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## The Use of Social Media in Public Diplomacy in US and China

Jennifer Offeibea Dodoo

Public Relations Manager, Graduate Student Communication,  
A Flair of Celebration Co. Ltd /Vilnius University, Lithuania

### Abstract:

*This paper examines the different social media strategies adopted by the US and China's use of public diplomacy in-depth, shedding light on how cultural, political and technological factors influence their strategies. The US prioritizes communication and transparency, reflecting its democratic values, while China emphasizes narrative control and image control. Through comparative analysis, the study highlights the importance of domestic factors in social media communication and emphasizes and reflects the evolving global transnational environment in the digital age. Both countries actively fight misinformation, albeit with different objectives. The study recommends conducting further comparative analysis, adapting to emerging trends, and developing strategies to combat disinformation in digital communication. Understanding the nuances of social media in today's digital age is essential for enhancing research, policy, and diplomatic practices.*

**Keywords:** Social media, public diplomacy, communication, digital age, international politics

### 1. Introduction

The digital revolution and the proliferation of social media platforms have fundamentally reshaped the dynamics of public diplomacy. Before the onset of digital communication technologies, diplomatic exchanges were largely confined to government officials and diplomatic envoys. However, the advent of the digital age ushered in a paradigm shift, replacing this monopolistic government-to-government communication model with a more participatory one, enabling a direct dialogue between governments and foreign publics (Cull, 2019). This transformation implies a significant evolution in public diplomacy from being an elite-driven, one-way communication process to a two-way engagement that prioritizes reciprocal interaction and mutual understanding.

Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, WeChat, and Sina Weibo, with their global reach and interactive nature, have emerged as essential tools in this new landscape. They have facilitated a democratization of the diplomatic conversation, providing governments with an unprecedented capacity to construct and disseminate narratives directly to foreign audiences (Lee et al., 2018). Communication, therefore, is a central mechanism in public diplomacy, serving not only as a conduit for information but also as a strategic instrument for shaping international perception and managing relationships (Melissen, 2005). Governments can use these platforms to engage in narrative building, fostering national image, promoting strategic interests, and even challenging the narratives of adversaries. Consequently, the practice of public diplomacy has been transformed into an intricate exercise of strategic communication, with social media serving as the digital theatre where these communicative interactions take place.

In the sphere of global politics, the strategic use of social media platforms for public diplomacy by the US and China creates powerful ripples that extend beyond their bilateral relations (Gerodimos, 2013). Their distinct approaches to the utilization of these platforms underline the role of national political ideologies and strategic interests in shaping the practice of digital public diplomacy. As the world's leading powers, both the US and China recognize the significance of social media in connecting with global audiences and use it to assert their influence, frame international discourse, and forge relationships with foreign publics.

While the power of social media in public diplomacy is unequivocal, the extent and effectiveness of its usage vary dramatically between the US and China. The American strategy, grounded in its commitment to open dialogue and engagement, spans multiple platforms, ensuring widespread reach and accessibility (Hayden, 2012). However, this broad-based approach grapples with the challenge of perception. In environments rife with anti-US sentiment, American diplomatic overtures, regardless of their sincerity, often encounter scepticism or even hostility. This highlights a nuanced reality: the universal reach afforded by social media does not automatically translate into successful engagement or a positive reception.

In stark contrast, China employs a markedly different strategy. Leveraging domestically controlled platforms such as WeChat, China disseminates its government-led narratives, promoting its progress and achievements (Qin et al., 2017). This top-down control over the digital narrative is indicative of the tightly regulated information environment within the country. Yet, this approach is not without its drawbacks. The uniformity of the narrative, often perceived as state

propaganda, may engender credibility issues, casting a shadow over the authenticity of China's communication and consequently diluting the effectiveness of its public diplomacy efforts.

Adding another layer to the already complex landscape is the dark underbelly of the digital age - information warfare. Social media platforms, due to their vast reach and influence, have become the theatre for disinformation campaigns and cyber warfare, posing a significant threat to global stability (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Both the US and China are not just actors but also targets in this new battleground, making their strategies not only about how to leverage these platforms but also how to protect against and counteract digital subterfuge. Thus, understanding the US-China dynamics in this digital age demands not only an examination of their public diplomacy strategies but also a nuanced analysis of their defence and responses in the face of information warfare. Such exploration will provide deeper insights into the changing character of global politics and diplomacy in an era shaped by digital technologies.

