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Jul 1, 2025 · 21 tweets · [P_Kallioniemi/status/1939996956652179589](#)

In today's Wumao Soup, I'll introduce how and where the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) online propaganda and influence operations work. Due to China's massive population and advances in AI, CCP-aligned online content has become increasingly visible.

1/20



Like Russia's troll farms, China has its own troll army: the "50 Cent Party" or "Wumao" refers to state-linked online commentators who are reportedly paid ¥0.50 per post to steer discussions away from criticism and amplify CCP narratives on social media.

2/20



Back in 2017, a research paper estimated that the Wumao produced almost 500 million fabricated comments annually to distract readers and shift topics. In that sense, Wumao operates very similarly to the Russian “Firehose of Falsehood” model:

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In today's [#vatniksoup](#), I'll be talking about the Russian style of online propaganda and disinformation, "Firehose of Falsehood". It's a commonly used Kremlin strategy for Russian information operations, which often prioritizes quantity over quality.

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The Firehose of Falsehood: the Russian style of propaganda for an age of information abundance.

- High volume and multi-channel approach
- Shameless in its willingness to broadcast lies
- No commitment to, or requirement for consistency
- Rapid, continuous and repetitive messaging
- Point is not to persuade but to confuse and overwhelm
- Assumes a low trust environment *and lowers it further*
- Number of arguments matters more than their quality
- Drown out competing messages through sheer volume

9:52 AM · May 4, 2023 

 2.7K  Reply  Copy link

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Today, online propaganda is deeply embedded in Chinese society. The Ministry of Culture holds regular training sessions, and participants must pass an exam before becoming certified “Internet commentators.” Their mission: to provide “public opinion guidance.”

4/20

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Far Eastern Economic Review website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the site's logo and several menu items: Politics, International Relations, Economics, Book Reviews, Author's Corner, and Interviews. Below the navigation bar, there is a section for Magazine Content, which includes a list of categories: FROM THE EDITOR, ESSAYS, LETTERS, REVIEWS, JAUNT THROUGH ASIA, INTERVIEWS, BAROMETER, and SPECIAL PACKAGES. To the right of the Magazine Content section, there is a subscription link: Subscription | Digital Edition | Renewal. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: HOME » ESSAYS » CHINA'S GUERRILLA WAR FOR THE WEB. Below the breadcrumb trail, the date July 2008 is displayed. The article title, China's Guerrilla War for the Web, is prominently displayed, followed by the author's name, by David Bandurski. The article text begins with: "They have been called the 'Fifty Cent Party,' the 'red vests' and the 'red vanguard.'" But China's growing armies of Web commentators—instigated, trained and financed by party organizations—have just one mission: to safeguard the interests of the Communist Party by infiltrating and policing a rapidly growing Chinese Internet. They set out to neutralize undesirable public opinion by pushing pro-Party views through chat rooms and Web forums, reporting dangerous content to authorities. Below the article text, there is a paragraph: "By some estimates, these commentary teams now comprise as many as 280,000 members nationwide, and they show just how serious China's leaders are about the political challenges posed by the Web. More importantly, they offer tangible clues about China's next generation of information controls—what President Hu Jintao last month called 'a new pattern of public-opinion guidance.'" At the bottom of the page, there is a subscriber login section with fields for User name and Password, a Log in button, and links for Forgot your password and Register. The footer of the page contains the text ABOUT FEER.COM.

Like Russia, the CCP also conducts aggressive influence operations outside China. A leaked propaganda directive outlined their key objectives:

- 1) Criticize the US
- 2) Downplay Taiwan's existence
- 3) Frame communism as a “better democracy” — without directly attacking democracy

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LEAKED PROPAGANDA DIRECTIVES AND BANNED "FUTURE"

Posted by Xiao Qiang | Jun 24, 2011

The **following leaked notice** is an internal directive sent to **internet commentators** over the past week, translated by CDT:

In order to circumscribe the influence of Taiwanese democracy, in order to progress further in the work of guiding public opinion, and in accordance with the requirements established by higher authorities to "be strategic, be skilled," we hope that internet commentators conscientiously study the mindset of netizens, grasp international developments, and better perform the work of being an internet commentator. For this purpose, this notice is promulgated as set forth below:

- (1) To the extent possible make America the target of criticism. Play down the existence of Taiwan.
- (2) Do not directly confront [the idea of] democracy; rather, frame the argument in terms of "what kind of system can truly implement democracy."
- (3) To the extent possible, choose various examples in Western countries of violence and unreasonable circumstances to explain how democracy is not well-suited to capitalism.
- (4) Use America's and other countries' interference in international affairs to explain how Western democracy is actually an invasion of other countries and [how the West] is forcibly pushing [on other countries] Western values.
- (5) Use the bloody and tear-stained history of a [once] weak people [i.e., China] to stir up pro-Party and patriotic emotions.
- (6) Increase the exposure that positive developments inside China receive; further accommodate the work of maintaining [social] stability.

