

# Mundo China: The media partnership reframing China's image in Brazil

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## Abstract

This paper explores China's increasing media engagement with Latin American partners. It examines the case of *Mundo China* (MC), a China-news segment broadcast by the Brazilian news channel BandNews TV and co-produced in partnership with CCTV. By conducting content analysis, we assess how China is presented, contrast the framing of China before and since the partnership agreement, and compare the televised image of China between BandNews TV and other news channels in Brazil. The findings show that MC has assisted in diversifying and balancing the ratio of positive frames in relation to the overall China-related reporting across the broadcasters sampled.

## Keywords

China, Brazil, *Mundo China*, framing, country image, CCTV, Bandeirantes, soft power, international broadcasting, co-production

## Introduction

Scholarly research on China's media 'going out policy' has largely focused on the geopolitical implications of such a strategy (Thussu et al., 2018) by mostly examining CCTV's internationalisation efforts (Zhang, 2011). Few studies, however, have probed

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Beijing's broadcasting ambitions beyond the Anglophone world (see Camoça and Araújo, 2021; Li and Liu, 2016; Madrid-Morales, 2015; Mihoubi, 2019; Ye and Albornoz, 2018), as is the case of Latin America (see Dai and Ding, 2009; Morales, 2018, 2022). Here, China's external communication engagement has become more sophisticated with the signing of cooperation agreements with several prominent media organisations, including both those that are privately owned, such as Globo Group and Bandeirantes Group in Brazil, or Caracol in Colombia, and those that are state-owned, such as Televisión Pública Argentina (TPA) in Argentina, Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC) in Brazil, Instituto Nacional de Radio y Televisión del Perú (IRTP) in Peru, or Telesur in Venezuela, among others (Morales, 2022). Seen as an attempt by Beijing to influence the framing of China-related reporting with the intention of reshaping global conversations about the country (International Federation of Journalists [IFJ], 2020), this development has raised concerns among critics, who warn of its implications for democratic values and freedom of expression in the region (Walker, 2019). This paper examines the case of Brazil, a country with great geopolitical importance but almost entirely ignored by previous research. In 2019, China Media Group (CMG) established partnerships with prominent broadcasters such as Globo (CRI, 2019), Bandeirantes and EBC (Camoça and Araújo, 2021). This paper focuses on the partnership between Bandeirantes and CCTV, and the co-production of *Mundo China* (China World), a 5 to 10 min China-news segment broadcast by BandNews TV, a 24-h news channel owned by Bandeirantes Group.

By employing quantitative content analysis, we aim to assess the contribution of MC to the (re-)framing of China in Brazil, as well as to identify any correlation between the signing of the agreement between both broadcasters and any changes in the framing of China in BandNews TV reporting. We first analyse how China is presented on MC, and then contrast the framing of China before and after the signing of the agreement and finally, we compare the image of China on BandNews TV to that on other news media in Brazil. The findings show that the signing of the co-production agreement between BandNews TV and CCTV has assisted in diversifying and, to a certain extent, balancing the ratio of positive frames in relation to the overall China-related reporting across Brazilian news broadcasters.

## **China's national image and soft power**

China has long been concerned about its international image as linked to strengthening its soft power. After Joseph Nye coined the concept of soft power in 1990, it quickly caught the attention of Chinese political discourse thanks to Wang Huning's translation of Nye's writings (Glaser and Murphy, 2009). By the mid-2000s, it had become one of the most popular terms in the Chinese foreign policy lexicon (Li, 2019). However, in China, soft power is understood somewhat differently from Nye's original concept. Repnikova (2022) highlights some differences: first, a vague separation between material power and cultural power in a way that any form of economic power can be counted as soft power; and, second, a domestic as well as external use of soft power which dialogues with ideas of cultural sovereignty and cultural security. Chinese leaders have become