In light of the transformative impact of social media on the conduct of public diplomacy, an investigation into the differing strategies of the US and China presents a unique prism through which to examine the nexus of communication, technology, and international relations. This digital landscape, while offering unprecedented possibilities for engagement and outreach, is also fraught with challenges, from credibility issues to the dark spectra of information warfare. Thus, understanding how these two global powers adapt to and navigate this evolving terrain is vital to appreciating the shifting dynamics of global politics and diplomacy.

The necessity to undertake such a study is underscored by the critical role of public diplomacy in shaping international discourse and fostering bilateral and multilateral relationships. Given the ubiquity and influence of social media, the outcomes of these diplomatic endeavours have profound implications on a global scale. Consequently, an exploration of the use of social media in US-China public diplomacy offers not only an insightful understanding of their respective diplomatic strategies but also contributes to a broader understanding of the implications of digital technologies on international relations and global stability. The findings could inform and shape diplomatic strategies, ensuring effective engagement and countering disinformation in the digital age.

### 1.1. Study Rationale

Existing literature highlights the transformative role of social media in public diplomacy, serving as a conduit for governments to directly engage with foreign publics and shape international discourse (Cull, 2019; Gerodimos, 2013). However, the dynamics of social media usage within the ambit of US-China relations remain underexplored, thus creating a significant gap in the academic pursuit. As two global superpowers with contrasting political systems, understanding the unique approaches and challenges each faces in leveraging social media for public diplomacy offers critical insights into the evolving landscape of international relations.

Current research underscores the distinct strategies employed by the US and China in their digital public diplomacy. While the US emphasizes open dialogue and democratic values, China focuses on amplifying its government-led narrative (Hayden, 2012; Qin et al., 2017). Yet, the effectiveness of these strategies and their implications on global public opinion and international discourse warrant further scrutiny. Moreover, the challenge of information warfare and the manipulation of social media for disinformation campaigns present potent threats to global stability (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019), but how the US and China navigate these digital battlegrounds remains inadequately examined.

This scholarly vacuum is particularly glaring in the face of rising tensions between the US and China. In an era of increasing geopolitical rivalry, the narratives created and disseminated through social media can shape perceptions, impact diplomatic relations, and even instigate conflict. Consequently, there exists a dire need to investigate this uncharted territory of US-China digital public diplomacy.

Empirical data further underscore this necessity. For instance, Facebook's global reach exceeds 2.8 billion monthly active users, while China's WeChat boasts over 1.2 billion (Statista, 2023). The magnitude of these platforms is indicative of the significant role they play in shaping global narratives. Yet, a data-driven analysis of the impact of these platforms in US-China public diplomacy is conspicuously absent. In summary, the need to conduct an in-depth study on the use of social media in US-China public diplomacy is paramount. The existing gaps in academic literature, coupled with the stark discrepancies in the strategies of the two countries and the threats posed by information warfare, present a compelling case for further research. Such a study will not only enrich the scholarly understanding of digital public diplomacy but also potentially inform diplomatic strategies and countermeasures in this evolving digital era.

In order to achieve the study objectives, the following questions put forward:

- What strategies does the US implement in using social media for public diplomacy?
- How does China craft and communicate its diplomatic narratives via social media platforms?
- How do the US and China respond to the challenge of disinformation campaigns in their social media-based public diplomacy?

### 1.2. Theoretical Debates

This study is principally underpinned by two interrelated theories: Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory and the Agenda-Setting Theory, both of which are particularly pertinent to the utilization of social media in public diplomacy.

Nye's Soft Power Theory suggests that nations influence others not through military coercion or economic payments but via attraction and persuasion, thus emphasizing the power of ideas, values, and culture (Nye, 2004). As nations transition into the digital age, they increasingly leverage these non-coercive power resources to sway global perceptions and win favour among foreign publics. This approach is evident in the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which serve as digital theatres for disseminating national narratives, promoting strategic interests, and facilitating direct engagement with global audiences.

Given the study's focus on the US and China, the Soft Power Theory is an apt framework for understanding their differing digital diplomacy strategies. For instance, the US, with its democratic ethos, leverages social media to propagate democratic values such as freedom of speech and human rights, reinforcing its global image as a champion of democracy (Hayden, 2012). Conversely, China seeks to project its development model and shape a positive global image (Qin, Strömberg, & Wu, 2017), utilizing its unique mix of cultural, political, and economic narratives.

