



## “Panda Network”: Interweaving the network and emotion strategies in China’s digital public diplomacy

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# Background: Chinese media's digital panda diplomacy

- The continuation of China's animal diplomacy
  - Panda : a political animal
  - Digital panda-themed communication = a digitalized form of animal diplomacy
    - Endorsement of China's national image
    - Telling China's stories (Transmitting favorable attitudes and promising visions to online publics through panda-themed storytelling)
      - Panda's cute visual recognition fits the schema of childlike characteristics
      - The uniqueness of panda's geographical distribution
  - What is the link between the network communication structure, network coordination, and emotional, strategic narrative?
    - What kind of message production strategy does the Chinese media adopt to construct panda-themed storytelling?
    - How China's state-owned media combine narrative strategies and network relationship management methods to build an "emotional" communication network on social media to enhance Beijing's soft power?

# China's digital PD and journalism

- Studying digital public diplomacy from a constructivist perspective
  - Switching communication paradigm : from mass media-driven to networked communication (from informing function to social construct)
  - **International journalism is no longer solely considered as an information production-transmission system. It has become a dynamic instrument of public diplomacy that represents “an integral part of societies, is embedded in [different] network structures” (Heinrich, 2012, p. 63)**
- Understanding China's digital public diplomacy principle
  - the mouthpiece of the CPC's authoritarian system
  - “a government political and ideological apparatus for the ruling CPC” (Hong, 2011, p. 377)
- Constructive journalism as the promising strategy to telling China Stories
  - A solution-based journalistic paradigm
  - Integrating positive psychology to frame “constructive” opinions instead of criticisms on the global stage
  - Seeking to reposition Beijing's social role in international affairs as an open and responsible international actor

# Emotion, narratives and constructive journalism in digital public diplomacy

## - Emotion

- In an interactive perspective, emotion...
  - ... is a “power issue” (Alloing & Pierre, 2020, p. 3)
  - ... is a possible instrument of domination of the body by biopolitics (Foucault, 1994)
  - ... joins in the persuasive process that can engage target publics and lead them to have a sense of intersubjective and relational attraction or repulsion towards topics or messages (Finn, 1989)

## - Narratives, positive psychology and constructive journalism

- applying positive psychology into constructive journalistic narratives helps to describe and translate “societal preoccupations and concerns” into positive or promising expressions and presentations (Yen, 2010, p. 69).
- Accepting the constructive journalism paradigm into the practice of China’s digital PD...
  - to weaken the information censorship color in the narrative production process
  - to improve the “party-state’s rigid propaganda and reporting style” (Li, 2015, p. 19)
  - to create a more attractive and empowering way to attract and disseminate information with affective signals online
  - to continually frame Beijing’s policies and ideas subtly through “affective feedback loops that generate and reproduce affective patterns of relating to interactivity” (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 23).

# Hypothesis & RQ

H1. Panda-themed tweets consist of a relatively effective constructive journalism practice of China's state-owned media in digital public diplomacy practice.

H2. Panda-themed tweets help Chinese state-owned media to weave a dynamic interactive network on Twitter to increase user stickiness.

RQ. How Beijing uses “panda” imagery to create news stories under the framework of digitalized constructive journalism?

