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Digital Nationalism on Weibo on the 70th Chinese National Day

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Abstract: China's digital nationalism has been on the rise during the last decade. This article examines the digital nationalistic expression of solidarity and unity on China's 70th National Day celebration in 2019. It conducted a qualitative content analysis of 500 posts regarding China's National Day, which were posted on October 1, 2019, on Sina Weibo. This study finds that Chinese internet users employ textual and visual posts to express their pride and loyalty, thereby reflecting their Chinese identity, a call for national unity, and their best wishes for China's bright future. This study suggests that Weibo offers a virtual "imagined community" for netizens to interact with national symbols to spontaneously strengthen a sense of national identity by highlighting the Chinese Communist Party's achievements. The findings concluded that national identity is socially constructed, rather than being permanent. Moreover, the Internet facilitates a more liberating Chinese media system; however, digital media is also somehow influenced by the Chinese government's media logic, which helps to further disseminate the government's interests.

Keywords: Social Media, China, Digital Nationalism, Imagined Community, National Identity

Introduction

Scholars have focused tremendous attention on nationalism over the last decades, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Friend and Thayer 2017). China is no exception. Zhang, Liu, and Wen (2018) suggested that China's digital nationalism is on the rise; meanwhile, there is a belief that the internet facilitates a growing digital nationalism in China (Leibold 2010; Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018). Although the Chinese media and online platforms are highly surveilled and controlled by the Chinese government (Brady 2008), digital media still plays a vital role in collective nationalistic actions and political expression (Hyun, Kim, and Sun 2014; Hyun and Kim 2015). Leibold (2010) posited that China's internet is full of aggressive nationalism, and that digital media could have a significant impact on domestic and international politics (Reilly 2012).

Hyun, Kim, and Sun (2014) proffered that the development of media technologies could also play a role in developing a sense of global interconnectivity and national insularity. Despite this, the internet can connect people across geographical spaces (Castells 2008), and promote a sense of nationalism (Eriksen 2007). Fang and Repnikova (2018) proposed that Chinese nationalistic expressions normally feature a top-down and bottom-up type of expression in digital media. This means that digital nationalism in China is not only supported by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but it is also supported by the public (Liu 2010), which demonstrates its grassroots feature (Hyun and Kim 2015). Although state-led digital nationalism and grassroots-oriented nationalism differ (Hyun and Kim 2015), they also share a common goal in that they both promote national identity and interests via the digital media (Nossek 2004).

Overall, digital nationalism in China is on the rise (Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018); yet, online nationalistic activities can trigger radical violence in real life (Schneider 2018a). For example, since the conflicts over the Diaoyu Islands between China and Japan, Chinese netizens have organized several activities to vandalize Japanese car brands in China (Schneider 2018a). This kind of online nationalistic expression in China is obviously uncivil and has promoted radical policies among anti-Japanese nationalists (Fang and Repnikova 2018; Schneider 2018b).

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However, one study suggested that the nationalism expressed in Weibo is multifaceted and contain both pro-regime and criticism of domestic political conditions (Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018). Due to contrasting accounts, it is vital to explore the expression of nationalism and the strategies that netizens utilize.

Meanwhile, most of the previous studies examined the political ideology of search engines (Jiang 2014), websites (Schneider 2018b), and online forums (Fang and Repnikova 2018), with relatively fewer studies examining the role of Sina Weibo, which contains 47.6 percent of all social media posts in China (Fu, Chan, and Chau 2013) expressing digital nationalism. Zhang, Liu, and Wen (2018) examined over 6,000 posts from 146 users at Sina Weibo; however, they only examined the expression of opinion leaders (with a large number of followers), yet ignored the systematic examination of expressions representing all netizens. This article discovered limited empirical studies examining the relationship between Weibo and nationalism. Meanwhile, the previous studies mostly focused on the role of the government in digital nationalism (Schneider 2018b), the political ideology of nationalism (Jiang 2014) and the effect of digital nationalism (Shen and Guo 2013). However, even fewer studies explored the nationalistic expressions and tactics used by netizens. Hence, the research question is raised: “How were expressions related to national identity and solidarity articulated, manifested and mobilized on Weibo during the period of the 70th National Day Anniversary of China?”

To answer this research question, this article followed Oruc’s (2019) suggestion and conducted a qualitative content analysis on Sina Weibo posts regarding the celebration of the National Day in China which was posted on October 1, 2019. This represents the seventieth year of China under the rule of the CCP; therefore, the Chinese government arranged a series of activities to celebrate this achievement with the highlight being a military parade. Sina Weibo is the largest social media platform in China (Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018), which offered a sphere for users to celebrate the National Day online. Meanwhile, the National Day acts as a symbol to rekindle citizens’ memory of the state’s history and increase its symbolic attachment to the nation (Ariely 2017). Hence, this article will utilize posts concerning the 70th Chinese National Day celebration from Sina Weibo to accurately answer the research question. Considering the popularity of Sina Weibo, this article identified relevant hashtags and manually searched them to locate relevant posts. Next, the article cleaned the data and randomly selected 500 posts referencing the National Day, along with relevant hashtags.

The article begins with the literature review that is focused on nationalism and the media, followed with a summary of the previous study on China’s digital nationalism. Next, this article reports on the various themes of the posts, as well as the strategies users utilized by analyzing 500 relevant posts’ text and visual content. Finally, all the results will be reported and discussed.

