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The use of Chinese social media by foreign embassies: How 'generative technologies' are offering opportunities for modern diplomacy

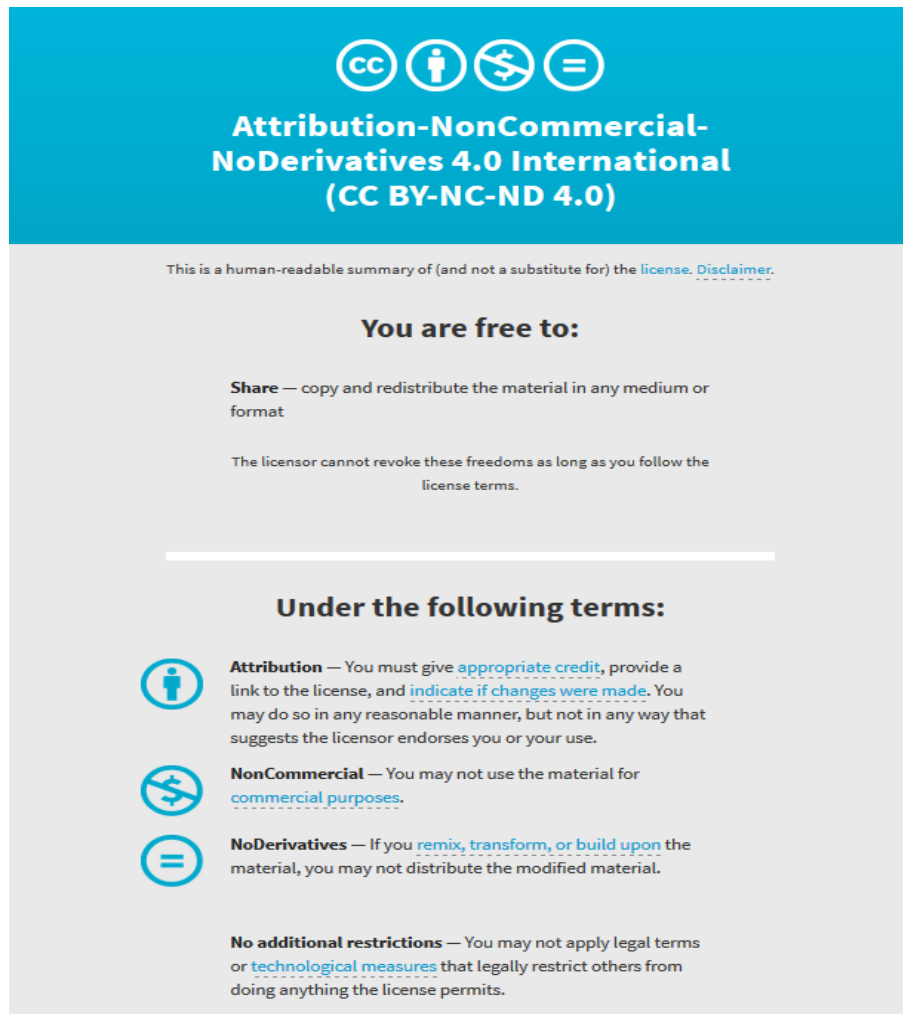
Making Publics, Making Places, 2016 / Griffiths, M., Barbour, K. (ed./s), Ch.9, pp.145-161

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Published version <http://dx.doi.org/10.20851/publics-09>

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The use of Chinese social media by foreign embassies: How 'generative technologies' are offering opportunities for modern diplomacy

9

Ying Jiang

Social media platforms provide spaces for interaction and increased engagement, thus furthering the goals of public diplomacy. Due to the perceived ease with which social media can be accessed and the low cost in comparison with other methods, social media platforms are seen as attractive technology-based communication channels for many embassies and other organisations, particularly for those facing budget cuts and demands to increase engagement (Fisher 2013).

