

# *Discourse Presentation of China's National Image in Indian Mainstream Newspapers' Coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics*

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**Keywords:** Beijing Winter Olympics; Indian Newspapers; China's national image

**Abstract:** The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu are three English-language newspapers (online versions) with significant influence in India. With textual analysis and qualitative approaches, the paper first examines them in terms of the number of reports and then applies the content mining software ROST to analyze the coverage of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics at the following levels: (1) The issue setting of the Beijing Winter Olympics in Indian English mainstream newspapers. (2) The discourse presentation of China's national image in Indian English mainstream newspapers. The results show that the mainstream English newspapers in India present a more positive image of China as a powerful country. Although the shaping of the national image saw some success in terms of communication effects, to actively set up issues and change the "pre-determined" perspective is needed in order to fully comprehend and recognize China's ideas and values.

This paper uses textual analysis and qualitative approaches to examine the China-related reports of The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu (online versions). The national image of China, as it appears in reports of the Beijing Winter Olympics in Indian English-language mainstream newspapers, is analyzed and the opportunities and challenges facing the communication of China's image are explored.

## **1. Literature Review**

With the accelerated pace of China's internationalization, some scholars have made a lot of explorations on how to build a good national image in recent years. Domestic studies on China's image based on the Olympic Games can be roughly divided into the following three categories: (1) Critical discourse analysis is applied as a theoretical framework and corpus analysis as a research method to analyze the discourse representation and meaning construction of China's image in the coverage by the foreign media. Zhang and Tang reveal the sample at the levels of text and discourse practices and conclude that the New York Times' coverage of Chinese athletes deviates from the principle of objectivity and has an obvious ideological bias.<sup>[1]</sup> (2) Based on the theory of cross-cultural communication, the role of the Olympic Games as a major sports event is explored in cross-cultural communication. Lin and Li argue the feasibility of athletes' construction of the national image to analyze the cross-cultural communication characteristics of the Olympic Games.<sup>[2]</sup> (3) Based on the

theory of news communication framework, the content analysis method is used to compare the differences between domestic and foreign mainstream media in terms of reporting positions and perspectives from the perspective of “The other”. Liu and Ji used a mixed method of content analysis and text analysis to study CGTN’s reports on the Beijing Winter Olympics.<sup>[3]</sup> They examined the news framework, subject and content details of different topics of the reports, to show the mainstream media in international sports communications to build a national image of the panorama and characteristics. In contrast, there are few studies on China’s national image abroad.

It can be seen that China’s image has received widespread attention from domestic scholars. Still, there are few studies on China’s national image, especially few studies on China’s national image based on Indian mainstream newspapers about the Beijing Olympics. Therefore, it is worth studying how to improve and shape the national image of China through the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 The Choice of Newspapers**

Indian and English make up the majority of the languages utilized in Indian newspapers. The majority of Indian English newspaper readers are elites who have a significant impact on India’s foreign policy decisions.<sup>[4]</sup> Hence, it is easy to get a broad idea of the specific perceptions of the Indians regarding the image of China by studying the coverage of China in English newspapers in India. Based on this, this essay chooses three Indian English-language newspapers The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu (online versions).

### **2.2 Research Procedures**

This paper analyzes the official websites of the three newspapers from the time the International Olympic Committee decided to award Beijing the hosting rights of the 2022 Winter Olympics until the time when it was successfully held. From July 31, 2015, to February 4, 2023—the first anniversary of the Beijing Winter Olympics—the data has been collected. The terms “Winter Olympics,” “Olympics,” “Beijing,” and “2022” are used as keywords to arrange and combine, and thousands of news reports are retrieved. In order to extract 100 valid stories with a total sample size of roughly 41,855 words, the number of reports is first evaluated. The reports are manually vetted to exclude news with poor relevance to China. Then ROST Content Mining 6 then is used to conduct the analysis of these reports.

## **3. Corpus-based Study of the Reports**

The number of reports and the issue setting of the Beijing Winter Olympics in Indian English mainstream newspapers are analyzed, and the discourse presentation is interpreted.

### **3.1 The Number of Reports**

The volume of the coverage shows the country’s enthusiasm for and importance of the Beijing Winter Olympics and China. Zheng argues that the number of reports can illustrate the importance and level of media coverage given to a news event.<sup>[5]</sup> The frequency of news reports on the Beijing Winter Olympics in Indian English mainstream media before 2020 is low, with the number of reports being around 30, according to an analysis of a sample of news reports from three newspapers (online versions), The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu (Figure 1).