Literature Review

Nationalism, National Identity, and the Internet

Although there are numerous empirical studies on nationalism, it is difficult to define nationalism clearly. Nationalism, as a word, was first mentioned in 1409 (Kecmanovic 1996); Many scholars further elaborated on the definition of nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Friend and Thayer 2017). However, due to the complex and multi-dimensional nature, the definition of nationalism differs depending upon how scholars define the nation as a community (Oruc 2019). Anderson (2006) defined nationalism as a sense of belonging to an imagined community. His idea is that most community members do not know each other, but community members believe they “live the image of communion” (Anderson 2006, 6). Through this perspective, national identity refers to “bonds of solidarity among members of the community” (Smith 1991, 15). Furthermore, Guibernau (2007, 11) proposed that community

members' belief in the commonality of "culture, history, kinship, language, religion, territory and destiny" plays a distinctive role in constructing a sense of national identity. Hence, Smith (1991) defined nationalism as a sense of belonging to a country and their willingness to keep the country independent and safe. However, Anderson (2006) further highlighted the nation as an imagined community, while Smith (1991) focused on the myths, memories, values, and symbols in the study of nationalism. Meanwhile, it is challenging to establish a line between nationalism and national identity. Billig (1995) proposed that nationalism contains the process of building a sense of national identity for those who are said to live in their own nation. Furthermore, Giddens (1985) posited that national symbols also play a role in nationalist feelings and expressions, such as during the National Day (Ariely 2017).

Hall (1996) suggested that identity could be constructed through specific discourse and enunciative tactics based on special historical and institutional social contexts. To effectively construct national identity, the constructedness of a national identity should be embedded in daily life in a natural way (Özkırmı 2000). Therefore, Rusciano (2003) suggested that culture plays a vital role in constructing national identity, such as language and history (Hall 1996; Rusciano 2003). Meanwhile, with the plurality of political, historical, and social contexts, there is no universal standard to define and construct nationalism (Özkırmı 2000). Thus, Özkırmı (2000) posited that language, history, and ethnicity are significant elements to construct a sense of nationalism; however, it is difficult to include all elements. Hence, nationalist discourse is a salient factor for examining the various forms of nationalism (Özkırmı 2000), which serve as a common denominator (Oruc 2019). Therefore, Özkırmı (2000) argued that there are three common features of nationalist discourse: national interests are the most important; the nation is the only legal agency to rule; and the significant differences between them and us.

Due to the development of communication technologies, the internet plays a vital role in constructing a sense of nationalism (Eriksen 2007). Conversi (2012) submitted that the internet can facilitate globalization communication, which not only allows users free access, but also "enabled individuals to create ad hoc micro- and even macro-communities, which can either transcend or reinforce ethnic boundaries" (Conversi 2012, 1360). Therefore, Conversi (2012) argued that it leads to the emergence of virtual ethnic communities. The members of virtual ethnic communities interact through digital media based on their putative common descent (Conversi 2012), which is an expansion of imagined communities (Anderson 2006). Meanwhile, the National Day could play a role as a symbol to remind citizens of their past with a focus on people who sacrificed something for the nation (Ariely 2017). Thus, Ariely (2017) posited that the National Day visualizes and vocalizes the symbolic attachment to the nation, encouraging people to remember and re-define their national history, which could promote a more emotional attachment to the nation and a sense of national identity (Smith 1991). Hence, it could be argued that the National Day celebrations stimulate citizens' shared memory, which format and bolster an "imagined community." Anderson (2006) proposed that imagined community members can share the same experiences and memory, although they do not know each other and without face-to-face communication. Meanwhile, Anderson (2006) also suggested that the media play a role in forming a nationalistic consciousness and forge a national identity by circulating shared symbols by promoting the emergence of imaginary communities. However, since the development of digital media, traditional media are not the only sources for the public to gain information; digital media have also produced meaningful and creative works in China, especially over the last few years (Schneider 2018b). Therefore, it is obvious that digital media play a substantial role by enhancing the dissemination of nationalism. In order to explore the role of digital media in Chinese nationalism, this article aims to explore the nature of Chinese digital nationalism and online activities.

Chinese Digital Nationalism and Online Activities

Digital media play an important role in promoting a national identity and interests (Nossek 2004), and China is certainly no exception. Despite the Chinese internet being highly controlled and surveilled by the government (Boas 2006; Brady 2008), digital media, like online forums and social networking sites, are available for Chinese citizens to arrange political online activities (Fang and Repnikova 2018). According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC 2019), there are 854 million internet users in China. Simultaneously, the number of microblog users have increased significantly during the last decade, from 63 million in 2010 to 350 million in 2018 (Statista 2018). Meanwhile, there are 139,270 government microblog accounts as of June 2019 (CNNIC 2019). Fang and Repnikova (2018) argued that China's digital nationalism contains state-led propaganda; however, many nationalistic expressions reflect a sense of sentiment and movement, which differ from state-led nationalism and, thus, should conclude the existence of digital activism.