It is believed that social media provide the right channel to reach youth populations, which is one of the major goals of current public diplomacy efforts (Mershon 2012). For public diplomacy, it is equally important to listen to and understand young people's thoughts and aspirations, along with their information-seeking and other kinds of behaviours (Riordan 2004). In addition, social media provide the opportunity to reach the youth populations of

other countries. In foreign embassies in China, for example, there are more than forty embassies that use the most popular Chinese social media platform — Weibo — to engage with the 'online publics' in China.

This chapter examines how 'generative technologies' are offering opportunities for modern diplomacy. Engagement and interactivity are what have been emphasised in using social media in public relation works. However, this chapter argues that interactivity is not necessarily linked to the success of the engagement with online publics via social media accounts. This chapter examines the interactivity of those embassies' Weibo accounts by looking at two aspects: the number of comments or retweets that each post receives, and the number of negative and positive comments that each post receives.

According to my previous research, it is evident that Weibo can be employed effectively to engage with online communities, which is one of the goals of public diplomacy, but it was difficult to measure its real effects simply by looking at the data collected at that stage. In fact, one of the important phenomena which my research illustrates is that the number of followers does not equal the influence Weibo has on its followers — that is, the level of 'conversational' or informal communication on Weibo accounts does not indicate the success of e-diplomacy. Indeed, the negative and hostile comments left on some of the embassies' Weibo accounts show that the outcomes of its public diplomacy tasks are unsuccessful.

This chapter focuses on measuring the interactivity of these foreign embassies' Weibo accounts. Through my research, I found that awareness does not imply positive influence. Defining public diplomacy [PD] as communication with foreign publics for the purpose of achieving a foreign policy objective, PD practitioners should be cognisant of the fact that *information* is different from *influence* (Wallin 2013). Other researchers have similarly found that an account's high number of followers does not necessarily equate to that account having a strong connection with an audience. An account might have 1 million followers, but even though a post from that account gets retweeted 1000 times per day, those followers may support or oppose the user's communication goals (Wallin 2013).

Literature review

Research on the government's application of new media has had a long existence. In 1986, Garramone, Harris and Pizante were the first researchers to discuss how computers could provide a two-way flow of information between elected officials and their constituents. McKeown and Plowman (1999) explained how 1996 US presidential candidates used the internet to reach voters during the general election; Trammell (2006) explained how blog-based attacks were utilised during the US election in 2004; Levenshus (2010) explained how Barack Obama's campaign

utilised the internet for grassroots efforts in 2008. Other scholars have looked at how governmental organisations from the Middle East and the United Arab Emirates [UAE] used the internet (Curtin & Gaither 2004; Ayish 2005; Kirat 2007), as well as the role of culture, in country-sponsored tourism websites (Kang & Mastin 2008); how the diffusion of social media has affected public health communication (Avery et al. 2010); and what the impact of transparency laws is on Latin American government websites (Searson & Johnson 2010).

Research that examines the influence of organisations' impact or influence on people through the use of social media is not rare. For example, in 2013, the European Commission published a report entitled *Assessing the Benefits Of Social Networks on Organizations* (Martin & van Bavel 2013). This project aimed to analyse the current market situation for a limited number of social media stakeholders, to identify and analyse best practices for these selected stakeholders, and to define and prioritise relevant policy options. This report is one of the most comprehensive pieces of research on the topic so far. It conducted an exhaustive and critical review of the academic, business and policy literature on the organisational use of social networking tools and social media platforms, as well as regular engagement with academic experts in this area. It was observed that while social media technologies present several potential benefits to organisations, there are considerable challenges and bottlenecks affecting adoption that may warrant policy intervention.

Apart from this relatively large-scale project on social media's influence on organisations, scholars from a range of backgrounds have also examined the effectiveness of employing social media in different contexts. For example, Murthy (2015) investigated the relationship between social media and organisational collaboration, changes to organisations, and the effect of microblogging on organisations. Puijenbroek et al. (2014) focused on investigating the relationship between social media use and learning activities undertaken by employees. Kleinhans, van Ham and Evans-Cowley (2015) explored the potential of social media and mobile technologies to foster citizen engagement and participation in urban planning.

