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Research on the Construction of China's National Image by Western Media Platforms from the Perspective of Algorithms

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Abstract:
The world's changes are accelerating, and dangers are emerging one after another. Building China's own discourse system, strengthening its own communication power, speaking well of China's voice, and breaking the ideological control of the West have become increasingly important. However, relying solely on "self shaping " is clearly unable to meet China's current international demands. It is equally important to pay attention to how the West shapes China.The West uses its powerful discourse system and advanced technology to construct a one-sided or even misleading image of China. With the arrival of a new technological revolution, the West combines artificial intelligence and algorithms to accurately push its audience. This undoubtedly increases the difficulty for China to implement its "going out" strategy and for the world to have a more comprehensive understanding of China. Therefore, it is of great significance to pay attention to how the West constructs the image of China through algorithms and whether the discourse system of China can truly play a significant role.

Keywords:
Algorithmic Bias, Other Shaping, International Communication, Artificial Intelligence, Image Construction

1 Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous improvement of China's international status, the stereotype of "a strong country must dominate"in the West has begun to restrain China's development. Different ideologies, cultural discounts, and advanced media technologies in the West have also made China's image construction increasingly difficult. On May 31, 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed during the 30th collective study of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee that we should attach importance to the shaping of China's national image, tell a good story about China, spread China's voice effectively, and demonstrate a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China to the outside world, which is an important task to strengthen China's international communication capacity. [1] With the advent of the information age and the development of the internet, building one's own discourse system has become an inevitable requirement for improving cultural soft power, enhancing China's image, and promoting global governance system reform.

This means that breaking through the ideological control of the West in all aspects is already an inevitable

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path for China to achieve international communication. We have observed that the current international image is mainly focused on “self shaping”, with relatively little emphasis on “other shaping” in the West. It is obvious that China's matrix communication has achieved initial results, but it is still constrained by the West, making it difficult to maximize its effectiveness. Therefore, we need to learn and research from both internal and external sources in order to achieve greater and more efficient construction of China’s international image. With the development of new media, the influence of traditional media is declining, and in the context of diversified communicators, we can see the diverse perspectives and shots of China through algorithmic media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, etc. According to this logic, the impact on the construction of China’s national image cannot be achieved. However, we have observed that different countries are still able to guide their own people and influence their perception of China's national image.

Therefore, under the influence of platform decentralization, understanding how countries complete the construction of China's national image is of great research significance for China's implementation of the “going global” strategy.

2 Literature Review

2.1The construction of national image

Many scholars have begun to analyze and study the national image from the perspectives of international politics and sociology. In this regard, represented by Robert Jevis, he views complex international relations in his books as interactions between signals and symbols between different countries, exposing the essence of the game in the diplomatic process. In fact, it is to construct an image that is beneficial to one's own interests and enhance the influence of national discourse[2]. As for the shaping of national image, in the article *“Research on the Current Situation of National Image in the Domestic Academic Community”,* Zhengguo Li believes that national image includes three aspects, namely “my image”, “other image” and “misplaced image”. “My image” refers to the image pursuit of the country itself in various fields, which is not subject to the will of other countries; His image Misplaced image refers to the formation of a mismatch between a country's image and its own image, as this cognitive mismatch leads to negative impressions that have a detrimental impact on the overall development of a country. [3] Therefore, how to gradually improve the distorted image of China abroad is obviously a key part of shaping China's image.

Scholar Yu Yan explained in his article *The Shaping of China’s Image in Western Media Reports* that the media is a place where various forces compete, and behind the power competition is the abandonment of national interests and relations. Due to the differences in ideology, cultural concepts, and national interests between the Western world and China, as well as the deep-rooted bias of the Western world towards China from the East, Western media inevitably convey varying degrees of bias in their coverage of China, thus shaping a distorted image of China. With the development of the economy, China has continuously strengthened its media discourse power, and has also begun to conduct research in various aspects. Yugang Fan stated in *The Construction and Dissemination of China's Mainstream Cultural Values under Global Cultural Influence* that the focus should shift from “self centeredness” to “foreign audiences”, creating a prerequisite for two-way equal communication. To achieve a dialogue and communication of “resonance on the same frequency”,

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both parties need to be in the same discourse system. This means that we need to break through the control of Western ideology and culture, not just limited to “self shaping”, but also analyze the information they receive and the information environment they are in from the perspective of foreign audiences.