- 4) Cherry-pick violent events and social unrest to claim capitalism and democracy are incompatible
- 5) Portray US foreign policy as "forcing Western values" and equate it with invasion
- 6) Promote positive developments in China



Russian troll farms share many of the same goals, but studies show they rarely coordinate with their Chinese counterparts. China mainly targets the US, while Russia focuses on Ukraine and the EU. For years, Russia's influence operations were also far more advanced.

ARTICLE

Comrades in Tweets? The Contours and Limits of China–Russia Cooperation on Digital Propaganda

Chinese and Russian online propagandists share broadly similar goals and tactics, but they still tend to work separately. Any efforts at greater coordination would have to surmount considerable barriers.

 English ▾



By Alexander Gabuev and Leonid Kovachich

Published on June 3, 2021

What **China**
brought to
Arab countries



high-speed trains,
reservoirs and dams

What **the US**
brought to
Arab countries

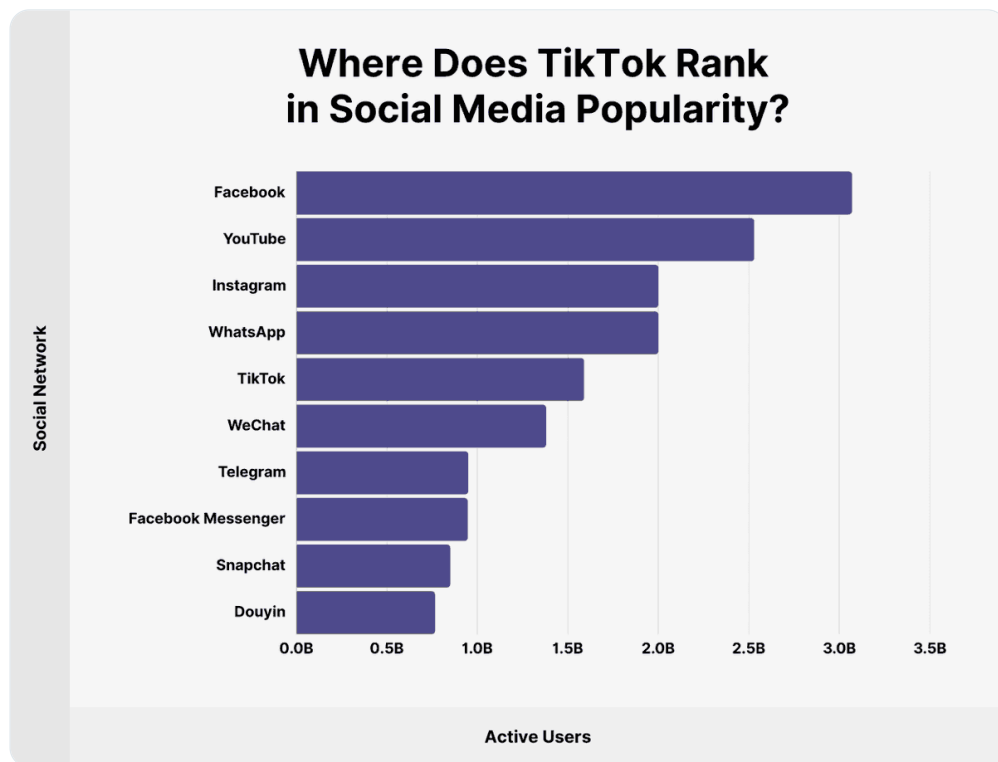


color revolutions,
chaos and wars



The CCP’s main propaganda weapon in the West is TikTok. It’s hugely popular with ~170 million users in the US, and over 130 million in Europe. In Finland, 50% of 13-18-year-olds get their news from TikTok, highlighting its massive influence among younger audiences.

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Media

Survey: Most young people in Finland follow news on TikTok

TikTok is the primary news source for 40 percent of Finnish teenagers, according to a survey conducted by the Finnish Media Federation (Finnmedia).



TikTok has become an increasingly popular source of news for Finnish teenagers. Image: Henrietta Hassinen / Yle

YLE NEWS

27.11.2021, 11:15

A 2024 study by Finkelstein et al. investigated whether TikTok downplays CCP-critical content and amplifies pro-CCP messaging. They found that TikTok showed much less anti-CCP content than other platforms.

Information manipulation on TikTok and its relation to American users' beliefs about China

Danit Finkelstein¹ Sonia Yanovsky¹ Jacob Zucker² Anisha Jagdeep² Collin Vasko²
Ankita Jagdeep² Lee Jussim^{1*} Joel Finkelstein²