aware that China's reputation in other countries was an important factor in the assessments of Chinese intentions as well as corresponding responses to increased Chinese capabilities (Ross and Johnston, 2006). Consequently, it was necessary to encourage positive overseas perceptions of China while minimising negative responses to the country's increasing military power and economic influence (Edney et al., 2020). Thus, to strengthen the country's soft power, it was important to increase the 'efforts to shape international perceptions so that the world is more welcoming and less fearful of China' (Edney et al., 2020: 1). In this sense, expanding the reach of its international media became vital. Despite prominent criticism in the West about the futility and inefficiency of these efforts, China continues to invest to tell its stories (Ramos and Menechelli, 2019; Repnikova, 2022) with the hope that 'China's cultural soft power will grow much stronger' (Xinhua, 2020). For this, it is not enough just to be able to communicate with the rest of the world, but rather it must 'tell China's story well' (Xu, 2020).

## Framing China

The belief in the effectiveness of 'telling China's story well' appears to be based on the understanding that mass-mediated messages have enormous power in shaping public opinion not only due to their content but more importantly because they contain clues about how they are to be interpreted. While audiences wield a certain degree of agency through their varying interpretations (Hall, 2005) the way messages are encoded is also crucial in the process of meaning creation. Audiences interpret messages by situating them in the context of previous knowledge, which is organised in *schemas* or 'frameworks that guide comprehension, memory and other processes associated with interpreting messages' (Wicks, 2000: 19). Particularly useful to understand this process is the concept of *framing*, that is, how the news media (or media practitioners) encode their messages by selecting and highlighting some aspects of reality, '*in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described' (Entman, 1993: 52). The media produce messages that are not just informing audiences about a certain event, but also offer the keys to how this information is to be interpreted and evaluated. In other words, the messages also suggest how the audiences ought to position themselves vis-à-vis a certain topic. Further research proposes that the degree of *accessibility* to certain frames is behind the ways of interpreting messages because they are readily available for audiences to retrieve from their own memory (Scheufele, 1999). In their capacity to offer alternative ways of interpreting reality, frames compete through their *frequency* and *strength* (Chong and Druckman, 2012). In other words, both the frequency of exposure to certain frames and the strength of individual frames are factors that contribute to shaping not only how certain issues are interpreted, but also how they are to be discussed.

China has been particularly interested in understanding how media frames contribute to its international image. Chinese scholars complain that the international media often frame China unfavourably (Peng, 2004), sometimes even demonising the country by giving salience to certain elements that lead to the perception of China as a threat (Li,

1998). Scholars beyond China also discuss how ‘global media’s news selection process – and some of the rhetoric involved in this coverage – was likely to contribute to a vilification of China’ (Paterson and Nothias, 2016: 121). Comparing the use of frames by the BBC and AJE in their coverage of China’s domestic politics, Arif and Hayat (2017) observed that the ‘BBC looked at Chinese politics from the Western point of view and values such multi-party system, democracy, freedom of expression’ (p. 103) and therefore tended to use the confrontation frame that shows conflicts and disputes within China.

The frequency and strength of unfavourable frames seem to contribute to a negative perception of China among overseas audiences who, in turn, interpret new messages by retrieving frames that are readily accessible to them. For example, Western media reports on China’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic often framed the crisis as a product of an authoritarian regime (see Sun, 2021; Zhang 2019; Zhang and Shaw, 2021) and mask donations were considered soft power efforts (Qi et al., 2022). During the same period, a Pew Research survey conducted in 2020 showed that negative perceptions of China had reached historic highs across the Western world (Silver et al., 2020). To counter this negative portrayal and reframe how China is seen internationally, Beijing has long been expanding the global reach of its media and over the past decade, it has diversified its approach by placing content and establishing partnerships with numerous media outlets across the world (IFJ, 2020), including Latin America.

