

ALGORITHMIC GEOPOLITICS: AI-MEDIATED INFORMATION FLOWS AND NARRATIVE POWER IN SINO-US SOFT POWER COMPETITION

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of algorithmic systems on the competitive dynamics between the United States and China within the political sphere. This paper extends Joseph Nye's concept of soft power by demonstrating how nations can leverage AI-based platforms, content moderation tools, and data infrastructure to influence global narrative perceptions. This demonstrates that China is pursuing digital sovereignty by establishing government-monitored digital ecosystems, in contrast to the U.S., which depends on the innovation of the private sector and an open network, even as credibility has diminished, as evidenced by an analysis of narrative power and critical discourse. The article discusses the emerging "splinternet," the shortcomings in ethical regulations, and the resistance from nations and civil society organizations in the Global South. The findings indicate that narrative supremacy increasingly relies on both the story's content and the mediation of algorithms. The development of new theoretical and policy models is required to address the increasing competition and its destabilizing impacts on the global information system.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background: The New Battleground of Narrative

In the 21st century, global geopolitics has undergone re-radicalization; traditional hard politics has transformed into more sophisticated forms of conveying messages of significance and supremacy. It also entails relinquishing both hard power methods (commercial and military coercion) and soft power strategies (cultural appeal and persuasion). It may also refer to algorithmically-mediated narrative authority, wherein artificial intelligence systems govern the creation, dissemination, and propagation of strategic narratives (De Souza Gabriel Landim & Da

Silva Coutinho, 2025). The transition has been significantly facilitated by the emergence of AI-driven platforms such as TikTok, Twitter/X, Weibo, and YouTube, which serve as the future framework for international public diplomacy and ideological disputes among nations (Grandinetti, 2021). Through their algorithmic curation, these platforms not only disseminate information but also shape a reality around the subjects and individuals they highlight.

The rivalry between the US and China has now extended into the online domain, where both factions utilize AI-mediated frameworks to analyze and evaluate public perceptions of their

strategic communications and social impact on worldwide audiences. Recent research indicate that artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a pivotal determinant of power and influence, fundamentally altering the nature of global competitiveness. This technology issue is so crucial that even major nations are now concentrating on establishing AI dominance as a component of national policy and as an element of national defense strategy, alongside economic supremacy. Nonetheless, both are utilizing AI to cultivate novel mentalities and representations through a new sort of information statecraft. The United States promotes liberal connection primarily driven by the private sector, while China adheres to the concept of digital sovereignty, which entails significant state regulation.

This signifies a significant evolution in the global application of force, characterizing an algorithmic theater of war (Grandinetti, 2021). In contrast to Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which encompasses the significance of a nation's political ideologies, cultural endeavors, and legislation, algorithmic power denotes the intentional manipulation of information environments to favor specific narratives over others. This has led to the emergence of what some researchers refer to as an AI Empire, in which corporate technology magnates and military forces collaborate to create innovative systems of governance and ownership over nations through the development of new mechanisms and frameworks of control on a worldwide scale (Lewis & Moorkens, 2020). The emergence of this new ecosystem markedly transforms conventional diplomatic practices and underscores the necessity to reevaluate, reassess, and reorganize the notion of public diplomacy within the digital sphere.

1.2 Problem Statement: The Limits of Traditional Frameworks

Joseph Nye's basic theory of soft power is insufficient for comprehending the dynamics of societal effect generation in an era dominated by algorithmic information control. A traditional perspective on soft power is demonstrated by cultural allure, political principles, and foreign strategies that perceive influence as a passive process of imitation and admiration, hence exerting a form of control over individuals. Nonetheless, the significance of algorithmic mediation as a mechanism to enhance the prominence, credibility, and relevance of narratives in digital media is still undervalued. Theoretical dichotomies significantly hinder the interpretation of the ongoing Sino-US clash, as both nations have advanced AI software and deliberately manipulate information domains rather than depending on biological attraction.

An illustrative instance is the intensification of the AI arms race between the United States and China. The two nations have invested significantly in AI technology and are now competing economically and militarily to enhance their AI capabilities more aggressively. The Next Generation AI Development strategy in China indicates a governmental objective to achieve global leadership by 2030. This obviously indicates technical rivalry. The United States' response has encompassed the regulation of high-technology semiconductor exports. This conflict beyond technological complexity; it is narrative governance the ability to influence the narratives surrounding international realities and identities.