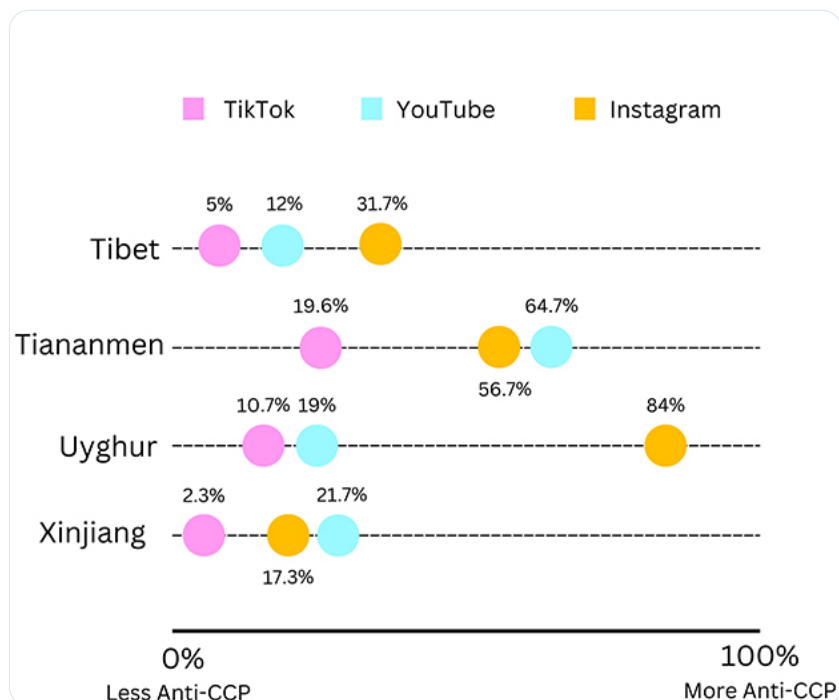
¹ Department of Psychology, Rutgers University–New Brunswick, Piscataway, NJ, United States

² Network Contagion Research Institute, Princeton, NJ, United States

Three studies explored how TikTok, a China-owned social media platform, may be manipulated to conceal content critical of China while amplifying narratives that align with Chinese Communist Party objectives. Study I employed a user journey methodology, wherein newly created accounts on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube were used to assess the nature and prevalence of content related to sensitive Chinese Communist Party (CCP) issues, specifically Tibet, Tiananmen Square, Uyghur rights, and Xinjiang. The results revealed that content critical of China was made far less available than it was on Instagram and YouTube. Study II, an extension of Study I, investigated whether the prevalence of content that is pro- and anti-CCP on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube aligned with user engagement metrics (likes and comments), which social media platforms typically use to amplify content. The results revealed a disproportionately high ratio of pro-CCP to anti-CCP content on TikTok, despite users engaging significantly more with anti-CCP content, suggesting propagandistic manipulation. Study III involved a survey administered to 1,214 Americans that assessed their time spent on social media platforms and their perceptions of China. Results indicated that TikTok users, particularly heavy users, exhibited significantly more positive attitudes toward China's human rights record and expressed greater favorability toward China as a travel destination. These results are discussed in context of a growing body of literature identifying a massive CCP propaganda bureaucracy devoted to controlling the flow of information in ways that threaten free speech and free inquiry.

The study also compared the reach of pro- vs. anti-CCP content. Even though users engaged more (likes/comments) with anti-CCP posts, TikTok disproportionately amplified pro-CCP ones, pointing to algorithmic bias, not user preference.

10/20



3.3.2 Implications

The clearest evidence for some sort of bias in TikTok search results was for anti-CCP and irrelevant content. Both results are consistent with some sort of suppression of negative information about CCP on TikTok. It is obvious why the CCP would seek to suppress negative information about the CCP. However, the distraction hypothesis specifically predicted the results for the irrelevant search results—one way to steer users away from unflattering information about CCP is by sending them to links irrelevant to searches on topics about which the CCP is sensitive.

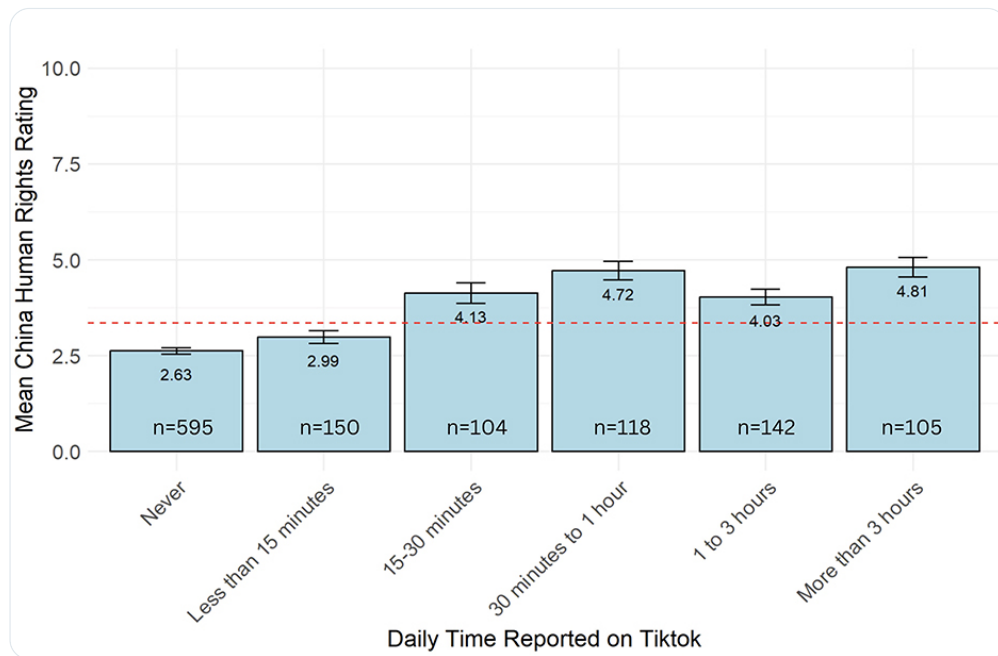
One possibility is that the CCP prefers to steer people away from political links involving the CCP, both positive and negative (King, 2018). This perspective, which is *post-hoc* and speculative and therefore points to a direction for future research, suggests that CCP policies, though targeting suppression of negative information about the CCP, do not focus on amplifying positive political information about China or the CCP, perhaps in an effort to avoid making anything about the issues addressed here (Tiananmen, Tibet, and the Uyghurs) too salient in people's minds and social media discourse.