However, there is not much research into the influence of foreign embassies in China. One piece of research worth mentioning is a report written in Chinese and published by Chinalabs in 2013, which looked at the internet influence that Chinese foreign embassies have, analysing the level of each foreign embassy's online impact by looking at their websites and social media accounts. This report found that only 15 per cent of foreign embassies in China opened Weibo accounts, and most of these Weibo accounts lacked interactivity. According to this report (2013), Weibo is playing a 'media' role. In other words, this social media platform was used by foreign embassies to share information rather than to influence followers or initiate interactivity with followers. However, this research was conducted almost four years ago, and, given

the rapid development of foreign embassies' use of Weibo, the research findings summarised in this report need an update.

Method

To address the above issues, I first gathered a list of embassies on Chinese social media platforms. For the purpose of this study, the definition of an embassy's Chinese social media account refers to the embassy's official account as verified by the service provider. It does not include any ambassador's personal account, nor does it include any consular or consular staff member's account.

To gather this list, I mainly used one simple method — trawling for known embassies through Weibo's celebrity plaza (Mingren Tang), where embassies are categorised by their countries. Following this, I then gathered a list of foreign embassy Weibo users. I collected numerical and descriptive data (such as the user's self-written Twitter biography, representative avatar, number of friends and number of followers) for each of our examined Weibo users. I then collected and archived further descriptive data (country, registered date) with both text and time/date tweeted. In order to analyse a similar series of tweets, I then edited this to a three-month period between September 2014 and December 2014.

Based on my Stage 1 research results, which will be published by Routledge in 2017 (Jiang, forthcoming), I selected the five foreign embassies' Weibo accounts with the highest number of followers. Canada has the most followers on Sina Weibo. Canada's followers have surpassed the US's followers, reaching a figure of more than 1.1 million. The US embassy has around 900 000 followers as of 6 December 2014. Cuba and the UK have the same number of followers and ranked third on the list, while the Korean embassy's Sina Weibo have slightly fewer followers than Cuba and UK. Echoing the method of Leavitt et al. (2009), I collected a three-month sample of those five accounts' Weibo comments, and then categorised the comments into three basic types: positive, negative and other (for example, irrelevant questions or advertisements).

Findings

Statistics on foreign embassies' Weibo influence (sample from 6 September to 6 December 2014)

The influence of each embassy through Weibo can be assessed by calculating the number of comments on their posts, and the number of retweets of their posts. After analysing the number of comments and retweets each embassy received on their Weibo account from September to December in 2014, I gathered the following results (Figure 9.1). As can be seen, the Korean embassy has the highest ratio of retweets and comments.

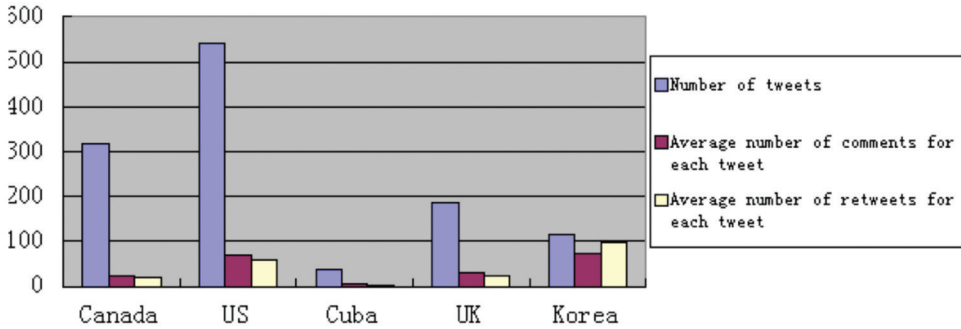


Figure 9.1: The number of comments and retweets per post by embassies.

Source: Y Jiang [Figure as provided].