Complementing the Soft Power Theory is the Agenda-Setting Theory, which proposes that the media does not tell people what to think but rather what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Within the context of public diplomacy, this implies that nations can use social media platforms to influence the international agenda by highlighting specific issues and framing them according to their strategic interests. In essence, through their diplomatic posts, nations can shape international discourse, dictating which topics garner attention and how they are perceived.

These theories are particularly relevant to digital diplomacy, given the information-heavy environment of social media. It suggests that by carefully crafting and disseminating diplomatic messages, nations can set the tone of the conversation, guide public attention, and shape perceptions of key global issues. For instance, the US might frame discussions around democracy and human rights, while China might direct attention towards its economic progress and the success of its governance model (Gerodimos, 2013).

Overall, the Soft Power Theory and the Agenda-Setting Theory provide a robust theoretical framework for examining the use of social media in US and Chinese public diplomacy. They offer a lens to understand how these nations leverage attraction and persuasion to influence global audiences and dictate the trajectory of international discourse. This dual-theoretical approach, therefore, not only enriches the analytical depth of the study but also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital diplomacy in the contemporary global landscape.

### 1.3. Conceptual Review

Navigating the age of digitalization, diplomacy has undergone a profound transformation, necessitating the reconceptualization of traditional diplomatic strategies. Hanson (2010) posits that the incorporation of digital tools and social media platforms, a practice coined as 'digital diplomacy', prompts diplomats to innovate their strategies to effectively manoeuvre the complexities of this new landscape. Key to this evolution is the shift towards 'network diplomacy', a concept advocated by Hocking, Melissen, Riordan, and Sharp (2012). This approach underscores the role of digital tools in cultivating diplomatic networks that transcend the conventional boundary of state actors, extending to encompass civil society and the general public. The pervasiveness of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook facilitates the cultivation of these networks, transforming diplomatic communication into a dialogue among a multitude of actors.

Parallel to this shift, Manheim and Albritton (1984) and Pamment (2013) postulate the emergence of 'public diplomacy 2.0', another fundamental strategy in digital diplomacy. This paradigm shift renders diplomatic communication a more participatory process, departing from the traditional top-down model. In this context, digital platforms provide embassies with a direct channel to convey their stances, share their cultures, and communicate their policies, fostering mutual understanding and enhancing soft power. In addition, Bjola and Jiang (2015) foreground the significance of 'data diplomacy' in this digital age. As data has become an integral part of diplomacy, diplomats can employ data analysis tools to extract valuable insights from online conversations, thereby facilitating informed decision-making and paving the way for predictive diplomacy.

Furthermore, the importance of 'cyber diplomacy' is underscored as an imperative strategy in digital diplomacy, as outlined by Hathaway and Crotoof (2012). This strategy is pivotal in addressing issues pertinent to cyberspace, such as cybersecurity, cyber warfare, and digital rights. However, Pelling (2015) cautions against potential challenges associated with these strategies. The accelerated pace of information dissemination, coupled with the necessity for rapid responses, can engender missteps or misinterpretations. Moreover, the question of privacy and the menace of online disinformation present pressing challenges that necessitate continuous adaptation in the digital diplomacy arena.

Within the scope of constructing diplomatic narratives, Krebs (2015) underscores the instrumental role of diplomatic narratives in shaping international relations and informing foreign policy decisions. These narratives, meticulously constructed storylines encapsulating a nation's perspective, aims, and values, drive public opinion, dictate foreign policy, and facilitate diplomatic engagement. From a different perspective, Nye (2004) emphasizes shared values as an effective strategy in the construction of diplomatic narratives. These shared values establish a common ground, fostering a cooperative environment and presenting the nation as a trustworthy partner, thereby enhancing diplomatic discourse.

Moreover, Partzsch (2017) highlights the significance of narratives of identity in the diplomatic landscape. By conveying a nation's history, traditions, and culture, these narratives allow countries to protect their identities and diplomatic positions effectively. As a result, they can garner support for their diplomatic initiatives and bolster their soft power. Entman (2004) attests to the influential role of media in the construction and dissemination of diplomatic narratives. Traditional and digital media platforms provide nations with a stage to share their narratives with the world. However, the challenge lies not just in crafting the narrative but also in managing its perception and comprehension by the audience, necessitating strategic communication skills and an in-depth understanding of the media landscape.

