

Original Research Article

Framing the pressure: How global medias portray China's singles' day shopping festival in 2024*Zihan Liu, Xuanyu Li**School of International Journalism and Communication, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, 100089, China*

Abstract: This paper examines how international media use visual and linguistic elements to frame China's 2024 "Double Eleven" shopping festival, shaping perceptions of China's consumer market. Using visual discourse analysis (VDCs) and text research, the study analyzed reports from CNN, Bloomberg, CNBC, CNA, NHK, and Arise News on YouTube and Twitter. It finds diverse narrative strategies around economic pressure, consumer confidence, government policies, and shifts in consumer culture. The analysis highlights the role of visual and linguistic elements in shaping multi-dimensional interpretations of China's economic and social development.

Keywords: International media; Visual discourse analysis; Narrative frame

1. Introduction

The "Double Eleven" Shopping Festival, also known as Singles' Day, has evolved into the world's largest e-commerce event, offering a unique lens through which to observe China's consumer market. As the 2024 edition unfolds, international media portray the festival through a variety of narrative frameworks that reveal both economic challenges and technological advancements. This paper investigates how global media outlets frame China's "Double Eleven" in 2024, focusing on the visual and linguistic strategies they employ to shape perceptions of China's economic development and consumer culture.

2. Literature review**2.1. China's "double eleven" shopping festival**

Launched in 2009, the "Double Eleven" Shopping Festival has become the world's largest e-commerce event, shaping both the Chinese and global markets. It serves as a key window into China's consumer trends. Wang Shuyan (2024) pointed out that the "Double Eleven" Shopping Festival provides a unique perspective for studying the new characteristics and trends of the Chinese consumer market through a variety of promotional methods and consumption scenarios.

However, the 2024 "Double Eleven" showed a different trend. According to Tao Li (2024), this year Tmall canceled the highly anticipated "Double Eleven Gala", stopped the media live broadcast hall that had been in operation for many years, and no longer released sales data or arranged interviews with executives. These changes mark the shift of "Double Eleven" from large-scale marketing to more low-key operations, reflecting the rise of rational consumption and the adjustment of e-commerce platforms' strategies in a changing market.

2.2. Framing theory

The media plays a crucial role in shaping a country's image. Through its coverage of "Double Eleven," international media not only interpret China's economy but also influence global perceptions of the country.

According to Framing Theory, the media shapes public perception through specific narratives. Many international outlets report on the 2024 “Double Eleven” in the context of China’s economic slowdown, highlighting declining consumer confidence and weakened purchasing power, with outlets like The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal noting the increased consumer caution. Despite the downturn, some media emphasize China’s advancements in e-commerce and technological innovation, with Alibaba’s new marketing strategies seen as driving consumption. Additionally, some portray “Double Eleven” as a symbol of Chinese consumer culture, illustrating its influence on social consumption patterns. Amid the Sino-US trade war, a few media frame the event as part of China’s economic competition with the West, showcasing its growing economic and technological strength.

3. Methods

This study uses Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA) and text research methods to explore how international media construct narrative frameworks when reporting on China’s 2024 “Double Eleven” Shopping Festival. VDA, a multimodal method combining visual and linguistic analysis, examines how visuals (e.g., picture composition, camera switching, music, and subtitles) and language (e.g., narration tone, vocabulary, and interview content) work together to shape public perceptions.

The research draws on video content from YouTube and Twitter, as well as graphic reports from international media websites, focusing on reports from September to December 2024. Media sources include CNN, Bloomberg, CNBC, CNA, NHK, and Arise News. The study examines how different media outlets, with their diverse perspectives, construct narratives on topics like China’s economic slowdown and consumer sentiment.

The data sample will exclude irrelevant reports and advertisements, focusing on 50 relevant articles and selecting 6-8 video samples for in-depth analysis. This will reveal how visual and linguistic strategies are used in constructing the image of China’s consumer market and the cultural/economic biases reflected in international reporting.