With the advent of the technological era and the rise of artificial intelligence, the entire social structure has undergone earth shaking changes. The media has also undergone changes, and a new round of media discourse power will inevitably begin to adjust. The emergence of a large number of social media and liquid news has begun to impact mainstream media platforms. Under the influence of decentralization on various platforms, the West still guides its own people and influences their perception of China’s image. And media is an important path for the West to understand China. The West controls algorithmic bias in the media by controlling it. Gitlin proposed the concept of “media framework” based on the “news framework”: “a continuous and unchanging framework of explanation, cognition, and statement, also a stable criterion for selection,emphasis, and exclusion.”Under this theory, the West selectively interprets and presents information and reports related to China. According to American scholar Kosicki, as a rule formulated by communicators for recipients, recipients will interpret content and symbols according to this rule to achieve the ideal dissemination effect of communicators

2.2 Ideological theory

The West is conducting a new round of ideological colonization through algorithmic capitalism. Haytham Karar takes the relationship between algorithms and algorithmic capitalism as a starting point to explain the theory of algorithmic capitalism, which states that algorithms have the ability to classify, sort, and predict. Meanwhile, algorithms have become a fundamental feature of the global capitalist network. Therefore, algorithmic capitalism has gained increasing dominance in the global network of capitalist markets.[4] Scholar You Yang proposed political colonization. In the era of algorithmic capitalism, algorithmic technology helped the digital bourgeoisie construct a new monitoring and control space for capital exploitation of labor, not only shaping a new form of power politics - the “algorithmic Leviathan”, but also reconstructing the logic of capitalist ideological production and output. Algorithmic technology has not changed the essence of capitalism, and the algorithmic hegemony formed by its algorithmic politics and culture still serves as the superstructure for the proliferation of digital capital. [5] As an ecological cultural construct, digital media has acquired an infrastructural status in the process of comprehensively enveloping and reorganizing everyday life, which means that it not only supports new patterns of behavior and perception, but also provides logic for the emergence of new cultural and political structures. [6] Scholar Bojun Deng believes that digital imperialism means the rise of a new digital hegemony, where users have actually become objects of surveillance and control under digital capitalism. [7] Due to seizing the initiative in the development of new media and its strong political position, Western media has established a relatively mature discourse system and regarded it as a universal system for communication and cooperation among countries in the international landscape. It subtly spreads Western cultural patterns and values to countries with different ideologies and political systems, establishing cultural hegemony. Many interpretations of China's rise and socialist values internationally exhibit preconceived Western thinking patterns and discourse habits.[8] Piette Wodgem pointed out that the characteristic of artificial intelligence capitalism is the commodification of data on various platforms through algorithmic technology, and the platforms form monopolistic political colonies under the influence of competitive

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mechanisms. Algorithmic manipulation of politics is an important means for developed algorithmic capitalist countries to carry out global political colonization. Through algorithms, they control the public's political participation intentions in other countries or regions, guide public opinion, and ultimately influence election results, achieving their goal of supporting political agents and cultivating opinion leaders.

However, due to the fact that algorithms are a product of the information age in recent years, there is a significant lack of research and literature on this aspect of algorithms. Most of the research still focuses on the construction of China's image by mainstream media, and has already conducted research on algorithms for emerging short video platforms in China. However, these algorithms are rarely analyzed and interpreted from the perspective of the "other party", and there is also little analysis of specific algorithmic approaches in the West.

Therefore, this article mainly looks at the construction of the national image of other countries from the perspective of the "other party". And explore how countries construct China's national image in the context of platform empowerment as data gradually grows and is widely used? What is its specific mechanism?