4.2.1 Implications

The results supported the biased algorithm hypothesis. Differences between users' engagement on the different platforms do not explain the differences between the content posted on each platform found in Study I. Across all platforms, users engaged far more with anti-CCP content than with pro-CCP content. TikTok, however, was the only platform that produced vastly more pro-CCP content than anti-CCP content. Thus, differences between users' engagement with pro-CCP and anti-CCP content explains neither why TikTok serves up more pro-CCP than anti-CCP content nor why it serves up far less anti-CCP content than do the other platforms.

In short, Study II results strongly suggest that algorithmic amplification of pro- and anti-CCP content on Instagram and YouTube is largely determined by commercial considerations, whereas advancing CCP propaganda plays some role in the algorithmic curation of TikTok content. Given that Study I found far less anti-CCP content on TikTok than on the other platforms, but not systematically higher levels of pro-CCP content, the results from the two studies, when taken together, strongly suggests that TikTok suppresses anti-CCP content.

A survey of over 1200 Americans revealed that those who spent more time on TikTok had significantly more positive views of China's human rights record and were more likely to consider China a good travel destination. Usage was linked to real-world attitude shifts.



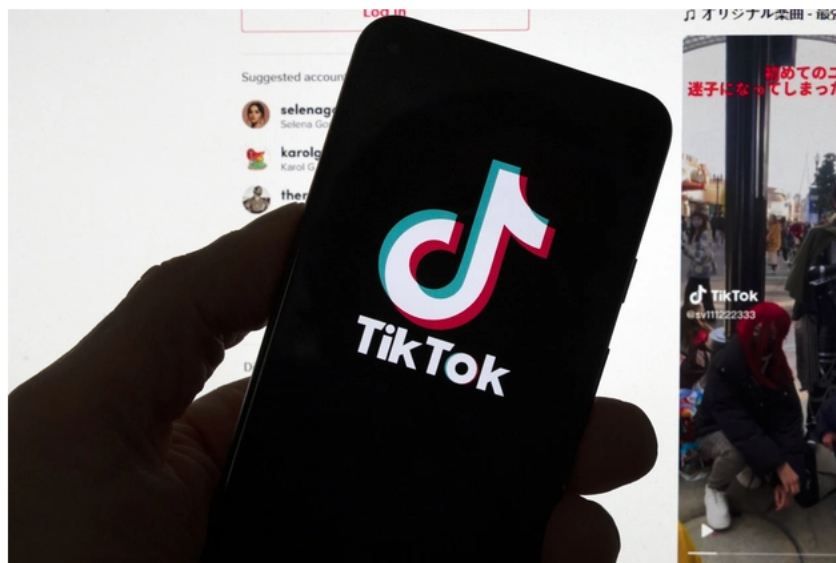
Overall, therefore, these analyses confirmed the hypothesis that the more time users spend on TikTok, the more favorable their views of China's human rights record. This relationship was observed in the bivariate correlation between TikTok use and ratings of China's human rights record, and it remained statistically significant even when controlling for time spent on each of the other platforms, demographics, and political affiliation.

For years, we've mostly focused on Russian online influence operations. But we shouldn't overlook China, which can mobilize massive "online armies" through internal policy. Unlike Russia, China also has a huge edge in generative AI.

TECHNOLOGY

The Chinese government is using TikTok to meddle in elections, ODNI says

The annual assessment from ODNI outlines national security threats facing the U.S.