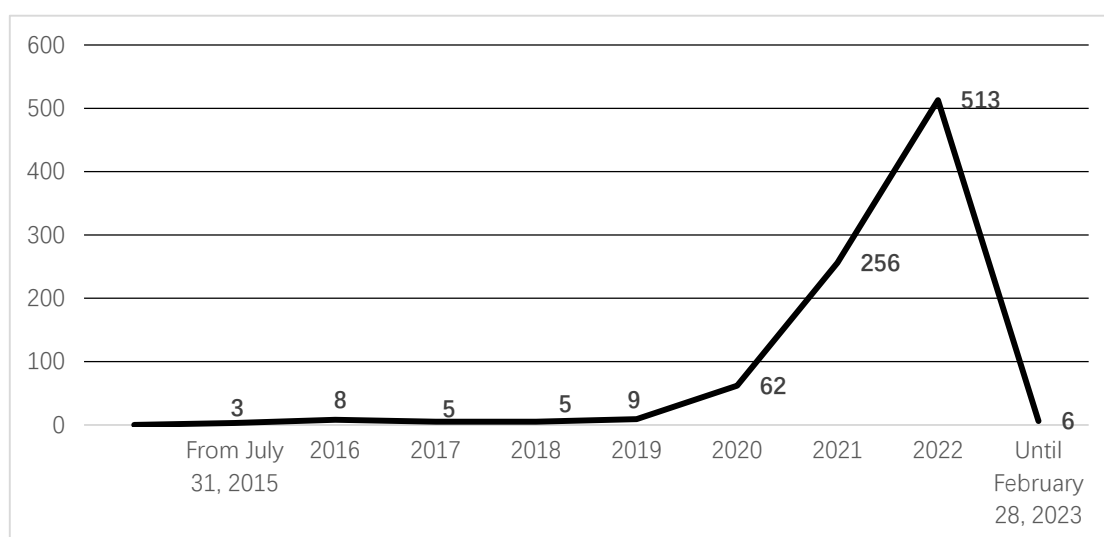


Figure 1: Number of reports involved in the Beijing Winter Olympic

The number of relevant news reports has increased significantly, reaching a peak of 513 articles in 2022, as India paid more and more attention to the 2022 Winter Olympics. It is an important position for the construction of China’s national image, according to the shifting trend of a continuous increase in the number of reports. On the first anniversary of the 2023 Beijing Winter Olympics, The Times of India and The Hindu continued to follow the Games, demonstrating how they left behind a rich cultural legacy to develop a system of discourse for international communication.

### 3.2 The Issue Setting

Table 1: Statistics on the frequency of words

	Keywords	Word Frequency (times)		Keywords	Word Frequency (times)
1	Beijing	474	16	States	54
2	Olympics	348	17	Russia	54
3	Games	276	18	Cases	53
4	Boycott	166	19	Xi	51
5	Rights	164	20	Pandemic	45
6	Olympic	164	21	Khan	44
7	Covid	138	22	Sports	44
8	Athletes	115	23	Media	44
9	Diplomatic	111	24	Global	41
10	IOC	89	25	Held	41
11	Pakistan	73	26	Genocide	38
12	Officials	64	27	Putin	37
13	United	59	28	Groups	34
14	Xinjiang	55	29	Ukraine	34
15	countries	55	30	Tokyo	32

The word choices made in news texts have a significant role in expressing hidden ideas and worldviews. Using the content mining program ROST Content Mining 6, 100 news articles were read, translated, and examined. First, a word frequency list is generated by using the “word frequency analysis” tool. Then, words are manually removed with no associations or unclear meanings as well as functional terms, and 30 high-frequency words are chosen in descending order of word frequency (Table 1).

Keywords are closely related to the content of the corpus, and keyword analysis can provide insight into the specific preferences and focus of the corpus text representation.<sup>[6]</sup> Keywords reflect the Chinese connotation. The word “Beijing” appears 405 times, as seen in Table 1. The Winter Olympics are being held in Beijing, a renowned historical and cultural center in China. Beijing’s hosting of the Games represents a marriage of Chinese culture and the Olympic movement. Keywords reflect the opportunities and challenges. In Table 1, “Covid” “Xinjiang” “Epidemic” “Genocide” and “Ukraine” are terms that appear more often. The reports link the content of the reports with topics unrelated to the Winter Olympics, creating a “politicized” interpretation. This has made it challenging for China to increase its influence in international communication.

Liu indicates that analyzing the word units in the sample separately cannot give a thorough grasp of the trends and attitudes in the coverage.<sup>[7]</sup> Because of this, this paper also divides the 100 samples of mainstream Indian English newspapers covering the Beijing Winter Olympics into five issue subjects from the high-level structure (Figure 2). This allows for a more in-depth analysis of the relevant reports’ specific content.