3 Research Methods

In order to further understand the current position of Chinese social media in the world, and to analyze how Western social media constructs China's national image and whether there are algorithmic biases. We used data analysis and content analysis methods to statistically analyze the top ten media outlets in the world.

3.1 Data analysis method

Based on the previous question, we proposed the hypothesis that the dominant social media discourse in the world is still dominated by the West led by the United States, and China's current development of external social media has not shaken the absolute position of the West. By analyzing the top ten social media platforms in the world and tracking their monthly active users and countries, we determined which countries hold the majority of media influence. At the same time, differentiate the user scope of these media, distinguished whether they belong to the domestic user group or the international user group, and analyzed the breadth of the coverage of this media. At the same time, analyzed the number of media outlets ranked in the top ten in China and compared it with other countries to see the position of China's external social media.

3.2 Content analysis method

Based on the previous question, we proposed the hypothesis that there is indeed algorithmic bias in the West, which deliberately guides the construction of China's national image. We selected YouTube, the world's second ranked social media platform, to conduct content analysis on the top 100 views related to China. Observed the inclination of YouTube's main content about China, whether it belongs to the news, humanities, lifestyle, or entertainment sectors, and calculated their attitudes, whether they are positive, negative, or neutral. At the same time, in order to be more accurate, we also conducted statistics on TikTok, a social media platform belonging to China. Statistics on the top 100 video views about China on TikTok. Calculated its content tendency and attitude. Checked if there are significant differences in attitude and content between the two.

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4 Value Co-creation and Algorithm Colonization

4.1 Value co-creation: users are influence

In the era of immersive screen consumption, platform media has provided a space for global users to participate in the production and dissemination of meaning, and Western powers have seized the international discourse power with the help of platform media. This method can capture the maximum amount of user attention and gain the traffic foundation of platform media. By using data analysis methods, the top ten social media platforms ranked globally were statistically analyzed. Based on the current distribution of world-class mainstream social media in different countries and the target audience, as well as the monthly activity levels of these platforms, the author analyzed the data. The author found that the United States accounts for 70% of the world's top ten social media platforms, far ahead of the second ranked China. And the monthly active users of social media apps such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram have all reached over 2 billion. They cover various aspects such as forums, news, images, videos, social media, etc. There are a wide range of media types and a large user base. In contrast, China only accounts for three of the world's top ten social media, namely WeChat, tiktok and the domestic version of TikTok. Among them, only WeChat and TikTok are aimed at the global community, both with a size of around 1 billion. WeChat mainly focuses on socializing, while TikTok mainly focuses on video sharing, with relatively few users and a limited range of media coverage. The United States holds absolute leadership in the number, variety, coverage, and user base of social media platforms.

As the world's most populous country, China's media influence is far inferior to that of the United States for three reasons. One reason is that China’s media technology started relatively late and still lags behind the West in terms of technology. The second is the long-standing ideological opposition between the West and China, which has led to the West deliberately curbing the dissemination of information and content related to China. The third is comprehensive national strength, and the development of media is closely related to the development of comprehensive national strength. With the development of comprehensive national strength in recent years, China's international status has continued to rise, gradually improving its external media discourse system, but the foundation is still relatively weak. TikTok, as an important platform for China to implement its strategy of spreading and going global, has been repeatedly restricted by the United States on the grounds of information security and data privacy since 2020.

The United States promotes and instills Western ideas by providing free platform facilities, attracting global users, and meeting user needs with advanced technology and diverse cultural products, thereby achieving control over discourse power. Herbert Schiller first proposed the concept of cultural imperialism in his book *Mass Communication and the American Empire*, which refers to “the process in which a society is forced to accept the values of the core forces of the modern world system under external pressure, and the social system is adapted to this world system.” Dan Schiller further developed it and proposed digital capitalism. The fact is that the internet has become the core control tool for global cross-border markets, and with the development of digital intelligence technology, this trend is becoming more apparent and its impact is becoming more widespread. In other words, the United States uses digital media to dump media products with its own values and ideological connotations to other countries, engaging in cultural export and invasion of underde-

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veloped or underdeveloped countries.

