

## A Multifaceted Narrative Perspective Research on the Guangming Daily During Covid-19

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a serious impact around the world, and as China is one of the countries most affected by the epidemic, the media has played an important role in the prevention, control and dissemination of the epidemic. As a widely influential newspaper in China, Guangming Daily played an important role in reporting the COVID-19 epidemic. In narratology, stories are told, so the angle of storytelling is essential, and the angle of storytelling is also the reporting perspective. The purpose of this study is to examine the content of Guangming Daily's coverage as a way to understand the perspective of Guangming Daily in COVID-19 outbreak coverage. Using Guangming Daily, COVID-19, public health emergencies and reporting perspectives as keywords, this study searched through the Guangming Daily Academic and Cultural Multimedia Material Library to collect data and explore previous studies. The scope of the study was determined to be from 27 December 2019 to 7 June 2020, based on the white paper "China's Action to Combat the New Crown Pneumonia Epidemic," which was released by the Chinese government on 7 June 2020,. The study found that there are different ways of narrative perspectives in Guangming Daily, which are categorised as zero-focused perspective, out-focused perspective, and in-focused perspective. Narrative perspective often means the narrator's point of view and position, and the audience's understanding of the narrative work is also affected by the narrative perspective, and the choice of narrative perspective also determines the narrator's relationship with the story and characters. The purpose of this study is to provide references and lessons for future media response to public health emergencies.

**Keywords:** Guangming Daily, COVID-19, Public Health Emergencies, Narrative Perspective, Reporting Perspective

### Introduction

Since 2019, the COVID-19 outbreak has had a major impact on the world, and public health emergencies have had a huge impact on people's lives and the development of society. Countries and governments have taken a series of initiatives, among which media coverage of the outbreak has become increasingly important. The country needs the media to

disseminate timely and accurate information, guide public behaviour and shoulder their responsibilities. Throughout this tumultuous period, the media has emerged as a pivotal actor, wielding considerable influence in the dissemination of information, the shaping of public perceptions, and the formulation of response strategies (Li et al., 2020). In China, Guangming Daily, a newspaper with intellectuals as its main readers, played a key role in the COVID-19 coverage as the main official newspaper and one of the most influential media. Within the realm of narratology, the concept of storytelling assumes paramount significance, serving as a lens through which events are perceived, interpreted, and communicated (Ryan, 2004). Since it is not possible to make a direct copy of the external objective world, when the author of a narrative, he has to choose a perspective to illustrate the story point (He, 2003). After a news report has been screened by reporters, editors and others, different reports will make the news event appear differently in the end, so it can be said that what the audience sees depends on the media's choice of perspective, which is the necessity of studying the narrative perspective. Studying the reporting perspective of Guangming Daily can understand the role of the media in public health emergencies, and provide research references for future reporting of related content.

## **Literature Review**

### **Guangming Daily**

Guangming Daily is a party newspaper under the supervision of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Guangming Daily was founded on 16 June 1949 and has permanent correspondents in 23 countries and regions around the world. Once known for the article Practice is the Only Standard for Testing Truth, its main readers are intellectuals (Su, 2021). Guangming Daily is a comprehensive daily newspaper organised by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), with intellectuals as its main readers, focusing on the ideological field and the UNESCO field, and facing the whole country (Zhang, 2015). As an iconic communicator of traditional media, Guangming Daily's comprehensive and balanced coverage of public health emergencies, as well as the layout model and topic selection features used in its coverage, is an experience that is very worthwhile for paper media of the same type to learn from, and its successes will be twice as effective when extended to local media. Guangming Daily is only a microcosm of traditional media, this paper hopes to summarise and analysis Guangming Daily's coverage of the Covid-19 outbreak, and seek to explore a more perfect mode of reporting on public health emergencies, so that in the future, when responding to the same kind of events, it can do so in a stable and orderly manner, and be busy but not chaotic (Gong, 2021).

### *Public Health Emergencies*

According to China's Emergency Regulations on Public Health Emergencies, a public health emergency refers to the sudden occurrence of a major infectious disease outbreak, mass unexplained disease, major food and occupational poisoning, and other events that seriously affect public health, which cause or may cause serious damage to public health. Because of their sudden outbreak, rapid spread, and close relationship with the lives and health of the general public, public health emergencies are prone to become the focus of heated debates throughout society within a short period of time. Many communication scholars believe that the SARS epidemic in 2003 was the beginning of the study of public

health emergencies, and then most of these studies focused on the reporting of social health events with greater impact.