This research endeavors to address a dualistic inquiry in research design. The alteration of narrative power in international relations, facilitated by algorithmic mechanisms, redefines all influence techniques that might be

considered as soft power, extending beyond traditional soft power theorization. This evolution delineates and elucidates the constraints of its conceptualization. Research on Sino-US competition as a paradigmatic scenario demonstrates that each nation has cultivated unique patterns of algorithmic impact, reflecting their language structures, political ideologies, and foundational value systems. The study asserts that AI systems, functioning as a sort of covert diplomacy, are essential for understanding the dynamics of modern geopolitical competition by analyzing the presentation, legitimacy, and veracity of official narratives through their algorithmic structures.

1.3 Scope, Structure, and Contribution

This study primarily focuses on the Sino-US algorithmic competition as the most significant instance of narrative strength in the era of AI. This research asserts that, while other entities like the European Union, Russia, and India are acknowledged, the US-China rivalry is a primary axis around which future international information regulation will be determined. The discourse contrasts the policies of the two nations circa 2017, when China formally articulated its objectives in artificial intelligence, with subsequent developments in massive language models and content recommendation algorithms.

The article's primary theoretical contribution is in the formation of algorithmic geopolitics as a conceptual framework that integrates International Relations theory with critical media and algorithms research. This conceptual framework enhances our comprehension of how technology systems shape geopolitical values and the degree to which narrative power is wielded through digital infrastructures. The integration of these disparate domains offers significant benefit to the current information competition by providing a fresh analytical

perspective on the conventional concept of soft power.

2. Literature Review: Algorithmic Mediation of Power in Sino-US Digital Competition

2.1 *Evolving Concepts of Power in International Relations*

The concept of power in international relations has evolved significantly, moving beyond traditional hard power capabilities (military and economic coercion) to many modes of exerting influence. Joseph Nye's initial concept of soft power (Nye, 1990) was presented as a crucial instrument for understanding how nations might achieve desired outcomes by appealing to culture, political interests, and principles, alongside foreign policy, without resorting to coercion. The paradigm represented a significant advancement in the manner in which states influence one another, particularly in an interconnected global context.

The two decades of the digital era, however, have shown limitations in the soft power framework, particularly with the influence exerted by authoritarian regimes. Raza et al. (2023) introduced the idea of sharp power to elucidate how authoritarian governments exploit, penetrate, or intrude upon the information environments of democracies through manipulation and distraction. The conceptual evolution of the phenomena reveals a growing recognition that digital technologies enable the emergence of novel forms of coercive power that reside in the ambiguous space between hard and soft power (Wagner, 2020).

The understanding of power is hindered by the ability of these notions to articulate modern geopolitical competition via algorithmic mediation. Zaharna (2018) argues that Nye's soft power framework presupposes a relatively open marketplace of ideas, neglecting the influence of algorithmic filtering in the active process that shapes culture and its

attractiveness. The concept of sharp power effectively elucidates intentional disruption; nevertheless, it fails to adequately explain how AI-driven systems autonomously amplify particular narratives without state intervention (Bradshaw and Howard, 2018).

2.2 The Algorithmic Turn in Governance and Society

In international relations, the concept of power has evolved significantly, moving from the traditional hard power tools of economic and military might to the more contemporary tools of power. Joseph Nye (2004) was the first to establish the idea of soft power. He claims that it is one of the most effective ways for nations to achieve their goals without resorting to force, but rather by utilizing their foreign policy, political interests, culture, and values. A significant stride toward interstate relations, particularly in an integrated international setting, was the paradigm (Walker & Ludwig, 2017).

The digital era and the previous two, however, show that the soft power model is not without its problems, especially when it comes to how authoritarian governments treat their citizens. Walk and Ludwig (2017) developed the idea of "sharp power" to describe how a tyrannical leader can exploit or undermine a democracy's informational space(s) by subtly diverting or manipulating it or her. The assertion that digital technologies will make it easier to recognize new issues related to coercive power which fall somewhere in the gray area between hard and soft power can serve as the foundation for the presentation of the relevant facts (Bjola & Pamment, 2019).

This prevents the appearance of power since these manifestations have the ability to use algorithmic intermediations to formulate the expression of neo-geopolitical competitiveness (Wagner, 2020). Without considering whether cultural processes and requests are influenced by algorithms, the soft power paradigm

presumes that there is a somewhat free market of ideas (Cammack, 2008). Sharp explains a particular idea like focused interference, but it doesn't go far enough in discussing how certain discourses can be independently amplified by AI-managed systems free from political meddling (Montes & Goertzel, 2019).

2.3 The Digital Dimension of Sino-US Rivalry

Research analysis of the online aspects of Sino-US competitiveness has garnered increasing interest, particularly via the perspectives of technological disengagement, diverse internet regulatory frameworks, and misinformation campaigns. Research indicates that the two nations are distinctly adept at employing digital technology for marketing their respective enterprises, albeit in varying forms (Egal, 2020). The Chinese leadership strategy emphasizes the role of national elites in shaping vision and fostering favorable worldwide perceptions, which are assessed through forums that evaluate global attitudes (Lindsay *et al.*, 2015). It posits that China endorses the notion of cyber sovereignty, asserting that each nation should maintain complete control over its domestic internet operations (Creemers, 2020).