After an extremely time-consuming manual collection of comments left on the Weibo accounts of the above-mentioned five embassies between 6 September and 6 December 2014, I found that although the US embassy has the highest level of interactivity (that is, the highest number of comments), more than half of the comments it received were negative ones (Table 9.1). Although Cuba has the least number of comments, most of the comments it received were positive. The Korean embassy is also leading the way in receiving positive comments. The percentage of negative comments received by the British and Canadian embassies is just under 50 per cent (Figure 9.2).

	Canada	US	Cuba	UK	Korea
Total number of comments	7632	37 800	195	5952	8658
Positive comments	2303	5670	120	1258	6925
Negative comments	3803	22 680	0	2542	760
Other (including questions not related to the topic or ads)	1526	9450	15	2152	946

Table 9.1: Analysis of comments left on the Weibo accounts of five embassies.

Source: Y Jiang.

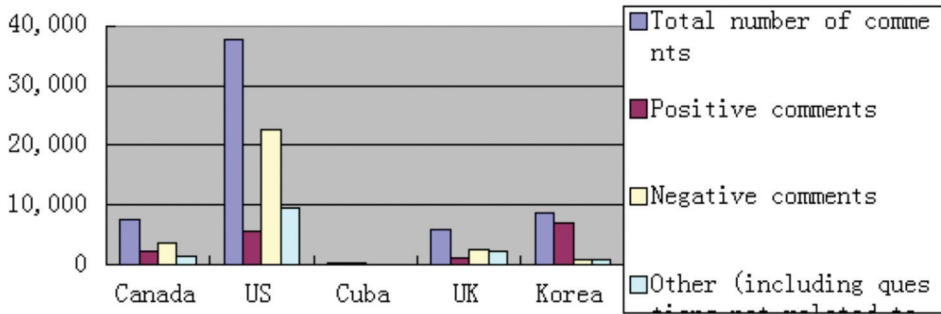


Figure 9.2: The number of positive and negative comments received per embassy.

Source: Y Jiang [Figure as provided].

Other findings

Among the collected valid comments, it was evident that nationalistic sentiments toward certain Western countries are frequently presented on the embassies' Weibo accounts. According to initial statistics, of 3000 negative comments received by the Canadian and the US embassies (which are the two embassies who received the highest number of negative comments), most of the themes of those comments were nationalistic. For example, this is a post made by the US embassy on 31 Oct 2014, which received 132 comments, most of which were negative (Figures 9.3 and 9.4):

@US Embassy in China: Around 2 million voters in America started the pre-voting process for the mid-term election on 20 October. President Obama has also joined them. Among the 50 states in the US, 43 of them allow pre-voting. Both parties are working hard to win the voters during this period. Due to the high competitiveness of the election, both parties are going to all lengths to win voters from every corner. What else would you like to know about the mid-term election?¹

Below is a sample of the comments that this post received²:

User name	Comment
Shua Qiang	Great! People in China won't be able to see one vote in their life!


1 Translation provided by the author.

2 Comments translated by the author.

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Xianshi_Taobi	Reply @wobuqirenyoutian: What's the real meaning of China's election system? We don't agree.
Jiujiaowoaliaoshaba	Do you dare to give me the American visa?
Wobuqirenyoutian	China's election system is similar to most of the nations. 1200 candidates are not nominated by themselves, they are nominated by representatives from different areas, and will then be voted by people. What's wrong with this? Isn't it the same in Ukraine? Also the same in Japan, Korea? Isn't it all the same?
Wobuqirenyoutian	Those 'occupiers' in Hong Kong requested a 20% threshold for election, if a 20% support rate can represent the community, why can't a 50% supporting rate represent China's election system?
Djquan172	American people request REAL election.
Gangchushengjiuhensha	Fucking Americans! Why don't you sit down and talk to the people who occupied Wall Street?
Xianshitaobi	Reply @wobuqirenyoutian 'Representatives need to represent the majority of people, otherwise, people will be represented without knowing who are representing them'. Aren't you talking about China?
Wobuqirenyoutian	Reply @xiaoshitaobi Because there are 7 billion people in the world, the majority of us will be represented instead of representing others or ourselves. How can we have 7 billion mouths discussing one issue? Therefore, the most effective and realistic method is to elect representatives.
Qingcheshuilian	America will spend an estimated 4 billion US dollars on the election, where does this money come from? What's the motivation of people who are providing the funds? Why are they spending so much on the election?