Previous studies concerning China's nationalism focused on state-led nationalism, which highlighted the Chinese government's effort in promoting pragmatic nationalism via patriotic education and media campaigns (Zhao 1998). In terms of digital nationalism in China, Schneider (2018b) proffered that the Chinese government supports radical nationalistic expression regarding the Second Sino-Japanese War. Meanwhile, Jiang (2014) determined that Chinese search engines follow the political logic of the Chinese government, which filter the information that is negative to China. However, some studies examined how the nationalist expression of Chinese youth could lead to destabilizing the CCP government and influence China's foreign policy (Yan and Zheng 2012). Meanwhile, one study examined the ideology behind online political discourse by analyzing over 6,000 posts relating to China's foreign policies on Weibo (Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018). They found that online nationalistic discourse is on the rise; however, the online nationalistic expressions contained both pro-regime and critical commentary of China (Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018).

Most of the studies highlight the role of government. However, Jiang (2014) posited that cyber-nationalism in China reveals a sign of becoming a two-tiered system with features of centralizing and decentralizing, which means it not only reflects the points of the Chinese government, but also netizens' perspectives. For instance, one study defines China's digital nationalism as a "spontaneous version of nationalism online" (Hyun and Kim 2015, 768). Leibold (2016) also argued that digital nationalistic discourse promotes a sense of Han supremacy, which validates that the Han ethnicity is dominant among all the 56 ethnic groups in China, which is in stark contrast with China's ethnic policies. Furthermore, some existing studies also suggest that digital nationalistic discourse promotes radical foreign policies, such as the relationship between China and Japan (Liu 2006; Schneider 2018b). Thus, Chinese digital nationalism is "understood as a radicalized expression of national identity that is rooted in antagonism toward other nations (deemed as enemies) and ethnic groups" (Fang and Repnikova 2018, 2165). Additionally, Han (2015) suggested that nationalistic expressions reveal features of patriotism. Therefore, although previous studies highlighted the role of the government's role or influence in China's digital nationalism, it also reflects the grassroots impact on digital nationalism.

The two-tiered feature of digital nationalism demonstrates contested "expressions and imageries of the nation between radical voices and the party-state" (Fang and Repnikova 2018, 2166). Anderson (2006) surmised that the media play a vital role in creating "imagined communities." Hyun, Kim, and Sun (2014) suggested that there is a close correlation between the internet and digital nationalism in China. They suggested that the internet offers Chinese netizens an opportunity to funnel their nationalistic emotions by arranging digital activities such as anti-Japanese activism, which facilitated a growing level of nationalism (Hyun, Kim, and

Sun 2014). Meanwhile, Fang and Repnikova (2018) also suggested that the nationalistic digital activities provide diverse online groups the opportunity to express pro-unification dialogues, but also offer a space for blind allegiance to the party-state. Hence, digital nationalism in China has become a fierce battleground for different online groups evoking uncivil expressions (Fang and Repnikova 2018). Thus, in order to understand China's digital nationalistic activities, this article will explore the nature of political online expressions in China.

Digital Media and Online Expressions

Nationalistic online discourse in China reflects the government's position; yet, it also demonstrates a growing grassroots movement (Hyun, Kim, and Sun 2014). Thus, unlike the government's pragmatic nationalism (Zhao 1998), nationalistic enthusiasm in digital media reflects the Chinese populace' desire, and mixed memory of China's glorious and humiliating history, which suffered from foreign countries over the past 100 years (Hyun, Kim, and Sun 2014). Therefore, the digital media offer a space for netizens to express their political ideologies. However, the previous study suggests that the engaging level of online expression in China is low. More specifically, Shen et al. (2009) conducted a survey and found that only 10 percent of the participants often express their view online, while 30 percent of the participants sometimes expressed their opinion online.

Although the engaging level of online expression in China is relatively low, Hyun and Kim (2015) suggested that nationalistic attitudes and political online expressions in China have a positive relationship. Meanwhile, the use of social media and the traditional media combined has a positive association with the level of online political expression (Hyun and Kim 2015), which is the same as Rojas and Puig-i-Abril's (2009) findings that the consumption of both traditional and online news has a positive impact on political online activities. Moreover, the consumption of traditional and social media could offer a social-interaction function, which means it offers a sense of interpersonal communication and discussion (McQuail 1985).

Hyun and Kim (2015) postulated that digital nationalism offers an opportunity for political expression and discussion while serving the same function as a state-led nationalism that strengthens the nationalistic ideology. More specifically, Shen and Guo (2013) suggested that the mass media, under the control of the Chinese government, disseminate nationalism through highlighting national unity and pride. Cyberspace in China also shares the same feature as online nationalistic expression, highlighting national unity and pride (Hyun and Kim 2015). Hence, the level of nationalism and the consumption of digital media have a positive relationship (Shen and Guo 2013).