Allison (2022) asserts that the United States has historically promoted a multi-stakeholder model for internet governance that supports the unrestricted dissemination of information while limiting governmental interference. Nevertheless, foreign intervention initiatives and organizations that challenge the authority of platforms in the United States have intensified scrutiny of this tactic. The authors explain the manner in which American liberal values grew ubiquitous within U.S. technology firms, rendering them susceptible to foreign operational influence (Triolo & Allison, 2020). The most recent study concentrated on the technical instruments for quantifying cyber capabilities or numerical assessments of disinformation dissemination. Notwithstanding the utility of current studies,

there is a propensity to neglect the qualitative dimensions of storytelling and enhancement through AI-related technologies in all of them. This underscores a significant deficiency in our comprehension of how computation is evolving into a geopolitical domain (Aurangzeb, 2025).

2.4 Synthesizing the Gap: Toward a New Framework

The theoretical disparity between the notion of power in foreign relations and the developing concepts of algorithmic mediation in media and technology interpretation is significant upon literature review. Although international relations researchers have developed complex models to explain the power rivalries inherent in state-centric domains, they often regard digital platforms as neutral spaces rather than as significant factors shaping geopolitical discourse (Diaz Ruiz, 2023). Conversely, technological research is often examined in the context of the isolation of algorithmic systems, neglecting their function as tools of political authority (Soriano, 2025). The primary problem relates to the qualitative dimension of information stream constructs in AI-generated data. Quantitative research has successfully quantified the characteristics of disinformation dissemination; however, it has not examined the impact of algorithms on the emergence of distinct discursive features in geopolitical discourse, such as issue framing, identity formation, and emotional resonance (Gray, 2021). This is especially evident since the interaction that algorithms are programmed to prioritize often eclipses veracity, even in contexts such as diplomatic discourse and the articulation of soft power. The deficiencies in this research are addressed by the introduction of a set of algorithmic geopolitics that integrate notions from international relations theory, media studies, and critical algorithm studies. This framework perceives algorithms as active intermediaries rather than mere conduits of geopolitical

narratives, examines the evolution of soft power through artificial intelligence systems, and assesses how states can develop targeted AI programs utilizing specific algorithms to reinforce their core political values and policies (Deibert, 2019). The synthesizing strategy aims to elucidate how alterations in algorithmic mediation are transforming Sino-US competitiveness and the overarching geopolitical landscape in the digital age (Lindsay *et al.*, 2015).

3. Methodology

The researcher at hand conducts an investigation and evaluation, utilizing a qualitative, interpretivist approach, of the emergence and competition for supremacy of narratives inside the information ecosystem mediated by AI. The study will not concentrate on extensive research typically associated with the integration of algorithmic systems into geopolitical discourse; rather, it adopted a more focused approach, without overly constraining the questions posed, limiting quantitative research, the prevalence of misinformation, but not its significance. The study employs two independent methodologies: Narrative Policy Analysis (NPA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Nonetheless, they exhibit considerable similarity. Narrative Policy Analysis (NPA) examines fundamental narratives and their rhetorical evolution across various media, while Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates linguistic practices, ideological presuppositions, and the political implications of governmental discourse (Fischer, 2003; Fairclough, 2013). The three data categories are as follows: (1) elite discourse, which includes policy white papers, diplomatic speeches, and strategic documents from the Chinese and U.S. governments; (2) state-sponsored media discourses, represented by CGTN and Voice of America, focusing on prominent geopolitical issues; and (3) algorithm-driven platform discourse, encompassing viral stories, hashtag movements,

and posts from Weibo, TikTok, and Twitter/X that garner significant attention. This is a three-step methodology applicable for analyzing the creation, maintenance, and utilization of various narratives across diverse methodologies.