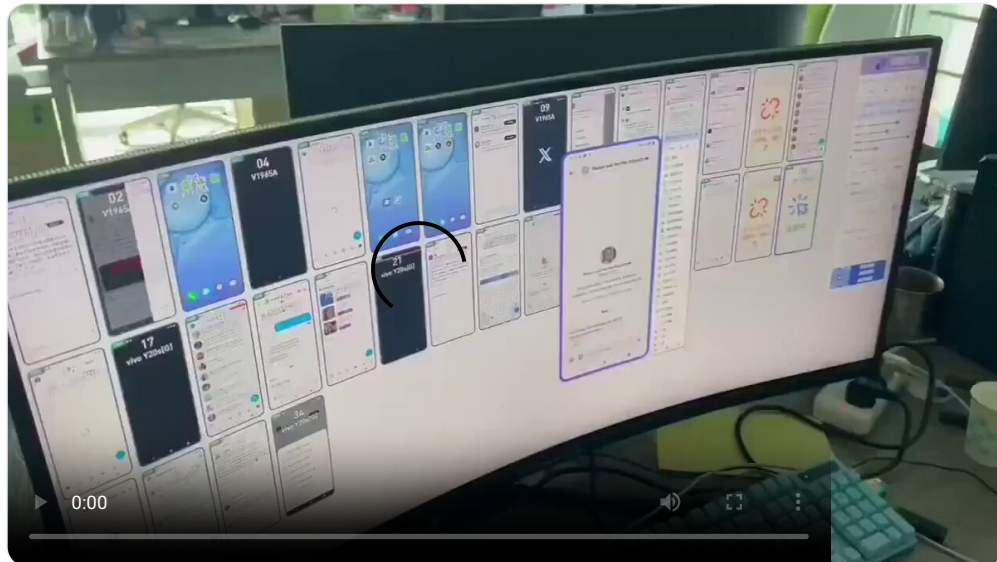


To date, there have been no concrete examples publicly provided showing how TikTok poses a national security threat. | Michael Dwyer/AP

By MALLORY CULHANE
03/11/2024 05:44 PM EDT



China can — and likely already does — use automated accounts to flood social media with anti-Western and pro-CCP narratives. Combined with algorithm manipulation, this enables the CCP to dominate online discourse and subtly shift public opinion in their favor.



Recently, I've been reviewing pro-CCP content on TikTok, and it's exactly what you'd expect. Here are some examples:

Disciplined Chinese kids doing synchronized or "productive" performances in kindergartens:

14/20



Drone shows, often thinly veiled demonstrations of military strength. One recent stunt featured “drone firefighters”:

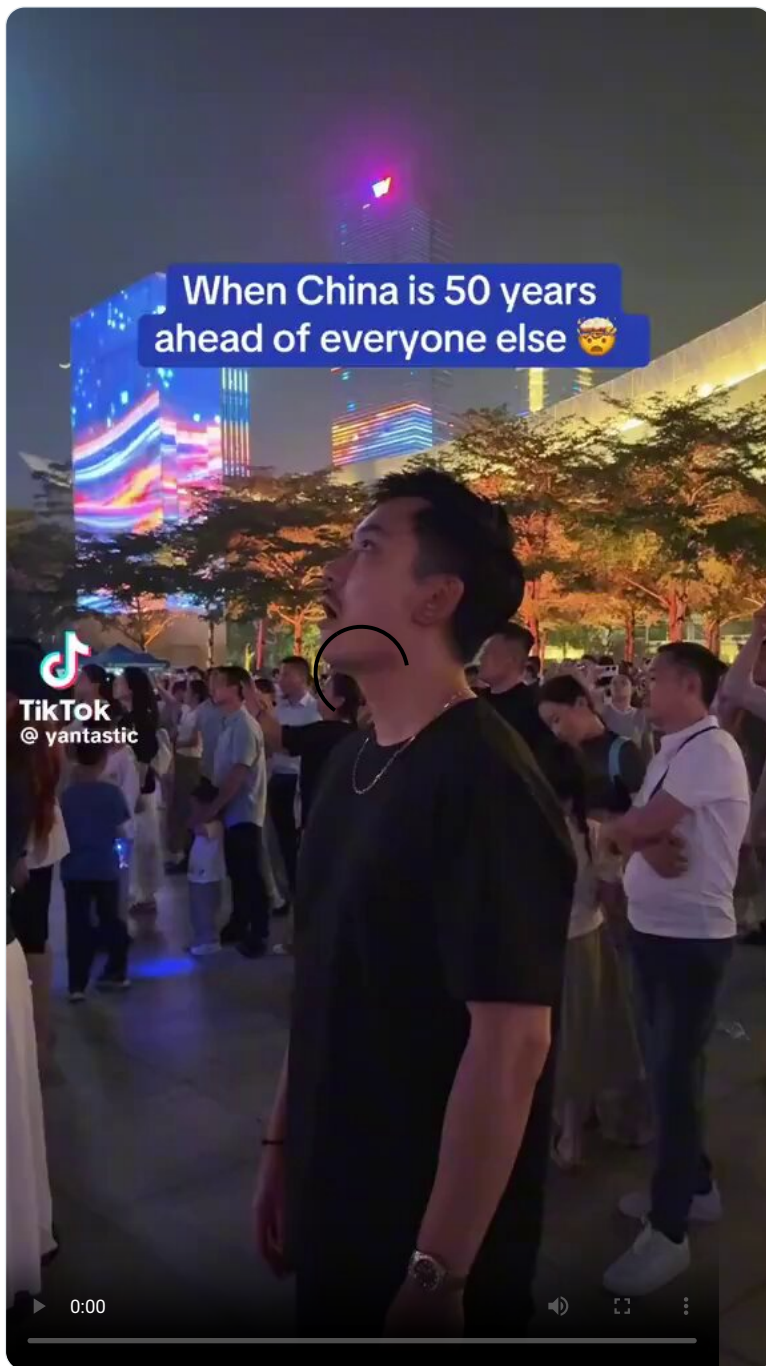




“Futuristic” cities, often highlighted by Western influencers. China actively recruits social media influencers to travel there and produce positive content.