Becker (2009) proposed that a country's elites inculcate national identity and pride into the general public to legitimize their right to govern. Even in Western countries, governments promote a sense of nationalism and patriotism to tighten their control (Hyun and Kim 2015), the same way in which China uses nationalism as a tool to reinforce their legitimacy. Hyun and Kim (2015, 767) argued that "nationalism is formed and developed through a political socialization process, occurring in multiple venues involving diverse socialization agencies." Hence, digital communication is one of the most vital vehicles for people to develop, reinforce, and adjust nationalistic emotions (Dekker, Malová, and Hoogendoorn 2003). The political online expression in China reveals features of spontaneity, which can prompt "explicit animosity and belligerence against foreign countries, especially when they are involved in diplomatic and territorial disputes with China" (Hyun and Kim 2015, 769). Previous studies revealed that China's digital nationalism may challenge the CCP's foreign policies and promote radical state policies (Fang and Repnikova 2018; Leibold 2016); however, King, Pan, and Roberts (2017) argued that China's social media are dominant by means of pro-regime posts. Thus, it could be argued that the Chinese government successfully utilizes nationalism to

reinforce its legitimacy (Zhao 2004), while online nationalistic expressions reflect the features of a pro-regime ideology (Han 2015; Tok 2010).

Van der Toorn, Tyler, and Jost (2011) posited that people generally express their pro-regime feelings according to their perception of the existing political system. Hence, when applied to China, Chinese digital nationalism and Chinese nationalistic expression highlight the development of personal welfare due to the improvement of the national or centralized power (Hyun and Kim 2015). This hypothesis was proved by Shen and Guo (2013), in that they demonstrated that digital nationalism is positively correlated to government trust among Chinese people. At the same time, social media, as a public sphere, offer netizens a virtual space to express their sentiment and national attachment to China (Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018), along with symbols like national flags that inspire a national attachment (Butz, Plant, and Doerr 2007; Carter, Ferguson, and Hassin 2011). However, there are relatively fewer empirical studies that explore the tactics underlying nationalistic expression and sentiments.

Methodology

Data Collection

This article aims to systematically examine how the Sina Weibo social media platform is a means to facilitate netizens to express their nationalism during the period of the 70th National Anniversary in China. However, there are numerous social media platforms in China, such as Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo, WeChat, etc. Therefore, it is impossible to include all the social media platforms in China in this research. After much thought, this article utilized Sina Weibo as an example for the following reasons. Firstly, Sina Weibo is one of the most popular social media platforms in China and had approximately 600 million registered users with around 132 million daily active users in 2017 (Wang 2018), which could offer systematic data regarding the Chinese National Day. Secondly, Sina Weibo, as a digital social media platform, gives users a sense of community by providing an imagined community network (Gruzd et al. 2011). Thirdly, Oruc (2019) suggested that Twitter provides a range of information, which includes usernames, text, visual content, followers, number of followers, and hyperlinks. Therefore, this article believes that Sina Weibo, as the “Chinese Twitter” (Ren 2018), could offer the same type of information as Twitter. Lastly, due to conveniences related to postings, Weibo allows users with diverse backgrounds and locations to use their platform. Hence, Zhang, Liu, and Wen (2018, 4) suggested that “Weibo forms a space where diverse ideologies can coexist and compete.” However, due to the substantial number of active users on Sina Weibo, this article followed Oruc’s (2019) suggestion and examined the Chinese hashtags regarding the 70th National Day celebrations mentioned in Weibo posts during the Chinese National Day. Oruc (2019) proposed that there is one main benefit for utilizing hashtags, in that hashtags allow researchers to easily examine targeted subjects (Mejova, Weber, and Macy, 2015). Moreover, hashtags combine “conversationality and subjectivity in a manner that supports both individually felt affects and collectivity” (Papacharissi 2015, 27).

However, it is worth mentioning that the Chinese National Holiday is a public holiday lasting seven days. Thus, this article assumes that there are numerous posts regarding the 70th Chinese National Day, since there are large numbers of registered users of Weibo combined with a one-week holiday. Therefore, this article only examined Chinese hashtags on Weibo during the 70th Chinese National Day celebrations (October 1, 2019) for the following reasons: (1) October 1st is China’s birthday; (2) the Chinese government launched a series of ceremonial events, including a military parade, to highlight the National Day of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 2019 in Beijing. Hence, this article assumes that October 1st is the absolute day to examine the nature of Weibo posts regarding the Chinese National Day as a means to examine nationalism. However, it should be noted that there are still many posts regarding the 70th Chinese National

Day on October 1, 2019, since there are large numbers of daily active users on Weibo. Thus, this article set out to find relevant hashtags to selected posts. However, unlike Twitter, there is no open dataset for public access. Therefore, this study manually searched “The Chinese National Day” to explore posts regarding the National Day on October 1, 2019 to locate relevant hashtags. Furthermore, this study clicked on each hashtag to compare their level of popularity to isolate and extract popular hashtags regarding the Chinese National Day.

Table 1: Chinese Hashtags on Weibo Regarding the 70th Chinese National Day

<i>Hashtags</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
#中国骄傲 / 为祖国骄傲#	#Proud_of_China/ motherland#
#祖国 / 中国生日快乐#	#Happy_birthday_China/ motherland#
#中国加油#	#Come_on_China#
#祖国繁荣昌盛#	#Hope_Motherland_be_prosperous#
#建立富强中国#	#Let_us_make_our_Motherland_stronger#
#我爱你中国#	#I_love__China#
#庆七十年华诞#	#Celebrate_70 th _national_celebrition#
#国庆阅兵#	#Military_parade#
#祖国万岁#	#Long_life_China#
#我和我的祖国#	#My_motherland_and_Me#