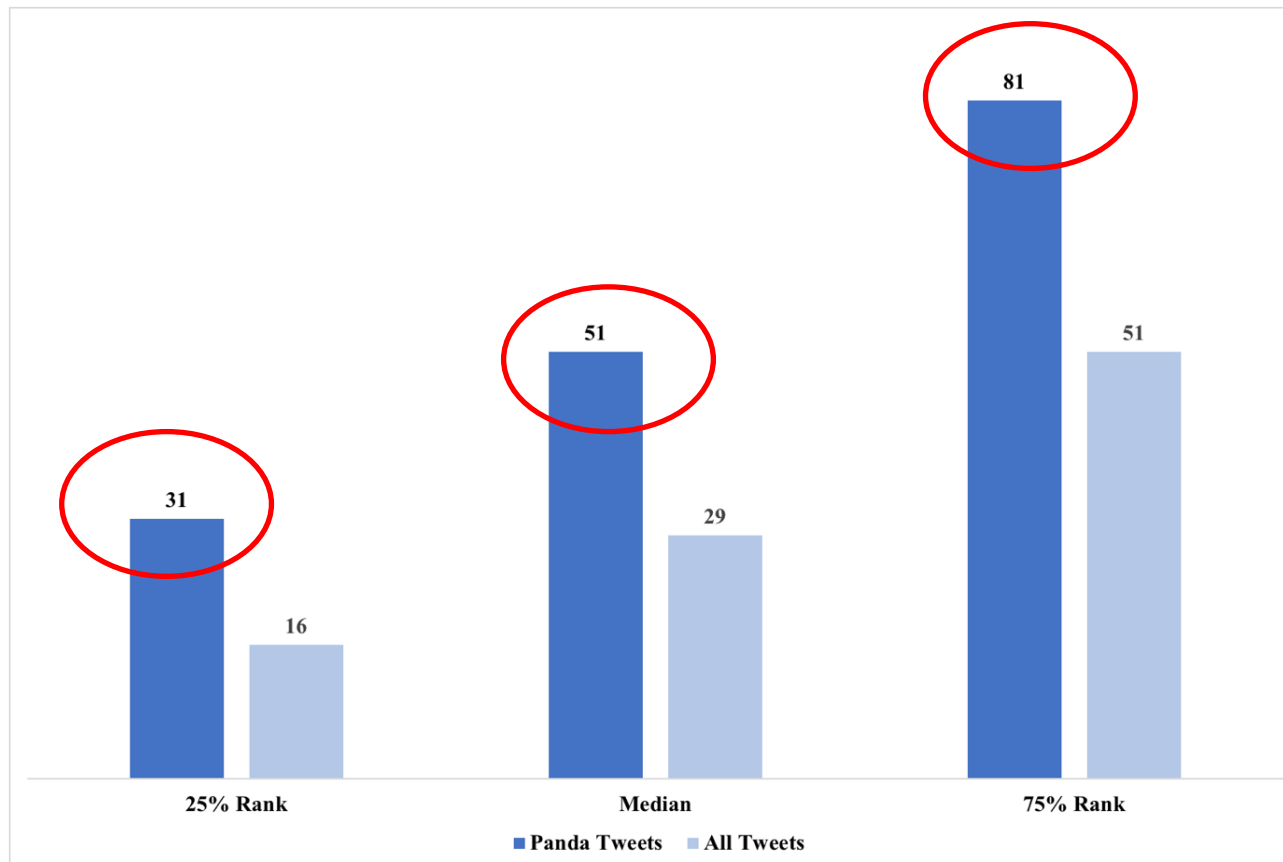


# A mixed methodology

- Data collection:
  - Three China's State-owned Media's Twitter monitored (1, 551 tweets posted in 2017 and 2018):
    - People's Daily (@PDChina)
    - Xinhua (@XHNews)
    - CGTN (@CGTNOfficial)
- A mixed methodology
  - A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to explore panda-themed online interaction level towards other Chinese media's tweets
  - A network analysis based on Twitter handles and hashtags to demonstrate "Panda-themed network"
  - A semio-discursive perspective to analyze Top 100-retweeted panda-themed tweets to understand Chinese media's news writing strategies
    - (a) anthropomorphic strategy,
    - (b) Knowledge mediation strategy
    - (c) Political and/or para-diplomatic mediatization strategy

# Results

H1. Panda-themed tweets consist of a relatively effective constructive journalism practice of China's state-owned media in digital public diplomacy practice. (✓)







# Qualitative finding

## 3 main strategies of the Chinese panda-themed news writing :

1) *Anthropomorphic strategy aims to use human-like expressions to give the panda a “human life”.*

**CGTN** @CGTNOfficial  
China state-affiliated media

Cute alert! Giant panda cuddles with keeper during shower time



10:15 PM · Jun 18, 2018 · Twitter Media Studio

582 Retweets 113 Quote Tweets 1.9K Likes

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# Qualitative finding

## 3 main strategies of the Chinese panda-themed news writing :

2) *Using panda's visual recognition to mediate related knowledge.*

 **People's Daily, China** ✓  
@PDChina  
China state-affiliated media

Panda eating show episode 4: pandas eat 12-38kg of bamboo every day to meet their energy needs  
[youtu.be/gE5M18jrXaY](https://youtu.be/gE5M18jrXaY)



▶ 12.6K views 0:00 / 1:53

4:53 AM · May 22, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

200 Retweets 35 Quote Tweets 515 Likes

 **People's Daily, China** ✓  
@PDChina  
China state-affiliated media

Keeper wears panda costume when interacting with cubs who will grow up in protected wildlife instead of in captivity [youtu.be/GaLP6S9ZHQ4](https://youtu.be/GaLP6S9ZHQ4)



▶ 30.4K views 0:01 / 1:12

5:25 AM · Jul 24, 2017 · Twitter Media Studio

419 Retweets 111 Quote Tweets 823 Likes

# Qualitative finding

## 3 main strategies of the Chinese panda-themed news writing :

### *3) Manipulating panda's image to frame political and public-diplomatic messages to endorse China and the Chinese government*



# Discussion

- The panda network exists, but not interactive.
- Three news writing strategies have been found, but each strategy's online interaction effectiveness needs to be explored.
- Panda network has been mobilized to transmit narratives related to happiness and build an online communication circumstance with “hope and vision” (Moïsi, 2010, p. 52).
- Further research questions:
  - 1) **How the Chinese media interact with its domestic partners (diplomatic departments, enterprises, and non-governmental institutions) and foreign counterparts in the panda-themed communication network to enhance the influence of China's digital panda diplomacy?**
  - 2) **In China's “panda network”, how does the synergy of network communication happen?**
  - 3) **In the framework of China's “panda network”, how to measure the communication effect of implementing different news writing strategies?**



Thank you for your attention!

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