Furthermore, Bhabha (2013) adds to the discussion by advocating the inclusion of counter-narratives. These narratives challenge the dominant narrative, offering alternative viewpoints that foster more inclusive and nuanced diplomatic dialogues. By integrating these counter-narratives, diplomatic narratives can encapsulate diverse perspectives, thereby enhancing diplomatic interaction. Nevertheless, Rosaldo (1989) cautions that the construction of diplomatic narratives is not devoid of challenges. The reception and interpretation of these narratives are influenced by the

audience's cultural, historical, and political contexts. Misinterpretations can precipitate diplomatic tensions or conflicts, thereby underlining the necessity for cultural sensitivity and understanding in the formulation and propagation of diplomatic narratives.

Conversely, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) underscore the exigency for diplomatic institutions worldwide to counter disinformation due to its substantial potential to destabilize diplomatic relations and foreign policy objectives. This complex issue necessitates several strategies to alleviate disinformation within the diplomatic sphere. Hobbs (2010) advocates for media literacy, ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media, as a pivotal strategy in deciphering misinformation and disinformation. Diplomatic institutions can augment media literacy through public diplomacy programs, thereby enabling the public to comprehend the media's role, identify reliable sources, and critically assess online information.

Furthermore, Graves and Cherubini (2016) affirm the criticality of fact-checking and verification in countering disinformation. Diplomatic institutions can foster partnerships with fact-checking organizations or establish their teams to refute false narratives promptly. The utilization of social media platforms to disseminate accurate information and counter false narratives directly also constitutes an effective strategy. Additionally, Howard et al. (2018) suggest that data analysis and artificial intelligence (AI) can significantly assist in identifying and countering disinformation. Techniques such as natural language processing and machine learning can detect patterns, sources, and spread of disinformation, thereby facilitating timely and proactive responses. However, the intricate issues surrounding privacy, surveillance ethics, and AI interpretability challenges require careful consideration and navigation.

Lastly, Schmitt (2020) emphasizes the importance of international cooperation given the transnational nature of digital platforms. The single-handed tackling of cross-border disinformation is ineffective, and collaboration on standards, research, and policy, along with sharing best practices among nations, can establish a collective front against disinformation. However, the inherent complexities of the digital information environment pose ongoing challenges, requiring diplomatic institutions to adapt and innovate continuously to address the evolving threats of disinformation effectively.

## 2. Methodology

This research embraced a qualitative, case-study approach to deeply explore how the US and China leverage social media platforms for public diplomacy. This study focused on Twitter and Facebook due to their global reach and influential role in public diplomacy. The reason is that these platforms are widely utilized by the US for diplomatic communication (Duncomber, 2017; Spry, 2018) and, despite being blocked domestically, are increasingly employed by China to engage with global audiences. The choice of these platforms provides a rich source of data to explore the public diplomacy strategies of two significant global actors. To this end, the accounts selected significantly contributed to shaping and disseminating diplomatic narratives.

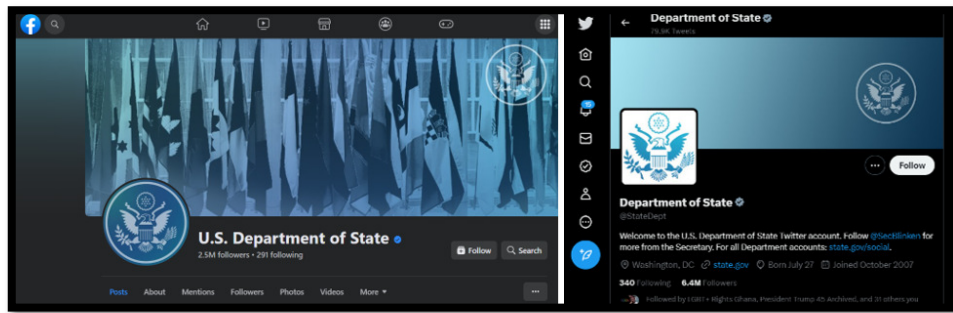
A purposive sampling technique proved most relevant, handpicking official accounts that yielded rich data for examination. Sample sizes composed of posts over a specific period from each account, their number guided by practical considerations, post volume, and the need for a representative sample to encapsulate the spectrum of diplomatic messages and strategies. Data compilation involved content analysis of chosen social media posts, with coding applied to both manifest content, the visible themes or keywords, and latent content, the underlying connotations. Thematic analysis served to pinpoint, scrutinize, and report data patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2021), with NVivo software aiding in data management and coding for a rigorous, systematic analysis.