Some experts and scholars believe that public health emergencies are emergencies that seriously affect public health and social development (Wang, 2010). It includes major infectious diseases, serious food poisoning and occupational poisoning, and unexplained diseases. According to Cai, public health events are characterised by five features: suddenness, diversity, group, social and stage (Cai, 2013). According to Ye Dongqing, public health events are characterised by suddenness, high concern, severity of harm, and chain reaction (Ye & Cha, 2009). Wang et al. found in their study that public health emergencies have a significant impact on the economy, security, and social order, but they also cause emotional problems such as nervousness, over-anxiety, and extreme depression among the public, which affects the public's normal social life (Wang,. The outbreak of C.pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in late January 2020, which spread throughout the country in a short period of time and then to countries around the globe, was a public health emergency.

## **Methods**

This study conducted a narrative analysis of news about the Covid-19 in the People's Daily in order to visit the characteristics of the news and summarise them. Data were collected through a search of the Guangming Daily Academic and Cultural Multimedia Material Library, and according to the white paper "China's Actions to Combat the Covid-19" released on 7 June 2020, the study period was set as 27 December 2019 - 7 June 2020, and the search keyword COVID-19 was used. to collect the Eligible news stories. A total of 2,559 stories were published.

Narratology theory was used for research and discussion. The term narratologie originated in France. The term "narratology" was first coined by the French linguist, Todorov, in his *Decameron Grammatique* (1969). With the continuous enrichment of the object of study, narratology gradually merged with other disciplines, and news narratology, which takes the news text as the object of study, also developed. The essential difference between narratology and news narratology lies in the authenticity of the research subject; the research subject of narratology covers virtual works including poetry, novels, etc., while news narratology takes news facts as the research subject, and the authenticity of the story is the basic principle. The penetration of narratology in the field of news opens up a new path for news pragmatic research, cis the study of narrative text, people's reports as a class of narrative text, based on the logical framework of narratology to analyse it, is conducive to carry out a more comprehensive analysis (Ren, 2020).

In narrative, story is the basic material, while discourse is a combination and structure, a combination and structure that integrates the story into the narrative text. In the view of American scholar Chatman, narrative text contains story and discourse, of which, story includes event and existence, while event includes action and state, and existence includes characters and environment, which is presented in the following figure.