回复@有秋意:选举团制度被创造出来时为了确保每个州都在总统选举中有代表。选举团制度迫使候选人到人口众多的地区以外展开竞选活动,照顾在直选体制下可能被忽略的地方。不赞成这种制度的人士则认为直接选举更简单明了。更多信息 [网页链接](#)

@美国驻华大使馆 

10月20日,大约200万美国选民提前开始2014年中期选举的投票。奥巴马总统也加入了提前投票的队伍。在美国50个州中,有43个州允许提前投票。两党都正在努力争取提前投票的选民。由于很多职位的竞选比分十分接近,两党都全力以赴争取每一个角落的选民。你还想了解中期选举什么?

[美国部分选民提前...](#)



美国部分选民提前开始中期选举的...

2014.10.22大约200万美国选民提前开始2014年中期选举的投票。10月20

[文章详情](#)

 71

2014-10-24 10:51 来自 新浪博客

转发 596 | 评论 239 |  62

2014-10-31 15:12 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏

转发 75

评论 123

 25



同时转发到我的微博

同时评论给原作者 美国驻华大使馆

[评论](#)


全部 | [热门](#) | [认证用户](#) | [关注的人](#)

共123条



[刷墙](#): 真棒,在中国民众一生都见不到选票


2014-10-31 17:59

[回复](#) |  3



[現實_逃遁](#): 回覆@我不杞人忧天: 中共的“普選”是什么内涵?是什么货色?我们不认同,你能怪罪我们吗?好好反省自己吧。删贴必再贴

2014-11-1 20:29

[查看对话](#) | [回复](#) |  1



[就叫我阿廖沙吧0](#): 敢不敢给我签证

2014-11-1 16:50

[回复](#) |  2

Figure 9.3: Screenshot of the US embassy's post and received comments.

Source: Y Jiang.

 **我不杞人忧天**：回复@現實_逃遼：中共的普选方案是与当前世界多数国家的选举模式一样。1200多人不是代表自己提名，而是作为代表提出他们所处的人群、团体、阶层、政党里获得票数超过半数的人选作为候选人，交由公民一人一票裁决胜负。这有什么不对吗？乌克兰不就是这样吗？日本、韩国不就是这样吗？——不都是这样吗
2014-11-4 09:52 回复 | 赞

 **我不杞人忧天**：占中者要求获20%支持就可以号称代表民意，就必须登堂入室执行权力，这让获50%支持的人情何以堪？这是外星球的国际标准吧。
2014-11-4 09:51 回复 | 赞

 **djquan172**：美国人民要真普选。
2014-11-4 09:13 回复 | 赞

 **刚出生就很傻**：操你妈了个比的美国佬，坐下来谈你妈，你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢？操你妈了个比的美国佬，坐下来谈你妈，你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢？操你妈了个比的美国佬，坐下来谈你妈，你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢？操你妈了个比的美国佬，坐下来谈你妈，你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢？操你妈了个比的美国佬，坐下来谈你
2014-11-4 02:20 回复 | 赞

 **信访脚步11**：极度腐败福建省莆田市仙游县原建设局长借其裸友名挂森裕项目建私人豪宅，圈抢、炒卖村民宅基地耕地。伪造规划，以权谋私，其亲友原鲤城镇党委书记滥用职权，欺上瞒下，对多年信访村民实行放火烧宅等打击报复手段，以超生、默许私人卖地，安抚部分村民忍受掠夺。一张假规划，8年信访路，习近平管吗？
2014-11-3 12:55 回复 | 赞