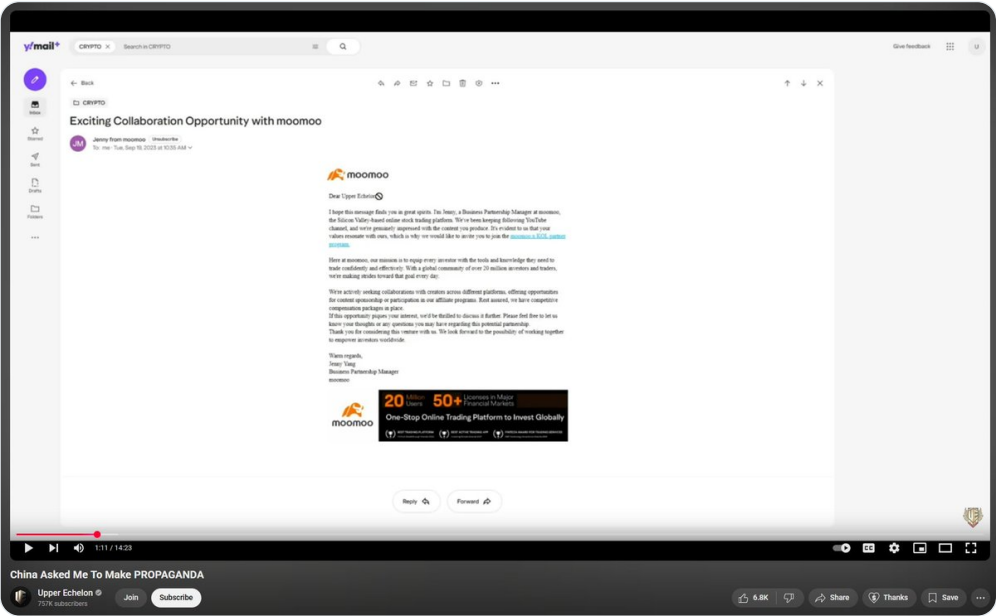
When China is 50 years
ahead of everyone else 🤖