## **Reshaping the conversation in Latin America**

The image of China in Latin America has been largely shaped by the dependency on international news agencies (Castro Obando, 2015 as cited by Guo, 2016; Ospina Estupinan, 2017), which is arguably exacerbated by the almost complete absence of correspondents from Latin American countries in China. Besides the dominant influence of Western media, Guo (2016) argues that China’s limited external communication capabilities make it difficult to strengthen the country’s image in Latin America. However, China’s international media are shifting from external actors to increasingly close partners (Morales, 2022). While in the 20th century Beijing targeted Latin American audiences by setting up Spanish and Portuguese versions of their international media – including magazines (*China Today*), radio (Radio Peking, later renamed as Radio Beijing and China Radio International), and television (CCTV, later rebranded as CGTN), over the last decade its ‘going global’ strategy has diversified to build new partnerships with local media organisations. One of the most far-reaching agreements was signed in 2017 between the Latin American Informative Alliance and China’s video news agency CCTV+, allowing 22 private TV networks from Latin America and the Caribbean to gain access to news content produced by CCTV (Alianza Informativa Latinoamericana, 2017). However, CGTN’s preference for Spanish appeared to leave unattended the most populated country in the region: Brazil. The strategic importance of this Portuguese-speaking emerging power has arguably led CMG – China’s state-controlled holding company in charge of Beijing’s international media operations – to sign agreements with Brazilian media giants such as Globo Group, Bandeirantes Group and EBC.

The partnership with Bandeirantes created an unprecedented opportunity for China to gain agency in shaping its image in Brazil. The scope of the cooperation between CCTV (CMG) and Bandeirantes Group has been expanding with the signing of agreements in 2011 (Tribuna, 2011), 2017 (Consulado Geral da República Popular da China em São Paulo, 2017) and 2019 (BandNews FM, 2019). Since September 2019, the partnership became more visible on the screen of BandNews TV with a Chinese journalist from CCTV, Gabriel Yin, contributing regularly to the channel's news bulletin. In October of the same year, the channel aired a series of reports on the 70th anniversary of the Chinese Revolution (de Sá, 2019). A month later, and ahead of the BRICS summit in Brazil, the Portuguese version of 'Classic Phrases Cited by President Xi Jinping' was broadcast as part of the latest agreement, which also marked the official launching of MC (BandNews FM, 2019). Well-aligned with China's strategy of 'borrowing a boat to go to sea' (*jie chuan chu hai*) to 'tell China's story well', MC's Chinese name *Zhongguo gushi* (China's story) is revealing of its main aim: to 'select interesting news stories that occur in China's economic and social fields every day, and show to a large number of Brazilian audiences a real, three-dimensional and comprehensive China in the new era' (CCTV, 2020). MC airs on BandNews TV during its news bulletins in two main formats: during weekdays it is presented by Brazilian anchors and during weekends it features Chinese presenters. This study reflects on MC's contribution to the portrayal of China in Brazil and tests the following three hypotheses:

H1: MC exclusively favours positive frames about China.

Based on the assumption that MC is tasked to tell 'China's story well', it is expected to show China in a positive light by exclusively adopting positive frames in its reporting about the country.

H2: Framing in news bulletins (not MC) has changed after signing the agreement and is now more aligned with the frames used by MC.

As a news channel, BandNews TV reports on an array of domestic and international issues, including news about China that neither is covered by MC nor is a product of this co-production. We test whether BandNews TV news bulletins (not including MC) have also adopted a more positive tone when reporting on China.

H3: The image of China on BandNews TV is now overall more positive and diverse than that of other news broadcasters in Brazil.

By showing a 'real' and 'comprehensive' image of China, MC is expected to cover stories that other channels would not. We hypothesise that MC contributes to showing an image of China that is both more positive and more diverse, helping to balance out the negative portrayal by other media organisations in Brazil.

## Methods

Content analysis has been widely used to examine different aspects of China's image across the world. For example, while Peng (2004) showed how the coverage of China in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* between 1992 and 2001 remained relatively negative, particularly in relation to stories presented using political and ideological frames, Li (2012) examined the framing of China on two of the most famous current affairs programmes in Australia. Very few studies have used content analysis to understand the image of China in Latin America. Armony and Velásquez (2015) explored how narratives of anti-Chinese sentiment are constructed online, by analysing Facebook users' comments in eight major newspapers from Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, and Peru. Examining five news outlets from Colombia, Peru, Mexico, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, Ospina Estupinan (2017) revealed how China's image is often negative in Spanish-speaking countries. Zhu and Wang (2018) focused on how Chinese outward foreign direct investment is portrayed in 14 newspapers across eight countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Venezuela. With this paper, we contribute to the understanding of China's image in Brazil, by examining news co-production between media organisations from both countries.