Source: Zhang

Sample and Analysis

After identifying the relevant hashtags, the study randomly selected 1,562 posts regarding the Chinese National Day. Since there was such a large amount of data, the study followed Oruc’s (2019) suggestion to pair the data to make the original data more manageable in conducting the qualitative content analysis. Firstly, the study follows Oruc’s (2019) method to make a sample of a post which was reposted twice or more. The article manually examined all the posts and found posts which were reposted. Afterwards, the article categorised each reposted post as a group. Next, the study found twelve duplicate groups and 920 single posts (which were not reposted). For example, China Central Television (CCTV) used their Weibo account to publish a post about celebrating the Chinese National Day, which led to many Sina Weibo users reposting the post. Hence, the study grouped them as one post, due to the original data containing many of these posts. Oruc (2019) suggested that this step could decrease the influence of large numbers of followers, which could ensure all the posts had the same chance to be selected. Secondly, the study combined the twelve duplicate groups and single posts ($n = 920$) and created a new database ($N = 932$). Lastly, the study randomly selected 500 posts from the new database. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that the dataset removed the posts which were advertisements and links are no longer available.

This article followed Oruc’s (2019) suggestion to conduct a qualitative content analysis to examine themes and tactics. Meanwhile, Özkırımlı (2000) suggested that there are three features of nationalism: (1) the nation’s interests and values are more important than other forms of interest and values; (2) the nation is the only source of legitimacy; (3) there is a clear line between us and them as well as a friend and foe. Moreover, national symbols play a vital role in nationalism (Giddens 1985). Therefore, the article examined thematic patterns of text, symbols, pictures (Oruc 2019), hyperlinks, and videos to analyse the themes. Meanwhile, this article focused on the language, online activities, references, and assertions to evaluate tactics

and strategies in Weibo posts. It is also vital to mention that Weibo posts may contain both text and non-text content (pictures, videos, etc.); thus, it is hard to use traditional data analysis methods (Oruc 2019). Hence, this article followed Oruc's (2019, 51) suggestion to use a multimodal method to conduct qualitative content analysis, since a combination of text and visual data could create relevant meaning (Pennington 2017). Meanwhile, when analysing the data, the study not only examined data, but also considered any symbolic or connotative meanings under a social and political context (Pennington 2017), since China's political system is unique (the CCP is the only legitimate party allowed to govern; Lawrence and Martin 2013).

Although there are no previous studies on ethical issues conducting research on social media, especially for content analysis (Oruc 2019), Bergin and Harding (2016) argued that open-access data do not mean it is legal for researchers to conduct research regarding social media. However, it is undeniable that it presents major difficulties to gain consent from all these social media users while conducting research on social media. Therefore, Fuchs (2018) suggested that while conducting research on social media, researchers should ignore social media user names unless it is concerning public figures or an organization. Hence, this study followed this premise and maintained the anonymity of the owner of the postings (Oruc 2019).

Results

This section aims to demonstrate the findings of this article in terms of themes and strategies in the posts. The results indicate that the posts are highly charged with national sentiment, collective belonging, collective destiny, and the positive framing of the CCP and leaders in terms of these themes. Meanwhile, the posts expertly utilize emotional language and visual data to express their national sentiments. Official government Weibo accounts also arranged several activities to celebrate the Chinese National Day as a tactic.

Themes

National sentiments

National sentiments can be divided into national belonging and national superiority (Billig 1995; Hjerm 2003). Meanwhile, Hjerm (2000) highlighted the close relationship between national sentiments and attachments to the nation (national identity/national pride). Hence, national sentiment can be defined as the expression of love, pride, and attachment to their motherland and its people (Iveson 2017). Also, Charney, Yeoh, and Kiong (2003) suggested that the Chinese national sentiment reveals the Chinese people's cultural pride and their close attachment with China. Therefore, this article ascertained that the posts highly feature national sentiments and reflect users' feeling of love, pride, and admiration for China. Here are some examples:

- I love the great motherland! Proud of my powerful motherland! #Proud_of_China#
- There is a kind of red, the "Chinese red" CN; there is a kind of pride, such as the "Chinese flag" CN; there is a confession, such as "I love China" CN;
#I_love_China##Happy_birthday_China#
- It is the 70th birthday of China; I felt passionate when I watched the military parade. It made me think that I am proud to be Chinese with yellow skin, brown eyes and black hair, and be a son of a Chinese, China CN, I love you!
#My_motherland_and_Me##I_love_China#
- It is a beautiful country, it is a powerful country, I grew up there and I am proud!
#I_love_China#

Some users even linked the celebration of the 70th National Day to the movie lines of “My People, My Country,” which states: “My motherland and I cannot be separated for a moment” with a picture of the movie’s poster.



