsibility to the local government amounted to 57 articles (28.6%), the second highest among all news coverage. Conversely, coverage implicating restaurant owners' responsibility was the lowest, with 45 articles (22.6%).

In theoretical research on news framing, "frames" are viewed as constraints shaping public perception of information. Through these frames, the public receives and interprets event-specific information. Within the theory of responsibility attribution framing, news media generally focus on two frames during public opinion crises: the "causes of the event" and "who bears responsibility for resolution." Therefore, the primary goal of crisis coverage is to illuminate the event's origins and resolution measures.

As the Qingdao prawn incident quickly gained attention on Weibo, the media adopted a frame that emphasized a "negative and critical stance towards the government's response measures" and a narrative of "government responsibility" to attract public interest. This led to public difficulty in fully understanding the event's true nature and exacerbated the incident's conflicts, thereby undermining public trust in government agencies.

News coverage of the Qingdao prawn incident was primarily concentrated in the early stage, classified into early, mid, and late stages. Various frames featured predominantly in the early stage, indicative of the peak of media interest in the incident. However, during this period, the media did not report on the incident objectively and impartially, complicating public perception of the event. This may be considered a key reason why the Qingdao prawn incident escalated into a high-impact public opinion crisis. Furthermore, during the mid and late stages of the research period, news coverage of various frames significantly declined, with some frames left untouched.

Although the Qingdao prawn incident was officially closed after its outcome was publicized, its impact persisted. The media, responsible for helping the public understand social events, should maintain a consistent

interest in incidents with considerable social impacts, leading public opinion in the right direction for an effective resolution of public opinion crises.

Particularly, a chronological analysis of news coverage on the government's response frame revealed limited positive and neutral coverage, alongside criticism. To resolve public opinion crises such as the Qingdao prawn incident, it is essential that the media maintain an objective and neutral stance. This involves accurately presenting both positive and negative information, reflecting the event's truth and full picture, which can guide public understanding correctly and support the reestablishment of government credibility.

5.3. Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study are primarily due to constraints in research personnel and methods, which led to a decision to select news gathered through online search databases instead of comprehensively capturing all news coverage related to the Qingdao incident across various media platforms.

The time constraints of the research period also posed a limitation. Rather than conducting an in-depth analysis of the specific content of news coverage, news frames were classified based on headlines alone. This approach may limit the depth and complexity of the understanding of the framing of the Qingdao incident, as the framing in the body of the text might have been different or more nuanced than what was presented in the headlines.

These constraints should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. The conclusions drawn from this research, although meaningful and instructive, may not be generalizable to all similar incidents or media environments due to these limitations. It's suggested that future research should aim to address these limitations, possibly by employing a larger research team, extending the research timeframe, or using more comprehensive methods for data collection and analysis.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Zhang L, Zhang N, 2020, Effectiveness of Trust Repair Strategies in the Crisis of Corporate Internet Public Opinion. *American Journal of Management Science and Engineering*, 5(1): 10–18.
- [2] Stieglitz S, Dang-Xuan L, 2013, Social Media and Political Communication: A Social Media Analytics Framework. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 2013(3): 1277–1291.
- [3] Schudson M, 2001, The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism. *Journalism*, 2(2): 149–170.
- [4] De Vreese CH, 2005, News Framing: Theory and Typology. *Information Design Journal + Document Design*, 13(1): 51–62.
- [5] Carragee KM, Roefs W, 2004, The Neglect of Power in Recent Framing Research. *Journal of Communication*, 54(2): 214–233.
- [6] Tang L, Fan B, Li C, et al., 2022, Empirical Evaluation of the Environmental Emergency Management Capability of Local Governments in China. *Sustainability*, 14(11): 6760.
- [7] Littlefield RS, Quenette AM, 2007, Crisis Leadership and Hurricane Katrina: The Portrayal of Authority by the Media in Natural Disasters. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 35(1): 26–47.

- [8] Kosho J, 2016, Media Influence on Public Opinion Attitudes Toward the Migration Crisis. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 5(5): 86–91.
- [9] Kumpel AS, 2022, Social Media Information Environments and their Implications for the Uses and Effects of News: The PINGS Framework. *Communication Theory*, 32(2): 223–242.
- [10] Berinsky AJ, Kinder DR, 2006, Making Sense of Issues through Media Frames: Understanding the Kosovo Crisis. *The Journal of Politics*, 68(3): 640–656.
- [11] Linstrom M, Marais W, 2012, Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology. *Communitas*, 2012(17): 21–38.
- [12] Johansson C, 2007, Goffman's Sociology: An Inspiring Resource for Developing Public Relations Theory. *Public Relations Review*, 33(3): 275–280.
- [13] Carter MJ, 2013, The Hermeneutics of Frames and Framing: An Examination of the Media's Construction of Reality. *Sage Open*, 3(2): 2158244013487915.
- [14] Scheufele, DA, 2000, Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(2–3): 297–316.
- [15] Pan Z, Kosicki GM, 1993, Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse. *Political Communication*, 10(1): 55–75.
- [16] Dan V, Ihlen O, Raknes K, 2020, Political Public Relations and Strategic Framing: Underlying Mechanisms, Success Factors, and Impact, in *Political Public Relations*. Taylor & Francis, Oxfordshire.
- [17] Reese SD, Gandy J, Grant AE, 2001, Prologue—Framing Public Life: A Bridging Model for Media Research, in *Framing Public Life*. Routledge, Oxfordshire, 23–48.
- [18] Hertog JK, McLeod DM, 2001, A Multiperspectival Approach to Framing Analysis: A Field Guide, in *Framing Public Life*. Routledge, Oxfordshire, 157–178.
- [19] Nilsson S, Enander A, 2020, “Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't”: Media Frames of Responsibility and Accountability in Handling a Wildfire. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 28(1): 69–82.
- [20] Glavanicova D, Pascucci M, 2019, Formal Analysis of Responsibility Attribution in a Multimodal Framework. *PRIMA 2019: Principles and Practice of Multi-Agent Systems: 22nd International Conference, Proceedings 22*, 36–51.
- [21] Potter WJ, Riddle K, 2007, A Content Analysis of the Media Effects Literature. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84(1): 90–104.
- [22] Franzosi R, 2008, Content Analysis: Objective, Systematic, and Quantitative Description of Content. *Content Analysis*, 1(1): 21–49.
- [23] Prasad BD, 2008, Content Analysis. *Research Methods for Social Work*, 2008(5): 1–20.
- [24] Weber W, Rall HM, 2017, Authenticity in Comics Journalism. Visual Strategies for Reporting Facts. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 8(4): 376–397.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.