4. Analysis & discussions

4.1. Economic pressure and declining consumer confidence

In CNA’s report, the “economic slowdown” is the dominant narrative, with visuals and language creating a serious, slightly pessimistic tone. The video opens with a gray, empty shopping mall, focusing on sparse consumers. A 32-year-old consumer contrasts the previous shopping frenzy with this year’s subdued experience, her slower speech and flat emotions matching the low-saturation product display. This visual and narrative technique highlights the shift from a shopping spree to more rational consumption.

NHK’s report focuses on declining consumer confidence, using quick camera shifts to show offline stores targeting older consumers. A merchant explains sesame seed nutrition to a puzzled elderly customer, with empty shelves in the background. This reinforces “Double Eleven’s efforts to reach new groups.” The narration, slow and heavy, highlights how “population shrinkage and economic slowdown have forced merchants to find new growth points,” intensifying the image of consumer pressure.

In contrast, CNBC’s report emphasizes data and professionalism, featuring fast-paced scenes of Alibaba’s logistics center to convey efficiency. The rhythm matches the host’s speech, but when discussing real estate declines and post-pandemic recovery, the pace slows, and a bar chart shows weak consumer spending. This

dynamic-static combination deepens the analysis of economic pressure, highlighting the impact of low consumer confidence on “Double Eleven.”

4.2. Visual representation of government roles and economic policies

The role of the government in stabilizing the consumer market is a key focus in multiple reports, especially *Arise News*, which uses visuals like the Chinese national flag and Minister of Finance photos, alongside sales data, to link government authority with consumer behavior. The narration emphasizes China’s challenges and the importance of policy intervention, reflecting both policy effectiveness and global perceptions of China’s economic resilience.

CNA’s report is more cautious, focusing on Alibaba’s “Return Treasure” service and policy measures to ease merchant pressure. The camera shows neatly stacked shipments in a small warehouse, subtly hinting at the ongoing challenges despite policy relief, acknowledging that policies haven’t fully solved the broader economic slowdown’s impact on the market.

4.3. The contrast between the globalization of Double Eleven and narrative optimism

In contrast to reports focusing on economic issues, *CNBC* and *Arise News* highlight the positive side of “Double Eleven” as a global shopping festival. *CNBC* uses bright visuals, lively music, and dynamic data to emphasize the festival’s global importance. An interview with the founder of Core sight Research, her confident smile, and a trend chart showing cross-border sales reinforce the economic vitality of “Double Eleven” and the positive view of the Chinese e-commerce market.

Arise News also uses data comparisons, showcasing “Double Eleven” sales trends and product packaging scenes to depict steady growth. The subtitle “steady growth amid challenges” and the neutral, steady narration strengthen the portrayal of China’s consumer market resilience.

4.4. Changes in consumer culture and the diversity of narrative strategies

Many media outlets have highlighted changing trends in “Double Eleven” consumer culture. *NHK* focused on offline activities and the rise of elderly consumers, signaling a shift towards diversification and localization. *Bloomberg*, on the other hand, highlighted the rise of live broadcasts and short video marketing, with brightly decorated rooms, neatly displayed goods, and engaging hosts, reflecting the transformation of “Double Eleven” from traditional e-commerce to multi-platform development.

Overall, international media coverage of the 2024 “Double Eleven” festival presents diverse narratives through visual and linguistic elements. Some focus on economic pressure and declining consumer confidence, using cold tones and data to show the shift from shopping sprees to rational consumption. Others highlight technological innovation and global expansion, presenting “Double Eleven” as a global e-commerce event. Some reports emphasize government policy intervention and the localized transformation of consumer culture, such as the rise of elderly consumers and offline activities. These reports reflect both the multi-dimensional interpretation of China’s consumer market and the cultural biases behind the narrative, underscoring “Double Eleven” as a window into China’s economic and social changes.

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