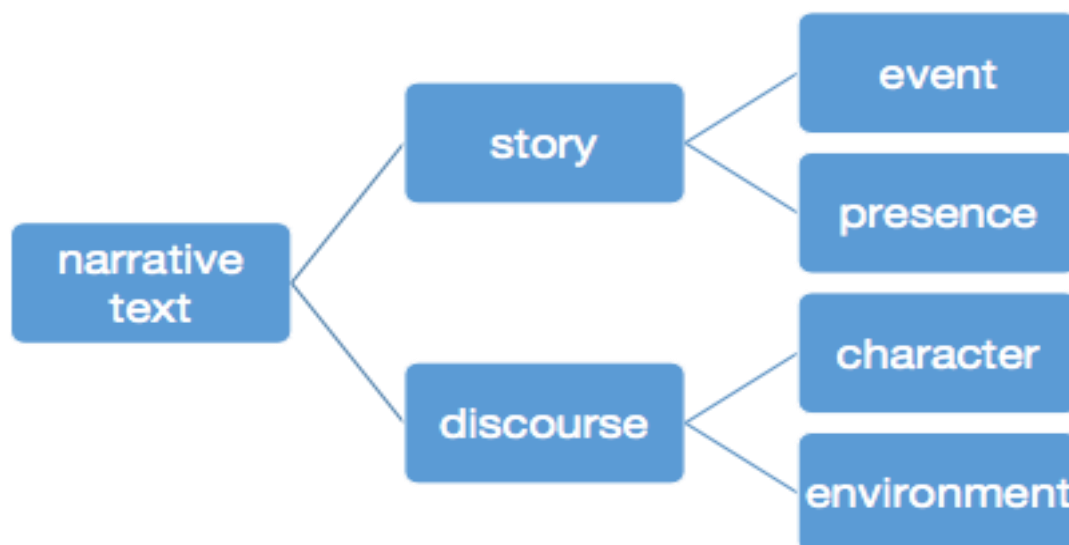


Table 1: Narrative Framework

The starting point of the study is the narrative text, the focus of attention is on the text, and the study is how to tell the story more specifically. G. Prince once elaborated that the study of narratology includes the study of the narrative work itself and its related theoretical study. From his understanding of narratology, it can be seen that for the study of narratology, narrative works are the foundation, and without narrative works, the study of narratology is meaningless (Wang Frost). In general, it can be considered that news narratology is a discipline that studies the principles, methods, laws and applications of news narratives, and its object of study is the news narrative works in various genres with truthfulness and objectivity, and its fields of study are narrative structure, narrative frequency, narrative perspective, narrative time, and narrator (Qin, 2016).

This study will focus on analysing the narrative perspective of Guangming Daily. In narrative research, perspective is used to describe stories. In news reporting, it is manifested in the phenomenon of "one thing, many reports", in which the same piece of news is reported through different perspectives, often presenting different news significance. Due to the limitation of space, it is difficult to present all the details of the news report, the narrator in the choice of events and characters, the narrator will put the narrative perspective on the most can arouse the interest of the readers, or the most can reflect the characteristics of the characters in the direction of the narration of the guidance of public opinion, so that their own reports are rich in social significance.

The perspective in news reporting is where the meaning of the article lies, and the purpose is to let readers receive the most crucial part of a news event, which is presented through the choice of the perspective of reporters, editors and others (Ren, 2020). Different scholars have their own focus on the study of narrative perspective, by analysing the selected samples, this paper analyses the narrative perspective of the "Guangming Daily" report, based on Gennett's division of perspectives, which are: zero-focused perspective, inward-focused perspective and outward-focused perspective.

First, zero-focus perspective is a kind of omniscient perspective, the narrator does not have a constant observation angle, can observe the story from any angle, can also penetrate into the heart of the characters, like God general omnipotence, not subject to the limitations of space and time, can be traversed to the past, but also can observe what happens in other places. The narrator knows more than the characters;

Second, the inward-focused perspective is that the narrator can only tell what he or she has mastered, and the narrator in this type of perspective is usually the one who is informed of the events or involved in the development of the story, and the narrator knows as much as the characters, which usually means that with the help of a certain character's conscious perception, the narrator narrates the world as he or she experiences it from a certain character's point of view. In this case, a character's perspective can always be used, or several characters' perspectives can be used in turn in the narrative to show the different stages of the development of the event.

Third, the external focus perspective, in which the narrative language shows the characteristics of calm and objective, and the narrator can only observe the characters from the external environment, but can't enter into the character's inner self, and narrates the story with an "impersonal" and indifferent attitude. "The narrator can only observe the characters from the external environment, but cannot enter the inner part of the characters, and narrates what he sees and hears in an "impersonal" and indifferent attitude.

The narrator is limited to describing visible behaviour without any explanation, and does not intervene in the inner activities of any of the characters in the story; the narrator knows less than the characters. The narrator knows less than the characters and records the events as if they were a camera.

### Discussion and Results

Searching for "Covid-19" in the Guangming Daily Academic Culture Multimedia Material Library, according to the white paper "China's Action to Combat the Covid-19" released on 7 June 2020, the research period was set as 27 December 2019- 7 June 2020, with a total of 2,559 reports. And it is divided into 5 phases: 1. 27 December 2019 - 19 January 2020; 2. 20 January 2020 - 20 February 2020; 3. 21 February 2020 - 17 March 2020; 4. 18 March 2020 - 28 April 2020; 5. 29 April 2020 - June 2020 7.

The number of reported outbreaks of CKP in these five phases is shown below:

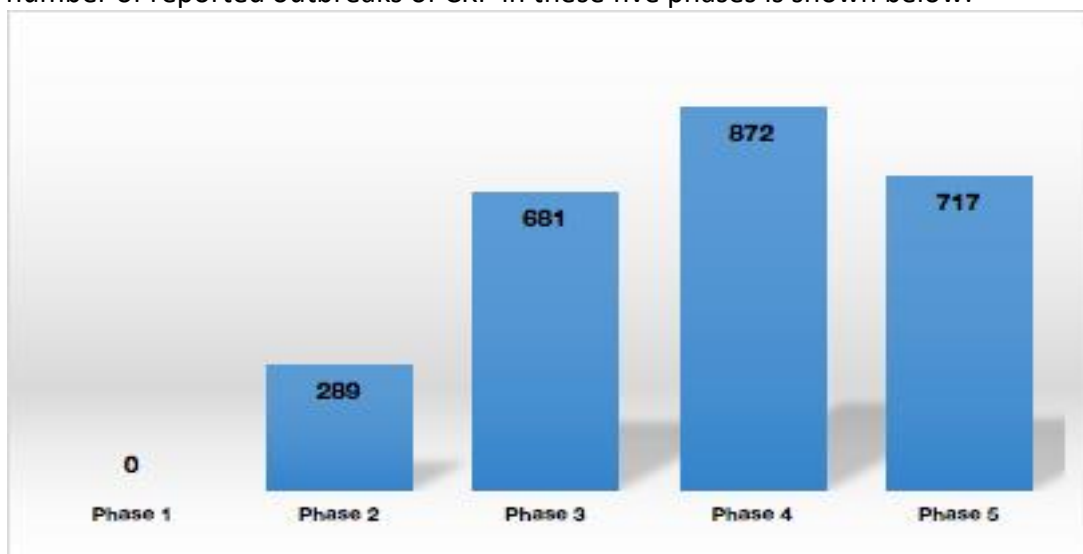


Figure 1: Number of Stories in 5 Phases

Phase 1, 27 December 2019 - 19 January 2020. News is released with timeliness, which refers to the time when the news facts occur and are reported as news, and is one of the basic characteristics of news. In terms of guiding public opinion, timeliness means that the media guides the dissemination of relevant public opinion. When a public health emergency occurs, the public is eager for the mainstream media to report the relevant news information in a timely manner with an authoritative, professional and rigorous style.

In the early stage of the Covid-19 outbreak, most of the epidemic information was circulated through the self-media or personal channels. However, due to the chaotic sources of information in the new media and the lack of supervision of its dissemination, many unconfirmed news were constantly reproduced and spread. One of the conditions for the occurrence of rumours put forward by the American psychologist Alpert is that news without concrete evidence means that the mainstream media have collectively lost their voices. It was only after 20 January that Guangming Daily began to pay attention to and report on the Covid-19, leading to a period between December and January when rumours were allowed to spread and the public was left in the dark. The mainstream media were slow to dispel the rumours, which led to more people spreading and believing in the rumours, which led to many people queuing up to buy essential commodities during the serious period of the outbreak, increasing the risk of contagion of the new crown epidemic. Therefore, after the epidemic and the spreading wave of public opinion, there was a certain lag in the reporting of Guangming Daily.

From phase 2 to phase 5, that is, from 20 January 2020 to 7 June 2020, the mainstream media began to report substantially, and people recognised the seriousness of the pneumonia epidemic and paid close attention to the relevant information. Guangming Daily shoulders the responsibility of mainstream value dissemination, through correct public opinion guidance, through authoritative and fast news dissemination, timely and fully respond to public opinion concerns, alleviate people's hunger for information, so that the general public can keep abreast of the development and evolution of the pneumonia epidemic and epidemic prevention measures. Through the study, it was found that the "zero-focus perspective", "outward-focus perspective" and "inward-focus perspective" were all reflected in the report of Guangming Daily. Due to the sudden outbreak of the epidemic, everything was unknown and people were eager to know what happened, so the content of the reports in this phase mainly centred on the spread of the epidemic, government initiatives, medical treatment, economic impact, and anti-epidemic heroes and stories.

The author adopts Genette's classification, and after statistical analysis of the columns, there are 1,443 articles in zero-focus perspective, 383 articles in in-focus perspective, and 743 articles in out-focus perspective. Of course, a story does not necessarily contain only one narrative perspective, and the categorisation in this study is based on the main perspective used in the story. In terms of quantity, we can see that zero-focus is the most and inward-focus is the least, and inward-focus can best show the emotional attitude of the narrator, which is less used in news.