 **現實_逃遼**：回复@我不杞人忧天：“既然当代表就需要站在整体利益、多数人利益的立场上，那样才有人推举你当代表，否则就甘心被代表。”你真的不是在讽刺中共233
2014-11-3 10:57 查看对话 | 回复 | 赞

 **我不杞人忧天**：回复@現實_逃遼 😂 因为我明白，在地球人口已经70亿的情况下，绝大多数民众都是被代表的身份，不然都去当代表，70亿张嘴怎么商讨问题？现实与有效的办法就是选举代表。不喜欢被代表，就去争当代表，既然当代表就需要站在整体利益、多数人利益的立场上，那样才有人推举你当代表，否则就甘心被代表。
2014-11-3 10:52 查看对话 | 回复 | 赞

 **清澈水莲**：美国选举要预计花费40亿美元。这些钱来自哪里，出钱的人目的何在，花钱的人如何获得？为什么要花这么多钱，进行选举，对美国人民来说，是不是一种不正常的选举模式？楼下，这里谈美国，你脑袋锈逗啦！
2014-11-3 07:18 回复 | 赞

Figure 9.4: Screenshot of comments left on the US embassy's posts.

Source: Y Jiang.

Making Publics, Making Places

People might argue that the topic of this particular post was 'political', and that it might have attracted certain users who are in favor of China's voting system. However, even with 'non-political' topics, negative comments were apparent. For example, the following post made by the US embassy on the same day regarding 'Halloween' also received ironic and hostile comments (Figures 9.5 and 9.6).

@US Embassy: Today is Halloween. It is a day deeply loved by American children although it's not an official festival, because they can wear any costume they like, and play 'treat or trick'. The other custom of Halloween is to decorate pumpkins. Children empty a pumpkin, sculpt a face on the outside, then put a candle inside of it. The pumpkin lantern, which is also called a 'Jack lantern', is then complete. Does China have similar festivals?³

Sample of comments received:⁴

User name	Comments
Barbie696	Why does your post sound so provocative? Of course different cultures have different festivals. We don't have Halloween in China, so what?
Moxisaixiansheng	Yes we do, people who play tricks will be beaten into a 'Jack-lantern' face.
Hongheixiaoqihao	This is a festival of Western devils, we don't need it.
Ruchunqiu	Yulanpeng festival. But it is not an entertaining day, kids will not allowed to go out after dusk.
Xiaonuan-Li	We have bo lantern!
Hsia SH	We have the Zhongyuan festival. We consider this a very important day although it's not an official festival. We use this day to commemorate our loved ones who have passed away. Do you have this type of festival in the US?
Yunjingchen	Do you have the Chongyang festival to respect your elders? Or Lantern's Day to eat sticky rice balls? Or Dragon Boat Day to eat dragon boats? Or the Qingming festival to sweep the tombs of those who passed away?

3 Translation provided by the author.

4 Comments translated by the author.

Making Publics, Making Places

Biantailadexiaohuzhu	I feel like our spring festival is better than this festival.
Daduhuangweiwei	Feel like your post is so ironic. We have the warmth of strong family connection, do you American devils have it?
Yiyongjunjueqipingtianxia	Do you know you are retarded?
Huaren37276	So a lot of pumpkins will be wasted on this day?

今天是万圣节，虽然不是官方节日，却深受美国儿童的喜爱，因为这一天他们可以穿上奇装异服，玩“不给糖就捣乱”的游戏。万圣夜的另一个风俗是装饰南瓜。把南瓜掏空，在外面刻出一张脸，然后在瓜中插上一支蜡烛，一个南瓜灯也叫“杰克灯”就大功告成了。请问中国有类似的节日吗？ [网页链接](#)



2014-10-31 10:06 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏 | 转发 75 | 评论 104 | 56

同时转发到我的微博

全部 | 热门 | 认证用户 | 关注的人 共104条

 **Barbie696** : 这话问的怎么这么挑衅呢。。不同的文化节日当然不一样，我们没有万圣节怎么了呀
2014-10-31 12:30 回复 | 1

 **默西塞先生** ★ : 有啊，谁捣乱直接打成杰克脸
2014-10-31 10:11 回复 | 1

 **红黑小7号** : 这是洋鬼子的节日，中国不需要
2014-10-31 10:13 回复 | 2

 **茹春秋** ★ : 盂兰盆会。但是我们一丁点没有娱乐的意思，我们就放河灯喂恶鬼烧纸钱，而且稍微懂点儿的都不让小孩儿天黑以后出门。

Figure 9.5: Screenshot of US embassy's post and the comments it received.