At present, although China is a media powerhouse in the world, it is also a media weak country, relatively lacking large media institutions and advanced communication technologies similar to Western countries, which seriously affects foreign people's correct understanding and perception of China. Therefore, how to break through the joint siege of Western media, expand the influence of our own media. In the current complex international situation, it is obvious that this has become another manifestation of national strength and an important component of national strength.

Table 1 Top 10 Global Social Media Rankings

Ranking	Platform	Monthly active users: 100 million (as of 2024)	Country	Mainly targeting groups
1	Facebook	30	America	International
2	Youtube	26	America	International
3	Whatsapp	22	America	International
4	Ins	21	America	International
5	Wechat	13	China	International
6	TikTok	12	China	International
7	Messenger	10	America	International
8	Linkedin	9	America	International
9	TikTok (Chinese version)	8	China	China
10	Snapchat	7	America	International

4.2 Algorithm colonization: digital imperialism

With the binding of smartphones, platforms, and people, specific groups on the platform can create user profiles and provide accurate push notifications. With the advent of the information age, a new form of colonization has quietly emerged. That is algorithm colonization, the combination of Western technology and political needs, where algorithm technology has become a means of political power. The algorithmic discrimination of the platform hides certain biases towards ideology in the "algorithmic black box", and increases the alienation and resistance of the masses towards mainstream ideology through biased information dissemination. At the same time, due to the widespread dissemination of biased ideological information and its use as a source of information by artificial intelligence algorithms, an ideological "bias cycle" is formed, leading to the repeated reinforcement of certain biased ideologies. [9] Relying on its monopoly on information, the government firmly controls the right to report on various public opinion events, and in order to maintain its own credibility and authority, the government sometimes selectively disseminates information.[10]The global popularization and application of digital technologies represented by smartphones, platforms, algorithms,

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etc. are driving the formation and development of automation neoliberalism. On the surface, this seems to be aimed at achieving human freedom and liberation, but in reality, it is capital's goal to achieve data monitoring of platform users at all times, in all fields, and in all directions. Its fundamental logic is to promote the construction of digital oligarchs and algorithm colonial empires. Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, and other corporate giants, as well as national intelligence agencies such as the National Security Agency, have become algorithmic oligarchs in the international community.[11]

In the era of intelligent communication, cultural invasion has become more covert, and the West has begun to form its own cultural colonization. With the development of Western media technology, the coverage of Western culture and consciousness has become more extensive. For China, different ideologies are also an important reason for mutual estrangement. The West selectively displays content related to China through one-sided distortion, data filtering, folded comments, traffic control, and other means. For example, the West exaggerates the "Xinjiang cotton incident" by distorting facts and selectively constructs an agenda of "China has no human rights and oppresses workers". This kind of agenda has caused great repercussions among foreign people, which has made foreigners who have long been influenced by western liberalism more critical of China and made some people more firmly believe that China is an authoritarian country. However, with the popularity of the TV drama *My Altay*, more people have come to realize the true Xinjiang. This TV drama, which was shortlisted for the main competition unit of this year's Cannes Television Festival, successfully presented to foreign audiences a scene about the real life of the people in Xinjiang, that is, there are multiple ethnic minorities living in the Altay region, and overall they have maintained a harmonious and stable life for decades. There is no preaching about ethnic policies in the drama, but it truly reflects the scene of mutual tolerance and warm friendship among different ethnic groups. It allows the world to see intuitively that ethnic equality has been a reality practiced for many years and taken for granted in Xinjiang.[12]