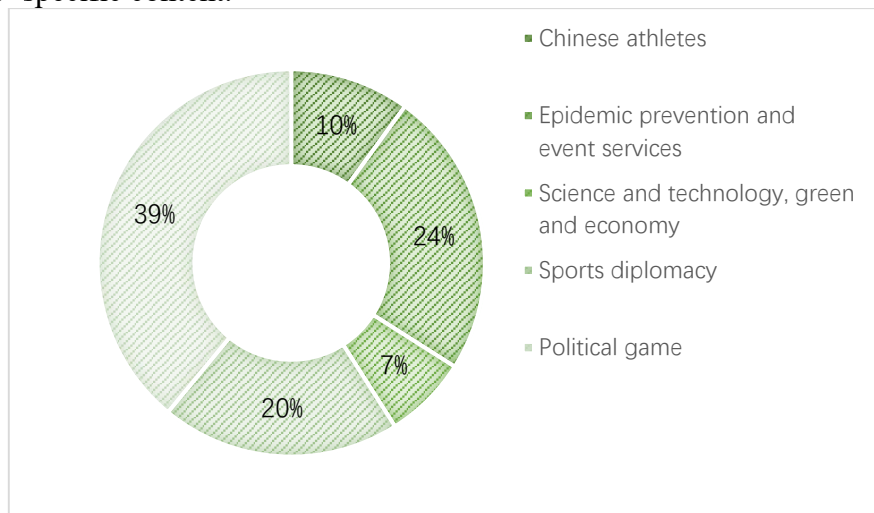


Figure 2: Statistics of the sample number of topics

### 3.2.1 Subject of the Issue

Table 2: Headlines of reports describing Beijing 2022 on five subjects

Time	Subject	Headline
Feb 15, 2022	Chinese Athletes	Winter Olympics: Su Yiming bags gold medal in Snowboarding Big Air event
Sept 30, 2021	Epidemic Prevention and Event Services	Overseas spectators banned from attending Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022:
Feb 8, 2022	Science and Technology, Green and Economy	Explainer: How China got blue skies in time for Olympics
Feb 5, 2022	Sports Diplomacy	China’s Xi hosts world leader banquet after two years of Isolation
May 19, 2021	Political Game	China hits back at Pelosi ‘lies’ over Beijing Olympics boycott call

The study discovers that the three Indian English-language newspapers have published a variety of reports on China for the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. By classifying the issues, it can be seen that mainstream newspapers published in India mostly covered five areas: sports, Chinese athletes, epidemic prevention, and event services. Different examples are listed for different subjects (Table 2).

Subject one is Chinese Athletes, which primarily refers to papers with in-depth analyses of the

competition process, prior experiences, and thought processes of a domestic athlete. As shown in Figure 2, there are 10 reports with Chinese athletes as the main subject, accounting for 10% of the total. The event is the focus of sports news coverage, and the coverage of the Winter Olympics in Indian mainstream English newspapers reproduces the wonderful moments of Olympic athletes' struggle and highlights the spirit of sports competition. The focus of event coverage is on the competitors, and coverage of athletes' training, exemplifies the spirit of competition and offers encouragement to athletes.

Subject two is Epidemic Prevention and Event Services, which mainly refers to the reports on policies, facilities, and links that provide protection for the health, competition safety, and quality of life of the athletes in the Winter Olympics. From Figure 2, there are 24 reports about the Beijing Winter Olympic Games with epidemic prevention and event services as the main subject, accounting for 24%. With their coverage of disease prevention and control, transportation operation and maintenance, and other topics, Indian English mainstream newspapers demonstrated a high degree of customer service as well as thorough and humanized meticulous administration of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

Subject three is Science and Technology, Green and Economy, which mostly refers to studies on the nation's overall, including economic, scientific, technological, cultural, and other soft and hard strengths, and strengths in relation to the Beijing Winter Olympic Games. As can be seen from Figure 2, there are 7 reports on the Beijing Winter Olympics with science and technology, green, and economy as the main subject, accounting for 7% of the total. The English-language mainstream media focuses on how the Winter Olympics have altered the city's ecosystem and state-of-the-art technology, highlighting how high-profile the Winter Olympics in Beijing were and how they gave the city's development fresh impetus.

Subject four is Sports Diplomacy, which mainly refers to the reports of establishing deep friendships between China and other countries, international organizations, etc. through the Beijing Winter Olympics. As can be seen from Figure 2, there are 20 reports related to the Beijing Winter Olympics with sports diplomacy as the main subject, accounting for 20% of the total. Major Sports events often play an important role as a platform to enhance the soft power of the country and shape its image.<sup>[8]</sup> Indian English-language mainstream media expressed China's willingness to actively engage in exchanges and cooperation, demonstrating China's confidence.

Subject five is Political Game, which mostly relates to the reports of malicious rumors and unfounded charges made against the Beijing Winter Olympics by several nations, as well as China's supportive response and vehement denunciation. As can be seen from Figure 2, there are 39 reports about the Beijing Winter Olympics with political games as the main subject, accounting for 39% of the total.