## Sampling

The sample consisted of China-related videos published by BandNews TV and other broadcasters on their respective YouTube channels. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman, 2021), Brazilians tend to prefer online platforms (including social media) to access news (83%), compared to TV (61%) and print (12%). Thus, the first step was to compile a list of China-related videos uploaded to the YouTube accounts corresponding to Bandeirantes and other news media according to the scope of the hypotheses. First, videos of MC were filtered from the account Band Jornalismo to test the prevalence of positive reporting. The time frame was established from the date of the signing of the agreement between Bandeirantes and CCTV (11 November 2019) until 31 December 2021. Second, to test changes in China-framing reporting, China-related news videos published by Band Jornalismo (excluding MC) were analysed by comparing the output pre- and post-signature of the agreement. The starting point for the time frame was set to coincide with the opening of their YouTube account (8 August 2016). Third, to examine the differences in the framing of China between BandNews TV and other media, the analysis included China-related news videos published by other private (SBT and Record) and public (TV Brasil) Brazilian broadcasters, as well as two international broadcasters with localised operations in Brazil (CNN Brasil and BBC News Brasil). The same time frame used for the first phase was used for the third.

YouTube's API and R were used to retrieve the sample list by conducting a search of the keywords 'China' and 'Chines', which permit identification of the Portuguese variants 'chinês' and 'chinesa' (Chinese). After eliminating duplicates and upon an initial inspection of the data, several videos without apparent relation to China were detected.

The assumption was that the search also incorporated comments and automatically generated captions that included such a combination of letters. Therefore, the list was filtered to include only results with the combination 'Chin' in either the title or description of the videos. Table 1 shows the number of videos included in the sampling process. A random sample of 40% of videos retrieved ( $N=616$ ) was deemed representative of this study. Having set each news story as the unit of analysis, the total of news stories coded amounted to 719, because each MC video contained an average of three stories each. Each subsample was proportionally (40%) calculated and rounded to replicate the distribution found in the sample retrieved from YouTube for each channel. Considering that some news channels might have pre-selected news before uploading it to YouTube, the data only reflects the material uploaded to this particular platform and it might differ from what was aired and what might have been taken off YouTube before the data collection. Therefore, the findings only refer to China's televised image as reflected by news channels on YouTube and should not be generalised to overall news broadcasting in Brazil.

### Variables

To address the hypotheses, stories were coded for *topic*, *tone*, and *frame*. The variable *length of news items* was retrieved from YouTube and therefore not individually coded nor subject to reliability scores. A codebook was compiled to explain in detail how each variable was operationalised. *Topic* was coded in accordance with Hernández and Madrid-Morales' (2020) study of news sources in Spanish international broadcasting and adapted to include one major relevant topic that deserved special highlighting: the COVID-19 pandemic. *Tone* was coded in relation to the image of China and in line with Peng's (2004: 60–61) own operationalisation of favourability, that is, stories were coded as either *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral*, depending on whether the overall tone or prevailing elements in the story contributed to a favourable image of China by suggesting either stability/strength/progress, or instability/weakness/conflict, or whether the tone was overall balanced/mixed. Unlike Peng, our study used a 3-point scale ranging from

**Table 1.** Sampling process.

Channels	Total videos retrieved	40% sample	Total news stories analysed
<b>Band Jornalismo</b>	<b>785</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>410</b>
<i>Mundo China</i>	118	47	139
BandNews TV	211* + 456 <sup>§</sup> = 667	84* + 182 <sup>§</sup> = 266	86* + 185 <sup>§</sup> = 271
<b>Other channels</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>309</b>
SBT news	132	53	54
Jornal da Record	213	85	86
TV Brasil	126	50	52
CNN Brasil	192	77	78
BBC News Brasil	93	37	39
<b>Total N</b>	<b>1541</b>	<b>616</b>	<b>719</b>

Note: \*Before agreement. <sup>§</sup>After agreement.