TikTok
@yantastic



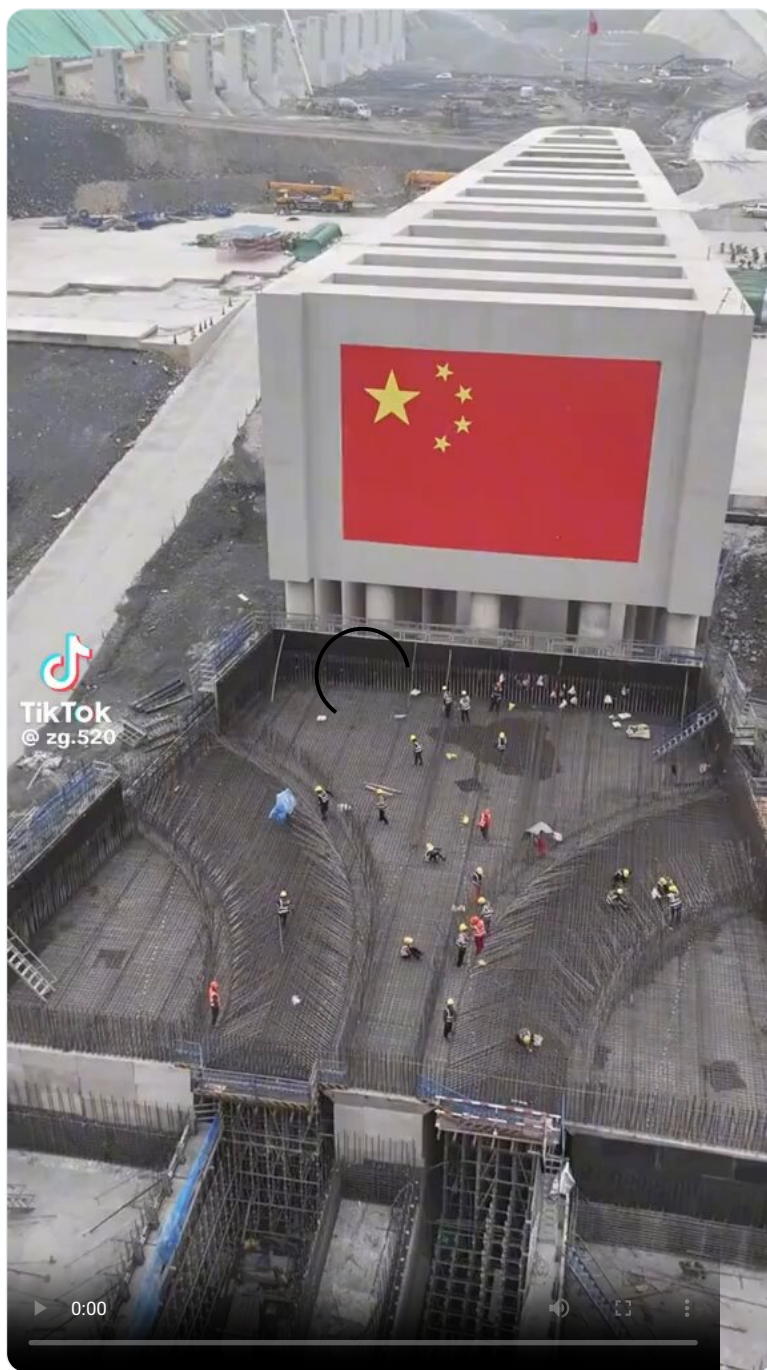
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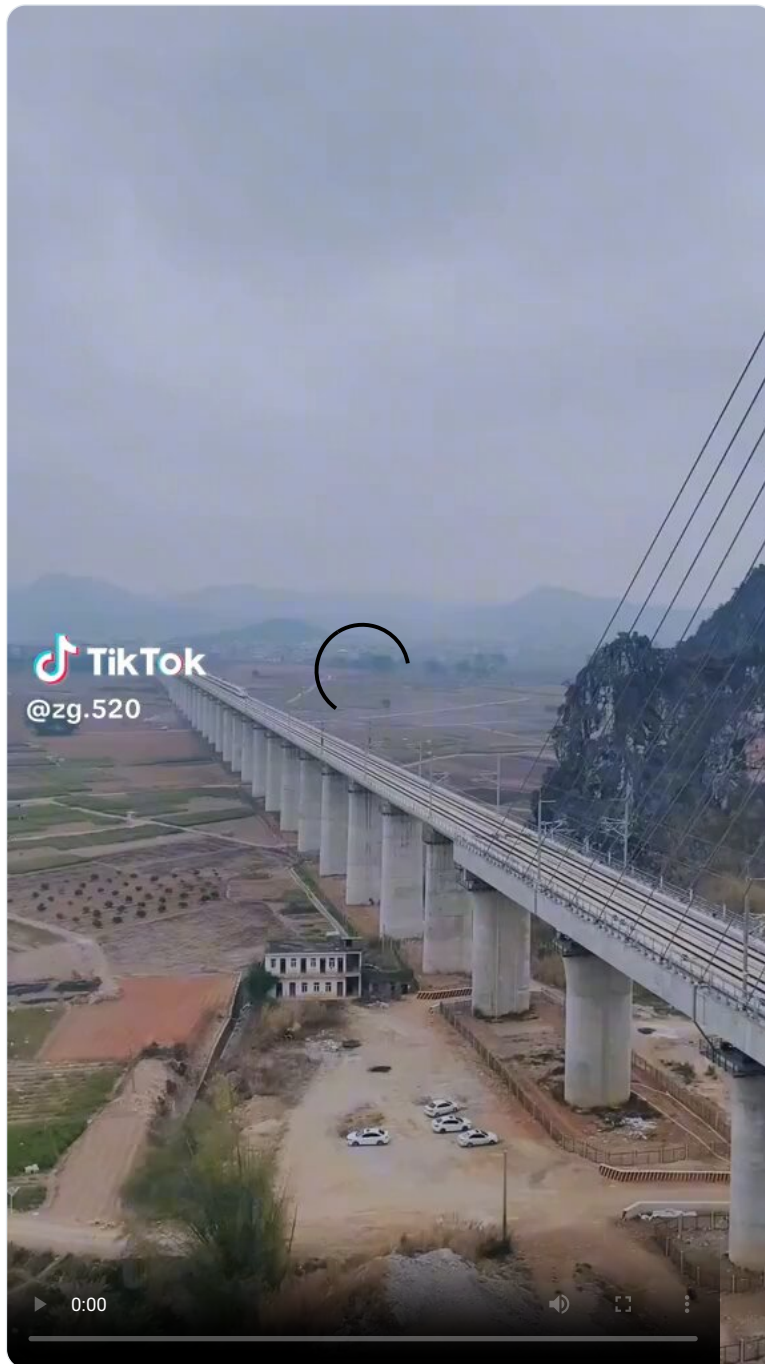


Massive construction projects filmed by drones are also a common form of propaganda:



TikTok
© zg.520

0:00



One of the most effective forms of manipulation is the “comparison video,” which contrasts China’s infrastructure or society with negative aspects or events in the US or Europe. Their favorite targets seems to be the US public transportation system.





Of course, it's not just the videos; the comment sections are flooded with Chinese bots and trolls. The most upvoted comments usually praise China and criticize the US. Comments pointing out Chinese oppression are typically suppressed and downvoted.



1,529 comments



davidromero1963

Hate to admit it, but China has surpassed the United States of America in alot of ways!

03-12 Reply

♡ 473



— View 44 replies ▾



noslnk

China is ahead of the US by 100 years.

03-13 Reply

♡ 196



— View 4 replies ▾



sublime377

We could have this too but instead the billionaires wants all the money for themselves.