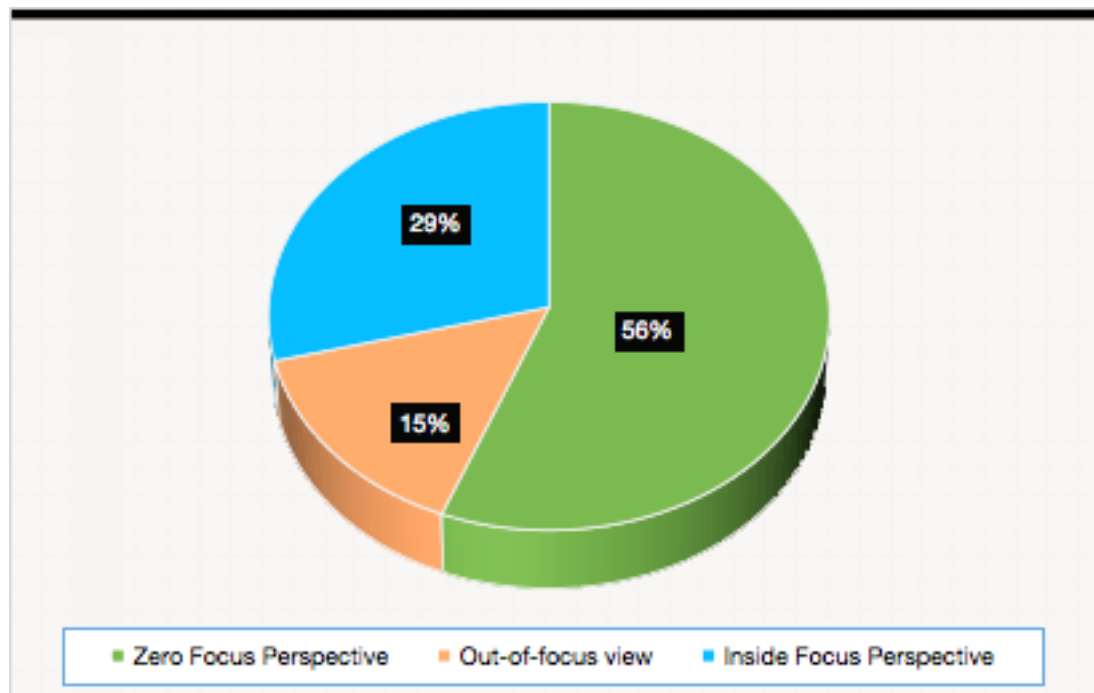


Figure 2 : Percentage of 3 Perspectives

It is found that Guangming Daily has adopted a zero-focus perspective in many of its reports on the Covid-19 outbreak. This perspective is often used in the reporting of relatively complex and specialised news events, where the narrator is able to explain the story from all angles, thus enhancing the breadth and depth of the report, and strengthening the authority and persuasiveness of the report. There are a number of such zero-focus perspectives in the research text, examples of which are shown in the figure below.

Table 2

*Examples of Zero-focus Perspectives*

Date of publication	Title
2020.02.07	Investing in the prevention and control of epidemics in key areas
2020.04.09	Stick to the front line of the fight against the epidemic and fight until the disease runs out.
2020.05.21	Scrambling in the lab

February 7, 2020 "efforts to do a good job in key areas of epidemic prevention and control" article wrote, "distress", "volunteers" and other words, reflecting the health care workers are always at the front line, is ready to sacrifice for the country and the people at any time, and also cited in the Leishenshan hospital construction site builders competing for time, day and night, making the characters appear three-dimensional and full-fledged.

On 9 April 2020, the publication of "adhere to the front line of the fight against the Covid-19, the war to the end of the disease". It tells the story that when the First Hospital Affiliated to Sun Yat-sen University received the call from the National Health Commission to assist Hubei, it immediately summoned 132 medical personnel. Soon after their arrival, they went to the Hankou Hospital in Wuhan City to start treatment, and stood firm until the end, until the patient was safely discharged from the hospital. The report also wrote that in the

isolation ward, a 57-year-old patient with Covid-19 suddenly developed severe respiratory failure. "Immediate endotracheal intubation, on invasive ventilator!" The expert group of the medical team from Zhongshan First Hospital, who had heard of the incident, made a decision on the spot. To establish an artificial airway, the closed suction tube brought from Guangzhou came in handy. Endotracheal intubation, invasive ventilation, peripherally implanted central venous catheter, action is crisp and methodical. The patient turned to safety and oxygen saturation was raised to 98% (wang,2020).