Source: Y Jiang.

Making Publics, Making Places



The screenshot shows a social media interface with a post and several comments. The post is from '小暖-Li' and is dated 2014-10-31 10:28. The comments are from various users, including 'HsiaSh', '云镜尘', '变态辣的小户主', '公民王海滨', '大肚黄维维', '义勇军崛起平天下', '华人37276', and '現實_逃遛'. The comments discuss the Mid-Autumn Festival and compare it to other cultural practices. The interface includes icons for replies and likes for each comment.

小暖-Li ★: 我们中国有波咯灯 🙄
2014-10-31 10:28 回复 | 1

HsiaSh: 中元节, 虽然不是官方节日, 但深受中国人民重视, 因为这一天可以带上黄表, 香纸, 出去给祖宗焚烧祭拜。中元节的另一个风俗是普渡, 择日以酒肉、糖饼、水果等祭品举办祭祀活动, 以慰在人世间游玩的众家鬼魂。请问美国有类似的节日吗
2014-10-31 12:07 回复 | 4

云镜尘: →_→你们有重阳节孝敬老人, 元宵节吃汤圆, 粽子节吃粽子。清明节扫墓么?
2014-10-31 10:10 回复 | 2

变态辣的小户主: 感觉春节全家团聚比这个更好。。玩什么时候不是玩。。。
2014-10-31 10:30 回复 | 3

公民王海滨 🙄: // @狗官纪事: 党国只有洗脑节日!
2014-10-31 10:20 举报 | 回复 | 1

大肚黄维维 ★: 这话的讽刺意味好浓啊! 中国人过节有浓浓的亲情味, 美鬼有吗? 我们有中秋节如此诗情画意的节日, 你们有吗? 中国春节小孩得红包, 你们有吗?
2014-10-31 10:24 回复 | 2

以上为热门评论, [查看更多»](#)

义勇军崛起平天下: 博主你脑残知道吗?
2014-11-5 19:20 回复 | 1

华人37276: 那不是要浪费很多南瓜,
2014-11-5 14:47 回复 | 1

刚出生就很傻: 操你妈了个比的美国佬, 坐下来谈你妈, 你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢? 操你妈了个比的美国佬, 坐下来谈你妈, 你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢? 操你妈了个比的美国佬, 坐下来谈你妈, 你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢? 操你妈了个比的美国佬, 坐下来谈你妈, 你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢? 操你妈了个比的美国佬, 坐下来谈你妈, 你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢? 操你妈了个比的美国佬, 坐下来谈你妈, 你怎么不和占领华尔街谈呢?
2014-11-4 02:21 回复 | 1

現實_逃遛: 回覆@大肚黃維維: 其實考慮到歐洲各國文化相近, 最後一句不算什麼諷刺吧... 例如吧, 聖誕節英美有聖誕老人, 某些國家是聖尼克, 設定也不相同。對應萬聖節的簡單回答也有中元節就

Figure 9.6: Screenshot of US embassy's post and the comments it received.

Source: Y Jiang.