5 Algorithm Operation: Cultural Foundation and Power Bias

5.1 Algorithm power bias

With the increasingly fierce competition between countries, media power has become a new arena for competition. Countries cooperate with algorithm platforms to promote media content that is beneficial to their own countries, while reducing the promotion of content that is detrimental to their own countries, thus achieving control over public opinion. In this process, China is seen as the enemy of the "zero sum game", and its national image is inevitably affected. We conducted content analysis and attitude analysis on the top 100 videos with views related to China on YouTube and TikTok respectively. Through statistics, it was found that among the top 100 views on YouTube, videos with negative attitudes towards China account for 36%, and the main video content is focused on news and entertainment humor. On the other hand, negative attitudes only account for 9% of the top 100 on TikTok, indicating a huge gap between the two. The author deconstructed the negative attitude section of YouTube's video content and found that the news mainly includes national leader meetings, dynamic animated news, economic broadcasts, and so on. A significant portion of the content showcases China's expansionist ambitions and misinterprets the statements made by important Chinese leaders. Similar misleading videos have been played by millions and account for a large proportion, while videos about Chinese people's love of peace, long cultural history, and harmonious people's lives have

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not been played. Obviously, the platform provides traffic control to videos that defame China, selectively displays content related to China, and selectively constructs China's image. At the same time, the platform imposes traffic restrictions on videos that showcase the true style of China, weakening the influence of related videos on the platform.

Table 2 Attitude Statistics and Content Analysis of YouTube and TikTok on the Top 100 Video Content in China (2024)

	YouTube	TikTok
Positive Attitudes	23%	42%
Negative Attitudes	36%	9%
Neutral Attitudes	41%	49%
Main Content of Dissemination	News accounts for about 31%, entertainment accounts for about 24%, culture accounts for about 13%, food accounts for 9%, and others account for about 23%	Landscape (including urban scenery) accounts for about 56%, humor accounts for about 21%, science popularization accounts for about 11%, and others account for about 12%

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5.2 The impact of algorithmic bias: increasing barriers and ideological confrontation

The algorithmic bias of Western social media prevents people from seeing a real China and exacerbates Western stereotypes and exclusion towards China. Moreover, some neutral videos on social media platforms are very rigid and fail to resonate with users. The display of Chinese content in those videos shows a characteristic of politicization. The effectiveness of this narrative style is limited, as it cannot fully resonate with people, nor can it meet users' aesthetic expectations, nor does it leave clear memory points for users. Therefore, such propaganda content cannot guide people to comprehensively and meticulously view social issues, nor can it establish a friendly national image in people's minds. Politically speaking, Western algorithmic bias is not only detrimental to the development of peace, but may also exacerbate the instability of world peace. From an economic perspective, these social platforms often contain huge business opportunities and are a major boost to economic and trade exchanges and economic development. However, deliberate Western guidance and confrontation may result in potential economic losses. From the perspective of media development, deliberate suppression in the West is not conducive to the media conveying different voices, nor is it conducive to the healthy development of the media. The algorithmic bias in the West not only fails to bring benefits, but also poses significant challenges to the development of media in China.

5.3 Hegemony competition in algorithm platforms

In the process of competing for algorithmic hegemony, the competition is no longer at the content level, but at the algorithmic power level. Whoever has a high level of global audience engagement has greater algorith-

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mic power. The more widely the algorithm platform is implemented, the stronger its ability to construct China's national image. Nowadays, there are several ways for China's media industry to break the Western algorithmic bias. Firstly, develop independent social media platforms: increase investment in technology research and development for domestic social media platforms, enhance the platform's algorithm recommendation technology, launch internationally competitive social media products, and provide more objective and diverse information services for global users. Secondly, China requires Western social media platforms to increase algorithmic transparency and reduce content bias against China through international cooperation or diplomatic means. Once again, through official mainstream media platforms and private social media channels, actively spread real and comprehensive information about China on Western social media, breaking the stereotypical impression of China created by the West. At the same time, international opinion leaders, scholars, and media are encouraged to objectively report on China and reduce the one-sided portrayal of China by Western media. It is worth mentioning that China's media industry should also actively participate in global discussions on artificial intelligence and algorithm governance, promote the establishment of fair and transparent international algorithm standards and rules, and advocate that algorithm design should respect different cultures and values. At the same time, domestic algorithm companies and media platforms need to strengthen research on artificial intelligence and algorithms, develop more fair and transparent algorithm technologies, and develop artificial intelligence tools to automatically detect and correct biased content on Western social media. Finally, media platforms need to mobilize the power of the public, encouraging foreign internet celebrities, international students, overseas Chinese, and others to share their experiences and feelings in China, and to narrate a three-dimensional and authentic image of China from diverse perspectives.