"Fighting for time in the lab" published on 21 May 2020 It describes how the medical staff of Chongqing Medical University, taking the laboratory of the medical school as a battlefield, successfully developed a series of serological test kits after 40 days of hard work, two chemiluminescence test kits were the first to be approved, and seven products were certified by the European Union (EU) CE marking and exported to many countries and regions. It also describes how Dr Wang Yue, a member of the medical team, wrote "A Love Letter to Wuhan" with deep emotion after 30 days of work. Dr Cai Jia, who has not been back to his hometown in Wuhan for two years, took the time to go to the door of the neighbourhood where his parents live, met his parents across the fence with tears in his eyes, and returned to work in a hurry (zhang,2020).

The above excerpts are typical of zero-focus perspectives. This choice of perspective breaks the limitation of time and space and restores the beginning and end of the event. Such a perspective not only penetrates into the internal details of the story, but also can stand in the macro perspective to look at the whole. This narrative perspective is like holding a magnifying glass to see every detail clearly, so that the audience can understand the events and characters of the news story more deeply, the audience can see more details of the event, and understand the content of the event is also more rich. In addition to the psychological activities of the characters, in the news report, the reporter also explains the other story characters do not know the background of the news and other materials, making the news report more comprehensive.

An example of an in-focus view is shown below.

Table 3

*Examples of in-focus Perspectives*

Date of publication	Title
2020.02.14	Three Foreigners' Notes on China's War on Epidemics
2020.04.24	If I don't go to the front line, then who will?
2020.04.27	Behind-the-scenes heroes guarding the nation's gates

Published on 14 February 2020, "Three Foreigners' Notes on Fighting the 'Covid-19'" tells the story of three foreigners of different nationalities, languages, and ages, who are fighting the epidemic in China with their own actions. "My name is Anthony Que, an American. Before I came to China, I was a senior clinical pharmacist, and on 1 February, I set off on a long journey from the United States to China, but I met a lot of good people along the way. I had a layover in Shanghai, a security guard helped me with my luggage in the train station, and a taxi driver who heard I was here to fight the epidemic didn't charge me for my big flight. I basically didn't encounter any difficulties along the way, and the people here are very nice. I just kept my promise to come to China and do the right thing at the right time. Responding



to the epidemic is a matter for the whole of humanity, and I'm not doing this because I'm American or European; it's not about money, regardless of borders" (Deng & Tang, 2020) .

"If I'm not on the frontline, who is?" published on 24 April 2020 , tells the story of Rizmi Tahir, a female surgeon from a Peshawar hospital in Pakistan. She volunteered to join a medical team organised by the hospital to support frontline departments fighting the new coronavirus, such as the outpatient department, by testing, screening and treating suspected cases. In the story she said she was 26 years old and it had been her childhood dream to become a doctor to help sick people. "It took me years to get my medical degree and my duty is also to save lives, I want to do something for my country and the people. If I don't go to the frontline, then who will?" (Zhang, 2020).

"Behind-the-scenes heroes guarding over the door", published on 27 April 2020, tells the story of Zhao Chunzhong, chief physician of the laboratory at the Shenzhen Customs Healthcare Centre. "My job is to fight viruses, and this is my position." He Shenzhen Customs Health Centre laboratory said. "Every sample has a high biosafety risk before pre-treatment." Zhao Chunzhong knows in his heart that from the moment he receives the sample, the sample is unboxed, the sample is taken out, the lid is opened, and each of these seemingly insignificant actions carries a great risk of infection at every step. In order to avoid the unknown pathogens in the samples in the operation of the leakage of infection accidents, they must follow the protocol requirements of each step of the operation to achieve precision and meticulous. "If we are faster, the danger to the public is less!" (Yan, 2020).

The above excerpts are typical of the "inward-focused perspective". This perspective is more "subjective" and "individual" in colour, and the subject of the narrative often appears as "I" or "we", which makes the news text more vivid and emotional, and can bring it closer to the audience. The subject of the narrative often appears as "I" or "we", and expresses his personal feelings in the narrative, which makes the news text more vivid and emotional, and can bring the distance with the audience closer, achieve emotional resonance, and get closer to the reader's psychology.

An example of an out-of-focus perspective is shown in the figure below.

Table 4

*Outside Examples of Focused Perspectives*

Date of publication	Title
2020.02.13	Charging on the front line Fighting at the forefront, constructing the building's life defence line
2020.02.18	Fighting Epidemics Without Borders: Meeting the Challenges Together
2020.02.18	Various regions have introduced real measures to ensure that key enterprises employ workers.