1 (*negative*) to 3 (*positive*). This approach was preferred to avoid confusion arising from the nuanced differentiation between intermediate and extreme points in the scale such as positive and very positive, or negative and very negative.

*Frame* was operationalised in six different categories by adapting the findings of previous studies. Two were based on what is often perceived as frames commonly used by foreign media in their reporting of China, either as a *threat* to other countries economically, politically or militarily (Wu, 2009) – and by extension undermining the international rules-based system, threatening democratic values in other countries and dragging them into debt traps – or inherently *authoritarian* and oppressive to its own citizens – from political persecution and violating human rights, to the use of technology for social control, surveillance and developing into a dystopian regime. The following two frames were deemed to be preferred by China: as an international *force for good* and as a *role model*. The former highlights the international projection of China's success, as a responsible power (*fuzeren daguo xingxiang*) or a global saviour (Repnikova, 2022) either by donating vaccines (*vaccine diplomacy*) or contributing to peacekeeping missions and as a partner in a win–win cooperation relationship. The latter emphasises the country's success domestically, as a unique and highly efficient model (*Zhongguo moshi*) with high technological development, where the Chinese dream (*Zhongguo meng*) enables unprecedented progress in standards of living, satisfying people's needs (poverty alleviation) and successfully battling against the COVID-19 pandemic (*kangyizhan*). Another two frequent frames see China as being *assertive* – strengthening its voice internationally and taking a defensive attitude against what it sees as unfair criticism or (verbal) attacks by other countries, with Chinese diplomats often seen as actively defending their country from 'anti-Chinese foreign forces' (*wolf warrior diplomacy*) – or as an exotic country with an ancient culture, extraordinary landscape, and even strange or unusual customs. Any reports that did not fall within those frames were coded as *other*.

Coding was conducted by two Portuguese speakers. The initial period of training lasted two weeks, after which the coding schedule was partially re-designed, followed by a period of re-training. Table 2 shows final intercoder reliability scores calculated using ReCal2 on a subsample of 10%. During the coding process, both coders made annotations about other aspects that could help further illuminate the findings, particularly in relation to sources disclosed, locations and profiles of presenters, journalists, correspondents, and other people appearing on camera. These additional observations will be addressed in the discussion to contextualise and critically reflect on the implications of the findings.

**Table 2.** Intercoder reliability coefficients.

Variable	Percentage agreement	Krippendorff's alpha
Topic	89.09%	0.859
Tone	89.09%	0.836
Frame	85.45%	0.810
<b>Average</b>	<b>87.88%</b>	<b>0.835</b>



## Findings

The findings validate H1, that is, the image of China emerging from MC is overwhelmingly positive, with 81.3% of the stories showing China in a positive light, compared to 15.1% deemed neutral and only 3.6% of stories interpreted as showing a rather negative side of the country. China’s preferred frames tend to dominate, showing it either as a success story (43.2%) or as a force for good (17.3%). The exotic frame is also often employed positively (20.1%). Among the most covered topics are COVID-19 (22.3%), economy and finance (20.1%), culture (18%) and science and technology (10.8%). A cross-tabulation of frames and topics ( $\chi^2 = 132.952$ ,  $df = 50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) shows that when China is portrayed as a force for good, it is mostly in relation to its economic power (41.7%). China’s success story is mostly associated with its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic (26.7%), its economic development (23.3%) or science and technology (16.7%). China is framed as an exotic country mostly in relation to its culture (57.1%).