Even though the research dealt with public data, maintaining privacy was paramount. All data were handled confidentially, used solely for research purposes, and reported without identifying specific individuals associated with the social media accounts. The study strove for neutrality, evading any interpretation bias in the data.

## 3. Findings

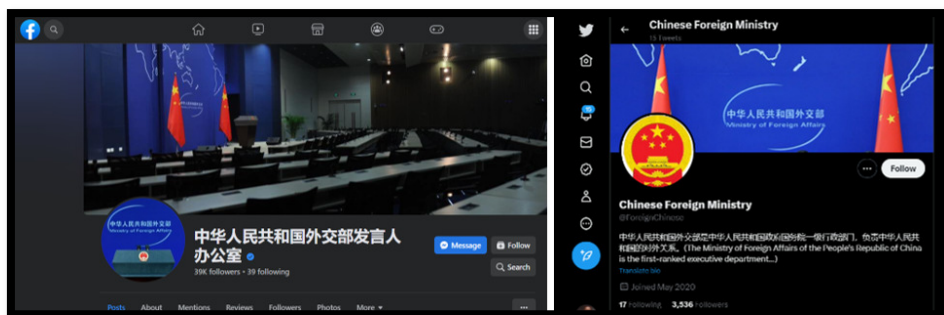
### 3.1. Social Media in Public Diplomacy

The results of this study illustrate a distinct dichotomy in the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter by the US and Chinese diplomatic entities.



*Figure 1: US' Social Media Diplomacy*  
*Source: US State Department Facebook and Twitter Pages (2023)*

Facebook and Twitter were found to be key conduits of the US's public diplomacy strategy. Analyses of the US State Department's Facebook and Twitter accounts reveal consistent use of these platforms to inform, engage, and build ties with international audiences. The US adopts an approach characterized by openness and dialogue, promoting policies, spreading democratic values, and responding to global events. It was noted that tweets and posts often incorporated interactive elements such as polls, videos, infographics, and user engagement via comments and replies. This transparency and reciprocal communication can be seen as a part of the US's broader soft power strategy.



*Figure 2: China's Social Media Diplomacy*  
*Source: China Foreign Ministry's Facebook and Twitter Pages (2023)*

On the other hand, China, despite having a prolific presence on these platforms, exhibits a fundamentally different strategy. China's Foreign Ministry's Twitter and Facebook accounts are used primarily as outlets to convey the nation's perspective and counter negative portrayals in international media, more so than direct audience engagement. As a part of their public diplomacy efforts, these accounts disseminate China's stances on issues like trade, human rights, and global governance, often using facts and figures. However, the interactivity with followers is noticeably less than that of the US's approach.

### 3.1.1. Discussion

The different usage of social media in public diplomacy between the US and China can be understood in the context of their contrasting political systems and cultural traditions. Haass (2020) argues that the US portrays itself as a democratic society, values openness and active engagement, promoting a dialogue with global audiences. This approach aligns with its overall diplomatic strategy, which focuses on the promotion of democracy and human rights.

China, on the other hand, operates within a different political and cultural paradigm, with its more controlled, top-down approach to communication reflecting its governance style, while its recent shift towards the assertive "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy is evidenced in its use of these platforms to counter negative narratives. Zhu (2020) elucidates that this presents a positive global image and strongly defends its national sovereignty and non-interference policy.

The strategic choices made by the US and China regarding their social media use highlight the ongoing adaptation of traditional public diplomacy tactics to digital spaces. They indicate the potential of these platforms as vehicles for international influence and image shaping, even as they underscore the limitations imposed by cultural and political contexts. Although both nations utilize the same platforms, their unique strategies and approaches have created a fascinating dichotomy in digital public diplomacy. This study illuminates the potential power of social media as a tool for statecraft, even as it showcases the complexities inherent in adapting traditional diplomatic methods to the digital age.

### *3.2. Crafting Diplomatic Narratives*

The crafting of diplomatic narratives on social media is a complex process influenced by a variety of political, cultural, and technological factors. A close examination of the US and China's diplomacy machinery on Facebook and Twitter uncovers some fascinating insights.



*Figure 3: US' Diplomatic Narrative*  
 Source: US State Department Twitter Page (2023)

The US State Department consistently crafts a narrative of global leadership, democratic values, and multilateralism on its social media platforms. The storyline is centred around promoting freedom, human rights, and international cooperation. Key messaging also includes:

- Showcasing the impact of US foreign policy and aid
- The efforts to combat global challenges like climate change and pandemic diseases
- Highlighting cultural exchanges and partnerships

The narrative is personalized through stories, behind-the-scenes insights, and spotlighting of individuals, which helps to humanize and create a relatable image of the US on the global stage.