4. Analysis: The Arena of Algorithmic Geopolitics

A. Theoretical Framework: From Soft Power to Algorithmic Narrative Power

4.1. Defining Algorithmic Geopolitics

Emerging algorithmic geopolitics an innovative approach for state-to-state international relations. It integrates a geopolitical framework, AI-enhanced infrastructure, and a narrative conflict. The theory exceeds traditional understandings of power by recognizing that AI systems are now the primary means through which a state's political power is mediated (Acharya, 2024). In ancient geopolitics, the primary focus was on the control and domination of land and territory. Algorithmic geopolitics pertains to the cognitive domain, specifically the contest to shape perceptions, conceptions, and identities influenced by narratives disseminated through digital media (Bubashait, 2025). This shift serves as the reference point for Nye's (2021) definition of the evolving role of power in the digital age. Modern society has been influenced by advanced technology, which has generated new architectural capabilities that operate under the pretense of indifferent technological processes. Algorithms function as tools of informational statecraft, fulfilling essential diplomatic roles typically associated with state actors (Gatica, 2025). They determine the prioritization of narratives, the framing of issues, and the allocation of representation. The laborious tasks previously assigned to human diplomats and cultural attaches are now performed by automated systems (Ivasechko & Kalyta, 2023). This represents a significant transformation in

diplomatic practices. The design of recommender, censoring, and statistics-gathering algorithms is influenced by specific ideologies and political perspectives that favor certain types of content while suppressing others (Wazir, 2023). Pacheco *et al.* (2025) characterizes these forms of control as digital leviathans, as they rely on technological infrastructure rather than coercive force.

4.2. The Components of Algorithmic Narrative Power

The algorithms of power in narrative consist of three components, which collectively alter the nature of displayed authority in nations. The amplification and gagging effects influence the clarity of information visualization. Algorithms determine the visibility of information, thereby limiting the spread of alternative narratives (Benkler *et al.*, 2018). This curation relies on recommendation algorithms, which may compromise accuracy and diversity of opinion. Secondly, credibility engineering operates by persuading additional sources through the application of algorithmic signals. Individuals rarely question the credibility regimes established by the platform's verification processes, search ranking systems, and content promotion systems (Bucher, 2018). This has gained credibility and is especially useful when government officials seek to enhance the realism of their arguments by employing technological methods that seem unbiased. Third, emotive targeting enables the modification of narratives to enhance their appeal to specific demographic groups based on factors such as age, gender, and other relevant considerations. The algorithms employed in the machine learning process facilitate the identification of user elements, including cultural preferences and emotional vulnerabilities. This enables states to formulate more compelling arguments that are tailored to each individual (Zuboff, 2019). This represents a significant advancement over the outdated

public diplomacy system that relied on mass communication rather than manipulation. Suzor (2019) characterizes this phenomenon as computational propaganda, indicating the use of algorithms, automation, and big data to shape individual thought processes. This is achievable due to the combination of three factors that establish a system of influence, which is more factual and extensive than any other system.

4.3. A New Model of Power: Beyond Attraction

The algorithmic power functions in three distinct manners that exceed the traditional notion of soft power. Curated attraction refers to the intentional enhancement of culturally appealing content, wherein platforms systematically promote narratives that align with governmental agendas while possessing the ability to exclude others (Yeung, 2017). This differs from organic soft power as it emphasizes the visibility of culture rather than depending on its intrinsic attractiveness. Algorithmic coercion manifests when less favorable voices are manipulated, evident through practices such as shadow-banning, de-platforming, and diminished visibility (Suzor, 2019). Creemers, R. (2020) characterizes these practices as the digital gerrymandering phenomenon, indicating the manipulation of information environments to produce specific political outcomes.

Ultimately, structuring manipulation achieves this by contextualizing information, as algorithms dictate not only the considerations presented but also their relationships to other concepts (King *et al.*, 2017). The tactical positioning of search results involves the organization of information via the collection of suggestions and the mapping of narratives to specific emotional valences. The three mechanisms are coordinated to create a power apparatus that integrates the application of attraction and force similarly. This concept may

also be termed algorithmic hegemony, indicating the formation of specific worldviews through the operations of technical systems that seem neutral and apolitical (Gatica, 2025). This hegemony is particularly effective as it functions through mechanisms that individuals have chosen to employ and frequently accept without question. This makes the exercise of power broader and less apparent than traditional diplomatic methods.

B. The Narrative Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

4.4. China's Model: Strategic Synchronization and Control

China possesses a sophisticated algorithmic narrative power mechanism that effectively aligns state aspirations with the functioning of digital spaces. This paradigm operates through two approaches: sustaining a well-managed home ecosystem and strategically considering its external presentation (McKelvey & Dubois, 2020).

The domestic information landscape is characterized as a highly regulated environment where platforms like Weibo and WeChat disseminate uniform national narratives, effectively excluding alternative perspectives (Tang, 2016). The Great Firewall represents the most effective national filtration system worldwide. It excludes more than half of the Chinese population from the global internet by obstructing foreign websites, censoring specific keywords, and complicating the use of circumvention tools. The visual serves as more than a simple access restriction; it facilitates the construction of a distinct internet reality in which Chinese platforms are essential for living in China (Li, 2025). Governments restrict materials deemed inappropriate on these platforms; however, such content is often persuasive, engaging, and substantial. They are leveraging the network effects of the majority of Chinese-speaking individuals globally to ensure that there is no intention to seek content

beyond the Chinese digital confines (Zhang, 2020).