The findings also support H2. Table 3 compares the mean and distribution of tone of videos corresponding to BandNews TV news bulletins (BNTV NB) before and after signing the 2019 agreement. The data suggest a decrease in China’s negative portrayal (15.2 percentage points) and a slight increase in China being portrayal in a positive light (6.3 percentage points). The results of a 2-tailed *t*-test to compare the mean difference between the two samples (i.e. before and after signing the agreement) appeared to be significant at  $p < 0.05$  ( $M_{BA} = 1.94$ ,  $SD = .845$  and  $M_{AA} = 2.16$ ,  $SD = .775$ ;  $t(269) = 2.06$ ,

**Table 3.** Tone mean and distribution of China’s portrayal on BandNews TV news bulletins (BNTV NB) before and after the agreement.

	Before agreement	After agreement	After agreement + MC
Mean	1.94	2.16	2.42
Positive	32.6%	38.9%	57.1%
Neutral	35.1	37.8	28.1
Negative	38.4	23.2	14.8
<b>Total N</b>	<b>N<sub>BA</sub> = 86</b>	<b>N<sub>AA</sub> = 185</b>	<b>N<sub>AA+MC</sub> = 324</b>

Note: Mean values range from 1 (negative) to 3 (positive).

**Table 4.** Tone mean comparison between channels.

	TV Brasil	Record	BBC News Brasil	CNN Brasil	SBT News
Bandeirantes 2.42	2.10	2.00	1.90	1.69	1.63
Mundo China 2.78			<b>1.86</b>		
			<b>1.91</b>		
			<b>All channels: 2.15</b>		

Note: Mean values range from 1 (negative) to 3 (positive).

$p = .040$ ). This difference becomes even more pronounced when MC is included in the post-agreement sample, bringing the proportion of positive stories up to 57.1%, compared to only 14.8 negative ( $M_{BA} = 1.94$ ,  $SD = .845$  and  $M_{AA+MC} = 2.42$ ,  $SD = .736$ ;  $t(408) = 5.216$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The findings also support H3, whereby MC contributes to changing and diversifying China's televised image in Brazil. Table 4 shows how the tone mean for all other channels is slightly negative (1.86), then becomes almost neutral (1.91) when BandNews TV news bulletins are added to the mix, and then finally slightly positive thanks to MC.

Table 5 shows how the distribution of topics is largely affected by the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which was the focus of attention across all channels apart from the BBC. Despite this, it is possible to observe that MC contributed to the expansion of the variety of topics, by covering areas that are relatively overlooked by other channels such as culture (18%), or comparatively underreported such as economy and finance (10.8%) and even news about the environment (5%). Conversely, topics that frequently feature on other channels seem to be underreported by MC such as domestic politics (0.7%), law (0%), and foreign affairs (5%).

Table 6 highlights a stark difference in how China is framed by different channels in Brazil. While BandNews TV does not shy away from presenting news that can lead to portraying China as a threat (20.5%), this frame seems to be among the most frequent in other channels (26.2%), particularly on CNN (38.5%), SBT (31.5%) and Record (26.7%). Portraying China as an authoritarian state is less frequent on other channels but nonetheless comparatively higher than on Bandeirantes. It is noteworthy that, even though China's preferred frames appeared more frequently on Bandeirantes (48.1%), they also featured on other channels such as Record (30.2%) and TV Brasil (28.8%).

## Discussion and conclusion

This study set out to examine how MC is contributing to a reframing of China's televised image in Brazil. The first hypothesis predicted that MC would exclusively favour positive frames in their reporting of this emerging power. As expected, the findings show that this co-production is primarily tasked with presenting a different image of China, one that other broadcasters in Brazil rarely offer. To 'tell China's story well' it reports more frequently on topics that other broadcasters seem less inclined to cover and it employs frames that create a more positive image of China. While CGTN has a dedicated Spanish channel to target Spanish-speaking countries across Latin America, Brazil was left relatively unattended, and the partnership with Bandeirantes has allowed CCTV to gain more agency in shaping the image of China in this emerging power. This could be considered a more indirect approach to 'borrow a boat to go to sea', which is not simply just about buying airtime to place content on local platforms but rather sharing the boat. During the coding process, we observed that while sometimes news readers and journalists appear to be all Brazilian, other times there was a mixture of Brazilian and Chinese newsreaders, reporters and even correspondents. Sometimes news was only read and discussed in the BandNews TV studio, but sometimes part of it would take place in CCTV's studios. Very often news was pre-packaged, featuring journalists