*Figure 4: China's Diplomatic Narrative*  
 Source: Wang Wenbin's Facebook Page (2023)

Conversely, China's diplomatic narratives on these platforms are characterized by an emphasis on its peaceful development, global contribution, and the merits of its political model. This is portrayed by Wang Wenbin, spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry's post in figure 4. The narrative often counters Western media portrayals, aiming to dispel perceived misconceptions and present China as a responsible global player. It emphasizes China's contributions to global issues, the growth of its economy, advancements in technology, and the benefits of its unique governance model. Notably, China's messaging is more institutional, with less personalization or individual voices, reflecting its collective societal orientation.

### 3.2.1. Discussion

The crafting of diplomatic narratives on social media provides an interesting lens through which to view the broader diplomatic strategies of the US and China. The US narrative on Facebook and Twitter embodies its values of democracy, freedom, and international cooperation. The use of personalized and human-centred stories aligns with the democratic ethos of individualism and promotes a more relatable and approachable image of the US in the global arena. On the other hand, China's diplomatic narrative aims to position itself as a peaceful, responsible, and contributing global actor. The messaging counters Western narratives, underlining its desire to reshape the global discourse about its rise. The

emphasis on collective societal achievements and the benefits of its governance model signals an effort to present an alternative to Western political models.

As espoused by Balzacq et al. (2019), the crafting of diplomatic narratives on these platforms also reflects the power dynamics in the global information space. While the US narrative plays into its traditional role as a global leader, China's narrative is part of its effort to assert its position and change the prevailing Western-centric global narrative. These findings underscore the significance of social media as a tool for crafting and disseminating diplomatic narratives. They illuminate how these platforms are utilized to not only communicate policies but also shape global perceptions, affirm national identities, and position nations within the global order.

### 3.3. Countering Disinformation

The analysis of how the US and China counter disinformation on their diplomatic Facebook and Twitter pages revealed some compelling findings.



Figure 5: US Countering Disinformation  
Source: US State Department's Twitter Page (2022)

For the US, efforts to counter disinformation are embedded in their public diplomacy strategy. The US State Department frequently posts content to debunk false narratives, particularly those related to its foreign policy and actions. It adopts a proactive and transparent approach, providing fact-checking resources, offering clarification, and responding directly to disinformation in real-time. The State Department also partners with tech companies and civil society to combat disinformation networks.

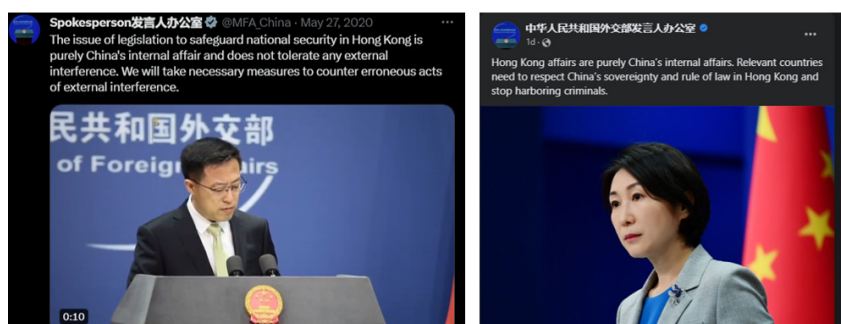


Figure 6: China Countering Disinformation  
Source: China Foreign Ministry's Facebook and Twitter Pages (2022, 2023)

China, meanwhile, utilizes a more defensive approach to counter disinformation on its diplomatic social media pages. The primary focus is on countering negative portrayals of China in international media and combating perceived biases. It proactively seeks to debunk narratives that it considers false or prejudiced, mainly concerning its governance model, policies, and global role. China's approach to disinformation also involves a strong emphasis on presenting its version of events and facts, attempting to reshape narratives in a way that positively reflects the nation.

#### 3.3.1. Discussion

The US and China's strategies for countering disinformation are reflective of their respective political contexts and international objectives. The US, with its emphasis on transparency and free speech, seeks to create an open information environment where truth can prevail. It utilizes fact-checking and direct engagement to debunk false narratives, aligning with its broader democratic values and its stance against disinformation. Conversely, China's approach is more focused on managing perceptions and controlling the narrative surrounding its national image. Countering disinformation, in this case, involves challenging negative portrayals and emphasizing the Chinese perspective. This aligns with China's broader efforts to reshape international narratives in its favour and counter what it perceives as Western bias in global media.