6 Summary and Reflection

The ideological war of the information age has begun, and cultural colonization has become a new political tool. The digital platforms used by people, such as Google search engine, smartphones, tablets, and desktop operating systems, Microsoft Office Software, Amazon, Facebook, Twitter, Uber, video websites, Netflix, etc., encompass almost all of people's work, life, learning, entertainment, and other content. All of this is dominated by a few multinational companies in the United States, and is a means for large technology companies to use algorithms for global colonization. It is a new type of technological hegemony created by humans themselves, because users are extremely dependent on the social convenience and service guarantee provided by algorithm technology, so people are bound by algorithms, resulting in a deep binding of "algorithm+human". However, China has always focused on its own image shaping, and has rarely viewed Western reporting and image display of China from the perspective of "other shaping". China's previous research on Western "other shaping"has mainly focused on traditional media reports, such as *The Times* and *The Wall Street Journal.* The one-sided understanding and distorted reporting of China by these traditional foreign media often leads to misunderstandings and exclusion of China by people from other countries in the Western stereotype of "it shapes". In the new era of rapid changes in the Internet, smart phones and social platforms, social platforms relying on smart phones and other communication tools have begun to rely on algorithms to construct China's national image. Among them, "algorithm black box" and "algorithm discrimination" have brought greater harm to the construction of China's national image.

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Western countries use the development of information technology and social platforms to provide convenient and even free services to invite users to create, in order to achieve rapid user expansion. As a representative of Western powers, the United States holds absolute discourse power, and its social media platforms cover various aspects such as video communication, image communication, and daily life communication. Despite the rapid development of global social media TikTok products in China, Western suppression of our media has always existed. In 2024, the US House of Representatives has passed the "TikTok divestment bill", and the TikTok account of *China Daily* has been subjected to political suppression by the US government. The homepage has been maliciously labeled as "Chinese state-owned media", reflecting the usual Cold War mentality and ideological bias of the United States.[13] The researchers also found that it was difficult to explain the results of news selection and value ranking based on newsworthiness theory alone without knowing what algorithmic metrics Google News used. And since these indicators cannot be made public, it is impossible for users to infer what kind of algorithmic logic the integration of Google News is based on and whether it is professional enough.[14] Most people, whose basic means of livelihood are already firmly tied to the digital labor system, are destined to never completely escape the increasingly "dehumanized" algorithmic environment.[15] Algorithms, as representatives of a certain culture, are not only objective things as opposed to human subjective consciousness. It is also embedded in the algorithmic distribution mechanism of the designer, the human reviewer, the rule maker, and the larger cultural background that has been formed by the platform ecology and human society. [16] However, China has not yet formed its own strong discourse dissemination system overseas.

Secondly, in the social content of foreign media, we can clearly see the ideological bias of the West towards China. Media platforms have already folded some comments through precise data push and audience screening, which can easily form "echo walls" and "filtering bubbles", reinforcing others' bias towards China. However, local TikTok in China also needs to improve its presentation of Chinese content. The content presented in the videos about China is too rigid, with the vast majority showcasing the scenery of key Chinese cities, neglecting the culture and harmonious living of Chinese residents. Joseph J.N. believed that a country's image is a reflection of its culture, domestic policies, and values, and is also its fundamental external appearance.[17] Therefore, in terms of disseminating content, we also need to enrich it, rather than constantly presenting a single content.

To spread its voice in the world, China must break through the joint restrictions of Western media. Therefore, in order to develop world-class social media, China needs to start from multiple aspects, perspectives, and channels. It is not only necessary to build its own world-class media platform, but also to actively respond to the limitations of algorithms in Western media platforms, and to showcase China's image and voice as effectively as possible.

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