The construction of these platforms enables the simultaneous management of multiple levels, providing censors with a significant advantage. Censorship on these platforms occurs more rapidly and discreetly than ever before. Surveillance is challenging to evade, while party propaganda can be disseminated easily through both automated systems and organized human networks, such as the "little pinks" or nationalist influencers (Sundquist, 2018). This encompasses meta-censorship, extending beyond mere information blocking by criminalizing VPN usage, restricting discussions on avoidance methods, and ensuring that all domestic search engines do not list prohibited websites. This has led to a growing difficulty among individuals in conceptualizing alternative implicit methods for navigating the constraints of filtered information. The study indicates that among Chinese users with the capability to bypass restrictions, only a small number engage with foreign internet content without specific motivation (Akduman, 2023).

The Digital Silk Road and the Emergence of External Narrative Projection: China is utilizing the TikTok platform and initiatives like the Digital Silk Road to promote its narrative of a community of shared future while addressing criticisms of its policies. TikTok's global expansion represents a significant achievement in China's soft power strategy. This is the inaugural social networking site outside the United States to compete with corporations in Silicon Valley (Brown, 2024). The political utilization of entertainment can be observed in its capacity to shape individuals' cultural perceptions and spending behaviors, achieved subtly through the platform's intelligent recommendation system (Wowor *et al.*, 2024). China can convey its narrative to the global audience through three mechanisms:

censorship, amplification, and the presentation of fabricated behavior. The Chinese respond to accusations through astroturfing, creating the illusion of genuine support, and employing algorithmic amplification of particular narratives when confronted by other nations regarding matters such as Xinjiang or Hong Kong. The national intelligence legislation enacted in China in 2017 permits the government to mandate companies like Byte Dance to provide Chinese officials with access to user data (Li, 2025). This raises significant concerns regarding data acquisition processes and the potential for foreign surveillance. The Chinese philosophy of cyber sovereignty posits that nations should possess maximal authority over the regulation of the internet within their borders. This is the framework within which external narrative projection operates. China promotes an alternative method of internet governance globally, contrasting with the multi-stakeholder approach advocated by the United States.

4.5. The U.S. Model: Ecosystem Leverage and Ideological Embeddedness

In the United States, the approach to algorithms of narrative power differs significantly. The approach is informed by the private sector and emphasizes that liberal principles should be integrated into digital designs. This paradigm underscores the reality that US tech giants surpass all others globally in promoting US ideals without direct government involvement or reliance on platform services (Arsène, 2012).

Domestic Ecosystem is a Framework for Decentralized Innovation and Critique. The US digital ecosystem represents a political paradigm characterized by decentralized control of the digital industry by the private sector. Although the platforms in Silicon Valley lack formal government control, they function as unofficial representatives of liberal ideologies (Bongini *et al.*, 2025). This practice illustrates

America's longstanding belief in free market principles and minimal government intervention in the online marketplace. This decentralization contributes to decreased security, as demonstrated by the proliferation of false information, election interference, and the political-partisan division of US platforms (Ferlito & Faraci, 2024). The characteristics of American platforms that foster bias in architecture favoring engaging yet superficial experiences over authenticity render this system susceptible to exploitation by both domestic and foreign actors.

The US model is ineffective in coordinating ongoing narratives due to its reliance on principles of free speech and business freedom, in contrast to China's centralized approach. This presents a paradox: the platforms being developed in America are designed to facilitate and disseminate liberal concepts, including free speech and freedom of choice. However, this vulnerability makes them susceptible to manipulation and dispute. The US government is increasingly aware of the pressure and demands to regulate the digital space, despite its historical tendency towards a hands-off approach (Yan et al., 2023).

The narrative influence of the United States is predominantly manifested through the global supremacy of its technology platforms and the ideological principles integrated into their architectural design. The aspects discussed can be debated openly, reflecting our personalities and the diversity of content in American media, which inherently convey narratives of freedom, human rights, and transparency. These characteristics contribute to heightened division and the proliferation of extreme content, resulting in significant inconsistency in the narrative projection of the United States (Ferlito & Faraci, 2024).

The United States utilizes market control, architectural discrimination, and distinct government-business relations to achieve individual benefits. US IT corporations predominantly control the global digital infrastructure, including app stores and cloud-based solutions. This grants them significant influence over which applications and content achieve global popularity. This market and its dominance in the digital realm are often termed digital colonialism by certain experts, suggesting that American technological norms and ideals are established in various areas of the digital ecosystem (Bongini et al., 2025).