This analysis suggests that while both nations are taking active measures to combat disinformation, their strategies are informed by different underlying goals. The US seems to aim at creating an environment where accurate information (Burns et al., 2020) prevails, while China is more concerned with controlling narratives and managing its global image (Huang & Wang, 2019). These results demonstrate the importance of social media platforms in the fight against disinformation and highlight the differing strategies employed by nations in their digital diplomacy efforts. They emphasize the need for continued scrutiny of state-level engagement with disinformation, particularly as the landscape of global information continues to evolve in the digital age.

### 3.4. Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of the US and China's diplomatic Facebook and Twitter pages provides insightful observations on the distinct approaches employed by these two nations in leveraging social media for diplomatic purposes.



*Figure 7: US' Social Media Analysis*  
Source: US State Department's Facebook Page (2015)

The US diplomatic machinery shows high levels of transparency and public engagement on these platforms. They employ a broad range of content, from policy explanations, multilateral initiatives, to human interest stories, and behind-the-scenes insights. The interaction level is substantial, involving regular responses to user comments, live Q&As, and the use of interactive features. This indicates an emphasis on dialogue and reciprocal communication in their digital diplomacy efforts.



*Figure 8: China's Social Media Analysis*  
Source: China Foreign Ministry's Facebook Page (2023)

In contrast, China's diplomatic machinery employs these platforms as a tool for narrative control and image shaping. There is a significant emphasis on presenting China's perspective on various issues, showcasing its achievements, and countering negative portrayals. The approach is more top-down, focusing less on direct engagement or interaction with users than the US.

#### 3.4.1. Discussion

The comparative analysis underscores the different diplomatic cultures, governance systems, and strategic objectives shaping the US and China's use of social media in diplomacy. The US's approach aligns with its democratic values and diplomatic culture of open dialogue and public engagement. Its use of social media as a platform for direct



interaction reflects its strategic aim of fostering closer ties with global audiences. China's approach reflects its governance style and cultural traditions. The emphasis on narrative control aligns with China's focus on national sovereignty and desire to reshape global narratives about itself. The less interactive nature of its social media diplomacy can be understood in what Luqiu and Yang (2020) note in the context of its top-down governance system and its preference for controlled communication.

This comparison highlights that while both nations are active in the digital diplomacy space, their strategies reflect distinct cultural, political, and strategic contexts. It points to the significance of national characteristics in shaping the use of social media in diplomacy and underscores the potential of these platforms as tools of influence and narrative control in the digital age. While it is important to note that social media is merely one aspect of the broader diplomatic toolbox, this comparative analysis nonetheless sheds light on the evolving landscape of global diplomacy in the digital age.

### 3.5. Cultural, Political and Technological Context

Cultural, political, and technological contexts significantly shape the use of social media for diplomacy, as is evident in the cases of the US and China. The Facebook and Twitter pages of these nations' diplomatic machinery exemplify these influences in action.

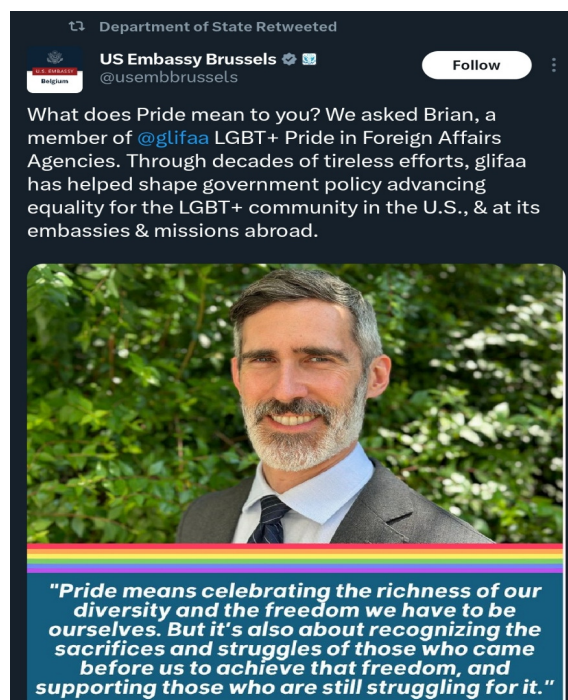


Figure 9: US' Context on Social Media

Source: US Embassy Brussels' Twitter Page (2023)

In the case of the US, cultural values of democracy, free speech, and open dialogue are apparent. These cultural traits, in combination with a politically democratic system, underpin a proactive social media approach characterized by user engagement, transparency, and promotion of democratic values. The advanced technological infrastructure also aids in the wide-ranging use of multimedia and interactive features, reinforcing the democratic ethos of inclusivity.