Figure 1: Poster of the Movie My People, My Country
Source: Weibo

National Identity

Ashmore, Jussim, and Wilder (2001) suggested that national identity is defined as a sense of belonging to a country or individual’s identity. The features of national identity are visible when citizens can recognize the differences between “we” and “they” in psychological terms (Lee 2012). However, when applied to the case of China, it is not only about the differences between “we” and “they,” but also concerning the unification of Chinese. For instance, He (2012) suggested that the Chinese national identity has been conflicted since Taiwan and Hong Kong received their sovereign status. Meanwhile, the power of nationalism “locates the source of individual identity within a ‘people’, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity” (Greenfeld 1992, 3). Hence, this study finds that the posts are highly charged with national identity as the posts reflect expressions of individuals who clearly remember their identity, their unification with all Chinese, and their loyalty to the Chinese nation. Here are the examples:

- #I_love_China# Only left Taiwan not come back to China, come back, come home
- My biggest pride is being a ChineseCN, it is an honor when foreigners call me Chinese; my happiness is to live in China, I never want to give up my Chinese identity, I wish China to be stronger!
#Happy_birthday_China##Celebrate_70th_national_celebration#
- I never regret being a Chinese; I hope I could be Chinese again if I could live once more CN#Military_parade##Celebrate_70th National_Celebration#

- #Long_life_China# I am touched because of China's prosperity; I am proud of my Chinese identity. I love you, my motherland
- Showing my love to my motherland, while watching the military parade #Hope_Motherland_be_prosperous# Sir and Madam protect yourself, I will follow you #support_HK_policeman#

Collective Destiny

Collective destiny refers to people who are bonded together due to the same interests and fate (Zhang 2018); hence, Oruc (2019, 55) suggested that collective destiny could reflect the willingness of individuals to "build a stronger country and desire to maintain its sovereignty and prosperity as well as commonality of present and future" (Oruc 2019, 55). China is not an exception. China's nationalism highlights the collective effort of all the state's territories and residences to achieve their national goals (Zhao 1998). In other words, the Chinese government wants to make the country's development a national cause for all Chinese (Zhao 1998). Therefore, the posts should reflect the use of people's expression concerning their desire to build a stronger China, celebrating China's future birthday, and maintaining China's prosperity. Here are the examples:

- #Let_us_make_our_Motherland_stronger# This is your birthday, China. I dedicate my youth to you and hope China will be prosperous forever #Hope_Motherland_be_prosperous##Come_on_China#
- #I_love_China# We have a home since we have China. Our Chinese identity makes us proud, our hearts should be turned to love China, dedicate ourselves to making China better, wishing prosperity on China forever
- What I can do for China to become the most powerful country in the world? The answer is being useful to China #Celebrate_70th_national_celebration#
- No power that can stop China from becoming stronger, I have confidence that China will be stronger and more prosperous. God bless China #Celebrate_70th_national_celebration#

The Party and Leader of the Nation

Oruc (2019) proffered that by analyzing the leader of the country, researchers could examine the construction of national unity. For instance, Oruc (2019, 53) examined Qatar's digital nationalism through analyzing Twitter feeds regarding the persona of Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani. He suggested that a national leader could strengthen people's perception of the strength, dignity, and glory of the nation (Oruc 2019). China is no exception. Zhang, Mol, and He (2016, 17) described China as "authoritarian or paternalistic" since China only has one political party to govern. Thus, the Chinese government usually associates a love for China equal to having a love for the CCP through their patriotic education campaigns (Zhao 1998). Hence, their posts should reflect the use of expressions thanking the CCP, and only that the CCP can lead China, as well as thanking the president. This study found that the posts showcase Chinese presidents and the CCP in a very positive way. Here are the salient examples:

- It is unnecessary to say too much, must respect the president #Military_parade#
- #Celebrate_70th_national_celebration# All countries are watching Beijing; all countries are watching China on the Chinese National Day. Only the Chinese Communist Party can save China, only the CCP can lead China. China has already demonstrated strength and prosperity! I believe that China will lead the world soon

- #Military_parade# We have a respectful leader and president; now he is old so we wish him good health and a long life
- Long live the great People's Republic of China! Long live the great Chinese Communist Party #Long_life_China#

Tactics and Strategies

This section aims to examine the tactics and strategies Weibo users employed to express their sentiment. Quite often, the official accounts of the Chinese government arrange some interactive activities to interact with Weibo users. For example, the People's Daily arranged an activity where users had the opportunity to win a gift if they reposted the post about celebrating the National Day. Similarly, CCTV also asked Weibo users to repost its post about sending congratulatory wishes to celebrate China's birthday.

Meanwhile, individual netizens usually employ a strategy which includes some text with pictures as in the examples illustrated below. The netizens usually use symbolic pictures (e.g., flags and hearts) to amplify the emotional content of the post. For example, people not only use the national flag to express their pride and love towards China, but they also use the CCP's party flags and hearts to convey their feelings. Another popular strategy is the use of pictures and videos of the military parade to symbolize China's strength and the profound changes China has undergone in an attempt to finally express their strong sentiment towards China. The profile of the Chinese president also serves as a tool to express their gratitude toward the CCP. For instance, netizens used visual representations and textual forms to mention former President Hu's greying hair reflected the efforts and legitimacy of the CCP. Against this backdrop, the CCP is also framed as the savior and facilitator to materialize China's growth.



Figure 2: The Popular Picture Weibo Users Used to celebrate the Chinese National Day

Source: Weibo



Figure 3: The Profile Pictures of the Former Chinese President and Chinese Premier
Source: Weibo

In addition to utilizing pictures as symbols, the data show that Weibo users also employ the selfie strategy upon joining activities related to celebrating the National Day or merely posting selfies to illustrate their joy in celebrating China's birthday and to express their sentiment. For example, on October 1st, a propaganda movie, "My People, My Country," was shown and many Weibo users shared their selfie next to the movie's poster to express their sentiment for China.