The characteristic of the US approach is essential in public-private partnerships. Research on new technology governance models indicates that technology firms are more effective than government entities in identifying issues related to their own services and products. The individuals possess familiarity with their technology and their responses to it. They are generally more adaptive than state organizations. The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) exemplifies the formalization of such relationships (Ferlito & Faraci, 2024). Platforms in this category engage in collaboration with governmental entities to address security threats. Such transactions raise significant concerns regarding accountability and transparency, as they often occur in secrecy and lack oversight, particularly in relation to national security and the agreements established between the government and technology companies.

4.5.1. Analysis of Competitive Weaknesses and Strengths.

The coordinated approach of the US model struggles to compete with China. The way in which Americans narrate stories seems to be

misunified and even incoherent. The misalignment among government policies, corporate objectives, and civil society concepts accounts for the situation at hand. The US-style digital paradigm has diminished in appeal globally, as individuals increasingly distrust US technological dominance and recognize the negative impacts of American technologies on society (Vezzoso & Nicholls, 2019).

Nonetheless, the US approach exhibits both adaptability and cultural appeal. The national ecosystem in the USA is more decentralized than that of China, facilitating the dissemination of ideas and enabling individuals to address new challenges. Furthermore, despite growing distrust, American platforms and the values they promote continue to enjoy significant popularity globally, especially among individuals living under authoritarian regimes (Xia et al., 2022).

The conflict between the two paradigms creates a central tension regarding the concepts of internet governance. Research on data sovereignty indicates that the United States, in contrast to the European Union, does not possess a comprehensive privacy regulation, instead depending on sector-specific regulations and self-regulation by businesses (Mierzejewski & Matera, 2025). This differs significantly from China's implementation of a fully state-controlled internet. The future of the internet is conceptualized as one that facilitates free information flows with limited government intervention, contrasted with a perspective that emphasizes the fundamental significance of state ownership and digital pluralism.

The results of this competition will significantly influence the future of international internet regulation and the balance between free and authoritarian societies online. The modification of narrative means influences the information accessible to individuals and

shapes their perceptions of an increasingly digital world.

4.6. Case Study: Narrative Battle over COVID-19 Origins

The emergence of COVID-19 as a traumatic event is a prime illustration of algorithmic narrative warfare. In order to promote divergent theories about the pandemic's genesis, the US and China halted their digital ecosystems. Even the scientific discourse did not address this. It was more about the story's philosophy than its facts, and in the end, it came down to who had the most power to rule the globe (Mierzejewski & Matera, 2025).

The stories were told in China with an emphasis on the liberation of the Chinese people and a portrayal of the nation as a responsible member of the international community that is cooperating to find a common solution to a problem. The Chinese government-controlled media were unable to give advice to foreign governments (Huang & Best, 2024). They believed that COVID-19 was a worldwide problem that other countries needed to deal with. There were many Weibo and WeChat channels that talked about this issue. Posts that focused on China's early response to the pandemic, international aid, and cooperation with other countries were given priority and ranked higher by the algorithm. By (1) eliminating and restricting any mention of the lab outage, (2) encouraging new research into the zoonotic origin, and (3) choosing when to promote the narrative by prominent international news outlets, the Chinese sought to successfully hide alternative histories. The narrative infrastructure had established a strong conceptual foundation, and expressing a preference for an alternative target China as a supplier of medical supplies and vaccines to the poorer states improved the perception of a shared future to atone for the

mistakes made at the start of the pandemic response (Liu et al., 2025).

The American narrative code is based on accountability and integrity. Rather of supporting a national political stance, the American narrative policy concentrated on demands for accountability and openness, making the investigation of causes a primary health care issue. Because Silicon Valley platforms prioritized democratic norms like transparency and accountability to a government, they helped spread this narrative (Yan et al., 2023). The American story that leaked out took many forms, such as (1) persuading people that a zoonotic cause of the disease was not possible from a scientific standpoint, (2) selectively leaking intelligence that the disease was associated with Chinese people (WHO), and (3) accusing the WHO of being too involved in Chinese politics. The American-based version, however, was compiled from a variety of other sources, such as government declarations, congressional hearings, investigative journalism, and scholarly discussions. All of these became popular because the platform's algorithms favored creating engaging content over accurate material (Kitsing & Vallistu, 2020).

These two nations shared their distinct stories on their websites by using algorithms. By censoring terms, removing content, and decreasing the popularity of content, the Great Firewall of China makes it more difficult for other beginnings to get past it. Bad-pieces were simultaneously propelled to the forefront of intense scientific discussions that disseminated lab-leaked content and posted on U.S. platforms as a result of engagement-based algorithms (Molter & DiResta, 2020). The US was decentralized while China was centralized as a result of the interests. Because they both demonstrated how they controlled the internet, this caused some sort of anomaly in the two

nations.