The US embassy is not the only Western country that has received hostile comments on its posts. Nationalistic comments left on the Canadian embassy site are also apparent. On 23 October 2014, a post made by Canadian embassy says:

Yesterday, barbarian behavior and a violent terrorist attack occurred in the land of Canada, for the second time in a week. We send our prayers and memorials to the family and friends of sergeant Nathan. Sergeant Nathan died in the attack when

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serving in the guard of honour for the Canadian national war memorial museum yesterday afternoon.⁵

However, the comments left by users are not friendly at all. Here are the translations of the first ten comments:⁶

User name	Comment
Sad grassmud horse	Didn't you ask the eastern Turkish brothers in your care to say hello to the Arabs?
Huang pu zhong sheng	Soldiers were killed, policemen were injured; it happened in a governmental organisation's venue. The attackers are now dead, but there is no evidence. How can you be so sure it is a terrorist attack? If it happened in China, would Western media consider it as a terrorist attack or a desperate action?
Warriorantigreen	You deserve it! I thought you could speak their language.
Shandiren	People with 'zhuangbility' want to show their 'niubility' but only reflect their 'shability'.
Zifeifanxiejiaozhilouxiajiaotang	You deserve it.
Artyang77	What do you think of the terrorist attacks in Xinjiang?
Sheisheibushiwo	Come on, I hope you accept more Muslims. Take all Muslims from China.
Lan Xiao Tian	Hope Canada takes more Muslims and becomes a Muslim country one day.
Roger is a big chubby guy	This incident only happened yesterday, it still needs investigation before being determined a 'terrorist attack'. The Canadian government should respect the rights of people who are involved and allow international organisations to join the investigation.

5 Translation provided by the author.

6 Comments translated by the author.

Ziwuyingxiao

We encourage the Canadian government to communicate with the minorities and stop suppressing the minorities.

昨天，在加拿大的国土上出现了野蛮和暴力恐怖袭击，这已经是本周第二次出现这样的事件了。我们向下士纳森·奇里洛的家人和朋友寄予哀思及祈祷，纳森下士于昨天在加拿大国家战争纪念馆参与礼仪仪仗队活动时遇害。



2014-10-23 14:47 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏 | 转发 75 | 评论 106 | 28

同时转发到我的微博 评论

全部 | 热门 | 认证用户 | 关注的人 共106条

 **悲伤的草泥马**：你们没让收留的东突兄弟向阿拉伯人弹问好？
2014-10-26 11:24 回复 | 8

 **皇甫钟声**：被打死的是军人，受伤的是警察，袭击发生在议会大厦这个政府部门，行凶者已被击毙，死无对证！凭什么是说是恐怖袭击？如果这事发生在中国新疆，西方媒体会怎么说？这是恐怖袭击还是绝望的呐喊？
2014-10-24 10:49 回复 | 9

 **Warriorantigreen**：活该 你不是会飙维语吗？
2014-10-26 16:16 回复 | 1

 **山底人**：装逼被雷劈！说的就是你@加拿大大使馆官方微博
2014-10-26 16:30 回复 | 1

 **自费反邪教之楼下桥塘**：活该
2014-10-26 09:48 回复 | 2

Figure 9.7: Screenshot of Canadian embassy's post and the comments it received, 10 October 2015.

Source: Y Jiang.



Figure 9.8: Screenshot of Canadian embassy's post and the comments it received, 10 October 2015.

Source: Y Jiang.

Discussion

These results and evidence demonstrate that 'conversational' communication enabled by 'generative technologies' does not necessarily equate to high engagement with online publics. Having a high number of followers and a high level of interaction with your audience does not link to positive action. Wallin's (2013) thoughts bear repeating here: PD practitioners should be aware that information is different from influence.

Based on my own research findings, it is also arguable that the number of followers do not necessarily equate a strong connection with an audience.

Conclusion

Future research can look at another channel of 'online publics' in China — Wechat — which is also used by some foreign embassies. Due to the different nature of Wechat, a couple of aspects might be worth comparing:

1. Are the 'spaces' created by those five embassies on Wechat consistent with their Weibo 'spaces'?
2. Does Wechat pose less challenges than Weibo for foreign embassies in China?

This chapter is intended to provoke thoughts about better ways to use these 'generative technologies' or other tools for public diplomacy practitioners. It is not intended as an argument against the use of local popular social media for public diplomacy purposes, but to encourage a critical look at its practice and to encourage those employing it to better analyse it.

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Links

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