03-13 Reply

♡ 127



— View 4 replies ▾



14,758 comments



TikTokcommunist

Americans finding out that their country is not the best in the world is comical. We all been telling you for years but you been to ignorant to listen!

01-18 Reply

♡ 4,141



— View 210 replies ▾



AllyKat 🎀

America is so far behind

01-16 Reply

♡ 13.3K



— View 398 replies ▾



ambrosine.liam

NYC is so guettttttttoooooo 🤔🤔🤔🤔

01-16 Reply

♡ 6,804



— View 68 replies ▾



Search: china flooding today 2025^Q



16,291 comments



Corg453

China will rebuild better and stronger unlike America.

17h Reply

♡ 2,147



— View 80 replies ▾



Chinga la migra

China will have this fixed in 3-5 business days while America would be 3-5 years

8h Reply

♡ 204



— View 6 replies ▾



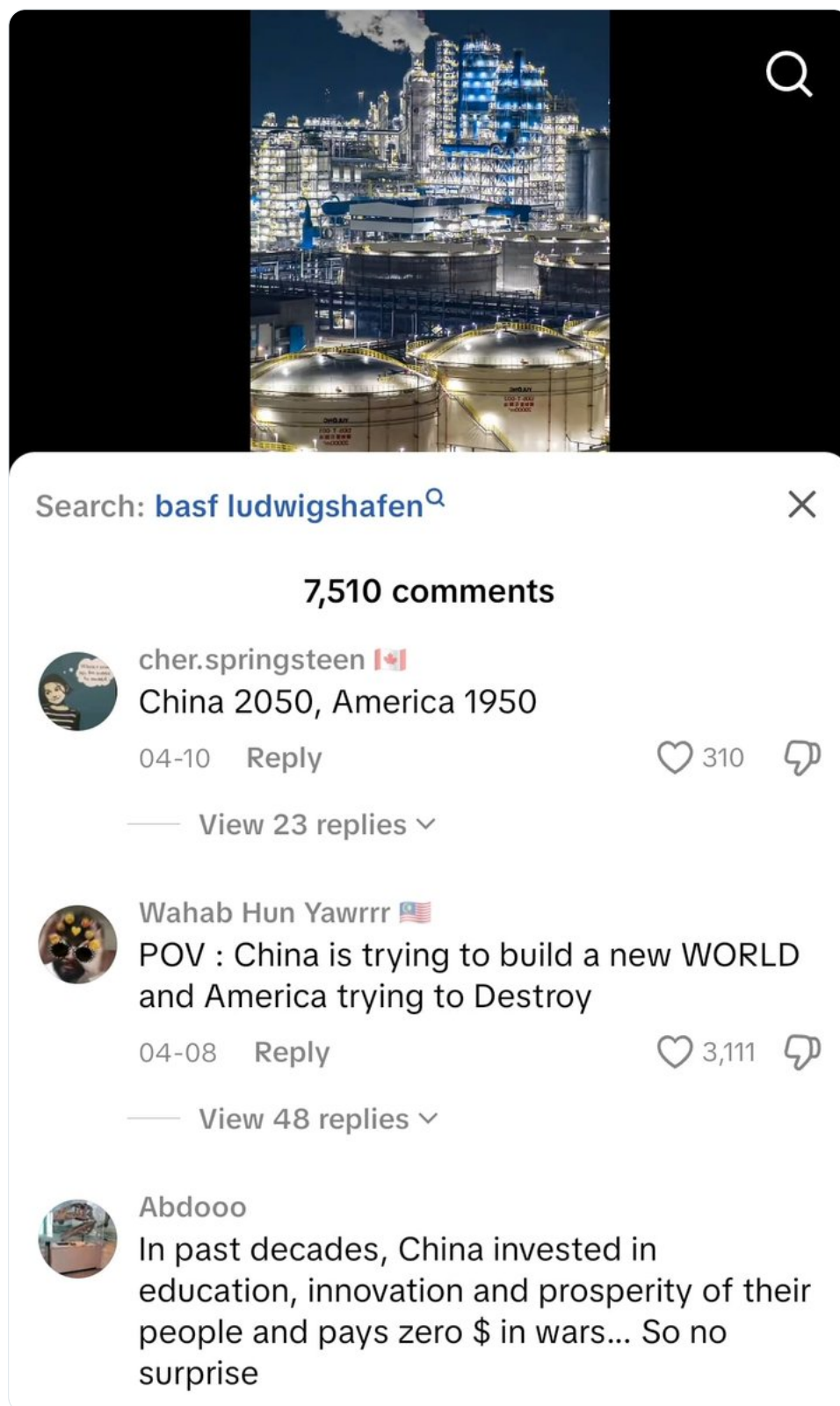
gasongason12

China is strong, they will make it more beautiful than it was ❤️❤️

1d Reply

♡ 713





In conclusion, China's online propaganda model blends Russia's "Firehose of Falsehood" with its own "Wolf Warrior diplomacy." It promotes China's achievements while highlighting and exaggerating the West's issues.



The 2nd edition of “Vatnik Soup — The Ultimate Guide to Russian Disinformation” is officially out!

You can order your copy here:

vatniksoup.com/en/books/

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