### **3.2.2 Characteristics of the Issue**

China's foreign communication goal must offer the global community a means of communication so they may understand the globe, not just communicate about China.<sup>[9]</sup> While the coverage of the Winter Olympics in Indian mainstream newspapers brings a diversity of perspectives, it is also inevitably muddied, with some issues being stigmatized, politicized, and unilateralist in their dominant ideology to varying degrees.

#### **3.2.2.1 Taking the Winter Olympics as the Focal Point of the Circle to Present China in a Variety of Ways**

The above three Indian mainstream newspapers, centered on the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, showcased China to the world from the multi-layered aspects contained in the issues of "Chinese athletes" and "epidemic prevention and event services". It is clear from the analysis of the subject that the Winter Olympic Games have been covered in Indian mainstream English newspapers in a broader context than just the sporting event itself, creating a balanced system of multiple values in

which the ecological, economic, cultural, and political values of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games coexist.

### **3.2.2.2 The “Pre-determination” of Limited Issue Viewpoints**

The “preconceived” viewpoint may turn the foreign public’s perceptions into an impassable mountain.<sup>[10]</sup> The “mirror image” idea put out by Jacques Lacan states that people’s cognitive frameworks provide knowledge about the decision-making process input meaning and structure.<sup>[11]</sup> Members of different cultures typically make interpretations that are consistent with their perceptions in cross-cultural international exchange and communication due to differences in political systems and cultural traditions. The political system in India is based on the Western system. India has an entirely distinct ideology from China. Hence, some reports in Indian English newspapers ignore the logic of the facts from a pre-determined perspective.

## **3.3 The Discourse Presentation**

The sample can be further analyzed in light of the “one and multiple” issue setting to reveal the discourse presentation of China’s national image.

### **3.3.1 The Olympic Power under the “Vertical Orientation”**

Vertical vectoring refers to the association between texts and other texts that constitute the historical context and are ephemeral in nature.<sup>[12]</sup> By putting texts from various periods side by side in the same place and time, the coverage grafted historical events into the current story. The comparison between the current 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics served as the backdrop for coverage in Indian English-language major media of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. For example, the article titled “No slogans: Beijing curbs its No slogans: Beijing curbs its enthusiasm for Winter Olympics” in *The Times of India* on January 29, 2022, attributed Chinese enthusiasm for the Beijing Winter Olympics to the country’s increased national power. It differs from the enthusiasm for the Beijing Olympics in 2008. China has frequently received extensive international media coverage as a result of the success and continued promotion of major international events like the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games, and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. This is indicative of China’s growing dominance in the international arena.

### **3.3.2 Powerful Nation in the “Official View”**

Based on the Chinese behavior or attitude reflected in the reports, China expresses its values and ideas through the juxtaposition and feedback of interaction under the “official perspective”. On the one hand, “juxtaposition interaction” is carried out. That is, a particular topic is discussed by both domestic and international discourse subjects. The terms “Olympic spirit” “Together for a Shared Future” demonstrate the official stance of the Chinese government, and they unmistakably reflect the idea, aim, and strategy with Chinese characteristics. On the other hand, “feedback interaction” is conducted, that is, to respond to the questions raised by foreign subjects of discourse. Zhou Rong argues that feedback interaction is conducted in a contradictory and clashing manner.<sup>[13]</sup> Expresses such as “accuse”, and “take firm countermeasures” show that China has adopted a strong stance in response to the challenges and will not participate in political manipulation.

### **3.3.3 A Comprehensive Power under “Visual Data”**

One of the contextual characteristics of the mainstream Indian English media is the highlighting of the events of the Beijing Winter Olympics through statistics. Phrases such as “350 kilometers per hour,” “58.4 billion yuan (\$9.2 billion),” “from around three hours to around 50 minutes” are closely

related to the rapid development of China's high-speed rail, providing a lot of positive words for China in terms of operational speed and construction investment, praising China's great technological achievements. Phrases such as "the 90,000-capacity" and "hundreds of 5G base stations" affirm China's economic strength to host the Beijing Winter Olympics and the ability to make Zhangjiakou an international city. A phrase like "by 2060" highlights China's resolve to fight pollution with a vengeance.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study reveals the issue setting and discourse presentation of China's national image in the reports of Indian mainstream English newspapers on the Beijing Winter Olympics. China's national image is relatively positive, presented to the world from the multi-layered aspects in Indian mainstream English newspapers, such as in ecological, economic, and political areas. The national image shaping and transmission in the Beijing Winter Olympics saw some success, but further progress should be made in active issue setting and correction of "pre-determined" perspectives so that Chinese ideas and values can be better understood and transmitted.

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