**Table 5.** Topic distribution comparison between channels (in percentages).

Topic	Mundo		BNTV		Total BandNews*	Total other channels*	SBT News	Record	TV	CNN	BBC News
	China	0.7%	NB	0.5%							
Domestic Politics	5.0	11.4	8.6	0.6%	2.6%	1.9%	2.3%	—	3.8%	5.1%	
Foreign affairs	—	1.1	0.6	11.0	4.7	7.4	4.7	7.7	20.5	15.4	
Military	20.1	14.1	16.7	1.6	1.2	—	1.2	—	5.1	—	
Economy, Finance	2.2	1.1	1.5	8.1	7.0	5.6	7.0	11.5	6.4	12.8	
Social issues	—	1.6	0.9	1.9	2.3	3.7	2.3	1.9	—	2.6	
Law	18.0	1.1	8.3	4.2	2.3	13.0	2.3	—	2.6	5.1	
Culture	10.8	5.9	8.0	1.6	—	—	—	3.8	1.3	5.1	
Science and technology	5.0	2.7	3.7	6.1	2.3	—	2.3	9.6	9.0	12.8	
Environment	5.0	—	2.2	1.0	1.2	1.9	1.2	—	1.3	—	
Sports	5.0	1.1	2.8	3.2	5.8	—	5.8	9.6	—	—	
Human interest	5.8	2.2	3.7	4.2	1.2	3.7	1.2	1.9	—	23.1	
Disasters	22.3	57.3	42.3	3.6	1.2	—	1.2	9.6	5.1	2.6	
Covid-19	139	185	324	50.8	68.6	63.0	68.6	44.2	44.9	15.4	
Total N				<b>309</b>	86	54	86	52	78	39	

Note: \* $\chi^2=46.398$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p<0.001$ . Significant at the 0.5 level.

**Table 6.** Frame distribution comparison between channels (in percentages).

Frame	Mundo China	BNTV NB	Total band news*	Total other channels*	SBT News	Record	TV Brasil	CNN Brasil	BBC News Brasil
Threat	0.7%	20.5%	12.0%	26.2%	31.5%	26.7%	13.5%	38.5%	10.3%
Authoritarian	–	2.2	1.2	4.9	11.1	3.5	1.9	–	12.8
Force for good	17.3	21.1	19.4	9.7	7.4	11.6	15.4	6.4	7.7
Success	43.2	17.8	28.7	10.4	5.6	18.6	13.5	3.8	7.7
Assertive	2.9	3.2	3.1	6.5	5.6	4.7	5.8	11.5	2.6
Exotic	20.1	2.2	9.9	5.5	1.9	2.3	7.7	2.6	20.5
Other	15.8	33.0	25.6	36.9	37.0	32.6	42.3	37.2	38.5
Total N	139	185	324	309	54	86	52	78	39

Note:  $\chi^2 = 75.036$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Significant at the 0.5 level.

reporting on-site and interviews with experts, officials, and the general public. While journalists on site were almost exclusively Chinese, voiceovers were mostly by Portuguese native speakers and subtitles were only used for interviewees. The content tended to look professionally made, despite some issues such as the lack of names and titles either on-screen or in the voiceover for many of the interviewees, many of whom seemed to be experts and officials from the Chinese government. It is unclear whether this was deliberate or just substandard journalistic practice.