It is also worth mentioning that the data show that Weibo users' language is emotional. Some posts employ the pronoun "us" or "our" to describe being Chinese and frame China as their mother to express their sentiment. For instance, "the world is big, but there is only one China, she is huge with 9.6 million square kilometers, she has 5000 years of history with a splendid civilization. As a son of China, I am proud. Happy birthday, mother #Celebrate_70th_national_celebration#." In addition to using emotional language, some posts also highlighted China's humiliating history when they went through a time of poverty and being brutalized by Western countries, to highlight the significant development of the military and economic power of China. One example mentions that: "We didn't have enough planes 70 years ago, but nowadays we can fly as much as we want to and as long as we want to. People are safe and happy. Our country is stable and rich #Celebrate_70th_national_celebration#."

Discussion

This study sets out to investigate references to express nationalistic discourse, the theme of their expressions and the tactics Weibo users utilize. The digital nationalistic expression in China has long been understood as a top-down or bottom-up structure (Fang and Repnikova 2018), which

means that the Chinese government dominates the nationalistic expression through the mass media and the educational system (Zhao 1998). However, the online expressions also present a sign of there being a grassroots movement (Fang and Repnikova 2018; Hyun and Kim 2015). In this case, this article found the same pattern in both the official government accounts and normal citizens' online feedback while celebrating the National Day. For example, when the official government accounts published a post concerning the national holiday celebrations, normal netizens reposted these, but with comments. Also, normal Chinese netizens posting on Sina Weibo shared their emotions and physical experience of celebrating the National Day and their feelings toward China. It could be argued that the state-led nationalism, which is promoted via patriotic education and the mass media (Zhao 1998), has a positive effect on creating and expanding digital nationalism. However, Chinese digital nationalism is becoming increasingly more spontaneous (Hyun and Kim 2015). That being said, political expressions online are limited in China (Shen et al. 2009), especially concerning issues related to foreign policies and relationships with other countries (Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018). However, this article determined that, unlike Zhang, Liu, and Wen (2018), the majority of Weibo users remain silent concerning anything anti-regime. Thus, most of the Weibo users express their pride and love for China, their gratitude toward the CCP, their loyal inclination toward being Chinese, and their bright wishes for China's future. The same pattern is also found in Israel where the participation level of celebrating the National Day in Israel is high (Ariely 2017). Therefore, this article suggests that the engaging level of online expression varies according to different topics.

To celebrate the 70th Chinese National Day holiday, this article discovered that Weibo users' posts were filled with emotion and a feeling of national sentiment. This finding aligns with Hyun and Kim's (2015) idea that digital Chinese nationalism tends to highlight the development of China and the improvement of the people's welfare. This finding also reflects Van der Toorn, Tyler, and Jost's (2011) hypothesis that national attachment often relates to the people's satisfaction of the existing political situation. The current study determined that, regardless of the government's official Weibo accounts, most citizens showed a desire to highlight China's transformation from being a poor country to a powerful actor in the world, while using the national flag as a symbol to expand their sentiments. Hence, this article argues that a national attachment is positively correlated to the satisfaction of the Chinese government through slogans and national symbols (national flag) to express their patriotic zeal. Also, the exposure of the national flag increases the people's sense of national sentiment (Ariely 2017) as well as a sense of national identity.

Previous studies argued that online nationalistic expression carries a theme of Han supremacy (Leibold 2016) and an attitude of supporting radical foreign policy (Fang and Repnikova 2018). However, this article did not find the same pattern and, therefore, suggests that there is rather a sense of all the ethnical groups being a unit and their loyalty to being Chinese. Additionally, even with the conflicts in Taiwan and Hong Kong and their desire for sovereign status, the posts reflected the netizens' willingness to unite China with Taiwan and Hong Kong. Hence, this article suggests netizens are expressing a clear attachment to their national identity and reunifying with Taiwan, rather than supporting radical domestic and foreign policies during the National Day holiday. Moreover, the national day as a symbol offers some cognitive and emotional knowledge to support the legitimacy of the nation, allowing citizens to identify with each other since they have a shared memory and experience. Therefore, the National Day serves as an important medium to reinforce a sense of national identity (Ariely 2017). Also, the Chinese government highlighted the reunification with Taiwan (Chang and Chen 2015) and the legitimacy concerning the sovereignty of Hong Kong; likewise, the Chinese netizens highlighted their willingness to return Taiwan to China in a very civil manner and tone.

Moreover, this article also found that netizens expressed a sense of collective destiny through wishing that China could be stronger and displaying a sense of gratitude to the CCP and the Chinese president. Zhao (1998) suggested that the Chinese government launched a series of

activities to promote nationalism through patriotic education and the media after 1949, especially after the Tiananmen incident. This state-led nationalism highlights the collective effort of all Chinese to build a stronger China, the achievements of the CCP, and the fact that support for the CCP is indistinguishable from loving China (Zhao 1998). Therefore, this article suggests that netizens' expression of a collective destiny and their gratitude toward the CCP is deeply influenced by patriotic education and media exposure. This is also confirmed by Shen and Guo's (2013) finding that the consumption of Chinese news has a positive effect on the level of nationalism. Thus, this article argues that these visual and textual posts express the individual's love for China, along with their gratefulness concerning the efforts the CCP and the president have made China powerful. There are also references of being proud of China and being Chinese, as well as a willingness to see a re-united nation and building a greater China for the future.