Both sides wanted to move the WHO, making it one of the main military battlegrounds in this conflict. While China used its institutional power to stall inquiries and hide the truth, the United States believed the organization was overly pro-Chinese. Since international organizations are generally seen as unbiased arbiters of justice, the ensuing crisis of institutional faith showed how harmful algorithmic narratives were to them (Mierzejewski & Matera, 2025).

C. Global Implications and Future Trajectories 4.7. *The Battle for the Global South*

Since the Global South is currently the main theater of battle, the dispute between China and the US over algorithmic narratives has gotten more intense. It is a global struggle that goes beyond standard diplomacy and includes tasks like reaching out to people, setting up internet infrastructure in other countries, and encouraging people in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia to tell stories (Guo, 2022).

China doesn't need to work on it; it is building relationships throughout the Global South by pursuing its Politics of the Digital Silk Road. In the West, the digital grid offers computer networks, cybernetics, and cybersight infrastructure and expertise. It is the most effective way for governments to advance technologically without losing their political influence. Additionally, it enables China to use its reliance on technology to tell a story (Mayer & Nock, 2025). Tik Tok apps have helped China's economy thrive in the Global South. Their algorithm favors content that happily reports the development's achievement while downplaying the scandal of China's totalitarian policies (Heeks et al., 2024).

Although the U.S. solution places a greater emphasis on liberal ideas and open governance, some people think it is hypocritical because it is based on the audience's self-observatory and formulaic preferences. It has faced major

challenges in areas where the Chinese goal of non-intervention and collaboration among Southern nations is pierced by centuries of disgust against Western aim. However, the biggest importers of U.S. stories are the journalism, civil society, and pro-democracy groups who care about open governments and digital rights (Devin, 2019). These strategies are very dependent on the individual and the circumstance. The idea of digital sovereignty and internet management is likely to be acceptable in any other totalitarian nation, like China. On the other hand, people who live in nations that support democracy would likewise enjoy American-style digital liberalism. Children and young people who embrace the Western social network are more likely to hold liberal democratic views. This is because, in contrast to the older generation, the younger generation has different political and technological inclinations (Baldino & Balnaves, 2025).

4.8. *The Fracturing of the Internet: Digital Sovereignty vs. Liberal Connectivity*

The algorithmic rivalry between the US and China is causing the splinternet phenomena to happen more quickly. The internet is currently separated into distinct technological sectors, each with its own set of regulations, data formats, and thought processes (Colmenarez, 2025). Compared to the initial idea of an international internet, this disaggregation is enormous. It makes working, conducting business, and communicating with people throughout the world more difficult. China is in favor of a concept of digital sovereignty that would allow the government to regulate data flows and digital infrastructure inside its borders. This strategy has been used not only by authoritarian countries but also by certain democracies that are concerned about America's technological superiority and data colonization (Zhu, Long, & Crystal, 2019). Another method of regulation that is more

focused on data sovereignty than China is the GDPR in the EU, which also validates democratic values. It is a third regulatory pole in this new, fractured society because of this. The US is still in favor of an approach to internet governance that incorporates many stakeholders, places a strong emphasis on information freedom, reduces governmental control over the internet, and uses the private sector to take the lead (Runde & Ramanujam, 2021). However, this method of operation has been undermined by allegations on the ways in which the US spies on people, algorithms that manipulate information, and the dissemination of false information via social media. Other models that advocate for the government to have more jurisdiction over digital spaces have gained strength as a result of the United States model's declining legitimacy (Baldino & Balnaves, 2025).

The rivalry of global narratives is greatly impacted by the increasing fragmentation of the internet. Sharing tales with individuals across borders becomes more difficult as digital environments become more divided and echo chambers become more potent. In the end, this kind of fragmentation could lead to whole different information economies with different facts. This would make international collaboration challenging and lead to miscommunications between nations.

4.9. *Ethical Abyss and Governance Challenges*

The algorithmic geopolitics between the United States and China arises from the differences in the rules guiding the ethical use of AI in information operations and statecraft. Without regulation, there is a great deal of escalation, inaccuracy, and unintended repercussions that could make the global system less stable (Soriano, 2025).

The main problem is that businesspeople and the government are not evenly impacted by each

other. Governments construct algorithms on a geopolitical premise, but in practice, financial firms create and run these systems without any covert control or exclusions. Even while states are free to reject any abuse or misuse of algorithmic amplification, this system allows them to employ it for their own good purposes (Allison, 2020). The proposed Algorithmic Accountability Act is one remedy for this flaw, however it only works in a business setting and not in a governmental one. When compared to other creations, like governance systems and ethical frameworks, the rate at which new technologies are being developed has accelerated significantly. Global organizations like the United Nations lack the political will, the power to impose restrictions, or the advancement of technology to create good governance guidelines for technical practices in geopolitical competition. States have questionable incentives to cross moral lines in order to gain narrative advantages because of this lack of control (Bradford, 2023).