"Charging on the front line, fighting at the forefront, constructing a lifeline of defence", published on 13 February 2020. The objective report shows that Party organisations at all levels of the health system have resolutely implemented the decision-making and deployment of the CPC Central Committee on the prevention and control of epidemics, and have led Party members, cadres and medical workers to effectively play the role of the first line of defence. Describes the setting up of fever clinics, isolation wards, and "stay-on-guard" wards. 18 February 2020, "Fighting the Covid-19 without Borders, Meeting the Challenges Together". The speeches of foreign government officials, including the spokesperson of the

Russian Foreign Ministry, the Speaker of the National Assembly of South Korea, and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, were objectively reported. The international community has expressed that the Covid-19 is a common challenge faced by all mankind, and called on all countries in the world to work hand in hand with the Chinese people to overcome the difficulties, believing that they will be able to win the ultimate victory in the fight against the epidemic (meng&lin, 2020).

On 18 February 2020, the article "Various places introduced real measures to ensure the employment of key enterprises" reported that under the premise of doing a good job of preventing and controlling the Covid-19, various places effectively followed the decision-making and deployment of the central government to ensure the employment of key enterprises. It objectively describes specific measures, such as the formulation of support policies, the implementation of "online" docking, and the prevention and control of the epidemic (wu,2020).

The above excerpts are typical of the "outward-focused perspective". In these articles, there is no subjective evaluation or comment, and the information is disseminated as objectively and honestly as possible.

## **Conclusion**

When a major public health emergency breaks out, more attention should be paid to the guiding role of public opinion, giving full play to the communication advantages of mainstream media and disseminating authoritative information in a timely manner, so as to bring into play the powerful force of news communication. As the mainstream official media in China, Guangming Daily has shown a great role in fighting against the outbreak and has had a long-lasting impact on the society. One of the most crucial elements in reporting is the narrative perspective. The narrative perspective will determine the focus of the reporter and editor on the news content, thus guiding the focus of the audience. Through research, The following conclusions can be drawn, it can be found that Guangming Daily mainly adopts and zero-focus perspective, external focus perspective and internal focus perspective.

The first, Zero-focus perspective is more common in news reporting. The reporter can flexibly use the details of the interview to grasp the whole picture of the event, both to break through the limitations of time and space as well as to penetrate into the heart of the characters. The reporter can know everything, more than any other character in the story. Not only do they know the past, present and future of the characters, but they can also see into their hearts. This narrative perspective facilitates the clarification of complex event threads and facilitates the perception and description of news events from all angles. The narrator can observe the event from different angles, understand what the characters think and feel, and arbitrarily make comments to enhance the authority and persuasiveness of the report.

The second, the narrator in the external focus perspective is like a camera, providing only objective content without any disclosure of inner activities and expression of feelings. The narrator of the outward-focused perspective is not involved in the development of the event, and the narrative discourse in this perspective is relatively calm and objective, which is commonly used in the expression of objective facts and description of the scene. Outward perspective refers to the news event narrator objectively and truthfully recounts the event, and in epidemic news, the content is mostly the release of authoritative facts.

The third, Inward-focused perspective refers to the narrator's perspective from a certain character, which is the narrator's narrative with emotion "in the middle of it", and is

often expressed as the self-narrative of the person concerned or related persons. There are more personal views and colours, and more 'subjectivity' in the narrative as it shows what he or she feels. This makes the narrative text more dynamic. It is usually easier to move the audience and achieve empathy when the events are told in the first person "I".

In narrative news text, what the audience sees is not the state of the event itself, but the content presented by the narrator as a "storyteller" who sifts and processes the event. Thus, the perspective greatly affects the reader's understanding of the content of the text. It can be seen that in the news text, there are often a variety of different perspectives, a more diversified display of the news facts, but also a more profound reflection of the news theme.

In news reporting, the choice of reporting perspective is crucial, because it directly affects the audience's access to information and understanding. Different reporting perspectives can present different stories and highlight different information emphases, thus shaping the attitudes and opinions of the audience to a large extent. Therefore, we should carefully choose the right reporting perspective according to the content, purpose and needs of the audience, so as to ensure the accurate transmission and effective communication of information. Correct reporting perspective can not only enhance the readability and attractiveness of news, but also improve the audience's trust and participation, and promote the dissemination of information and social progress.

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