The second hypothesis anticipated that the framing of China on BandNews TV news bulletins (excluding MC) would have changed after signing the agreement and would now be more aligned with the frames used by MC. Even if the data suggests a slight increase in the proportion of positive reports and a minor downward trend in the proportion of negative reports, it would be misleading to assume that it categorically supports the hypothesis of Bandeirantes being influenced by CCTV, let alone engaging in self-censorship. Nevertheless, it appears that some sectors of Brazilian society believe this is the case. The most memorable case that feeds this narrative happened at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when diplomatic tension emerged between China and Brazil, after Eduardo Bolsonaro – a member of the Brazilian Parliament and the son of the incumbent president, Jair Bolsonaro – accused China on Twitter of allegedly withholding information about the coronavirus (Bolsonaro, 2020), which prompted a swift counter-tweet by the Chinese ambassador in Brazil condemning Bolsonaro's 'evil insult against China and the Chinese people' (Yang, 2020). Soon after Brazil's minister of foreign affairs intervened in Bolsonaro's defence, BandNews TV published an editorial harshly criticising Bolsonaro's tweet as an 'unnecessary provocation by an irresponsible deputy, followed by an idiotic chancellor' (Bandeirantes, 2020) and describing their actions as 'an attitude of contempt for Brazil's friendship and respect for a people who are currently showing their tenacity in an efficient fight against the coronavirus' (Bandeirantes, 2020). A few months later, rumours circulated on Facebook alleging that the Chinese communist party had acquired Bandeirantes Group (Agência Lupa, 2020). Even if this was later discredited as 'fake news', many comments left by viewers on YouTube tend to replicate similar claims.

Although these stories appear to be wild speculation, certain elements seem to indulge such claims. While BandNews TV is mostly clear about MC's nature as a co-production with its 'partner' CCTV, sometimes such differentiation became blurred. We observed that, compared to other channels, Chinese sources are more frequently used by BandNews TV in its reporting of China (even excluding MC). Sometimes Chinese journalists are referred to as reporters or even correspondents, without mentioning their affiliation with CCTV or CMG. Furthermore, a few videos were found to be named in ways that misrepresented China as the focus of the story when it was only mentioned briefly. For example, on a video of 2 min 19 s entitled 'China's president declares he joins USA in fighting coronavirus' only 10 s (00:45–00:57) were dedicated to Xi Jinping's declarations, while the focus of the report was solely placed on events in the USA (Bandeirantes, 2020b). Finally, other stories arguably have limited news value in Brazil and echo the style of Chinese state media. A 22-seconds video clip published in early 2021 features a Brazilian anchor reading news akin to CCTV's flagship newscast *Xinwen Lianbo*:

Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a New Year's speech today to the people and members of the Communist Party. He thanked the [Chinese people for their] effort during the Covid-19 pandemic and highlighted the country's rapid economic recovery. [Xi] Jinping also celebrated the success of probe shipments to Mars and the moon that brought back samples of lunar soil. (Bandeirantes, 2021)

Echoing South Africa's Information Scandal and particularly the McGoff episode documented by Paterson and Malila (2013) in relation to the South African government gaining control of the UK-based United Press International Television News (UPTIN) during the 1970s with the aim of influencing how South Africa was perceived internationally, it is worthwhile reflecting on the implications of transnational media partnerships that allow a country's state media to gain agenda-setting power over domestic media in another country, even if the overall content itself might appear innocuous. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent journalistic independence and integrity can be guaranteed if the content is deemed of a sensitive nature by any of the parties involved.

The third hypothesis suggested that, thanks to MC, the image of China on BandNews TV is now overall more positive and diverse than that on other news media in Brazil. The data confirmed that MC's main contribution is its coverage of less sensitive areas such as economy, finance, culture, science, and technology, while avoiding foreign affairs, the military and law. In terms of framing, MC contributes to presenting China in a constructive way, prioritising positive frames that highlight the country's success both at home and abroad, and making use of the exotic frame to showcase its ancient culture.

MC is a unique experiment in Brazilian journalism and this paper has only examined the tip of the iceberg. Future studies need to inspect how the image presented by MC is journalistically constructed and legitimised, the type of sources used, and the voices featured. While this paper contributes to our understanding of China's televised image in Brazil, it only addresses how this image is reflected by content published by news channels on social media and no inferences should be made with regard to audience perception and public opinion. Finally, even if there is a strong case for collecting data from YouTube, the main limitation of this study is the absence of Globo TV, perhaps the most prominent broadcaster in Brazil, which unfortunately does not publish journalistic content on YouTube.

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