The commercialization of surveillance technology is also making regulation more challenging. Digital infrastructure that may be used for spying is sold in China by firms like Huawei and ZTE suppliers. US companies like Palantir commercially create analytical tools that can be used for both government and industry purposes. It has been demonstrated that managing algorithmic technology is quite difficult because it can have both positive and negative applications. For example, laws that safeguard civil liberties may harm American companies in international marketplaces (Bryson & Malikova, 2021).

4.10. *The Rise of Resistance and Alternative Narratives*

Not only is it a two-sided conflict between the Chinese and the United States, but it is also gradually becoming a three-poled world as lesser countries develop their own strategies to

oppose, seize, and create counterarguments to the narratives of superpowers. This resistance can take many different forms, such as digital protectionism or creative ways that people from the East use international platforms (Jiang, 2024).

By taking advantage of both the Chinese and American digital worlds without becoming unduly reliant on either, the countries of the Global South are trying to be digital slumbers. For instance, the recent prohibition on Chinese applications and India's unwillingness to give the US its data are both excellent examples. To prevent Chinese and American technical security from undermining their digital morals, a number of other nations, including as Brazil and Indonesia, have passed laws governing data localization (Fischer, 2022).

Narrative modes have been popular in local forums because they allow stories to be shared without being influenced by powerful people. The VKontakte app already has millions of users in Russia because it takes into account regional languages, customs, and political influence factors that international websites typically ignore. Like Gojek in Indonesia or other nations, Koo uses comparable strategies to reach the millions of consumers in India. Stories that run counter to Chinese authoritarianism and American liberalism are featured on these regional venues. Rather, they spread regionally specific views on global issues (Khasanova & Tai, 2024).

Through the use of international arenas, civil society and citizen organizations have developed unique strategies to challenge American and Chinese supremacy. Because the demonstrators in Hong Kong used Instagram and Telegram to arrange their acts, Chinese monitoring was unable to stop them. Even though Tik Tok is a Chinese-owned corporation, the Belarus

protestors utilized it to document government violence (Merlec & In, 2024). Despite the simplicity with which algorithm systems are built to permit this, these campaigns of resistance show that they can be used against the state (Yun, 2024).

One of the main problems with state-owned narrative ecosystems over time is the growing popularity of decentralized technology like blockchain and encrypted communications. These technologies allow information to pass over informational barriers that could harm Chinese censorship infrastructure as well as American technical dominance. But they also make it easier for crimes, radicalization, and false information to occur, and it's safe to expect that even the global information landscape will eventually get more complicated (Pohle, Nanni, & Santaniello, 2025).

Though less powerful regions, non-state players, and transnational civil society organizations are anticipated to figure more, this will probably highlight the ongoing battle between the U.S. and Chinese models of algorithmic geopolitics (Su & Tang, 2023). Instead of operating within two containers, this ecological scenario will create story models that take into account the field's cultural, political, and technological background. A significant obstacle to the universal ruling will be the development of basic rules and principles that forbid the most heinous types of algorithm manipulation without limiting the expression of cultural variety and a democratic experiment (Razaq, 2024).

5. Conclusion

5.1. Consolidated Findings

The current study has demonstrated that AI-mediated platforms have emerged as the new arena for geopolitical competition, necessitating the development of a new analytical framework known as "Algorithmic Geopolitics." Based on their respective political

systems and ideologies, it may be said that China and the United States employ quite distinct modes of narrative power with structural mediation. China's policy is a combination of controlling information inside the nation and using a network of interconnected state-controlled samples to spread sophisticated narratives outside of it. Despite its decentralized structure, which makes things more difficult, the United States instead depends on private sector innovation and the architectural fusion of liberal ideas. The genesis of COVID-19 case study illustrates how these two opposing approaches are used in real-world situations. In order to promote their own narratives and disparage others, each side has its own algorithmic ecology.

5.2. Theoretical Contribution

By combining critical media and algorithm studies with International Relations theory, this article makes a significant theoretical contribution. It goes beyond traditional ideas of soft power to investigate how algorithmic mediation affects narrative power in international relations. By recognizing that power operates not only via the content of stories but also through the technological frameworks that control their exposure, credibility, and influence, the algorithmic geopolitics notion provides a more nuanced understanding of contemporary statecraft. This approach closes a significant gap in media studies and international relations, which have traditionally examined technical systems and geopolitical competition as distinct fields of study rather than as intricately linked ones.

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