National identity refers to a "closeness uniting those who belong to the nation and arises to engender love and loyalty to the nation" (Guibernau 2007, 11–12). Social media offers a virtual space for the public to interact, which leads to a reinforced feeling of belonging, solidarity, and bonding (Papacharissi 2015; Zhang, Liu, and Wen 2018). Smith (1999) proffered that autonomy, unity, and identity are three elements that require the full participation of a nation to achieve common goals and their destiny. However, "nation" is an abstract term which is hard to materialize (Oruc 2019). On the Sina Weibo platform, China is framed as a mother to personalize national unity and identity. Netizens also posted the national flag and the CCP party flag to represent national autonomy and unity, thereby strengthening a feeling of national cohesion and solidarity (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). Hence, this article argues that Weibo offers a space to disseminate and interact with shared symbols that offer a space and vehicle to create and express a collective national identity and a sense of nationalism.

Furthermore, netizens utilized pictures to symbolize the significant changes China has gone through. In order to express their sentiment, Chinese netizens shared pictures of the military parade to reveal their pride that China has transformed from being a poor country to a powerful economic powerhouse after the CCP took charge of China in 1949. In a sense, it could be argued that Chinese nationalism is rooted in its humiliating history (Zhao 1998). Additionally, Palmer (2012, 122) affirmed that "constant reinforcement of belonging is the basis for both nationalism and web participation," which is displayed through the netizens sharing the military parade, movie posters, and their selfies to celebrate the National Day. Lastly, this article also discovered the tactic of using emotional language, such as painting China as the mother and utilizing pronouns such as "us" and "our" to describe Chinese individuals. In other words, this implies that the pronoun "we" is one of the most popular words to express a sense of nationalism and national identity (Cillia, Resisigl, and Wodak 1999).

Therefore, this article suggests that national identity is a dynamic social construct, rather than immutable, which also aligns with Oruc (2019). Meanwhile, this article also suggests that digital media offer a virtual space to reinforce a sense of nationalism and national identity through interacting with the users, slogans and national symbols. However, this article proffers that the active online nationalism discourse reflects the idea of a state-led nationalism, which is promoted by traditional media campaigns and patriotic education. Thus, this article further posits that social media, although viewed as liberal in the Chinese media environment, also follows the media logic which is dominated by the Chinese government. Also, Chinese nationalism is created and mobilized through the interplay between politics and technology, which results in nationalistic expressions being incorporated into social media.

Conclusion

Through examining 500 Sina Weibo posts that mentioned China's 70th National Day, this article determined that expressions regarding nationalist sentiment dominated on Weibo. Meanwhile, this article also determined that people utilize emotional language to express their sentiment, as

well as symbols and pictures to materialize their love for China and their grateful feelings toward the CCP. Zhao (1998) suggested that the Chinese government manages to dominate the growth of Chinese nationalism through patriotic education and the media; this article argues that there seems to be a grassroots movement within Chinese digital nationalism (Hyun and Kim 2015). However, it is undeniable that Chinese nationalism is rooted in its humiliating history, especially since this and the CCP's glorious achievements and policies are required teaching material in the CCP's patriotic educational syllabus and reiterated by the media (Zhao 1998). Hence, this article suggests that, although the internet might be liberal in the Chinese media environment, the Chinese government stills aims to inject nationalism and its interests via the digital media, which is accomplished through an interplay between the internet and politics. In short, the Chinese digital media, to some extent, follow the Chinese government's media logic to spread the government's interests. However, it is an undeniable fact that social media serve as a virtual space for people to materialize an imagined community as a nation by interacting with national symbols. In short, it enables netizens to create and express a shared belonging and identity, and finally trigger people's willingness to spread a sense of nationalism online.

This article also has some drawbacks. On the one hand, this study explored nationalistic expressions and tactics in the social context of the National Day, which may increase people's level of nationalistic expression. Ariely (2017) suggested that the exposure of celebrating the National Day has a positive impact on national identification and nationalism. Therefore, people may utilize particular nationalistic expressions and specific tactics to demonstrate their support on that particular day. On the other hand, this study utilized certain online hashtags and only explored Weibo's posts on October 1, 2019. In other words, it makes it impossible to explore different nationalists' expressions and tactics utilized for the duration of the National Day holiday. However, although this article has these limitations, it could still contribute to the role of digital media and its influence that helps drive nationalism in China. For future studies, this article suggests that researchers could address different topics and incidents to explore their expressions and tactics against the backdrop of the complexities surrounding Chinese nationalism. Meanwhile, the dynamic role of political issues and business-related issues in digital nationalism in China also warrant further investigation.

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The Journal of Communication and Media Studies offers an interdisciplinary forum for the discussion of the role of the media and communications in society. The journal explores everyday experiences of media cultures, the forms and effects of technologies of media and communications, and the dynamics of media business. It also addresses media literacies, including capacities to “read” and “use” the media, and the role of media as a key component in formal and informal learning. Contributions to the journal range from broad, theoretical conceptualizations of media, to detailed empirical examinations and case studies of media practices.

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