Figure 10: China's Context on Social Media

Source: China Foreign Ministry's Facebook Page (2023)

China, on the other hand, demonstrates a different approach, shaped by its unique cultural, political, and technological environment. A top-down governance style, coupled with an emphasis on societal harmony, informs a more controlled social media approach. The focus is on presenting official perspectives, showcasing national achievements, and countering perceived biases. Technologically, despite restrictions on the domestic use of these platforms, China has recognized and harnessed the potential of Facebook and Twitter for reaching international audiences and shaping global narratives. In figure 10, the "Warm Children's Hearts: A China-Africa Joint Action," for instance, is an initiative by Prof Peng Liyuan, wife of Chinese President Xi Jinping, together with the organization of African First Ladies for Development (OAFSLAD) with the aim of conveying warmth and care to African orphans on the occasion of International Children's Day.

### 3.5.1. Discussion

The analysis underscores the intertwining of cultural, political, and technological contexts with social media strategies in public diplomacy. The approach of the US, emphasizing engagement, transparency, and promotion of democratic ideals, mirrors its political and cultural tenets. The interactive nature of their digital diplomacy also reflects the nation's technological prowess and its commitment to leveraging it for public diplomacy. China's social media approach, marked by narrative control and image management, reflects its unique political landscape and cultural tradition. Despite the nation's domestic internet restrictions, the sophisticated use of these platforms for international diplomacy demonstrates a pragmatic recognition of technology's role in shaping global narratives.

This comparative analysis provides valuable insights into how cultural, political, and technological contexts mould a nation's digital diplomacy approach. It illustrates how these underlying factors determine the ways in which nations project their image, engage with global audiences, and navigate the complex information landscape on social media platforms. The findings underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of these contexts in interpreting and engaging with nations' digital diplomacy efforts.

## 4. Recommendations

The research unfolds significant implications for understanding the evolving dynamics of digital diplomacy. It accentuates the fact that the cultural, political, and technological contexts are pivotal to dissecting digital diplomacy strategies. This acknowledgement expands the comprehension of state behaviour and diplomatic actions in the digital space. Moreover, the study throws light on the power of social media platforms as effective tools for diplomatic communications, shaping narratives, and countering disinformation. Such an understanding of these complex dynamics broadens the perspective on global information warfare and aids in framing more efficient digital diplomacy strategies. Further, the researcher's findings stress that social media, while a modern platform, is closely interlinked with traditional diplomatic goals and practices. Hence, it is critical to view social media strategies not as separate but as an integral part of a broader diplomatic framework.

Building on the study, the researcher suggests that a more expansive comparative study across various nations would offer a broader understanding of digital diplomacy strategies. As the study uncovers stark differences between the US and China, it suggests that individual nations, influenced by their distinct contexts, likely adopt unique approaches to digital diplomacy. Moreover, the study recommends that policy-makers should be attentive to the emergent trends in digital diplomacy. This adaptive approach, informed by a close study of these trends, could be pivotal in shaping more effective public diplomacy strategies. Finally, the study indicates the need for further exploration and formulation of strategies to counter disinformation. The role of social media in this endeavour is evident and suggests the potential of these platforms in mitigating the effects of disinformation in the realm of digital diplomacy.

## 5. Conclusion

This research scrutinizes the role of social media in public diplomacy by comparatively analyzing the strategies employed on Facebook and Twitter by the US and China. The study reveals the cultural, political, and technological factors that shape each nation's approach to digital diplomacy, reflecting their domestic environment and international objectives. It highlights the increasing significance of social media in both shaping diplomatic narratives and countering disinformation. The open information environment of the US and China's narrative control strategies are noted as distinct methods of countering false narratives. The research concludes by calling for broader comparative studies, adaptation to emerging digital diplomacy trends, and comprehensive disinformation counterstrategies. It emphasizes that understanding the nuances of social media diplomacy is essential for future research, policy-making, and diplomatic practices in the now-interconnected digital era.

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